

## **A WOMAN OF SUBSTANCE: SR. CORAZON P. MANALO, DC**

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*Fifty years of Philippine Catholic education are viewed from the representative works of Sister Corazon Manalo, DC, aFSC, PhD. Three major movements or shifts in Philippine Catholic Education over time are discussed: experimentation and reform following Vatican II (1965-1980); the contributions of liberation of theology and the theology of liberation (1975-1990); the end of the experimentation period and the recodification (1991-2015). The article ends on the renewed emphasis on global sustainable development and care for the environment ushered in by the election of Cardinal Bergoglio as Pope Francis. The paper was first presented in a conference held in honor of the wisdom figures of DaKaTeo, one of whom was Sr. Corazon Manalo at DLSU, Manila in 2017. She passed away on May 28, 2019.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

**W**hat I hope to present to you in honor of the honoree are reflections on about fifty years of Philippine Catholic education, the backdrop against which we can appreciate better, the lifetime contributions of indefatigable Sister Corazon Manalo, Daughter of Charity, Affiliated De La Salle Brother, Doctor of Education and member of the Board of Incorporators of *Damdaming Katoliko sa Teologiya* (DAKATEO).

Having said that, there are three major movements I would like to highlight: first, the period of experimentation and reform following Vatican II; second, the contributions of liberation of theology and the theology of liberation to Catholic education; third, the end of the experimentation period and the recodification of the output of the makeover period after the reign of Pope Benedict XVI, and at the same time, gaining new ground with a

renewed emphasis on global sustainable development and care for the environment.

At the outset, let me say that I will be speaking from my experience in the Catholic school set-up. I had my basic education and much of my higher education in a Philippine Catholic school managed by a religious congregation, the De La Salle Brothers. And that is its own advantage, as well as its own inherent limitation, in sharing about Catholic education—I circulate in the same milieu in which our honoree has been immersed for much of her life.

### **THE PERIOD OF EXPERIMENTATION AND REFORM**

The curtain opens as it were, after October 1965. Some of us were already in grade school then and experienced the vestiges of what was often referred to as the Baltimore Catechism. We were taught at that time that as human beings, we were to know God, then to love Him and to serve Him. We learned about the angels and the heavenly beings, the pains of hell, and to pray for the poor souls in purgatory. We were taught to care for the poor, and gave to the Mission Collection every Tuesday. We were asked to be doubly generous during Advent and Lent. We memorized the Act of Contrition, and went to the immaculately clean Main Chapel section by section, and then row by row, for individual Private Confessions. October was the month we all started school with the daily recitation of the Rosary. In my younger years, in the early 60's before I went to formal school, I vaguely remember attending Masses at Malate Church, and at the Ermita chapel, where what I saw of the main presider was mainly his back, covered by the richly embroidered chasuble, in brilliant liturgical colors. And for Holy Week, we retired to my parents' province, and tried to look sad and downright miserable because God was dead until the bells for Easter rung.

But all that seemed to have changed so suddenly and all at the same time. By the time we had our First Holy Communion in 1967, we were singing liturgical songs from Tina Benitez, and the Flying Nun was such a great TV series because she was different from the nuns we knew—she was the Sister Act of her time. So was Julie Andrews, also known as Maria, who left the convent to sing

to us that “*the hills are alive*,” and so was she, since she got out of the strict confines of the convent, and into the Von Trapp family. While the monumental work, “The Dutch Catechism,” was published by the progressive Dutch Catholic Church, and then put out of circulation shortly after by the Vatican, like a nascent conflagration doused with cold water, the Catholic schools seemed to have taken the spirit and text of Vatican II on reform and renewal rather head-on. Students like me suddenly no longer learned words like the humeral veil, or the paten or the censer. We no longer saw the religious Brothers in their flowing robes in the corridors by 1969. They had taken to wearing the short sleeved barong with a religious pin on their collar. In veneration of Mary, we were singing “when I find myself in times of trouble... Mother Mary comes to me” with John Lennon and Paul McCartney in 1973. In retrospect of course, none of us, including our teacher, when I think of it, had any idea that for the Beatles, Mother Mary was the kind word for smoking a joint of marijuana when one was down and troubled and needed a helping hand. I dread to think what the Yellow Submarine stood for.

What I learned later also was that what had come into fashion back then in the 70’s in Catholic Education was the CEA—the Christian Evocative Approach – that is why we no longer had stories from the Old Testament nor from the New Testament from 1969 onwards, or from when I was about Grade 4. Religion Classes came to be called CEP—the Christian Experience Program. We played all kinds of simulation games and role-playing skits, and then we would be asked what we felt about trust, friendship, love, duty, and many other values. Which somehow led to teachings about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. There were discussions on Values Education and Values Integration in curriculum planning sessions. Books with titles like *Why Am I Afraid to Love*, and *Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am* were often the sources of readings in refreshingly creative prayer services. From the lectured type to the *Cursillo* type of retreats, the class retreats of the 70’s were very psycho-spiritual, with self-actualization high on the totem pole of learning objectives.

Towards the end of the 70’s, I remember we were using a booklet entitled “Experimental Liturgy,” with several choices or

combo options – I think we had at least 10 of each: Introductory Rite in blue, Offertory Rite in yellow, the Preface all the way to the Doxology in white, and the Communion Rite in green. In those heady days and times of creativity, we could never tell what the next Mass was going to be like— where the tabernacle would be, where we would face, what new OPM songs might be included, what new rites of reconciliation or post-communion and symbol-laden activities we would be asked to be actively involved in.

### **THE IMPACT OF “THE LIBERATION OF THEOLOGY” AND THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION**

There is another movement that will pick up as the Marcos dictatorship goes into full swing—the time of the Basic Ecclesial Communities, and liberation theology will have its own influence on Catholic Education in the Philippines—but that is going ahead of the story.

The context of reform, experimentation, and the hope for renewal, in the post-Vatican period, is the setting of Sr. Cora Manalo’s scholarly doctoral dissertation of more than 300 pages, entitled, “Dance in the Faith Life of the Contemporary Filipino Catholic.” In her review of literature, she begins by referring to Harvey Cox and the Philippine Plenary Council—with the former highlighting a sense of the loss in areas of creativity, festivity, fantasy, and revelry and joyous celebration, and the push for the harnessing of memory, imagination, myth and symbols in more festive and feeling-related rituals, and the latter bringing up the matter of a culturally contextualized, relevant and meaningful renewal of the Philippine Church. Sr. Cora concludes:

It is not simply a matter then of adaptation and renewal, but an entirely new creative effort that takes cognizance of humans as embodied beings, with hearts and heads in place, in touch with a culturally rich historical past, attuned to artistic currents and anthropological movement of the

present, and open to historical and transhistorical images of the future.<sup>1</sup>

Having significantly noted the post conciliar axial shift towards a more embodied, historical, contextual, and inculturated spirituality in a reaction to the Cartesian-inspired discombobulation and separation of the intellectual head from the corporeal, material, fleshly aspect of the human being, she then conscientiously dialogues with the currents of thought of that period on spirituality and theology. The sacred, symbols, myths and rituals, and religion and its expression in art forms, as well as thinkers in anthropology, psychology, and dance, before moving into a data-based study of indigenous Philippine dance, eventually dwell on her main theme of “dance in religion,” and in particular, situating “dance in the faith life of the Filipino,”<sup>2</sup> and documentation of “selected dance-laced religious celebrations among lowland Filipino Christians vis-à-vis some danced ethnic non-Christian religious rituals.”<sup>3</sup> Included in her seminal work are references to Buhlmann, Tracy, Kung, Schillebeeckx, Galilea, Belita, de Mesa, Ginete, Mercado and Chupungco among others. In the end, she had also identified no less than 50 traditional and ritual/fiesta dances as “Dances of *Homo religiosus*,” and further classified them into three types corresponding to Guzie’s three levels/stages of religious development.<sup>4</sup>

I have dealt rather lengthily on her dissertation because it is emblematic of those who not only do theology on the ground, but also do it from the specialized field of religious education. To understand what she has done and the process she has employed is to understand the work of religious educators caught in the wake of the clarion call for reform and renewal following the second Vatican Council. The call was clear, but how it was going to happen was left to the Holy Spirit. And while others will consequently do

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<sup>1</sup> C. Manalo, *Dance in the Faith life of the Contemporary Filipino Catholic*. Dissertation presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School, College of Education, De La Salle University, 1994, 6-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

more God-talk on the conceptual level, how the rest of the People of God, especially the young entrusted to our care will grow in the Faith is pretty much left once more to the Holy Spirit. And that is where champions like Sr. Corazon Manalo picked up from where theologians alight, and lead the way (familiar with the departure points), navigating into the fascinating unknown, with a clear focus on the education of the young and their formation in Faith.

Let me say that at this point as an *intermezzo*, that as we entered the mid-80's and approached the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Vatican II, a pendulum swing back to a certain orthodoxy and focus on content was also well underway. The period of experimentation was practically over, and the Experimental Liturgies of our youth were done away with. "It was fun while it lasted," we might say, but then, by the 80's, it would be safe to say children were once more taught about sacred vestments, the proper way to serve as sacristans, and so on and so forth. Moving ahead, we know that the pendulum would have swung towards the other end sometime in the papacy of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger as Pope Benedict XVI, and will swing back once more, when Jorge Cardinal Bergoglio of Buenos Aires becomes Pope Francis.

Personally, I would say my experience of religion and religious education before 1965-67 was one kind, those I had between 1967 and 1977 were another kind, and the one I returned to as a high school religion teacher in 1987 was a third one that had little semblance to the one I experienced in high school. It was like the ones I was familiar with 20 years before, and yet there were some differences as well. In retrospect, if we survey the curriculum of the Catholic schools in the 80's, there was a pendulum swing back to a certain focus on content and orthodoxy. Gone were the Christian Experience Programs and "how did you feel modules." In their place were religion classes called Christian Living Programs, with focus on Introductions to the Old and New Testaments, Church and Sacraments, and Christian Morality. In retrospect, the incorporation of concepts and issues from contemporary theologies, and the use of the outputs of Biblical scholarship were refreshing indeed. There was also one major difference: we now had Social Teachings of the Church as well, which more often than not incorporated the insights of many

liberation theologians and authors on liberation spirituality. Examples from our Philippine context were flourishing and happily abundant at that time. This brings me to my next point.

The second movement I would like to single out is the general effect on Philippine Catholic education of insights directly traceable to the events, contexts and theological reflections associated with the Gustavo Gutierrez's seminal work on the liberation of theology and the theologies of liberation generally associated with Latin America, with many Filipino theologians joining the dialogue table from their own contexts and in solidarity with the poor. Without naming particular theologies or theologians and their relative impact on Catholic education, suffice it to say that, the salient feature that appeared was a renewed emphasis on the option for the poor, who were also often referred to as the marginalized and the oppressed, and tools for analysis of why they were so. This was seen most concretely in the conscientization, exposure and immersion, and solidarity programs developed for students and institutionalized and incorporated in many Christian Living Programs all over the country. It was an added boon, perhaps, that we were in the transition years from the Marcos Regime to the Cory Administration via the so-called Yellow Revolution. I can no longer remember how many times I showed my classes the movies "Romero" and "The Mission." And how the religion programs were designed, such that by the senior year in high school, students would meet people on the picket lines and learn from them. Nor will I forget the furor in classes that I had when I tackled the plight of the sugarcane workers with the children and inheritors of many haciendas in Negros Occidental. Bishop Fortich was very much alive then, and with him, Brian Gore and Niall O'Brian, and the *Kristohanong Katilingban*, known as *Sambayanang Kristiyano* elsewhere.

There was a refreshing refocus on orthopraxy alongside orthodoxy, and the logical consequences of a new ecclesiology first espoused by the second Vatican Council found their way into Catholic education's curricula. The stage had been set for Catholic schoolchildren to march in the streets, in a holding on to a "Faith that Does Justice," and in seeing a new way of being Church. In a manner of saying, the cuteness of the Vatican II's "Flying Nun" of

the late 60's and 70's gave way to the admirable commitment of a "Sister Stella L" and the basic ecclesial communities in the 80's.

An incisive example of how this dimension of the Faith became intrinsic to religious education is reflected in works such as the one produced by the Daughters of Charity and edited by Sr. Cora entitled "*The Woven Fabric of Christian-Vincentian Living: Curriculum Patterns, Maps, and Guides*,"<sup>5</sup> particularly the chapter on "Catechesis on Social Responsibility." One thing though was sure: Catholic religious education would never be the same again. Once the genie had been let out of the bottle, there was no way of putting it back again.

Sr. Cora Manalo noted in her article, "Religious Education Beyond Jubilee 2000," wherein writing about religious education for today's world, she scans the historical antecedents of Modern Catechetics and identifies the shifts occurring in three periods: from the *Kerygmatic* phase, to the *Anthropological* phase, to the *Political* phase.<sup>6</sup> She writes further, saying that with the contributions of the last phase in particular, with much of its insight coming from Liberation Theology, and its focus on humanity in its concrete life setting, the unity of salvation history and human history, the overcoming of the immanence-transcendence dilemma and the attention to a critical balance among context, content and method,<sup>7</sup> the emergent catechesis then would be seen as "beginning on the earth and rooted in humanity, rising almost vertically to the Word of God, then drops back again to the humankind."<sup>8</sup> Making an intrinsic link between religious education and evangelization, she sees the task of Catholic education as "evangelization towards social transformation," and

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<sup>5</sup> Daughters of Charity, 2016. "*The Woven Fabric of Christian-Vincentian Living: curriculum patterns, maps, and guides*", Ed. C. MANALO DC, in the chapter entitled "Curriculum Guide. Catechesis on Social Responsibility RE-CVF 105", 151-158.

<sup>6</sup> C. Manalo, *Religious Education Beyond Jubilee 2000*. In *Quest for insights into Faith. Charting new paths and directions for religious education*. Eds. J. Belita, CM and C. Manalo, DC, 2001, 219-239 and 221-223.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>8</sup> M. Warren,. Ed., *Sourcebook for Modern Catechesis*, as cited by C.Manalo, 1983. *Ibid.*

consequently pushes for an approach that is incarnational and “uses inculcuated, liberationist, contextual and inclusive language.”<sup>9</sup>

Going forward some ten more years, sometime in the 90’s, the industry jargon of education began to include not only “social transformation,” but also “learner-centered education,” “performance tasks,” “outcomes based education,” “expected learning outcomes” and “lifelong learning.” An excellent example of how these came into the consciousness of religious educators and Catholic education in general can be seen in the work of the Daughters of Charity cited earlier, wherein the entire learning continuum of basic education organized in tabular form, a column labeled “Content Standards,” is immediately juxtaposed with two other columns respectively labeled, “Performance Standards,” and “Learning Competencies.”<sup>10</sup>

### **THE END OF THE EXPERIMENTATION PERIOD AND THE RECODIFICATION**

Meanwhile, the casts resulting from the experimentation period were fast hardening after 35 to 40 years removed from the events. With Pope Benedict XVI at the helm, the Catholic tradition began to look back to earlier years, even to the years before Vatican II to retrieve things perceived to be of value, and points to be re-emphasized to the Faithful. Reflective of this direction, for example, was the definitive English text of the Mass, which caused an uproar from among many American Catholics at one time or another. Another example was the reiteration of transubstantiation, and the re-emphasis of the Son’s “consubstantiality” with the Father into the Apostle’s Creed. A telling one in recent memory was the Vatican response to the text that came out of a huge conference of US religious women.

I was reminded of this third movement as it were, when one day I attended Mass at my old parish, and what was posted onscreen as people lined up for communion were reflection

<sup>9</sup> C.Manalo, *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Daughters of Charity, *op. cit.*

questions like, “Are you properly dressed to receive Holy Communion?” In an earlier era, I thought, the question would have been, “We invite you to spend some quiet time in reflection,” or maybe credits while some reflective music from John Michel Talbot was played.

I mention this third movement in particular because at the moment, the CEAP (Catholic Educators Association of the Philippines), in which Sr. Cora Manalo has been another giant among her peer religious educators, is busy with the dissemination and promotion of the instrument called PCSS (Philippine Catholic Schools Standards) all over the country, across the breadth and diversity of Catholic educational institutions committed to the fostering of Catholic formative and transformative education especially for the young. I have no time to go into detail, but I’ve taken a brief preliminary look at the material and for some reason, I had a distinct whiff of strong pre-Vatican flavors mixed in with the aroma of the insights that have shaped Catholic education for over half a century now since the Vatican Council II.

## **CONCLUSION**

What strikes me is that, as one confrere told me, Sr. Cora is reportedly one of the chief consultants, if not one of the chief architects of the instrument recently put out. She can confirm that bit of news in a moment, but what I would really like to say in admiration, is that she has done much in Philippine Catholic education, in the last 50 years since the curtains officially closed on Vatican Council II. And as we all move on into the next decade further away from 1967, she too moves into yet another period of her life, and as we expect her next opus, wherever it will be coming from, we cannot but exclaim that indeed, we have been graced with her presence, and verily, we have had among us all along, like the character Emma in her favorite novel, *a woman of substance*.

Let me conclude by showing a glimpse of what we can expect from Sr. Cora. To use her own words,

A new mode/ministry of presence beckons—  
fervently embracing new missionary involvement;

developing new hobbies and artistic endeavors; mentoring and coaching the young; engaging in creative arts, reading, research and writing, archival work; reflective living; caring for one's body and keeping a healthy lifestyle; cooking, engaging in household chores; undertaking vegetable, herbal and natural gardening; growing flowers and trees; listening to good and soothing music; and engaging in new modes of rest and relaxation.<sup>11</sup>

Thank you very much for your gift of self, Sr. Cora, DC, AFSC, and *Ad multosannos!*

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<sup>11</sup> C. Manalo, in *Spirituality of Aging and Dying. The Phenomenon of Aging and Dying*, in *Spirituality and Health*. Institute of Spirituality in Asia, Lecture Series 16, Chapter 5, 165.