

THE STATE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE PHILIPPINES: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

RITO V. BARING

Catholic education in the Philippines is nearing its 500 years of celebration. This milestone exhorts both leaders of the church as well as catholic educators to review the educational vision and to track new directions in its educational engagement. In the present study the current status of Philippine Religious Education is reviewed through an analysis of recent publications on Religious Education in the country written by Filipino and non-Filipino writers in local and foreign publications. The review covers the last 25 years of Religious Education since the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines in 1991. Relevant literature made before 1991 which in the past was deemed foundational to the discussion is included to establish a better understanding of the present order. Complementing the library reference search, “Google” and “Google scholar” search engines are utilized to find relevant online literature. This article underscored the challenges, scholarly directions and engagements of Religious Education emanating from the configuration of scholarly discussions on Religious Education in the Philippines.

INTRODUCTION

Catholic education is a broad concept which covers Curriculum and instruction in Catholic schools. The recent use of “Religious Education” in Philippine Catholic education has led to its cautious adaptation as a term synonymous to “Christian Living” and “Catechesis”.¹ In practice today catechetical

¹ See Joseph Roche 1992. “Catechesis/ Religious Education in the Spirit of PCP II, *Landas* 8, no.1 (1992), 145-65.

instruction is casually referred to as “Religious Education”.² In his report on the state of catechesis in the country some years ago for the extraordinary Synod of Bishops in November 25, 1985, Monsignor Gerardo Santos mentioned how Archbishop Leonardo Legaspi, OP had indicated the significant strides made in the area of catechetical formation.³ Prior to that, a national catechetical project was in the pipeline to produce a national catechetical material.⁴ At about this period, the Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education (ECCCE) released its own findings of the state of Philippine Religious Education then.⁵ Apparently the national catechetical project successfully made its way into what is now known as the Catholic Faith Catechism (CFC) published in 1992. The CFC together with the National Catechetical Directory of the Philippines (NCDP, CBCP 1992) are considered essential components of an inculturated catechesis in the Philippines.⁶ The NCDP had been revised as the New NCDP in 2007 while the correct use of the CFC and its Filipino version KPK had been disseminated in different parts of the country.⁷

The Philippine Church’s attempt towards an inculturated catechesis⁸ raised the stakes about understanding the inner life of

² Rito Baring, “Plurality in Unity: Challenges Towards Religious Education in the Philippines,” *Religious Education* 106, no. 5 (2011), 459-475.

³ Gerardo Santos, *The Second Vatican Council: Shifts, Realizations and Directions for Catechesis and Catholic Education in the Philippines* (unpublished paper, Manila, 2013).

⁴ J. Roche, “The National Catholic Catechism Project,” *Landas* 1, no 1 (1987), 165-82.

⁵ Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP-ECCCE). 1989. *The Shape of Religious Education in the Philippines Today* (Manila: Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education, 1989).

⁶ Patricia Panganiban, *The Development of the National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines (1985) and the Catechism for Filipino Catholics (1997): Model of Inculturation* (Ph.D diss., Washington DC: Catholic University of America, 2010).

⁷ See ECCCE, *Update on the 8 Key Concerns*, accessed June 13, 2016, <http://ecccewebsite.com/Programs/update.html>.

⁸ J. Roche, “The CBCP Pastoral Exhortation and Religious Education,” *Landas* 13, no.1 (1999), 37-47. See also PCP II nos., 160-162; 210.

the Church which articulated a preferential option favouring the poor. The dynamics of culture and faith is now articulated in local catechesis. Echoing the spirit of *aggiornamento* at the Second Vatican Council,⁹ the Second Plenary Council (PCP II) in 1991 provided useful grounding for Catholic Education in the country. There is a section in the Acts and Decrees of the PCP II that is on Catholic educational associations as “Communities of renewal”.¹⁰ This view seamlessly linked the Catholic Church’s understanding of Catholic schools as instruments of renewal for the world order by becoming “instruments of cultural progress for individuals and for society”.¹¹ These ideas envision an education that catalyses human formation and development.¹² Hence the PCP II event and the ecclesial developments thereafter formed part of an important transition experience for Philippine Religious Education.¹³ While the PCP II did not provide “precise academic discussions”¹⁴ for the conduct of religious education, in terms of its methodologies, its vision, however, offered some guideposts which Catholic educators can reflect on. Understanding the current state of religious education, therefore, necessitates among others an appreciation of the current state of scholarship on

⁹ Teodoro Bacani Jr., “Church of the Poor: The Church in the Philippines’ Reception of Vatican II,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 42 nos. 1-2 (2005), accessed, <http://www.eapi.org.ph/resources/eapr/east-asian-pastoral-review-2005/volume-42-2005-number-1-2/church-of-the-poor-the-church-in-the-philippines-reception-of-vatican-ii/>.

¹⁰ The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II) no. 622 (Manila: CBCP, 1992).

¹¹ John Paul II, *Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities, Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, no. 32 (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana) accessed from http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_15081990_ex-corde-ecclesiae.html.

¹² See FABC-Office of Education and Student Chaplaincy (OESC), *A Consultation Meeting on Dialogue in Moral and Religious Formation in Education: Towards Vision 2020*, October 24-28, 2007 (Assumption University, Thailand).

¹³ Pedro de Achutegui, “The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (20 January - 17 February 1991): A Brief Account,” *Landas* 5, no. 2 (1991), 201-207.

¹⁴ J. Roche, “Catechesis/ Religious Education in the Spirit of PCP II.,” *Landas* 8, no. 1(1992), 145-65.

religious education before and after the PCP II. It can be argued that the enduring viewpoints of the present have their relationship to the envisioned goals identified with the PCP II. Scholarly discussion or literature prior to PCP II also serves to provide a back draft of the PCP II vision. The main focus of this article is to present a review of relevant literature on the state of Religious Education in the Philippines. The basis for the selection of study materials includes pronouncements and documents from the Church, scholarly works, essays and commentaries from independent writers, relevant documents from local educational institutions from both the private and the public schools in the last 25 years. Documents and scholarly works published earlier than this period are considered only in relation to its significance to the PCP II experience. For purposes of this study, Catholic Education and Religious Education are interchangeably used to refer to either faith-based instruction (formal or informal) or education that is grounded on Catholic principles and tradition. In the Philippines, it necessarily involves faith initiation of the learners. In contrast, variation in meanings regarding the secular sense of Religious Education covers the academic study of religion and values like the Religious Education programs in Europe. The predisposition towards learning is not generally biased towards faith. The growing interest in international scholarship in the field of religious education has brought international attention towards a focus on the emerging interface¹⁵ between the empirical disciplines, theology and Religious Education.

Philippine Catholic education is essentially tied up with the ideals of the Catholic Church. These ideals are enshrined in the documents of Catholic educational institutions such as the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP). As an umbrella organization, CEAP sees to it that instruction and curriculum in Catholic schools operate seamlessly to deliver

¹⁵ See Eric Cohen, "Research in Religious Education: Content and Methods for the Postmodern and Global Era," *Religious Education* 101, no. 2 (2006), 147-156. See also Kevin Lawson, "The Research We Need in Religious Education: Four Facets," *Religious Education* 101, no. 2 (2006), 157-161.

Catholic formation. The Religious congregations complement this commitment by forming local clusters of Catholic schools within their ranks to facilitate training and updating of their religious educators. Parish communities also contribute through their parochial schools in informal instructions organized around a Diocese. In this context, traditional scholarship in Philippine Religious Education is focused largely on religious instruction (catechesis), methodology (pedagogy and approach) and values formation. When it comes to religious instruction, textbooks in Christian Living Education (CLE) are a commonplace in all Catholic schools. The attention given to the development of textbooks, to a certain extent, has left some void in critical discourse on Religious Education in the Philippines. Teachers of “Christian Living” (CL) courses in the Basic education programs of Catholic schools are preoccupied with what to teach in the classroom, and not with academic engagement with other practitioners. CL teachers just depend on the institutional inputs to update themselves with the current developments in religious education. In order to encourage a more dynamic process of exchanges among practitioners and academic research in the field, educational institutions and the Catholic Church hierarchy have organized fora, symposia, and congresses for religious education teachers. The Congregation of St. John Bosco and the Archdiocese of Manila, for example, organized a Catechetical Congress meant to provide religious educators and catechists with new updates in the ministry. Noting other pockets of academic symposia held in schools nationwide, De La Salle University (DLSU) also had its annual National Conferences in Catechesis and Religious Education since 2012. DLSU’s academic conference is meant to improve the research climate in Philippine Religious Education as well as increase academic discussions on relevant issues affecting Catechesis and Religious Education. From the list of published materials available online, only a handful of Religious Education practitioners in the country can be said to have made significant scholarly contributions.

Considering the significant attention given to the study of human values in the late 1980s,¹⁶ several studies in Religious Education were given to the taxonomy of values in both government and private schools. Catholic religious education in schools is called upon to “help students rediscover the profound value of the human person”.¹⁷ Roche presented his analysis of the configuration of values from a Christian perspective.¹⁸ The inquiry of Bautista regarding the possible alignment of the senses of values from a secular point of view vis-à-vis the religious version of values is only a few of the attempts to address the matter.¹⁹ Bautista began with a critique of the government framework of values (DECS).²⁰ She then discussed the Christian view of the human person and Christian moral discourse. Given this point, Bautista already thought of finding the alignment between the values training proposed and implemented by the government and the ongoing Religious Education formation in Catholic secondary schools. And she thought of the Christian moral discourse as a material that interacts with the values program of the government.

Very often, discussions in religious education in the Philippines are confined to the internal life of the community. Studies and researches on this discipline outside the country deal more with the impact of Catholic education on the life of the

¹⁶ Lourdes Quisumbing, “A Study of the Philippine Values Education Programme (1986-1993),” (a paper presented for the International Conference on Education 44th session at the International Conference Center of Geneva, Switzerland, 1994).

¹⁷ R. Baring and Rebecca Cacho, “Contemporary Engagements and Challenges for Catholic Religious Education in Southeast Asia,” in *Global perspectives on Catholic Religious Education in Schools*, eds., Michael Buchanan and Adrian Gellel (Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2015), 143-153.

¹⁸ J. Roche, “Value Education/ Moral Recovery and the Catholic Educator,” *Landas* 3, no. 2 (1989), 175-186.

¹⁹ See Aida J. Bautista, *Values Education in Religious Education* (Manila: Rex Bookstore, 1994).

²⁰ Department of Education Culture and Sports (DECS), *The DECS Values Education Program*, DO 6, s. 1988, accessed from <http://www.deped.gov.ph/orders/do-6-s-1988>.

nation.²¹ These studies reprise the role of Catholic education in the human formation and social development of the nation. Philippine Catholic education also needs profile reports from the field, for example, regarding the state of the Filipino youth's religious attitudes²² for empirical inputs. The Catechism for Filipino Catholics (CFC) considers these inputs to be essential to know and understand the character of Filipino youth religiosity.²³ Catholic institutions²⁴ have also done their share of describing the religious profiles of the Catholic youth in the interest of Catholic education. These investigations only emphasize Catholic education's need to remain relevant in the face of growing challenges posed by contemporary life. Given the strategic place of Catholic schools in society today, it will be unfortunate to witness Catholic education's failure in terms of integral human development and social transformation if these schools stagnate in their vision. Recently the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) released a pastoral letter commemorating the

²¹ John Convey, "Catholic Schools Make A Difference: Twenty-five Years of Research," (Washington, DC: National Catholic Educational Association, 1992).

²² See the following literature: Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP), "National Filipino Catholic Youth Study 2013: Its Joys and Hopes," accessed, http://ceap.org.ph/upload/download/201410/7114053166_1.pdf; Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines- Ecumenical Youth Commission (CBCP-ECY) and Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP), *The National Filipino Catholic Youth Study 2014* (Manila: CBCP-ECY & CEAP, 2015); Refer also to, R. R. Baring, "Exploring Theological Constructs of Suffering in the Notions of the College Students: An Empirical Inquiry," *Justitia* 15 (2010), 57-74; R. R. Baring, "Analyzing Empirical Notions of Suffering: Advancing Youth Dialogue and Education," *Religious Education Journal* 105 no. 2 (March -April 2010), 157-174.

²³ J. Roche and L. Z. Legazpi, *A Companion to CFC 1* (Manila: ECCCE/Word & Life Publications, 1998).

²⁴ See the studies conducted by the following catholic institutions: UST Social Research Center (UST-SRC), *The Filipino Youth: A Sociological Study*, (occasional papers 2, Manila: UST/ Social Research Center, 1986); Ateneo de Manila University (AdMU), *Ateneo Youth Study* (Quezon City: Philippines, NFO Trends, 2001); J. Marco, and A. Monera, "The Lasallian Youth: A study on Belief, Morals and Social Conscience," in *Studies in Religion and Theology: Issues and Perspectives*, ed., Rito Baring (Quezon City: Central Book Supply Inc., 2011), 146-177.

400th years of Catholic education in the country.²⁵ The document pondered on the questions that dwell on the relevance of the collaboration between the Church, Catholic schools and the State.

DOING RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: CHALLENGES

The Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP) lists about 1,400 Catholic affiliated schools operating throughout the country. This number is less than half of the total number of schools serving the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Many of these schools are found in the countryside to reach out to the poor students. As of September 30, 2015,²⁶ there are 14,894,646 pupils enrolled in the primary level of education, and 6,012,761 students in the secondary level (up to Grade 12) for SY 2015-16. Such datum points to the reality that not many students are able to persevere in their studies, mainly because of poverty. The primary challenge, therefore, facing Catholic education today is to reach out to the young ones in the periphery. It means making education affordable to those who suffer economic, existential and socio-cultural marginalization.

Even as we see that a lot still needs to be done in order to address this challenge, it is important to note that Catholic schools,²⁷ being run by dedicated religious congregations, recognize their mission to accommodate the least or marginalized in society. Even during the Spanish occupation, schools and convents already showed preferential option for the marginalized. This commitment to serve the poor in educational institutions is

²⁵ Jose Palma and Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, "A Pastoral Letter of the CBCP on the Occasion of the 400 Years of Catholic Education," accessed March 25, 2016, <http://cbcponline.net/v2/?p=5684>.

²⁶ Mark Llego, "Basic Education Statistics in the Philippines," accessed March 26, 2016, <http://www.teacherph.com/basic-education-statistics-philippines/>.

²⁷ Martin Scanlan, "The Grammar of Catholic Schooling and Radically 'Catholic' Schools," *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 12, no. 1 (2008), 25-54.

codified in official documents. The By-laws of the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP), for example, ensures that Catholic education must give witness to its fidelity to the Church's 'preferential option for the poor'.²⁸ In the same spirit, the Philippine Catholic institutions of learning are envisioned to contribute towards social transformation and integral national development (CEAP).²⁹ Philippine Catholic schools adhere to policies that favour social and human development. As the country faces new socio-economic and political realities, Philippine Catholic education is also exhorted to attend to the needs of the marginalized sector.³⁰

Another challenge we recognize is that fact that many Catholic schools are inclined to give exclusive attention to the formative needs of fellow Catholics. Such tendency is evident in the approach and policies of other Christian denominations who seem to be exclusivist in managing their own Religious Education programs, tailored for their respective communities. This makes academic institutions not open in their selective application process for new student applicants. Preference for homogeneity in religious belief and even culture in Catholic schools poses a challenge to students who may not belong to the same religious confession. While the Second Vatican Council and regional Bishops Conferences have become more open to peoples of other faith traditions, there is a need to translate this vision through a more sustained and concrete ways even in the classroom-setting remains. This calls for a greater sensitivity and respect for the exercise of religious freedom in order to promote greater unity and dialogue, and not division or conflicts. Concretely, this means that Catholic schools must maintain an open attitude towards students coming from other religious denominations.

Unlike Theology, Religious Education has not entered the dialogue phase, much required in a multi-religious context in

²⁸ See the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines.

²⁹ See Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP, 2014), accessed from. <http://www.ceap.org.ph/>.

³⁰ Joel Tabora, *Catholic Education and the Poor*, 2015, accessed March 25, 2016, <http://www.manilatimes.net/catholic-education-and-the-poor/222132/>.

Asia. Due to its orientation as a faith-based program, Religious Education in schools is designed to present religious instruction within one specific religious tradition and perspective. Consequentially, it cannot enter into conversations within multi-faith contexts. This denominational predisposition in schools tones down initiatives that spell out inter-faith activities in campus. The weak orientation towards ecumenical initiatives in the campuses of Catholic schools appears to reflect the observed scanty references to the ecumenical spirit in the PCP II.³¹

It is important to note that the growing need to articulate religious content in the region coincides with the need for dialogue. The highly diverse religious condition,³² present in the Southeast Asian region, reinforces the call for dialogue, invoking a concrete response from different faith traditions³³. If this is any consolation at all, certain ecumenical fora are held outside the confines of Catholic schools. The holding of the ecumenical services during the Octave for Christian Unity in some seminaries and parishes, as well as the collaboration of Catholic and Protestant bible scholars in the Philippine Bible Society and in our theological or biblical associations are concrete ecumenical initiatives found outside the academic setting.

Having cited the faith-based orientation of Philippine Religious Education, the plural conditions³⁴ which characterize many academic environments today essentially pose a challenge towards religious instruction. The intense debate is such that one can find varied positions in scholarship with regard the question of allowing or not allowing catechesis in the public schools. This issue is an old controversy which dates back to the period of

³¹ P. de Achutegui, "The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines...", 201-207.

³² R. Baring and R. Cacho, "Contemporary Engagements," 143-153.

³³ Peter Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004).

³⁴ See R. Baring, "A New Approach to Catechesis: Involving Students in Catechetical Education in the Philippines," *International Studies in Catholic Education* 2 no. 2 (2010), 176-192.

American occupation,³⁵ when liberal education was introduced to the public schools where protestant teachers were assigned to teach. One can say that this question has been finally resolved as one could note that the 1987 Philippine Constitution permits “religious instruction during regular class hours”.³⁶ A more recent government action includes several directives such as the Department of Education’s memorandum,³⁷ allowing the proper conduct of religious instruction³⁸ in the academic programs of government-operated basic education schools. As a safeguard for religious freedom, it stipulates that religious instruction should proceed only with the written consent of the parents:

No student shall be allowed or permitted to attend religious instruction classes without the said written application and duly accomplished request of his/her parent or guardian.³⁹

Time and again, the question of religious neutrality in academic institutions of learning is tied up with discussions on religious diversity. This question is also associated with the management of Religious Education programs and very recently with religious freedom. Scholarship is divided between those who traditionally propose insights favouring religious neutrality⁴⁰ and those who challenge religious neutrality⁴¹ as an unrealistic

³⁵ Oscar Evangelista, *Religious Problems in the Philippines and the American Catholic Church 1898-1907* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1967).

³⁶ L. Quisumbing, “Philippine Values Education Programme,” 5.

³⁷ Jeslie Lapuz, May 14, 2009. “Reiterating the Revised Rule on the Teaching of Religion in the Public Elementary and Secondary Schools,” *DepEd Memorandum order no. 49, series of 2009* (Department of Education. Republic of the Philippines).

³⁸ Isidro Cariño, “The Religious Instruction in the Public Schools: A Constitutional Perspective,” *Docete* 13, no. 63 (Special Issue, 1990), 73-76.

³⁹ See Department of Education Order 49, series of 2009.

⁴⁰ See Winton E. Yerby III, “Toward Religious Neutrality in the Public School Curriculum,” *The Federal Court System* 56, no. 2 (1989), 899-934.

⁴¹ Refer to the work of Terrence Copley, “Non-indoctrinatory Religious Education in Secular Cultures,” *Religious Education* 103, no. 1(2008), 22-31. See

viewpoint. Various academic sectors, non-government organizations and media networks provide religious profile reports that offer some insights regarding religious freedom and positive influence of religion. The report of Raul Pangalangan profiled religious freedom in the Philippines.⁴² Rodriguez also had a similar profile report that presented religion's apparent influence in values instruction and the overall curriculum in the country.⁴³ Religion is also thought to have played a serious role in family life.⁴⁴ Those who criticize religious instruction in public schools view religion as something mythical detached from reality and does not subscribe to reason. By placing religion opposite to the hallmarks of academic inquiry i.e. reason and reality, these proponents emphasize that religion is practically incompatible with academic life. Another argument being thrown against religion in schools is nurtured by sociological perceptions that suggest that religion is "anti-modern". It proposes that belief in a particular religious tradition, such as Christianity, puts the believer into disengagement from modernity. It creates an impression that Christianity is an exclusive religion that promotes social isolation where its members despise the world for all that it is. The difficulty created grounds for an epistemological challenge that trivializes religion's place in society. However, contrary to this trivializing treatment of religion, recent studies in sociology points

also K. M. Kwan, "Christian Theology as an Academic Subject in the University," *Quest* 1, no. 1 (2002), 63-87.

⁴² Raul C. Pangalangan, "Religion and the Secular State: National Report for the Philippines," in *Religion and the Secular State: Interim Reports*, eds., W. Cole Durham Jr., Javier Martinez-Torron (Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2015), 559- 571.

⁴³ F. Rodriguez, *PH Education: Allergic to Religion?*, 2015 accessed, <http://www.rappler.com/move-ph/80474-ph-youth-religion-education>.

⁴⁴ Monch M. Misagal, *Familial Filipino Traits Prevail despite Changing Times-Experts*, accessed November 29, 2015, <http://www.mb.com.ph/familial-filipino-traits-prevail-despite-changing-times-experts/>.

to a recovery of the strategic place of religion and spirituality in social life.⁴⁵

Some people are afraid that teaching about the faith may compromise the principle of neutrality which should be upheld by government institutions at all times. But can there really be academic and religious neutrality in government institutions of learning?⁴⁶ The history of the University of Paris (Sorbonne) in France would show that Theology was offered side by side other secular Sciences in its early development. Theological discourse played a significant role in the growth of the academe. Discerning from the past experiences and recent discussions on this topic, it has become apparent that accommodating a study of religious life in the academe is neither new nor unimaginable, contrary to positions that sees religion or religious studies as having no place in the academic setting.

If catechesis is allowed in public schools, the next problem of the Philippine Church is: Who will teach the children considering the shortage of trained catechists to handle Catechesis in the public schools? Varied responses are proposed by institutions. One of the solutions is getting volunteer catechists from the adult volunteers. The other option is to train students in schools and have them teach a class in the schools. A study of this initiative generated favourable feedbacks by students who considered the exposure as having benefitted them as well as the children they taught.⁴⁷ A handful of other schools in Manila and in some provinces are also taking to task their college students to assist in the work of catechesis in public schools they have adapted.

⁴⁵ Robert W. Hefner, "Religious Resurgence in Contemporary Asia: Southeast Asian Perspectives on Capitalism, the State, and the New Piety," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 69 (2010), 1031-1047.

⁴⁶ Paolo Romero, "Lawmaker Wants Religion Out of Gov't Offices," *Philstar Online*, Philstar News Service, June 16, 2012, accessed, <http://ph.news.yahoo.com/lawmaker-wants-religion-govt-offices162241156.html>.

⁴⁷ R. Baring, "A New Approach to Catechesis: Involving Students in Catechetical Education in the Philippines," *International Studies in Catholic Education* 2, no. 2 (2010), 176-192.

SCHOLARSHIP IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

There is a limited degree of scholarship on Catholic education studies in the Southeast Asian context in recent years. In the Philippines, published and unpublished works on Catholic education can be clustered in terms of program assessment,⁴⁸ studies on the Catholicity of schools and the relevance of Catholic education in the social and political life. Gutiérrez' work refers to Catholic schools as source of hope for Asia. They are generally perceived by parents as offering better academic programs and training than government institutions.⁴⁹ In Southeast Asia basic education schools which are managed and operated by religious congregations are also appreciated for offering better academic and human formation.⁵⁰ A contrasting picture is offered by Raffin and Cornelio (2009) who view Catholic schools vis-à-vis the Catholic Church as sources of "panic".⁵¹ This critical attitude towards Catholic education and towards the Church with regard the level of scholarship appears to reflect the general sentiments from the Social Sciences.⁵²

Significant scholarship though was poured into catechesis and values formation in the past, prior to PCP II. There was Gorospe's work⁵³ which examined the problem related to the values formation among students within the Philippine context.

⁴⁸ P. Gapuz, 1985. "A Descriptive Analysis of the Religious Education Program of the College of the Immaculate Conception High School Department," (Master's thesis, DLSU: Manila, 1985).

⁴⁹ Angelina Gutiérrez, "Catholic Schools in the Philippines: Beacons of Hope in Asia," in *International Handbook of Catholic Education*, eds., Gerald Grace and Joseph O' Keefe (Netherlands: Springer, 2007).

⁵⁰ Baring and Cacho, 2015. "Contemporary Engagements...", 143-153.

⁵¹ Anne Raffin and Jayeel Cornelio, "The Catholic Church and Education as Sources of Institutional Panic in the Philippines," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 37, no. 5 (2009), 778-798.

⁵² Giselle Vincett, and Elijah Obinna, eds., *Christianity in the Modern World: Changes and Controversies* (England/ US: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2014).

⁵³ Vitaliano Gorospe, "Christian Renewal of Filipino Values," *Philippine Studies* 14, no. 2 (1966), 191-227.

His investigation made him trace the problem to the dichotomy between the individual's moral perspective and the prevailing social morality in the background. The evidence of this moral disconnection still remains many years later in the guise of pre-moral or relative dispositions of young students. Later, Roche rendered his own analysis of the question of values education and moral recovery in the context of the religious educator.⁵⁴ A greater bulk of Roche's works dwells on an analysis of the catechetical vision and conduct in the Philippines.⁵⁵

The recent shift towards inter-disciplinary research has influenced Religious Education scholarship of late.⁵⁶ Investigations in student learning, dispositions and pedagogy have increased. The need to understand Religious Education vis-à-vis Church life is also an important area of study. In response to the PCP II's call for renewed evangelization, the question about the role of Scriptures in student life is a timely inquiry.⁵⁷ It is generally admitted that the gap between the youth and the scriptures remains a fundamental challenge. Philippine Catechesis is also pastorally challenged by the never ending need for catechists in local churches.⁵⁸ On top of this evangelization issue is the question of dialogue and ecumenism. Asian countries like the Philippines are usually confronted with religious pluralism and cultural diversity. In response to the universal and the regional vision, e.g. FABC, the Catholic Church in the Philippines has

⁵⁴ J. Roche, "Value Education/ Moral Recovery and the Catholic Educator," *Landas* 3, no. 2 (1989), 175-186.

⁵⁵ J. Roche, 1992. "Catechesis/ Religious Education in the Spirit of PCP II," *Landas* 8 no. 1(1992), 145-65. See also J. Roche, "The CBCP Pastoral Exhortation and Religious Education," *Landas* 13, no. 1 (1999), 37-47.

⁵⁶ R. Baring, "Plurality in Unity:," 459-475.

⁵⁷ R. Baring, "Revisiting Patristic and Medieval Frameworks in the Student's Bible Reading Attitudes: Early Exegesis at Work in Contemporary Times," *UNITAS* 80, no. 4 (2007): 421-436. See also R. R. Baring, "Understanding Student Bible Reading Attitudes: A Philippine Experience," *Religious Education* 103, no. 2 (2008), 162-178.

⁵⁸ R. Baring, "A New Approach to Catechesis: Involving Students in Catechetical Education in the Philippines," *International Studies in Catholic Education* 2, no. 2 (2010), 176-192.

made a commitment towards dialogue and ecumenism. However, Religious Education still needs to systematically address this demand for dialogue when planning and articulating the curriculum around Religious Education.⁵⁹

The relationship between theology and Catechesis has also been raised. Some believe that Catechesis does not essentially involve theological reflection. Others insist that Theology and catechesis go together.⁶⁰ As an area for exploration in Religious Education theological constructs remain pastorally relevant when inquired with respect to student dispositions.⁶¹ For instance, the question of human suffering is an enduring human issue affecting the youth's imagination. Hence scholarly discussions built on life themes are significant for Religious Education research.⁶² Relative to the youth engagement on crucial life issues is the problem of spirituality. Recent research from the West has generally admitted of the transition in youthful dispositions from institutional appreciations of religion towards new forms of spirituality. It is therefore essential that scholarly attention is also given towards an understanding of children's spiritual and religious dispositions.⁶³

VARIED ENGAGEMENTS OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

The new challenges facing religious education regionally include religious and cultural diversity, national policies, new

⁵⁹ R. Baring, "Analyzing Empirical Notions of Suffering: Advancing Youth Dialogue and Education," *Religious Education Journal* 105, no. 2 (2010), 157-174.

⁶⁰ R. Cacho, *Bakas ng Kagandahangloob ng Diyos: A Proposed Inculturated Approach to Sacraments for Religious Education* (Ph.D. diss., DLSU: Manila, 2004), electronic resource.

⁶¹ R. Baring, "Notions of Evil Today: Perspectives of Sixth Graders in Manila". *SSEASR Journal* IV (2010), 85-97.

⁶² R. Baring, "Exploring Theological Constructs of Suffering in the Notions of the College Students: An Empirical Inquiry," *Justitia* 15 (2010), 57-74.

⁶³ R. Baring, "Children's Image of God and their Parents: Explorations in Children's Spirituality," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 17, no. 4 (2012), 277- 289. See also R. Baring, "Peace-Making at Home in the World: Grounding Children's Spirituality in Peace," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 18, no. 4 (2013), 318-334.

media technologies, justice and peace and contemporary youth attitudes.⁶⁴ In the Philippines the separation of Church and state and economic poverty can be added to the list of challenges. The question of separation between the Church and State stands out as an urgent issue for Religious Education. There have been abundant discussions in this regard to understand the limit and shared spaces of both institutions. For many, the separation of Church and State reflects the secular and spiritual divide. The Church cannot engage in secular affairs while the State has nothing to do with spiritual matters. But historically, the Church and State never observed a complete demarcation of lines in terms of what is spiritual and material. Throughout the period of Spanish rule in the Philippines, “Church influence was so strong, thinking became uniform, unorthodox ideas were condemned, and original scholarship was non-existent”.⁶⁵ The long reign of the union between the Church and State under Spanish rule cemented the relationship that became persistent in the attitudes of people even during the American occupation. American presence in the Philippines adhered to the separation of Church and State. However, long after the American rule, the Church and State maintained close cooperation despite the principle of separation now enshrined in the Philippine Constitution. Numerous debates and discussions regarding the separation of civil and spiritual powers have provided the academe with varied viewpoints. In other Southeast Asian countries like “Burma, Malaysia and Thailand”⁶⁶ there has been a desire to articulate the centrality of religion in national development. Although the Philippines distinguishes itself as the only Catholic nation in the region, the principle of separation of Church and State cushions any move to locate religion at the center of political and economic activity. Within Catholic education systems however, local organizations like the CEAP have laid operating guidelines

⁶⁴ R. Baring & R. Cacho, “Contemporary Engagements,” 148.

⁶⁵ Pacifico Aprieto, *Book Publishing and Philippine Scholarship* (Manila: Daily Star Publishing Co., 1981), 23.

⁶⁶ F. R. Von der Mehden, *Religion and Modernization in Southeast Asia* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 145.

identifying Religion as the core of the curriculum in the basic education programs. This is more emphasized in parochial schools managed by local churches. Given the varied initiatives that apparently promoted the collaboration of the schools and the state, the principle of separation has become the locus of attention in Philippine society. It has in fact contributed towards magnifying the significant role of religion in Philippine society. Recent attempts though are being done to control the presence of the 'religious' in the public sphere through legislation⁶⁷ and this has only generated strong reactions. The same principle of separation is also linked to the recent debate held in Philippine Congress regarding the reproductive health bill where the Church came up with an organized national resistance to the proposed bill. Overall these controversies only indicate the recalcitrant position long held by religion in society.

While the Church is called to a preferential option for the poor, Religious Education is also challenged to take its share of extending academic opportunities for the less fortunate students through scholarships or financial assistance. In its 2015 National Convention in Manila, the CEAP member schools collectively reflected on Catholic Education's mission to attend to the poor. Manifestations of poverty in provincial and urban settings include de-humanization, marginalization, isolation, disorientation and deprivation among others. These experiences of marginalization rationalize Catholic education's involvement with the poor through community engagement, welfare programs, technical training programs, advocacies and charity works.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Paolo Romero, *Lawmaker Wants Religion Out of Gov't Offices* (Philstar Online, Philstar News Service) June 16, 2012, accessed, <http://ph.news.yahoo.com/lawmaker-wants-religion-govt-offices162241156.html>. See also R. Baring, "Challenges to Reproductive Health in the Philippines: Profiling the Attitudinal Sources of Conflict" *Asia-Pacific EJournal of Health Social Science* 1 no. 2 (2012), 1-11 accessed, <https://sites.google.com/site/asiapacificjournalofhss/>.. ISSN 2244-0240.

⁶⁸ A. Gutiérrez, "The Preferential Option for the Poor in Catholic education in the Philippines: A Report on Progress and Problems," *International Studies in Catholic Education* 1 no. 2 (2009), 135-151.

The drama of large-scale poverty and hunger in many parts of the world, internal conflicts and civil wars, urban deterioration, the spread of crime in large cities, impede the implementation of projects for formation and education. In other parts of the world, governments themselves put obstacles in the way, when they do not actually prevent the Catholic school from operating, in spite of the progress which has been made as far as attitude, democratic practice and sensitivity to human rights are concerned.⁶⁹

Another significant area of engagement in Philippine Religious Education is media in its varied forms. Obviously, Religious Education has to understand mass media⁷⁰ and digital media to be able to improve formation programs and catechesis. Numerous reports and studies had been conducted with respect to students' engagements with mass media such as television and most importantly, with digital media.⁷¹ But these studies are not conducted to understand student behaviour and attitudes towards media use in Religious instruction. Religious Education has yet to build up significant amount of empirical data to train its instructors towards precise interventions. Currently, Religious Education is content with the third party data from commissioned researches conducted by local social scientists.

Given the intense media interactions of the youth in recent studies, the challenge of discerning "media influence"⁷² for religious instruction is strategically important. There is abundant scholarship when it comes to studies of digital media use in general by students. However, there is limited knowledge about

⁶⁹ Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE), *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (December 28, 1997) accessed from http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccatheduc/documents/rc_con_ccat_heduc_doc_27041998_school2000_en.html.

⁷⁰ R. Baring, "Narratives of Healing in Suffering: Religious Education in Media," *Religious Education* 108 no. 3 (2013), 263-279.

⁷¹ R. Lee, R. Baring, M. Sta. Maria & S. Reysen, "Attitude Toward Technology, Social Media Usage and Grade Point Average as Predictors of Global Citizenship Identification," *International Journal of Psychology* 52, no. 3 (2017), 213-219

⁷² R. Baring & R. Cacho, "Contemporary Engagements," 149.

the effectiveness of digital media applications in religious instruction or human formation. Inevitably, instead of denying it, Catholic education will have to wrestle with the basic question of how a Catholic institution should utilize the power of new media technologies given their dominance in the social life of students. There is a burning contention among scholars whether video game applications are effective for student learning in the classroom.⁷³ Those who argue for its effectiveness see how children benefit from the simulated exercises.⁷⁴ Those who believe on the contrary⁷⁵ insist that there is a great limitation that divides digitally formatted games and available improvised software. In this case, digital catechesis will have to contend with the difficulties and hopefully benefit from this burning discussion.

CONCLUSION

Catholic education in the country has gone a long way but local scholarship on Religious Education stands in need of attention. This article has presented the challenges, scholarly directions and engagements of Religious Education in the Philippines. Literature points to the logistical and practical challenges in local Religious Education. Scholarly pursuits are directed towards the need for inter-disciplinary understanding,

⁷³ H. Jenkins, E. Klopfer, K. Squire, K., & P. Tan, "Entering the Education Arcade," *Computers in Entertainment* 1, no. 1 (2003), 17.

⁷⁴ See A. McFarlane, P. Triggs and W.C. Yee, *Researching Mobile Learning*, 2008, accessed May 5, 2016, http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/1473/1/becta_2009_mobilelearning_summary.pdf.

⁷⁵ Refer to the following studies: D. Buckingham and M. Scanlon, *Education, Entertainment and Learning in the Home* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2003); K. J. Facer, R. Furlong, and R. Sutherland, *Screen Play: Children and Computing in the Home*. (London: Routledge, 2003); Z. Okan, "Edutainment: Is learning at Risk?" *British Journal of Education Technology* 34 no. 4 (2003), 255 - 264.

critical attitudes nurtured by scholars and the gaps experienced in the conduct of Religious Education. Scholarly works are needed to address the gaps and challenges confronting religious instruction and Christian formation. While other disciplines have advanced in their academic engagements, Religious Education lags behind in terms of nurturing a critical culture towards understanding the faith. The struggle is not in terms of opening up the discussion but rather in appreciating the valued place of a critical disposition in understanding the faith. Nothing is new about critical discourses on the Christian faith. The medieval period is replete with academic discussions by Church personalities aided by philosophical inquiries. As a result of the current gap, there is the impression that catechesis is a closed system. But Philippine Religious Education cannot act as a closed system for it is also concerned with values formation. The constant engagement of Religious Education with other disciplines for new discourses on values formation will keep its dynamism in shape. Lastly, engagements in Philippine Religious Education reflect practical considerations when dealing with emerging social contexts vis-à-vis religious instruction.

Rito Baring

Theology and Religious Education Department

De La Salle University

2401 Taft Ave., Malate, Manila

rito.baring@dlsu.edu.ph