



PHILOLANGUAGING RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TOWARD THE CONTEXT OF INCLUSIVITY

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Abstract: *The context of delivering Religious Education in Catholic schools must be inclusive of any faith or religion through what maybe possibly called as the ethics of communication. Hence, this paper aimed to synthesize the philosophical concepts and interpretations on language as applied in Education to determine an excellent framework reference for a more meaningful way of teaching Religious Education. Specifically, it ascertained the way how Religious Education is currently taught in Catholic schools, the meaningful use of language, and the possible misconceptions that could be addressed with a sound philosophy of language and philosophy of education. This paper employed the documentary analysis which covered a range of meta-synthesis methods including critical interpretive synthesis and thematic analysis. Careful analysis show that varied cultural, religious, and spiritual worldviews should be a point of consideration in lieu of giving emphasis to the prominence of the Catholic Faith and Tradition. Religious Education in Catholic schools needs to be tolerant with non-Catholic Christians and non-Christians as it tries to keep its social teachings and moral dispositions as well. It should be well noted that the language of faith is not a kind of reasoning but a matter of discipline or attitude that reflects human values. Hence, the language of religious education is proposed to be relearned in the context of Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of language.*

Keywords: *meaning, myth, values, philosophy of language, religious education*

I. INTRODUCTION

The question of meaning in conversations is a question that can be addressed on the use of language itself. To fully understand what one says, the context of the language uttered must be clear. It is through language, whether expressed verbally or non-verbally, that human beings understand each other. The expression of language is truly relevant when it makes sense in the light of human experiences. Thus, attitudes and commitment in dialogue with others should be in consonance to what people really think and feel. This may be called the ethics of communication.

In the context of discussions in Religious Education between teachers and students, or among the educators themselves, it is deemed important that the meaning of language used is according to the realm of faith and not only to intellectual discourse, for language has its own context for validation. As educator in the field of religion, one should yearn to bridge the gap

between faith and reason. Keeping this great task at hand, the language of religious education is proposed to be relearned in the context of Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of language.

This research paper is a quest for a more meaningful way of teaching Religious Education. It aims to help the teachers in Religious Education to fully understand the language that they use and be guided not only with a sound philosophy but also with a life of religiosity and spirituality to inspire students to become more faithful to God. At one point, in the course of Religious Education, it must be clear that spirituality may or may not necessarily lead to active participation in an organized religion. It is asserted in this paper that Religious Education as part of the curriculum should not be authoritative in favour of the Catholic Faith (as this may be true to some Catholic schools). The context of Religious Education must be inclusive of any faith or religion for that matter. Religious Education should also go beyond the peculiar academic nature of UBD or OBE approaches with regard to teaching and learning styles or pedagogies, exams or modes of assessments, and the use of educational technology. A holistic vision to Religious Education is indeed relevant.

Research Objectives:

Generally, this paper aimed to synthesize some philosophical concepts and interpretations on language as applied in Education to determine an excellent framework reference for a more meaningful way of teaching Religious Education.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. Why should Religious Education be taught in Catholic schools?
2. When could the use of language be really meaningful, in general, and specifically in Religious Education?
3. What are some possible misconceptions in the Religious Education's teaching-learning process which could be addressed with a sound philosophy of language and philosophy of education?
4. How can one be more committed in the profession, mission, and vocation as a Religious Education teacher?

II. METHODOLOGY

This study made use of documentary analysis method in a qualitative approach. In this paper, it became a process reference for the researcher to search for, select, appraise, summarize, and combine documents to address the research questions (Erwin, E.J, Brotherson, MJ, Summers, J.A, 2011). This paper also covered a range of meta-synthesis methods including critical interpretive synthesis and thematic analysis. Although this is not a new research approach in other

fields, the author suggest that it can offer a promising practice in arriving at a theory development in teaching Religious Education.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Religious Education should not be treated simply as one of the minor courses or subjects in the curriculum of Catholic schools. It is not surprising to consider that Religious Education plays a major role in the academe for Catholic schools because Religious Education is guided by the teachings of the Church, yet most specially by the Gospel values and the Greatest Teacher himself, Jesus Christ. According to the Philippine Catholic Schools Standards (for Basic Education), the defining characteristics of an excellent Catholic school contain essential attributes and qualities without which the Catholic school cannot exist or claim to be Catholic. For the said defining characteristics, an excellent Catholic school is centered in the person and message of Jesus Christ, participating in the evangelizing mission of the Church, animated by the spirit of communion, an active member of (established as) an ecclesial institution, distinguished by a culture of excellence, committed to integral human formation, engaged in the service of the Church and society with preferential option for the poor, and promoting dialogue on faith and life and culture. Accordingly, if these eight defining characteristics are actualized to some degree in each Catholic school, this will be a matter of *Transformative Education*. Hence, the language of Religious Education should be in itself an expression of the Word of God.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION INSPIRED BY JESUS AS THE LANGUAGE OF GOD AND ENRICHED WITH VALUES

There are murky and confusing terms and concepts in the field of education which religious educators have to deal with. A philosopher like Wittgenstein may help educational philosophers and practitioners with the linguistic and conceptual problems they face in discussing their discipline (Dolhenty, 2015). How people are educated to the apprehension of language is a philosophical endeavour which can relate to correct practice or use of the language itself. Philosophy of language, for Wittgenstein, is an attempt to resolve problems that arise as the result of linguistic confusion, and the key to the resolution of such problems is ordinary language analysis and the proper use of language. How language gains its meaning from its use in context is the concern of philosophy of language.

Why Philosophy?

In the words of John Dewey, "Philosophy implied a certain totality, generality, and ultimateness of both subject and method" (Buford, 1969). *"The traditional conception of philosophy has presented philosophy as a fundamental or architectonic discipline, laying the foundation for all other disciplines of knowledge. The philosopher becomes an investigator into*

all knowledge and philosophy is the summary of all branches of knowledge." (Dolhentry, cited Oryshkewych, 1966, and Buford, 1969).

There should be no question that a teacher (in any branch of knowledge) is a philosopher himself/herself. Philosophy is integral. A religious education teacher is also a philosopher in the field. A good teacher, as such, should have a sound philosophy of education, whether in the field of science, math, linguistic, to name a few. Just as a teacher in Science should know Philosophy of Science, a Social Studies teacher for Philosophy of History, in Religious Education one should also have a background in Philosophy of Religion, Ethics, and Values Education. Among all these disciplines, however, is the underlying Philosophy of Language which should guide us into the rule of the possession of appropriate language. In Wittgenstein's theory of language, in order to understand what the meaning of a word or sentence is, one should not ask what it "pictures" but rather what job or task it performs (Kimble, 2010).

The Philosophy of Language vis-à-vis The Philosophy of Education

Wittgenstein's philosophy of language is difficult to understand but it has a practical value. Unless one is able to understand that Philosophy of Language is primarily concerned with the nature of linguistic meaning, usage and interpretation, he/she may continue to misuse words and make them mean things that they aren't made to mean. *"How we become acquainted with words and use them, and come to understand concepts, is a matter of great importance to Wittgenstein, and illuminates the relationship between understanding, meaning and learning."* (Fortes, 2012). To be an effective communicator of the language, therefore, in the field of education, especially Religious Education, one needs to undergo training on its appropriate usage in any given circumstances. Wittgenstein emphasizes that familiarity with a concept is to apply it right in action; knowledge is found in the correct use of the concept. Learning a concept is to obtain proper use within established conventions, to master the practice that is the concept's grammar. To describe a concept is to clarify the usage rules in the current context.

Jureschi (2012), in her research presentation on the 3rd annual NWS conference, held at the University of Southern Denmark on June 8-9, 2012 with the theme, "Wittgenstein, the Philosophy of Education, and the Education of Philosophy" said: *"In the process of exploring Wittgenstein-inspired approaches to the philosophy of education, there are two major directions one can take. We can either draw an analogy between Wittgenstein's style and method on one hand and pedagogy on the other, or investigate the implications of Wittgenstein's remarks on the processes employed in education."*

How teachers use concepts in the teaching and learning process should reflect the importance of a primacy of learning through *paradigms* over learning through *rules*. Whereas, according to Jureschi, the application of this primacy can be expanded to *moral education* and even *adult training techniques*. To fully understand this claim, Jureschi further said:

In order to make these points, I start from investigating the way in

which children learn one of the most basic things they are taught: language. The hypothesis I put to the test is that even in this case, what children learn is to do things (with words) – they are trained in mastering techniques. To put it in Wittgenstein’s terms, we learn language games, not concepts. It is important to note that looking at how children learn to use language as intertwined with actions is not a philosophical artifice. The reason why starting here is relevant is because the very meaning of our concepts is embedded in practices. Our concepts are given by the human factual way of life.

In his essays on *Philosophical Investigation*, Wittgenstein guided us with a method for thinking about meaning and philosophy. Meaning can only be properly understood by participating in the actual practice of language, and it is in this participation that we come to understand what bringing words back to their everyday use means. Wittgenstein is asking us to consider, when meaning is concerned; to whom, on what occasion and why we are saying things.

The Language of Religious Education in the Person of Jesus Himself

The youth of today in the educational set-up need teachers who would be able to understand them, journey with them, and form good values with them. They do not need intellectual giants who are emotional dwarves. In the context of Religious Education, they do not need eloquent preachers but living witnesses to what they say.

When Jesus speaks to people, in His time, the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law would question the authority of His preaching and teaching. But to common people, His words give life. Jesus was the source of their inspiration and strength. Jesus was the language of God. As the Scripture says: “*For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it*” (John 12:49). The Jews saw in Jesus a compassionate God.

Students in our Religious Education classes may experience the love of God in many ways, like when we manifest that we care for them. Being their mentors, we need to guide our students in realizing the importance of the Scriptures. “The Bible itself constitutes the irreplaceable source for coming to know and love Jesus Christ” (NCDP, 94). But the big question is if we, ourselves, as their Religious Education teachers also read the Bible.

The Bible affirms Jesus as the Word of God in the fullest, truest, and most proper sense. John 5:39 says: “*You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf.*” This Gospel passage affirms that Jesus is not simply the spoken word of God, but rather Jesus Himself is the living manifestation of what is to come in the Kingdom of God - salvation. Hence, to believe in what is written in the Gospel is to believe in the one it speaks of.

Catholic institutions providing Religious Education need educators who are true and just. Religious Education teachers should be Christ-like in their dispositions and attitude so that the

students will truly appreciate the language of the course in the fullest, truest, and proper sense as well.

Religious Education Enriched with Values

Our present educational system today makes Education synonymous with examination, employment, and empowerment. When a certain school produces a lot of topnotchers in board examinations it gives more pride to the institution concerned. What seems to determine success in educational institutions are the quantity of board exam passers, empowerment of the school to be in autonomous status as it granted excellent marks in accreditation, and the employability of their graduates.

A value-laden description of Education is when it stands for emancipation, ennoblement, and evolution. Education today is sometimes marks with the absence of a holistic approach and an imbalanced growth of knowledge - dealing only with external world around us and not related to the inner-self of an individual. It is a big question when students are not learning values from the school. When teachers do not exert effort in giving a holistic approach to teaching-learning, education may only be on the head level. In a misdirected educational system - instead of developing a person as a humane being it is only directed towards superficial, surface level of achievements. As one yearns to achieve the greater heights of financial success which maybe consequent to getting an academic degree in the school, negative qualities like jealousy, hatred and rivalry instead of virtues like kindness, compassion and honesty may also be promoted.

Education's role is not mere stuffing of facts. A good and quality education indeed makes one wiser, happier, and more contented but there is something more to it. *Education is really the process of removing the ignorance that is covering our inner knowledge, which is absolute, which is perfect, which is eternal, which is supreme.* Education is for a HOLISTIC LIFE and not for a mere living. 'Education' needs to be enriched with VALUES (Khrisna, nd).

SOME POSSIBLE MISCONCEPTIONS IN THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION'S TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS

As understanding of spirituality should be distinguished with knowledge of religion, whereas, religion is community focused and spirituality is individualistic; religion is observable, measurable, and objective while spirituality is less measurable and more subjective; religion is formal, orthodox, and organized while spirituality is less formal, less orthodox, and less systematic; religion is behaviour oriented and gives emphasis to outward practices while spirituality is emotionally oriented and inwardly directed; and religion is authoritarian in terms of behaviour while spirituality is less authoritarian and with little accountability (NCCAM, 2005), it is important to figure out what it is and what is not in Religious Education's teaching-learning process. These misconceptions, which the researcher considers as 'myth' should not be exempted from scrutiny using the philosophy of language.

Myth 1. *Anybody who is a graduate from a seminary, or a Catholic university (or college) can teach Religious Education if the need arises.*

How is someone who is not an Education graduate (from the seminary) be an effective teacher if he/she has enrolled only in minor Theology or Religious Education subjects? One can only be an effective teacher if he/she knows the pedagogy in the teaching - learning process. You only end up misusing these persons in trying to make them mean for things that they are not made to mean (just to fill in the vacancies needed in the academe). However, if they are given chances to learn the language of Education, for example, by providing them with crash courses in teaching or assigning them a peer tutor, the story might change.

Myth 2. *Approaches in the teaching - learning process like UBD and OBE should not exempt the Theology and Religious Education Department. Religious Education courses do not make any difference with all other courses or subjects.*

The Department of Education (DepEd) and CHED (with its CMOs) provide guidelines on the computation of grades and even in the content of a syllabus. All academic institutions are enjoined to abide to such mandate; however, Catholic Education should assert that not all objective statements in the syllabi and lesson plans for Religious Education can be in the measurable mode. One can never measure faith just in a sentence or in any learning assessment. Hence, there is a need to rethink how Religious Education is best delivered in our Catholic schools. Wittgenstein presents us with a view of the nature of religious discourse according to which religious claims are non-cognitive and not verifiable or assessable for correctness by means of evidence (Kimble, 2010). For example, the statement "God exists", in Wittgenstein's point of view it means more than saying that "there is God". To a religious believer it is affirmed in this statement that God is indeed a reality in one's life. This is a personal declaration of faith that only a believer in the meaning of the language used would understand.

Myth 3. *All programs in the Theology and Religious Education department must be anchored from the Action Plan of the school Principal or the Academic Dean.*

Each Department Head has Individual Performance Plan (IPP) according to discipline. In one way or the other, such IPPs must be in consonance with the Action Plans of the Principal or Dean. However, certain religious activities must not be treated academically with rubrics. (Example: Students attending Masses or recollections are asked to submit reflections and their papers are treated with a rubric for essay writing and such is included in the computation of grades). School administrators should understand the spirit of the Theology and Religious Education Department. What is good to other courses in the Curriculum may not necessarily be applicable in the Theology and Religious Education Department. The unique characteristic of Theology and or Religious Education is its attachment to eschatology. At the end, it is not about the "academic programs" conducted which gained excellent remarks but the "transformation" in the individual

which matters most. Excellence is not limited to the academic or intellectual aspect of personhood development.

Myth 4. *The medium of communication in Religious Education should be English.*

You can never make the students appreciate much our Religious Education classes with the use of highfalutin English words or statements. We need to be open to the language of their culture, or to the "language of the youth" themselves. In His preaching and teaching, Jesus used simple words yet striking to the heart. *Ang kabuluhan ng mga salita ay naaangkop lamang sa tamang pag-unawa at sa pagsasabuhay sa mga ito.* In English, the essence of words spoken, or the language itself, is in understanding of what is said as it is put into action.

Myth 5. *Religious Education in all Catholic schools in the Philippines is strictly a matter of Catholic Education.*

In a research conducted by Del Rosario (2017), citing various literature, he said that religious education must be diverse in approach, multi-centred, and intercultural. Catholic theology for him, (or religious education, per se) should be in "intercultural" and "inter-religious manner" liberating everyone from strictness on doctrines, close-mindedness, conceit, and hypocrisy. Indeed, Religious Education should be more inclusive that it may not lead to over-emphasizing the dogmas of the Catholic faith.

TEACHING AS A PROFESSION, MISSION, AND VOCATION

“Teaching is a noble profession.” The word “profession” is synonymous to: occupation, job, career, work, line of work. The word “professional” means long & arduous years of preparation, a striving for excellence, a dedication to public interest and commitment to moral and ethical values. If one considers teaching as a profession, then he/she must be willing to go through a long period of preparation, go through continuing education (continuous development of potentials), strive for excellence (not “*pwede na*” mentality), commit to moral, ethical and religious values and dedicate oneself to service. The Filipino phrase “*pwede na*” may be translated in English as “good as ok”, which means that one may not have an excellent output but it will just be considered.

The word mission is derived from the Latin word “*misio*” which means “to send”. The Webster Dictionary defines “mission” as “task assigned”. If teaching is your mission then it means it is the “task” entrusted to you in this world; it is your assigned task thus you’ve got to prepare for it; and, it calls for a continuing professional education. A popular saying goes, “Once a teacher, forever a student.”

The word “vocation” comes from the Latin word “*vocare*” which means “to call” thus vocation is a “call”. For Catholics and other Christians, the CALLER is GOD Himself. If teaching

is your vocation then it means you said YES to your call to teach; you commit yourself in the total transformation of the learner; and, you consider teaching as a lifetime commitment thus aim through the years towards quality teaching. According to Bilbao, et. al. (2006), "teaching may not guarantee financial security but love of teaching has served as a motivating factor to many teachers through the years. Teaching has remained inspiring and fulfilling".

IV. CONCLUSION

Being in a Catholic school classroom with diverse students, both in terms of culture and religion, nuances in the delivery of Religious Education must be addressed with the right perspective. The varied cultural, religious, and spiritual worldviews should be a point of consideration in lieu of giving emphasis to the dominance of the Catholic Faith and Tradition. Religious Education in Catholic schools needs to be tolerant as it tries to keep its moral dispositions as well.

As one yearns for truth and meaning, philosophy attempts to give the answers needed. The task of philosophy, in general, is to fathom everything that the mind could think with the use of reason through language. The Philosophy of Language, in particular, is an avenue to discuss what is being reasonable vis-à-vis what may be unreasonable. In Wittgenstein's contention, although religious believers are not reasonable for most of the time, they are not also unreasonable at the same time. The "language game" in Religious Education, when it is marked with follies from the believers themselves, is what makes these religious believers unreasonable. It should be well noted that the language of faith is not a kind of reasoning but a matter of attitude that reflects human values.

In the Religious Education's teaching-learning process, there are some confusing propositions which should be reinterpreted in a language that exemplifies a philosophy of education that respects Theology itself. After all, "philosophy is the handmaid of theology". Religious Education, in context, is geared towards "faith seeking understanding". To keep this faith reasonable as is in its own language, the approach to Religious Education should be distinguished from the nature of educational approach which is required from other curriculum. The teacher in Religious Education considers teaching as a profession, mission, and vocation. It is no doubt that all teachers share the same profession in Education, but for the questions on faith and morals, this is an expertise for the Theology and Religious Education teachers. They know more of the language in their own field. Their vocation as teachers is anchored with the Divine, and their mission is to reconcile everyone despite differences in faith, morals, and culture: a task which is not necessarily required from other educators.

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