The FABC Vision of Inculturation and the Pedagogical Renewal of Catechesis in the Philippines

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In 1977, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP), in its position paper on the Synod's theme, *Catechesis in Our Time*, stated an ideal that all catechetical undertakings should aim at when it states:

> Finally, we strongly suggest that catechists should accentuate the movement towards total conversion of the whole man, the dynamism towards personal union with God which the Holy Spirit sustains in all those who accept that Jesus is Christ, the eternal Son of God made man, and an outpouring of the effects of this union through Christian witness.[1]

More than four decades have passed, and numerous initiatives have been done and have achieved a certain level of progress in the catechetical apostolate. But the sheer enormity of the task pointed out by the bishops requires a constant effort to find new and distinctive ways to make it happen—as many as the voices of the thousands of catechists who articulate the faith, based on their experience and interpretation, to varied audiences. The importance of an updated pedagogy cannot be overemphasized since it has for its subject God's revelation itself—something dynamic and alive.

As *Catechesi Tradendae* (CT) notes, "Throughout sacred history, especially in the Gospel, God Himself used a pedagogy

1 CBCP, "CBCP Position Paper On the Synod Theme Catechesis In Our Time," (Baguio City, July 13, 1977), http://cbcponline.net/cbcp-position-paper-on-the-synod-theme-catechetics-in-our-time/ (accessed on 13 April 2020).

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that must continue to be a model for the pedagogy of faith" (CT 58). Pedagogical renewal, then, cannot be a one-time endeavor, but it has to go with the so-called "signs of the times" (GS 4). Catechesis at the service of Church's ministry of the Word pays attention to the nuances and unfolding of life, events and circumstances that may alter how it carries out its goals and purposes. Education in the faith has to use a tool, an approach or even a personality that may facilitate its job of communicating, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, the truths of the Christian Faith.

Recent years have produced inculturated catechisms that have been expertly prepared by catechetical authorities based on how they see things from their desks. Inculturation may be best experienced when done on the ground as *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, considered as the "Charter of Inculturation," declares, "…what matters is to evangelize man's culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way, as it were, by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots)…" (EV 20).

Renewing a Catechetical Method

Since the time of the introduction of Christianity in the Philippines, there have been varying efforts to introduce and make the Christian Faith part of the daily life of Filipinos. Many of these initiatives have been preserved up to the contemporary period. The bell was an important part of the daily routine as it is rung for the Angelus, for daily Mass, for announcing that somebody is dying or has just died, for important occasions and many others. This type of "catechesis" is what they call *Bajo las campanas* (MCF-NCDP 399). Life itself is full of Christian practices that are educating them in the ways of the faith like the celebration of fiestas and other festivals, the statues or images of Jesus, Mary and the

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Saints in home altars; the celebration of the seasons of Lent and Easter, Advent and Christmas; the seasonal *Flores de Mayo*, *Santacruzan,* and the *Pasyong Mahal*; and other devotional practices. To a great extent, this method has captured the imagination and consciousness of Filipino converts. The missionaries taught them the faith by memorizing the *Doctrina Cristiana* (MCF-NCDP 399) which perhaps was foreign to their understanding and experience as many of their unchristian, native beliefs were not "enlightened" by it. They tended to mix Christianity with their indigenous beliefs and cultural practices in what was to be called "folk Catholicism." The missionaries, however, were successful in instilling in them the value of being resigned to what God wills (*kalooban ng Diyos*), that God is in-charge (*bahala na ang Diyos*) and that God is merciful (*may awa ang Diyos*). All these things happened within the context of family, Church and community.

After more than four centuries, there are inevitable changes in the template of the family and society, even in the countryside, where life is more laidback compared to highly urbanized centers. The once successful pedagogy implemented by the missionaries, which was "orderly, logical and experiential" (cf. MCF-NCDP 399) may no longer be, for the most part, as effective as before. In recent years, there is much emphasis on human experience that is illustrated in methodologies, such as "Christian Communities Program (CCP), the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, the Human Evocative Approach (HEAP), and other variants" (Cf. MCH-NCDP 403). Each of them has served its purposes and has been maintained by some catechetical institutions, depending on the needs and circumstances of the faithful they serve. The focus on engaging in the latest methods from the field of education may be advantageous, but they should be treated

with caution since catechetical instruction is not just one of the human sciences.

Moreover, the focus on human experience makes the Christian truths closer to the level of the catechized, especially as they search for personal meaning and sense of purpose through God's living Word in the Scriptures. Over-concentration on human experience should be avoided so as not to miss the point of the Good News, which takes precedence in catechetical sessions. Thus, in the effort to arrive at a suitable method for a particular catechetical need and audience, there should be a balance between teaching the truths of faith and the desire to be relevant and effective.

The Necessity of Pedagogical Renewal

As stated, times and circumstances have been altered. The Church's mission in Asia and in the world continues to keep abreast of the never-ending narratives and developments that are unfolding every step of the way. These realities primarily affect societal structures, particularly the family and the Church. Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, describes them by noting "the proliferation of new religious movements that tend towards fundamentalism; the birth of a materialistic, consumerist and individualistic society; the process of secularization that tends to reduce the faith and the Church to something private and personal; the weakening of the sense of sin; and the increase of relativism that disregards the objective moral norms" (cf. EG 63-64). These phenomena definitely have serious consequences in the Church's exercise of its prophetic role in the world.

In the Philippines, there are many significant changes that are less likely to escape the scrutiny of a keen observer. Filipinos today are more empowered and less likely to just

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accept anything without articulating their sentiments. Although there are still some traces of "colonial mentality,"[2] gone are the days when they would act like sponges that absorb what is imposed on them. They are more cognizant of what is happening around them and freely decide, right or wrong, on matters affecting them. The masses, who did not have the opportunity to finish their studies, are often victims of oppression and manipulation of sweet-talking politicians and more often than not, become avid followers of media and entertainment personalities. Confronted with this underlying situation, the Church must present the living Gospel message in a manner that draws people more deeply to the Christian ideals.

Philippine Cultural Trends as Context of Renewal

Contemporary Filipino mindset and way of life[3] may be gleaned from their preferences and values. What the majority chooses and believes in are motivational factors that explain why they live and behave in a certain way. From mere external observation, it is easy to pinpoint a general pattern among Filipinos today, such as the desire to look good, to be physically healthy, to have a decent salary to satisfy their wants and to be able to travel. These inclinations are not exclusively Filipino, but things they may share in common with the rest

2 Considering the fact that Filipinos have been under the Spanish, American and Japanese colonizers, they have a high regard for foreigners, especially the Caucasians. Imported items have a different appeal on them, rather than patronizing Philippine-made goods. Foreign fashion trends and sports capture their imagination.

3 This section wants to zero in on cultural trends that directly affect the lives of Filipinos as they present a more focused and relevant context of pedagogical renewal. The Asian context would be too general for this purpose. The researcher, then, took an article that more or less resonates with contemporary, secular mindset.

of Asia. What makes Filipinos unique is that these longings are expressed alongside the values of family (at its core), optimism, humor, flexibility, hospitality, fellowship, faith and religion. Not everything is lost for the Church's continuing mission of evangelization in the midst of contemporary cultural movements.

Business specialists are rather efficient in reading cultural developments, especially as they study the present-day trends in order to formulate marketing strategies for the realization of their objectives. Any change in the purchasing behavior of consumers would mean either an increase or a decrease of their profits for a particular fiscal year. In 2017, for instance, Chiqui Escareal-Go and Josiah Go, Chairman and CEO respectively of the marketing, training and advocacy firm Mansmith and Fielders Inc., have written about cultural trends that influence how Filipinos behave. In Filipino homes, these are the current observable factors: "the absence of parents and the increasing role of schools in instilling values; the social disorders associated with the increasing absence of parents in the lives of children (drugs, child sex abuse, teen pregnancy, among others); the changing boundaries and sequence of love, marriage, sex and family; the rise in the number of single parents; the growing preference for late marriages and smaller families; the upgraded role of music as surrogate companion; and the rise of single young adults (30 and above) without kids, mortgages and responsibilities."[4] In the past fifty years or so, these realities were not even thought of to be happening in Philippine shores. This is the new normal for many families, not only in urban centers but also in most provinces. The high regard for family remains the same, but unexpected outside

4 Cf. Chiqui Go and Josiah Go, "Cultural Trends Changing How Filipinos Behave" in *Inquirer,* September 1, 2017, https://business.inquirer.net/236089/cultural-trends-changing-filipinos-behave (accessed on May 5, 2020).

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forces place it in a more difficult predicament, at least based on the optic of Christian teachings.

In the area of lifestyle trends, the following cultural antecedents are prevalent: "the stressful lifestyle of the working class that leads to lack of sleep; the growing awareness to plan out free time; the choice to buy new gadgets and spend on travel; the frequent trip to the malls as instant escape; the increasing dominance of point-of-purchase activities (packaging, display, sampling, among others); the expansive food knowledge, instead of owning cars, as a sign of sophistication; and the use of visual communication like emojis and memes."[5] Definitely, the desire to wrap oneself by the "good life," to succeed and to be known serves as the driving force. The preferred lifestyle is the new notion of simplicity. They may equate their activities with success, even if many of them are unnecessary. Being preoccupied with so many things—oftentimes stressful—does not translate to being productive. The ultimate goal in Christian life is not success but fruitfulness that is only achieved through Christian self-denial, self-restraint and self-sacrifice. Meaning, depth, and peace are not attained by external trappings but by an intimate relationship with Jesus.

Moving towards the realm of communication and technology, there are notable cultural strands that are evident, namely, "people relying more and more on online applications to keep in touch, such as Line, Messenger, WhatsApp, Viber, among others; the continuing shift of advertising from traditional to digital; the owning of multiple mobile phones; the increasing acceptance of foreign cultures (American music, Korean pop and television shows, Indian yoga, Chinese *feng shui*, Japanese *anime*); the opinions are shaped not just by

5 Cf. Go, "Cultural Trends Changing How Filipinos Behave."

watchdogs, but also by strangers in social media; the emerging consciousness of people to self-organize and to help others in times of natural disasters; the increasing reliance on tech-based solutions to manage personal life and work; the rise of omnichannel that provides customers seamless shopping experience; more online activists and social influencers; and the rise of virtual reality and augmented reality."[6]

An increasing number of hours are spent in the virtual world that does not require personal appearance and good rapport with others. They can freely communicate their thoughts and feelings without leaving the safety of their private spaces. Anything they need from food, clothing, gadgets, etc. is just a click away. And perhaps, they find better educators in Google, Yahoo and other search engines, practically substituting the role of parents and other traditional sources of information. People are becoming more and more very impersonal in contrast with a God who seeks to have an encounter with His creatures.

Engaging in the twenty-first century poses many challenges for effective catechesis; indeed, faith-education needs a lot of imagination and creativity that is sustained and precise. Keeping up with cultural trends implies realignment of efforts, strategies, and objectives. The aim of this effort is to make progress in proposing the Gospel message to dynamic and fast-paced developments in how Filipinos live their lives.

6 Cf. Go, "Cultural Trends Changing How Filipinos Behave."

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Inculturation in the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences

The term "inculturation"[7] (FAPA I, 6) is reputably first used by the FABC in November 1970 during the Asian Bishops' Meeting[8] in Manila, as there are other authors who claim that it first appeared sometime in 1973 onwards. The documents suggest that the word was first used in the context of the Church in Asia, and it officially appeared in papal documents after three years. From its beginnings, the FABC seems to be liberal in its use of the term as it uses other names[9] for it. James Kroeger articulates this in these words:

> One looks in vain in the FABC literature to find a consistent definition of culture and inculturation. For example, in the early FABC documents, terms like "adaptation," "incarnation," "acculturation," "indigenization," and "inculturation" were often used interchangeably. Yet, this lack of a single term has resulted in a wide variety of descriptions of the inculturation process, some of which border on poetic. While maybe not sociologically or theologically precise, these various descriptions elicit a vision or dream of the mission to be accomplished.[10]

7 As cited previously, FABC was the first to use the term "inculturation." Some quarters, however, claim that it first appeared in John Paul II's "Catechesi Tradendae" in 1973. Others say that this word came from G.L. Barney, a protestant missionary in New York at about the same year.

8 This was the time when Pope Paul VI came to Manila and met with the Asian Bishops with the desire to form a permanent organization – a development that laid the initial ground for the establishment of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference. Cf. James Kroeger, *Asia's Dynamic Local Churches: Serving Dialogue and Mission* (Quezon City: Claretian Communications Foundation, Inc., 2014): 56.

9 At one time, in describing an inculturated local church, the terms used were "incarnate, indigenous, and localized" (cf. FAPA I, 12). In another instance, inculturation is referred to as indigenization which "renders the local church truly present within the life and cultures of our peoples" (cf. FAPA 1, 16).

10 Kroeger, *Asia's Dynamic Local Churches,* 56.

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Though there was this glaring inconsistency in the use of the term, FABC clearly knows the task to be accomplished, namely, that of making the Church, introduced by Westerners, take on an identity that fits into the Asian context—a reality that other religions have achieved. Its structure, teachings, sacraments, and practices do not readily assume an Asian touch and color.

In an effort to name this process of making the Church blend with the Asian culture, in 1978, Father Pedro Arrupe, the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, laid down a decent working definition of inculturation as follows:

> Inculturation is the incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about 'a new creation.'[11]

This landmark description has not only pinpointed the appropriate terminology to be used, but it has also encapsulated the inherent nature of the term—its meaning, process, and goal. The only thing that is lacking in this articulation of what inculturation is all about is its theological foundation which shall establish the parameters in which the process should proceed. Likewise, it concentrates only on what the Christian life and its message can do to a particular culture without taking into account "what the culture can offer to Christianity."[12]

In 1979, a year after Arrupe's definition, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences explains, "Inculturation is not

11 Pedro Arrupe, "Letter to the Whole Society on Inculturation," in *Studies in the International Apostolate of the Jesuits* 7 (June 1978): 9.

12 FABC rightfully develops the dialogical aspect of inculturation (cf. FAPA I, 138-139).

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a mere adaptation of a ready-made Christianity into a given situation but rather a creative embodiment of the Word in the local Church. This is the basic and fundamental process of inculturation" (FAPA I, 138). It is not a one-size-fits-all Christian faith that immediately harmonizes with the receiving culture but rather an encounter between equal parties that are ready to submit themselves to a painstaking process — stripping both parties to their essentials – in order to arrive at a new creation or way of being.

FABC Vision of Inculturation as Dialogue

Since the 1970's, the FABC has articulated its vision that "the decisive new phenomenon for Christianity in Asia will be the emergence of genuine Christian communities — Asian in their way of thinking, praying, living, communicating their own Christ-experience to others … if the Asian Churches do not discover their own identity, they will have no future" (cf. FAPA I, 70). With this, it is understandable why the FABC has profoundly developed the theology of the local Church more than any other topic. The Federation stresses that "The local church is a church incarnate in a people, a church indigenous and inculturated … a church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, and the religions"[13] (FAPA I, 14). It is not a Church coming from above, but a Church that genuinely resonates the "meanings and values, the aspirations, the thoughts and language, the songs and artistry, and even its frailties and failings that aspire to be healed" (cf. FAPA I, 14). In other words, the FABC idea of local church is something that grows from the ground up and not some form of a foreign entity that has sprouted

13 The theology of the local Church is explained extensively in FABC as one of its key themes.

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from nowhere. The local Church is "the realization and the enfleshment of the Body of Christ in a given people, a given place and time" (cf. FAPA I, 14). John Paul II confirms this in his writings when he says that the Church must be "an expression of the community's life" (RM 54). Insofar as it dialogues with culture (inculturation), the Church presents herself as an entity that embodies the people's sentiments, experiences, and dreams.

Moreover, inculturation is not a trend that will easily fade, but it is something that is firmly linked with the proclamation of the Christian faith. The FABC traces its theological foundation[14] in the mystery of the Incarnation and Paschal Mystery. The FABC explains, "The mystery of the Incarnation and Paschal Mystery are at once the foundation and the model for the deep insertion of local Churches in the surrounding cultures, in all aspects of their life, celebration, witness and mission" (FAPA II, 201). On the one hand, the Church's mission "is bound by the same law of incarnation as is implied in the mystery of Christ Himself, which she signifies" (FAPA I, 72). The institutional Church has to carry out her evangelizing mission in specific settings and cultures as this cultural insertion aims to arrive at an expression of faith that is truly reflective of the locality. "Universal in intent, the Church's mission needs to be actualized by becoming incarnate in particular human situations. This is the mystery of the "local Church;" in Asia this is the mystery of the Asian Churches" (FAPA I, 72). Inculturation

14 The same conformity of the Church to her Master is the decisive theological foundation for the inculturation of local Churches. The Son of God became man in Jesus in a particular place at a particular time of history, two thousand years ago in Palestine. Jesus was a Jew, deeply inserted in the culture of his people. The revelation he conveyed of the mystery of God as well as the way he accomplished his messianic and saving mission are steeped in the religious tradition of Israel, even while they fulfill it in an unforeseen manner (FAPA I, 343).

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makes present Christ's incarnation in the here and now. In his speech to the Pontifical Biblical Commission, Pope John Paul II said, "The term *acculturation*, or *inculturation* may well be a neologism but it expresses one of the elements of the great mystery of the incarnation."[15] Inculturation can trace its conception from the Incarnation in such a way that the Word assumed the flesh just as the Good News is communicated in a specific language and form.[16] The Incarnation becomes the paradigm[17] (cf. AG 10) for the Church's initiative to relate with culture. Without this definite basis, inculturation, with its anthropological roots, cannot be admitted into the realm of pastoral theology where it is properly situated. Likewise, if incarnation — denoting a theology from above — is to be the model for inculturation, then it may appear that "there is an emphasis on the transcendental aspect and view the incarnation of the gospel message as a one-way process and the Gospel itself as a disembodied essence injected into a concrete cultural context."[18]

On the other hand, this theological grounding on the paschal mystery is very important for inculturation, since this process "could remain naively optimistic, or merely a call for a more respectful insertion in a given milieu, making oneself

15 John Paul II, *Address of His Holiness John Paul II to Members of the Pontifical Biblical Com- Commission,* April 26,1979, http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul ii/en/speeches/1979/april/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19790426_pont-com-biblica.html (accessed on April 20, 2020)

16 Mariusai Dhavamony, *A Christian Theology of Inculturation* (Rome: Pontificia Editrice Vaticana, 1988): 95.

17 The Incarnation, the divine-human encounter, is acknowledged as a normative principle, an analogy, a model and a metaphor for the incarnation of the Gospel message and of the Church in various cultures. The similarity is said to be in method and motivation rather than in an identity of the process. (Cf. Anthony, Ecclesial Praxis of Inculturation, 35).

18 Francis-Vincent Anthony, *Ecclesial Praxis of Inculturation: Toward an Empirical-Theological Theory of Inculturizing Praxis* (Vatican City, Rome: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1997), 35.

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all things to all people in order to save them in Christ"[19] (cf. 1 Cor 9:22). In other words, the Church's work on inculturation will just remain on the level of theories if it will not address the very heart of humanity and cultures — a movement that will allow purification of cultures and newness of life brought about by the Resurrection.

Specifically, inculturation includes dying and rising to attitudes, values, practices that are not in agreement with the Gospel message,[20] thereby arriving in a "new culture"—something that results from the encounter between the Eurocentric faith and culture or cultures. In this task, both the Church's faith and culture share an equal status in such a way that going through the Paschal way, they preserve their identity and integrity while shedding off what is not admissible to their dialogue patterned after Christ's mystery. Thus, inculturation grounded on the Paschal Mystery is characterized by a transformation that springs from God who rose from the dead. From the dynamic interaction between the Christian faith and culture comes a new being characterized by a unique Christian identity and self-expression. Thus, while belonging to the universal Church, a person lives, nourishes and matures in faith according to his or her own context.

With the FABC insistence on building local churches that is truly reflective of the Asian cultural realities and finding solid theological grounding, its vision of inculturation zeroes in on its dialogical dimension. The FABC notion of inculturation is dialogue — "the only possible avenue, given the multiracial, multilinguistic, multireligious, and multicultural reality of Asia."[21] The FABC vision of inculturation as dialogue

19 Michael Paul Gallagher, *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1998): 106-109.

20 Cf. Gerald Arbuckle, Culture, Inculturation, and Theologians (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 171.

21 Kroeger, Asia's Dynamic Local Churches, 60.

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is the way to go in the Church's evangelizing mission since up until this contemporary period it can be said that

> … as a social institution the Church is perceived as a foreign body in its colonial origins while the other religions are not. The lingering colonial image survives in its traditional ecclesiastical structures and economic dependence on the west… The Church remains foreign in its lifestyle, in its institutional structure, in its worship, in its western trained leadership and in its theology. Christian rituals often remain formal, neither spontaneous nor particularly Asian. There is a gap between leaders and ordinary believers in the Church: *a fortiori* with members of other faiths (FAPA II, 195).

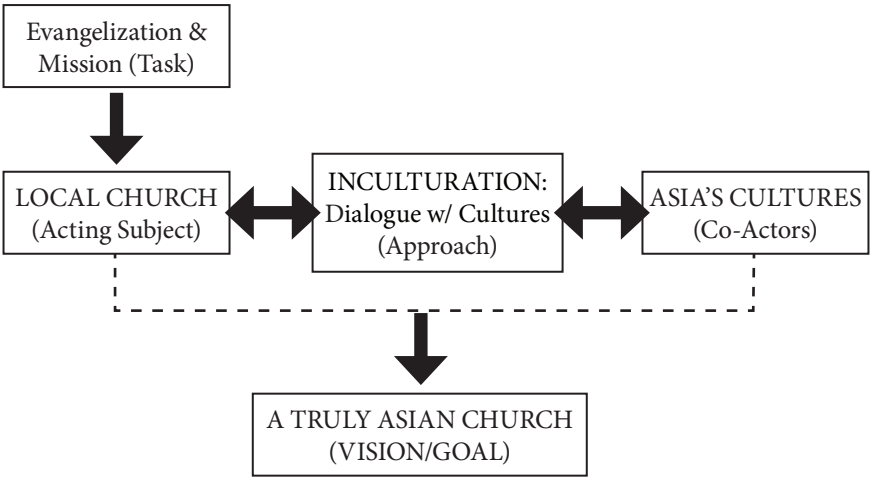
In the Philippines, for instance, where more than 80% of its population are Catholic Christians, majority of them cannot articulate their faith since they are not adequately catechized (cf. MCF-NCDP 57). Overall, FABC observes that "There are many seeds of faith and hope, nevertheless, it still holds true that the Church is often giving a counter-witness to its evangelization with the poor, its lack of concrete involvement in interfaith dialogue and its lack of interest in inculturation" (FAPA II, 196). Envisioning inculturation as dialogical in nature would close the gap between the Christian message and Asia's cultures.

Finally, to wrap up the FABC inculturation through dialogue, the succeeding illustration highlights all the elements at work in this process. Since evangelization is the primary task of the Church, it is always on mission. The local Church is "the acting subject of mission which lives and acts in communion with the universal Church. It is the local church that discerns the best Gospel proclamation, the Church set up, and the values of God's Kingdom to be realized in their place and time" (FAPA I, 281). The local Church is composed of "the people of God in a given milieu — laity, religious

and clergy — which includes the diocese, the parish, the Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) and other groups (FAPA I, 281). Considering the complexity of the Asian context, as mentioned previously, the only way for inculturation to prosper is through dialogue; the co-acting subject is the various cultures of Asia. The resulting output in this dialogue between the local Church and Asia's cultures is the realization of the vision of a genuine Asian church. The goal is really to be able to establish an ecclesial community that embodies everything that is Asian — a Church that reflects the hopes and aspirations, the beliefs and values, and the attitudes and customs of the people in Asia.

FABC Vision of Inculturation

(Illustration 1)



The Method of Inculturation in FABC

At the outset, it must be noted that in the documents of the FABC, the word "dialogue" can have various nuances and meanings. It may refer to the triple dialogue with people, cultures and religions. At times, it points to the dialogue between faith and culture. Oftentimes, it refers to

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interreligious dialogue. On top of this, the FABC "orientation in one word is dialogue" (FAPA I, xxiv); the "new way of being church" is dialogue (FAPA I, 332); and the model for evangelization is dialogue (FAPA I, 138). One can get caught in these different usages and may use the FABC insights on "dialogue" in a different context.

Dialogue is intrinsic to the very life of the Church and the essential mode of all evangelization (FAPA I, 111). The Church is therefore called to be a community of dialogue. This dialogical model is the new way of being Church (FAPA I, 332). "This dialogical approach is always a two-fold process of dynamic interaction. There is always mutual reinforcement; this means that while the Church influences the people, their cultures and religions, the Church herself is concomitantly being shaped and molded. In a word, the dynamic of inculturation is always at work."[22]

What are some of the characteristics of this process of inculturation by way of dialogue? First, the Word of God made flesh in Jesus is proclaimed and continuously incarnated in the cultures it finds itself in, transforming them through the Holy Spirit and makes them new (cf. FAPA I, 138). This dynamic exchange adopts an ongoing reciprocity that snowballs into a "new culture" that encompasses everything that people represent in a particular context. In other words, inculturation is "a creative embodiment of the Word in the local church which captures the basic and fundamental process of inculturation" (cf. FAPA I, 138).

Second, this inculturation through dialogue receives the Word, not only superficially, but rather makes it the principle of their life, values, attitudes and aspirations as the become the body of Christ in this particular time and space (cf. FAPA

22 Kroeger, Asia's Dynamic Local Churches, 61.

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I, 138). This dialogical encounter is understood in its deepest meaning as it comes from the Trinitarian salvific movement — a dialogue accomplished in humility and mutual support to seek together as brothers and sisters, the fullness of Christ (FAPA I, 138-139).

Third, through inculturation, the seeds of the Word, which is now freed from the limited historical embodiments, are discovered hidden in the given cultures and traditions (cf. FAPA I, 138-139; AG 11). The mutual exchange of their discoveries among the local churches will lead to their enrichment as well as that of the universal Church (FAPA I, 139).

Fourth, the community gains a new identity without losing its cultural riches but integrating them in a new whole and becoming the sacrament of God's liberating love active among men (FAPA I, 138). As the Incarnation is fulfilled in the death and resurrection, the Church as the messenger of the Gospel and the given cultures and traditions of the people are purified, healed, and transformed by the saving power of the Gospel (FAPA I, 12, 139; EN 15).

Fifth, the Word remains the principle of unity amidst the enriching process in which the creative Spirit gives its expression and leads to the communion of churches through the unity of faith and sacramental life, co-responsible service, and the unifying leadership of the episcopal college (FAPA I, 138). The locus of these processes are the living Christian communities which are committed to evangelization and thereby entails involvement in the life-situation of the peoples to promote these processes (FAPA I, 139).

Enumerating these five elements of inculturation through dialogue gives a clear direction of the process but not all quarters are in agreement. Some say that "inculturation is unnecessary because other cultures are incompatible with

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Christianity … or inculturation is impossible because it endangers the unity of the Church and might damage the very content of revelation" (FAPA I, 139). Furthermore, there are other hindrances to inculturation, namely, over-eagerness to see results, irresponsible experimentation and undue imposition without sufficient preparation of the people" (FAPA I, 139). Fruitful engagement with culture demands docility to the Spirit's guidance, willingness to take risks and profit from mistakes, openness to correction, the motivation to dialogue with others in sincere openness, persevering patience, openness to collaboration, and mutual acceptance (FAPA I, 139). Nothing can be better than possessing a good attitude if there is the desire to make inculturation happen. After all is said and done, it is the Spirit who determines everything.

The Challenges and Progress of Inculturation in the Asian Context

Since the birth of the FABC in the 1970's up to the present, with the countless efforts that have been put together in many parts of Asia on inculturation, one notices the rather slow progress in this endeavor. Reading the FABC profile of Asia and its challenges (cf. FAPA I, xxvii) from its early documents, one feels that the challenges are freshly written for the present. The FABC possesses voluminous materials on the ideals, processes, and goals on how to become a truly Asian Church, but much of the challenge now, as it was before, lies on the interest and dedication of all the stakeholders on the local level since the FABC as a transnational body (FAPA I, xxiv) has overwhelmingly done its job up to this time.

On the Asian level, the FABC Consultation on Evangelization and Inculturation (FAPA III, 215) is one primary document that itemizes the challenges of

inculturation in Asia, though there are sporadic insights here and there on this subject in many of its documents. Still, in this gathering, the participants have reiterated that it is dialogue initiated and guided by the Spirit that shapes the local Church's identity — its being and its mission — as it affirms that the Asian church is a community on mission (FAPA III, 215-216). The said dialogue is not a walk in the park since there are many terminologies and symbolisms that are understandably foreign to the receiving culture.

The abovementioned material echoes the perennial obstacle for inculturation expressed in *Ecclesia in Asia* when it declared that the initiatives to Christian faith is "fraught with philosophical, cultural and theological difficulties, especially in the light of the beliefs of Asia's great religions, deeply intertwined with cultural values and specific world views" (EA 20). If the level of evangelization defines the Church, then it has to be in constant mission. Inculturation, an essential part of every missionary endeavor, is still confined to the level of concepts and hardly connects with the inhabitants of a certain locality. The presumed superiority of the Christian faith, which, in its present form, has already been immersed into some cultures since its inception, is counterproductive. Without that healthy interaction, inculturation is unilateral and a kind of an imposition on the receiving culture which possesses its own customs and practices.

Disregarding a genuine dialogue with the native culture has huge adverse consequences to the progress of evangelizing mission as seen in poor catechetical instruction, lack of national and regional animating structures and persistent traditional sentiments within the Church (cf. FAPA III, 216). These problematic concerns have cascaded even to the culturally appropriate formation of priests and religious, including

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the training of the lay faithful in theology and sacramental participation. The local ordinaries[23] have not done enough in order to facilitate the encounter of the faith with the local culture. Furthermore, equally threatened at this day and age is the integrity of the Asian culture and religiosity by overindulgence to the modern mass media. The danger of taking out people from their communities, which effectively disrupts the work of inculturating the Gospel, seems to be forthcoming with the advent of globalization, the craze over electronic media and the uncritical use of science and technology (cf. FAPA III, 216-217).

Based on these inputs, the challenge of inculturation, which is an essential component of evangelization, is far greater these days because it has to contend, not only with the ins and outs of the native culture, but with the ever-changing landscape of a specific locality. While acknowledging the complexity of any culture, the influence of other surrounding cultures and trends has to be factored in if there has to be some progression in the task of inculturation. At present, much of the "inculturating activity" in the Philippines is found in

23 Sadly, in the actual Philippine context, only very few bishops make inculturation or catechesis a priority in their diocese. The 1983 Code of Canon Law, however, emphatically states that diocesan bishops should give the overall direction of catechesis in their respective dioceses (cf. CCL 775). Clearly, this is not the case. Ideally, the bishops should be able to produce a local catechism, sustain resources, initiate activities, ensure the training of personnel, and establish a catechetical office. Moreover, Canon Law, in its provisions on catechesis (cf. CCL 773-780), significantly deals with inculturation as it mandates a doctrinal or faith formation that is living, manifest and active (cf. CCL 773). It also asserts an ongoing instruction for children, young people and adults that is appropriate to their age and condition (cf. CCL 777). Christian doctrine and all forms of preaching must be adopted to the needs of the time (cf. 769-770). Above all, the continuing catechetical challenges could be significantly addressed if the agents of catechesis — bishops, parish priests, parochial vicars, deacons, seminarians, catechists, parents, etc .— conscientiously embrace the pertinent provisions of the Code whose underlying principle is inculturation.

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praiseworthy ecclesial documents, catechetical lessons, and liturgical preaching and symbolism. For this reason, this is an excellent foundation on which future studies could build on.

FABC Inculturation as a Method of Renewal

To date, there are different models of inculturation but in this study, inculturation takes the incarnational model — "just as the Word of God became flesh for us, so does the Gospel get articulated in a specific language and form."[24] But there are still a lot of gray areas as to its scope, process and goals, including identified obstacles like 1) the lack of an actual, step-by-step method and; 2) the absence of a unified and consistent effort from Church authorities to pursue inculturation in their respective ecclesiastical territories; 3) the inadequacy of technical capability to implement inculturation in a given context; and 4) the need to put up structures that would pave the way for a more focused approach to inculturation. If inculturation is considered indispensable, there should be a lead body that manages all initiatives about it. At the most, suffice it to say that this research is just a modest contribution in conjunction with the many scholarly studies on the subject. There is a long way to go for this subject whose importance is presumed, but which often receives inadequate attention.

FABC Methodology

The FABC theological methodology may vary in its elements, but certainly the identification of its chief composition is unanimous. One has to decipher them from its vast documents in order to assert its existence. In fact, in the whole of FABC, there is only one deliberate articulation of its theological methodology, that is, in the "Final Reflections of BISA VII" (cf. FAPA I, 231-232). This methodology begins

24 Cf. Mariusai Dhavamony, *A Christian Theology of Inculturation* (Rome: Pontificia Editrice Vaticana, 1988): 95.

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with *exposure-immersion* in which the awareness of the reality of poverty is presented and lived, following the incarnational paradigm. The second stage is *social analysis* that assesses the social, economic, political, cultural and religious dimensions of society. This is supported by a careful discernment of the sign of the times since a mere social analysis is limited as it may be tainted by a spousal of ideology or self-interest. The third stage is the *contemplative dimension* of human development that seeks God's presence and initiative within society. Many times, it is difficult to decipher the hiddenness of God's action in the midst of the experience of poverty. The poor, in their experience of poverty, may teach certain cultural values and religious practices that are necessary for the advancement of spirituality like simplicity, openness and sharing, community awareness and family loyalty. The fourth stage, *Pastoral planning*, seeks to operationalize the previous three stages and works for their sustainability. Prayer cuts across these various stages at it grounds a spirituality that sees that hand of God active among the poor (cf. FAPA I, 231-232).

In the context of evangelization, new efforts to find helpful ways of incarnating the Faith into a local culture are met with certain expectations, even as it follows previously held models. In the case of FABC's theological approach, the starting point is from below, but proceeds to carry it out by following the incarnational paradigm, which is from above.

In contrast to the traditional discursive orientation of classicist theological methodologies which are invariably metaphysical in orientation, they have traditionally focused upon wisdom (*sapientia*) or rational knowledge (*scientia*), and are often detached from the daily living experiences of its target audience, the contextual theological methodology of the FABC is primarily pastoral in orientation, seeking both to be shaped by, as well as to shape daily life experiences in the

multireligious, multiethnic, multilingual and pluricultural Asian *Sitz-im-Leben*. In other words, the starting point of the FABC's contextual theological methodology is not the universal precepts of *lex aeterna* and *lex naturalis*, or abstract metaphysical principles pertaining to God, Revelation and the Christian Gospel, or even conciliar, papal or doctrinal pronouncements, but rather the life experiences of the Asian peoples (*FABC Papers 108:6*).

The appreciation of context, even in catechetical modules, assures some kind of decisiveness and timing in presenting the Gospel message. Undermining socio-religious context means an out-of-sync proclamation of the faith. The situation presumes helpful and not helpful elements as well as an openness to new influences coming from global developments. Presenting a Christian faith that resonates with the realities and sentiments from the ground would have a greater probability of realizing the goal of establishing a truly local Church.

Since this study is more inclined to follow the incarnational model of inculturation and on taking a closer look at the Philippine context, it is inclined to follow Ruben C. Mendoza's concept of FABC methodology that takes "two salient elements: 1) discerning the signs of the times and 2) using the pastoral cycle that consists of four stages such as a) immersion–exposure; b) social analysis; c) contemplative dimension; d) pastoral planning."[25] At first glance, all these items resemble parts of a catechetical method. After all, this study proposes inculturation as a method in catechetical instruction. In fact, this approach was adopted in FABC's new approach to family catechesis, which also used the "Pastoral Spiral" when it states:

25 Ruben Mendoza, "Assuming All That is Asian: Becoming a Truly Local Church in Dialogue," in *Asia Pacific Mission Studies,* 1:1 (2013): 5-26. Mendoza's source is FAPA I, 231-232.

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> This method of discernment starts with the analysis of the situation and is followed by reflection-in-faith. In the light of both the situational analysis and the faith-reflection, certain pastoral recommendations or decisions are made at the FABC Plenary Assembly. This third phase (decision-making) was the end of the process. It was left to the Episcopal conferences and their Family Life Commissions to continue the pastoral spiral by going into the planning on how to implement the decisions. Action or implementation then follows. To conclude the pastoral spiral, evaluation is made not only of the result or impact of the action but also of the process of "see–judge–act. Thus: Situation — Reflection in Faith — Decisions and Recommendations – Planning – Action – Evaluation.[26]

Using the pastoral spiral, catechetical instruction, as an ongoing formation in the faith, is firmly grounded in context, no matter how fluid and complex it may be. This present study, however, takes this pastoral spiral or method, together with the signs of the times, as an approach to teaching faith in an actual classroom setting.

FABC Inculturation as Dialogue With Cultures

If there's one word that stands out in the whole of FABC and for everything that it stands for, it is the word "dialogue" (*FABC Papers* 130:5-26). Without dialogue, the Church in Asia, just like elsewhere, will find it hard to express herself meaningfully and substantially against the background of highly complex and fast-paced cultural contexts. Dialogue levels the playing field for all the stakeholders and paves the way for a common ground towards integral human development and spiritual experiences. As provided in this study, dialogue is what characterizes inculturation. FABC declares:

26 Vicente Cajilig, ed., *Family Catechesis: Contextual Challenges* (Manila: FABC–Office of Education and Student Chaplaincy, 2007): 20.

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> Dialogue is a primary means and way for inculturation. We discover the seeds of the Word in other religions and we become open to and ready for a process of change. It makes us listen to others so that we can understand how they see us Christians within the context of the Church's message and her structures. Then, the foreignness of the Church becomes less evident in the eyes of persons of other faiths (FAPA I, 142).

Through dialogue, the Christian faith is incarnated and resurrected in a manner that makes it as if it has a new face that is truly reflective of a specific people. Thus, the gap between the Good News that comes from the West is narrowed down, if not truly obliterated, in the process.

"Inculturation like dialogue is not primarily for the purpose of winning people in the Catholic fold, but rather it is one's way of living and witnessing to his faith in the actual context God's providence has implanted him. Genuine inculturation happens when followers of Christ, whether taken as a whole or as individually, proclaim through their lives their love for the faith and their cultural heritage" (FAPA I, 170-171). On the one hand, the authenticity of inculturation may be seen in the integral conversion of the people who have found an expression of Christianity that they can call their own. On the other hand, from the secular standpoint, true inculturation is a process that has improved the faithful's quality of life and the way they live it.

Furthermore, inculturation can never thrive without doing it in a dialogical manner. Taking dialogue out, inculturation will appear as an imposition of a "superior culture" to a locality. Inculturation, then, is far from being a one-way street that seeks its own ends, but rather a two-way traffic that ensures a certain level of reciprocity between the parties involved in order to realize the desired objectives. Dialogue leads to mutual enrichment and shuns away the excesses that

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are not in keeping with the Christian ideals. Inculturation as dialogue with cultures works towards the realization of the Church's missionary mandate to propagate God's kingdom.

Inculturation as Dialogue and Integration as Interrelatedness

While inculturation is specifically a dialogue with cultures, integration is a method that proposes the Christian faith in an interrelated and holistic manner. In general, they are both approaches or means so to speak, that are designed to achieve similar objectives, namely, to be able to present the Faith in a manner that is understandable to its recipients. On the one hand, FABC's inculturation as dialogue seeks "to keep a creative balance and interaction among three dimensions, such as the human and spiritual sense of life; a biblical and hope-filled sense of history; and an open and dialogical sense of mystery" (FAPA I, 154). On the other hand, catechetical integration as a method emphasizes the three dimensions of the faith, that is, doctrine, moral and worship. In a wider sense, this study sees a parallel among the dimensions presented under inculturation as dialogue and integration as interrelatedness.

Parallelism Between Dialogue and Integration

(Illustration 2)

FABC's INCULTURATION AS DIALOGUE	INTEGRATION AS INTERRELATEDNESS
Biblical and Hope-filled Sense of History	Doctrine
Human and Spiritual Sense of Life	Moral
Open and Dialogical Sense of Mystery	Worship
*The **Mission Dimension** completes the parallelism between dialogue and integration as they both point to an "incarnational praxis" that emanates from a sound understanding of the faith to its actual enfleshment in daily life.	

The parallelism may be too broad to establish, but inculturation and integration can work hand in hand towards making the Christian Faith closer to the faithful's lived experience. To illustrate their relatedness, biblical and hope-filled sense of history is, first and foremost, doctrine since catechesis has the Scripture and Tradition as its main sources. Second, the moral aspect includes human and spiritual sense of life, since human behavior and interaction involves the spiritual faculties of intellect and will that tell a person whether his/her actions are good or bad. Third, the worship aspect is normally characterized by an open and dialogical attitude toward the Divine. These linkages further strengthen the idea that FABC's vision of inculturation can shed light on the renewal of catechetical pedagogy in the Philippines.

Dialogic Integration: A Contemporary Pedagogy of Faith

This study introduces a new phrase called "dialogic integration" to signify the common ground between FABC's inculturation as dialogue and catechetical integration. The said phrase is being proposed for the purpose of arriving at a contemporary approach to pedagogical renewal of Philippine catechesis. This pedagogy of faith is just one of the many ongoing attempts to discover further effective means to incarnate the Christian Faith in the Filipino cultural setting.

At the Service of Evangelization

Dialogic integration surfaces as another catechetical pedagogy that is basically the result of this research as a response to the challenges of the New Evangelization. It is a combination of two important subjects, that is, dialogue and integration. On the one hand, FABC's dialogue is "understood as intrinsic

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to the very life of the Church and the essential mode of all evangelization" (cf. FAPA I, 111). On the other hand, integration is emphasized in the NCDP and the CFC and is commonly used as a methodological approach in catechesis, which is also an indispensable moment in the evangelizing mission of the Church. Catechetical integration brings about the interrelation of the three dimensions of the faith, namely, doctrine, moral, and worship. This presumes that the Gospel message is wholly communicated to the recipients as it touches their heads, hands and hearts. This approach, however, remains highly theoretical and knowledge of the faith remains as a "head knowledge." Without undermining the great and pioneering contribution of the CFC in "inculturating" the Christian Faith, the ready-made integration of every catechetical topic found in its pages would still need to be expressed in some other ways in the actual classroom sessions, considering the highly volatile and dynamic twenty-first century culture. This paper, then, proposes a catechesis that engages in an active dialogue with culture in the here and now, if it has to be called "inculturated catechesis." FABC itself states:

> As part of an ongoing process of accompanying proclamation, the churches in Asia must carry out a dialogue with the cultures in which they are situated in an attempt to take root in and transform their cultural environment. In this way, new expressions of Christian faith can emerge which are at once deeply Christian and at home in the local cultures. Through this process of dialogue, the Church itself is enriched and gains new insights and apostolic impetus. (FAPA I, 103-108).

Inculturated catechesis, then, should always have the element of the "present," or better still, inculturated catechesis is the "present tense of catechesis" in the sense that it is an expression of the faith at this very moment. Far from being a subjective articulation of the Faith, it is a kind of a Gospel

proclamation that enlightens the identity and values of Filipinos, but at the same time, takes cognizance of his actual cultural environment. In fact, inculturation never actually stops as it is a lifetime endeavor. After all, inculturation is not syncretism or the fusion of a foreign belief system and an indigenous culture, but "the presentation and re-expression of the Gospel in forms and terms proper to a culture. This process results in the reinterpretation of both, without being unfaithful to either."[27]

Objectives of Dialogic Integration

Dialogic integration, as a newly coined phrase in this study, is a modest attempt to bring catechetical integration to another level as inspired by FABC vision of inculturation. If it has to be a legitimate pedagogy, it must have certain goals that must be fulfilled in order to measure its progress. Dialogic integration, then, has five fundamental objectives that underlie its operational standard. The list includes the following goals:

1. **To discern the "signs of the times" that are carefully guided by ecclesial antecedents.** Looking at the "signs of the times" on the pastoral–theological–missiological level, one must give an assessment of faith that includes the following: 1) the Word of God; 2) Christian faith and Tradition; 3) the *sensus fidei* of the believing community; 4) the specific guidance of the hierarchical Magisterium; 5) the reality of sin (personal and social) within the world; 6) the centrality of the person of Christ; and 7) the role

27 Aylward Shorter, "Inculturation of African Traditional Religious Values in Christianity," http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/shorter.htm (accessed on April 15, 2020).

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of the Holy Spirit.[28] Dialogic integration considers the "signs of the times," not as mere environmental survey of circumstances and happenings, but they should always be enlightened by God's Word, by the Church, by Christ and His Spirit. In other words, the element of faith is always part of the process of discernment for it is the one that gives meaning and direction to any human experience.

2. **To immerse itself to the level of the greater majority for the purpose of discovery and appreciation of the cultural thought, behavior and practices.** Dialogic integration is an exercise of mission that requires "delineating the local Philippine context because it turns out to be cross–cultural, confronting them with a multiplicity of contexts all at the same time."[29] Following the incarnational model, one must be able to capture the peculiarities of the Philippine culture that is replete with sub-cultures and be able to discern ways to genuinely include the Gospel. The multiple cultural contexts make up the collective experience of Filipinos here and abroad. Many times, in actual catechetical classes, it is the catechists who determine the "contexts of students" in their prepared lesson plans. Contexts in dialogic integration are drawn from students in real-time as they are the main stakeholders in the inculturating process. Oftentimes, catechetical outputs are pre-determined by the catechists and hardly make the catechized a part of how specific Christian truths and values should be expressed in a given

28 Cf. James Kroeger, "'Signs of the Times' Theological Method" (A one-page handout that he has given in his FABC Class on November 4, 2019). For a fuller appreciation of the article, kindly refer to the following: James Kroeger, "Always Alert to God's Signs: Exploring the Vision of *Evangelii Gaudium,*" in *Evangelii Gaudium: Voices of the Universal Church,* eds. Klaus Kramer and Klaus Vellguth (Freiburg: Verlag-Herder and Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2015): 85-96

29 Cf. E. Acoba, "A Locus for Doing Theologies" in *Doing Theology in the Philippines,* ed., John Suk (Mandaluyong City: OMF Literature Inc., 2005): 27.

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time. Far from sacrificing the intrinsic value of a Christian teaching, dialogic integration deepens the meaning of the doctrine as it is now couched in something they can easily identify with.

3. **To take into account societal problems, issues or trends with the aim of allowing the Gospel to enlighten it and bring about a change of perspective or a conversion.** Catechetical instructions empower the catechized to draw some realizations or convictions that are geared towards personal conversion. Dialogic integration moves towards a change of heart, mindset or attitude based on the ongoing engagement of the Christian faith and culture(s). Without realigning of the self towards the Good News, catechetical sessions are bound to just be one of those secular disciplines in school or whatever the setting may be. The "spiritual enlightenment" that takes place comes from the Holy Spirit who makes the dialogue of Gospel and culture possible. "There is progress from the 'Seeds of the Word' already present in the hearer to the full mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ. The Church must recognize the process of purification and enlightenment in which the Spirit of God opens the mind and heart of the hearer to the obedience of faith."[30] Jesus, the ultimate goal of catechesis, is ever-present because of His Spirit who brings everything to fruition. Any catechetical initiative, without a personal impact on its recipients, becomes inadequate. The catechists are expected to help the catechized draw a personal implication based on the teachings of the faith they have received.

4. **To contemplate and pinpoint the movement of God in the current events and situations of life.** A core theme in

30 Pontifical Council for the Interreligious Dialogue, *Dialogue and Proclamation* (Manila: CBCP-CIRD, 1991): 70.

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Filipino culture is the sense of connectedness, of being part of an intricate network of relationships that includes the visible and the invisible, the human and the spiritual. Their gods are distant and unreachable, unlike the Christian God who reveals himself to His people and is ever-present in Jesus.[31] Christianity answers their longings for a "god" who stays with them. The statues of Mary and the Saints, the celebrations of the Sacraments and other Christian symbols are living reminders of God's abiding presence. Christianity's seasonal celebrations (Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter), for instance, present to them a God who is one with them and accompanies them through life, especially when they need them most. His Word inspires, enlightens and directs them in every situation of life — good or bad. With the postmodern way of life that is complicated and with less time for silence and reflection, most Filipinos need to be guided in order for them to see the hand of God working in their midst. Although they have that deep sense of God, they must be constantly led to Him.

5. **To propose a course of action that takes the faith as the focal point that gives meaning to personal and communal affairs.** For Filipino Catholics, it should be clear that following Jesus means making His teachings, commandments and sacraments operative in their daily lives. All activities and circumstances must be seen in the context of their relationship to Christ. It is faith in Jesus that, among others, strengthens, encourages, forgives, justifies, and corrects His believers. Everything must be done in the context of that faith. Thus, every single event

31 Cf. Melba Magay, "Towards Contextualization from Within: Some Tools and Culture Themes, in *Doing Theology in the Philippines,* (Manila: OMF Literature Inc. and Asian Theological Seminary, 2005): 46-48.

can become a faith-experience. Furthermore, this exercise of faith is not merely personal. It has a communitarian dimension. In fact, growth in faith takes place within the context of the ecclesial community. One's relationship with others in the community is a confirmation of how a believer develops in his faith in Jesus. Faith, then, should be a factor in dialogic integration as it implies the growth of the person, not only in a catechetical way, but more importantly, in the demands of Christian discipleship.

Derived Pedagogical Principles for Catechesis

This study does not claim that these principles are entirely new but rather, a modest enhancement of what has been previously crafted; an articulation of what has been unspoken; or a second look at certain ideas that should have been emphasized. At the most, these pedagogical propositions are the necessary result of this research and could be very well translated into a catechetical pedagogy that may be helpful to catechetical instructions in the school, parish or community setting. The succeeding paragraphs enumerate the said pedagogical theories.

1. **FABC inculturation occasions a catechesis that shapes the local Church, rather than simply emphasizing a personal "mastery" of the faith as its end, which has often been the case.**

While evangelization brings the Good News of the Gospel to all who seek the life-giving message of faith in Jesus Christ, catechesis nourishes, forms and deepens the faith that one has received....[32] It suffices for the present to indicate here

32 Cf. Robert Barron, *Welcome Message at the Website of the Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops,* October 2018, https://www.usccb.org/committees/evangelization-catechesis (accessed on April 27, 2020).

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the continued building up of the local Church as the focus of the task of evangelization today (in which catechesis as an intrinsic component), with dialogue as its essential mode through a more resolute, more creative and yet truly discerning and responsible inculturation (cf. FAPA I, 131). It should be emphasized that catechesis, as part of evangelization, is not an end in itself, but should always be seen with the context of building up the local Church. The students' efforts, for example, to understand and live their faith must be viewed as forming oneself in the faith for the local Church as it fulfills its evangelizing mission. "Catechesis aims to build up the Church and prepare people to live their faith responsibly and maturely."[33]

Catechetical materials must always emphasize not only the personal dimension of catechesis, but more importantly, the communal aspect which prepares its recipients for mission. Generally, people who go to school study well in order to graduate. After completing their studies, they look for jobs, start a family and eventually, build their houses. Catechism classes, when isolated from the sequence of evangelization – catechesis – church – mission, lose its purpose and do not capture the imagination of the catechized. It is like working hard for something without a purpose. A person, who enters a catechetical class, trains himself well in order to grow in the faith and becomes a useful member of the local Church that invites him to share in its mission. Catechesis is doubly significant when it is given and received with the higher goal in mind, that is, the strengthening and shaping of the local Church.

33 Ladislav Nemet, "Inculturation of Catechesis and Spirituality in the Documents of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines," 1-2, https://www.scribd.com/ (accessed on April 25, 2020).

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2. **Inculturation in catechesis is more than the prepared "inculturated catechism" by experts in this field since it may lose its relevance after a certain period. It is rather a dialogue between the Gospel and the ever-changing nuances of contemporary lifestyle and the Filipino value system.**

In the documents of the CBCP, catechesis is seen from different perspectives, depending on the context and purpose. Educational catechesis refers to initiatives within the Philippine Church to make individuals believe that Jesus is the Son of God who gives them the chance to have a full life in Him, and thus by educating them, builds the Body of Christ. Another kind is doctrinal catechesis that deals mainly on the orthodoxy of content in union with the universal Church. The CBCP also talks about an inculturational approach that defines catechesis as a process by which Filipino values can be purified, permeated and strengthened by the Gospel and the Gospel values in turn are concretized and lived in Filipino values and patterns of actions.[34] Considering these three descriptions of catechesis in the Philippine setting, the inculturational approach clarifies that inculturation in catechesis is simply beyond a published inculturated catechism. Catechetical inculturation challenges the existing values and ways of doing things of Filipinos as individuals and as a nation.

Thus, there is a need to have a template for inculturated catechesis because it is the only way Filipinos would address the "foreignness" of the Christian faith and be able to convey it in a way that truly expresses their identity and values. Nemet opines that "the different approaches and ideas on catechesis present in the documents of CBCP lead us to the

34 Nemet, "Inculturation of Catechesis and Spirituality," 1-2.

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conclusion that for the purpose of achieving an inculturated catechesis in the Philippines, no single definition of catechesis can be acceptable but serves as a model of an inculturated catechesis which must be created."[35] Furthermore, GDC declares, "Inculturation of Faith … means the penetration of the deepest strata of persons and peoples by the Gospel which touches them deeply, 'going to the very center and roots' of their cultures" (GDC 109). It is a never-ending dialogue to find ways to engage contemporary culture with its challenging issues and circumstances. Inculturation in catechesis, then, goes beyond publishing a book, discovering a formula or proposing a model for doing it.

3. **Catechetical integration not only includes Doctrine, Morals and Worship, but it is deepened and made complete by a commitment to Mission.**

   The dialogical aspect of inculturation gives rise to a pastoral dimension in catechesis which moves the catechized to participate in God's saving mission and rather than simply become "classroom disciples." One may argue that the moral dimension, inasmuch as it deals with one's relationship with others and the expectation to practice the derived virtues/values in daily life, is already the mission component. In actual practice, the moral dimensions can still be "head knowledge" since they are the necessary consequence of the doctrine and do not move the catechized to action. If the doctrinal dimension is "Jesus is Lord," then the moral part is "I should obey Him." The worship aspect is "If Jesus is Lord," then "I should worship Him." Still, the concrete action is part of the dynamics of the lesson. With this illustration of actual integration, the moral part is often associated only with skills and attitudes of the individual.

35 Nemet, "Inculturation of Catechesis and Spirituality," 3.

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Where does mission come in? The key word is dialogue as E. Javier notes: "Dialogue is the norm and necessary manner of every form of Christian mission because Christian mission is participation in the mission of God, and God's being and action is dialogical. Mission reflects concrete acts."[36] In other words, mission implies a specific pastoral context and method that is not identical with the moral demand that was formulated in the classroom or session hall. If it is to be catechetical inculturation, which presumes a dialogical interaction, then it has to occur between individuals and not be simply relegated to textbook abstraction. Mission is intrinsically the necessary consequence of catechetical abstractions in an educational setting. The movement, as it were, should be from doctrine, moral, and worship to the missionary component that ensures tangible and measurable actions are produced, regardless of how modest they are, for the purpose of promoting the ecclesial community.

4. **The effectiveness of "inculturated catechesis" is not measured by periodic tests, but by performance-based, descriptive evaluation gleaned from how they give witness to the "inculturated faith" resulting from the dialogue between Gospel and culture.**

> In the Philippines, the bulk of catechetical instructions are done within the academic environment of government-run or private schools and of Catholic educational institutions. Oftentimes, students see catechesis as just one of their social science subjects. It is just one of those courses they have to study and receive a grade. Since the catechists are not part of the schools' faculty members who are equipped with updated classroom approaches, students somehow do not take them seriously. Catechists, with their usually

36 Edgar Javier, *Dialogue: Our Mission Today* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2006), 168.

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kind demeanor, give the students the impression that they will always be considerate and helpful.

Catechesis, however, is a special subject because it does not only teach a specific religious content, but it also expects its recipients to act out what they have learned from its lessons. And ideally, by putting into practice their learning, they are gradually transformed and develop closeness to Jesus. Considering the intrinsic value of catechesis and its emphasis on practicing the faith in actual life, assessment through written examination may be misplaced as it would cater again to mere head-knowledge. Strictly speaking, then, faith knowledge and faith practice are the two areas that need assessment. If the evaluation of learning is performance-based, the former is presumed in the latter.

Assessment in catechesis, a non-curricular subject,[37] does not need to follow the regular grading system because its impact on the person is not numerically quantifiable but can be progressively described. When you give eighty-eight or ninety-eight to a person in a catechism class, the said number only takes into account the person's textbook knowledge of the subject. Catechesis expects to see some impact on how its recipients live their lives. The performance-based "grade" is a narrative description of the catechized performance in class and how he relates with his classmates and teachers in school as well as his family at home. Catechists of a parish or diocese can have a one-page, common grading form where there are

37 Students can graduate even without going to a single catechism class, especially in government or non-sectarian schools. In fact, non-Catholics are free to leave the classroom if they are not comfortable during catechetical instructions. Sometimes, principals or administrators, who are Born-Again Christians, do not allow catechists to do catechesis in their schools. Others, however, are inclined to give the catechists the most "unholy" hour of the day when the students are already tired or feel sleepy.

spaces allotted for the description of the catechist, teacher-class adviser and the parent or guardian of the catechized. Whenever a grading period ends, this one-page document that keeps track of the students' conduct is issued.

At the end of the year, there is a four-page narrative that records their progress in knowledge and practice of the faith. It will also reveal the strength of the catechetical program as well as its impact on the lives of students. If the grade is a mere number, it may just be taken as one of the grades they receive in school. It must be admitted that this will require extra work on the part of the catechists, but this a small sacrifice to make for the sake of making catechetical instructions significant and relevant in the school or parish setting. It is high time to push a little bit more in the catechetical apostolate, especially as Filipinos celebrate the fifth centenary of the arrival of the Christian faith in the Philippines. It is a great opportunity to once again revitalize the faith by proposing new ways of expressing it in these fast-changing ways of living and its accompanying circumstances.

Implications for Philippine Catechesis

Having established the objectives of dialogic integration, the proposed method for doing inculturated catechesis based on the FABC thought on inculturation, and having laid down the derived pedagogical principles in the light of said document, this next section carefully projects their implications for catechesis. Definitely, there are a number of things that must be secured. One significant assertion of this study is the fact that inculturation can be used as a method of teaching in a school setting. Presuming that this contention is sound, those involved in the catechetical apostolate have to step up and rise to the challenge. This would mean some adjustments

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in the administration, structure, formation and resources of the catechetical apostolate.

Training of Catechists

In the Philippine setting, even if there is a ready-made national training program for catechists, a good number of catechetical centers find it difficult to fulfill them. This is due mainly to financial constraints, lack of competent catechetical trainers or the absence of a catechetical structure that would make possible the formation of catechists. Unfortunately, many bishops assign newly ordained priests or deacons to handle the catechetical ministry in their dioceses. Since they do not have the proper training and experience, the formation of catechists, the production of catechetical materials, and the organization of activities suffer. Many times, one cannot also blame the bishops since they also lack the manpower to fill up all the positions in the diocese. They are forced to assign priests and deacons — sometimes lay persons — to different ministries without the necessary preparation.

Given these perennial problems in the training of catechists, the National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines insists on following the standard training program for aspiring catechists. Thus, the basic catechists' formation program in the Philippines is composed of the following: "1) solid training in doctrine, morals and prayer-worship, based on Scripture and Church teaching; 2) a deeper initiation into a sound Christian philosophy and psychology of the person; 3) educational and leadership skills and techniques; and more importantly, a serious formation in prayer and Christian spirituality" (MCF-NCDP 488). These are the primary elements of the program. Catechetical centers are given the

freehand to add other subjects or activities that may be necessary in their respective localities.

Among the other topics that need to be introduced is a study of the FABC documents, particularly the themes on local Church, mission and evangelization, inculturation, interreligious dialogue and integral human development. As the FABC provides a great overview of the Asian context, the catechists would profit immensely from its insights on the family and the many factors affecting society like poverty, development, peace, injustice, conflict, ecological concerns, youth, and exploitation of women and children. All these topics need to be discussed for a more focused catechetical instruction. If possible, the training of catechists should be held within or near the area of their actual apostolate for a greater grasp of context. Moreover, if catechists have to be adept or at least, well prepared to do inculturated catechesis, they have to be familiar as much as possible with anything that surrounds the life of Filipinos. Being Filipinos themselves is an advantage, but it is not enough since beliefs, attitudes, and circumstances can easily be coated with foreign influences. Considering the fact that the average age of most catechists in the Philippines is between 45-50, there is already a wide age gap between them and their audience who are not even half their age.

Finally, it is interesting to note that the FABC itself has come up with principles and attitudes that are important for designing the training program of catechists. These guidelines include 1) a profound understanding of the respective roles of the clergy and laity in the mission of the Church; 2) the training of catechists should be done locally; 3) not a formation for individuals, but for small groups; 4) refrain from creating "clerical" lay leaders or "mini-priests;" 5) involvement of the

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laity in creating training programs for catechists; 6) lectures are not effective means to inculcate new values and attitudes that will enable the would-be catechists to do things, to share, and to create; 7) the collaboration of the parish priest, religious and trainer-catechist are very crucial; 8) prayer, the bible, and the liturgy are presented as sources while methods of Gospel-sharing must be propagated; 9) the mission of the Church moves outwardly to the world and society; 10) the formation of catechists must emphasize personal spirituality and social accountability; 11) the training should give the laity a chance to serve and share with the community what God has blessed them with" (cf. FAPA I, 236).

Over and above these insights, the training of catechists should make them more confident by equipping them also with a sound knowledge of current educational methods and classroom management standards. Knowledge of these things will empower them to confidently use other methods in classroom sessions. It would be easy for them to lose heart if they are not properly acquainted with the things they are to expect in their place of teaching. The more they are equipped with knowledge and skills, the more they become self-assured to facilitate sessions with their students.

Reorientation of the Catechetical Syllabus

Only very few dioceses can produce their own catechetical materials. Some adopt a particular catechetical material taken somewhere else as their basic reference when they do catechesis. Others rely on other dioceses for their references as they catechized the children and young people in academic settings. In the Bicol region, for instance, most of the dioceses use the catechetical syllabus made by the Caceres Catechetical Center for elementary and high school students. Aside from

this, catechists tend to use the same lesson plans for a long time and use the same method they were taught during their training. Introducing a "new" catechetical strategy would entail a lot of effort to orient them about it. This will mean taking them out of something they are very familiar with and bringing them into something they need to devote more time in order to learn and to embrace it as their own. Since it is a method, they need to practice it over and over again to gain a certain level of skill. By doing so, they continue to discover the richness of the living Word of God and the variety of ways it can be proclaimed. There is only one Christianity, but there are hundreds of specific cultures that this universal religion may find itself engaging. Teaching materials may be able to address particular catechetical needs for a time, but in the long run, they have to be adjusted according to the existing catechetical context.

Using the dialogical integration method, three areas need attention in making an updated syllabus, namely, focus, elements and content. First, the focus should shift from integration of doctrine, moral worship that the catechist determines (usually before coming to the classroom) to dialogic integration that allows the students to participate in the formulation of faith lessons, identification of values and challenge to mission. The method of inculturation as dialogue is not so complicated on paper but becomes unnecessarily unsettling when implemented. There may be objections to the capability of catechists to handle such catechetical sessions. Would catechists be able to handle a free-flowing discussion-dialogue in a given class without being rattled by unexpected questions and issues? Would they be able to consistently maintain the primacy of the Gospel message as it actively engages the cultural elements during catechetical sessions? Ultimately, this shift of focus in the conduct of

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instructions would require some level of experience and skill on the part of the catechists.

The second shift deals with the structure of catechetical lesson plans. In the Philippines, it generally uses the following template: opening/overview of the topic, lesson objectives, the needed materials (in some cases), context/activity, reading of the Gospel, Christian message or teachings, integration/ synthesis, challenge/assignment and finally, a celebration (usually a prayer or song). Catechists use this kind of lesson development for so long that they know these things like the back of their hands. In using *dialogic integration,* certain elements may change in favor of putting more emphasis on student activity and participation. Without sacrificing the integrity of the faith that purifies and raises the level of the cultural elements, focusing on dialogue would bring about structural changes in the conduct of the lesson. Determining the constituent components of the lesson would depend so much on the principles of dialogic integration described in the previous section. The design of the new lesson plan should provide opportunities for "a free, responsible faith-decisions of people who are converting to the Lord. No one, no matter how skilled or competent he/she may be, can make decisions for others."[38]

Finally, the third shift lies in the content of catechesis. What is crucial in *dialogic integratio*n is the fact that the Christian message must not be lost as it opens itself in dialogue with the not-so-structured, uncharted cultural territory. Catechists may be a bit familiar with the time-tested Filipino values but may find it unsettling to deal with the nuances and complexity of contemporary Filipino culture. Another projected difficulty is how are they going to relate

38 Cf. Gerald Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospels: An Inculturation Handbook for Pastoral Workers* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 195.

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or apply the Gospel message to post-modern realities so that a genuine Christian expression may come to the fore. It is, however, too early to speculate on these things that can be partly solved by actually drawing an actual lesson plan for dialogic integration with all its components — a topic that will not be determined in this particular study. At this point, it is enough to say that catechesis and inculturation complement each other. "On the one hand, as catechesis intends to make people active in the Christian faith in actual daily life and initiates to convey the Good News to different cultures, it comes as something bigger than inculturation. On the other hand, when it comes to inserting the Gospel into cultures and gradually transforming them, catechesis now becomes a tool for inculturation."[39]

Diocesan Catechetical Ministries

This endeavor of introducing a new catechetical strategy called "dialogic integration" means that diocesan catechetical ministries have to reorient their focus and direction in a way that primarily involves their monetary resources, personnel training, and catechetical materials.

First, most diocesan catechetical ministries have meager sources of income that would allow the sustainability of their operations. Most priest-directors or ministers have to raise funds if they plan to work on an activity or a program. Hardly any bishop gives subsidy to the catechetical ministry. However, in some dioceses in Metro Manila, aside from the subsidy they get from the diocesan curia, they are able to provide just remuneration to their catechists. They can surely sustain whatever is required for their catechists to have a good grasp of the enhanced pedagogical approach.

39 Cf. Anthony, *Ecclesial Praxis of Inculturation,* 166.

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Second, the catechetical ministries may feel the overwhelming pressure of gathering their catechists for training at designated periods. In the actual field, many volunteer catechists find it hard to go to the assigned formation venues. In the provinces, catechists rely on their parishes for transportation expenses, which sometimes the parish priest could not provide. These are trivial considerations but they get in the way whenever they are asked to attend training sessions. Some can hardly concentrate on what they are studying since they have to think of their families' needs at home. On the training of personnel alone, the catechetical ministries have to plan in a manner that would make the catechists acquire the pedagogical skill within a limited amount of time.

Third, the revision of catechetical materials is another task that requires an enormous effort. Today, the normal lesson plan consists of an Introduction, Context, Reading of the Word of God, Exposition of the Christian Message, Synthesis and Challenge. With the new method, if ever it will be implemented, this usual process of the lesson will be significantly altered — the underlying factors will be that of dialogue and integration (DMW) that will now include the element of mission as an indispensable component. Indeed, there are numerous things to be considered by the catechetical ministries if some form of renewal in catechesis has to be accomplished.

Moreover, presenting a new strategy for inculturated catechesis entails a serious commitment on the part of the catechetical "authorities" in the different dioceses. If there has to be a pedagogical renewal, there must also be a renewal of attitude towards catechesis in the diocese — that it is not optional and insignificant but a serious duty on the part of bishops and priests (cf. CCL 773-780) who should be

the prime movers of all catechetical initiatives in the local churches. Learning to use inculturation as a tool for classroom instruction is certainly labor intensive, but it enhances the experience of Christian life in the different faith communities. Strictly speaking, inculturation cannot be imposed from the outside since it is the lived-experience of a people in a specific time and space. The role of catechetical authorities or experts is to guide the process, but they can never enforce their own biases in the community. The role of theologians and those engaged in pastoral ministry, particularly the catechists, is to provide avenues for the encounter between Gospel and culture. Venues, equipment, consultation with the experts, and updating of formation programs are some possible assistance that pastoral workers or catechist-leaders can provide so that community discernment for the purposes of inculturation can take place. Indeed, the best starting point for inculturation is the lived experience of the community in the diocese.

Conclusion

In this study, a good amount of the author's experiences in actual catechetical work came into play. First-hand experience of what was happening on the ground seemed an advantage as insights from references pertaining to this research came pouring in. Nonetheless, the author accepts that his experiences were somehow subjective and not the standard that must be utilized. The work of the Holy Spirit in catechesis was so pronounced that there was a wide range of stirrings that He initiated and sustained. This research opened up many insights that led to the following three overarching realizations.

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1. **Every catechetical method must achieve a balance between human experience and content.**

> "Every adequate catechetical methodology must be grounded explicitly on three bases — Scripture, Tradition, and Human Experience" (NNCDP, 344, 359; 367). This is one of the directives of the national directory that should guide catechetical pedagogy. However, due to an exaggerated preoccupation to make catechesis appealing and relevant to its recipients, the pendulum has often gravitated toward experience rather than Scripture and Church teaching. Certainly, experience is essential in catechesis as "It arouses in man, interests, questions, hopes, anxieties, reflections and judgments which all converge to form a certain desire to transform his existence" (GDC 152). Caution, however, must be exercised since the effort to provide a catechesis that reflects the religious and cultural milieu may produce Christians who are less acquainted with the substance and profundity of Catholic teachings.

The challenge of evangelization to find new ways of expressing the faith is proof enough that methods are taking the edge while the content is presumed. Unlike the *Doctrina Christiana,* the Baltimore Catechism, and other catechisms where content is emphasized, today's drive to present the faith in a way that appeals to the complexity of postmodern life is rather understandable. Faith is not a commodity, but it has to be packaged in a way that captures the imagination of those who will embrace it. Many competing voices plague the mind of an individual groping to survive in a not-so-friendly society. The advantage of faith is that it offers life-changing truths of divine revelation that enable believers to stand on solid ground and navigate their way to the higher kind of life – a life that puts into the proper perspective the harsh realities of life. This is the reality of faith, but the problem of "presentation" remains the same in overlapping contexts.

Many times, catechesis is reduced to an interpretation of experience. Generally, in the mind of most catechists, it is the context that determines the presentation of the catechetical lessons. Their first concern in preparing lesson plans are the stories, situations, or activities that would capture their listeners' attention. Many times, the integrity of the content is not well-discussed, and the students remember more the "context" rather than the message. The students are over-exposed to social media; visuals and colorful illustrations get their attention right away. Indeed, if Christian truths and values are presented in a dry, outdated fashion, catechists would be treading the path of irrelevance. The failure to communicate "content" is also a failure to communicate that God has revealed certain truths that are necessary for humanity's life in the world.

In conclusion, it is very important to create a balance between maintaining the orthodoxy of the doctrine and the manner it is presented to its hearers. Inculturation as dialogue with cultures has a greater chance of attaining this objective because in this process, the Gospel message takes precedence over cultural antecedents while respecting their intrinsic value and purifying their excesses.

2. **An inculturated catechesis goes beyond an "inculturated" catechism.**

> According to Michael Amaladoss, "A genuine process of inculturation needs to give heed to the voice of the people. It needs to consider the sense of the people of God."[40] The different sections of CFC (or any written catechism), for instance, with its priceless contribution and value to Philippine catechesis, have been written by several authors and put together in one coherent whole

40 Michael Amaladoss, *Making All Things New: Dialogue, Pluralism & Evangelization in Asia* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990): 128.

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> by a general editor. Is it an *inculturated catechism*?[41] Yes, in a limited sense. It is inculturated in the sense that its various authors, commissioned by the Episcopal Commission on Catechesis and Catholic Education (ECCCE), have projected a Philippine culture based on their perception of it and inserted the Christian message. However, it does not directly come from the community or the recipients. Strictly speaking, "Inculturation is not first and foremost the work of experts, particularly, 'outside' experts, but instead the work of ordinary people, the subjects of local social and cultural contexts."[42] This study asserts that inculturation may be used as a method in catechetical instruction, wherein the religious education teacher or the catechist facilitates the process of Gospel–culture dialogue.

In this context, the role of catechetical authorities is indispensable as they determine, with their extensive knowledge on inculturation, the parameters, principles, and objectives of inculturating process. This also includes the various elements that make up a real-time inculturated catechesis with an actual audience. The process requires a lot of technical knowledge and skill from the catechists. Nevertheless, catechists, or any faith-educator for that matter, will eventually gain familiarity with the process called "inculturated catechesis."

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41 The CCC is the universal catechism but it is not an "inculturated catechism." CCC does not claim "to provide the adaptation of doctrinal presentations and catechetical methods required by the difference of culture, age, spiritual maturity, and social and ecclesial condition among all those to whom it is addressed. Such indispensable adaptations are the responsibility of particular catechisms" (CCC, Prologue, Section VI, 24).

42 Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder, "Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today," in *Religious Studies Revie*w, 38:1 (March 2012): 10-12. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1748-0922.2011.01574_2.x (accessed on March 4, 2020).

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3. **Dialogue is an indispensable element of any contemporary catechetical pedagogy.**

Dialogue is essential in a multi-layered local culture with multiple influences of thought and lifestyle. There is no way the Christian faith can force its way through the different cultural realities and impose its categories. The way God reveals His truths or the "divine pedagogy" is never done in haste. It is a series of interactions that ultimately leads his creatures back to Him. God's pedagogy is the template for any catechetical pedagogy, according to the General Directory for Catechesis: "Catechesis as communication of divine Revelation is radically inspired by the pedagogy of God, as displayed in Christ and in the Church" (GDC 143). God did not force Himself on his creatures, although He could very well impose the process. For its part, the CCC states that

> The divine plan of Revelation… involves a specific divine pedagogy: God communicates Himself to man gradually. He prepares him to welcome by stages the supernatural Revelation that is to culminate in the person and mission of the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ (CCC 53).
>
> Jesus, the fullness of revelation, is the center and focus of catechesis.

God's self-communication is not a one-way street but a two-way exchange with His creatures. It is the epitome of dialogue that unfolds in the entire salvation history. This dialogue of all dialogues is meant to be the pattern of communication or proclamation of God's truths, whether evangelization, theology, or catechesis. Every Gospel presentation involves a dialogue that happens in a specific context characterized by diversity and pluralism.

McBrien explains:

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> On the one hand, as long as the peculiarly human circumstances where no one has seen God directly, teaching the faith will be defined in a groping, tentative, provisional and halting manner. In this scenario, articulated perceptions, convictions, formulated beliefs, and varying theologies must be trusted as far as possible. On the other hand, there may be differences in the way people express their perceptions of God but everybody is one in the conviction that the God of their theology and of their belief is a real, living God.[43]

Doing a dialogue in view of teaching the faith may not be as easy as it seems, but the common recognition of the one true God may serve as a good starting point. Thus, the dialogical engagement with culture might be intricate and complex but it should move towards the acknowledgment of God as its ultimate end. Every time the dialogical process unfolds, the understanding of the Christian faith advances, the dignity of culture is raised and purified, and God is better known and glorified.

How exactly can this dialogue be carried out in an actual catechetical session? In the first place, out of God's goodness and love, He initiates the dialogue of salvation that must be replicated in the dialogue with people (cf. ES 72-73; GDC 140). Dialogue, in a typical catechetical session, may be classified as one of those strategies in classroom discussion. It invites everyone to be involved and open to a "dialogue of salvation" as if God is directly interacting with the class. Taking inspiration from GDC 150-151, a group of religious educators envisioned how dialogue might look in a classroom setting in the following manner:

> During formal catechesis, dialogue can take many forms and can be used with a large group, small groups,

43 Cf. McBrien, *Faith, Theology and Belief*, 136-137.

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> or one-on-one. It can be woven into panel discussions, agree-disagree discussions (physically move to a position on a continuum line), brainstorming, and case studies or current events articles followed by discussion. A skillful catechist can incorporate inductive and deductive reasoning, proclamation of the catechetical message, and the personal experience of the learners.[44]

This is a testament that there can be a lot of creative and intelligent ways in which dialogue can be operationalized in a classroom atmosphere. The fact that dialogue can take place in a classroom further bolsters the method of dialogic integration proposed by this particular study. Indeed, inculturation can be used as a teaching method in catechesis. The concrete model, however, that illustrates the detailed template of the lesson, including all the elements that must be in the lesson, is no longer part of the scope of this research.

44 Suzanne Nelson, Mary Beaudoin, and Rob Maro, Five Core Methodologies for Catechesis in *New Theology Review* (February 2010): 71, https://cathdal.org/5_Methodologies_of_Catechesis.pdf (accessed on March 17, 2020).

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