

Integration of Christian Faith and Practice: The Challenge of the Filipino Christian Living (FCL) Faculty to Integrate Their Teaching to the Perpetualite Students

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Abstract

This hermeneutical phenomenology study looked into the lived experience of nine (9) Filipino Christian Living (FCL) educators as to their being Christians to serve and to continue the mission of Christ with the qualification to love unconditionally. Intensive analysis of the participants' shared accounts revealed that the FCL teachers have an important task to form the Perpetualites students to become a human person and people of God, growing with their Christian faith through the integral way of teaching, this definition of Christian faith was based on the teaching of the church and being affirmed by the participants' answers. Hence, in their teaching of Christian faith they have shown that God is alive in our life, multi media were instruments used to transmit the lesson of FCL effectively to the Perpetualite students, but teachers themselves are more important in their learning process, FCL teachers were models of their teaching on Christian faith and practice by setting as examples, the holistic approach in teaching the FCL topics was advantageous to mould the students on Christian faith and practice, Christian faith taught in the FCL classes was always related with attending the Mass/Eucharist, the process of teaching the FCL lessons affected the students in one way or another personally and morally, Christian faith could be practiced inside and outside in the class for as long as it was part of life, the teaching method of FCL was integral because Christian faith is total and holistic, and mentors/FCL teachers could provide various avenues to shape students' life and values, such as the Eucharist, class discussion, recollections and the FCL7 and 8 programs, to be aligned with Perpetualite and Christian values, the manifestations of Christian faith.

Keywords: Integration, Christian Faith, Practice, FCL Faculty, Perpetualite Students

Introduction

Faith was the central element of man's relationship with God. It was understood as the belief and trust of Christ who brought to us salvation, (Bible Dictionary, 2014) the expression of God's love. *For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whosoever believed in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16)*. In the version of St Paul, faith is trusting, acceptance of God's will (Rom 4:3-6). Jesus' Faith to the Father was seen to His action which led Him to death on the cross (Rom 3:22,26).

Henceforth, in the Christian mission, this Christian faith was coupled with practice/action in order to effectively propagate the Good news to the whole world regardless of people's differences, with her holistic approach in word and action. Yet, the challenge to every believer was how to integrate this Christian faith with practice/action in all aspects of life particularly in one's teaching profession. In this

framework practice was synonymous with action, works, service, and living in the context of obedience to the Will of God, (Thesaurus, 2016).

The integration of Faith and Practice was highly stressed in Christian life. Through, Vatican Radio, all Christians were called to be consistent of their faith in action/practice, Pope Francis (2015). *...For Faith in practice/action is Love, and love in action is service. It is by transforming that faith into living acts of love, that we put ourselves in contact with God Himself, with Jesus our Lord*, Mother Teresa of Calcutta. This was also shown by the exemplary models of Christian faith; Abraham, by his faith offered his only son Isaac on the altar (Gn. 22:1), Mother Mary, by her faith she obeyed and accepted the will of God to be Mother of Jesus Christ, (Lk 1:38). Our first Filipino Saint and Martyr, St. Lorenzo Ruiz who professed his faith and eventually offered his life for it, Susan Tan (2014). Offering one's life was the highest way of expressing one's faith into action/practice, as Jesus Christ did in the cross for our salvation. Christ is the Love of God for His people, (Jn 3:16).

In the area on education, teachers as facilitators were evangelizers to promote one's faith to God fervently and concretely in the aspect of molding the students formatively and integrally in the class, Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines (CEAP) 2012). This could be possible, when students saw in their mentors, the religious teaching of faith in their good behaviors (practicing the faith) through empathy, active listening and relationship with them. Since Faith could be transformed into attitude, trait, virtue and values, Audi, Robert (2011), which transpired a holistic results of educating the students.

In view of the foregoing, this study was designed to unveil chances for the FCL teachers to develop themselves personally, academically, spiritually and religiously, and always be prepared to relate teaching Christian faith with real life of students. Furthermore, the researcher would eventually propose a program which would strengthen the spiritual foundation of FCL educators to carry on their task in education, to shape the lives of their learners according to Christian's values. For the students, they were individuals with well-grounded personalities, professional Perpetualities who were prepared to face problems and trials in their profession in the future.

Methodology

In the study, the researcher applied the hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative approach as it dealt to interview and understand the concepts, meaning and phenomenon of Christian faith embodied in the experience of teaching FCL subjects. It also dared to analyze and interpret subjectively and objectively the text and language used in the interview proper with chosen participants. Phenomenology was the branch of Philosophy which dealt with consciousness, thoughts and experience, (Collins English Dictionary). Hermeneutics as the methodology of interpretation was concerned with problems that arouse when dealing with meaningful human actions and the products of such actions most importantly texts, Stanford *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (2013). Martin Heidegger was famous in this method of Hermeneutic phenomenology in investigation and discovering the truth of things. Eventually hermeneutic phenomenology was used as methods of study particular qualitative research. Van Manen,(2014) cited that the basic tenet of hermeneutic phenomenology was the most fundamental and basic experience of the world, and already full of meaning. This method was a unique way to understand human existence and activities. In the context of study, the researcher used this hermeneutic phenomenology qualitative method, because it directly pointed out to the participants in the study through personal conversation (experience). In the course of interview proper, the researcher was able to draw out concept and knowledge behind the process of conversation, interpreting the text

and language used by the participants To analyze and evaluate the data collected from the In-depth interview, the researcher does not use any statistical instruments in order to arrive at the results and to explain and learn meaning behind the participants' teaching Christian faith and his/her behaviors with the students. Any gathered data from In-depth interview with the participants were held valuable references for the researcher to understand the essence of teaching Christian faith experienced by the participants to the students in the University of Perpetual Help, Binan, Laguna..

The researcher acquired data solely from the scheduled interview with the nine (9) participants of the University of Perpetual Help, Binan Campus. Here, in-depth conversation with the guide and open questions, careful and keen observation on the dynamics of the participants while answering the question by the researcher were considered. The number of participants who were subjected to in-depth interviews was nine (9) educators who were taken from the three departments of the University: three (3) participants from Allied, three (3) participants from College and two (3) participants from Basic Education. These participants were Filipino Christian Living Teachers with the experience of teaching FCL subjects. They were employees, and committed to teach and involve in the FCL programs. Furthermore, these participants were presumed to be well-oriented with FCL programs and dynamics of teaching them to the students which included also the response of Perpetualite students. The instrument in the study was the interview guide questions for the nine participants which focused on the process of their Christian faith and practiced it inside classroom with the students. The researcher had prepared questions for the nine participants to honestly answer. 1. What do you teach in the FCL subjects to enhance the Perpetualite students' relationship with God? 2. Based on the teaching of the church and from your lived experience, what is your understanding about Christian faith? 3. What are your ways to effectively transmit this Christian faith to the students in teaching? 4. As FCL teachers, what are your expressions, as model in practicing this faith in teaching the students? 5. What are the advantages of holistic method to mold the Perpetualite students with faith and practice? 6. How do you relate this Christian faith, as taught in the FCL with practice through attending the Holy Eucharist? 7. How does the process of teaching the Christian faith in the FCL and practice affect the students? 8. How do you practice this Christian faith inside and outside the class? 9. How can you say that your teaching method in FCL subjects (Faith) is integral in dynamics? 10. As a mentor/facilitator, how can you provide an avenue in shaping their faith, values and life –style according to Christian virtues, prescribed in the Perpetualite core values, as an affirmation of their identity as Perpetualite, Helper of God?

Cresswell (2007) described in-depth interviews as the primary means of collecting information for a phenomenological study, with a selection of individuals, and that the important process was to describe the meaning of a phenomenon for a small number of individuals who have experienced the event.

The researcher cordially approached people with expertise and knowledge of data procedure for guidance, and then preparation for an interview, then proper interview started. This involved an informal consultation and dialogue to some participants of the study and professors in doctorate with similar study, and then learned from their experiences as they conducted the interview. Though, there was verbal communication about the scheduled interview with the participants, still the researcher sent a formal letter to them for verification and official transaction. As far as the process was concerned, the ways to gather data were only from direct and personal encounter with the participants. By this, the researcher conducted an interview through guide and open questions related to the theme of study. This augmented with the researcher observation on the way the participants answered the questions. The researcher recorded the in formations from the in-depth interview in a verbatim form and with

affirmation of the participants with regard to their authenticity and truth. The researcher gathered and organized the data. Next, was analysis of the data and coding them in phrases and finally interpreted the meaning of FCL teachers' behaviors in teaching.

Before the researcher started with the interview proper, he proceeded with a formal manner of approaching and informing the direct head of the participants about the project or research. Then, the researcher met each participant cordially and partially to discuss something about the research. Here, the schedule for the interview was set according to the convenience and availability of the participants, but they were free to decline or accept the request of the researcher as part of the study. Furthermore, during the interview proper, the researcher related the participants professionally and humbly. The questions for study were well, carefully and sensitively delivered to the participants with the expertise and knowledge of the subjects. The data gathered from the interview were held confidential and with respect by the researcher. It meant that any results with the participants' conversation would be kept secret, beyond the others' reach, and after the study, these information were erased accordingly. Before finalizing the results especially the dialogue during the interview, the researcher approached the participants to verify the correctness and truth of the data in the text. After the interview, the researcher expressed his gratefulness to the participants to actively answer the questions with honesty and sincerity, and above all to become participant and part of the study. The data which were collected from the in-depth interview with the participants and personal observation were valid materials of the study and for the researcher to discover patterns, coherent themes and meaningful categories, and new ideas and in general uncovered better understanding of a phenomenon or process. Suter (2006). The gathered data were organized, the researcher started categorizing and coding them according the sequence of the guide questions given to the participants. When the process was completed, the researcher analyzed and evaluated the results of the dialogue expressed in the verbatim form, and interpreted them especially the patterns of the behaviors of the participants.

Results and Discussion

This study presented the results of the investigation, from the answers of the participants during the interview, and eventually explored the extent of these results with their implication to the research. In this study, the researcher used the hermeneutic phenomenological qualitative research approach in showing the data gathered from the participants, and then analyzed them, followed with interpretation based on the sequence of the statement of problems.

Herein, the researcher expounded the integration of Christian faith and practiced from the theories of the following: James 2:14-26, Vatican Council, Lumen Gentium, cited by Cosiban, (2012) and Fowler's stages of faith. This was also affirmed from the answers of the participants during the interview.

1. The FCL subjects teach topics in connection with Christian faith to enhance the Perpetualite students' relationship with God

The participants claimed that they taught their students the lessons based on the FCL. Like for example FCL 1- Identity and the Perpetualite, core values, FCL II- Faith and Revelation, FCL III- Relationship with others. These lessons pointed out the relationship to others and God, that's why the key important element here was their Christian faith. Some participants mentioned problems in the society and currents issues of the country just to tell their students that Christian faith was not a separate entity with human context and trend of time.

Furthermore, in the FCL discussions, participant two emphasized the Christian value formation as the foundation of relationship to others and God which started in the family. The FCL teachers (according to the participant four) would only provide activities like or role play reflection, etc. in the FCL classes for the students to gain insights and values of Christian faith, more essentially to relate real life. Participants two and seven talked about prayer and the Eucharist to enhance one's faith as a way to strengthen their relationship to God.

2. The understanding of Christian faith based on the teaching of the church and participants' lived experience

Christian faith as understood by participants two, five and seven, was a belief that God is existed and His existence was real in human life. By faith man had to establish his personal and intimate relationship with Him. Christian faith was not only a belief but also a trust and be confidence in God's love and kindness. Yet, this trust implied a practical commitment to God's commandment, and action/practice, Bishop, John (2016).

Living this Christian faith is a difficult and challenging process because it ensured to obey and follow the teaching of Christ in the daily life. To be complete and holistic, this Christian faith should be integrated with practice, it meant the commitment to Christ particularly in the Eucharist, the only way for everyone to transform into a good believer and real Christian. According to participants three and six, this Christian faith was witnessing the love of God to human experiences. That's why in the Catholic Church, through the Document of Vatican II, in the Year of Faith, the Pope asked the Catholics to reflect and deepen their knowledge about faith and its implication to human life, Pope Benedict XVI (2011).

3. The ways to effectively transmit this Christian faith to the students in teaching

In the rapid changes of time particularly in technology, communication which was necessary for a relationship became easier among us. Technology was really an important tool in education also especially for the teachers to effectively transmit the lesson to the students. Most teachers, according to the participants employed multi-media, such as slide, videos and power point as their means to effectively to imbibe the lessons to their learners.

Though these multi-media were effective instruments to convey the message of Christian faith to the students, yet the more essential and effective dynamics in the learning process were the teachers themselves and the substance of the lessons and how they related to experience and put into practice as a necessity of Christian faith, Sposite (2009). Some participants cited that a particularly relevant activity concerning one's experience would explore the lessons about faith to the students so that they can easily relate it to their lives, augmented with the teacher setting an example of her/his teaching and sharing their experiences with the commitment to prayer and worship, disclosing the unconditional love of God. Participant four emphasized that what was more effective way to carry on the message to them and be able to relate the discussion to practical life, was by touching the core of their humanity. It meant delving their inner heart which projects an inner values, realizing that they (students) are good people despite the lapses and mistakes in life, Dees (2016)

4. The expressions of FCL teacher as a model in practicing this faith in teaching

It was a challenge to be model of Christian faith and practice it because it was hard since it started from within first. It needed to be real and true to one's teaching, stated by participant one. The other participants taught the students about the commitment of the sacrament of Eucharist and to be a man of prayer as a way to practice their Christian faith. Despite the sin along the way through the sacrament and prayer, one will become a good human person.

Two respondents emphasized that to be a model of their teaching about Christian faith, they have to set as examples, like being religious teachers and faithful to attend the Eucharist. This being religious then in relation to faith would lead to transform good behaviors, Audi, R. (2014) and a good relationship with their students. Considering that this relationship of teacher-student was one of the most powerful elements within the learning environment, Hughes & Chen,(2011).

5. The advantages of holistic method to mold the Perpetualite students with faith and practice

Participant two said that in his FCL lesson, he tried to integrate the concept of Christian faith with action/practice, for faith required action/ practice and this action required responsibility, Sposite (2009). Thus, Christian faith was not only knowing for it needed an application and living it, and the other participant claimed that it was her holistic approach to teach the students. Yet , the common answers from some participants was that the lesson on Christian faith was connected with the different issues of human life such as work, economics, politics and relationship with others and God, and even problems of life. With this the teacher should be seriously prepared to connect the teaching on Christian faith with the real life of the students, Kartal (2013).

Then, there was a challenge for the students to live and apply their learning on Christian faith to practical life and consider everything in line with will of God through the eyes of faith. This holistic method (with practice) enabled the students to live their Christian faith truly and integrally, and lived as responsible children of God, cited by participant five and six. In this true faith in God, students can turn these negative conditions (experiences) of human life, like problems, failure, sin and other frustrations of life, into positive perspectives of life, and deal them as a trials, challenges and opportunities to develop themselves especially in their relation to others and above all to God.

6. The Christian faith as taught in the FCL is related to attending the Holy Eucharist

The Eucharist was the highlight of the Christian faith because Christ was the center of the celebration. It was a wonderful experience to spend time with Jesus Christ in the celebration of the Mass, Kneibert (2017). Most participants seriously affirmed that they taught the Eucharist in their FCL classes, participant 1 stressed that it is the spiritual food of our soul since Christ is being received and present in the mass. Participant 5 encouraged the students to attend the mass and practice their faith with the hope that this will transform their behaviors. Participant. 2 believed that the attending the mass was not enough but this Christian faith should be lived in our day to day life. The Eucharist according to participant 4, was the Christian commitment of the Gospel and to Christ, our Savior. That was why one should attend the Mass as an act of professing Christian faith. By this, the participant confirmed that everything was interconnected in faith especially our relationship to others and God.

7. The process of teaching Christian faith in the FCL and practicing it affects the students

Primary, it started with the FCL teachers, to teach the Christian faith with their convincing efforts and act not only as good teachers to the students but also as effective evangelizers of the Word of God. This could be possible when they (teachers) lived their teaching on Christian faith despite the adversities in life, and practiced it religiously by attending the Eucharist regularly, cited by participant 2 and 5, as a consequence this would transform into a good behaviors in the class, such as empathy, kindness, etc. In the Mass, the sermon of the priest would help them realize the implication of their faith and its challenge and be grateful to a gift of life, participant 7, and be active participants of preaching the Gospel.

Second for the students, according to participant 1, students were perceptive in the discussion especially with the topics about God because they wanted to enhance their Christian faith, cited by participant 2. Participant 1 stressed that students believed and accepted their teaching about faith, and of course through the sincerity of the students to listen empathically. Empathic listening was more than registering words, it was about listening with the intent to understand the lesson, Covey (2013). This would affect and lead for gradual change of their behaviors inside the class, and at the end they realized that Christian faith was part of life which called for a mission. Furthermore, there was a transition in the part of students, from negative conditions into positive perspectives.

8. Christian faith is practiced inside and outside the class

If someone was a good person as the result of his true and authentic Christian faith, participant 1, then, everywhere he could practice this inside or outside the classroom, since it radiated freely because God is the inspiration in the day to day life. Participant 4 added, if it was part of life-style anytime and anywhere one could practice his faith because of consistency, the fruit of faith is love, while the fruit of love was authentic relationship where there was trust and empathy. The transformation of this Christian faith was good attitude, virtue and values, Audi, (2011)

Participants 5 and 7 emphasized that one should be conscious of his Christian faith as part of life then it will follow to practice it everywhere, whether it was religiously or behaviorally. FCL teachers were challenged to once again to strengthen this Christian faith everyday through his spiritual nourishment, like attending the Eucharist, reading the bible and reflection, and other religious activities.

9. The teaching method in FCL subjects (Faith) is integral in dynamics

Christian faith was holistic in nature, and therefore the method in teaching this faith should be also integral in dynamics. Participants 1,3,7 teach their students the lessons on faith and provided activities that would enhance their learning, and provide activities to connect the lesson to their experiences, then applied the faith into practice every day. The teacher should be seriously prepared to connect the teaching on Christian faith with the real life of the students, Kartal (2013). Participant 4 affirmed that in teaching Christian faith started in believing, trusting and following the teaching of Christ and mission. Participant 7, incorporated the significance of the attending mass as the completion and celebration of Christian faith.

By this integral method of teaching, it would create a positive outputs to the part of the students like change of their perspective and life-style. Their behaviors would also be affected and developed a good attitudes especially in the FCL 7 and 8 they have given an opportunities to reach out people and would show concern particularly the unfortunate ones in the community.

10. The mentor / facilitator can provide an avenue in shaping faith, values and lifestyles according to Christian virtues, prescribed in the Perpetualite core values, the affirmation of their identity as Perpetualite, Helpers of God.

Most of the participants clearly mentioned that in providing an avenue to shape students' values, life-style, etc. they started with the teaching of Christian Faith in the classroom. Particularly, participant 1 said that FCL discussion where they began to beget that values and Christian virtues, in teaching the FCL lesson on faith in the classroom it should be augmented with corresponding activities for them to analyze, discover, realize, reflect and lastly gained insights and wisdom the meaning and implication of Christian faith.

The similarity of the participants in the study, from the teaching they disclosed another avenue for the students to integrate Christian faith learned from the classroom to another context such as retreat and recollection to enhance and develop their spiritual and moral life, centralized in their participation of the Eucharist. Majority of participants, of course except for the participant 1, emphasized that FCL 7 and 8 in the outreach program the students were blessed to explore their Christian faith as they dealt people who were unfortunate in the community, their experiences, observations and insights disclosed another good perspective of life, it was proven to their deep reflection. For participant 8 stressed that the students were given the chance to exercise the three H: the head, the heart and hand.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from the summary of finding to affirm the truth behind the dynamics of Christian faith: the FCL teachers have an important task to form the Perpetualites students to become a human person and people of God, growing with their Christian faith through the integral way of teaching, this definition of Christian faith was based on the teaching of the church and being affirmed by the participants' answers. Hence, in their teaching of Christian faith they have shown that God is alive in our life, multi media were instruments used to transmit the lesson of FCL effectively to the Perpetualite students, but teachers themselves are more important in their learning process, FCL teachers were models of their teaching on Christian faith and practice by setting as examples, the holistic approach in teaching the FCL topics was advantageous to mould the students on Christian faith and practice, Christian faith taught in the FCL classes was always related with attending the Mass/Eucharist, the process of teaching the FCL lessons affected the students in one way or another personally and morally, Christian faith could be practiced inside and outside in the class for as long as it was part of life, the teaching method of FCL was integral because Christian faith is total and holistic, and mentors/FCL teachers could provide various avenues to shape students' life and values, such as the Eucharist, class discussion, recollections and the FCL7 and 8 programs, to be aligned with Perpetualite and Christian values, the manifestations of Christian faith.

Future Directions

The following recommendations are hereby recommended to draw out activities and programs to improve the performance of FCL teachers to educate Christian faith with its integral components. For future study, these will also serve as launching pod: the Religious Institute Head will provide formative sessions, trice every semester for the FCL teachers to develop their moral and spiritual self and become worthy in their teaching of Filipino Christian Living to the Perpetualites students, the FCL Chairperson will initiate activity, the *Sunday Faith Sharing* in the context of their teaching FCL

topics, every last Sunday of Prelim, Midterm and final period (one hour only). The flow of this Sunday Faith Sharing (SFS), would start with a song, prayers, then chosen reading from the Bible, sharing the message and connecting it with the experience of teaching, followed with singing the Our Father and then the final song, Human Resource Department will conduct a workshop seminar on the use of multi-media for the FCL teachers for them to be equipped more and effective in their teaching, the FCL Chairperson in coordination of Religious Institute will schedule Recollections for FCL teachers to enhance their spiritual wellbeing, so that they more strength to do their job and become a worthy model of their teaching with the permission of the School Director and financial support from the HR, the Head of religious Institute will provide a session to orient the FCL teachers about the vision-mission of the Catholic Educational Association of the Philippines, (CEAP) concerning the task of teachers in evangelization. The FCL teachers were expected to participate and to acquire more skills and strategies in teaching religious subjects and attend any CEAP symposium ,the Religious Institute Head will observe a proper protocol of informing the schedules of masses to the Chairperson ahead of time, based on the calendar of activities. Then, the Chair will communicate to the FCL teachers so that everyone will be informed about the masses with the permission of the Dean, and the Religious Institute Head in coordination of the school Administrator will appoint Campus Minister in College to spear head any religious activities in school. The campus Minister is important to pave a way for easy communication from the Office of Religious Institute.

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