

Understanding the Role of Mary in the Catechetical Documents Issued in the Philippines

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Abstract

The Blessed Virgin Mary plays a vital role in the history of salvation. She was chosen to become the Mother of God and given by Christ to become the Mother of All. The Church in the Philippines is called *Pueblo Amante de Maria*, which means people in love with Mary. It is one of the characteristics of the Christian Faith of the Filipino people, wherein their approach to Christ is through and with Mary. Mary becomes the central inspiring force in bringing about a deeper evangelization for the people to preserve and have a fuller maturity in the faith. This paper seeks to look at Mary's place in the Catechetical Documents issued by the Catholic Church in the Philippines. In presenting the said theme, the following topics are discussed: first, Mary in Catechesis by having a general outlook on her role and mission; second, the Catechetical situation in the Philippines by looking into its context; and third, the place of Mary in the Philippine Catechetical documents by presenting her as the Inspirational Model that must be emulated especially by the Filipino people.

Keywords: Mary, Catechesis, Philippines

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Introduction

In the course of the history of salvation, a woman plays a vital role in fulfilling the promise of sending forth the Messiah that was revealed after the fall of man. The name of the woman was Mary. She was chosen to become the Mother of God as revealed to her at the Annunciation (Luke 1: 26-38). This was made possible through her consent and cooperation with the plan of God. Mary continued to journey with her Son's work and reached its peak at the foot of the Cross (John 19: 25-27), where she was given by Jesus to humanity to become the Mother of All.

The Church in the Philippines has a special bond with the Mother of God. It was even called *Pueblo Amante de Maria* – a nation in love with Mary due to the numerous invocations, titles, and devotions that pertain to her by the Filipino people. Stripping off her regal titles and adornments, what remains is the personal and collective devotion of the Filipino people through which they ask the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, especially in their approach to her Son, Jesus, as described by the Catechism for Filipino Catholics (1997) which is "through and with" her. This approach became a vehicle for catechesis, "initiating the hearers into the fullness of Christian life"(Congregation for the Clergy, 1997, 18). The Blessed Virgin Mary is called the "compendium of catechesis. She is the living catechism" (Carberry, 1997), for the faith of the faithful became incarnate through her, which is Jesus Christ.

This paper seeks to look at the place of Mary in the Catechetical documents issued by the Catholic Church in the Philippines. In presenting the said theme, the following topics are discussed: first, the Place of Mary in Catechesis by having a general outlook on her role and mission; second, the Catechetical situation in the Philippines by looking into its context; and third, the place of Mary in the Philippine Catechetical documents by examining and presenting her as the Inspirational Model who must be emulated by the Filipino people leading them to a fuller maturity in the faith.

The Place of Mary in Catechesis

Jesus Christ was sent by the Father to proclaim the Good News to the people by inviting all to conversion and faith. From Him, the task was entrusted to the apostles through which the essential mission of the Church and the reason for her existence is to evangelize. As the primary motive of evangelization is the "love of Christ for the eternal salvation of all." (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 2007, 8) To evangelize "does not mean simply to teach a doctrine, but to proclaim Jesus Christ by one's words and actions, that is, to make oneself an instrument of his presence and action in the world." (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 2007, 2). In fulfilling the task, under the "ministry of the word" (John Paul II, 1979, 27) of proclaiming the good news is catechesis, which "matures initial conversion to make it into a living, explicit and fruitful confession of faith" (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997, 82). The primary and essential object of catechesis is the "mystery of Christ" (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997, 41), revealing the person of Jesus because everything that must be taught should be about Him.

The Blessed Virgin Mary plays a vital role in catechesis. She unites and mirrors within herself the central truths of the faith (Vatican II, 1964, 65). As the first formulas of faith would mention that "Jesus is acknowledged as the Son of God and

Son of Mary." (John Paul II, 1998, 1) As the goal of catechesis is to know and develop an intimate relationship with Jesus, who is her Son, it will be useful to look up to the person who has raised the Son of God, who is then her mother, Mary. The mystery of Christ is unveiled with the Incarnation. The Second Person of the Blessed Trinity took up the human form and lived with us as a fellow human. This was made possible through the cooperation and consent of Mary to become the Mother of God through which also opens up the door of faith for her. After a long expectation of the promise, the fullness of time had come that God sends forth His Son into the world. The plan was enfolded at Annunciation. The angel revealed that she was chosen by God to become the Mother of His Son, and through her cooperation, this became possible. When she knew that her relative, Elizabeth, was pregnant, she went in haste to where she was staying to take care of her. At their meeting, she was acclaimed by Elizabeth, at the prompting of the Spirit as "the mother of my Lord." Hence the Church confesses that Mary is truly the "Mother of God" (*Theotokos*).

During the start of the public ministry of Jesus, Mary makes notable appearances. At the wedding feast at Cana, she was moved with pity for the newlywed couple and asked for the intercession of her Son to help them. Her role as the Mother of God did not stop there but fortified it, mostly when she was at the foot of the Cross when she was entrusted to John and became the Mother of All. The Blessed Virgin Mary is intimately united with the Church as she continuously intercedes for her beloved children. Radiating from Christ as the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1992) 487 would mention that "what the Catholic faith believes about Mary is based on what it believes about Christ, and what it teaches about Mary illumines, in turn, its faith in Christ." The teachings of the Church on the Blessed Virgin Mary draw its source from the Sacred Scriptures, which is always in relation with Jesus.

The Blessed Virgin Mary remains an "important priority for Catechesis" (Baumbach, 2017). She is seen in the light of being the Mother of God and the Church.

The Catechetical Situation in the Philippines

In the estimated Catholic population in the year 2020, according to the Global Catholic Population, there were about 85,470,000 Filipinos who are Catholic, which makes 81% of the total population. This number made the Philippines third among the world with the largest number of Catholic members and the only predominantly Christian nation in Asia.

The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines was conveyed to examine the coming of the 500th year anniversary since the arrival of Christianity in the country, if the faith that was planted in the Philippine shore makes any difference in the life of the people and the nation, especially with the many things that are happening around. The quantity of Catholics in the Philippines affects the catechetical activity through which also other aspects of society are involved, namely: economic, political, educational, and religious landscapes. This then calls for a contextualized catechesis for the Filipinos that would make the message and its resources adaptable to the needs of the people. This would also mean that the Gospel message must be preached in the language understood by the people (Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, 1992).

Catechesis to become systematic (Legaspi, 1982), must be a program that has a definitive goal, it should focus on the essentials of the faith, and it is a means to introduce and develop the whole Christian life of the faithful. The specific goals of catechesis in the Philippines are: to help people understand more fully the faith because many are ignorant of God's word and it is the right of the people to know the Word of God; to educate and catechize the people about the basic principles of morality; to develop the ability to pray and participate actively in the Church's liturgy; to create a sense of personal belonging to the Church, and to educate the catechize in translating the faith in their everyday lives.

One of the fruits of reflection of the Second Plenary Council was the primary priority on the Integral Faith Formation of the Filipino people. The importance given during the 1991 convocation was once again emphasized in the Pastoral Letter issued by the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (2013), mentioning that one of the realities that are faced by the Filipino people is the weakening of the faith, which needs to be renewed to have an encounter with a person who is Jesus Christ.

The principal purpose of this is mentioned in the Pastoral Letter issued by the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (2012) which is to “gradually introduce the baptized person to “the knowledge of the mystery of salvation, become ever more aware of the gift of Faith they have received, and that they learn in addition how to worship God the Father in spirit and truth (cf. John 4:23) especially in the liturgical action, and be conformed in their personal lives according to the new man created in justice and holiness of truth (Eph. 4:22-24); also that they develop into perfect manhood, to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ (cf. Eph. 4:13) and strive for the growth of the Mystical Body; moreover, that aware of their calling, they learn not only how to bear witness to the hope that is in them (cf. Peter 3:15) but also how to help in the Christian formation of the world that takes place when natural powers viewed in the full consideration of man redeemed by Christ contribute to the good of the whole society.” (Vatican II, 1965,2)

The Blessed Virgin Mary in the Philippine Catechetical Documents

The Church in the Philippines has issued 3 Catechetical documents that complement each other, used as a reference for contextualized catechesis. The Catechism for Filipino Catholics (CFC), which is the "National Catechism for the Philippines" (Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, 1997, 1), the Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines which provides the specific catechetical situation in the Philippines and points of renewal especially in terms of integral faith formation, and the National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines which foster within the Philippine context the universal catechetical goals and methodologies in presenting the faith. The twofold role of Mary is as Mother and Model, as mentioned by Pope John Paul II (1987, 2), which is emphasized in the Magisterial Documents, is close to the hearts of the Filipino people.

Mary co-journeys with her beloved Filipinos from the time it was discovered in 1521 through the Spanish Christian evangelization. Every epoch of Philippine history, she was already there present: As early as 1571, the image of Nuestra Señora de Guia was found and venerated by early Filipinos to the surprised of Spanish people. She is also venerated as Nuestra Señora del Santísimo Rosario de La Naval de Manila back to

1593, which commemorates the miraculous victory of the Spanish fleet against the Dutch Protestant invasion in 1646 through the power of the Rosary. The same victory took place over the peaceful rallying of the people to end the term of a dictator in 1986. The millions of Filipinos at EDSA were not looking out for appearances of Our Lady because they believed she was already with them. They brought her with them and enthroned her in the many altars that sprouted along the length of the highway and in every other nook and cranny. (Villegas, 2008). Like a mother who takes care of his/her children, Mary in every era of Filipino history, whether it is in times of trouble and need, of darkness and loss of hope, whenever we prayed to her, she always came to be with us and raise us up (Catholic Bishops Conference (Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, 2013). Filipinos call Mary as *Ang Mahal na Birhen* (Catholic Bishops Conference on the Philippines, 1975, 53). This is the title by which Filipinos very often address Mary. The Filipino tradition has nuanced this title with all the reverence paid to Mary as Mother of God and all the childlike trust with which we can call her our own Mother.

The Catechism for Filipino Catholics has pointed out some Filipino traits, which are an inculturated presentation of the faith of the Filipino Catholic today. This is greatly influenced by the deep devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, especially through various Marian devotions and pious exercises related to her. The different forms of devotions and pious exercises become vehicles in educating the faith of every follower of Christ. The following were the five characteristics that lead the Filipino believer to Jesus with Mary.

First, Filipinos are family-oriented (Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, 1997, 34). They give importance to every member of the family. This even includes those members that are part of the extended family. It is, in the same way, the attitude towards Jesus and her mother, Mary, Filipinos call Jesus as brother and Mary as Mother. Second, Filipinos are meal-oriented (Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, 1997, 37). They give importance to celebrations, which are a form of thanksgiving and an opportunity to bond together as family and friends. The organization of fiestas, as called in the Philippines, falls during May, which is a Marian month. An expression of the people's gratitude to the Mother of God for her intercession to God. Third, Filipinos are kundiman-oriented (Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, 1997, 39). They have a positive attitude in accepting suffering, which is an expression of love. Filipinos can relate this with the various titles of our Lady as Mater Dolorosa and Perpetual Help, which are invoked in times of sorrow and distress; fourth, Filipinos are Bayani-oriented (Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, 1997, 41). They tend to look up to someone who can defend those who are weak and oppressed. This relates to Mary as a liberator that would free the people from the hands of their enemies as she brought and proclaimed the good news in her womb, the Messiah; and Fifth, Filipinos are spirit-oriented (Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, 1997, 43). They have a deep belief in the supernatural. Mary is venerated as the woman whom the Holy Spirit overshadowed and conceived Jesus in her womb without sexual relations with a man.

The devotion to Mary is intertwined with Christ and the mystery of Incarnation and Redemption (Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, 1975, 72). The faith of Filipino Catholics is described as Marian in character, for it is already embedded in the life and culture of the people. This is evident with the various manifestations of

popular piety towards the Mother of God not only in churches, the liturgical celebration of her feast but even to the religious calendars that bear the picture of our Lady, in the most humble nipa huts or the slums of the cities, to her picture in public vehicles, buses or jeepneys. Grottoes dedicated to the Immaculate Conception under the invocation of Our Lady of Lourdes which are found in private gardens or various public places, along the roads or in corners of modest dwellings (Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, 1975, 14). Also, almost all our favorite pilgrimage places all over the country are Marian shrines and sanctuaries.” (Villegas, 2008) The popular religiosity of the people becomes a vehicle in growing deeper in the faith. The recitation of the Rosary, together with Angelus, is the core of Filipino devotion to Mary (Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, 1997, 1546). Also, the novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help. Through the various devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, it helped the Filipinos to remain Catholic.

In the National Catechetical Directory for the Philippines, Mary was called the Model of Faith. A faith that draws back to the Annunciation to her, being chosen as the Mother of God. Her response was complete cooperation with the plan of God, which opened herself to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Every Christian is called to become a missionary. In realizing the vision of the Church in the Philippines to become a missionary community of disciples, it turns its gaze to Mary, who is the Model of Discipleship as presented in the Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines. Learning from her it may lead the Filipino people towards the right way to personal and social transformation.

Mary is fully and truly human (Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, 1997, 525). Everyone can relate to the experiences that occurred in her life, and we can learn from those occasions. When the angel announced that she would be the mother of God, she was puzzled about what was revealed to her, yet because of her faith, she holds unto what was revealed to her. She is also a woman who discovers the joy of the company of other people when she visited her relative Elizabeth. She is also able to relate to "realities of ordinary, daily living; in family crises; in moments of uncertainties and inability to understand; and in times of distress, worry, anguish and suffering" (Episcopal Commission on Catholic Education, 2017, 204) when her Son was lost for three days in the Temple. The same was the experience when she saw her Son carrying the cross on his shoulders and crucified on the cross. She is someone who can identify the concerns of the people in the same way also are the people. A faith that liberates, which fosters the value of spiritual joy as Mary pronounced in her Magnificat (Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, 1997, 140). The virtues exemplified by Mary are imitated by the people, especially in uplifting the state of the poor. Mary was honored because of her virtues in following Christ (Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, 1997, 738). She is like a mirror that reflects the mighty works of God (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, 22). A mirror of contemporary men and women that aspires for the betterment of humanity.

As a fruit of contemplation on the Mother of God, it should lead the people to give justice to those that are oppressed, be charitable, especially in assisting the needy, an active witness to the love of God in the hearts of the people (Paul VI, 1974, 37). Devotion to Mary shows itself in works, and the works which we needed in the Philippines today are the works of justice and freedom from oppression (Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, 1975, 96).

Lumen Gentium 65 encapsulates that Catechesis aims that in "Mary unites in her person and re-echoes the most important doctrines of the faith." For example, her divine maternity has always been the touchstone of an authentic understanding of the Incarnation: her Immaculate Conception helps us to see more clearly the gratuity and the power of God's redemptive love; her Assumption clarifies the teaching of the Church on eschatology by giving us hope that the ultimate victory of Jesus over death will be shared by our own bodies. (Carberry, 1997) The devotion of the Filipino people to Mary safeguards the faith and leads to a deeper and fuller evangelization of the people (Evangelization in Asia Today, 1974).

Conclusion

In communicating the tenets of faith, the Blessed Virgin Mary plays an important role, especially in the discussion of the mystery of Incarnation and in the work of Redemption brought by Jesus Christ. It becomes an avenue for her to become the Mother of God and the Mother of All people. The Catechetical activity in the Philippines is greatly influenced by the different aspects of society through which the gift of faith received by the Filipino people, whether it is social, economic, political, or educational dimensions. Amidst this, one of the distinct characteristics that remain is the Marian character of the faith of the Filipinos. The Filipino approach is to Jesus through Mary, invoking the intercession of our Lady in presenting our prayers to her Son, Jesus. In the Philippine Catechetical Documents, Mary is characterized as a Mother of the Filipino people who takes care and journeys with her children. She is also a Model of Faith as Christ calls everyone to Discipleship. A model that is worthy of being emulated, especially the virtue of faith that she has exemplified and as a disciple that learns from her master. The Blessed Virgin Mary is venerated as the "realization of faith" (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997, 80). Every Filipino faithful can draw inspiration from Mary by following her attitude, "In her heart, more than in any other, faith in the risen Christ acquired its most complete and authentic aspect, that of joy." (John Paul II, 1998, 5) The veneration to the Mother of God is a way to imitate what she had achieved while still here on earth and as she is in heaven guiding her children (Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, 1975, 98). As a response to the invitation of following the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary, every Filipino faithful is called to fully and responsibly accept the will of God and lead one to become charitable and be of service to other people (cf. Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, 1975, 91). Mary is a mother and teacher of the spiritual life (Paul VI, 1974, 21).

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