International Book Chapter - ISBN: 978-623-09-7870-8

CHAPTER XIII

Learning From the Past, moving into the Future: Revitalizing Catholic Theological Education in an Era of Technological Disruption Through the Franciscan Spirit

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Abstract

This paper discusses the challenges and opportunities for Catholic theological education due to the accelerated progress of digital technology in the 21st-century era. Technological developments have impacted changes in the world of education. In this case, the Franciscan model can still encourage education in times of complex problems like today. Even though the Catholic Education curriculum has undergone many changes and advances since the Second Vatican Council, further adaptation is needed to remain contemporary. The core Franciscan ideals of simplicity, sanctity of life, social justice, and peace contain profound wisdom regarding current issues of environmental unsustainability and social marginalization. Based on this paradigm, integrative methodologies such as hybrid learning, artistic media, and data analysis can improve the quality of Catholic theological education. However, transformation encompasses all dimensions of education. The institutional ethos must be driven by inclusivity, empathy, and reconciliation. Students require the formation of a conscience to tackle complex issues wisely. Ultimately, the shared future depends on mobilizing all societal actors through policy reforms aligned with universal ideals. Despite the turmoil, Franciscan thought is a steadfast guide to realizing humanistic education in the digital age.

Keywords: Catholic theological education, Digital technology, contextualized curriculum, Interactive learning, Contemporary humanitarian issues

Introduction

In the 21st century, technologies like the internet, mobile learning, learning analytics, augmented reality, and virtual classrooms are becoming integral components of the educational ecosystem (Schwab, 2016). These technological changes have significant implications for education, including in the context of Catholic theological education. According to Pope Francis (2017) in his Veritatis Gaudium Catholic Higher Education policy guide, there is a need to constantly

update and refresh the curriculum, teaching methodologies, and practices of Catholic theological education in the changing times. The aim is to ensure that Catholic theological education remains relevant and responsive to the actual issues faced by humanity.

Pope Francis also emphasized the importance of preserving the rich heritage of intellectual tradition within the Church while trying to revitalize it. Catholic education's methodological and curricular renewal should be based on evangelical values and the spirit of fidei depositum. Hence, there needs to be a balance between drawing from the best legacies of the Catholic faith tradition and being open and responsive to advances in cutting-edge science and technology as they pertain to the current educational context. In that context, contemporary Catholic thinkers such as Leonardo Boff (2021) and Joanna Kujawa (2020) argue that incorporating Franciscan ethos and values is essential when envisioning the revitalization of Catholic theological education in the digital age. St. Francis of Assisi, in addition to the fundamental principles of the Franciscan movement, which include simplicity, natural harmony, and peace, can serve as a highly relevant source of inspiration in addressing the challenges humanity faces amidst the emergence of disruptive technologies today.

In line with this idea, Brown (2022), in his acclaimed work entitled Franciscan Wisdom and the Renewal of Catholic Education, directs explicitly his focus toward the revival of Catholic education by utilizing the values symbolized by the Franciscan tradition. He emphasizes that amidst the frenzied pace of change ushered in by cutting-edge technology, the bulwark of Franciscan spirituality is crucial for Catholic Education to maintain its evangelical orientation and not succumb to the tide of change.

From this brief explanation, it becomes clear that the realization of a Catholic theological education that effectively adapts to technological advances while remaining firmly rooted in the Church's noble tradition presents a formidable challenge. On the one hand, Catholic theological education's curriculum, methodology, and praxis must be responsive and relevant to humanity's pressing issues in this digital age. On the other hand, the Church's cherished doctrinal, intellectual, and traditional aspects, including evangelical values and the spirit of the Franciscan movement, must also be preserved and revitalized as the fundamental impetus that drives Catholic theological education. For this reason, this paper further examines the problems and challenges faced by Catholic theological education today, both in terms of methodological, curricular, and practical-operational, as an implication of the rapid changes in digital technology. Then, new opportunities will be elaborated.

Literature Review

Renewal of Theological Education after the Second Vatican Council

The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) marked an important milestone in the history of the contemporary Catholic Church, particularly the revitalization of theological instruction. The ninth paragraph of the document, Orientalism Ecclesia Rum, explicitly articulates the need to continuously renew ecclesiastical educational institutions, including curricula and pedagogical approaches (Flannery, 1996). This imperative was recognized as essential to ensuring the continued development of Catholic theology and its ability to address the faithful's concerns effectively. In response to this spirit of the Council, great strides were made in the content and methodology of Catholic theological education post-1965. As Gaillard Etz (2022) explains, the core of this renewal involved a shift from speculative-manualist theology towards a more pastoral, ecumenical, and contextual theology. Furthermore, the curriculum now focuses more on the humanities and social sciences.

Boff (2021) underlines the importance of post-Conciliar Catholic theological education in engaging with contemporary disciplines, encouraging dialogue, and shedding light on humanity's real challenges. They argue that a multidisciplinary and contextual approach is an unavoidable requirement. Sullivan (2020) also argues that post-Conciliar theology should be responsive and grounded while remaining faithful to the Catholic tradition. Regarding curriculum, Cheney (2017) observes a post-Conciliar Catholic theological education development towards a more adaptable and open competency-based framework. The demands of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue are increasingly emphasized. The focus of teaching has changed from teacher-centered to student-centered, where participatory methods and experiential learning come first.

Skehan (2021) posits that the revitalization process encompasses the amalgamation of rudimentary tenets, namely justice, safeguarding of human rights, and comprehension of ecological concerns, within the framework of modern Catholic theological instruction. Catholic theological reflection is increasingly attuned to the social problems of the present age. As a result, post-Vatican II Catholic theological education makes a paradigmatic leap in which contextualization is central to responding effectively to the dynamic signs of the times.

Industrial Revolution 4.0 and Technology Disruption Trends and Their Impact on Education

The Industrial Revolution 4.0 is distinguished by highly disruptive advances in digital technology, including the Internet of Things, big data, and artificial intelligence, which have led to digitizing all aspects of life (Schwab, 2017). This wave of change has significantly impacted the transformation of the education system. According to the OECD (2018), digital technologies are changing how learning and teaching are conducted, requiring a redesign of curricula and educational methodologies to adapt to the current era. Modern education requires a more individualized approach that uses learning analytics and interactive digital platforms. The 21st century increasingly demands critical thinking, creativity, and data literacy.

Within the Catholic sphere, Groome (2020) and Martin (2022) argue that this digitization trend requires the updating of Catholic religious education by constantly updating its curriculum, methods, and teaching materials. However, Sullivan (2021) warns against abandoning evangelical and humanistic values in Catholic education due to the rapid development of technology. The utmost priority lies in attaining equilibrium amidst novelty and conventionalism.

Specifically, Biasin (2021) accentuates the favorable facets of technology, for example, boundless accessibility to information, interactive pedagogical approaches, and the capacity to extend theological education beyond national boundaries. However, he simultaneously cautions against the plausible erosion of religious conviction attributable to digital content. Despite the rampant dissemination of instantaneous virtual material, introspective and spiritual elements endure as significant components of theological education.

In response, Cheney and Skehan (2020) present a new framework for Catholic theological education in the digital age. They maintain a call for reform in Catholic theological education, which can be realized by merging contemplative spiritual traditions with the integration of cutting-edge digital technology. This is essential for the sustainability and contextualization of theological education in the 21st century. Creativity and balance are vital in meeting the challenges of the current era.

Cheney and Skehan assert that Catholic theological education must wisely embrace technology to remain relevant today. However, Grigolon (2021) reminds us that theological education should not just follow the digitalization trend but rather reflect its core purpose and essence amidst the changing times. The importance of theological education is ultimately to change an individual's perspective, attitude, and behavior to become more aligned with the Christian faith, a process referred to as the enculturation of the Christian faith (Groome, 2011).

Digital technology is merely a tool and not an end in itself. It has the potential to enrich the process of character formation and theological awareness

but also carries the risk of overshadowing the essence of Christian faith education. Grigolon, therefore, calls on Catholic theological educators and policymakers to use discernment, drawing from the Ignatian tradition of finding God in all things. This approach recognizes opportunities presented by digitalization while remaining cautious of data manipulation, distraction, and even dehumanization caused by technology.

The Spirituality and Example of St Francis of Assisi in Responding to the Challenges of the Times

The enduring relevance of Franciscan spirituality and theology in addressing contemporary global issues can be understood through the lens of the Franciscan intellectual tradition. The Franciscan school of philosophers like Bonaventure, Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham contributed seminal ideas spanning metaphysics, logic, and theology. Corduan (2020) observes the Franciscan emphasis on God's love and goodness as a counter to skepticism. This positions Franciscan philosophy as a constructive mediator between faith and reason.

In tracing the legacy of Franciscan thought, its contemporary significance emerges. As a current example, Westra (2021) applies Franciscan ideas on natural law and environmental ethics to tackle issues like climate change. Therefore, the Franciscan intellectual tradition offers conceptual resources to approach new challenges today. Centuries of philosophical insight on reconciling divergent ideas could inform conflicts now, be it religious intolerance or social inequity. Ultimately, Franciscan thought and practice model building connections from nature to society through an ethic and theology of love. Its gentleness of spirit holds wisdom to heal modern divisions.

As per Boff (2021), the essence of Franciscan spirituality lies in a deep appreciation for humility, simplicity, and sanctity of life. These principles have special significance amidst the ecological crisis of human greed and excessive consumerism. The unadorned Franciscan way of life offers a natural solution to contemporary environmental difficulties. Meanwhile, Kujawa (2022) and Brown (2022) highlight Pope Francis as an inspiration to address current issues of religious intolerance and global conflict, emphasizing the spirit of peace and good (pax et bonum). Interreligious dialogue and tolerance are fundamental tenets of Franciscan theology. These values of reconciliation remain highly relevant when applied in the current context.

From an educational point of view, Davis (2021) understands Franciscan spirituality, focusing on contemplative aspects and practical engagement, which aligns with the Ignatian paradigm in education known as contemplation in action. In the digital age, reflective elements and social engagement are critical to humanistic education. On the other hand, Walsh (2020) praises Pope Francis' passion for serving the poor and marginalized as a source of inspiration for

contemporary Catholic education reforms prioritizing inclusivity and mindfulness of the marginalized.

Discussion

SWOT Analysis of Current Catholic Theological Education and Identification of Gaps between the Current Curriculum and the Needs of the Times

Responding to the dynamics of rapid change, Sullivan (2020) and Barnes (2022) emphasize the urgency for Catholic theological education to always carry out a self-evaluation process. One of the analyses that can be used is SWOT to identify internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and challenges. The results can be used as a basis for revitalizing theological education in the future.

From the internal side, Boeve and Mannion (2021) see that the curriculum of Catholic theological education is still not fully contextualized and adaptive. There is still a speculative bias and a need to be more responsive to people's problems. Meanwhile, the hard skills of digital learning methodology still need to be discovered by most theology teachers. Meanwhile, from the external side, Kujawa (2020) and Skehan (2020) see significant opportunities from digital technology and interactive learning models that have yet to be fully utilized. On the other hand, challenges around hoaxes, misinformation, and hate speech are increasingly massive problems in the digital space.

Responding to the analysis of these conditions, Barnes and Martin (2021) propose a more integrative post-truth theological education curriculum design by combining contemplative traditions and doctrinal studies that are the strength of Catholic theology and utilizing digital technology for learning methods that are more contextual, interactive, and digital media literate. Meanwhile, Walsh (2020) emphasizes the urgency of a more inclusive and egalitarian theology curriculum to respond to the challenges of increasingly prominent issues of diversity, justice, and alignment with marginalized people.

The identification results through SWOT analysis provide an objective basis for Catholic theological education to formulate curriculum and methodology revitalization in today's era of disruption. Contextualization of learning is necessary without losing the power of contemplation and the core traditions that have been the hallmarks of Catholic theological education. Creativity, balance, and inclusiveness are vital in designing a contemporary theological curriculum. In addition to conventional analyses of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges in general, Boff (2021) invites a more radical and comprehensive

SWOT reflection. He encourages Catholic theological education to dare to conduct an honest self-critique, including acknowledging past weaknesses and failures.

Boff questions why issues of ecology, gender equality, and social justice for minorities have only entered the theological curriculum in the last few decades when these issues have been around for a long time. Similarly, why does Catholic theological education only want to be responsive to technological advances when Catholic scientists have played a role in the history of the development of modern science? Therefore, Walsh (2020) asserts that Catholic theological education needs to open historical memory to learn from past failures and delays before moving into the future.

Skehan (2021) added that empathizing, humbling, and apologizing for past sins is also essential so that Catholic theological education in the future is genuinely inclusive and does not leave anyone behind. Thus, SWOT analysis is a diagnostic, prospective, and retrospective reflection on past weaknesses and failures. This is important so that the revitalized Catholic theological education in the future becomes truly authentic, inclusive, responsive, and contextual.

Formulate a New Curriculum Framework for Catholic Theological Education that Is Adaptive to Technological Developments and Relevant to Contemporary Social Problems.

Catholic theological education needs to adjust to the changes brought by digital technology and confront the current humanitarian challenges to maintain its relevance and importance in people's lives. Through interactive multimedia's gradual and continuous integration, Catholic theological education will become more inclusive and contextual. Second, Christian character education. Amid the complexity of humanitarian problems in the 21st century, Groome (2021) emphasizes the urgency of character-building as a core element of the Catholic theological education curriculum.

True Christian character is characterized by love, wisdom, justice, respect for human dignity, and dedication to serving the suffering. To shape such character, Martin (2022) suggests using case studies and moral dilemmas as a stimulus for class discussions, for example, on the topics of abortion, LGBTQ, political populism, and ecological crises. With adequate theological understanding, students are trained in critical reflection, empathy, and wise and responsible decision-making on today's thorny issues. Teachers can also utilize role simulation, field trips, and service-learning to forge students' character and social awareness.

The third is the content of transformative social praxis as an element of the core curriculum. Groome (2021) emphasizes that the Catholic theology curriculum must not be confined to an ivory tower but must be actively involved in responding

to humanitarian problems, providing solutions, and advocating for social justice. Social praxis can be done through internships in non-profit institutions such as orphanages, drug rehabilitation centers, and community bases, such as the struggle for the rights of people with disabilities and workers. The goal is to give charity and encourage systemic and structural changes for justice and equality.

Chan (2021) emphasizes the importance of incorporating contemplative prayer and spirituality into the theological curriculum to build a strong foundation. The absence of steadfast spirituality leads to selfish motives and empty idealism in social advocacy and justice-oriented activism. Therefore, it is imperative to cultivate a robust theological awareness and resilient character by engaging in contemplative practices in the Christian faith, such as pilgrimages, retreats, lectio divina, and embracing Ignatian spirituality, which emphasizes the discovery of Christ in all aspects of life.

Furthermore, Grigolon (2021) asserts that the curriculum of contemporary Catholic theological education should have the quality of resilience, implying the ability to adapt to the evolving currents of the times while maintaining the Christian essence. Achieving this requires a harmonious balance between existentialism and progressivism. Using ancestral tradition as a firm foundation, theological education must embrace constant innovation and contextualized transformative social action.

We are exploring new methods and approaches in Catholic theological education by integrating digital elements and Franciscan values. Central Catholic theological education faces significant challenges in maintaining its relevance in the digital age and being responsive to the global socio-ecological crisis. In this context, Carolan and Rivera (2021) propose that the Franciscan theological paradigm, characterized by its emphasis on simple living, natural harmony, and contemplative spirituality, has the potential to be transformed into new methods and approaches for contemporary Catholic theological education.

The core principles of Franciscan theology include liberation and peace. The regulations, which include anti-materialism, equality among living beings, and appreciation of the unique qualities of each individual, are effectively integrated into the current framework of Catholic theological education. Furthermore, the Franciscan tradition of contemplation, such as fostering a friendly relationship with nature, embracing silence, and spontaneously praising the beauty of creation, is seen by Carolan and Rivera (2021) as a remedy for the challenges posed by urbanization and technostress in the present era. Taking inspiration from this Franciscan theological paradigm, some potential new methods and approaches have been adopted in contemporary Catholic theological education:

Firstly, blended learning combines traditional face-to-face instruction with cutting-edge digital technologies. For example, a face-to-face class begins with a mindfulness exercise accompanied by observing trees or listening to birdsong, then

discusses digital climate change-related literature. It concludes with personal reflection and contemplation facilitated through a mobile app. By integrating Franciscan contemplative practices with technology, student engagement and overall understanding can be holistically enhanced (Rahner, 2022). Secondly, they contextualized learning through field trips and environmental reflection work. For example, eco-theology study is continued through activities such as tree planting, environmental clean-up efforts, or the construction of wildlife ponds. These practical actions cultivate awareness of the Earth as the shared habitat of all God's creatures through concrete examples rather than mere discourse (Baldovin, 2021).

Third, digital storytelling evokes empathy about social justice issues such as poverty, racism, and gender discrimination. This is achieved using techniques such as 360-degree videos or audio podcasts, which allow students to immerse themselves in the experiences of the underprivileged, racial minorities, or those with disabilities in their daily lives. Digital storytelling will enable students to understand marginalized individuals' perspectives deeply and foster genuine acts of solidarity (Baldwin, 2022).

Fourth, role-playing and the presentation of moral dilemmas serve as effective means to foster decision-making skills based on evangelical values and universal humanity. By taking on the roles of peace activists, LGBTQ activists, or even corporate CEOs, students can develop empathy and make informed decisions regarding contemporary moral controversies (Martin, 2022). Fifth, character and spiritual education can be facilitated by integrating science and artistic media. For example, an examination of the narratives of famous figures such as St Francis, Father Mangun, or Mother Teresa can be followed by a discussion of their noble values, which are then expressed through forms of artistic expression such as poetry, painting, or reflective vlogs. The merging of science, art, and technology is a powerful model for cultivating character and spirituality among students in the digital age (Carolan & Rivera, 2021).

Data literacy and artificial intelligence can increase social justice and environmental preservation arguments. For example, exploring big data about air pollution or deforestation can support ecological campaigns. Furthermore, statistical analysis can be used to uncover gender inequality and its impacts on children (Grigolon, 2021). Seventh, implementing service learning and community development efforts is essential in developing students' character, compassion, and organizational skills. For instance, establishing Friends of the Earth groups within educational institutions encourages sustainable environmental action. Additionally, engaging in homestays within indigenous communities allows students to appreciate the rewards of diversity (Groome, 2020). Through cultivating a sense of togetherness, theology moves beyond theory alone and manifests itself through concrete acts of solidarity (Chan, 2021).

Bringing the Franciscan Spirit into 21st Century Education

21st-century education faces challenges in preparing future generations, including globalization, rapid technological progress, economic and social inequality, and the environmental crisis (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). In facing these problems, the Franciscan spirit and values can be a relevant source of inspiration for the world of education today. One of the core values of Franciscan spirituality is inclusivity, namely the acceptance of all beings regardless of background (Boff, 2021). Inclusivity is the foundation for creating equality in education. Inclusive education allows every student with diverse backgrounds, abilities, and needs to be served relatively (Walsh, 2020). Inclusive education is critical so that no student is left out.

Furthermore, simplicity is a Franciscan principle that teaches a life free from excessive attachment to materialistic things (Boff, 2021). Implementing simplicity in the education system can help instill a simple spirit in students from an early age so that they will grow up wise and not greedy. Some examples of the concrete application of Franciscan values in 21st-century education include a religious education curriculum that is inclusive and tolerant of diversity (Kujawa, 2022), integrating environmentalism themes in science learning to foster ecological awareness from an early age (Boff, 2021), providing scholarships for students from underprivileged families to increase access to education for marginalized groups (Walsh, 2020), as well as teaching and learning activities that empower students' empathy and social sensitivity, such as visits to nursing homes or orphanages.

Implementing the Franciscan spirit and values requires fundamentally revitalizing educational policies and practices. Walsh (2020) and Davis (2021) encourage reforms to the curriculum, learning strategies, and institutional structures of schools to make them more inclusive and oriented towards human values in line with the ideals of Franciscan education. It requires the involvement of all educational elements and stakeholders, starting from the government, school administrators, educators, students, parents, the community, and other related parties. Through good collaboration, the Franciscan educational vision can be realized to build a future civilization that is more just and humane.

Finally, social sensitivity or caring for the fate of others who suffer is integral to Franciscan spirituality (Kujawa, 2022). Pope Francis himself is known to care deeply about the fate of the poor and marginalized. This value of social sensitivity can be integrated into 21st-century education through a transformative pedagogical approach and social problem-based learning (social justice). In this way, students are trained from an early age to be sensitive to the reality of social inequality around them. They are moved to provide real solutions through humanitarian and social action.

Conclusion

Maintaining a firm foundation in the Church's rich doctrinal and spiritual heritage while adjusting to the unparalleled speed of technological advancement is a complex problem for Catholic theological education. However, chances can be taken advantage of with discernment, moderation, and inventiveness.

Franciscan spirituality emphasizes simplicity, holiness, harmony with nature, peace, and social justice, providing a relevant paradigm. Collaboration between interactive technology and contemplative practices has proven helpful in improving the learning process, and transformative pedagogy such as role-playing, digital storytelling, and data analysis will greatly assist in increasing relevance. The main goal is to shape students' personalities so that they can overcome complex problems with patience, love, and awareness. Learning in service enables theology to foster an attitude of practical solidarity. The theological ethos of the Franciscan concept is based on the qualities of conversation, empathy, and reconciliation, all of which are indispensable for making peace and preventing division.

Catholic education mobilizes all stakeholders to face the future and achieve inclusion, fairness, and environmental friendliness. Reforms in policy and curriculum Catholic theological education must align educational outcomes with core Franciscan concepts. Given the current turbulence, Franciscan philosophy and practice in Catholic theological education are fundamental to leading the way with humanity. If implemented with vision, cooperation, and compassion, Catholic educational reform can promote solidarity worldwide.

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