Lesson Plan: Language and Logic Course

Lesson Title: Integration of Faith and Reason

Lesson Length: One class period

Essential Question: How can you understand and construct a basic deductive argument?

CNS Standards:

General Standards

CS, S.712, GS2 - Explain and promote the unity of faith and reason with confidence that there exists no contradiction between the God of nature and the God of the faith.

CS, M.712, GS2 - Develop lines of inquiry to understand why things are true and why they are false.

Intellectual Standards

CS, S.712, IS2 - Demonstrate confidence in human reason and in one's ability to know the truth about God's creation and the fundamental intelligibility of the world.

CS, S.712, IS4 - Relate how the search for truth, even when it concerns a finite reality of the natural world or of man, is never-ending and always points beyond to something higher than the immediate object of study.

Educational Objective: Students will be able to see that the ability to understand an argument, to be able to construct an argument, and to recognize the importance of defining terms is essential to understanding and arguing temporal matters, and that these same abilities are essential in being able to argue matters of eternal importance.

Plan/Activity:
Review of the syllogism: The syllogism is the basic deductive argument. It consists of three statements: The major premise, the minor premise, and the conclusion. In a properly formed syllogism, the conclusion necessarily follows from the premises. This tells us the syllogism is valid.

For example, All birds are feathered.
           All blue jays are birds.
           All blue jays are feathered.

However, this does not tell us that the conclusion is true. The truth of the conclusion not only depends on the conclusion following from the premises, but the truth of conclusion also depends on the premises themselves being true. One could claim that the 1st premise

is false by pointing out that a baby bird still inside an egg is not feathered, and that it might even be hatched without feathers. So, for part of its life, a baby blue jay is not feathered, but at no time is it not a bird. Nonetheless, botanists must be practical, and so must we. We make the statement: "All birds are feathered" without qualification. Only if someone tries to argue against this do we need to point out that in the interest of time and convenience that we accept the statement: "All birds are feathered" as true and dismiss anyone who thinks he has cleverly derailed our argument. Or, perhaps, we more charitably agree that he has made a valid point, but in the interest of time we will accept that the natural potentiality of the embryonic bird to be feathered is sufficient for accepting our statement as true, and we can move on to examining the syllogistic argument in its entirety.

We would also say that a baby inside the womb of his mother is a human even though she/he is not able to do all that a person outside the womb can do. A human person is typically defined as "the rational animal". However, at conception the baby in the womb is not capable yet of reasoning, and still after birth there is a time when the baby is not reasoning. This does not disqualify the infant from being part of the human race. We see this, for example, in the baptism of infants. The infant does not make a rational decision to be baptized. His parents/godparents make this decision, and the baby benefits supernaturally from their decision.

Still, all the above can help us to see that the syllogism may be valid without being true. Validity applies to the construction of the syllogism; the truth of the syllogism depends not only on the construction, but also on the truth of each of the two premises being true.

We should be able to apply our knowledge of the syllogism to other aspects of the Faith. That the baby in the womb is a human can be argued purely on natural terms – we don't need to employ facts from the Catholic Faith to argue the point.

Let's take a doctrine of the Faith that we may have to argue with a non-Catholic, or sadly sometimes with a Catholic about: Devotion to Blessed Mother is proper. The typical syllogistic argument we may well face someday goes something like this:

We should pray only to God.
Mary is not God.
We should not pray to Mary.

Is the above syllogism valid (properly constructed) so that the conclusion necessarily follows from the premises? Yes. Is the syllogism true? No. We would contend that the 1st premise is not true. We would say that the use of the word "pray" needs defining. If we equate "prayer" and "worship" then we have no argument. But we don't. Prayer is of four types: adoration, contrition, thanksgiving and petition. We can make prayers of petition

directly to God, and hopefully we do this. But we can also make prayers of petition to others. We often do this by asking for the intercession of another on our behalf. I assume good non-Catholics believers ask others here on earth to pray for them. They might even say something such as: "I know you to be good and faithful, so please pray that I find a solution to the bats that have infested our attic." We certainly honor Blessed Mother more than any other human person. (Remember that Jesus is a Divine Person with a divine and human nature.) But we do not honor her as God. We base our devotion to Blessed Mother on what we read in the Scripture. Blessed Mother interceded on behalf of the newly married couple at the wedding feast at Cana. Elizabeth recognized her unworthiness to have Blessed Mother come to her and declares that the infant in her womb leapt with joy at the sound of Mary's voice. And Blessed Mother responds with the Magnificat in which she says, "henceforth all generations will call me blessed for He Who is mighty has done great things for me."

We can see that the ability to understand an argument, to be able to construct an argument, and to recognize the importance of defining terms is essential to understanding and arguing temporal matters, and that these same abilities are essential in being able to argue matters of eternal importance.

Assessment:

Formative: Students will engage in informal whole group discussion, with focused teacher observation, guidance, and intervention.

Adapted from Seton School, Manassas, VA