
THE DISCOURSE OF SPIRITUALITY METANOIA IN ASIAN JESUIT HIGHER EDUCATION

亚洲耶稣会高等教育对灵性皈依的探讨

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ABSTRACT

The essence of spirituality carries important meanings: first, spirituality refers to 'believing life' (*Vida creyente*). Second, spirituality relates to discernment in the context of Christian faith (*lo doctrinal*) and pastoral work (*lo pastoral*) (Ashley, 2017). Customarily, spirituality can be found in different religions, even though Ignatian spirituality is deeply rooted in the formation of the Society of Jesus (Allen & Williams, 2020; Nullens, 2019). Under the teaching of the Jesuits, spirituality comprises finding God in all things, the Spiritual Exercises, discernment, and the Constitutions (The Society of Jesus, 2021).

In this paper, we will discuss the distinctive discourse of spirituality, "Metanoia," in Jesuit Higher Education in the Asian context. After collecting data from 30 semi-structured in-depth interviews of 30 Presidents, faculty members, and senior administrators from four Jesuit Universities in Asia over a period of nine months from September 2020 – June 2021, about Jesuit Educational Leadership, in my DPhil

(Ph.D.) studies at The University of Oxford, we have found the distinctive characteristics of spirituality Metanoia define commitment in Asian Jesuit Higher Education from the top level of management, structured Jesuit programs, and spirituality. The original names of all the interviewees are anonymized so as to protect the confidentiality of the interviewees. All the interviewees' names used in this paper are not real. Snowballing sampling method was adopted in this study.

Keywords: Jesuit spirituality, commitment, sermon, structured Jesuit programs, personal care, personal formation

1. Commitment from the top level

First, Fabian believed that Ignatian spirituality is a commitment by the top management of his Jesuit university, i.e., the President and Vice President have taken up the responsibility to teach some courses in their universities. If they do not teach Ignatian spirituality or Christian Humanism, who has the professionalism to teach the subjects? Or if Jesuits do not teach the Ignatian spirituality, who can have a similar level of professionalism or knowledge to deliver the subjects, especially to the layman?

“The President or Vice President has to teach some courses at the university.”
(Fabian, Interview, 8:03)

The sermon is very important

In addition, Haddon stressed that the sermon of the President does matter a lot in promoting Ignatian spirituality. He further explained that the sermon could direct students back to the core values of their life, although money and materials are important in their secular lives. The sermon can remind students and lead them to think about God and have a dialogue with God.

“I think the biggest responsibility of the President is the sermon. And the sermon in the sense of saving people working every day in the daily fight. We tend to forget big things. And we want more students. We want more money. We want to have a higher level for the university.”
(Haddon, Interview, 18:15)

“The Universal Apostolic Preferences refer to the service directions and missions of the Jesuits in the contemporary era, i.e., showing the way to God, walking with the excluded, journeying with youth, and caring for our common home.”

2. Structured Jesuit Program

Jaasaw mentioned that the distinctiveness of his Jesuit university is that it has a very structured Jesuit program for every student of his university. This program acts as an important channel to develop Ignatian spirituality among students. The structured Jesuit program has been in place for many years in his university and has been perceived as distinctively Jesuit.

“We have a common platform for developing the Jesuit Spirituality for the students. Once a year, we have a program for the students. So this is a very Jesuit program. (Jaasaw, Interview, 15:25)

In addition, Kacia observed that the university has relevant and skilled professors to teach religion and spirituality.

“It was by the priest professor. So I think compared to the other university, our school students have some good opportunity to have some personal exposure to spirituality or other things. Also, we are a very small school in the country. But so we have the main major. Not that the specific major, but one special thing was we have the religion major.” (Kacia, Interview, 30:05)

Apart from professional and committed professors, Mac explained that the pedagogy of Ignatian spirituality is tailored for the undergraduates of his university. Through the curriculum of Ignatian spirituality, they learn reflection and self-development (Mac, Interview, 12:14; 13:55). Also, undergraduates practise Ignatian spirituality through working with others in the structured program (Mac, Interview, 18:29).

“And also, we are trying to provide some Ignatian spirituality, the value of Ignatian Spirituality, especially, we have a program called reflection and growth. So every undergraduate student should attend the course. The reflection and growth, they have to attend a two day program.” (Mac, Interview, 12:14)

“Then in the program, they are learning Ignatian spirituality and also the process of becoming a mature person, something like that, and interaction with other people. So I think the program called reflection and growth can be one of the main characteristics of our university.” (Mac, Interview, 13:55)

“So, I think basically the key aspect of a Jesuit University is Ignatian pedagogy. We use a very typical task to practice the Ignatian pedagogy, to implement Ignatian pedagogy, and that can be done personally because, in a Jesuit University, personal

care is one of the main characteristics. So doing in a group or volunteering in a group may be personal when I meet, when I work together with other faculty members and with other admin staff, then I am trying to approach them with the sense of Ignatian spirituality or pedagogy.” (Mac, Interview, 18:29)

Faculty Day

Xavier found his university has a Faculty Day every semester to allow the President to explain the Ignatian spirituality to the faculty members (Xavier, Interview, 29:03; Zadie, Interview, 13:30)

“I mean, many of our formation programs are geared around orienting people to Ignatian spirituality and personal formation. So I think, especially the last President, very often would talk about it when he would address the faculty. So on the first day of every semester, but usually, at the end of the first or second week of every semester, we have what’s called faculty day. So we bring together all the university, at least the college-level faculty. There are usually discussions, and the different topics or issues depend on a lot of things. But usually, what sets the tone is the address from the President. And the last speaker would often talk about issues that were happening, but always trying to bring some component of what it means to be Jesuit, what it means to practice Ignatian spirituality.” (Xavier, Interview, 29:03)

“Every semester or, in fact, twice a semester we have a faculty day, in which the university president addresses the issues that we faculty must care for in our respective positions. So when you say how, in what way that the person impacts on us, of course, I call it the president’s State of the University address. So it impacts us

not only in our teaching and our research and extension, but basically we as faculty of a Jesuit, Catholic, Filipino University. There are numerous occasions wherein these values are reinforced. It's reinforced in his letters to us, in his writings in our newsletters, in the addresses to us twice every semester. So, when you say how do you implement Jesuit values, of course, everything is translated into memos, rules, and routines of the university. So what more can you say about influence? It shapes how we behave as Jesuit faculty, as faculty at Jesuit Catholic University." (Zadie, Interview, 13:30)

3. A Spiritual Leader

According to Nahum, the President was the spiritual leader of his university (Nahum, Interview, 03:57; Ocean, Interview, 27:23). I argue that this has been the distinctive element of a Jesuit university and the tangible identity of a Jesuit university.

"He is our spiritual leader as well as an educational leader in setting up the goal and then also implementing the means for carrying out this role for a certain set period, during which he serves for the intellectual community at the university, and that's how he is perceived to play a role there. And then usually, he's a Jesuit faculty member. So he's supposed to be a spiritual leader. So that's the role that he feels in that capacity." (Nahum, Interview, 03:57)

"But I have been for a short time also Vice President for Student Affairs. So giving support to all the students and making no separation between Catholics, non-Catholics, non-Christians, religious, non-religious, and trying to give them an aim in their life." (Ocean, Interview, 27:23)

Decision making is spiritually grounded

Quella pointed out that the President made a decision based on Ignatian spirituality and the results are more spiritually grounded:

"That was the time when we had a lot of people who were against it, but when the President wanted to do something else, so he made very well thought out statements that were spiritually grounded, compassionate, and prophetic without being antagonizing. Like that, and then he identified priorities for projects and for research. They define our focus on nation-building and the environment. So, aside from his own statements, he also did things to incorporate Jesuit values in research directions and projects." (Quella, Interview, 38:08)

"Ignatian spirituality is a commitment by the top management of a Jesuit university, i.e., the President and Vice President have taken up the responsibility to teach some courses in their universities. If they do not teach Ignatian spirituality or Christian Humanism, who has the professionalism to teach the subjects?"

Universal Apostolic Preferences

Victor highlighted that the mandate of the Jesuits' Universal Apostolic Preferences is highly valued by the Society of Jesus, putting Ignatian spirituality and spiritual exercises as one of their top priorities for missionary work. The Universal Apostolic Preferences refer to the service directions and missions of the Jesuits in the contemporary era, i.e., showing the way to

God, walking with the excluded, journeying with youth, and caring for our common home (The Society of Jesus, 2021). “And it promotes Ignatian spirituality and spiritual exercises.” (Victor, Interview, 19:52)

Zadie demonstrated the distinctiveness of spirituality in the Jesuit universities by pointing out that public universities do not have any spiritual components.

“The private university, as I mentioned to you, specified moral, intellectual, spiritual values. Obviously, public universities do not have that spiritual dimension we just considered in our search for the presidency.” (Zadie, Interview, 8:35)



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