

SPIRITUALITY FOR EAPI: FORMING PASTORAL SERVANTS WITH DISCERNING HEARTS

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ABSTRACT

This paper articulates how the East Asian Pastoral Institute (EAPI) understands and seeks to foster spirituality. The ideas expressed here are the author's attempt to convey his own understanding of what good spirituality is and of how EAPI can foster it among its participants. After an introduction about the relevance of spirituality for the formation of pastoral workers, a general definition of spirituality is given. This is followed by a reflection on how some key elements typical of the Asia Pacific context can and should affect our spirituality. The central idea explored in the rest of the paper is that of spiritual maturity. This notion is defined and explained by means of a model which articulates how spiritual growth happens in stages. The author then suggests concrete characteristics proper of the spiritually mature person and gives ideas on how the EAPI formative context can help participants develop these aspects of maturity. Finally, it is argued that discernment can be seen as the central characteristic which makes it possible for pastoral workers to truly become servants of God's Kingdom in today's world.

Introduction

The participants of the East Asian Pastoral Institute (EAPI) come from a great variety of places and backgrounds. They have been and will continue to be engaged in all sorts of ministries, including parish work, formation of seminarians, training of religious men and women, catechism, health care, education at all levels and ages, youth ministry, family ministry, evangelization, etc. Most of these areas of ministry require at least some competence in terms of management, leadership, communication skills, psycho-emotional integration, as well as sufficient “human quality” which enables the sustained and fruitful interpersonal relationships necessary for ministry. Since we are talking specifically of Christian ministers, clergy, religious, and lay, good theological formation is also indispensable. One could argue, however, that the truly decisive characteristic which enables pastoral workers to be fruitful witnesses of God’s love is the depth and quality of their spiritual life. It is obvious, then, that EAPI’s formation of the pastoral worker must pay special attention to the dimension of spirituality. Being a Jesuit institute, and when articulating its vision of what good spiritual formation is, EAPI necessarily draws from its Catholic, and more specifically Ignatian, roots. At the same time, and in line with the fundamental thrust of the institute, there is a clear effort to conceive and teach spirituality in a way that responds specifically to the religious, cultural, and social contexts of Asia Pacific.¹ EAPI’s vision of spiritual maturity is an articulation of the characteristics considered to best enable pastoral workers to grow in holiness and fruitfulness, not in spite of or against the world-context in which they move, but precisely in and through a discerned interaction with the Spirit of God present and active in that world. Thus, we can speak of contextual or inculturated spirituality, in the sense that it explains how some universal essential marks² of Christian spiritual maturity can be developed through engagement with the concrete pastoral needs and challenges of the different places in which we live.

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1. There has been increase in the number of participants who come from Africa and other countries that geographically do not strictly belong to Asia Pacific. This may require a widening of the original vision of EAPI in terms of applicability of the training to the target contexts of these participants.
 2. General, universal, essential marks of spiritual maturity such as: depth, interiorized personal faith expressed in prayerfulness as relationship with God, receptivity and openness, authentic conversion, etc.

General Preliminary Ideas on Spirituality

EAPI began to exist at the time and in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, and although the council's documents almost never explicitly treat of spirituality,³ the spiritual impact of some of its key principles is significant. The notion of sacramentality⁴ in particular, can be seen as central to EAPI's spirituality. Here, sacramentality is understood not in the formal sense of the seven sacraments but in the way this rich concept affirms that anything (people, cultures, religions, nature, etc.) can be a means through which God becomes present. Understood in this way, sacramentality is meaningful for spirituality in two ways. It calls for *openness to recognizing* the active presence of God in all creation and in all forms of goodness (be they explicitly religious or not), as well as for *active cooperation* with that divine action wherever and however it may express itself. This willingness to *discern* and *cooperate* with God should be a central element in the spirituality in which EAPI wishes to form people. Discernment allows us to discover how the realities encountered in our day to day life can become sacramental for us. At the same time, cooperation with the God we recognize as present in those realities helps us become "sacraments" of God's presence for the world, not just by being embodied reminders of a God who is near, but also of a God who is always at work⁵ for good, reconciliation, freedom, and peace. A "God who labors" is St. Ignatius of Loyola's central image of God. It plays a decisive role in Ignatian spirituality, which ultimately aims at forming hearts capable not only of *finding God in all things*, but also of becoming true *contemplatives in action* by actively working with the Lord.⁶

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3. Austin Flannery, "Vatican II," in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, edited by Michael Downey (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 991–97.
 4. Both of Vatican II's documents dealing with the nature and mission of the Church (*Gaudium et Spes* [GS] and *Lumen Gentium* [LG]) speak of it as a sacrament in ways that connect with EAPI's spiritual and pastoral vision. See for example GS 42, 45; LG 1.
 5. Spiritual Exercises no. 236, in St. Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Louis J. Puhl (Makati: St. Paul's, 1987).
 6. See, for example, Vatican II, Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life (*Perfectae caritatis*), 28 October 1965, *Vatican II Documents* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2014), no 5: "join contemplation, by which they cleave to God by mind and heart, to apostolic love, by which they endeavor to be associated with the work of redemption and to spread the kingdom of God."

I propose this basic definition of spirituality: *A response to God's presence found in the world and within us, spirituality is the set of beliefs and practices that a person or a community actively embraces as best for maturing their life in the Spirit.* (By "life in the Spirit" we mean the life shaped by motivations and actions ordered to communion: love of God, self, and others.)

Our obvious presupposition is that spiritual growth is desirable and actually possible. The way a particular spiritual tradition understands what it means to be spiritually (and humanly) mature will greatly determine the practices it chooses for attaining that maturity. Therefore, if we are to reflect on the characteristics of the spirituality which EAPI hopes to promote, we need first to have a general idea of how spiritual maturity is to be understood. Defining what a spiritually mature person is can be done in a number of ways, but it will inevitably involve selecting certain categories which one believes express that wholesomeness and holiness desired by God for us. It requires us to highlight different, usually complementary characteristics, which, when consistently present in a person, bear witness to the fact that he or she is "a spiritual person." But before actually describing these characteristics of spiritual maturity, we must mention some relevant contextual characteristics to which our spirituality must respond and which maturity allows us to face fruitfully.

Contextual Factors and Their Relevance for Spirituality

The first obvious element which applies to the whole of Asia is that this continent is the birthplace of most major world religions. More significantly, as M. Thomas Thangaraj notes, every single nation in Asia has in its midst significant numbers of faithful from at least two different religions,⁷ thus making this region's spiritual background truly pluralistic and multi-religious. Despite having many participants from countries where some form of Christianity is numerically dominant (Philippines, Papua New Guinea, and some island nations of Oceania-Pacific), the majority of EAPI participants live and work in environments where they form part of a small Christian minority. In view of this, we must ask: Is our spirituality truly open to learning from other religions and spiritual traditions? This is not a rhetorical question. While it is clear that in

7. M. Thomas Thangaraj, "Religious Pluralism, Dialogue, and Asian Christian Responses," in *Christian Theology in Asia*, ed. Sebastian Kim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 157.

today's pluralistic world no healthy spirituality can simply limit itself to "personal spiritual maintenance" enclosed within the safety of a single tradition, the criteria for finding a healthy balance between openness to other "ways" and faithfulness to one's identity is not obvious. Given that each person's spiritual journey is unique, more than trying to offer a rule of thumb for EAPI participants to apply in seeking their own balanced openness, we must instead form them for spiritual discernment.

Still connected with how religious pluralism affects our spirituality, we must also ask which model we should use when living in the midst of and engaging with others whose spiritualities and religious beliefs are so different from ours. Thangaraj suggests, after critically presenting several models of relationship between Christians and non-Christians,⁸ that the healthy prevailing model at present is that which teaches Christians to look at people of different spiritualities as partners in a dialogue. While there is value in the idea of dialogue (e.g., learning from one another's traditions, growing in mutual respect by avoiding prejudices, etc.), it seems to me that this model's impact on lived spirituality is somewhat limited. It is possible to sincerely see people different from me as someone with whom I can dialogue and at the same time remain totally unchanged at an existential level.⁹ A better model which may have a greater impact on the lived spirituality of persons living in contact with different faiths is perhaps that which sees in the other "a spiritual co-pilgrim." This image not only includes some of the meaningful models proposed by Thangaraj (it includes for example the dimension of struggling together for justice and peace, as well as that of dialogue), but makes more explicit the underlying common humanity which unites persons in their search of spiritual maturity and existential fulfilment. The point here is that at EAPI, we must be convinced that God calls everyone and that we can fruitfully work with, learn from, and live side by side with different people. Focusing on the underlying common spiritual

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8. Ibid., 159–62. The models are: the other as enemy of God, the other as potential convert, the other as primitive superstition, the other as unfulfilled seeker, the other as storehouse of culture, the other as companion in struggle, and the other as partner in dialogue.
 9. To my mind, the objectives and the manner of interreligious dialogue are neither clear nor easy to define. I see the value of such encounters as a means of promoting a better understanding of and respect for different traditions, as well as opportunities to find common causes for which we can fight together on a practical level. But I am of the opinion that its impact in the lived spirituality of the majority of believers has been minimal.

thirst at the heart of all faiths and spiritualities is helpful as a means of finding God's Spirit working beneath different cultures, religions, and spiritual practices. And in the end, despite the importance of holding one's doctrine faithfully, what matters most is that one responds and learns from that Spirit alive in the depths of all things, no matter where it may be found.

A second important element that shapes the spiritual context of most of EAPI's participants, is that religious pluralism necessarily places our God as a God among other divinities. Limiting ourselves here to thinking about how this may affect the daily lived spirituality of our participants, we must highlight a key question: What image of God do we hope to foster? How does our image of God affect us in our way of relating to other spiritualities and different ways of relating with the divine? To put it more concretely: How much openness to other ways of praying, theologizing, expressing, and experiencing the divine does our God allow and will for us? Despite the religious and spiritual variety of their backgrounds, there often is a general tendency in many of our participants to "play safe," to "operate by the book" of the traditional Roman Catholicism that they learned in seminaries and houses of formation. There is a need, on a personal and communal level, to move towards a less philosophical, doctrinal, or systematic emphasis when thinking about God and spirituality. Our spirituality must seek to be more in touch with the richness of the biblical and mystical approaches, which offer us a way of fidelity that keeps the tension between safety in clarity of orthodoxy as well as flexibility and richness of Mystery. At the same time, cultivating a greater awareness of what our "real, operative images" of God are would be decisive for authentic spiritual growth at a personal level, not only due to cultural and religious backgrounds but also to each one's personal history and faith journey. We often relate to and are affected by images of God which are far from that which Jesus revealed. More than the comfort of our familiar and "safe" ways of thinking about God, healthy spiritual growth always comes hand in hand with the capacity to remain face to face with the Mystery. Spirituality involves courage to remain open to constant purification of our images of God, and this can happen more deeply when we truly allow ourselves to encounter those who see and relate to God in different ways.

A third important element which is relevant for our spirituality is connected with the pluralistic religious context we have been discussing but also independent from it. We can formulate it as a question: What is the place of Jesus Christ in our spirituality? Without ever denying Jesus's uniqueness as God

made man and Savior of the world, it seems helpful for our spirituality at EAPI to place emphasis on the Lord's humanity. It seems fruitful, both on a personal level as well as with regard to living in a pluralistic context, to develop a spirituality that places greater emphasis on learning to personally imitate Jesus's manner of witness through wisdom and loving action, rather than allow ourselves to be excessively influenced by the more theoretical apologetics of a unique Savior. St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. Teresa of Avila, for example, both agree with the value of this emphasis on Christ's humanity as the right focus of our prayer and spiritual life as a whole. For St. Teresa, as Harvey Egan put it, "Christ is simply such good company and so important as a pattern, that the contemplative should not forsake him for any reason."¹⁰ This passage is meaningful for us because Egan uses it to explain that this was St. Teresa's rule of thumb, even for the most advanced mystics. In line with what was said above, Egan then goes on to say that St. Ignatius's Son-centered spirituality, in its constant effort to imitate the Incarnate Christ through contemplation of his human life, is precisely what allows us to "see everything as a sacrament of the divine presence."¹¹

To conclude, emphasis on Christ's humanity is essential for our spirituality for two reasons: One, because no matter the religion or tradition one belongs to, in the Asian context, people are much more open to respect and learn from the example of wisdom figures than from abstract doctrines about the Son of God. And two, because focusing on the human figure of Jesus offers us criteria to recognize the marks of the authentic Spirit of God who, despite revealing itself in unexpected forms and places within the huge variety of religious and cultural spaces in which we move, never ceases to be the Spirit of Jesus. This ensures a certain flexibility and capacity to be open to the surprises of the Spirit, as well as a way to prevent types of spirituality that end up turning prayer and life in the Spirit into forms of excessively abstract, self-referential pseudo-mysticisms.

Spiritual Maturity (A Possible Basic Model)

As was said above, spirituality is about growing in maturity of response to God. In this section we continue articulating our understanding of spiritual

10. Harvey Egan, *Christian Mysticism: The Future of a Tradition* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1984), 142.

11. *Ibid.*, 79.

maturity. While cautioning us to be careful not to apply models of spiritual development with defined stages too strictly, authors Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich, in their work *The Critical Journey*, provide a useful presentation of such stages of spiritual development.¹² A simple overview of their proposed system will suffice for our purposes here.

According to Hagberg and Guelich, spiritual growth happens through six stages of faith. They are cumulative, interconnected, and fluid. All of them are positive and necessary, and despite the many different life circumstances through which each person grows in the life of faith, the core experiences and characteristics of each stage must be present before one can move to the next stage. Despite being simultaneously affected by all the stages that one has reached, at any given period, each person has a home stage which is dominant in their way of relating to God, to the community, to their self, and to life in general. It is possible for a person to move back to previous stages due to life's circumstances or lack of readiness to advance.

Hagberg and Guelich name the first stage of faith, "*Recognition of God.*" It is marked by a sense of awe and a newly discovered awareness of God's presence in one's life. Such initial positive experiences of God are meant to help build a healthy sense of self-worth and to lead the person away from isolation and into life in a community. The second stage is named "*The Life of Discipleship.*" It is marked by learning about who God is and by belonging to a faith community from which one draws a sense of security and guidance. The third stage is "*The Productive Life,*" in which the focus on one's life of faith, as well as source of self-value, comes from working for God. More than in the previous stage wherein one follows leaders and rules more passively, here a person manifests a sense of uniqueness and seeks fulfillment by achieving personal pastoral success.

The fourth stage, marked by a time of crisis and sincere, often painful, self-questioning, is a time wherein a person rediscovers God and must seek a deeper sense of meaning and a new direction in life. Hagberg and Guelich call it, "*The Journey Inward,*" and it precedes a critical moment which happens between this and the next stage. This critical moment, which may be experienced for a longer or shorter time, they describe as "*The Wall.*" At the beginning of the book, we are presented with a simple yet very useful definition of what faith is: "Faith is

12. Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich, *The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith* (Salem, Wisconsin: Sheffield Publishing Company, 2005).

the process by which we let God direct our lives.”¹³ The Wall is the time in which we are invited to start living that abandonment to God in a much deeper and concrete way than we ever did before. It is a time of discomfort and solitude, of healing and surrendering, of seeking and discernment, which by God’s grace should lead to a much greater awareness, forgiveness, acceptance, and love. These four characteristics are essential elements of spiritual maturity that will continue to be developed in those that are sufficiently disposed.

The fifth stage is one of “*The Journey Outward*,” wherein a person, having been transformed by the Wall, lives out their surrendering to God with a renewed sense of being accepted and fruitful in their own truth. This allows them to embrace their own vocation and ministry with a renewed zeal, altruism, and peace. At the same time, they become freer from the often too pragmatic concerns of success, which may cause others to misunderstand them and see them as careless or aloof.

The sixth and final stage is “*The Life of Love*,” wherein a person, in their uniqueness, most fully reflects God’s presence and love. Here we see a more Christ-like attitude of obedience to God and compassion for others, as well as a more definite separation from everything in the world which represents disordered attachments. At this point, thanks to having lived and learned through the journey in openness to God’s grace as given in each stage, a person has reached wisdom, psycho-spiritual integration, and holiness in the way they were uniquely meant to.

Before continuing to expound on the notion of spiritual maturity which we adhere to at EAPI, we must point out a few other important ideas from *The Critical Journey*. Hagberg and Guelich make a broad distinction¹⁴ between stages 1 to 3, which they call “outer stages,” and stages 4 to 6, called “inner stages.” In the first three, regardless of whether the person is aware of this or not, spirituality is experienced mostly as prescribed from the outside (Church rules, imitation of leaders, expectations of the community etc.). From stage 4 onwards, the spiritual experience becomes more like a unique process of personal transformation, rediscovery, real healing, and growth towards God. The meaningful observation is made that “the church is generally best at working with people in stages 1 through 3,” followed by statistic findings which the authors interpret to mean

13. Ibid., 4.

14. Ibid., 11.

that most people of faith never go beyond stage 2.¹⁵ In view of this, it seems to me that helping EAPI participants reach stage 4 and even, if and in the measure God allows it, begin to experience the Wall, should be one of the goals of EAPI spirituality.

There are a few major movements, integral parts of all stages in different ways, which our spirituality should promote. Spiritual growth means journeying “from fear, to sureness, to confusion, and then to peace.”¹⁶ This involves a pattern of increased forgiveness and acceptance of self and of others, which gradually makes unconditional love of others and surrendering to God possible. Thus, each stage presents unique opportunities that create the conditions to move to the next stage and add to the overall maturity of the person. At the same time, each stage also presents specific dangers, which Hagberg and Guelich call “cages,” that prevent us from moving on. In the context of Ignatian spirituality, it is very meaningful to have an honest and realistic understanding of these “cages,” since they are intrinsically connected with all kinds of disordered attachments.¹⁷ “We get stuck because we find it more comfortable to sit than to move.”¹⁸ Awareness of what form of comfort from which we are getting compensation and to which we are becoming too attached is essential in the process of freedom to continue living the life of faith. It is one of the goals of EAPI to place growth in this kind of honest self-awareness, both on a spiritual and psychological level, at the heart of its formation programs.

Against the naïve notion that the spiritual life is a linear and straightforward progress, we must keep reminding ourselves that moments of crisis and pain are not only unavoidable but even necessary.¹⁹ Not that we must look to provoke or try to anticipate these decisive moments but when they happen we must learn to not avoid them by sheltering ourselves in comfort zones. Unfortunately, when the circumstances of life make people remain immersed in their familiar routines and pastoral environments without ever being challenged by a radically new setting, it is easier for our “temptation to

15. Ibid., 187.

16. Ibid., 16.

17. The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius make it very clear that the goal of prayer and of the spiritual life is to make us free from disordered attachments in order to be more able of responding to God fully. See no. 1 of the Spiritual Exercises.

18. Hagberg and Guelich, *The Critical Journey*, 9.

19. Ibid., 13.

comfort” to remain unnoticed and unchallenged. By being a place wherein participants can be challenged as much as they are supported and guided in their struggles and learnings, EAPI hopes to provide a much-needed opportunity for “healthy crisis.” Realistically, we must acknowledge and find ways of addressing the fact that, as Hagberg and Guelich put it, “not everyone goes through the Wall. Some stop or get stuck at earlier stages in the journey and never get to the Wall. Others, when facing the Wall, choose to return to an earlier stage. Still others get stuck in front of the Wall, not wanting to submit to God.”²⁰ At EAPI, in the midst of its concrete day-to-day life in community, each of us is invited to constantly ask: To what extent do I allow myself to be truly challenged? How ready am I, not to uncritically accept anything new, but to truly reflect and discern how God may be inviting me to change? “To move beyond family-of-origin stuff, local church stuff, cultural stuff, flag-and-country stuff is a path that few of us follow positively and with integrity.”²¹ The spirituality, community, and programs of EAPI hope to provide a unique space where this “moving beyond” can happen.

Spirituality Embodied: Concrete Elements for Spiritual Growth

We mentioned above four essential movements of inner transformation that are signs of spiritual growth: forgiveness, acceptance, love, and surrendering to God. These four can very well summarize what Jesus taught, lived, and asked from us. They function as foundation (Jesus opened for us a new way of life by living these four attitudes) and horizon of our spirituality (we practice spirituality in order to grow in these same virtues). In this section we look at some ways in which this growth can be fostered.

a. “Being Oneself”

At EAPI, we hope to foster the space and freedom for participants to be themselves. God can only work on us, gently leading us to become our best, most graced selves, if we allow ourselves to start from where we actually are as persons. Simply put, this means we believe that at the basis of authentic spiritual

20. Ibid., 115.

21. Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), Electronic Edition: Chapter 6, Subsection: “Hating Family,” paragraph 3.

(human) growth is the capacity to recognize my own desires, personality, fears, ambiguities, sinfulness, virtues, and giftedness, as they are in the present. Too often, even in seminaries and religious communities, we live in “a world of masks,”²² where people, with or without being conscious of it, tend to live out and cultivate idealized images of themselves that are in fact disconnected from their reality deep within. Maturity involves the capacity to be as I am in front of the Lord and of others, while gradually growing in the trust that I am accepted and loved, even as I am in process. Only this remaining in the truth can set us free (Jn 8:32), and only in this acceptance of our truth can we begin to experience God’s unconditional love. It is also from this experience of being allowed “to be myself,” that I can grow in self-acceptance, realistically seek help for areas of my life that need healing, and gain confidence in interpersonal relationships, knowing that I am respected and appreciated by others who, like me, also know themselves to be both vulnerable and graced.

Being allowed to be myself does not mean that I can “let go and don’t care.” For participants to truly be able to “be themselves,” they must first engage in what Richard Rohr calls “shadow work,”²³ the honest effort of critical self-knowledge that is also an important focus of many of EAPI’s modules. St. Ignatius, with his emphasis on the importance of daily examination of consciousness – which we must seek to cultivate in our participants – clearly places self-knowledge at the center of his spirituality. In Egan’s words, “Ignatian Mysticism . . . does not cut a person off from any aspect of human existence in order to dwell in mystical introversion.”²⁴ We affirm the importance of working with the truth of each person as it is, rather than with some idealized version of ourselves that we sometimes mistakenly believe can relate better with God. By “truth of each person as it is” we mean his or her fears, emotions, wounds, virtues, personality, past history, and in a very special way, the constant inner dynamics of desire. Inner motions, desires (holy or disordered), are at the very center of Ignatian Spirituality. By trying to teach participants a discerned attentiveness to their own

22. It is often the case that religious priests, and especially religious sisters undergo many years of formation, and pastoral activity under the weight of “having to be perfect” by some idealized standards. This has led to feelings of unworthiness, or to equating one’s value as a religious with the capacity to merely follow rules obediently and not standing out negatively. Moreover, given the heavy amount of doctrine, bible, and liturgy-sacraments in the academic curriculum of seminarians, explicit formation in spirituality is often neglected.

23. Rohr, *Falling Upward*, chapter 11, paragraph 6.

24. Egan, *Christian Mysticism*, 55.

interiority we hope to compensate for common mistakes such as suppressing, ignoring, or uncritically following every impulse and inclination. Spirituality is about what we do with our desire, and *how we deal with and channel* our inner energy and its tensions.²⁵ In fact, rather than a sign of weakness, feeling and wrestling with one's tensions, acknowledging them openly, and not trying to resolve them prematurely are all signs of maturity.

b. "Authentic Conversion"

Christian spirituality happens necessarily in the context of the Church and in community. No one is shaped in isolation, no one can grow alone. This has several implications, of which we here highlight two. Since we live, receive blessings, and have the conditions of spiritual growth precisely in the context of a Church, a community, and our relationships, we cannot accept a kind of spirituality which is concerned only with "private inner life."²⁶ Lifestyle, external action, and "worldly concerns" such as politics, social-justice, environmental issues, etc., are all very much a part of spirituality. Conversion has to do with change. It basically refers to a willingness not just to assent to the Creed or to the teachings of Jesus as true, but to consistently act in ways which are in accordance with those values. Simply put, conversion has to do with actually living in and for the Spirit, as opposed to being centered in "the flesh"²⁷ and its selfish tendencies.

c. "Openness and Receptivity"

Coming to EAPI and embracing the experience of living intensely in a multicultural community is done not simply for the advantages of improving one's English, learning many things from different people, experiencing the

25. Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing* (New York: Image, 2014), 11.

26. David Lonsdale, "The Church as Context for Christian Spirituality," in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*, ed. Arthur Holder (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 240.

27. While the terminology of spirit and flesh is useful, we should take care not to interpret these terms in a simplistic way. Living in the Spirit is not just about having pious devotions or doing "religious things." Likewise, the expression "the flesh" does not refer only to sins of a sexual nature, nor does it necessarily imply any negativity towards temporal, material, and bodily aspects of human life.

richness of other cultures, or even personally growing from overcoming the challenges of life in a new place. There is a deep spiritual significance in the EAPI experience precisely in that being placed in a space full of “differences” should help create in a person an inner disposition of attentiveness and openness to the present with its spiritual gifts. Henri Nouwen identifies growing in this kind of openness and receptivity a movement from hostility to hospitality. “Hospitality, means primarily the creation of a free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place.”²⁸ At EAPI we hope participants experience a kind of awakening made possible by the encounter with people and cultures different from theirs which may lead to a deeper and, hopefully, more spiritual and more compassionate knowledge of self and of others. “If I cannot receive the love of someone whom I can see, how can I claim to receive the love of God whom I cannot see?” (Cf. 1 Jn 4:20)

Personally, I am convinced that openness and receptivity are at the heart of inculturation. In the Gospels, we see Jesus not allowing any culture, religion, tradition, nationality, law, or any other external circumstance to prevent him from being open and lovingly reaching out to all persons. Two Jesuit missionaries can illustrate this contrast. More than the classic formula of “preaching, baptizing, and bringing others to our truth,” which we see embodied in Francis Xavier, we look at the way Mateo Ricci sought to simply make friends amidst the Chinese. He was pastorally successful in an unprecedented way, because he was open enough to reaching out to people without having to convince them. Sometimes we are so eager to “bring Christianity to Asia” that we fail to realize that God was already there. Spirituality helps us see ourselves as mere collaborators in the Mission of the Spirit rather than as main agents.

Receptivity can also refer to the capacity to think more and more in terms of spiritualities, rather than simply trying to measure other expressions by comparison with the horizons that I currently accept and consider to be true. In other words, when encountering different spiritualities, both within and without Christianity, rather than constantly asking and worrying about the question of which is “more true,” receptive persons ask, “Where is God present and acting there?” For St. Ignatius, reality (things, situations, feelings, events) has the capacity to reveal elements of God’s will that our habitual thinking alone, with

28. Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 55.

its preconceptions, cannot grasp. Being open to the real, “present to the present” as it is, constitutes an essential characteristic of the contemplative.

d. “Depth and Holy Indifference”

Depth and holy indifference are much-needed attitudes for today’s world because, to a greater or lesser extent, most of us are affected by the “atmosphere of superficiality, distraction, and easiness” that dominates contemporary thinking. The greatest enemy of spiritual growth is not our sins or weaknesses, but most likely the deep rooted laziness and lack of willingness to keep praying, thinking, and engaging with reality in a deep, sustained way.²⁹ When facing a problem, an important decision, a delicate pastoral situation, or even a personal moment of crisis, the spiritual person does not settle for easy solutions or comfortable ways out. He or she seeks to study, asks questions, prays, gathers data, and, as much as possible, thinks realities through in all their causes and consequences. This is a very concrete way of living out the Ignatian *magis*.³⁰ Being a person of depth is somehow opposed to being easily satisfied or “happy enough” with one’s (often superficial) grasp of situations and response to them. For this authentic “effort of depth” to be possible, we need to cultivate a stance of inner freedom, which St. Ignatius calls holy indifference. At EAPI, especially in view of the rich missionary experience and of the great variety of countries and situations that our participants experience, we are becoming aware that holy indifference means more than just willingness to do the will of God whatever it may be. It requires the capacity to let go of our models and build enough inner freedom from pre-conceived ideas that prevent us from listening to God when he speaks in new, creative, and prophetic ways.

Another way of growing in depth and holy indifference is by cultivating the capacity to move from a simplistic “either-or” thinking to genuine acceptance of the complexity of life, coupled with patient, “non-dualistic thinking.”³¹ This

29. Rolheiser puts it like this: “it is not weakness that is problematic within our relationship to God, but rationalization, denial, lying, and hardening of our hearts in the face of truth.” (*The Holy Longing*, 226.)

30. In Ignatian terminology, *magis* refers to the attitude that, in our choices, we do not settle simply for some or any kind of good, but always seek to discern and act in the way that seems to lead us to the *greatest possible love* and conformity with Christ within our concrete circumstances.

31. Rohr, *Falling Upward*, chapter 12, section “Both-And Thinking,” paragraph 1.

approach to reality, which refuses to reduce things to “totally right or totally wrong,” forms a much wiser basis where action stems from contemplation. Holiness is about desiring God above all else. Like in Buddhism, the seeker focuses on wanting Reality Itself,³² without ever settling for any lesser loves.

e. *“Prayer and Prayerfulness” (Interiorized Personal Faith)*

Last, but certainly not least, we need to say a word about prayer and prayerfulness. I recently asked a wise Jesuit priest, “Why do we pray? What is the fundamental purpose of prayer?” He answered, “We pray to become more aware of who and how our God is.” Our God knows us completely and loves us completely. Becoming aware of this in a personal, experiential way is deeply transformative. We pray also because we wish to be transformed and freed from all that, in us, is ungodly, unloving, and untrue. From the foundation of prayer, we then seek to expand that same inner attentiveness to all other moments of day-to-day life, so that in everything we may discover the life-giving presence of God. This kind of prayerfulness is an essential part of our Ignatian vision³³ of finding God in all things, a “new vision of life in which the daily events are part of an actual ongoing pilgrimage.”³⁴

Most EAPI participants, priests or religious sisters well in their 40s or 50s, are no longer beginners in the life of faith and ministry. At this life stage, it is important to find ways of translating one’s initial enthusiasm for God, prayer, and mission, often present at one’s initial phases in religious life, into sustained expressions of serene, discrete, constant, and loving faithfulness to one’s relationship with God.

Prayer is extremely important in the process of purification that must happen. By mid-life, spirituality should gradually become less about one’s own efforts or personal apostolic affirmation, and more about a willingness to simply remain present to the Lord who works, prays, and lives in us. This mature, even mystical quality of prayer is often described as a kind of passivity. The notion of

33. Beatrice Bruteau, *What We Can Learn from the East* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 26.

33. Together with the Ignatian foundations which form the basis of our formation in prayer, we also seek to allow participants to experience and be open to different styles and traditions of prayer, both Christian and from other religious faiths.

34. Robert Wicks, “Prayerfulness,” in *Prayer in the Catholic Tradition: A Handbook of Practical Approaches*, ed. Robert Wicks (Cincinnati, OH: Franciscan Media, 2016). Kindle electronic edition, location 506.

passivity is important to counterbalance the tendency to excessive activity and voluntarism to which we are all exposed nowadays. Some authors³⁵ affirm that prayer is about what God does, our role simply being that of “staying out of God’s way” and not preventing the Lord from doing what only he can do in us. Others³⁶ claim that what is most proper of the great “prayer-ers” is precisely the intensity of their activity in willful loving. Perhaps we could capture both ideas without contradiction, saying that in prayer, we *actively and lovingly sustain in ourselves an openness of mind and heart toward what God is doing or showing within us*. If asked, we all know that prayer is relationship, at times dialogue, at times silent communion. We know that it is not active monologue, nor is it merely idle passivity. However, much of the time, we end up falling into some of these modes of “prayer.” Perhaps the Johannine idea of *remaining* or *abiding* in Jesus (Jn 15) can be of help as an expression of the kind of prayer we desire. As when floating flat³⁷ on the sea one must exert just enough effort to *remain* afloat while letting the water itself hold and move us freely, so in prayer we are called to sustain a loving willingness for inner attentiveness to the action of God happening beneath our own restless need for activity. At EAPI, we hope to help participants rediscover the active “to-dos” of prayer, as well as cultivate the capacity for patient, silent waiting for the Lord.

Conclusion: Servants with Discerning Hearts

This paper described an understanding of spiritual maturity by highlighting some of the key characteristics that EAPI hopes to cultivate in its participants. It explained how we seek to promote spiritual growth by means of cultivating certain attitudes or virtues³⁸ that give flesh to the presence of the

35. Richard Rohr, “How Can Anyone Pray Always?” in *Prayer in the Catholic Tradition: A Handbook of Practical Approaches*, ed. Robert Wicks (Cincinnati, OH: Franciscan Media, 2016). Kindle electronic edition, location 12582.

36. Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man’s Spiritual Consciousness* (New York: World Publishing, 1972).

37. Thomas Green, *When the Well Runs Dry: Prayer Beyond the Beginnings* (Makati City: St. Pauls, 2000), chapter 6.

38. Other sets of virtues could have been chosen and are in fact used at EAPI modules. Earnest Tan, for example, speaks of Spiritual Quotient (to complement the more widespread notions of Intellectual and Emotional quotient) and identifies 12 characteristics which together contribute to spiritual maturity or holiness. They are self-awareness, oneness with all,

Spirit in us. The author concluded by arguing that, in his view, the idea of discernment, of becoming pastoral agents with discerning hearts, can be used as the inclusive overarching concept that best captures EAPI's vision of spirituality and spiritual maturity.

As was seen from the general definition given above, spirituality is a response to God's initiative that leads to loving action. The concept of *response* is essential to understand the kind of pastoral workers EAPI wishes to form. More than just agents who follow their own individual apostolic ideas, or who merely execute the usual work inherited from past models, the Church and God's Kingdom need men and women of discernment capable of generously responding to God's initiative in its varied expressions.

As way of conclusion, we propose four essential steps that form the necessary basis of discernment and of which only spiritually mature pastoral servants are capable: The first is *holy indifference*, the basic attitude of openness to whatever God may show to be His will for me regarding a particular situation. This inner freedom involves self-knowledge (to recognize how my own attachments may limit my freedom), as well as the capacity to "be myself" in recognition of the deepest desires through which God may speak. Holy indifference is a grace from God, which must be cultivated in constant prayer. Secondly, we must be willing to constantly *gather data* for our discernment. This involves a certain willingness for depth, for constant attention to what one's inner motions are revealing in the face of different situations and life's realities, as well as a capacity for openness and serious engagement with the world we face. We need to seek a deeper understanding of the world and of the pastoral challenges we face in order to find more fruitful choices of action. Thirdly, we need to enter the sacred space of *prayer* daily, bringing all the data (gathered from the external realities and echoing in our hearts) and pondering it under the light of God. It is here that we listen and seek to choose *magis*, that which honestly seems to me most loving and fruitful for the Kingdom. Finally, we must *act*, for no discernment is complete without actually putting into practice that which we, to the best of our ability, discover to be God's invitation. It is here that the aspect of conversion plays a central role and becomes the cornerstone of transformation of ourselves and of the world.

Discernment is both *the end goal*, a sign of spiritual maturity and essential characteristic of holy pastoral workers truly at the service of God, as well as *the means* by which spiritual maturity can grow. It seems to me that discernment is the essential trait which Pope Francis constantly asks us to cultivate,³⁹ without which his style of addressing today's challenges is impossible to understand and practice. Besides all the skills, psycho-emotional integration, and theological updates that participants can gain at EAPI, we hope that they become servants with discerning hearts, capable of bearing much fruit in the specific political, cultural, religious, social, and human contexts wherein they are called to work. Only thus will they truly become instruments of God at the service of the Kingdom.

39. In *Amoris Laetitia*, for example, the Pope explains that discernment is more than just applying rules (no. 37) and involves a careful look at inner motions and at the uniqueness of each person's situation (no. 79). The ultimate goal of discernment is to find ways of integrating people as much as possible (no. 296), in other words to find the way of greatest possible charity for each situation. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, the Pope speaks of the importance of training people for critical thinking so that they can discern well amidst the world's complexity (no. 65). In *Gaudete et Exsultate*, after explaining that discernment is a spiritual gift, the Pope affirms that discernment is about listening to ourselves, to God, to others, and to reality, being free enough to be challenged by it (no. 172). The fact the Francis refuses to give easy solutions and rejects a "black and white" mentality of simply reaffirming rules of "right and wrong" has caused much tension within the Church. To my mind, this is a clear sign that we are often too attached to our "comfort zones," and that formation for discernment is the essential aspect to pay attention to.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

FRANCISCO MACHADO is from Portugal. After a decade in formation as a Jesuit scholastic, he decided to continue his service in Asia as a lay person. Following studies and work in the Chinese mission, he came to Manila where he completed graduate studies in theology (Licentiate in Sacred Theology at Loyola School of Theology, Ateneo de Manila University). After graduation in May of 2017, he joined the EAPI staff team as coordinator of the sabbatical programs. His main interests are theology, Ignatian spirituality, spiritual accompaniment, and holistic Christian formation.