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# RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN ASIA

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# THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN IDENTITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION.

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## *Abstract*

*Maranatha Christian University as an education institution bears a Christian label. By announcing the university as “Christian”, what does it mean? Is it because Christians founded the University or because it is church related institution? Is it just to offer an excellent education plus Christianity teaching in “Christian environment”?*

*This essay will begin describing the issue of Christian identity, firstly in the perspective of organizational culture and then in a controversy as it encounter the secular world, Finally the discussion will be on leadership on context of Christian identity consists of two issues, i.e. Managing the organizational culture and The Integration of Faith and Learning.*

### **Christian Identity in the perspective of organizational culture.**

Basically, organizational culture is the personality of the organization. Culture is comprised of the assumptions, values, norms and tangible signs (artifacts) of organization members and their behaviors. Members of an organization soon come to sense the particular culture of an organization. Culture is one of those terms that are difficult to express distinctly, but everyone knows it when they sense it. For example, the strong culture of Ateneo de Manila University, with its identity as a Catholic and more specific Loyola or Jesuit education institution is different than that of University of Philippines which is secular university. Christian Identity becomes the main ingredient in the formation of institutional culture in Christian college or university.

### **The controversy of Christian identity in the secular World.**

The issue of Christian identity becomes controversial with the issue of secularism. Secularism is the social ideology in which religion and supernatural beliefs are not seen as the key to understanding the world and are instead segregated from matters of governance and reasoning, commonly secularism can be defined as the idea that religion should not interfere with or be integrated into the public affairs of a society. Religion becomes the domain of individual private affairs and private affairs of a faith community.

There is an example of controversy regarding Christian identity in secular world. In the USA, higher education institutions that keep their Christian identity (university or college) have the common agenda of “The Integration of Faith and Learning” issue. There is a model uses apologetic approach, which is to develop a worldview of Christian theism and be ready in a dialogue or conversation with other worldview, including the secular worldview. This approach invites harsh refusal and criticism, the former dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the university of Illinois at Chicago, Stanley

Fish in his articles in *First Things*, “*Why We Can’t All Just Get Along*”. : “Religionists cannot be granted a place at the academic table, argues Fish, because of their insistence upon making religious truth claims. To join the academic discussion one must give up such things. But religionists cannot do so without pulling the rug out from under their own stance, and so they should not even try to join the discussion. But since they foolishly seem to want to join in anyway, they must be told they are not welcome. The two sides, religion and the academy, cannot ‘just get along’. They must occupy separate spheres”. The issue is more on academic freedom

Meanwhile another model which are more acceptable to the secular world is Valparaiso University that is Lutheran define it as following: “ The Integration of Faith and Learning, where Faith is living with a commitment to faith or truth as it is understood in religious tradition and Learning as searching fearlessly and critically for truth along paths where the tradition does not specifically send them. This integration has become VU identity and VU claims it makes the institution opens to constant change, development of ideas, and increasing interdependence of peoples and cultures”.

In secular world, education is regarded as public domain, therefore religious idea should not interfere with the education process and education should be public education. On the other hand, historically “church related” universities were founded by particular Christian group with a purpose to prepare their young peoples for leadership role in the society. Another more theological reason is that as committed Christians who confess God as creator and Christ as ‘Lord of all’ implies that all life with its culture and learning must be penetrated with Christian perspective.

University that is founded based on those reasons will not have much complication, provided the student body and faculties are homogenous.

In real practice, for example Maranatha Christian University is not homogenous, it has approximately 70% of their students as Christians; the other 30% are from other religions and beliefs. Furthermore their faculties are approximately 20% non-Christians.

In my opinion, Maranatha Christian University as Christian institution has to be relevant with the context and challenge of the society where they lived. The context of Indonesia is that Christians are only 10% of the populations and the society is plural and diverse in ethnic and faith. The challenges of Indonesia are poverty, ignorance, corruptions and massive unemployment. Therefore MCU has to contribute to solve the problems of the society, by educating students to be skillful and knowledgeable, ethically grounded and have a good prospect in his future career in work life and hopefully can also create jobs for others. It is very unlikely for MCU to be exclusive institution, it has to be **open, plural and diverse**, otherwise it will be a **ghetto or strange body or alien in its environment**, yet as an institution it **keeps its loyalty and commitments to its faith and the Word of God**.

### **Leadership in the context of Christian Identity.**

At least there are two issues in the context of Christian Identity that has to be managed; they are **organization culture** and the issue of **Integration of Faith and Learning**.

### **Managing the organizational culture.**

When there is four or more people gather everyday, they will form a pattern of behavior, they will form group values and norms. This formation will happen naturally whether consciously managed by purpose or by letting it happened by itself. In modern management it is called an organization culture that has to be managed purposefully and it is the main task of the top leader to manage organizational culture.

It will start with value formation, once the values has been determined than the task will be on how to disseminate it to all members of organization and make it the share value and make it not only the ethics value but the ethos of working.

Ateneo de Manila University has a very strong organization culture; since they are rooted from 500 years established tradition of the Jesuit or the Society of Jesus, with it's Magis, its Spirituality Exercises, tangible sign or artifacts, abundant story and tale about the champions and heroes. To disseminate and implement in the university life for students, the University has developed INTACT (Introduction to Ateneo Culture and Traditions). For Faculty Development Program in the context of culture management, the University has set up Teacher Formation Institute, Ignatian Spirituality in Education Workshops, series of Retreats and recollections every year, Culture management program such as colloquium on Solidarity for Teaching program, Intellectual Autobiography. Those things are carefully designed and interweaved in the university activity and in every ceremonial events, the organization value is pronounced again and again.

### **Managing Integration of Faith and Learning**

The purpose of education has to do with the making or formations of persons and the preparation and training of students for their future career in working life. Christian Education has to do with making of persons of the God's Image ("Imago Deo"). Holmes suggests three features that are essential for Christian education. Firstly, a person is a reflective, thinking being. Secondly, a person is a valuing being and thirdly a person is a responsible agent. Persons as reflective, thinking being will imply that education should promote the development of an inquiring, critical and analytical mind. An indoctrination approach has no place here.

Since a person is a valuing being, education should teach values as well as facts. Ethics, social problems should be exposed to students and students should be equipped by the skill to make moral judgment. As a responsible agent, a person is responsible in every relationship, with other people, with the society and with the environment he lives. And ultimately, a person will accountable to God. In his book, "The Idea of a Christian College", Arthur F. Holmes describe that Christian College retains a unifying Christian worldview and brings it to bear in understanding and participating in the various arts and sciences, as well as in non academic aspects of campus life.

Ateneo de Manila University articulates it as: To form students who are academically excellent, socially responsible, culturally rooted and spiritually mature. In Academic formation through *student-centered learning* which is the formation of students who are reflective, analytical, critical and strategic in their thinking and who are resourceful, creative and motivated lifelong learning. And the development of students into "men and women for others", striving for "the greater glory of God and the greater service of mankind", is one of fundamental goal of education at Ateneo.



The instrument for those formations is through its curriculum and well-designed Non Academic formation Program.

The primary instrument for the academic formation is through its curriculum, which have two components: the core curriculum and the major curriculum. The core curriculum consists of courses in the Humanities, Languages, Mathematics and Science, Social Sciences and History courses. It has the function to equip the students who are broadly educated, who see themselves as global citizens, who can be leaders in business and public service, and who are ethically grounded. Major curriculum consists of courses that provide a strong program of training in the area of specialization in which the student wishes to major. It has the function to train and prepare students for their future career in working life.

In the formations of students through Non Academic formation (Character, spirituality, leadership, service) there are several means has been developed, called Integrated Non-academic Formation Program with INTACT (Introduction to Ateneo Culture and Traditions), The ADSA Team (Associate Deans for Student Affairs) consists of: Office of Student Activities, Office for Social Concern and Involvement, Campus Ministry Office, College Guidance Office, Placement Office, College Athletics, Residence Halls. Each office developed an integrated program to form character, spirituality, leadership and service of the Atenean students, in a more direct vision statement as to form students who are academically excellent, socially responsible, culturally rooted and spiritually mature.

### **The challenge for Maranatha Christian University**

MCU was established in 1965 as a direct response to the need for higher education as the preparation and training of students for their future career in working life at that time. It started with professional and vocational programs such as Medicine and Engineering and further developed that MCU has seven faculties right now. For MCU bearing “Christian Identity”, the task to manage organizational culture will be much easier than the task to manage the issue of Integration of Faith and Learning. The idea of combining liberal arts curriculum into professional studies will be very attractive to answer that challenge.

Valparaiso University and Ateneo de Manila University has the advantage by having the College of Arts and Sciences, School of Humanities and Social Sciences that can support the delivery of combination of liberal arts curriculum into Professional Studies. It takes much more effort for Maranatha Christian University to do this.

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