

---

---

**BUILDING THE “SPIRITUALITY OF EXCELLENCE” OF SPU MANILA FACULTY:  
RESPONSE TO NEW EVANGELIZATION**

**Gerardo L. Guiuan<sup>[1]</sup>**

<sup>[1]</sup>*St. Paul University Manila*

**ABSTRACT**

*For two consecutive school years (2009-2011), SPU Manila excellent faculty were rated with a common characteristic—“approachable.” This action research concretizes their journey as it uncovers the word “approachable” as the key to build the spirituality of excellence by reference to Scripture. Sixteen faculty members, across Colleges, participated, i.e., those with summer loads of 2013. The seven “I am” sayings in John’s gospel were chosen as these uniquely declare Jesus’ divinity with rich symbolism. The chosen bible passages: “I am the bread of life” (6:35) and its indicative text “I will not reject anyone who comes to me . . .” (6:37) offered three insights subsumed in the titles: God’s Word, Christian hope, and Nurturing Vocation. The concurring teacher-behaviors are: (“God’s Word”) they do not pre-judge students; they facilitate and guide; (“Christian hope”) they encourage students to speak; they show conviction in students’ decisions; and (“Nurturing Vocation”) they stop anything when a student approaches; they answer questions to the best of their ability. The suggested deepening activities are: (“God’s Word”), more group discussions be held on teachers’ and students’ growth issues; (“Christian hope”), the strict implementation of school rules should be considered, being “approachable” is not a license to unrestrained freedom; and (“Nurturing Vocation”), a prayerful relationship with God must be maintained. The recommendations are: that the Campus Ministry consider four biblical stories/images—Bethlehem, “true vine”, the multiplication of the loaves and the wedding at Cana as topics in Faculty formation; that the titles be incorporated in a “Faculty Credo of Excellence”; that the Academic and Student Services units organize group discussions; and that the faculty develop the devotion to the daily Noon Mass.*

**Running Head:** *Spirituality, Excellence*

**INTRODUCTION**

During his first Mass on the morning of March 14, 2013 for the intention of the Church—“Missa Pro Ecclesia”, newly-elected Pope Francis reminded his brother Cardinal-electors: “Building the Church. We speak of stones: stones are solid; but living stones, stones anointed by the Holy Spirit. Building the Church, the Bride of Christ, on the cornerstone that is the Lord himself. This is another kind of movement in our lives: building.”

This study was given impetus by this brief message from the Pope. As a follow-up to the research submitted by the proponent to the Vice President of Academic Services last March 9, 2012 entitled “The Journey to Excellence of SPU Manila Faculty SY 2009-2011: A Study on the Student Evaluation,” the idea of “building” as a life-movement befits the journey to excellence. Culling from the Message of Sr. Zeta Caridad Rivero, SPC during the 2012 SPCEM Educators’ Congress, she clearly re-iterated: “. . .excellence as

being the best of what one is capable of being. . . . Excellence results when we maximize the God-given gifts of nature, nurture, and opportunity we have received. . . . our standard of excellence is the image of God that he has placed within our being and in the heart of all created realities – including our schools. . . . This is where excellence meets spirituality; this is where spirituality informs and guides excellence.”

Interestingly, this study was doubly needed as we in SPU Manila celebrate the extraordinary Year of Faith in the thrust of the New Evangelization, i.e., toward a renewed vigor in our mission of education. In truth, by building this spirituality of excellence, we, the faculty are but building ourselves as a Church, a living Church on the cornerstone of Jesus, the Christ.

Recalling the context of the 2012 research, is “approachable” a unique Paulinian character of excellent faculty evident in all SPC schools? Uncovering the word was the key to build the spirituality of excellence among the faculty. One clear path to take

was to refer to Scripture, specifically the gospels, and be enlightened by the Lord's own words and deeds—a guide for Christ-centered spirituality. Instead of threading simplistic pedagogical and psychological strategies and techniques in being “approachable,” one encompasses a more spiritual and personal viewpoint which characterizes the true vocation of a Paulinian teacher—a Catholic, Christian, and Filipino teacher.

### **Statement of Objectives**

The main objective of the study was to uncover in concrete terms the behavioral indicators of the word “approachable” as widely used to describe Excellent faculty among students using gospel passages.

Specifically, the following questions were answered:

Among the seven “I am” gospel passages found in John's gospel, what is the most appealing passage where Jesus is found to be “approachable”? What are the significant elements which elicit indicators of being “approachable” as provided in the text? Based on one's teaching experience in SPU Manila, how are these indicators translated into concrete behaviors in and out of the classroom? What are the hindrances that impede these behaviors? How can one imbibe Jesus' “approachable” example with its concrete behaviors and overcome hindrances?

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study is a simple qualitative-descriptive research which employed survey method through a questionnaire.

### **Participants and Sampling Technique**

Out of the fifty-four (54) faculty members assigned with a summer load, AY 202-2013, random sampling was applied in order to get respondents from all the Colleges. From a list given by the Registrar, all odd-numbered faculty were selected as respondents. Twenty-six (26) faculty were included.

### **Research Instrument**

The proponent made use of an original survey questionnaire, choosing the specific passages where the sayings are to be found. These were presented chronologically as written in the gospel, namely: “I am the bread of life” (Jn. 6: 32-40), “I am the light of the world” (Jn. 8: 3- 12), “I am the gate for the sheep” (Jn. 10: 1-10), “I am the good shepherd” (Jn. 10: 11-18), “I am the resurrection and the life” (Jn. 11: 21-29, 32-35), “I am the way and the truth and the life” (Jn. 14: 5-14), and “I am the true vine” (Jn. 15: 1-10).

### **Validation of the Instrument**

As a subject matter expert (SME), the proponent considered the background of the chosen participants who are neither theology majors nor possessing biblical scholarship. The instrument highlights the evocative approach of the scriptures as the reader appreciates the meaning of the passages as related to one's present understanding and consciousness. The proponent also included an “informal” consent agreement by allowing the participant to return the questionnaire personally, if he/she cannot adequately and easily respond to the questions. By so doing, the instrument was safeguarded in its content validity.

### **Date Gathering Procedure**

Following the sampling technique mentioned earlier, the proponent photocopied the instrument and personally distributed a copy to the identified faculty in order to verbally encourage participation in the study. As to the length of time in answering the tool, twenty minutes was enough to adequately respond to the specific problems posed. There was a two- week grace period to answer the tool, i.e. from April 23 to May 7, 2013.

### **Data Analysis**

As a qualitative study, the data was treated along common threads of ideas. Since there was only one choice among seven, this was generated in a cumulative manner of which the majority choice became the first choice. As to the specific problems, these were answered in a chronological manner following the same procedure.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### ***Participants in the Study by Academic College/Unit***

There are sixteen (16) faculty members participated in the study; all Colleges were well represented with the CNAHS, CMPA and REL having a 100% retrieval rate. This gesture of support is to be appreciated. In total, a 64% retrieval rate (16/25) is way above the required 50% rate for this study as the target respondents were not the total number of employed faculty but representative-faculty only.

### ***The results for the specific problems***

Among the seven “I am” gospel passages found in John’s gospel, what is the most appealing passage where Jesus is found to be “approachable”? What are the significant elements which elicit indicators of being “approachable” as provided in the text?

The most appealing “I am” passage where Jesus is found to be “approachable” is “I am the bread of life” (in Jn 6:32-40)—seven faculty chose this passage. Next is “I am the good shepherd” (in Jn. 10: 11-18)—five chose this. The other three passages chosen were: “I am the way and the truth and the life” (in Jn. 14: 5-14), “I am the light of the world” (in Jn. 8:3-12) and “I am the true vine” (in Jn. 15: 1-10)—the former was chosen by two faculty and the last two by one faculty each.

The significant elements which elicit indicators of being “approachable,” as provided in the text, are as follows: “I will not reject anyone who comes to me . . .”—a unanimous text for all seven respondents.

“Whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst”—three respondents also liked this passage.

“Everything that the Father gives me will come to me . . . I should not lose anything of what he gave me”

“Everyone who sees the Son and believes in him may have eternal life, and I shall raise him (on) the last day.” Each of these last two verses above was significant to one respondent.

Based on one’s teaching experience in SPU Manila, how are these indicators translated into concrete behaviors in and out of the classroom? What are the hindrances that impede these behaviors?

The concrete behaviors in and out of the classroom which translate the text- indicators above are as follows:

Have an open mind & a big ‘heart’ when dealing with students. Always project a pleasant disposition—smiling and greeting them whenever one meets them or upon entering the classroom to make students feel at ease.

Being concerned for students who are absent—finding out their reasons, giving them extra projects/ make-up exam for valid reasons

Do not pre-judge students according to looks, behavior and what people say; teachers must facilitate the learning process and guide them to be better individuals. However, for caution, too much familiarity can bring out disrespectfulness.

From encounters with “problem” students, their stay on school gives them an affirmation of their positive qualities—something that gives them pride and dignity even though they are not academically good and morally upright.

Help them to communicate their thoughts; listen to them and give sound advice and genuine support.

Encourage students to speak their minds out when they have class problems; be confident in doing what students believe is right when they have issues to resolve; show conviction in students’ decisions contrary to the dictates of the majority.

Clarify issues raised by students pertaining to the lesson or otherwise, either through face-to-face or electronic means. Make one available for the students inside and outside the classroom.

One stops anything one is doing when a student approaches; one can always be interrupted at the middle of the lesson if there are questions; answer students’ questions to the best of one’s ability.

One approaches students to inquire of need if one sees them waiting in the office.

As to the hindrances that impede these behaviors, the common response was the limited time one has to offer students due to other things that teachers need to attend to. Quite observable is that this impediment was also cited among the other respondents who chose the other “I am” gospel passages.

How can one imbibe Jesus’ “approachable” example with its concrete behaviors and overcome hindrances?

Maintaining a prayerful relationship with God, as a constant reminder, can affect a balance in one’s life especially in dealing with students.

Having more group discussions, fora, conferences on issues related to teachers’ and students’ personal, academic and spiritual growth encourages open communication. This entails collaboration among the Academic, Student Services and Christian Formation-Campus Ministry units.

A pool of qualified class advisers can help students in problem solving in coordination with the Guidance Office and subject teachers; strengthening tutorials and peer counseling activities are to be considered. More “visibility” of the Sisters can impact on students and employees by interaction.

Organizing leadership training/group activities like simple sharing of lunch or snacks where student leaders can freely interact with the Administrators provides avenues of communication.

In particular, the Campus Ministry should initiate a culture of “friendship and trust” in a “warm and welcoming” community. A simple “hi” or “hello” greeting to students not in one’s class is a good habit to start.

The strict implementation of school rules should be considered carefully to have a family-oriented community.

## DISCUSSIONS

The results for specific problem no.1 will be trimmed into two, namely, that the first choice among

the gospel passages is “I am the bread of life” (Jn 6:35) and the textual indicator is “I will not reject anyone who comes to me . . .” (Jn. 6:37). A discussion on these passages will guide the treatment on the second and third specific problems.

### **On Specific Problem 1**

Understanding “I am the bread of life” (Jn 6:35) as the fulcrum in building a Spirituality of Excellence among SPU Manila Faculty.

The proponent’s choice of using the “I am” sayings in John’s gospel is deliberate for an action research. First, John’s gospel is unique compared to the synoptic gospels—Mark, Matthew and Luke thus focusing attention to one orientation and avoiding references to other passages found in the other gospels. Second, the “I am” sayings—in seven different passages, declare Jesus’ own divinity by portraying a rich symbolism which connects with preceding “signs”—also in seven different passages, that show and prove that divinity. Thus, there can be more than one reflection/insight in deepening one passage. In this case, this study will pursue one of the many expressions of the spirituality of excellence based on the chosen “I am” saying.

One way to understand “I am the bread of life” (Jn.6:35) is to view it in a so-called “menorah” structure as explained in a biblical website: <http://www.wellofbethlehem.witnesstoday.org>. It shares: The “I am” statements of Jesus, and the corresponding details of his birth, form a menorah structure which shows Jesus to be the “I am” who became the Passover lamb. . . . Six of the “I am” statements form three pairs of matching statements, and six details of Jesus’ birth form three pairs of matching details (as shown below, numbered for reference).

“I am the bread of life.” John 6:35, 41, 48-51

“I am the light of the world.” John 8:12, 9:5

“I am the door of the sheep.” John 10:7, 9

“I am the good shepherd.” John 10:11, 14

“I am the resurrection, and the life.” John 11:25

“I am the way, the truth, and the life.” John 14:6

“I am the true vine.” John 15:1, 5

The first and seventh form a matched pair, the second and sixth form a matched pair, and the third and fifth form a matched pair. The fourth one stands

alone in the center, and is by far the most significant one. The first matched pair of “I am” statements, “I am the bread of life,” and “I am the true vine,” are both linked to the place of Jesus’ birth, Bethlehem Ephratah (Micah 5:2, Matthew 2:5, 6), since Bethlehem means “house of bread,” and Ephratah means “fruitful.”

The base of the menorah is “I am; don’t be afraid,” John 6:16-21 which Jesus said while walking on the Sea of Galilee, relating to all the statements above. As to the confirming “sign” or work (miracle), the “sign” for the “bread of life” is the feeding of the 5,000—five loaves of barley bread and two small fish are multiplied to supply 5,000 men plus women and children (John 6:1-13). While the “sign” for the “true vine” branch, is the turning of water into “wine”— six large waterpots of water are turned into “wine” for the guests at the wedding in Cana ( John 2:1-11). Both the bread and the “wine” were consumed at the last supper, and represented the body and blood of Jesus (Matthew 26:20-29, Mark 14:17-25, Luke 22:14-20).

By this consideration, the common understanding of the passage “I am the bread of life” as referring directly to the Eucharist is enriched in three ways: first, by accommodating the reference to the birthplace of Jesus, i.e., Bethlehem as the “house of bread”, second, by connecting it with another saying “I am the true vine” and vesting it with a sense of “fruitfulness” and third, by proposing two miracle stories of Jesus expressing the signs” of divinity in the natural images, i.e, the multiplication of bread to 5,000 people from 5 loaves of bread and two fishes and the turning of water into wine in the wedding feast in Cana.

By hindsight, one can easily see the richness of meaning of the Bethlehem “manger” where the animals eat and take shelter and in which Jesus was humbly born. Jesus, the bread of life, gives life— physical and animate, even to the simplest creature. Jesus as the bread of life sustains fruitfulness of life; life is generated and always new. Jesus, the bread of life, is the true spiritual food that provides satisfaction to human need and joy to the needy. Indeed, the following verse: “whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst” (Jn. 6:36) is a fitting complement to the saying. It even expresses a reminder that before “partaking” Jesus in holy communion, one needs to “come and believe” him first, e.g. in the conscious appreciation of His Word, in spending time to talk and meet Him in prayer and in action, to name a few. These related biblical stories/images are to be deepened more clearly in the

spirituality for excellence.

Understanding the textual indicator “I will not reject anyone who comes to me . . .” (Jn. 6:37) “in building a Spirituality of Excellence among SPU Manila Faculty.

The New Jerome Biblical Commentary provides three considerations in understanding this text. First, the group of texts from verses 36-40 is a continuation of the condemnation of Jesus’ audience found in verse 30: “So they said to him, ‘What sign can you do, that we may see and believe in you? What can you do?’” due to the latter’s unbelief. Jesus had just performed a miracle— multiplication of the bread (stated above) and still the people—the Jews were skeptical of him as a man of God—the people still need “convincing” signs, more spectacular than Jesus himself. Second, these verses also prepare the reader for the future divisions that will definitely come even among Jesus’ disciples. “As a result of this, many (of) his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him. Jesus then said to the Twelve, “Do you also want to leave?” (Jn 6: 66-67). Third, the text indicator itself is a clear proof against the Jews who will cast those who believe in Jesus out of the synagogue, particularly in the case of a man born blind (Jn. 9:13-38). Having been cured by Jesus on a sabbath, the man became a source of controversy among the Pharisees and the Jews in the temple. Twice called for questioning, since his parents were afraid to be identified as believers of Jesus, he faced his skeptic inquisitors and profoundly said: “This is what is so amazing, that you do not know where he is from, yet he opened my eyes” (Jn 9:30). For this, he was thrown out of their sight. But the story continues:

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are proposed:

That the Christian Formation-Campus Ministry unit considers the four biblical stories/images: the Bethlehem story, the “true vine”, the multiplication of the loaves and the wedding at Cana, as topics in Faculty formation sessions, e.g., recollections, retreats, BEC faith- sharings, as these pertain to the building of a spirituality of excellence.

Corollarily, that the titles: God’s Word, Christian hope, and Nurturing Vocation be incorporated in a “Faculty Credo of Excellence” to be posted on the faculty room bulletin board or be printed in bookmarks for personal use of the faculty as constant reminders in the journey to excellence in SPU Manila. Adding colored images/



pictures of the Bethlehem story, the “true vine”, the multiplication of the loaves and the wedding at Cana to the corresponding titles can enhance appreciation of the biblical significance of the titles. (Samples are placed in the Appendix).

That the Academic and Student Services units organize concrete projects as suggested, e.g., group discussions, fora, conferences on issues related to teachers’ and students’ personal and academic growth even once a semester for the faculty. To suggest for interesting topics, a related study of the proponent—the Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS) of 2013 can give light. To cite a few findings: three priority concerns of school service recurred from the 2012 survey, namely: “All students have equal opportunities to participate in intercollegiate athletics” (co- curricular), “Class change (drop/add) policies are reasonable” and “It is an enjoyable experience to be a student on this campus” (condition of service rendered). While on the Paulinian Core Values, one priority concern recurred: “A respectful attitude towards all persons is felt in this campus” which refers to the Paulinian Core Value of Community. These are areas for improvement in student satisfaction which directly relate with teacher-student interaction. As to the Student Services unit, discussion on the rationale on the strict implementation of school rules (as mentioned) is urgent.

That the faculty be guided in this “Eucharist-centered” spirituality of excellence by developing the devotion to the daily Noon Mass as its practical basis in school. Ultimately, being an “approachable” and excellent teacher is a constant following of Jesus and He allows Himself to be received entirely in this sacramental celebration in a prayerful relationship.

### References

- [1] Beinert, W. F. Firoenza (2000). *Handbook of Catholic Theology*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co.
- [2] Brown, R., J. Fitamayer and R. Murphy (1999). *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*. Bangalore: Theological Publications in India.
- [3] Coleman, L. (Ed.) (1991). *Serendipity New Testament for Groups*. New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press.

- [4] Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the United States Catholic Conference (1991). *The New American Bible*. Nashville: Catholic Bible Press.
- [5] De, S. (2009). *Walking in Spiritual Excellence*. Retrieved from <http://sabrinate.hubpages.com> on June 29, 2013.
- [6] Downey, M. (Ed.). (1993). *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press.
- [7] Guiuan, G. (2012). *Performance Excellence, Teaching Load, and Work Tenure of SPU Manila College Faculty*. *The Paulinian Compass*. 2 (3), 92-121.
- [8] MacArthur, J. (2001). *The MacArthur Quick Reference Guide to the Bible*. Tennessee: World Publishing Group.
- [9] Maxwell, J. (2003). *Leadership Promises For Every Day: A Daily Devotional*. Mandaluyong: OMF Literature Inc.
- [10] Rykan, L., J. Wilhoit, and T. Longman III (Eds.) (1998). *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. Illinois: Inter Varsity Press.
- [11] Samson, W. (2012). *A Synopsis of the Ateneo Centennial Theme: Living 100 Years of Excellence, Sprituality and Citizenship*. Retrieved from <http://www.adzu.edu.ph> on June 29, 2013.
- [12] Sheldon, A. (2013). *Confirming “Signs” in the Gospel of John; the Menorah structure*. Retrieved from <http://www.wellofbethlehem.witnesstoday.org> on June 21, 2013.
- [13] SPU Manila Inter-Office Bulletin, May 29, 2011. *Sr. Zeta stirs educators to excellence*. Retrieved from [www.spumanila.edu.ph](http://www.spumanila.edu.ph) on June 29, 2013.
- [14] St. Paul University Manila (2012). *A Hundred Thousand Miracles: The St. Paul University Manila Centennial 1912-2012*. Manila: St. Paul University Manila.

- [15] Tabora, J. (2012). Rekindling the Call to Spirituality and Excellence, posted on June 16, 2012. Retrieved from <http://taborasj.wordpress.com> on May 29, 2013.
- [16] The Catholic University of America (2003). The New Catholic Encyclopedia. 2nd Edition. Gale, MI: The Catholic University of America.