

Competence to See and Courage to Act

It was on the eve of Teachers Day in India, 5th September, that the director of the education ministry in the congregation, Br. Prodip Gomes requested to write an article for those confreres, and their collaborators engaged in education ministry in the congregation. The teachers' day gave me an added impetus to reflect on the proposed title 'Competence to See and Courage to Act'. India began to celebrate Teachers Day in 1962 in honour of one of the greatest teachers of the country and the second president of the Republic of India, Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. On a global scale, World Teachers' Day is celebrated on October 5th every year. It was established by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1994 to recognize and celebrate the role of teachers in shaping the future. Most countries honour their teachers in ways unique to their history and significance. The common thread among them is the recognition and appreciation of teachers for their invaluable contributions to society and the education of future generations.

The Congregation of Holy Cross is in the midst of the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the entry of blessed Basil Moreau into eternal life in 1873. During this celebration, we reflect on the rich educational heritage bequeathed by our founder and after 188 years, it is still a force for good in the world.

Before you read this article, pause a moment and think about the favourite teacher of your life. It might surprise you to note that what you admire in your favourite teacher is not his or her academic qualification, socio-economic status, or appearance, instead you remember his or her character traits. If you remember certain actions of your favourite teacher, those actions flew out of his or her character.

In the beginning, was the teaching brothers....

A decade before the birth of Basil Moreau, in the early period of the French Revolution, the conflict between the revolutionaries and the Catholic Church resulted in the state's supremacy. The government seized the church endowments and properties and dismissed priests and church-controlled teachers, resulting in the collapse of school education for decades in the villages of France. French Revolution abolished the religious privileges of the Church and actively promoted the dechristianization of the country.

It is in this context in 1820 that Fr. Jacques Dujarié, a priest of the diocese of Le Mans, organized and trained a group of men to be teachers in the primary schools of the parishes of the diocese. Fr. Dujarié called them the Brothers of St. Joseph. In 1835, at the request of the bishop and the brothers' insistence, Fr Moreau agreed to become the superior of the brothers. He devoted tremendous energy and attention to catholic education from the moment he assumed responsibility for the teaching brothers. Personal experience as a child and youth had an impact on how he perceived the importance of education and the ministry of the brothers in the Diocese of Le Mans and beyond its frontiers.

Fr. Basil Moreau was a priest of the Diocese of Le Mans, France. He began his primary education at the age of 9 at the rectory of the parish church. As a student, he was an earnest, intelligent, focused and disciplined person. Soon after his ordination to the priesthood, he wrote to his spiritual director that he was burning with a desire to evangelize in the country. He wanted to be a

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missionary abroad, willing to be a martyr for the sake of the Gospel. His attitude gives a glimpse of his character, and courage to act for the sake of his faith.

When Fr. Moreau was appointed to teach philosophy, and later on theology and sacred scripture at the major seminary, he attempted to cultivate in his students both competence and character to enhance the mission of the local church to people who are indifferent to religion if not antichristian in their attitudes and practices. In the early years of his priesthood, he had the competence to see the plight of his countrymen and women and the courage to act to bring about better times for future generations.

Pedagogy of Fr. Moreau

The vision of Fr. Moreau for education was not merely to make his compatriots literate but through education formation of hearts and characters of future generations to assume responsibilities for their religion and country. In a society that was more identifying itself with attitudes of secularism and antichristian practices, Fr. Moreau dared to envisage education as accompanying young people in their journey towards wholeness. He wrote, 'Society has a greater need for people of values than it has for scholars' (Christian Education, 1856).

From the humble beginning of the boarding school of Notre Dame de Sainte-Croix in the outskirts of Le Mans, in 1835 established by Fr Moreau, until now Congregation of Holy Cross has a living and vibrant tradition of teaching ministry. As the Congregation was developing, it was primarily the need and the request for educators that led to its expansion beyond France to Algeria (1840), to America (1841), to Canada (1847), to Rome (1850) and Bengal (1853).

There are over 115 educational institutions that boast of their Holy Cross traditions built on a Holy Cross legacy. From Universities and senior high schools to primary schools, Holy Cross educate over 110,000 pupils daily spread over 5 continents. We serve the upper middle class to the poor in our educational institutions. From prominent institutions to schools with primitive settings, all have distinctive Holy Cross characters.

The original intent of the unpublished manuscript 'Christian Education (1856) by Father Moreau was to convey his vision of what it means to be an educator, a Holy Cross educator, primarily to brothers, the largest segment of his congregation, engaged in teaching ministry. Part one of the document talks about Virtues about which we seldom talk in the classrooms or corridors of the schools. In Moreau's words, 'How we educate the mind will change with the times; how we cultivate the heart is and will remain timeless'. This is why Father Moreau's Christian Education will always have relevance. The symbolism of the heart meant much to Father Moreau. It is a symbol of love and the locus of virtue; it is the core of human nature. It is the point where faith and reason are embraced. For all his life Father Moreau worked to reconcile the separation between faith and reason which was one of the results of the Enlightenment.

It must be admitted that the unpublished manuscript of Christian Education, an internal document by Father Moreau was not available to his priests and brothers then working in different countries. The Holy Cross tradition is an oral tradition. Christian Education has been taken by individuals to different cultures at different times and adapted to their contexts. However, this tradition of the

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Holy Cross school has flowed to the present from the earliest Holy Cross foundations. It has taken expression in various forms, but usually in a philosophy which promotes the education of the whole person-spiritual, intellectual, artistic, physical, and social.

Christian Education continues to be a guide for teachers on how to 'be' rather than how to 'teach'. Throughout all of his writings on education, the organization of a school takes second place to the quality of persons teaching in the school. Teachers are life models for young people and will be effective Christian educators only in so far as they are faithful, knowledgeable, and caring Christians themselves. The personal qualities of teachers in a Holy Cross school are what make Father Moreau's vision of education work. Without these personal qualities of **reverence, knowledge, zeal, vigilance, self-control, meekness, patience, prudence, and firmness**, teachers will not be able to carry out their call to develop young people into Christians, and the schools in which they work will be ineffective. These nine qualities demonstrate the personal knowledge of young people that Father Moreau had and how they act, a knowledge that came from his own experience as a teacher.

Education today

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, modern teachers play a pivotal role in shaping the future of their students. One of the messages that I received on Teachers' Day is that teachers are engineers of the human soul and disseminators of human civilization. No one will disagree with the fact that education is the single most important profession. Teachers are tasked with the mission of spreading knowledge, ideas and truth. To accomplish this noble task, teachers require a dynamic combination of competence and courage to foster an environment where students can engage with the world within them as well as the world around them and cultivate virtues such as character, empathy, and courage. It also implies that education prepares students to face the challenges of life with resilience and responsibility.

A nation is built by its citizens and citizens are moulded by their teachers. Modern teachers are more than just educators; they take different avatars as mentors, advocates, and champions for their students. Their competence to see and courage to act go beyond the traditional role of teaching, profoundly impacting the lives of those they guide. In an educational landscape that demands adaptability and empathy, these teachers provide the foundation upon which students can build their futures. The competence to see and the courage to act are the tools modern teachers wield to shape the leaders, thinkers, and change-makers of tomorrow.

In the context of Southeast Asia, Africa, Latin America, Haiti etc., where there is a massive young population, there is an ever-increasing demand for quality education. The education sector is considered a noble profession, and also a lucrative business in these countries.

Challenges to Christian education today

During the time of Father Moreau, France was considered a catholic Christian country. Today EU is a secular body with a clear separation of church and state. Similarly, in most places in Asia and Africa, Christians are a minority community. In places where Holy Cross is engaged in teaching ministry, teachers cannot explicitly speak about Christian Education. Yet if there is a need to

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practice and teach values that Father Moreau speaks about in his 'Christian Education', it is now. Today, more than ever, the competence and character of teachers matter most because;

1. The task of Holy Cross education aims to strengthen the full development of the human personality. It requires competencies in educators to foster in their students a sense of social responsibility, encouraging students to address societal issues, advocate for positive change, and contribute to their communities.
2. Teachers should have the courage to witness the values of humanity and challenge corrupt practices by those who enjoy power and privileges in public life. Educate their students with regard to human values: Values such as respect for all, ethical conduct in all situations, human solidarity, and justice for all are central concerns.
3. Teachers should raise issues of social justice with students in the classrooms in order to sensitize the plight of the poor and the marginalized in society. Students who are ethically grounded are more likely to have the courage to act in ways that align with their moral compass, even when faced with opposition or temptation.
4. Modern teachers must possess a heightened competence to see each student's individuality. They have to recognize that every learner is unique, with their strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles. This ability to discern the specific needs and potential of each student goes beyond traditional teaching methods.
5. Teachers need to employ a variety of techniques and tools to tailor lessons to match students' abilities and interests. This individualized attention helps students excel and stay engaged in their studies.
6. Understanding students' emotional and psychological needs is another aspect required of a modern teacher's competence. They are to be attuned to the mental well-being of their students, fostering a safe and supportive classroom environment where open communication is encouraged between students who hail from different faith traditions, socio-economic statuses, genders, etc.
7. Modern teachers require the competence to discover hidden talents in their students, providing opportunities for students to excel beyond the traditional academic curriculum.
8. Amidst violations and abuse of human rights, teachers not only need the competence but also the courage to teach in the classrooms about human rights: committing to human rights, teaching and educating about them, and addressing rights violations are a natural part of Christian and modern education.
9. Modern teachers require competence and sensitivity to educate students about sustainability: Sustainable development goals are to serve as a blueprint for peace and prosperity for all people and the planet itself. Pope Francis in his encyclical 'Laudato Si' invoked and invited all including educators to face the moral and spiritual challenge of caring for our common home called Earth.
10. Despite being perceived as digital-savvy by parents and teachers, school-going children are not supported sufficiently to foster their digital etiquette and literacy. Hence teachers have the responsibility to educate children to be safe and empowered in an increasingly digital world.

Conclusion:

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Holy Cross educators need periodic in-training to strengthen their noble vocation. The goal of education as given by Father Moreau is both an invitation and inspiration to all Holy Cross educators. Since the purpose of education extends beyond the mere transfer of knowledge and skills, it should be a journey of self-discovery and growth in virtues, equipping students with the competence to see the world through a critical lens and the courage to act upon their convictions. Such an education empowers individuals to thrive personally and contribute meaningfully to the betterment of society, ultimately creating a brighter and more inclusive future for all.

Questions for reflection

1. What are the strengths of our education program today?
2. How does 'Christian Education' by Father Moreau challenge the present practice of imparting education?
3. How to empower students in educational institutions with the competence to see ethically and the courage to act justly?
4. How to incorporate the principles of 'Laudato Si' into the curriculum?

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