

## **“THE GREATNESS OF YOUR MISSION”**

### ***Holy Cross Educational Heritage and Values***

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The principles and practices of Holy Cross education are rooted in a charism, a sacred gift given to Blessed Basile Moreau, founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross, and then expanded and developed further by the Family of Holy Cross. The religious of Holy Cross – Brothers, Priests, and Sisters – and their colleagues are involved in the very works to which Father Moreau committed them: education, parishes, and various pastoral ministries.

The charism of Holy Cross emerged within the social, political, and ecclesial world of post-Revolutionary 19<sup>th</sup>-century France. That world presented a devastated landscape of schools, parish communities, and various services in serious disarray or simply non-existent. Many people believed there was nothing that could be done; the task of responding appeared to be far beyond human capabilities. It was precisely to revitalize this landscape that God called and gifted Basile Moreau.

As Moreau looked at the reality, he recognized the need for much more than mere renovation; nothing less than a resurrection would be necessary. A new life was needed if France was to have a future. Father Moreau believed the seeds of that new life would be planted through schools that assured an education and a formation to values that could change society; through parishes that would refresh the spiritual life of the people; and through a variety of services to meet the pressing needs of so many who had been neglected.

Father Moreau himself articulates the charism that shapes the mission and ministries of Holy Cross. In his book, *Christian Education*, he writes:

“Hurry then; take up this work of resurrection, never forgetting that the special end of the Institute is, before all, to make young people holy. It is by this that you will contribute to preparing the world for better times than ours; for these students who now attend your school are the parents of the future, the parents of future generations, each one of whom bears a family within.”

The charism that shapes all Holy Cross ministries today, including education, is to prepare the world for better times than ours. Everything we do in ministry, and even the way we live our daily life, is meant to make a contribution to building a better future.

As we reflect on the school at which we work, it is valuable to identify how our efforts have made and continue to make a contribution to better times for our country and our world. For Moreau, the contribution we make is nothing less than a “work of resurrection.” I am not aware of any other writer who refers to education with that image. This charism is important and timely because the world will always stand in need of better times.

The charism remains just words unless there is an educational process through which we enable it to become a reality. Moreau speaks of such a process in his book on education.

“The end which has been proposed in founding institutions of this kind, which we wanted especially in the work of Holy Cross, is principally that the students whom you nurture be solidly instructed in religion, formed in the practices of the Christian life, and able to persevere in virtue after they have left your schools.”

The Holy Cross educational process is three-fold. First, students are to be “solidly instructed.” The underlying principle here is academic excellence. The knowledge and skills

that are communicated to students must prepare them for the practicalities of the world in which they will live and work and enable them to flourish in their chosen careers. Second, students are to be “formed in the practices of the Christian life.” This can be broadened beyond only the Christian life to include a life of values, a life that will use the knowledge and skills learned productively and ethically. Third, students should be “able to persevere in virtue after they have left your schools.” Graduates of Holy Cross schools should be committed to making a difference in the world, to preparing it for better times by the quality and example of their lives.

This process of information, formation, and transformation constitute what a Holy Cross education strives to accomplish. It should influence everything in the school environment because it can shape the lives of the students, now and for the future. What can we do to assure that the charism of Holy Cross and the educational process are at work in our schools? There are four themes or pillars of Holy Cross education; they are approaches to the education that we offer and for which we are responsible.

First, building respect. Father Moreau writes: “Never forget that all teaching lies in the best approach to the individual student; all the successes you will find will be in direct proportion to the efforts you have made in this regard” (*Christian Education*). Holy Cross education is distinctly student-based. The uniqueness of the students need to be respected so they can benefit from being in an environment that provides them the best possibility for learning. If we respect the students and work with respect for one another as faculty and staff, then our example encourages and teaches students to respect one another and all the people they encounter.

Second, educating minds and forming hearts. Moreau directs us: “We shall always place education side by side with instruction; the mind will not be cultivated at the expense of the heart” (Letter 36). Holy Cross schools provide students with an academically excellent course of studies. However, the significant challenge within Holy Cross education is the formation to values that must accompany those studies. This formation must be evident in every aspect of the school, not only in classes focusing on social responsibility, ethics, or service projects. Formation enables students to use the knowledge and skills they learn in ethical and appropriate ways. This formation must be evident everywhere, from the classrooms to the sports fields.

Third, being community. Father Moreau reminds us: “One member of this institution will do intellectual work and another, manual labor; this one will teach, that one will administer. All the while this activity of the individual will help the community, and the activity of the community will, in turn, help each individual” (Letter 65). Moreau was convinced that a genuine interdependence among faculty and staff would give the students an example of community that goes beyond the boundaries of natural family. He built the curriculum of the first school so it would be a social equalizer, providing every student – regardless of background or social status – with access to all aspects of school life; teaching them to share their gifts and talents in coordination with those of others. Such interdependence would have a transformative influence on society.

Fourth, brining hope. Moreau was confident as he looked toward the future. He says: “I have the firm hope that Providence will complete what it began years ago” (Letter 79). Holy Cross educators must be people of hope, people who recognize the almost limitless potential of the goodness within humanity, people who believe that each person and the

world can be transformed. That belief is based upon the conviction that God has been and is guiding all that we do in the school. We choose to be people of hope regardless of what we experience and what we observe happening in the world today. It is a choice we make in our work and for our life.

The richness of this charism and the wisdom of this educational process do not make Holy Cross education easy. In fact, Father Moreau tells us that the opposite is true.

“From what has been said, you can conclude that your mission as a teacher is difficult and requires hard work. It requires of you a great devotion in order to continue in your calling as a teacher. Consider the greatness of your mission and the wonderful amount of good, which you can accomplish. And also consider the great reward promised to those who have taught the truth to others and have helped formed them into justice: ‘they will shine eternally in the skies like the stars of the heavens.’” (*Christian Education*)

Yes, consider the greatness of your mission, your work as an educator; consider, too, the tremendous amount of good you can do and have already done. Consider that you are the stars that shine for your students; you are the lights that guide them to live in such a way that they will do a work of resurrection. You are in a privileged position to encourage them in taking up the adventure of preparing the world for better times than ours. This is your call as Holy Cross educators.