

The Holy Cross Charism of Education

The beatification of Blessed Basile Moreau, founder of the Congregation of Holy Cross, was an important moment in the life of his religious family. It signaled the Church's recognition not only of the virtuous life of Fr. Moreau, but also of the value of his writings for reflection and prayer. Moreau, like St. Paul, did not compose long treatises on particular subjects, but wrote occasional letters in response to particular needs. In addition, Moreau wrote sermons, books of meditations, and catechisms. Moreau's only treatise was the short text *Christian Pedagogy* that contained some of his key insights into the ministry of education and practical advice for dealing with students of various temperaments. In an attempt to articulate a philosophy of education that has otherwise been largely passed on and lived by oral tradition, members of the family of Holy Cross have begun mining this treatise, sharing its content and deepening its insights.

In the summer of 2013, a group of Holy Cross religious representing the four colleges and universities sponsored by the United States Province of Priests and Brothers gathered to discern the core of a Catholic education in the Holy Cross tradition. This brief essay makes use of the statement issued by that working group as the framework for reflecting upon Moreau's vision of education.

**"A Catholic education in the Holy Cross tradition transforms minds and hearts
with zeal in communities of hope."**

Transforms Minds and Heart

Moreau's often quoted claim "that the mind will not be cultivated at the expense of the heart" needs to be held together with his claim that "our students will not be deprived of anything that they need to know." The purpose of education was not the mere imparting of knowledge, but assisting "young persons to grow to maturity." For Moreau, the mature person was one who had honed her capacity to reason to the truth and to choose the good. The development of a student's capacity to reason to the truth required from the institution a consistent commitment to academic excellence. Moreau demanded that the curricula in Holy Cross institutions provide its students with opportunities to engage the most important and influential developments and questions of the day. He also demanded that Holy Cross institutions use the best pedagogical methods available to meet the individual needs of students. The development of a student's capacity to choose the good required not only exposure to religious and moral values, but to virtuous people whose lives modeled both the strength and gentleness of Jesus Christ. For Moreau, the heart was not the seat of sentiment, but the seat of decision for good or evil. The best academic education in the world would not be of benefit to society if virtuous habits were not simultaneously formed with the intellectual virtues.

With Zeal

The craft of transforming minds and hearts was not a mechanical process; in fact, Moreau spoke of education as an “art.” The weaving together of excellent academic content and state-of-the-art pedagogical practices in such a way as to shape the minds and hearts of a diverse student body demanded amazing levels of commitment and creativity. Moreau suggested that being an educator must be a vocation, a special call, from God precisely because of the truly demanding nature of the craft. Moreau spoke of zeal as a “burning desire.” The true educator is one whose “burning desire” encompasses not only a passion for the truth, but a passion to impart that truth to others in such a way that it sparks excitement and passion in one’s students. A Holy Cross education is meant to expose its students to particular subject matter and to the burning questions of the day, and it requires educators filled with zeal for that subject matter and for engaging those pressing questions. The modeling of zeal invites students to explore their own passions and interests. Broad-based exposure to the liberal arts serves an important vehicle for students to discover or rekindle passion for learning.

In Communities

In founding the priests, brothers, and sisters of Holy Cross, Moreau stressed not only the value of collaboration and unity for the success of its works, but the cultivation of a familial spirit that would enable Holy Cross to grow “like a mighty tree.” Working together with a unity of purpose, while laudatory and most likely fruitful in itself, would be more efficacious in an environment of mutual positive regard marked by a familial spirit. Moreau’s sense of familial spirit was marked by a deep sense of shared purpose and responsibility as well as a deep regard for the uniqueness of each member. Each member of a Holy Cross institution is responsible for its flourishing. This responsibility extended beyond the performance of one’s own specific task and extended to the creation of an atmosphere where everyone could flourish. In terms of pedagogy, Moreau believed that students ought not to be treated identically as a collective whole, but that educators ought to have a deep working knowledge of each individual student. An educator communicates a profound respect and appropriate affection for the individual student when she expresses interest in helping a student to discern his or her unique aptitudes and passion. As families rally to support their members that are most in need, so Holy Cross educators ought to focus their attention on the student who is most in need.

Hope

Moreau chose as the motto for the Congregation of Holy Cross, a phrase from a contemporary hymn, “O Spes Unica, Crux Ave,” “Hail the Cross, Our only Hope.” It was a proclamation that engaging the suffering of our world was an act of hope in the power of the resurrection to make all things new. Moreau spoke of education as a “work of resurrection;” it was meant to be a liberation from the darkness of ignorance; it was meant to be a vehicle for the transformation of society; and it was meant to be a process that helped to make all things, especially the persons engaged in it, new. In order to

ensure that his educational institutions were places of hope and resurrection, he insisted that access be provided for the poor and that his students, both rich and poor, engage in service to the poor in the local community. The students at Notre Dame de Sainte Croix, for example, worked with the St. Vincent de Paul Society in caring for the poor of LeMans. While education provided access to opportunities for personal success, the common good of society was not to be neglected. Education, often, in his day, the privilege of the elite, was to be open to all and to serve the broader good of society. Education was to be an act of hope.

Holy Cross Education at King's College

King's College, founded and sponsored by the Congregation of Holy Cross, seeks to embody in its life and mission the educational philosophy of Blessed Basile Moreau. The contemporary culture of assessment suggests that we ought to hold ourselves accountable to his vision as it is embodied in the charism of the Congregation of Holy Cross today. Such accountability suggests that we probe our mission and use it as a tool to examine the educational experience that we provide to the students entrusted to our care.

As we do so, it may serve us well to recall to mind the foundation of King's College and to place it within Moreau's vision of education as a work of resurrection. The College was founded by the Congregation of Holy Cross in response to a request from Bishop Hafey of the Diocese of Scranton. King's was to provide a quality Catholic higher education to the sons of coal miners. In the winter months, the miners descended into the bowels of the earth before dawn and emerged only after dusk. Their grueling and backbreaking labor for the good of their families and community was made even more onerous and psychologically demanding by lack of the light of day. By his death and resurrection Christians believe that Jesus overcame the power of darkness with the light of God's mercy, exchanged the pains of death for the gift of new life, and enabled all people to embrace their dignity as the beloved children of God. King's was founded so that the sons of coal miners might be liberated from the darkness, afforded opportunities for new life, and embrace their dignity for the betterment of society. Father Connerton captured something of that founding vision in his often quoted phrase that King's teaches its students, "not only how to make a living, but how to live." It is our common calling to continue to engage this great work of resurrection on behalf of the students we are privileged to serve.

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