

THE PALLOTTINE APOSTOLATE OF EDUCATION IN INDIA

L' APOSTOLATO DELL' EDUCAZIONE IN INDIA

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“In her encounter with different cultures and with man’s progressive achievement, the Church proclaims the faith and reveals ‘to all ages the transcendent goal which alone gives life its full meaning’. She establishes her own schools because she considers them as a privileged means of promoting the formation of the whole man, since the school, a centre in which a specific concept of the world, of man, and of history is developed and conveyed. The catholic school forms part of the saving mission of the Church, especially of education in faith” (The Catholic School, The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1971).

The biggest of the schools and colleges in India are moving just in one direction, that is to satiate the desires of the students and their parents. This desire is good results in examinations, high salaried jobs and the very desired social status. Thousands of wealthy and intelligent students are sailing westwards to get admission in the best of colleges. The schools and colleges in India are often labelled as business centres which promise to prepare the students for the lucrative careers. Currently, there is a huge shift in the management of the schools and colleges, which are administered by the politicians and businessmen. Most of the schools have changed their institutions into centres where students are prepared to pass annual examinations. Hence, the entire formal education is geared towards earning as higher grade as possible. The genuine objectives of educations in these schools are left behind. The formation aspect of students is overlooked both by the institutions and parents. This is why the Educational Apostolate has a huge role to play and our Catholic schools and colleges should become centres of human, spiritu-

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al and faith formation. In the following pages, we will survey and analyse how the educational institutions have a pivotal role to play while executing Educational Apostolate in India.

1. Meaning of Educational Apostolate

Through education, the students are directed to God and his creation. Through education, we try to bring about peace and harmony in the society. Through education we orient the students to their God given talent fulfilment and their personality development that matches the blue print ordained by God for all these individuals. There are several Church documents either from the Popes or others clearly indicating that the educational apostolate is a necessary instrument that fits into the mission of the Church to bring about Catholic identity in the children of God. Several efforts have been made through the organization of conferences and seminars in India whether of the Bishops or of Catholic Educationists who time and again asserted that Educational Apostolate, through schools and colleges, is an indispensable instrument in accomplishing the mission of Christ.

It is in the very nature of the Church to proclaim the Gospel to all the nations (Mt. 28:20). The Catholic Schools and Colleges offer a fertile environment. Where Christian Education is concerned the following points can be recognised as important from the document of *Gravissimum Educationis*:

- *“Catholic Schools also have a missionary thrust, by means of which they make a significant contribution, including those areas in which no other form of pastoral work is possible to the evangelizing mission of the Church though out the world.”*
- *“Drawing from the above, the Catholic schools and colleges should be integrated within the lively pastoral activity of the parish and diocese and the Universal Church. Hence, the Catholic schools should play an integral role in the pastoral activity of a diocese. Hence, it is the responsibility of the Bishops and the Major Superiors to acknowledge and lend support to Catholic schools: only the Bishop can set a tone, ensure the priority and*

effectively present the importance of the cause to the Catholic people.”

It is needless to say that the purpose of Catholic schools is the formation of all students enveloped by Gospel values, that these students become the leaven of the society, leaders in their places, a clarion call of the Church for upholding and nourishing the values of Christ. In a few words, it is the responsibility of the Catholic schools to form, nourish and educate in faith and Gospel values, to make people live by the commandment of loving God and their neighbour. In the Message of 1979 to the National Educational Association of the United States: Pope John Paul II wrote, “*Catholic education is above all a question of communicating Christ, of helping to form Christ in the lives of others*”.

Our school apostolate has a Catholic world view. In its formation of individuals, the whole person is taken into consideration. The Vatican documents speak of “*an integral education, an education which responds to all needs of the human person*”. Various aspects of an individual are attended to, like intellectual, social, psychological, moral and religious. In such formation the person of Christ takes a central place. The Gospel values become the framework and the spirit of formation. In addition to various secular aspects of education, the faith aspect of the Catholic Church is firmly and essentially inculcated.

Another aspect of Catholic schools is to help individuals grow in wisdom and to discover truth. This is a great challenge to the teachers and the students. Closely following Papal teachings, the Holy See’s documents on schools insist on the principle that education is about “*...discovering truth both in its natural and supernatural dimensions. The school considers human knowledge as a truth to be discovered. In the measure in which subjects are taught by someone who is knowingly and without restraint seeks the truth, are to that extent Christian. Discovery and awareness of truth leads man to the discovery of the Truth itself*”.

Most Rev. J. Michael Miller, CSB, said in his presentation to the Solidarity Association, Washington D.C. 14 Sep 2005, “*The Holy See, through its documents and interventions, whether of the Pope or of other Vatican Offices, sees in Catholic Schools an enormous heritage and an indispensable instrument in carrying out the Church’s mission in the*

third Christian millennium. Ensuring their genuinely Catholic identity is the Church's greatest challenge. Complementing the irreplaceable role of parents in ensuring the education of their children, such schools, which should be available to all, build up the community of believers, evangelize culture and serve the common good of society”.

2. Significance of Educational Apostolate to India

Educational Apostolate has immense significance to the people of India. The schools and colleges contribute to the people of India by attending to various aspects: illiteracy, poverty, multi culture, multi religion and spirituality. It has been happening for centuries. This is an immense impact across the entire country. Name the best of the leaders in the country or name the philanthropists, bureaucrats or the well placed, all have taken roots in Catholic schools and colleges in India.

2.1 Educational Apostolate can Reduce Poverty Rate in India

Falling into the definition of the world bank as regards extreme poverty, we had 270 million Indians in 2016. They had no more than 1.90 dollars or less a day. There is a vast chasm between the life of people in urban areas and rural areas. Of these large number of poor Indians 80% lived in rural areas. These people mostly survived on daily wages. On the other hand, economy rose in leaps and bounds in urban areas where large multinational corporations such as IBM and Microsoft, base their software development headquarters. *“India, which now has the world's third largest economy in terms of purchasing power parity has been an urban centred, industrializing nation since its independence in 1947. Over the last 25 years, India has been noted for its significant economic growth which looks to continue for the 2017 -2018 fiscal year with an expected growth rate of 7.2%. While India has maintained much economic success, many failures and weaknesses still debilitate the nation's full potential. For example, the poverty rate in India has been less severe in recent years, but there is still much room for improvement”* (Tess Hinteregger, How Education is Affecting the Poverty Rate in India).

It is a common man's observation that economic growth takes place in the urban areas while in the rural areas it is either slow or absent due to lack of adequate education. There is thus a huge gap between the urban and rural life. No amount of economic growth can solve the issues of extreme poverty in rural areas. *"A study in 2002 found that these conditions in India are partially due to educational poverty, which is defined as the deprivation of basic education and literacy. Only six percent of the income from the poor households is invested into education and health, while the majority is spent on other necessities such as food and fuel"* (Tess Hinteregger, *How Education is Affecting the Poverty Rate in India*). The extreme poverty rate from 53.86% in 1983 has fallen to 21.23% in 2011. Observing this the world bank strongly believes that education is the fitting instrument for poverty alleviation in India.

Obviously, eradication of poverty can take place only through education and the Catholic schools can play a pivotal role in this. In fact, much of India today owes to the great efforts of foreign missionaries. Catholic schools today have done a yeoman's service in enhancing education and reducing poverty in India. Much has been done through the efforts of Indian government through various schemes like *Sarva Sikhsa Abhiyan* project which brings education to the door steps of people in villages and consequently helps in reducing poverty.

In many of the government schools, quality education and the required infrastructure is missing. A reinforcement through adequate efforts is made by the Catholic schools in India. Former U.N. Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon, professed *"with partnership, leadership and wise investment in education, we can transform individual lives, national economies and our world"*.

2.2 Educational Apostolate can Build Bridges in the Diverse Cultural Milieu of India

Diversity and plurality are strongly etched characteristics of India. It is a matter of pride to witness a diverse India living as a big democratic country, but also a cauldron of conflicts due to the same diversity of cultures and religions. More people have died from reli-

gious and caste conflicts than from hunger and poverty. It is here that Catholic education can play an important role in building bridges and taking forward people into harmony and peace. In most of our schools, we have people of several religions, castes and cultures. Through careful implementation of workable plans, the Catholic schools can bring about unity, respect and understanding. Prior to Vatican II, the Educational Apostolate was considered a pious, virtuous act but today the Church documents are full of acceptance of Educational Apostolate as an important and integral mission of the Church. Current Church teachings are rich with references declaring that education is an indispensable dimension of mission. Pope John Paul II says, *“All basic academic activities of a Catholic (institution) are connected with and in harmony with the evangelizing mission of the Church ...”* (Ex Corde Ecclesiae).

Core values that the Catholic schools can nurture in the students are: responsible citizenship, commitment to human rights, respect for creation, compassion, tolerance, commitment to social justice, freedom from discrimination, freedom of religion, a dynamic work culture, selfless service and a culture of peace. It may be relevant to quote here from the Mission document of St. Vincent Pallotti International Residential School in India: *“...It is to provide a socially conducive environment for a harmonious growth of an individual who will live from moment to moment, joyfully aware of his/her own specific individuality and with an admiration for the differences in others of the community. The student would be assisted to academic success, personal growth, responsibility to the societal needs, patriotism and a sense of global belonging. In a natural rustic setting away from the hustle and bustle of a choking city life, the students are introduced into a family of trust and love where individuals grow with a lifelong appreciation of learning and an awareness of the awesomeness of God’s providence”*.

2.3 Educational Apostolate is a Way to Faith and Spirituality

Pope John Paul says, *“The mission of the Catholic school is the integral formation of students, so that they may be true to their condi-*

tion as Christ's disciples and as such work effectively for the evangelization of culture and for the common good of the society." (Address of the Holy Father Pope John Paul II to the Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Regions of Chicago, Indianapolis and Milwaukee, USA, on their "Ad Limina" Visit, May 30, 1998, #2).

Our schools and colleges can be centres of faith formation and spiritual awakening. Most of our schools have one or more priests and sisters heading the institutions. In addition to academic excellence, groups of students can be formed as a leaven of faith and spirituality in schools. In the policy of the CBCI, we find *"The policy highlights our duty to give serious attention to and deepen the authentic spiritual formation of all our students and nurture the faith culture of Christian believers"*. And it further says, *"Being a Christian is essentially an invitation to become a person of faith, hope and love"* (CBCI Office for Education and Culture, CBCI Centre, New Delhi).

3. Educational Apostolate is an important aspect of our charism

"The Union of Catholic Apostolate, a gift of the Holy Spirit, is a communion of the faithful who, united with God and with one another in accordance with the charism of St. Vincent Pallotti, promote the co-responsibility of all the baptized to revive faith and rekindle charity in the Church and in the world, and bring all to unity in Christ" (Gen. St. UAC 1).

In one of the articles from Australian Region "Belonging to the Pallottine Family" it is written quoting St. Vincent, *"Whether young or old, healthy or sick, alone or in community, in any position of life given to them by God, all can participate fully in the apostolic mission of Jesus Christ by any means whatever"*.

From the above quotations and other sources, we gather that the UAC has very important characteristics such as universality, collaboration, inclusiveness, fraternity, diversity, omnipresence of God, openness, dynamism, change etc. In other words, people of all walks of life can live in a union that is God and neighbour oriented.

In the light of the above our schools and colleges can become centres contributing to our charism. Our schools and colleges can also become the clarion call inviting change in the people around as Pallotti desired. In the recent years the Church began to recognize schools and colleges as communities of faith and charity. From the document *Gravissimum Educationis*, we gather that in the mind of the Church there is a gradual transition from the school as an institution to the school as a community and ultimately to the community of faith.

In somewhat similar words, CBCI Office for Education and Culture, India says, *“Developing micro models of communities of solidarity across the many borders that presently divide us, like the caste and creed and culture, and make us less human is therefore a major objective of the policy. Jesus showed us the way by proclaiming the Kingdom of God on earth by breaking down age-old barriers of mind and heart, and all types of exclusion and discrimination. In our apostolate of education, our goal, both as individual institutions and as members of corporate bodies (the diocese/religious congregations/ Church in India), is to build inclusive human communities”*.

India is a diverse country of religions, castes, languages, cultures etc. While living together in this diversity is a miracle, the frequent tensions due to this diversity is a reality that should challenge every God-fearing person and even more challenging for us the Pallottines whose charism lies in the union of all diverse people. All India Catholic Education Policy says, *“Making a major contribution, through education, towards creating a more just, equitable and harmonious society is a key objective of this policy”*.

Conclusion

The great commitment of St. Vincent Pallotti to the education apostolate and the history of his foundation clearly reveal the importance of our schools for the apostolate of the Pallottine family. From the beginning, the education apostolate has played a key role in the development of the Pallottine foundation. Those responsible for Pallottine schools, began a process of reflection on the Pallottine charism and our educational institutions, that brought about a

collaboration among Pallottine schools on the national and international levels. Subsequently, various formation projects were realized, researching and deepening the Pallottine charism in the education apostolate specially focusing on diverse aspects like social, Pallottine, spiritual, academic, nature, etc. A concrete result of the said process was the Vision and Mission for the Pallottine Schools. The vision statement says, *“The unceasing love of God as experienced and expressed by St. Vincent Pallotti is the beacon to our educational institutions which are moulded into a unifying force of love to bring about in the staff and students a staunch faith in God and an all-encompassing charity. They are spiritually and educationally animated to become integrated persons, Apostles and a Clarion Call to all people irrespective of caste, creed, colour and place”*.

To make sure that this vision does not remain merely a theoretical text but be a practical impetus for our educational commitment on the various continents, a mission statement was put in place, which says, *“...the mission of our educational institutions, through the collaboration of Clergy, Religious and Laity as envisaged by St. Vincent Pallotti, is to prepare all students to realize their unique God given potential through spiritual growth, intellectual excellence, social involvement, emotional integrity, Christian charity and brotherhood. In their education, the staff and students will develop such attitudes as honesty, sincerity, self-discipline, integrity, cooperation and responsibility to become exemplary citizens in a diverse, challenging and evolving world. This mission shall be accomplished in the backdrop of Pallotti’s ever breathing spirit in the love of God that urges us on”*.

In India, Education Apostolate has an essential pivotal role to play. In all our educational institutions, we find students and teachers hailing from many states of India and thus diverse in culture, religion, language and in every other aspect. And yet our institutions are very good examples of unity in diversity. These institutions can be missionary in nature in addition to the academic excellences. As mentioned above these institutions can be heralds of Gospel values, examples of living together as unions of enlightened persons as envisaged by St. Vincent Pallotti. It is here that we can have access not only to

students of all cultures and religions but also their parents. The schools in our mission areas generate vocations. It is through schools our pastoral work too can be enhanced. Reaching different corners of the country, to people of all faiths and castes, educational institution is one sure way.

Although cultural contexts vary, as well as educational possibilities and influences, there are a number of quality hallmarks that Catholic schools and universities must be able to ensure: respect for individual dignity, uniqueness of individuals, respect for all cultures, acceptance of all differences and yet an acceptable atmosphere to live together in peace and harmony. Besides a wealth of opportunities, students could also be offered to see meaning in life, to understand the ever-living presence of the Divine that can become one shelter for all, thus melting the differences. If a balanced focus can be offered to the students on cognitive, affective, social, ethical and spiritual areas, mission in educational institutions can become a living model of missionary work.

“The mission of the Catholic school is the integral formation of students, so that they may be true to their condition as Christ’s disciples and as such work effectively for the evangelization of culture and for the common good of society” (Address of the Holy Father Pope John Paul II to the Bishops of the Ecclesiastical Regions of Chicago, Indianapolis, and Milwaukee (USA) on Their “Ad Limina” Visit, May 30, 1998, #2).

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