

Discovering the Legacy of Holy Cross Educators

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Inaugural Convocation of the Holy Cross Institute

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I am pleased to welcome you to the Inaugural Convocation of the Holy Cross Institute at St. Edward's University. Since my appointment just over a year ago, it has been my privilege to visit each of the secondary and middle schools represented here today. Over and over what I heard was, "Bring us together."

This is not the first meeting of Holy Cross sponsored schools and colleges of these proportions. In the spring of 1989, there was a gathering of administrators of all Holy Cross secondary schools at Mater Dolorosa Retreat House in Sierra Madre, Calif. In 1992, all Holy Cross sponsored educational institutions met in South Bend to mark 150 years of Holy Cross education in the United States.

Since the spring of 1994, in New Orleans, the administrators and board chairs of schools of the South-West Province have met under a rubric called "The Table." From that meeting, seminars for faculty formation, a summer social justice immersion program for students and an annual student leadership workshop have been created. A somewhat parallel structure emerged in the Midwest and Eastern Brothers' Province leading to the creation of a joint mission effectiveness office, called Holy Cross Educational Ministries, under the direction of Brother Tom Dziekan. All of these entities anticipated and contributed to a ready response for the Holy Cross Institute initiative.

From its inception the institute was meant to be inclusive. Bringing schools and colleges related to the three U.S. Brothers' province was considered only the first step in launching the institute. Today, the Holy Cross higher education community will initiate a conversation on how they might choose to participate in the institute and how the institute might serve the individual and collective efforts of the colleges and universities. Having had the privilege of serving both in secondary and higher education, my experience tells me we can learn from one another.

When we began planning for this convocation, the Board of Governors defined the following outcomes:

1. Bring Holy Cross educators together and provide the opportunity to get to know one another.
2. Discover and share our experience of legacy as Holy Cross educators and deepen our understanding of this legacy. My remarks will lay the groundwork for and frame this morning's conversation groups.
3. Define our expectations and recommend priorities for the services to be rendered by the Holy Cross Institute. This will be achieved through focus groups conducted throughout the afternoon.

The history of Holy Cross education in the United States begins in northern Indiana in 1842. Sustained foundations have existed in New Orleans since 1879, in Austin since 1885, in Portland since 1901, and in Chicago at Holy Trinity since 1910. However, the majority of the schools and colleges represented here today are all of an age having been founded between 1946 and 1968 — part of the post World War II boom of vocations and Catholic school expansion. I observe that this era of unprecedented growth was a singular phenomenon in the American Church, and that many of us here today have spent most of our professional lives adapting to a changed reality. Things change and therein lies our story.

The Holy Cross story has always been characterized by adaptability. In the words of Father Tom O'Hara, "All mission is local." Whatever template we arrived with was refashioned to meet the needs we encountered — whether it was the children of Polish immigrants in Chicago, the sons of coal miners in Wilkes-Barre or the children of migrant farm workers in Texas.

With some ingenuity we continue to adapt. One size does not fit all. Through a variety of sponsorship agreements and arrangements, we have worked to sustain the Catholic identity and Holy Cross legacy of our schools. In most instances provinces retain ownership of property and apply canonical oversight through reserved powers exercised by members of the corporation, while at the same time empowering boards of directors and trustees to assume increasing responsibility in policy making, governance and planning for the future.

Let us say up front that it remains to be seen if sponsorship in its various and evolving forms together with an initiative such as the Holy Cross Institute will sustain congregational identity and relationships. Can a school without Holy Cross religious be identified as Holy Cross? When this question was posed to a group of students at Bishop McNamara HS, without missing a beat one young woman responded, "Certainly. Just because the Pope isn't my pastor doesn't make me any less a Catholic."

The true test for Holy Cross religious present this morning is this: you are seated next to, surrounded by and, indeed, outnumbered by a group of men and women who call themselves Holy Cross educators. Do you identify them as Holy Cross educators? We must be clear that the primary impetus for the Holy Cross Institute has come from non-vowed Holy Cross educators. (I happen to believe that in some measure it is the devotion of these women and men to Basil Moreau that has accelerated his cause for canonization.) One researcher who has addressed this identity issue contends, “In the final analysis, the laity will be the arbiters of whether congregational identity survives.” The challenge is to “successfully inculcate the founding culture in a core group of people who will continue within the charism.” (Holtschneider and Morey)

The Holy Cross Institute can provide valuable resources. A newsletter and website are already in the works. The institute will very likely provide workshops, seminars and research projects, but its most critical task is to provide future leaders — storytellers, coaches and mentors — who accept responsibility as that core group of people and who will articulate the mission, charism and Holy Cross legacy.

Consider these lines from Moreau: “If we put no obstacles in the way of His designs, God will bless them, for He Himself has inspired whatever has been undertaken up to the present for the completion of this important work. Yes, I have the firm confidence that God will bless our educational program since He is giving us the means to realize it.” (Circular Letter 36). Do we believe we are engaged in God’s work and that in our sponsorship agreements based on mutual trust and that in the shared responsibility of the Holy Cross Institute, God “is giving us the means to realize it?”

For purposes of clarity and to convey where I am coming from, I will take a moment to define my understanding of three terms I will be using this morning: mission, charism and legacy.

Mission

Mission is derived from the Latin *mission*, meaning “to send.”

“It is not that the church has a mission, but rather the mission has a church. And what is that mission? The person and word of Jesus Christ.”

— Roger Cardinal Mahoney, *Archbishop of Los Angeles*

“Evangelization is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize.”

— Pope Paul VI, *On Evangelization* (1975)

The mission of a Catholic and a Holy Cross school is the gospel.

The mission is not static but dynamic. It demands a response: Go and teach all nations.

Charism

Charism is derived from the Greek, meaning “gift.”

The Church speaks of the charism of a religious congregation, its unique gift to the church. The Second Vatican Council instructed religious congregations to rediscover their founding charism.

I like to think of charism as a lens through which the founder [Basil Moreau] read the gospel: “An aspect is magnified: trust in Providence, the hope of resurrection.” Or, I see it as a prism, catching the light and reflecting some aspects of the gospel.

In addition to having his own take on the gospel, Moreau was also an educator with very definite ideas about teaching and learning and about curriculum in terms of both content and methodology. “I have always been convinced that the first duty of any teacher is to produce Christians; society has a greater need for people of values than it has for scholars. Knowledge itself does not bring about positive values, but positive values do influence knowledge and put it to a good use.”

Sister Graziella Lalande, CSC, of Canada is one of the few Holy Cross scholars who has drawn on Moreau’s treatise, *Christian Education*, in her reflections on the spirituality of Moreau. She remarks succinctly on the charism of Moreau:

In fidelity to the totality of his call, Father Moreau had also to **create a means of evangelization**. The privileged means for Father Moreau would be education in the broadest sense education through teaching on different levels and with different groups. Education of the whole person: it was a matter of preparing the younger generation not only to serve Christ in His Church, but also to be responsible citizens, good workers in the secular city, at the heart of the troubled society of his day. Under the urging of Father Moreau, and according to his vision of humankind and of Gospel Salvation, a specific kind of education gradually emerged in Holy Cross.

Is it charism or charisms? In congregational materials one finds both mention of the charism of Holy Cross and lists of charisms. For my part, I chose to speak of the charism as a prism that refracts various qualities or characteristics, such as reliance on Providence, community or sense of family, spirit of unity, the paradox of cross with the hope of resurrection, zeal, hospitality and compassion, the inclusivity of mission, and the education of the whole person.

Legacy

Legacy is defined as a “bequest,” specifically something transmitted by or received from an ancestor or predecessor.

Legacy and colleague are derived from the same Latin word *legare*, “to depute.” Colleagues share something in common.

The gift (charism) that is given you as a colleague is a bequest (the legacy) to be shared, acted upon, invested in, and enriched and transmitted to the next generation.

We speak of a gift as something freely given. In our context, the synonym “talent” may be more appropriate.

The legacy of Holy Cross education is not a gift given to be buried in the archives but a talent to be acted upon. The legacy is not some precious heirloom to be put in a museum — it is gold to be tested by the fire of our experience and reshaped into a useful form.

We have an obligation to those who went before. “The footsteps of those men who called us to walk in their company left deep prints, as of men carrying heavy burdens. But they did not trudge; they strode. For they had the hope.” (*Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross*, 8:122)

With this background, I share with you my journey in discovering the legacy of Holy Cross educators. During the past year, I visited every secondary school and participated in the University of Portland Living the Mission Conference in June. It was a straightforward process, as I simply listened to you.

From almost verbatim, here is what I heard. I suggest that by listening carefully you may come to know one another as well as I have come to know you. I will also comment on the implications of what I heard and the challenges presented by these observations.

In my conversations I found faculty, administrators and students to be cordial and candid. While there is a remarkable resonance between and among schools, allow me to say that I encountered some dissonance.

The first category of dissonant remarks related to the diminishing presence or absence of religious. You speak for yourselves.

“We have the example of the Brothers. We don’t want to think about when they aren’t here.”

“When the Brothers were here they ...” These statements lacked a corresponding sense of ownership for the legacy or a sense of responsibility for transmitting the legacy.

“We’re really fortunate because so many Brothers have taught here and we have their example.” When asked to articulate what was learned, the response was, “Well, you know ...”

“If we could just get a couple more Brothers ...”

“With the departure of Brother X, I am beginning to understand it is up to us and wondering what do we do now.”

“I have come to understand that a school may recognize its Holy Cross legacy only after there are no Brothers present.”

Other remarks represent a category of dissonance regarding what might be called “legacy literacy.”

For some, their school is “different” or “distinctive.” Nevertheless it is inexplicable, “words cannot describe it.” Others will say that it is “just another Catholic school.”

There are those administrators who feel that their faculty is “tired of hearing us talk about Father Moreau.” For others, Basil Moreau and talk about Holy Cross is a “just another layer of varnish,” suggesting it is a current enthusiasm that will wear out off. In one school, the administrators speak candidly of the disconnect between words and practice in their community.

In some instances there may be too much literacy. The language is losing meaning and becoming trite or jargon. One principal says, “I am having trouble getting my arms around the full implication of ‘educating hearts and minds.’” The original language is, “*We shall always place education side by side with instruction; the mind will not be cultivated at the expense of the heart.*” Meaning is lost when the line is reduced to sound bytes that will fit on banners and brochures. Thus, it has become “educating hearts and minds” or even “educating hearts,” despite the fact that for Moreau the mind has priority, and original thought implies both balance and tension.

Earlier I remarked on the experience of resonance. For the intuitive observer or listener there is considerable evidence that the Congregation has left its mark, but the mark left is often not recognized or perceived as an element of the Holy Cross legacy. It is more implicit than explicit. I discovered a remarkable resonance of experience, if not language, which reverberates across the country and of which many Holy Cross educators seem unaware.

Now we'll turn our attention to student perspectives. Last night you heard directly from several students. In my conversations, students had this to say when asked how this school had changed them:

"I found myself."

"I chose this school because I believed it is the place where I could become the person I want to be."

"I found my voice."

"I am more cosmopolitan." When his friends laughed, he replied: "That's a good word. I am man of the world." To which another added, "I know what he means. I've learned I can hold my own here, and I know I can hold my own out there in the world."

"I am holier. Before I came here religion didn't mean anything to me and now it is everything. That's why I am going to a Catholic college."

"I used to care only about sports. I've become more focused now and tied the whole thing together."

"I've learned to be more responsible for my own actions."

"There's a lot besides head things that can be learned. I'm more mature and more intelligent because of what I've done outside the classroom."

"I have learned to be more aware of other aspects of my life like finding God for myself and learning what priorities are important to me."

"I look forward to going to physics. The teacher is passionate about his profession and goes above and beyond what he needs to do. He also shares his life experience. We learn more than just physics — how to live your life and be a good person."

"When you develop a relationship with teachers, you want to work harder for them because you don't want to let them down."

"One of my teachers had trouble as a new teacher, but she made sure that no one got left behind. In this respect, she became my mentor in life, as well as my teacher."

"This is a special place. Other schools won't accept non-Catholics. I am a Muslim and am accepted for who I am."

Across the table from him sat a Hindu, who added, "From the beginning they were sensitive. Before the first Mass the counselor called in small groups of non-Catholics and explained the Eucharist to us. After that I felt really comfortable here."

"The Christian service program changed my life. I realize now how really good I have it."

"Teachers care about you as a real person. You get the idea that this is not just a job for them ... they really want to be here."

"There's something for everyone here."

"You know the Holy Cross day doesn't end at 2:30."

"This is a brotherhood."

"This is a family."

Now, listen to yourselves.

The most common thread in faculty conversations relates to a commitment to maintain a diverse student body, in terms of socioeconomic status, ethnicity and ability. I only remark that among our schools there are several sometimes glibly referred to as schools for "rich kids." It is my experience that they have aggressive need-based financial aid programs to assure diversity.

"The kind of experiences students get here is what helps develop them into the kind of people we want to teach. My son has been able to be who he is here. He's the long-haired blonde kid who is goofy. But he's found himself in the band. There's a tolerance for kids who act different and are different."

"We begin where students are."

"When we accept a student, we accept a family and that means you add to your mix. You get the bright and the average."

"I've been teaching here 12 years. Last year my son graduated from here. As a parent I have a whole new appreciation for what we do here."

"We are more interested in working with those kids who choose us than choosing who we will teach."

“We do an extraordinary job with ordinary kids.”

“I am surprised by the number of alumni who come back to teach. I would never go back to the school I graduated from.”

“The thing I like about this school is that we have all kinds of kids of varying ability. We are not highly selective.”

“This is not an elitist place.”

“We take three sections in a remedial program and work really hard with these guys. Some of them end up taking AP courses. The thing that is really hard sometime is when other schools say we take just anyone. It is like you have to apologize for teaching the poor.”

I would remind you that these are the same people who for the most part insist that whatever is distinctive about their school cannot be put into words. Moreover, students do not discover themselves, their voice, become holier and even more cosmopolitan on their own. Finally, to begin where students are and to accept them for who they are is truly incarnational teaching.

Challenge: To Comprehend What We Apprehend

I think most understand that this legacy we speak of has been transmitted orally from generation to generation of religious through conversation and modeling behavior. Before 1986, when Moreau's *Christian Education* was first translated by Brother Edmund Hunt, English-speaking Holy Cross religious and educators did little in the name of Basil Moreau because they simply did not know what he had to say about education. First published 150 years ago in 1856, it gathered dust in the archives for most of those years.

In fact, the suggestion to translate *Christian Education* resulted from a sustained session of story telling among several Brothers assigned the task of discovering the characteristics of a Holy Cross education. For better or worse, I suggest that the uncovering of this text stalled the process of self-discovery. I recall a moment while listening to George Martin articulate his understanding of the Holy Cross legacy when a Brother leaned over and said to me, “Does he know that Father Moreau said almost the same thing?” My response was, “For heaven's sake don't confuse him ... he gets it.”

Those who have taught know how different the experience is when a student discovers an answer and truly gets it versus when she is given the answer. To discover something for oneself requires inquisitive exploration.

In the words of T.S. Eliot from *Little Gidding*:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

A scholar in Asian spirituality at the Graduate Theological Union (GTU)-Berkeley, Choan-Seng Song writes in a paper titled “In the Beginning Were Stories, Not Texts:”


Future is won by those who dare to dream and to tell their dreams in stories ... Future belongs to those who dare to dream and strive to convert their dreams to stories, stories of struggle, stories of suffering, also stories of hope, faith, and compassion.

Moreau dared to dream. His story was one of struggle, and he found expression in his teaching and in *Christian Education*. And even though the text was seemingly misplaced for 100 years or more, the story was so compelling that it continued to be told. Remembering “in the beginning were stories, not text,” I would respectfully suggest that it is the stories of our experience that validate *Christian Education* and not Moreau's words that validate the experience.

I have to be honest. I sometimes had to restrain myself from the temptation to interrupt a listening session by blurting out, “You sound just like Moreau.” For instance, when I was sitting in that conference room at St. Edward High School in Lakewood, Ohio, listening to the Muslim and Hindu, I was reminded that the year before I was sitting in Dhaka, Bangladesh celebrating the 150th-anniversary of the Congregation in Bengal. It would have made little difference to that audience if I had felt compelled to tell that story, however relevant. For me, it is more important that the contemporary language and experience echo Moreau than that we parrot Moreau. Some laughed at the student's remark that he was a man of the world, but I will tell you that sentiment echoes an important principle of Moreau's educational philosophy.

Look to yourself: Just as you do with your students, I urge you to begin where you are. Listen to yourselves, you are telling that story. Recognize the language that names your experience. The language of our legacy is not something that “can't be put into words” or was heard only “when the Brothers or priests were here ...”

If you can't name it, you don't own it. If you don't own it, you can't share it. Our critical task is to bring to comprehension what we already apprehend but what remains tacit and implicit knowledge. The resonance of our stories is not by chance and their echoes will not reverberate by chance.



What stories do you tell? I've heard you speak of close relationships between faculty and students, dealing with hearts and heads, arriving early and staying late, creating community — sometimes called family or brotherhood — accepting students where they are, and celebrating diversity. They are stories of faith, trust in the goodness of the young, and compassion and caring.

They are stories from the heart:

The best among us do not excuse themselves
from matters of the heart.
The heart does not know the Pythagorean Theorem,
the parts of speech or plant phyla.
The heart knows love and its loss,
craves compassion and responds to hospitality.
The heart struggles with ambiguity,
weighs choices and considers consequences.
The heart, given space, learns to risk once it finds courage and hope.
In the stillness of listening, it is the heart that hears the gentle breeze.

There are also intimate stories that are told back to us by our former students. Recently, a colleague spoke of receiving an e-mail from a student of some 25 years ago. The student, recounting a successful career in the Air Force, shared that he had earned two bachelor's degrees along the way. He ended their conversation by saying, "I remember when you called me into your office, and you had my progress reports, which weren't very good. You asked me if there was something going on that accounted for my poor grades. I will never forget your look of disappointment. I knew that I never wanted to disappoint you again."

This morning's conversation is about telling your story, discovering what you most passionately care about and finding a language to express it. Each table has a designated group leader who has materials to initiate the conversation.

Why a conversation? Jane Regan writing in *America* magazine remarks:

Adult faith formation is not exclusively about information; it is primarily about providing opportunities, within a faith context, for adults to talk with other adults about things that matter. As such the best process for adult faith formation is not lecture but conversation. But the information is not enough — it is not information for its own sake, but information that is in service of formation and transformation. By the way adult faith formation is structured, we can invite adults to look beyond the "what" of our tradition to the "so what?"

It is the purpose of the Holy Cross Institute to form a community of learning and practice among Holy Cross educators. We must be a community of learners willing to explore the "what" in order to discover the "so what." In the words of George Martin, "We must continue the conversation."

Fortunately, we have a text. We discovered a language in *Christian Education* that corresponds to our experience. It gives us a context in which we can deepen our understanding of our legacy. Indeed, Basil Moreau continues to challenge us. The closing lines of *Christian Education* read:

Hurry then; take up this work of resurrection, never forgetting that the special end of your Institute is, before all, to sanctify youth. It is by this that you will contribute to prepare 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 within self a family.

For Moreau the measure of mission is the formation of new men and women "for better times than ours." Elsewhere, Moreau has remarked:

Our students are destined to live in the business and problems of the world. So, they should not be made to live a type of life that they would have to abandon when they leave our institution. They should be trained in such a way that they may be everywhere what they were in school. We must never lose sight of this principle (from Basil Moreau's *Teachers' Guide to Holy Cross*, which is lost and known only by references found in other writings).

These lines are a clear expression of Moreau's conviction that education is a cohesive process. The medium is the message. Just as our students are accepted for who they are, warts and all, and brought from threshold to threshold as new men and women, they must also be prepared to accept and address the world they enter — flawed as it is — bringing to it the transcendent hope of the resurrection. A resurrection they first experienced at the hands of caring teachers who believe as St. Paul, "My little children I must go through the pain of giving birth to you until Christ is formed in you." (Galatians 4:19)

May the conversation continue.



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