

Writings on Education
From the Circular Letters of the Superiors General

EDWARD SORIN, CSC
1868–1893

Circular Letter #62 - 1 March 1876

As a teaching body, here is our first duty Circular early revealed: we must excel by a special care to place at the head of all fields that of religion; hence our chief end is to make of our pupils good Christians before they are learned scholars ... Honor and glory to the teachers who will bear me out in this commitment; and especially to those who will impart, besides a real religious instruction, a true sense of the spiritual life in the young hearts entrusted to their care. For them I predict choice blessings. In proportion as they will have taken God's own interest to heart, Heaven's blessings will follow them ... Let us place in honor the study of religion; let us give it the time required; and, above all, let us create and maintain efficient means of imitation ... Our teaching leaves behind us all the aspirations of this world and fits our students for eternal life.

Circular Letter #93 - 29 August 1880

What I want ... is to bring our whole family to a new and lively sense of our duty on the vital question of Catholic education. The daily and universal demand from the Catholic press, and many private high quarters, that Catholic educators should not be satisfied with the mere name of Catholic institutions, but should more amply prove the real and thorough Catholicity of the education imparted in their schools, cannot be set aside as unfounded. Even what was deemed sufficient a few years ago does not now meet or answer, the increasing wants of an age remarkable, above all others, for its constant progress in infidelity, materialism and actual enjoyment, all of which cannot be refuted or resisted any longer save by a superior and fuller training in the positive teachings and moral habits of religion, without which Catholic education is only a name. Understand me well: today, more than ever before, Catholic education, as we propose to give it in our schools, means for our youth a knowledge of divine truths, more comprehensive and developed, more visibly sustained by daily Christian practices, cheerfully accepted and faithfully observed by them as an indispensable evidence of their initiation to a Catholic life, of which they may well feel proud all their life, and not ashamed or tired, as so many are when entering upon their duties in society, evidently because their early training never established a foundation upon which anything solid might rest. Of every student confided to us by Catholic parents we must, first of all make a practicing Catholic for life. This is our first duty; to overlook or discharge it negligently would be a serious offense to society ... Each time a student is received, a contract is entered upon, with a clear obligation on our side to train that person for eternal life. To one assuming such a responsibility, that

student shall be, the whole year, an object of constant regard; otherwise, there is wanting even a sense of common honesty ...

Circular Letter #105 - 13 January 1882

A grand, a noble task has been assigned to us as educators of Christian youth; a task, the importance of which none of us can duly appreciate, and for which we shall never be able here below to return proper thanks to God.

Circular Letter #125 - 7 January 1885

Teachers take upon themselves the most important — the all-important — office or duty of training youth for the reality of life; planting deep in every young person entrusted to their care the foundations of a divine and lasting faith; even more, the strong love of that faith, and that to such a degree that they may feel, when leaving the school, more proud of their faith than of any other object or success obtained in their studies. Hence the twofold advantage to be found in our Catholic institutions alone — the knowledge and the love of our faith.

Circular Letter #125 - 7 January 1885

Teachers must know thoroughly the various fields of study they have to teach. This is universally admitted; and the qualification is every day becoming more strictly required. The time of common or mediocre teachers is rapidly passing away ... But even admitting the required proficiency of all our teachers, will their superior personal ability secure all the advantages most undoubtedly needed in, and confidently expected from, our Catholic schools? No; something more than knowledge and talent is required in the classroom for the complete education of the future generation. It is not enough to cultivate the intellect, to cram the minds of our youth with such knowledge as can be learned in the public schools. This instruction, or filling up of the mind, is only a part, and a supplementary part, of the great work of *education*. Education, in its proper sense, implies the expansion and cultivation of all the faculties, mental and physical, the cultivation of the heart as well as the mind; and of these, the formation and enrichment of the heart is undoubtedly the more important of the two ... Above all, and first of all, you must see how you can best plant in your students a real and lasting sense of the spiritual life, while storing their minds with knowledge suitable to their age and condition.

GILBERT FRANÇAIS, CSC
1893–1926

II Circular Letter #3 - 4 May 1913

If a wide and deep fund of knowledge is a powerful means of exerting real influence over youth, this knowledge needs to be supported by a strong religious education in order to be truly effective as an enduring good. By instruction we store the minds of students with knowledge; by education we raise their spirits to God, an incomparably greater work; by the combination of instruction and education walking hand in hand we form people of character, genuine Christians, which is the perfection of the teacher's work. Learned people are admired, cultured people are respected; people of learning and Christian culture are followed: they lead others to their true goal.

ALBERT COUSINEAU, CSC
1938–1950

Circular Letter #10 - 25 December 1941

Let us not hesitate in recognizing the power and the glory of our mission as educators. We may jeopardize it by our carelessness or indifference, or by an exaggerated concern with other activities that catch our attention. We must cherish the freedom to educate, which up to the present time has enabled us to accomplish great things.

Circular Letter #10 - 25 December 1941

Let each of our teachers bring to the *apostolate of education* ... an eager and sustained preparation. Three conditions appear to me as indispensable, and I shall briefly refer to them here.

1. Educators must *know well the subject they teach*. In the work of education there is nothing to replace the necessary knowledge; no, not even devotedness, for one can give no more than one possesses.
2. Educators must know how to keep *intellectually alive and up-to-date with their subject*. It is not enough to begin well; one must finish well what one has begun. (Otherwise, we will find teachers who) began as masters of their subject, but were not able to adapt themselves later on to the actual needs of their students, or to keep in touch with the progress of human knowledge.
3. Educators must be *people of prayer*. I speak here of prayer as a function of teaching. All should pray for the success of our mission as educators.

Circular Letter #32 - 7 April 1950

All of you who are called to the apostolate of education must reflect on the nobility of this work ... Certainly you exercise a ministry that is difficult and delicate. It is your task to form sound and honest minds and to fill them with the light of truth and faith. You should enhance the intellects of your students with facts and principles and with a knowledge that is wide and solid; but you should also develop in their hearts virtues which will direct and sustain these intellects toward their end, which is integral truth both in the order of nature and of grace ... No matter how many degrees and honors teachers may have, they must consider these as a starting point, as a visa, which permits them to climb the peaks ... Careful thought, constant and daily work, are the essential conditions for success in teaching. Otherwise, teachers stiffen in a kind of death in their acquired knowledge ... Such people have ceased to be educators.

CHRISTOPHER O'TOOLE, CSC
1950–1962

Circular Letter #26 - 8 December 1961

In education excellence seems to be the order of the day ... “Excellent” when applied to our educational policy means not only that teachers are as competent as possible, that students are encouraged to do their best possible work, that proper screening is used to insure good and capable students, but also and *above all* that the education we control and impart should have a Christian and Catholic orientation ... We are not pursuing excellence merely to produce top-notch students or to compete with other institutions ... We should not be content to match the excellence of secular schools merely on the academic level; we are aiming to match and even go beyond the academic excellence of these schools, and surpass them completely in a field of excellence which, if not unknown to them, is one in which they wander about without compass or chart. We will surpass them by producing a more excellent *person*, because the excellence for which we strive as Catholic educators is the education of the person whole and entire ... If, at times in practice, on account of the composition of the student body, tactics must be varied, at least students and teachers of other faiths will know what we stand for in principle and will, we hope, see in our conduct a living witness of the teaching of Christ.

Circular Letter #26 - 8 December 1961

If in the schools ... we do not succeed in transforming the mentality of the students in accordance with the spirit of the church, then to that extent the schools are a failure, no matter how fine an education may be given or how fluent the students may be in French or English when they graduate. The graduates of these schools should be leaders. If they are not true *Christian* leaders, our time and money have been wasted.

THOMAS BARROSSE, CSC
1974–1986

Circular Letter #8 - 20 November 1977

It is, of course, crucial in the schools that we awaken an awareness to the reality of social injustices and a sense of responsibility for social justice. An education cannot be neutral. To educate others is to make them more powerful. To educate them to their responsibility is to contribute greatly to the cause of social justice. To educate them without helping them to develop a sense of moral responsibility is to run the risk of having them later use that power in pursuit of selfish ends and, perhaps unwittingly, in exploitation of their neighbors ... A critical question for the schools is this: To what values are we educating? Are they the values of an affluent consumer society? How can we prepare young people for a life in an increasingly technological and affluent society so that they will shape it according to Gospel values?

CLAUDE GROU, CSC
1986–1998

Circular Letter 3 - 1 September 1987

Education in its widest sense, seen as an effort to walk with the men and women around us towards the light of Christ — a journey which implies the growth of both individuals and communities and liberation from ignorance and oppression — seems to me to summarize practically all the dimensions of our mission ... Our work in education is always done in the context of faith. Even when our particular task as an educator may not have a direct link with our faith, we are with those we serve as witnesses to the faith and we call them by all that we are to a life lived in the light of the gospels. If we lose sight of this perspective or if we reduce it to a vague sense of being where we are in the name of faith, we are no longer truly educators in the faith.

Our work aims to liberate the creative strengths of individuals but also to allow them to express their most profound aspirations, aspirations to which the social context does not always allow free expression these days.

Commentary on Constitutions, 1997

Education consists not just in transmitting information, but in allowing each individual to develop personal gifts. At the same time, we need to awaken in each person that deepest longing which modern society tends to suppress.

Circular Letter #14 - 9 December 1994)

In educational institutions we see a reflection of how we have responded as a church to the ecclesiology, which emerged from the Second Vatican Council. We are few among many; we are fellow workers who share with others in a common effort to foster the kingdom of God. Lay administrators, teachers and staff are our collaborators. The changing modes we experience in our relationships with others in these institutions reflect the dynamic character of the changing situation we face. This transformation is constant, and it will continue to confront us with difficult questions about our future in the ministry of Christian education ... Much remains to be done. How do we provide for a continuation of the Holy Cross charism in a school in which there are no longer active religious? How do we maintain our option for the poor when the schools least able to afford our presence are most in need of us? How do we incorporate the insights of our lay collaborators into our own tradition of education?

HUGH CLEARY, CSC
1998–

Circular Letter #3 - Holy Cross Jubilee 2000

Father Moreau believed in education as formation of the whole person. He wrote of his ardent conviction concerning the role of Christian education in evangelizing a fractious culture. *We can state in a word the kind of teaching we wish to impart. We do not want our students to be ignorant of anything they should know. To this end, we shall avoid no sacrifice. We shall always place education side by side with instruction; the mind will not be cultivated at the expense of the heart. While we prepare useful citizens for society, we shall likewise do our utmost to prepare citizens for eternal life.* (Basil Moreau, Circular Letter 36)

***Pentecost: The Harvest Continues*, Circular Letter #5, June 8, 2003**

Our Congregation of Holy Cross was founded at a critical period in the history of Western civilization when reason replaced religious faith as the central paradigm for considering life's mysteries. In the devastating wake of the French Revolution, our founder, Basil Moreau, sought to help renew the Church in France, and then around the world, by offering an education that took both the roles of faith and reason seriously. The progress of science and technology would need to be informed by Gospel revelation if it was to be authentic.

The ideology of reason as a power unto itself militated against a religious understanding of life. Science and technology, particularly as expressed through the Industrial Revolution, became a law of logic unto itself. And while capitalistic economies promised justice for the worker then seemed to simply shift financial power from the monarchies to elite business monopolies. The new cultural confidence in science and technology quickly became the tenet of faith for the modern age. Science and technology were seen as the means for harnessing nature's forces to provide for economic growth and the wants and needs of human longing.

Father Moreau was a visionary for his times. He knew that the power of reason was very real and formidable but that it had its limits within a finite horizon. Reason is one of the highest attributes of human nature. Yet if we put our ultimate trust in reason alone, Moreau believed, we will eventually despair. It is not salvific.

As we say, Basil Moreau sought to educate the whole person by attending to the formation of both mind and heart. His words are familiar to all of us: "We shall always place education side by side with instruction; the mind will not be cultivated at the expense of the heart. While we prepare useful citizens for society, we shall likewise do our utmost to prepare citizens for eternal life." (Circular Letter 36)

Father Moreau was clear that it is Jesus' revelation, not reason's logic for acquiring material resources, which ultimately reveals the truth concerning human fulfillment

and the longing of the human heart. In every Holy Cross education Moreau expected that his Congregation would “seek to make God known, loved and served.” For Moreau, cultivating the mind and heart meant learning to return love for love with an infinite horizon.

The Enlightenment notion identifying material progress as the absolute goal of life comes at a high cost. Wasteful consumption of the earth’s good erodes our environment as well as our spirit. The earth is not able to provide all that human beings hunger for, even in the finite material world. There are not enough of the earth’s resources to go around for all that we desire today and will want tomorrow. In such a situation greed and violence become the stepchildren of an ever-darkening Enlightenment. Greed and Violence give birth to terror, a creature of despair.