

The Catholic Church And Divinization Through Education

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Abstract

The Catholic Church is considered as the largest educational institution in the world. For the church education is ‘a divine mission’ for transforming the world based on the Gospel values of ‘service in love, peace rooted in justice and fellowship based on equality’. Everyone irrespective of caste, creed and gender have access to education with the intervention of the church in the educational field. Until then in Kerala and in the other states of India education was reserved to high class people. Certain political leaders and media persons rigorously and continuously criticize the church and try to condemn all the services and contributions of the church in the field education. The church proposes that education should be based on moral, individual and social values. Thus the proper and ultimate aim of education is divinization of human person. The role of the church in education is not just to make a human better human, not just to make him a more social being with good social and moral or ethical values but make him to actualize the divine potential in him.

Introduction

The Catholic Church is always interested in providing education. She is active both in the fields of religious and secular education. The Catholic Church is the biggest educational institution in the world. When we speak about the global educational perspective we can never side back the role of the Catholic Church in providing worldwide education. Church is the owner of huge educational structure which is extended all over the world. And she is the strongest promoter and protector of human rights, wellbeing and social equality of mankind.

Indian education scenario and the Catholic Church

India is considered as one of the ancient civilization which had taken education seriously. India possesses a long history in education. Indian heritage begins from the Vedas. But there were many shortcomings in the educational systems due to the cultural pattern followed. In the Indian Context we find in the Vedic education system education was meant for high class and in the Muslim educational system education was for the Muslim community and there too gender inequality prevailed¹. In that situation of untouchability, social inequality, social injustice and lack of adequate educational opportunities to different sections of the society, the church came with apt and adequate educational opportunities to all sections of the society irrespective of caste, colour, creed and gender. It is because of the timely and bold

intervention of the church in the field of education that helped the downtrodden people of India to have education which was once reserved for the upper class people of the society.

Here we should give tribute to the eminent educationalist St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara. He is the master mind behind the spread of education all over Kerala. When he was appointed as the Vicar general of the Verapoly Arch Diocese, he issued a decree in which he ordered to begin schools by all churches under his jurisdiction (J Powathil 2008).ⁱⁱ And in those schools children were admitted without any social or gender discrimination. Today the church runs more than 3000 schools all over Kerala. In India there are around 3785 nursery schools, 7319 primary schools, 3765 secondary schools, 240 colleges and 1514 technical institutes run by the Church (J Powathil 2008).ⁱⁱⁱ Through all these educational institutions the church provide opportunity for moral education and character formation of the individual and there by socio-cultural development. One can rightly say that before the intervention or coming of the church in the field of education, in Kerala and in the other states of India education was reserved to high class people. Educational Opportunities were denied to many due to the caste system which prevailed in India.

State versus Church

There are always arguments against the Church. Though the Church played a major role in the development of India and Kerala but unfortunately both the Central and State Governments are reluctant to accept the great service, contribution and role of the church in the field of education and development of Kerala and India. Though the Catholic Church had played a major role in the field of public education the Central and State Governments are not only unwilling to accept the contributions of the church but also makes collective effort keep away the church from the educational field (J Powathil,)^{iv}. The argument for doing this is said to be that the church through education aims at conversion. It is true that the church hands over the treasure of faith from generation to generation through religious education. But it is a false notion to conclude that the sole aim of church is religious conversion. If the sole purpose of education is conversion then all those who had come out of educational institutions of the church would have become Christians or members of the church.

We find in the text books the educational reformation and contribution of a few individuals like Sree Narayana or Chattambi Swamikal but those texts consciously keep silence about the great contribution of Christian missionaries in field of education. Nowadays because of this meaningful silence many people think that the church had done nothing in the field of public education. It is a great mistake and it should be corrected immediately or else we are doing great injustice against the greatest promoter of social justice and provider of educational opportunities for the downtrodden and the marginalized people of India.

But again we find that an effort is strongly made from different corners to keep away the church from the field of education. We doubt that there is a hidden agenda behind this strategy. Even though the church has accelerated the social transformation and social development and stood firmly for the freedom of individual (CBCI 2007)^v, on the basis of certain lonely incidents some rigorously and continuously criticizes the church and tries to condemn all the services and contributions of the church in the field of education. Those who criticizes the church should never forget that the first school began by St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara was a Sanskrit School^{vi} in 1846 which itself proves the dedication and love of the Church to the Indian culture and languages.

Education is the mission of the church

When we look at the Catholic Church we find a number of educational institutions varying from big universities to nursery schools both in the secular and religious realm. Why the Catholic Church is giving so much importance to education? It is nothing because the church considers education 'a divine mission' In the Gospel of St. Matthew. 28, 19-20 we read "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age". The church cannot disregard this command of Jesus. To give awareness about the Gospel values of 'service in love, peace rooted in justice and fellowship based on equality' (CBCI.2006-2)^{vii} through moral and religious education to the nations is the prime duty of the church.

The church played cardinal role in the social transformation and there by compelled the society to end up social inequality. The educational policy which emphasized ethics and morality enabled social development and a feeling of oneness among different sections of the society and in the long run such education will help individuals and the society to work for the common good of the society (Goudium Et spes, 30)^{viii}. Thus the development thus became participatory development where all the sections of society play its role in the development of world.

We all believe that education makes an individual a social being. By education we mean all types of education which includes formal, non –formal, informal and so on. It is the accepted fact that education begins in the family itself. Before the so-called formal process of schooling the human child learns from home. His character formation begins at home. Parents, siblings, relatives and neighbours have their own peculiar contribution in the growth and development of the child. Therefore social situation is very much important in the character formation of the child. The church always and every time stick to the point that the child is educated in the family (M Anikuzhikattil, 2003).^{ix} Therefore proper family backing is a must for the development of the child. Not only the family members but also those who relates to the family and the child are very important in the process of character- formation. Therefore we need a society well developed with good religious and moral values. If the society has no positive outlook towards moral and religious values then whatever formation and education the child gets that may be of little use. The educational institutions communicate and nurture the values of the society to the generations. This means the role of educational institutions and the method of imparting education is of prime importance.

Divinization is the supreme aim of education

The Latin word 'educare' means to bring forth or to bring out. Thus education in one sense means bringing out the best in child and man. Usually everybody says the role of education is development of the human person. That is to say the all round and the integral development of the human person. This in way speeds up the socialization process. Therefore for many the major purpose of education is not the individual development but to actualize the socialization process of the individual. That is making an individual a best human person who can cope with all the situations and so on.

The Catholic Church moves a step further. For the church education is for making a man divine. In other words the role of the church in education is not just to make a human better human, not just to make him a more social being with good social and moral or ethical values but make him to actualize the divine potential in him (J Powathil 2013)^x. That is to say that making a man divine or to say divinization of the human child is the actual goal or the supreme end of education. Quoting the Vatican II Mar Mathew Anikuzhikattil states that we should provide that education which encourages the children and youth to know and love God (G E 2)^{xi}.

So the purpose of educational institutions is to make an individual divine person. In 1964 Higgs Boson spoke about “God-Particle” and the scientific world is in search of ‘God-particle’ until this day. But long ago from the scriptural time onwards people of faith always recognized the god-particle in man (Gen.2, 7). This divinity is actualized in man through education. By this we not simply mean allegorical divinization but divinization in actual sense. We have to take it seriously that the supreme aim of education is divinization of the individual. Make him aware of the divine call of each every individual.

When we come to the point that the supreme aim of education is the actualization of the divine potential in man the question arises how we can attain this goal. For this we need masters with spirit of God. Therefore the teachers as per the vision of the Catholic Church must be teachers with divine touch or spirit. That means the teachers must have the faith in their mission. They are called not just to teach the alphabets and the life skills but they are doing a divine mission with enriching the children with their own experience with the divinity.

So the church speaks to the teachers that not only in the classrooms but also in their private life they should be persons with imitable personality. The true model for all the teachers is Jesus the greatest teacher world has ever seen. Therefore position of catholic teachers it is such a great mission that they are participating in the mission of Christ (M Anikuzhikattil 2003)^{xii}. When speak in this manner some may come with the doubt that catholic institutions are for religious conversion. It is not the fact. If it were so there would have been number of Christians in India. The purpose of education institution is making the individual divine or to say enabling one to sense the divinity in oneself. This realization of divinity in oneself and the other enables human to give utmost respect to the other.

The church always upholds the need of asserting God in education. In every sphere of life we can see the visible signs of God. One can consciously deny these visible signs of god but that doesn't mean that we can deny the divinity in him. If God is taken away from the process of education then the values will become foolishness. Because in a world of competition, success is determined in terms of achievement and it is a grievous mistake. It is really shrinking the aim of education to mere material achievement.

It is true that we all dream a better life, a change in the present life situations. We convey this dream to the students. But how can we simply stick on to the material development alone without giving adequate and apt importance to the radical spiritual values. The Church firmly affirms that everything flows from the seeking of god because Jesus says “strive first for the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you”(Mt.6,33). Once we are enlightened we can accept all the difficult situations in life.

When we have no faith in the values of truth, love, trust etc. then how can we move forward as a society?

Therefore it is a social necessity to work for divinization. “Lupus est homo homini, non homo, quom quails sit non novit,”(Titus Maccius Plautus,495)^{xiii}. The Latin proverb appear in the play named *Asinaria* can be translated as ‘Man is no man, but a wolf, to a stranger’. It really means “A man is a wolf rather than a man to another man, when he hasn’t yet found out what he’s like.” When Thomas Hobbes explained the proverb he wrote “Man to Man is a kind of God” (*De Cive*, 1642)^{xiv}. We need a global order where there is an education which aims at divinization of all and brotherhood of all. When God has no role in life values will perish. Then peace of world will be at stake. If individuals fail to attain the goal of divinization then each instant make vicious situations.

Divinization helps an individual to accept the other. In the modern world we find a number of educational institutions and scientific development and material progress, but we are always afraid of the other. This fear or threat makes life difficult. Religious fanaticism and terrorism comes from the failure of attaining supreme aim of education.

How someone can cut the throat of innocent people in the name of God. Media report killing in the name of God by the so-called learned people who have proper schooling and college education. It is astonishing that cold- blooded murder of innocent lives in the name of God is rationalized by educated people in the modern society. In the middle east we find attempts to wipe away Christianity from the land by killing hundreds and hundreds of innocent people and making thousands homeless and pushing them to the wilderness without a ray of humanity is to be addressed by all nations. Whether it is done by Christianity or by Islam or by Hinduism human genocide is to be addressed as human genocide. It is a threat to the humanity. When we look at those fanatics we find that they also have religious education. But what is lacking in that education is that which makes man to realize the divine imprint in him and to recognize the divine imprint in another.

Conclusion

So the education institutions and educators have a crucial role in attaining the supreme aim in education. Here comes the need of educators with faith in divine values and education institutions which transfer these divine values to the learners so that one can realize the presence of the divine element in him and in the society. In such a society there will be no space for religious fanaticism, intolerance and chaos. A divinized one can never become a terrorist or fanatic. The prime feature of the divinized person is that he is able to accept everybody as they are. Therefore the education for divinization cannot be side back from the policy of the Church. So it is the ‘special function of catholic educational institutions to develop in the community an atmosphere animated by the spirit of liberty and charity based on the Gospel’ (Vatican II 1965)^{xv}. So we should never deviate from this aim of divinization. Catholic Church, ‘values highly those other educational media which belong to the common patrimony of men and which make a valuable contribution to the development of character and formation of men’ (Vatican II 1965)^{xvi}. Therefore the Church makes an appeal to all the educators and curriculum framers to keep in mind the ultimate aim of education that is realizing the divine imprint each every human.

References and Citation

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