

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND EDUCATION FOR GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Global citizenship is a way of living which helps us to recognize that our world is an increasingly complex web of connections and interdependencies; wherein our choices and actions may have repercussions for people and communities locally, nationally or internationally. The Catholic Church is the largest educational institution in the world. The church considers education as ‘a divine mission’ to give awareness about the Gospel values of ‘service in love and peace rooted in justice and fellowship based on equality’. The Catholic Church proposes that global citizenship should be based on moral, individual and social values. According to the Catholic Church, the proper aim of education is really to promulgate and promote awareness about our common home and common brotherhood. In the present global situation of “collective selfishness”, what should really happen in our educational institutions is the empowerment of the weaker sections of the society ‘by taking the fundamental option for the poor’. The church stands for global citizenship and for brotherhood of all the people.

Introduction

‘Citizenship’ is the identity of a person within a city, state or nation and their right to work, live and participate politically in a particular geographic area. ‘Global citizenship’ refers to a person who identifies oneself with a ‘global community’ over their identity as a citizen of a particular nation or place. Through global citizenship one’s identity transcends geographical or political borders and the responsibilities or rights can be defined from the stand point of a member in a broader class - ‘humanity’. This does not imply that such a person denounces their nationality or other local identities, but such identities are given only ‘second place’ to their membership in a global community (Israel, 2012).

Global citizenship – nature and characteristics

A global citizen is one who identifies oneself with being part of an emerging world community and whose actions contribute to building the values and practices this community on the basis of two fundamental assumptions viz., (1) there is an emerging world community with which people can identify oneself and (2) such a community has a nascent set of values and practices (Israel, 2012). Ban Ki-moon (2012) the United Nations Secretary-General exhorts that “*We must foster Global citizenship. Education is about more than literacy and numeracy. It is also about citizenry. Education must fully assume it’s essential role in helping people to forge more just, peaceful and tolerant societies*”. Global citizenship nurtures self-respect and respect for others, wherever they live. It encourages individuals to think deeply and critically about that which is equitable, just, and minimize harm to our planet. Exploring new vistas of global citizenship themes help learners grow more confident in protecting their beliefs, and become more skilled in evaluating the ethics and impact of their decisions.

Global citizen is one who contributes to the wider world community. They don't just follow the crowd. They are their own person who wants to make a difference but they know they can't do it on their own. A global citizen is conscious of the wider world around them and has a sense of their own role as a world citizen. They respects and value diversity, possess an understanding of how the world works and at the same time they are annoyed by social injustice. They involve themselves within the community at different levels - from the local to the global. They are willing to do something to transform the world a more equitable and sustainable place and takes responsibility for their actions. To become effective global citizens, the youth need to be more flexible, creative and proactive. They must be able to think critically to make decisions and solve problems. They must be able to communicate ideas effectively and work well within teams and groups. These skills and qualities are increasingly recognized as being essential to succeed in other areas of life including many workplaces in the 21st century. These skills and qualities can be developed only with the use of active learning methods through which young people learn by doing and by collaborating with others (Oxfam, 2015).

According to Oxfam (2015), education for global citizenship is a framework to equip learners for critical engagement and active interaction with the challenges and opportunities of life in a fast-changing and interdependent world. It is transformative with respect to developing the cognitive skills, values and attitudes that learners require to participate fully in a globalized society and economy and at the same time to secure a more just, safe and sustainable world than the one they have inherited. Education for global citizenship can support a wide range of school-improvement priorities and educational outcomes. It involves a wealth of real-life contexts for learning, which can inspire learners and raise their motivation and attainment. It also emphasizes developing skills in critical and creative thinking, reasoning and communication skills. The extensive range of participatory teaching methodologies and learning strategies supports the learners' acquisition of skills as well as their understanding of the global background of their lives. Teachers and school leaders have recognized that global citizenship education is capable of developing and enhancing values and skills that are integral to the educational aims and school ethos. In short, they view it as synonymous with their understanding of outstanding education and as an integral part to a broad and balanced curriculum.

His Holiness Pope Francis – The icon of global citizenship

Christina Nunez (2014) opined that being a global citizen means something different to each of us: it is about caring for one another, in spite of geographical limits, and guarding the world we live in. Nunez (2014) observes that there are so many marvelous individuals who live by this philosophy each and every day, from the Dalai Lama, to the late Nelson Mandela. Nunez (2014) affirms that His Holiness Pope Francis - the spiritual leader to the world's 1.2 billion Catholics, is an icon of a global citizen who guides us by example – as an individual who has used his position of power to stress the importance of inclusivity, compassion for the poor and needy as well as respect for the environment.

The present leader of the Catholic Church is the first pope in recent years to reach out to non-believers instead of demonizing them. His Holiness Pope Francis takes a different stance from his predecessors by not condemning non-believers. He said "*doing good*" is the basic principle that unites all humanity, beyond the diversity of ideologies and religions.

Nunez (2014) asserted that through the historic statement “*A gay person who is seeking God, who is of good will — well, who am I to judge him?*” Pope Francis expressed his differing views that a gay person should not be marginalized, but rather included in the mainstream of society.

His Holiness Pope Francis set an example by ignoring stigmas and caring for the sick, disfigured, and disabled through a powerful message he gave to the world in that remarkable moment when he identified a disfigured man in a crowd of worshippers, approached him, and kissed him on the forehead. Nunez (2014) also observed that Pope Francis spoke out against anti-immigrant hatred and intolerance when he said, “*It is possible to dialogue, to listen to one another, to make plans together, and in this way to overcome suspicion and prejudice, and to build a coexistence that is ever more secure, peaceful, and inclusive.*”

In his address on the 38th Conference of Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO, 2013), His Holiness Pope Francis demonstrated compassion for all human beings “*A way has to be found to enable everyone to benefit from the fruits of the earth, and not simply to close the gap between the affluent and those who must be satisfied with the crumbs falling from the table, but above all to satisfy the demands of justice, fairness and respect for every human being.*” Pope Francis stressed the importance of food security and nutrition when he addressed delegates from the 172 nations at the Second International Conference on Nutrition. He observed that despite there being enough food to feed the world, food issues are regularly subject to corruption, manipulated information as well as false claims about food security; and addressing these challenges needs to be the first step towards remediation. Pope Francis reminds us that “*Our grandparents used to make a point of not throwing away leftover food. Consumerism has made us accustomed to wasting food daily and we are unable to see its real value*”. His Holiness Pope Francis condemned wasteful behavior before his weekly audience at St. Peter's Square through his remark that “*Throwing away food is like stealing from the table of those who are poor and hungry*”.

His Holiness Pope Francis stood up for the environment when he praised trash pickers who sort through trash for recyclable and reusable items. He thanked them for their dignified work, and reminds us that recycling is good for the environment. Nunez (2014) observed that Pope Francis himself has a record of living modestly rather than lavishly. He chose to live in a guest house rather than the papal apartments, and he typically prefers simple clothing to expensive dresses.

‘*Earth is our common home and we have to work together for the protection of our common home*’ (Laoudato Si, 2015). Therefore as “co-members of this common home” and global citizens, His Holiness Pope Francis exhorts us to strive for the “common good” of the world. The proper aim of education must be to really promulgate and promote awareness about our ‘common home’ and ‘common brotherhood’. He reminds us that what unites the mankind is not just the love towards the earth but all the more the loyalty towards the Creator of the universe and a sense of brotherhood among different nations. Through several examples, Nunez (2014) urges us to recognize the important role we will have to play as global citizens and follow the footsteps of His Holiness Pope Francis in our journey towards global citizenship.

Educational perspective of the Catholic Church for global citizenship

His Holiness Pope John Paul II (1990) in the message for the World Day of Peace rightly observed that *“there is a growing awareness that world peace is threatened not only by the arms race, regional conflicts and continued injustices among peoples and nations, but also by a lack of due respect for nature, by the plundering of natural resources and by a progressive decline in the quality of life. The sense of precariousness and insecurity that such a situation engenders is a seedbed for collective selfishness, disregard for others and dishonesty”*. He cautioned that those who try to keep the Church away from the field of education is really trying to keep away God, morality and ethical values from education, for whom global citizenship is uncontrolled freedom of the individual where there is less stress for social and collective responsibility of the society.

“Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mathew19: 19) is the strongest and ever most morality put forward by the church for the development of global citizenship. This exhortation for global citizenship is backed with more than 2000 years of tradition and an educational system firmly rooted on the belief in God, world and man. Empowerment of the weaker sections of the society *‘by taking the fundamental option for the poor’* through love for your neighbor should be the motto of our educational institutions. Education should enable the citizens to accept each other. Only then shall the dream and vision of education for global citizenship will become a reality.

Conclusion

The educational philosophy of the church combines both religion and ethics, it includes international understanding, integration and assimilation of eternal values and thereby enabling the individual and the society to take up acts of love, sacrifice, ability to cope with society and even certain times willingness to accept defeat for others. The church wants to say to the society that in a world of competition, ‘collective selfishness, disregard for others and dishonesty’, the true education is to support the weaker sections of the society when they are oppressed and abandoned. In true education, religion and ethics are important because no individual can truly love the other if he has no awareness about the eternal values. The church stands not only just for global citizenship but also for brotherhood of all the people all over the world inclusive of all religion and culture. The perspective of Catholic Church is to nurture individuals for global citizenship through education based on moral, individual and social values. The Catholic Church envisions education as a means to create awareness about the Earth and the environment.

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