

## **AN EXPERIENCE OF REFLECTION – IMCS INDIA**

### **“The Presence of The Church in the University through Liturgia, Diakonia, and Martyria – Reality and Vision”**

*Indian Response by  
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I am immensely delighted and elated and my heart brims with joy and bliss to stand before you, Your Eminence, Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski, the Honorable Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, my dear fellow speakers on the dais, the University Chaplains from all over the world, the representatives of Global, National and Local student movements, my counterparts in the International Movement of Catholic Students, the student leaders and Ladies and Gentlemen,

I owe this opportunity as a gift from the Almighty to speak to you on behalf of the university students in India. I shall be here deliberating my reflections from the perspective of the minority Catholics and oppressed masses of our country. The Church in India is an active Church. It is the Church of/for/with the poor and the marginalized. It is a witnessing Church. Witnessing the love of the Father in the community of believers is the lived effect of the unlimited, unconditional and unfathomable Love of God. It is a loving Church. Love that does Justice is the guiding principle of the faithful in India.

India is a subcontinent rich in natural resources, earthy minerals, water reservoirs, ostentatious coastal assets, and a loving lot of people – a little more than one billion of them! And I am here as one of them. In this paper, I shall dwell upon the status of higher education in my country and the challenges before the Catholic educators there and try to identify the forces that impel the presence of the Church in our universities.

At present, the primary, middle and secondary schools have quantitatively achieved a great compound growth rate than in the past, and the institutes of higher education have considerably increased in number. The number of students enrolled (about 10 million) in the universities seems very high. There is a constant growth pattern in the number of literate masses. India can reasonably boast of the high and competent standard of education it offers. Some educational institutions have ostensibly reached beyond the global standard. The country contains the ‘so-called’ creamy-layer of higher education with the tag of special “centers of excellence” like the Indian Institutes of Technology. The credible achievement of the educational system, both in creating literates and in maintaining the status quo of the educated, is enormous and tangible.

But, there is another side to this drama. The system has miserably failed to encompass the whole lot of the poor masses. There is a high percentage of stagnation in the enrollment. The prevailing very high percentage of drop-outs (we shall call them as 'pushed-outs', for since it is done purposefully and coercively) disturbs us. Alarming, the dropout percentage at the primary level is 42.3% and at the secondary level 58%. Among the Dalits (the former 'untouchables') it is 49.35% at the primary level and 67.72% at the secondary level. There are tens of thousands of schools that lack proper infrastructural facilities— No pukka building, no blackboards, no drinking water facility, not enough teachers and so on. Rural India still lags behind. I have personally met tribal communities, which have not sent any child to a school. They have not sent because they cannot send! There is no facility. This reflection leads us to the first conclusion that though there has been substantial increase in the quantity of educational institutions in India, there is an extensive decrease in the qualitative position of the education system.

Education in India in general, and university education in particular has certainly remapped the social fiber of our people. University education opens vistas of new life and enlarges the vision. The objectives of higher education in the documents are inspiring. In 1948-49, the Radhakrishnan Commission (a commission is set up by the government to assess, analyse and activate the institutions whenever it is needed, and it suggests ways and means to amend the plight of the system) opined, "university education should

- 1) Seek to harmonize life and various branches of knowledge.
- 2) Provide general, liberal and professional competencies
- 3) Develop the inborn qualities of individuals
- 4) Try and build character among students
- 5) Lead to discovery of new knowledge

In 1952, Mudaliar Commission suggested that the objectives of secondary education are:

- 1) Development of democratic citizenship
- 2) Development of personality and leadership
- 3) Cultivation of professional efficiency

In 1964, the Kothari Commission recommended a national system of education which would be a powerful instrument for the 'creation of democratic, secular and egalitarian society which would be based on science and spiritual values and wherein the evils of poverty, ignorance and ill-health would be eliminated through a human use of scientific and technical knowledge'. And each attempt to renew and reform the educational system pointed out the nexus between the society and the system. The report of the working group in Asia 1974 holds that higher education has five goals: political stability, social development, human resource development, cultural development and economic development.

But the objectives of higher education that are supposed to reform and transform the society unfortunately remain as 'paper verbalism' and 'classroom rigmaroles'. In India, there are 260 million people living below the poverty line without proper and adequate food, clothing, shelter, good water, health care, education and employment. Higher education has not used its resources to its full measure towards annihilating poverty in the nation. According to the 2001 Census of India, more than one third of the population in the seven-plus age group is still illiterate. 296.2 million persons are illiterate and about 189.6 million of them are women. The male-female literacy gap is as high as 21.7%. According to the World Education Report, India has 32.3% of the illiterates of the world. This leads us to further reflection that the very purpose of education has been defeated in the country. Once again, education as a system has suited only the vested interests of the rich. Especially after the vivid actualization of the globalisation process has commenced, not only the basic, foundational philosophy of education undergoes changes but the dynamics of the social processes are also severed.

Other issues related to higher education:

Besides the above-mentioned threats of the educational system in India, there are other pressurizing factors that are in force today. They are Liberalization of economy that operates hand-in-hand with Privatization and Globalization, Commercialization, Criminalization and Communalization of the educational system. As new and emerging trends, these forces pose grave dangers to the country greater than ever before. Free enterprise in education is going to produce more intellectual pygmies who shall exist without social sense and social responsibility. The educational institutions will be mere knowledge industries.

Commercialization of education will endanger the social integrity of the country. Only the 'moneyed people' will get access to 'the best' education possible. More private educational institutions will be founded with less government aids and control thus camouflaging the system into a profit-making trade. Mushrooming of private institutes offering professional courses with high capitation fees is a growing menace. Education has already turned out to be a commodity for the rich and the poor are thrown out of the scene. The system is at present rich-friendly, money-friendly, market-friendly and profit-friendly. It avoids being pro-poor, pro-marginalized, pro-human and pro-life and therefore God-friendly. Consequently, greater number of Dalits, tribals, women, refugees and unemployed youth will be wiped out of the system.

Communalization of education is another serious intimidation to the minorities of the country. The attempts to homogenize the pluralistic tradition and culture of India not only proliferates fear and consternation for the minority educational system but also attack the very socio-economic-politico-cultural fiber of the country. The majority-minority mind-set generates only violence and hate. And a country that is motivated by violence and stereotypes, prejudices and hate will

only hijack the Constitutional measures that protect and safeguard the rights of the minorities.

A total transformation and overhaul is required in the education system in general and higher education in particular. While there is a considerable quantitative increase in the educational institutions in the country, especially in the post-independent era (in 1950-51, there were 28 universities in India, in 2004 we have 350, the number of colleges has also increased from 700 in 1950 to 14,000 now in 2005. The number of students in the colleges has increased from half a million to 10 million), yet, a lot more needs to be done in terms of qualitative improvement of the system. Due to the lack of adequate funding to be allocated by the State, qualitative viability is at the low ebb. In the First Five-year plan, the Government allocated about 34 million dollars for education, which amounted to 0.7% of the National Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In the Ninth Five-year plan, the allocation is to the tune of 20,381.6 crores that is about 3.7% of GDP. Still, the proportion is very much less in comparison with many countries. The continuing high rate of illiteracy, the scandalously low rate of female literacy, the low rate of literacy in the weaker sections of the society, particularly the Dalits and Tribals, the high rate of dropouts in the early years of education, the ever-increasing number of illiterate adults and uneven spread of education in different parts of India are some of the issues that call for immediate and urgent response. The system is still in the hands of a few elite and the privileged. The socio-economically marginalized sections of the country are yet to acquire 'good' education, which in turn will create a more humane, equal and egalitarian society.

## Part II

### The University experience of the Indian Catholics:

The presence of the Church is felt in Indian Catholic universities and colleges in more than one ways, primarily by being faithful to the documents of the Church and the State. The context of the universities in India is very much different from most of the countries in the world due to the plural nature of the country. The Christians altogether are just 2.5% of the total population. No school or college in India is run only for Catholic students. There are students from other faiths in all the institutions. The challenge to find what is 'Catholic' in the Catholic institutions is immense in the country. Where do the Catholic universities root the Church in the maelstrom of changing times that we have glimpsed in the first part of the sharing? In what follows, I have identified some distinctive movements from where we realize the presence of the Church in universities in India where the Christian population is a minority but the impact of their existence is massive.

### Movement from single-side personalism to Complete Humanism:

Catholic education deals with the 'full' person. Development of a person cannot be limited to one aspect. It covers all matters that concern the body, mind and the soul of the learner. 'In order to be authentic, it must be complete, integral, that is, it has to promote the good of every person and of the whole person', said Pope Paul VI while paying tribute to the missionaries through his encyclical letter 'On the Development of the Peoples'. Moreover, youth during their university days, is a 'time of change (physically, psychologically, socially and economically), a time of search (for meaning, models, companions and identity), a time of decision-making (on one's career, one's partner, one's direction in life, on which depends the entire life and happiness), a time of discovery (of oneself, of one's qualities, potentials, and limitations, depending on which confidence and inferiority complex increases), a time of reshaping (accepting, rejecting, questioning values, beliefs regarding life and reshaping one's life). The Catholic colleges have understood the fact that in India, academics alone will not produce a person with humanism. The most corrupt people in politics and any other establishment have been highly educated from extremely reputed colleges. Therefore, all-round development is the need of the hour.

### Movement from Lay-collaboration to Lay-partnership:

One of the objectives of Catholic universities and colleges is to create lay leaders and to promote them to face new challenges of the future. Most of our colleges are run by the religious congregations in which the laity holds considerably a big share in the administration, policy and decision-making processes. The Vatican Council documents clearly evince the sign that the Church of the new millennium is going to be the Church of the Laity. The Church in India, especially the educational institutions have made an adequate paradigm shift from 'seeing' the laity as actual and potential threats, competitors, enemies, and beneficiaries to 'experiencing' the laity as actual and potential partners, friends and companions in our apostolates and missions. But still, we have a long way to go in making the cooperation and partnership with the laity as the constitutive element of our educational mission. We have a long journey to hope for the future that laity shall 'take an active, conscientious, and responsible part of the mission of the Church in this great moment of history' (Pope John Paul II, Apostolic exhortation on Christifidelis Laici)

### Movement from Self-oriented to Service-oriented:

Universities are the fertile grounds to create 'men and women for others,' that the students learn not for their own selfish ends but for serving the neighbours. The Church itself is to be understood as the 'Servant Church'. 'Every human being is born in this world to live a human life, free from all exploitations, where the basic values of Truth, Love, Human Dignity, Social Justice and Peace prevail and where Democracy is the way of life for the people' (AICUF document, 1971).

Crawling into the shells of selfishness will harm the society. The students should learn to move from the imprisoning shells to freeing service. Movements like All India Catholic University Federation (AICUF), an affiliate body of International Movement of Catholic Students (IMCS) are encouraged in the colleges precisely to bring out the students from being contained in themselves to flowering forth as critical and creative persons in the service of others, especially the marginalized. All learning in the higher education should develop the individual self in terms of his/her conscious dedication to the society.

#### Movement from Ethnic cleansing to Nation building

The Government Policy Perspective on Education entitled 'The Challenge of Education' rightly points out that "only education can imbue people with the knowledge, the sense of purpose and the confidence essential for building a dynamic, vibrant and cohesive nation capable of providing people with the wherewithal for creating better, fuller and more purposeful life'. The dream of the post-independent leaders is to build a nation with political stability and freedom. The objectives of the Catholic colleges themselves achieved a sea change in the post-independent era. In one way, the direct evangelization in educational institutions itself was also to be understood as 'indianisation' of the values of Christ and as direct involvement in National Development which is the comprehensive concept involving economic, social, cultural, political and individual development of every Indian and of the society as a whole. AICUF experience in the past 80 years has been inspiring in terms of National Development. Today, the majority of young people exercising leadership at the grassroots level in the country are the ex-AICUFers or people who had close contact with AICUF.

#### Movement from Students at receptive-end to Student centrality:

Students are not 'empty bags' in the campus to be filled up by the teachers. Keeping students at the receptive end will do no good both to them and the society. For the past five years, some students are engrossed in deep deliberations on Student Rights within and outside the campus. Their slogan 'Student Rights Are Human Rights' receives an international appreciation, support and solidarity among university students from many quarters of the world. The policies, principles and plans should keep the students at the center, so that the learning will become meaningful and significant. Student centrality has to be understood as part of student activism and their political participation. The colleges have to encourage various types of groups in order to develop the young in leadership, so that 'men and women who are truly new and artisans of a humanity can be forthcoming' (Gaudium Et Spes no.30). Though the concept of student centrality has not been fully understood and actualised, the Church-run institutions have gradually started acclimatizing to the newer challenges from the new generations. They design their courses, restructure their faculty and curriculum and renew the strategies and pedagogies to be more conducive to the

emerging trends about which 'we can justly consider that the future of the humanity lies in the hands of those who are strong enough to provide coming generations with reasons for living and hoping' (GS no 31).

Movement from Fanatic Monologues to Faith dialogues:

Education itself is an on-going dialogue. Unfortunately, education itself has been reduced to the awful position of providing a monologue by the teachers to the students everyday. But, learning has nothing to do with monologues. Learning happens in dialogues and dialogue itself is a part of learning. In the broader multi-religious context like that of India, relationship inspired by dialogue needs to be impelled and initiated. At the wake of recent attacks on the minorities in India, the Catholic education concentrates on the aspect of dialogue without being rooted out of one's faith. Newer groups like 'Students for Secularism', 'Students for Religious Harmony' have come into existence on the campuses.

Movement from Stagnation and Frustration to Innovations and Pioneering:

This is one movement where people concerned with the educational system learn from our institutions. Never to get tired and retired! The whole world needs optimism and hope! Gaudium Et Spes proclaims, "the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men and women of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these two are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is the community composed of men...that is why this community truly realizes that it is truly and intimately linked with humankind and its history...' Our history has been history of innovations and inventions. The Catholic education has brought out new aspects, new researches and new praxis in the educational scenario of the country. The movement has started and not yet gained full acceleration. There is a sense of complacency in many of us. There is a temptation to travel in the beaten path. A pioneer has to sacrifice. A pilgrim has to undergo climatic changes. We, as the intimate followers of Jesus, have no right to be comfortable with the obsolete systems. Jesus dared. A little reformation in terms of arduous search for viable and creative programmes and projects and re-orienting the existing structures and systems has taken place in the Catholic education but what the system direly needs is the total transformation and radicalization.

Movement from commitment to Elite to Option for the Poor and the Marginalized:

The prophetic nature of the educational system blossoms forth in this preferential and prioritized option for the poor and the marginalized. Announcing the 'good news' also contains denouncing the inhuman attitudes and mind-sets. Constructions and destructions are the dual obligations of the educators today. 'Look', Yahweh declares, 'I have set you over the nations and kingdoms, to uproot and knockdown, to destroy and overthrow, to build and plant' (Jer 1, 11).

And 1971 Synod of Bishops on 'Justice in the World' asserts, 'action on behalf of Justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as the constructive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation' (Intro.). The basic of this option stems from the creation itself. 'God created man in the image of himself; in the image of God, he created them; male and female he created them' (Gen 1, 27). The necrophilic approaches and tendencies of human beings have torn this image of God into pieces thus re-modeling the society into an unequal and unjust one. The rich and the poor, the powerful and the powerless, the privileged and the under-privileged, the haves and the have-nots! But God hates such discriminations. When there are divisions and discriminations, the Father and the Son have taken sides with the poor. Our faith is the faith that does justice. AICUF as the university student movement in India has opted to be part of this process of 'Kingdomising' the world by being with/for the marginalized people namely the Dalits, Tribals, Women and Refugees. Liberative pedagogies during the resurgent camps exclusively organized for them have brought to light the desired effects. From the time the AICUFers declared, "We were born into an unjust society; we are determined not to leave it as we have found it", and from the time the student leaders started using the '**reflection-involvement-reflection**' methodology, and from the time the student leaders started interiorizing the modern Catholic social teachings, their activities are geared towards the emancipation and the empowerment of the oppressed masses. The Catholic institutions in India, though many of them are still hesitating to appropriate the option, have renewed their education policies in favour of the oppressed masses in India. Interestingly, the CCBI has taken up 'Catholic Education and the Church's Concern for the marginalized' as the theme in its forthcoming General Body Meeting to be held in February 2006.

Movement from learning about Christ to living out Christ:

The liturgy and other faith-practices must lead the faithful into actions that build peace within oneself and among the communities. The **signs of our times** demand a spirituality that will liberate the people and a spirituality that will guide us identify with the oppressed masses. The educators' spirituality is the spirituality of compassionate action, spirituality of responsible solidarity, spirituality of critical love. Therefore, our spirituality is a dynamic spirituality. It is in living out Jesus Christ that we experience his life, death and resurrection. It is in living Him that we can gain comfortable harmonious existence with other human beings and creation. It is in living Him that we learn to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of His Kingdom.



### Part III

#### Challenges and recommendations:

Understanding the educational system as a part of the socio-economic-political structures:

That the educational system does not operate on a vacuum but only in the context of the state the system manifests itself completely. That the dominant class has a covert agenda in preserving its status quo in the society, and that the dominant class will not allow changes in the system.

Finding alternatives to counter and encounter the existing structural evils:

The World Social Forums declare with utmost optimism that 'another world is possible'. If that another world is possible, it is certain that another system also is possible. The present structures are pro-rich and pro-dominant class and castes. Adequate alternatives are dormant in the traditions, cultures and experiences.

Making higher education as an agent of social change and transformation:

Any change is possible only with the determined involvement of the university students. History vouchsafes this fact. That is one reason why developing countries decline to give significant importance for higher education. It is either neglected or avoided or given very less importance. The university students are called to enter into an assessment, analysis and action with proper perspectives.

Radicalization of the educational system:

Small reforms will not effect desired changes. Change has to be radical, before the chasms that already exist widen up and destroy the humanity. Any system that does not respect the dignity of human beings is bound to be destroyed. The system has to undergo a serious introspection, lest it should become 'useless' for the poor.

Offering space for autonomous activities of student groups and movements:

The student centrality is to be respected. The students have their own rights within the campus. Without them, there is no system. The student movements have an important role to play in promoting the Catholic vision of a new society that is to be built in love and compassion, word and worship, sacrifice and freedom, justice and equality. The contribution of the student movements has been huge in terms of mobilizing the Catholic intelligentsia to the poor masses

and in terms of creating thinking, ideology, orientation, thrust and activities towards betterment of the society.

Maintaining the struggle dynamics of the minorities:

The Constitution of the country preserves the minority rights and the welfare of the weaker sections. As the world shrinks into a 'global slum', the weaker sections are taken for granted. The governments, at the wake of exploding process of globalisation, have lost their ability to govern. If the govern-ability of governance to take care of the poor and oppressed masses is lost, the country loses its political integrity. Higher education needs to teach the weaker sections to maintain the struggle dynamics without intervals.

Accepting 'to be religious is to be inter-religious' in a pluralistic religious context:

Faith formation, catechism teaching, and religious formation become increasingly difficult in the context of pluralistic religious context, like that of India. Conscious and concerted efforts have to be devised to create an inter-religious outlook and approach in the context of multi-religious teaching and student communities. Sensitivity is the need of the hour. The question, 'Who do you say that I am?' haunts us always and in all the ways.

Experiencing the presence of the Church in the universities through solidarity:

Being affiliated to the International Movement of Catholic Students generates universal perspective for our members. The network and coordination at the national, regional and international levels are great strengths of the student movements that cut across the borders of the world map. This aspect is very much lacking in the Catholic institutions. Mostly, the network and coordination cease with the congregational or diocesan levels. Cutting across the artificial borders will make the Church's presence stronger and our solidarity efficacious.

Learning for humanizing and Kingdomising the World:

A campus is a 'little Church'. The community--staff and students--in the campus is a learning community. Every human being in this world is engaged in an on-going learning process. The right type of learning leads to right type of response. The ultimate response of the Catholic institutions is to create the Kingdom of God and enter into it as a witness to the Love of God for human beings. We then become the torchbearers of His Hope for this world. To humanize the world is to attend to the cry of the poor and the oppressed masses. And to Kingdomise the world is to experience His love through a deep and interior knowledge of the person of Jesus, here and now!

## Part IV

### Conclusion:

*The wars between Liberalization and Liberative education, Globalisation and Self-Reliance and Mutual Dependence, Privatization and Egalitarian and Maintaining Public Sectors, Commercialization and Critical awareness and freedom with Accountability, Communalization and Respect for all religions, Languages and groups and between Dominant hegemony and oppressed people have been initiated already. The universities in general and the Catholic institutions in particular have a great role to play at this juncture of our history. As the 'Great Master Jesus Christ, the Only Son of God' leads us in the struggle for freedom from the evils of the society for the well being of the whole humanity and as we are all 'children of one Father in Heaven', as 'Christ has set us free in order that we might remain free' and as Christ sends us on a mission among the university students, the university campuses should get transformed into 'freedom grounds' where the presence of the Church will be intimately felt.*