

THE ROLE OF AUGUSTINIAN EDUCATIONAL VALUES AS ELEMENTS OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE CHURCH'S MISSION OF EVANGELIZATION IN AFRICA

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Abstract

Humans are a product of values. No matter the society, environment or age he/she belongs, one cannot be considered or understood without values. Education plays a very vital role and maintains a vital responsibility in social transformation, yet the welfare and advancement of a nation or society are determined by the quality of its educational value system. Faith-based educational institutions, particularly Catholic Augustinian schools and colleges, uphold a value system which shapes the practices, programs and policies of school operations (Curry, 2014). This work sets out to discuss the relevance of Augustinian values in the character development of educators and learners in Augustinian educational institutions and the role they play in advancing the church's mission of evangelization for the effective social transformation of the African society.

INTRODUCTION

Education is carried out and developed over a given system of values without which human life is rendered empty of motivation, thus set on an aimless voyage without a compass (Insunza, 2006). Values therefore have always been incorporated by and among educators as a sine qua non condition for every effective educational system/institution. Results and experience have shown that values offer a strong foundation for the school's mission and vision as it shapes its organizational structure, culture, policies and practices.

The Augustinian school is built upon values from which the Augustinian pedagogical principles and approaches are designed and implemented. They are identified as the Augustinian value education; a transformative pedagogy carried out through a dialogical process of training students at the different levels of education leading them to discover oneself (self-knowledge), and discover one's potential; to enable them cultivate acceptable, supportive and meaningful knowledge, skills and attitudes; developing in them the problem solving orientation so as to direct their skills and knowledge towards the positive transformation of the society for the common good and in

accordance with the teachings of St. Augustine our founder and inspired by the teaching of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Augustinian educational values thus constitute an apostolic activity (Constitutions of the Order of Saint Augustine §162) that occupies a very critical position in the church's mission of evangelization towards the formation of young minds that make their ways to the school as students. Nurtured therefore with this orientation in an Augustinian school/college one will turn out to be a sure passport to improving and enhancing the content and climate of a society that will bring about not just the desired transformation but also the acceptable transformation.

AUGUSTINIAN PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

St. Augustine recognized the importance of a sound education for every child. In his commentary on *Holy Virginity*, the Bishop of Hippo explained that the blessing of parenthood is not to simply produce children but to also offer them sound education for the sake of perseverance (*Holy Virginity*, 12, 12). However, why one should be educated and why one should undertake an educational apostolate constitutes what is most crucial for St. Augustine. In his *De Doctrina Christiana*, the Holy Father held that the purpose of education is about '*moving the minds of the learners not simply that they may know what is to be done but that they may do what they already know should be done*' (IV, 12,27) The Augustinian purpose of education is therefore centered on the effort **to not only produce smart and intelligent people who are equipped with knowledge and can answer all the questions of the teacher in the classroom but that they may also believe what they know and put them into practice.** Hence if we believe what we know and persevere in doing them, all forms of wrong doings/practices can be extinguished through education that is based on the moral teachings of the Lord (Curry, 2014). Therefore the purpose of every Augustinian educational institution is to solve problems using the Christian values that St. Augustine lived and taught; being actively involved and not by being an armchair commentator. In order to achieve this purpose, important steps must be followed beginning with the dialogue between the teacher and the learner meant to enable true learning and right understanding. This will in turn bring about the development of the good character and formation of the will to do good and to do well, leading both parties into the willful act of rejecting what is evil and accepting what is good. McCloskey (2005) held that it is with this orientation that the education we acquire will help us to appropriately read the signs of times, not only so we can know them but that we can be

empowered to act through the impulse of the interior master from within to address the problems of the world even if we cannot fully resolve them.

AUGUSTINIAN CHARACTER OF OUR SCHOOLS

Every religious order or congregation in the Catholic Church is unique. The uniqueness is defined by its particular charism - the special spirit handed on by the founders of the congregation or order coupled with the special task of Christian evangelization that the order or congregation is inspired and committed to focus on and carry out in the world. This is to be practiced to the extent that each unique character-charism comes to impact significantly on the immediate community especially those who have the opportunity to encounter them directly. (*Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church*, Canons §577 and §578)

The Augustinians over the years have made conscious efforts to incorporate its values within each of the apostolates and ministries of the order without excluding the educational apostolate. Thus the character of a typical Augustinian educational institution is recognized in the following:

1. The journey of the restless heart (INTERIORITY) that is manifested in the constant and consistent search for the truth – VERITAS - through the help of the inner teacher.
2. Our intense emphasis on genuine unity – UNITAS - that is manifested in our coming together as a COMMUNITY to live in one mind and one heart intent upon God (Rule 1.1)
3. Fostering of love – CARITAS - through SERVICE to God and to the community/society for the development of the character and the formation of the will.

These values are not only there to be known but that they may be practiced in line with our Holy Father St. Augustine's original intention. Prevost (2006) explained that the search for truth, unity, community, friendship and charity makes the school environment a truly Augustinian educational environment. In turn they set the tone for the effective practice of the teaching and learning exercise and the general school operation. They are taught not just so we can only know them to enhance our intellectual lives but that by knowing them we may put them into practice so that our learning could become virtuous and our desire for social transformation could become concrete, effective and positively impactful.

THE CHURCH'S WORK OF EVANGELIZATION IN AFRICA

The mission of Christ the Redeemer which is entrusted to the church is far from completion and we must commit ourselves totally to its service (*Redemptoris Missio*, 1). The church in Africa with the different religious orders and congregations serving on the continent are not exempted in this task of evangelization. In fact a deeper mission of evangelization is very appropriate in our continent considering that there are still many Africans who are yet to come in contact with Christianity (Pengo, 2011).

Concerned about the real challenges and the prospect of evangelization in Africa, the fathers of the first African synod chose the theme: *You shall be my witnesses* as the focus of their synodal reflection. Twenty four years after the first synod, the church in Africa deserves a pat on the back for playing significant roles in calling for an end to the excruciating poverty on the continent, promotion of peace, reconciliation and justice in the theatres of war across Africa; for challenging ineptitude and bad governance among our leaders and other integral human development programs in Africa. However, the situation in Africa calls for a more profound approach to evangelization that will deepen the faith of those who have received it thus leading them to a true conversion that will empower them as authentic witnesses with the character and will to fundamentally address the challenges and usher in the relevant transformation on the continent.

Christian educators are agreed that formal and value education is the most reliable panacea that will usher Africa out of the current social quagmire. This is because historical evidences have revealed that one of the most successful acts of Christian evangelization recorded in the early period was in the educational apostolate. Pawliková -Vilhanová (2007) revealed that in the early missionary movement in Africa, Christianization went with reading and writing. This is because that kind of missionary movement 'proved to be truly a creative force within the history of African people and societies transforming their lives materially and mentally' (p. 256).

An educational system that can transform both mentally and materially must be equipped with values. This is why the Augustinian value education is not just a reputable option but also a priority in the world today, particularly in Africa. This ought to be the guiding policy and the inspiration to our institutional mission that should be lived out in our daily institutional operations.

HOW AUGUSTINIAN VALUES ARE LIVED OUT IN OUR INSTITUTIONS

Witnessing to the Augustinian values is a requisite function of all the brothers who have pledged to live a fuller expression of their baptismal promises in the religious order of St. Augustine. St. Augustine desired in his thought and teachings that his followers should promote and spread the Christian values he had lived and taught among the communities we serve especially in the educational apostolate. In line with this the Order of St Augustine over the years has remained committed to the promotion of education as a way of keeping the legacy of its father and spiritual founder and in living and spreading the treasure of Christian values that makes their schools/colleges unique and truly Augustinian.

In our schools, the mission to mentor hearts and form minds for the common good is inspired by the Augustinian core values. Each day sincere efforts are made to entrench the Augustinian values through a dialogue that encourages interiority, enhances unity in the community and fosters love through service to God, to the church and to one another in the day to day operation of the school. This dialogue takes place between teachers and students and among students themselves (McCloskey, 2006) and it is carried out in the following format:

1. INTERIORITY

1.1 PRAYERS

The search for God is at the heart of the Augustinian apostolate including the educational apostolate. St Augustine confirmed that life and success are incomplete if God is absent because God has made us for himself and our hearts are restless until they rest in God (*The Confessions* I, 1,1). Thus finding the truth in Christ as revealed in the scripture is very important to the Augustinian pedagogy (Curry, 2014).

This vital part of the school cycle is observed with the daily liturgical celebration of the Eucharist, the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and Benediction, the daily morning and evening prayers all observed in the school's chapel while the night prayers usually observed in the hostels. During these moments the Eucharist is celebrated and prayers are offered for the wellbeing of the community and success of all the students in their studies and for their families. In this divine

relationship, the school draws life and the unction to function from God. All students are required to be in attendance except for a very grievous reason, like a serious illness.

1.2 TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM

Teaching belongs to the very essence of the apostolate of the church (*Deus Scientiarum Dominus*). In the Augustinian classroom apostolate, nothing is to be preferred to the search for truth since one cannot enrich the soul with grace if it has not been first enlightened with the truth (cf., 246). Through this regular classroom apostolate, students are exposed to relevant issues with the hope to seek answers to ultimate questions in order to obtain the true knowledge of self and understanding as the necessary step to personal transformation. On this base, students are soundly educated on the discipline of science and engineering, in the arts of literature and history and on the approaches to live a strong civic and responsible life. At the theoretical level, the theories and experiences are to be explained and analyzed through the lens of ethics and the moral teachings of the Lord as enshrined in the scriptures. The ultimate goal of this exercise is not only to acquire knowledge and skills but also for the student to realize the truth and thus develop the good character and the inspiration to do God's will by rejecting what is evil and accepting what is good (Curry, 2014), promoting not only the desire to be great speakers like St. Augustine, but to also cultivate an exemplary lifestyle, authenticity of life as against formal commands.

1.3 PEER PARLIAMENT PROGRAMS

This is another platform where the restless heart continues to search and it is thus empowered with the critical thinking skills to expand boundaries and articulate a new vision with the will to address the needs and challenges of the school community and by extension the immediate society. For St. Augustine, the formation of the mind towards knowledge must be carried out with the formation of the will to do well. Hence, if the will is educated, the character is also educated (Curry, 2014).

The Peer Parliament is a weekly activity that brings the staff and students together into different groups where both categories leverage on the opportunity to wrestle with cultural, religious, moral, scientific, civic and relevant topical issues in an open, free but respectful atmosphere of engagement. This is an extracurricular activity that offers everyone a voice in the discussion and a stake in the outcome. As an activity that reinforces some topics that may have been treated in the regular classroom activity, it is carried out with the thought of strategizing how they can be

concretized in the immediate community. The goal here is to further empower the students and teachers with the requisite critical thinking skills to expand boundaries and articulate new vision.

After a very interesting regular classroom instruction on the rights and responsibilities of every citizen, A JSS3 student (names withheld) felt the need to address the entire student body on the same topic to bring to the knowledge of each student about the limits of their rights and the where their responsibilities ought to begin. To achieve this, the student in question went ahead to mobilize few of his classmates and formed a team, broke down the topic into different comprehensive aspects with each person focusing on one aspect to ensure that it is properly stepped down. This was very impressive and it made a huge impact on the life of the school's program.

2. COMMUNITY

*The primary reason for our coming together is to live harmoniously
in one mind and one heart intent upon God. (Rule I,1)*

Another value that is at the heart of Augustinian education is to learn how to live together. This is understood as UNITAS, concretized in a Community where the learning enterprise is carried out not as individuals but as a community with others (Baker, 2016). The goal here is to create a community of friends to search, understand and to share through a dialogue with the inner teacher and with one another. This value is conveyed through the following practices in the school:

2.1 COMMUNITY MASS

As a symbol of our oneness of mind intent upon God, the entire school community gathers together once every week to do something together in one place so as to relish how pleasant and wonderful it is for brothers and sisters to live together in unity (Psalm 133:1). The presence of the Lord at Mass was chosen as the most symbolic and impactful moment to doing things together in one place for us in the college.

Every Wednesday afternoon, the school community sets out to achieve this value through the UNITAS Mass that is celebrated in the school chapel by all the priests with the students and the staff resident within and outside the campus in attendance. The goal is simply to come together in one place to do something together by praying together. The great African writer Chinua Achebe

captures it very aptly in these words: *'A man, who calls his kinsmen to a feast, does not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their homes. When we gather together in a moonlit village ground it is not because of the moon. Everyone can see it in his own compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so.'* (1959/1994, 118).

By gathering together in charity, the community is enabled with the opportunity to reflect on the need to always work hard to be true brothers and sisters and to avoid acts and behaviours that will demean the efforts of each other and the efforts of the community as well.

2.2 ASSEMBLY

This is another platform that helps to foster the value of the community in the school. It is very important because through it important information and announcements bordering on the school's activities and programs are effectively communicated to everyone. On this platform too, the Augustinian values of the school are taught and reinforced actively and effectively. Bad behaviours are abhorred, discouraged and corrected while good behaviours such as excellence in academics and obedience to the school rules and issued instructions are encouraged complemented and awarded as the case may be. Brief speeches of admonition with regards to morals, character and learning are also offered.

In his *Sermon 355*, 1 Augustine admonished that there are two things: Conscience and reputation...those who being clear in conscience and neglect their reputation are being very cruel. Hence 'our reputation among you ought not to be tarnished but influential for good'. Thus the goal here is to see that the conscience and reputation of each person and that of the community itself is not neglected or allowed to lose its vitality and significance especially for the personal development of both staff and students and the consequent transformation of the society.

2.3 INTERACTIVE SESSION WITH STAFF AND STUDENTS

For us to gain the desired value there must be an intentional dialogue; a form of communication that solicits cooperation and building trust with the thought of enhancing friendship built in the community and the care for the common good. Through this feedback ministry people get to know what others are doing and how each one is contributing to the growth and success of the school (Eze, 2016).

The management and staff on the one hand and the management and the students on the other hand engage themselves in a very respectful and honest dialogue where questions are asked, complaints are brought forth, suggestions are proffered and explanations are made to provide answers and clarifications in areas of misinterpretation, misunderstanding and misinformation, thus curtailing the influence and the impact of the terrorism of gossip on the hard-earned friendship and unity of the community. To further sustain the gains of the activity in our Augustinian dimension of education the school leadership leverages on this opportunity to affirm the good and challenge the bad, not to please anyone or to play to the gallery, but about being honest to control negative influences that may dampen what is cherished and valued for the unity of the community (Eze, 2016).

2.4 COMMITTEE/DEPARTMENTAL MEETINGS

At this level, the school community meets at a miniature level to assess the success recorded and how relevant the recorded success is to the institutional mission and values. Research has revealed that that with a true and passionate commitment of each committee/department member, a remarkable success is recorded in the areas of students' academic success, student engagement, staff and student satisfaction as well as staff and student retention among many other institutional and personal benefits. It is a grassroots system of building and sustaining the gains of the values cultivated with the hope that it will one day blossom and spread to beautify the entire community as well as those that live and work therein (Eze, 2016).

3. SERVICE

*The love of knowledge and truth should invite us to continue
learning; the love of others should compel us to teach.
(St. Augustine: Eight Questions of Dulcitius, 3,6)*

Every community has its deepest roots in Love and this love is verified in one's love for God and for neighbor; for St. Augustine, there is either a false love or a true love (Esmeralda, 2002). The true love he defines as *caritas* which is rooted in humility and is committed to the needs of the other and the needs of the common good. Hence, the degree to which each one is concerned for the common good as against one's own good is the criteria by which we should measure our love.

According to McCloskey (2006), the knowledge of what is true and right is not enough for the Augustinian learner, what is rather noble is that he/she does what is right.

In Augustinian education, methods and practices that can strengthen the character and the will to act rightly must be included in the pedagogical program in order to successfully live out the value of love (McCloskey, 2006). In his *City of God*, St Augustine explained that if this method and related practices are good they are motivated by a good love and bad if they are motivated by an evil love (*The City of God*, XIV, 7,12). In our schools, our methods and practices of charity are expressed in the context of service to God, the community and to humanity. We believe that our knowledge, skills and talents are useful only when they are used to promote love through working for the common good. That is why through the Augustinian Young People Association (AYPA) we have been carrying out successfully a Caritas volunteer program within the school by helping through service in the students' kitchen, cleaning the school chapel and other school surroundings at our own discretion. Other uncommon services include the freewill donation of items and funds raised to support orphanage homes that are visited. In the academic part of it, we have witnessed student volunteers who on their own initiative set out to teach selected subjects to students who are having difficulties to succeed in the said subject areas.

In the Augustinian education, as Saint Augustine advised his followers we should 'use knowledge as a kind of scaffolding to help build a structure of love and understanding. Your knowledge is useful when it is used to promote love, and becomes useless, even harmful, when separated from such an end.' (*Letter 55*, 33). Thus love expressed in the context of service is useful because our knowledge, skills and talents are used to promote love and they are harmful when they are separated from love

ROLE OF THE AUGUSTINIAN VALUES IN SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Obviously, the evident illiteracy, low educational standard and inappropriate education form the basic factors that have contributed to the social and economic problems in Africa today. The evident problems that are fundamental to growing up such as respect for human life, building a healthy friendship, developing a growth mindset for a purposeful and meaningful life challenges us to promote and preserve our Augustinian values in service of education for the common good

and transformation of the society. It is clear that there is a need for the Augustinian values to play its role through the custodians to salvage or enhance the raging turbulence.

Every personality is constructed by values and every transformation is a social construction. In the history of education, teaching of values is an indispensable element in the early times to ensure the holistic upbringing of the child for the benefit of the society. Educators observed that the solution to the myriads of problems that threaten the social order and disrupt the peace of society is possible when effective value education is practiced (Tonga, 2016). This is because armed with the requisite positive values the individual can intentionally set out to develop honest and positive strategies guided by the good character and the will to do good for the common good.

The Augustinians are known for their values and they can also impact on the system positively in the following ways:

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

The Augustinian value education makes an impact on the students learning which is evident in the development of understanding and character (Curry, 2014). Through a transforming experience that may contribute to the student's perception of his environment, a change in the students' character and understanding is impacted (McCloskey, 2008).

As a system of education that does not train only the intellect but forms the character and the will to do well, the Augustinian values promote the acquisition of knowledge and skills for life and the disposition to apply the knowledge and skills in a practical way to the service of God, the church and to the community. To this end Augustinian values perform the roles of encouraging students to discover and achieve their mental, spiritual, physical and even emotional potentials. In his research on the Augustinian Value Institute in North America, Baker, (2016) established that Augustinian values play very integral roles in the development and success of the individual and not just the knowledge of books acquired. As a result, students who graduate from our schools are more likely to undertake more rigorous academic courses, have greater diligence, good attitudes towards work as against lazy habits to thus record a high achievement profile in their future endeavours (Lovat, et al., 2010).

VALUE ORIENTATION

Augustinian values also develop other values such as empathy, judging kindly, putting on the good and appropriate behaviours, passion and dedication for the common good. This will in turn eventually reduce the ills of jealousy, and the terrorism of gossip in the community and society. Since the Augustinian values are rooted in our Christian and Catholic values, it also performs the roles of offering students solid and effective Catholic and Christian education that is more likely to motivate them to pray daily, be part of the pious societies of the Church and to remain Catholic even after many years of graduation.

When an individual embodies these values, the fruit is also experienced by others. Africa is a multi-ethnic continent with diverse peoples, tribes, cultural groups and practices as well as identities. According to the fathers of the African synod, these are challenges that call for an honest concern (cf. *Ecclesia in Africa*, 49) because it has frustrated the quest for unity and appropriate human development on the continent. The Augustinian values ensure there is time for prayer and socializing for the purpose of forming a strong society to dispel mutual suspicion and encourage mutual respect for all people without prejudice to race, color or creed. They cultivate the need to care and show solidarity with others in the society, cultivate a warmth relationship that will bring the society together to do something together in one place so as to encourage acceptance and a constant dialogue that will enable proper knowledge and understanding of one another in the society on the one hand, and to overcome the division that has brought upon our beloved continent series of painful conflicts, the shedding of innocent blood and the destruction of lives and properties on the continent.

PURPOSEFUL PASSION FOR THE COMMON GOOD

As an approach that promotes charity through service learning, the Augustinian educational values encourage African students to pursue meaningful careers and a purpose-based training in the different fields to support the personal and professional development for the good of the people. This will help to build citizens with the critical thinking skills to think well about our African politics and civic responsibilities to our nations; to judge our leaders critically but mixed with fairness and objectivity; think well about and respect the sacredness of life and the dignity of every

human person; most importantly let our thoughts and actions be motivated by and towards the common good.

RECOMMENDATION/CONCLUSION

Social transformation is about human development and human development is about the realization of potentials. It is about what people know and what they can do with what they know. The United Nations report for 2018 revealed that Africa is the second most populous continent in the world with over 1.2 billion people. In this report, 41% of the African population is under the age of 15 years, while another 19% of the population is between the ages of 15 and 24. Putting this together tells us that the largest demographics in Africa are adolescents and young adults who could be in our Augustinian established educational institutions, taught in our classrooms and equipped with the Augustinian values for the transformation of our different societies.

Therefore, this may convince us that in our bid to significantly live out our identity and service to the church's mission of evangelization in Africa in the 21st century, the Augustinians in Africa may need to recognize the importance of education in development and social transformation in the larger society. To this end, a heavy emphasis on education and the building/establishment of educational institutions must occupy a pride of place in our major deliberations and resolutions as Augustinian circumscriptions or as a region. Education is today one of the primary goals of many religious groups and denominations and we must not be excluded. The Jesuits, Claretians, Dominicans and many others have reached their watermarks in establishing numerous and different level of educational institutions across the countries of the world (Africa inclusive) through which they have promoted their particular charism and spiritualities. Thus to enhance the spread of our Augustinian values and even the Augustinian spiritualities and devotions, and to reap its concomitant benefit of a sustainable social transformation, promoting education by establishing educational institutions on different levels is indispensable. This will enable us to revisit the transformation campaign from a new lens that hopes to be concrete, realistic and fruitful.

In his apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, Pope St. John Paul II highlighted that for the mission of evangelization in Africa to be fruitful, 'the whole community needs to be trained, motivated and empowered for evangelization each according to his or her specific role within the church' (53). Ours as Augustinians is to embrace this educational apostolate with the passion it

deserves so as to play our roles in the church's mission of evangelization in our dear continent of Africa. Our educational apostolate should aim at forming and churning out pastoral agents who may or may not embrace the priesthood and religious life but will willingly and passionately carry along these values of transformation into the wider world as lay evangelists (cf. *Ecclesia in Africa*, 53) and bring them to bear concretely and positively in our societies after leaving school to the glory of God's name.

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