

# When the Church Fathers speak of Education

## A reflection on the Tertiary Education in Africa

**Prof. Mvumbi F.N**

The Catholic University of Eastern Africa, CUEA, Kenya

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*“Having children is a matter of nature; but raising them and educating them in the virtues is a matter of mind and will. By the duty of raising them I mean not only not allowing them to die of hunger, as people often limit their obligation toward their children to doing. For this, is needed neither books nor rubrics, for nature speaks of it quite loudly. I am speaking of the concern for educating children's hearts in virtues and piety - a sacred duty which cannot be transgressed without thereby becoming guilty of the children's murder, in a certain sense.” (Lessons by John Chrysostom on education)*

### Introduction

One day in the storehouse of humanities is a time well spent; it is a great achievement because such time questions our being where we are and draws a roadmap for good citizenship. Without neglecting or looking down knowledge and skills, the Church Fathers believe that education if it has to be truly education should start with humanities where values, human and cosmic, are gradually imparted into children. The Church Fathers have high expectations that once this is done, the children grow in the fear of God and respect of people. Hence, “Values, first, then knowledge and skills” is almost the most concise summary of what we get from the Church Fathers’ views on education. We are tempted to say that no person, even if he/she is a renowned scholar, should be allowed to teach when his/her life shows minimum indications of what personhood ought to be. If we have to reap only what we sow, we also have to uproot what compromises our education. The Fathers of the Church could, perhaps, assist in carrying out both related exercises; that is reaping and uprooting. This is exactly what *Sapientia Christiana* states in its foreword:

Christian wisdom, which the Church teaches by divine authority, continuously inspires the faithful of Christ zealously to endeavor to relate human affairs and activities with religious values in a single living synthesis. Under the direction of these values all things are mutually connected for the glory of God and the integral development of the human person, a development that includes both corporal and spiritual well – being.<sup>1</sup>

But before we begin this task, it seems proper to prepare those who may think that this text has a limited audience since the Church Fathers seem to speak only to Catholics/Christians. Let them know that this could be a grave historical oversight. And some others who may assume that we have labored in vain because the issues underlined are just old principles; we answer that they are old principles but in a new order. These objections and many others of this kind seem to be a proper beginning of the road we wish to follow as education is concerned.

This essay, therefore, is all about the Church Fathers’ views and overviews on education that we find through their life and their works. Thus, the purpose of writing this text is both a modest activity and a motivated effort of a reviewer, for it is written as a guide and an essay as well. As a

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<sup>1</sup> *Apostolic Constitution, Sapientia Christiana* of the Supreme Pontiff, Pope John Paul II, on Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties, no.1. All Ecclesiastical Universities and Faculties are governed by the principles and the norms contained in this document.

guide, we hope it will be of great use to educationists because we intent to offer to them a significant reference that could enhance on-going discussions and provide a tool that may possibly influence the form and the content of education in Africa; this could influence decisions of stakeholders. We, therefore, endeavor to construct another educational theoretical framework that educationists could comfortably use as they carry out research in various aspects of education.

As an essay, it is a text that is far from being extensive in the sense that it is an on-going research. Again, given the volume of the Church Fathers' writings on one hand and the difficulties in finding systematic texts of what they might have said concerning education, on another, make this text an essay in which we attempt to make a case. Hence, the conclusions we make are steps in search of another paradigm in education. And for more clarity and concision, we attempt to give an account of the following points: (1) the Church awareness to education, and (2) the historical ever growing importance of education in the Church; (3) the review of what the Church in the modern world, particularly the Church after Vatican II Council (1962-1965), stands for in educational matters. These three points necessitate that we give a brief comment on the Vatican II document on education "*Gravissimum Educationis*" in which the Church underlines its basic principles of education. As a matter of facts, these principles have, in one way or the other, their foundation in the Church Fathers' lives and writings. Obviously at the end, we shall then find whether educationists of our time could critically listen to the Church Fathers' perception and, perhaps, be guided by it.

Generally, the concept "Education" –we are strictly talking about formal education at all levels- is not a concept that someone can afford to ignore, for it speaks loud. The Universal Human Right, for instance, proclaims it in its article 26<sup>2</sup> and today many national and international jurisdictions refer to it as a right. Even parents who do not have formal education know somehow the place of education in all departments of life such as religion, politics, economy/business, medicine, technology and law...People need to be trained to perform certain duties; maybe to perform them more efficiently and effectively. Although the concept is not always understood in the same way or, perhaps different people have different considerations or put emphasis on different issues/themes/, education is a journey that most parents would like their children to take for a noble reason. From our observations, education which corresponds to the concept "training" considers the following parameters: (1) the trainer, (2) the trainee, (3) the content of the training, (4) the environment and (5) the goals of such or such training. Etymologically, *Educare* means to train"; and this tells us that to educate is to take someone and move her/him from point A to point B; thus, actions such as teaching, learning, tutoring, instructing, experiencing, schooling, edifying, culturing, take place or should take place between point A and point B. The trainer and the trainee meet in many ways and communication of the content is done. This needs a comprehensive agreeable environment.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Article 26. (1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. (2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. (3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

The processes of knowing, getting skills and embracing new attitudes are initiated and continue until death. The church is very much aware of this reality right from its beginning as it is said in what seems to be its charter as education is concerned:

The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw him, they worshipped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, all power in heaven and on earth had been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teach them to observe all that I have commanded you. (Matthew. 28, 16-20).

From this passage, we understand that the Disciples' mission was to baptize and to teach; and the content of this command has no limit except in the limits that Jesus had commanded. Hence, commenting on these verses, Jerome wrote:

The Church acts in virtue of the commission that Jesus has received, a commission that is without limit. By his authority, they may make disciples of all nations... Their work is to baptize and to teach... The object of the teaching is all I have commanded you.<sup>3</sup>

If it is almost impossible to write down the details of this command, it could be possible to state that Jesus' command embraces all aspects of human life since he willed that all people be saved. For this reason, the Church holds high all dimensions of education; in fact, the words "baptizing" and "teaching" echo the fact that the whole beings, in all its aspects, should be educated; and this is not an option but a command that any reasonable person can receive. Jerome says that "The word "command" does not affirm the establishment of a new law, but of a new way of life, just as the new law of Moses established a new way of life."<sup>4</sup>

It is this "charter" that guides the Church Fathers as they opened both people's souls and minds through their life and writings as well. In their own ways and with different tones of voices, the Church Fathers interpreted, explained and commented on Jesus' command to his disciples, for this also became the command they obeyed with delight.

For instance, Gregory the Great testifies:

I confess that I receive and revere, as four books of the Gospel... These with full devotion I embrace, and adhere to with most entire approval; since on them as on a foursquare stone, rises the structure of the holy faith; and whosoever and, of whatever life and behavior he may be, holds not fast to their solidity, even though he is seen to be a stone, yet he lies outside the building...<sup>5</sup>

In the same line but with great enthusiasm, Pope Leo XIII wrote in his Encyclical Letter "On the restoration of Christian philosophy according to the mind of St. Thomas Aquinas":

The Only-begotten Son of the Eternal Father appeared on earth to bring salvation and the light of wisdom of God to the human race. As he ascended to Heaven he bestowed on the world a blessing, truly great and wondrous, when, commanding his apostles to "go and teach

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Raymond E. Brown et alii (eds), *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (see the Apostolic Commission (28:16-20) (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall. Inc.), 1968.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> John R. Wills (ed.), *The Teachings of the Church Fathers* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), p. 37.

all nations”, he left a Church, founded by himself, as the universal and supreme mistress of all people.<sup>6</sup>

For Pope Leo XIII, the Church mandate to teach all nations is not only a command but a marvelous blessing (brings good things) and a consecration that makes the Church mistress of the whole educational enterprise. The Church ought to build principles of education, administer the processes, manage its structures and give proper leadership to all stakeholders of education. Hence, with the greatest earnestness, the church, as a whole and up-to-date continues to cherish education in its twofold aspects; and to create personnel as well as structures that abide with Jesus’ command and blessing: J. W. Donohue states:

The basic educational tasks of Christians, consequently, was twofold: to provide religious instruction that would initiate their children and converts into Christian doctrine, way of life, and worship; and, as some Christians judged desirable, to synthesize their Christian life with the best of the secular culture embodied in the rhetorical and philosophical studies of the pagan schools.<sup>7</sup>

Religious and secular disciplines should be taught in a way that they build the entire human person to know and to live a life worthy of praise. Although this could be considered as an early Christian education testimonial, it still flows into the Church throughout history, but with some improves either in the structures or in the management. Vatican II Document on Christian education is, perhaps, the most authoritative text that summarizes what the Church has been, what it still does and what it plans to do as education is concerned. Before we respond to the question “why should we study patristic Education?”, we are obliged to make a brief analysis of it in order to underline some tenets in relation to the modern world educational trends and systems.

The nature of this work dictates that we use a library research centered method which insists on reading texts –old and new-, and apply hermeneutics for some of the statements need to be interpreted. These texts are mostly primary and secondary sources of the Church Fathers themselves, their translators and commentators. Some vital information was also gotten from encyclopedia. However, books on Church History and their biographies were largely considered.

## **1. THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ON THE DECLARATION OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: A COMMENT**

The document commonly known as the Declaration on Christian Education is one of the 16 documents that Vatican II Ecumenical Council produced as the Council Fathers sought to reflect on the relations between the church and the modern world; it took place in Vatican, Rome, between 1962 and 1965. The Council divided these 16 documents into 4 constitutions, 9 decrees and 3 declarations, depending on their weight and the kind of the matters discussed. Thus, constitutions are the primary documents of an Ecumenical Council and usually the other Council documents are built on them. Often the Constitutions provide keys to properly understand the decrees and declarations because they treat substantive doctrinal issues that pertain to the very nature of the Church; they are considered as authoritative summaries of the official teachings of the Catholic

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<sup>6</sup> Pope Leo XIII, *Encyclical Letter*, Rome, 1874.

<sup>7</sup> J. W. Donohue, Articles on Education in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967).

Church with regards to doctrine and belief. Decrees and declarations are generally practical ways of applying what is defined in the Constitutions. Likewise they can address issues of practical pastoral concern, such as the media or ecumenism; they are more specific in addressing certain areas of concern within Catholic life and practice.<sup>8</sup>

In fact the thinking here is that a Constitution is a “definition” of a major point concerning the doctrine of the Church (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Dogmatic constitution on divine revelation, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the modern world). While a Decree (the Decree on the means of social communication, the Decree on the catholic churches of Eastern rite, Decree on Ecumenism, the Decree concerning the pastoral office of Bishops in the church, the Decree on renewal of religious life, the Decree on priestly training, the Decree on the apostolate of the laity, the Decree on the mission activity of the Church and the Decree on the ministry and life of priests) and a declaration ( the Declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christians, Declaration on religious freedom and the Declaration on Christian Education) are applications of the Constitutions in various areas of the mission of the Church.

The document we present here falls under the declarations; it deals specifically with the major principles of Christian education. In the introduction of the document, the Fathers of the Council wrote:

In fulfilling the mandate she has received from her divine Founder to proclaim the mystery of salvation to all men, and to restore all things in Christ, the Holy Mother the Church must be concerned with the whole of man’s life, even the earthly part of it insofar as that has a bearing on his heavenly calling. Therefore she has her role to play in the progress and spread of education. Hence this sacred Synod enunciates certain basic principles of Christian education, especially those applicable to formal schooling. These principles will have to be developed at greater length by a special postconsular commission and applied by Episcopal conferences to varying local situations.<sup>9</sup>

Five issues emerge from the quotation above; and these underline, in a concise summary, the whole content of the document: (1) the Church’s mandate from the divine Founder, (2) the total salvation of man’s life, (3) the role of the Church in education, (4) the formulation of basic principles concerning education and (5) the application of these principles in various areas by various Church leaders. The document takes care of various matters which flow from these thoughts namely the right of all people to education, the substance of Christian education, the stakeholders of education, and the importance of schools at all levels and the emphasis on moral education in schools. It is quite interesting to note that what the Church perceives as education originates from the mandate that she received from her divine Founder. It is exactly the interpretation of this same mandate that we attempt to explore in the life and the writings of the Church Fathers for the simple reason that many statements made by the Church today were vividly articulated by them, perhaps with more accuracy since, historically, they are closer to the reality of the beginning of the Church. The history of the Fathers of the Church, their philosophy of education and their educational activities become references to someone who desire to know the Church foundations regarding education. Someone may, therefore, borrow their design, their process and activities in order to shape our educational systems today.

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<sup>8</sup> See Benjamin P. Bradshaw: <http://www.catholicadultfaith.com/documents>

<sup>9</sup> See the introduction of the document.

We limit our scope to the study of the identity of Church Fathers and their contribution to the educational enterprise, the impact of their philosophy and activities in relation to education yesterday and today. We will concentrate more on a few of them.

## 2. THE CHURCH FATHERS ON EDUCATION: SIGHT AND INSIGHT

It is not an easy task to establish the vision and the perception of what the Church Fathers taught with reference to education but we endeavor to do so by exploring their personal writings and, of course, the comments written by many prominent historians. Thus, we have to admit that we are faced with four major difficulties. These are highlighted here in order to alert our readers about the shortcomings that might occur in our critical interpretation of the data before us. The first difficulty is historical, for the epoch of these Fathers of the Church is far away from us. We are studying here the life and acts of people who lived during the Christian Antiquity which began right from the first century of Christian era and ended, according to many scholars, in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. We are almost 12 centuries away from them; and this reminds us of a historical distance -language and culture in particular- that could easily become an intellectual obstacle towards the understanding of some of their ideas. The second difficulty concerns the immensity of their writings, for many of them wrote intensively. Those who are familiar with the writings of the Fathers of the Church will bear witness to the numerous texts written or attributed to them. It requires, therefore, patience and attentiveness to get a wide and proper overview of their major thoughts. The third difficulty is thematic.

Although scholars group their writings into what we refer to as history, doctrine, theology and spirituality, the Fathers of the Church wrote on many issues and developed many themes that explain Christianity.<sup>10</sup> While it is more or less straightforward to identify their theological and doctrinal positions, it is rather complex to pinpoint their views on education since distinctive treatises on education are rarely found in their works. Education is a topic that is not easily referenced. However, we recall that John Chrysostom and Augustine of Hippo wrote brief but significant treatises on education. We shall analyze them in the course of this essay. The fourth difficulty originates from some issues related to the primary addressees of their teachings. First of all, the study of the life and the writings of the Fathers of the Church (Patristic and Patrology) is a branch of theology; and this is taught to students in theology. So the students in theology are the primary recipients of the study of the Fathers of the Church.

The point I have in mind is well explained by F. Cayre A.A in his work “Manual of Patrology and History of Theology and Johannes Quasten under the title “Patrology”. For instance, F. Cayre A.A said: “The work has been written, however, above all and directly, for the future priest, the theological student in the seminary or study house.”<sup>11</sup> Even though we magnify nowadays “interdisciplinary”, it is still tough to convince some students of different fields of knowledge, for instance students in the faculties of education, Arts and Social Sciences that this is neither time nor knowledge wasted.

Nevertheless, these difficulties enumerated here, though significant in the whole analysis, do not prevent us to find in their lives and writings, the Church Fathers’ perception to formal education. A few of the manifold aspects of education, either in their content or form, can still be revealed to us

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. F. Cayre A.A, *Manual of Patrology and history of theology* (1<sup>st</sup> vol.), (Roma: Desclee & Co, 1936), pp. 3-6.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. v.

and benefit from them. We should, however, keep in mind is that values and formation of good conduct of people, children and adults, are paramount in the teachings of the church Fathers.

### 3. WHO ARE THE CHURCH FATHERS?

F. Carre A.A describes the Father of the Church as “the early ecclesiastical writers, and especially those who have owed to their genius, their outstanding gifts and their holiness an indisputable authority as masters of Christian thought; in brief, the Doctors.”<sup>12</sup> This means that the Fathers of the Church are faithful people of God, renowned Church leaders, witnesses of God’s love, lovers and teachers of the truth and orthodox writers of the first eight centuries of the Church; they are holy people who dedicated their lives to preaching and teaching what Jesus had commanded. Jesus command to his disciples “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teach them to observe all that I have commanded you (Matthew. 28, 16-20)”, consecrated not only his immediate disciples but also their successors, the Bishops, to the teaching mission of the Church, for only Bishops were allowed to preach and teach. These were called “Fathers of the Church”, for as Johannes Quasten wrote:

In ancient times the word “Father” was applied to a teacher; for in biblical and early Christian usage, teachers are the fathers of their students. Thus, for instance, St. Paul, in first letter to the Corinthians (4, 15), says: For although you have ten thousands instructors in Christ, yet you have not many fathers. For in Christ Jesus, through the Gospel, I have begotten you.<sup>13</sup>

So the Fathers of the Church were first and foremost the Bishops because of their exclusive teaching role. But Johannes Quasten added: “The use of the term “Father” became more comprehensive; it was now extended to ecclesiastical writers in so far as they were accepted as representatives of the tradition of the Church”<sup>14</sup> and that they also assumed the teaching role of the Church. With this development, Christian writers of the early Church were called Church Fathers”. While it is true that the title “Fathers of the Church” was given to Early Christian writers, it was not given to all since orthodoxy to the doctrine -the teaching of the Church-, holiness of life, ecclesiastical approval and antiquity were still the necessary qualifications. Cayre asserts:

It is evident then, that the title of Father connotes orthodoxy. Patrology is not concerned with every Christian author who has written on religious subjects...In order, therefore, that an author may be regarded as a Father of the Church; he must have lived during the first ages of the Church, fulfilled the required conditions of orthodoxy and the holiness of life and merited the approval of the Church. This title, nevertheless, has been conferred on certain early writers who fulfilled only partially the last three of these conditions. Tertullian, Origen and Eusebius of Caesarea may be cited as an instance to this.<sup>15</sup>

Still this title “Fathers of the Church” is not identical to “Doctors of the Church”, for some “Doctors of the Church” never lived in antiquity. But we should sincerely remember that conjunction of orthodoxy of doctrine, holiness of life and ecclesiastical approval is the key qualification of the two categories of the Father of the Church: the Greek (those who wrote in Greek: Irenaeus of Lyons, Clement of Alexandria, Origen of Alexandria, Athanasius of Alexandria, Cappadocian Fathers, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus) and the Latin

<sup>12</sup> Carre F. A.A, *Manual of Patrology and History of Theology* (Rome: Desclees &Co, 1940), p. 861.

<sup>13</sup> Johannes Quasten, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> F. Cayre A.A, *Manual of Patrology and History of Theology*, 1<sup>st</sup> vol. (Roma: Desclee & Co, 1936), pp. 2-3.

(those who wrote in Latin: Tertullian, Cyprian of Carthage, Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose of Milan, Jerome of Stridonium, Augustine of Hippo, Gregory the Great, Isidore of Seville)<sup>16</sup>

As we reflect on all of them, particularly in reference to their lives, we shall give more attention to John Chrysostom and Augustine of Hippo, for they have well systematized treatises on education.

#### **4. MAJOR CHARACTERISTICS OF CHURCH FATHERS' PERCEPTION TO EDUCATION**

The Catholic University of Eastern Africa, as a higher Learning Institution of Learning, considers "witness to life" among its core values; it is, perhaps, the most important in the minds of many because of its nature that is expected to be manifested in all its operations: community service, teaching, research, customer service. It should flow in all administrative and managerial activities as well. This aspiration of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa coincides with the orthodoxy and the holiness of life that the Christian Antiquity recognized in the lives of the Fathers of the Church. These attributes explain, in one way or the other, their character towards God and the people. It underlines what we could borrow as education today is concerned. We proceed to discuss a few of them.

##### **1. TERTULLIAN (160-220): A TEACHER BY EXAMPLE**

Although little is known about Tertullian's life, Justo L. Gonzalez, in his book titled "The Story of Christianity" (vol.1) places Tertullian among the teachers of the Church. He said:

But towards the end of the second century the challenge of Marcion and Gnostics required a different response. The heretics had created their own systems of doctrine, and to this the church at large had to respond by having some of its teachers offer equally cogent exposition of orthodox belief. Precisely because the speculations of the heretics were vast in scope, the response of Christian teachers was equally vast. This gave rise to the first writings in which one can find a fairly complete exposition of Christian truth. These are the works of Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian and Origen.<sup>17</sup>

Moreover, from eminent patrologists, we learn that he was an African from Carthage; and that he received a very good education which includes studies in law and rhetoric.<sup>18</sup> Tertullian had the fear of God and respect for human beings. Speaking about him, Cayre says:

The predominant trait of his character was his will power...All his life he fought for the truth, good and right, or at least what he thought was such... Tertullian was given excess in everything, even in his reasoning. He was a brilliant and vigorous mind, endowed with rare powers of penetration and a wide culture...he gave great care to his composition; his writings are all well planned, and even in his widest digressions, he never loses sight of his goal.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church\\_Fathers#Latin\\_Fathers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_Fathers#Latin_Fathers)

<sup>17</sup> Gonzalez Justo L. *The Story of Christianity (vol. 1: The Early Church to the dawn of the Reformation)* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1984), pp. 67-68.

<sup>18</sup> Altaner B. *Patrology*, (Freiburg: Herder and Herder, 1960), p. 166.

<sup>19</sup> Cayre, F.A.A, *op.cit*, p. 232.



From the testimony of Cayre, we learn that Tertullian was a man who always sought for the truth, goodness and righteousness; these were the foundation of his life. He not only taught people to become truthful, good and righteous but his very life combined truth, goodness and righteous. As a preacher and teacher, he took care of his work that he remained always focused of the idea he puts across. He was creative in all his endeavors. He hardly taught his people what he had not planned because he knew that planning puts in perspective what he intended to communicate, the materials to be used and the best method of communication. That is why Berthold Altaner described him as a man who had a penetrating intelligence when he said:

Tertullian is one of the most original, and until Augustine the most individual of all Latin ecclesiastical authors. He combined Punic fervor with Roman practical sense. A religious enthusiast, he had a penetrating intelligence, passionate eloquence, ever-ready wit and extraordinarily well-vexed in all department of knowledge.<sup>20</sup>

His multidisciplinary spirit made him accept and defend rationality as one of the sources of knowledge, although, in the process of knowing, faith precedes reason (*Credo, ut intelligam*). Hence he advocated that topics such as the existence of God and of the soul can be known by rational reflection.<sup>21</sup> We can say that those who reflect on the Tertullian's life can easily approach education differently.

## 2. CYPRIAN (200-258): ADMINISTRATOR OF A CLASSROOM

Like, Tertullian, Cyprian was also from Cartage. His integrity is shown throughout his life. Thus as a Bishop and a leader, Cyprian never allowed his life to be proud of his position in his dioceses; instead, he influenced other leaders to follow his example. Tixeront remarks:

He was a man of government and authority before whom all inclined, even those he did not command...During his nine years of his episcopate, saint Cyprian, without constraining anyone, without any encroachment on the rights of his colleagues, by means of his personal influence and skills, was able to group around him the hundred of bishops who govern the African Churches...<sup>22</sup>

We may and should understand that Cyprian influenced people not by the force of his writings or his authority as a bishop or his words as a preacher but simply by his personality and talents that carried human values which people longed to embrace. We can learn from him how teachers can govern a classroom without violating the rights of each but by being a representation of what students expect from a teacher. He attracted many. Moreover, Cyprian was always enthusiastic in clarifying issues that seem to be obscure. F. Cayre A.A testifies that

Saint Cyprian contributed to the clarification of certain consequences of the principle of the Roman primacy, which he himself had presented as the basis of catholic unity, not only in the order of faith, but also in that of hierarchy and government.<sup>23</sup>

Those who recall the complexity of the issue concerning the Roman primacy –the Place of the Bishop of Rome vis-à-vis other bishops- and the consequences that go along with this doctrine, could tell how important although difficult it is to make a coherent statement that moderates views and opinions of many people. This is to say that a teacher should strive to shed light on complex

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<sup>20</sup> Altaner B. *Patrology*, (Freiburg: Herder and Herder, 1960), p. 166.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p. 179.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, p. 256.

<sup>23</sup> Cayre F. A.A, *Manual of Patrology and History of Theology*, 1<sup>st</sup> vol., (Paris: Desclee & Co, 1936), p. 266.

issues for more clarity. Cyprian was not a great thinker but his morality gained him many disciples; he actually led his people to what is virtuous and, showing an example not as a theorist, to the practice of charity.

### 3. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO (354-430): A MASTER AND DISCIPLE

Here is another Father of the Church, Augustine of Hippo, who gathered as well as combined, without confusion, different qualities of many of his predecessors. Berthold Altaner commented:

The great bishop united in himself the creative energy of Tertullian and the breath of spirit of Origen with the ecclesiastical sensitivity of Cyprian; the dialectical acumen of Aristotle with the soaring idealism and speculation of Plato; the practical sense of the Latins with the spiritual subtlety of the Greeks. He was the greatest philosopher of patristic era and, without doubt, the most important and influential theologian of the Church in general...<sup>24</sup>

It is still very important to mention what Vernon J. Bourke says about Augustine because it serves as a link between what scholars of his time and of his immediate period said in one hand and the modern and contemporary scholars say about him, on the other. So writing on the influence of Augustine, Vernon J. Bourke says:

Among modern and contemporary philosophers, Augustine is read by people of widely diversified interests. We have seen how many of his works are printed, both in Latin and in the vernaculars, through this century. Existentialist, phenomenologists, philosophers of history, actionists, idealists, introspective psychologists, representatives of a dozen other movements, find or think they find a patron in St. Augustine.<sup>25</sup>

Angelo Di Bernadino adds:

Departing from the evidence of his knowledge of himself, he expounded on the themes of being, of truth, and of love, and contributed much to the understanding of the problems of search for God and the nature of man, of eternity and time, of liberty and evil, of providence and history, of beatitude, of justice and of peace...Augustine was a master who nevertheless considered himself a disciple and decided that all be disciples with him of the truth which is Christ.<sup>26</sup>

For Augustine of Hippo, a good master must be a good disciple; as a master, he never found his self-knowledge sufficient enough to teach his people but gathered adequate information from various scholars of different fields. Hence, he was able to transmit knowledge that could cut across borders. The margins of his message were extended to various disciplines that he could meet the demands of his complex and versatile audience. He was all-round and, without confusion, he could bring together search for divine knowledge and human knowledge for the truth of the matter to be clearly identified. Berthold Altaner declared that

Augustine's reputation for scholarship and piety was even then very great, thus when, in 391, he entered the Church quite unsuspected...With this, his spiritual and intellectual development entered a new stage. His hitherto predominantly philosophical interest and his

<sup>24</sup> Angelo Di Bernadino (ed), *Patrology*, (Maryland: Christian Classics, Inc, 1986), p. 351.

<sup>25</sup> See in the introduction of Eugene Portalie, *A guide to the thoughts of Saint Augustine* (London: Burns & Oates, 1960), p.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Ibid*, 351-353.

occupation with the liberal arts gave way to a purely theological orientation and practical activities in the service of the Church.<sup>27</sup>

Augustine's life reminds us of the responsibility of a teacher to become one with the disciples in order to meet the demands of our students. It is noteworthy to mention here that his love for people, search for justice and his all-around knowledge worked for the attitude that the Church so admires in him. A.J. Ennis says:

Augustine was a man of brilliant genius, whose profound humanity transformed the already declining rhetoric and philosophy into new and distinctive and made him a precursor of modern times...He marks all that he treats with personal quality that is a product of a nature that exceptional sensitive, of an experience that is, exceptionally lucid and, above all, of a love that is exceptionally profound.<sup>28</sup>

As education is concerned, Augustine of Hippo edified his audience on the necessity of having personal qualities, knowledge of subjects and the right method of teaching. For example, in studying Scriptures, he said: "There are two things necessary to the treatment of the Scripture: a way of discovering those things which are to be understood, and a way of teaching what we have learned."<sup>29</sup> Hence, he took time to write many essays on philosophy and Liberal Arts where he exalts arts and eloquence with a remarkable simplicity. This is where we find his essay on the teacher. It is convenient that we look into it as we unveil his educational theory and his influence on education.

### **Brief comment on his Treatise "The Teacher"**

The essay on "The Teacher" is a dialogue between Augustine and his son Adeodatus in which Augustine instructs his son on the existence of two teachers -the outward and the interior- but also on the credit the interior teacher. It is true that the purpose as well as the distinct value of words and signs uttered by the outward teacher cannot be overemphasized because, for Augustine, we should only speak for the purpose of teaching and learning. Words and signs are both important when we speak, for teaching and learning take place through words and signs.<sup>30</sup>

However, it seems that we do not learn through the words which sound outwardly, but through the truth which teaches within us. He says:

To give them as much credit as possible, words possess only sufficient efficacy to remind us in order that we may seek things, but not to exhibit the things so that we may know them. He teaches me something, moreover, who present to my eyes or to any other bodily sense or even to my mind itself those things which I wish to know. By means of words, therefore, we learn only words or rather the sound and vibration of words, for if those things which are not words, even though I have heard a word, I do not know that it is a word until I know what it signifies. So when things are known the cognition of the words is also accomplished, but means of hearing words, they are not learned. For we do not learn the words which we know, not can we say that we learn those we do not know unless their signification has been perceived; and this happens not by means of hearing words which are

<sup>27</sup> Berthold Altaner, *Patrology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1959), p. 491.

<sup>28</sup> Ennis A.J., Augustine, St. in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol.1, (New York: McGraw – Hill Book Company), 1966.

<sup>29</sup> Saint Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* (translated by D.W. Robertson), (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc, 1958), p. 7.

<sup>30</sup> Whitney J. Oates (ed.), *Basic Writings of Saint Augustine* (New York: Random House Publishers, 1948), pp. 361-387.

pronounced, but by means of the cognition of the things which are signified. For it is the truest reasoning and most correctly said that when words are uttered we either know already what they signify or we do not know, then we remember rather than learn, but if we do not know, than we do not even remember, though we perhaps prompted to ask...But referring now to all things which we understand, we consult, not the speaker who utters words, but the guardian truth within the mind itself, because we have perhaps been reminded by words to do so. Moreover, he who is consulted teaches; for he who is said to reside in the interior man is Christ, that is the unchangeable excellence of God and his everlasting wisdom, which every rational soul does indeed consult.<sup>31</sup>

This long illustration underlines the importance of two issues for true learning to take place. In as much as we cannot afford to neglect words and signs in the process of learning we should listen to what the interior man, Christ, teaches, for it is he who teaches; words and signs remind us of what is taught. Students should, therefore, submit to God, the teacher of the truth. It is only when the truth of the matter is revealed to the learner that he/she lives a happy life because the goal of education, according to Saint Augustine, is the attainment of happiness. In his theory of knowledge, Augustine quickly stated: “What if even the ignorant can lead a happy life? That's hardly possible. If it were so, ignorance would have no importance, instead of being the only true unhappiness”.<sup>32</sup>

Then, he concluded that he concluded the purpose of education is the attainment of happiness by a closer union with God<sup>33</sup> who is the interior teacher. He, therefore, calls teachers and learners to conform their teaching and learning to the teaching of the truth.

#### 4. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM(344-407): ELOQUENT MASTER OF MODERATION

John of Constantinople, later called John Chrysostom (Golden Mouthed) because his eloquence in preaching is one of those counted among the Greek Fathers of the Church; he was from Antioch where he initiated reforms in the clergy. The words of Johannes Quasten inspired our choice when he said:

None of the ancient Christian writers has had many biographers and panegyrists as he, from the oldest and best writings before 415 by bishop Palladius of Helenopolis down to the last in late Byzantine times.<sup>34</sup>

Then, talking about his writings, he added:

Among the Greek Fathers none has left so extensive a literature legacy as Chrysostom. Moreover, he is the only one of the older Anthiochenes whose writings are almost entirely preserved. They owe this preferred treatment to the personality of their author as well as their own excellence. None of the Eastern writers has won the admiration and love of posterity to such a degree as he.<sup>35</sup>

As a young boy, John Chrysostom received wonderful education from renowned teachers; but what is more interesting here is that he was receptive and cooperative. Moreover, he applied all that he

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 389-390.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. <http://www.newfoundations.com/GALLERY/Augustine.html>

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>34</sup> Johannes Quasten, *Patrology, vol.3 The Golden Age of Greek Patristic Literature* (Maryland: Christian Classics Inc, 1992), p. 424.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, p. 429.

learned with prudence and moderation. It is these qualities namely receptivity and cooperation, prudence and moderation<sup>36</sup> that we could highlight as we link his life to education, for effective learning and helpful teaching requires a good dose of these features. We, therefore, learn from him that, in learning/teaching, both students and teachers need receptivity as a disposition to receive what is taught or said, cooperation as mutual involvement in the subject, prudence as forethought for genuine selection of what is delivered and received and moderation as a control measure. In his sermon on Priesthood, for instance, John Chrysostom said:

...Therefore the bishop needs great prudence to withdraw the people from foolish questions, and at the same time to keep himself clear of the aforesaid changes...Because he who is appointed to correct ignorance of others, and give warning of the approach of the war waged by the devil, cannot plead ignorance and say: 'I did not hear the trumpet, I did not foresee the war.'<sup>37</sup>

There is something persuasive in his life, for although he was very eloquent as a teacher and preacher, he taught and preached through his entire life. Justo Gonzalez says:

But for John Chrysostom the pulpit was not simply a podium from which to deliver brilliant pieces of oratory. It was rather the verbal experience of his entire life, his battlefield against the powers of evil, an avoidable calling that eventually led to exile and to death itself.<sup>38</sup>

Consequently, many people of his audience became not only his hearers but his disciples; they became very much attached to him. This is also the result of his careful plans, unity in all that he said and the avoidance of deviation in his preaching method, his sincerity and the depth of the content and the clarity of his language.<sup>39</sup> His method of teaching/preaching goes beyond his eloquence; it is worthy to be imitated as it is stated in the same introduction:

Nevertheless, however gifted as orator, St. John Chrysostom was pre-eminently the teacher, and not infrequently he made sage observations on methods of teaching. He spoke of the advisability of imparting new knowledge a little at a time, which explained his very gradual unfolding of St. John's Gospel in the homilies. He was clearly aware of the truth of the principle: '*repetitio mater studiorum*', for he repeated the same texts many times in the same homily. Probably another motive for this was the desire to increase the familiarity of his listeners with Scripture and those compensate for the lack multiple copies and the prevailing lack of literacy.<sup>40</sup>

In the mind of John Chrysostom, education should neither neglect eloquence nor moderation; and these should come through a gradual exercise which leads the speaker and the listener into a world of effective cooperation. But more importantly, John Chrysostom, without neglecting knowledge and skills, shows great concern on the ethical side of education<sup>41</sup>; therefore, in his treatise on

<sup>36</sup> See the introduction of Saint John Chrysostom's book titled: *Commentary on saint the Apostle and evangelist. Homilies 1-47* (Translated by sister Thomas Aquinas Goggin), (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1957), p. ix.

<sup>37</sup> Cfr. Colman J. Barry (ed.), *Reading in Church History* (3 volumes in 1), Maryland: Christian Classics, Inc., 1985), pp. 116-117

<sup>38</sup> Gonzalez L. Justo, *The Story of Christianity*. (vol.1.) *The Early Church to the dawn of Reformation*. (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1984), p. 194.

<sup>39</sup> Saint John Chrysostom, *op. cit.*, p. xii.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *Introduction on "Vainglory and the right Way for Parents of bringing up their Children"* by Max L. W. Laistner (Stuttgart: Cornell University Press, 1951).

“*Vainglory and the Right way for Parents to bring up their children*”, he exhorts parents to bring up their children in the proper way.

**Brief comment on “*Vainglory and the Right Way for Parents to bring up their Children*”**

In form of a homily, John Chrysostom speaks of child education and insists on the need of ethical education as the foundation of authentic personhood; he calls parents to teach moral values to their children because these make them gentle and sober. Hence, parents ought to instill in their children these values when they are still tender. So he warns parents who excite their children with things of less value:

The man-child has lately been born. His father thinks of every means, not whereby he may direct the child’s life wisely, but whereby he may adorn it and clothe is in fine raiment and golden ornaments...Implanting in him from the first an excessive love of wealth and teaching him to be excited by things of no profit...<sup>42</sup>

He, then, proposes a method through which education of children could be better done:

And as you remove what is superfluous and add what is lacking, inspect them day by day, to see what good qualities nature has supplied so that you will increase them, and what faults so that you will eradicate them. And, first of all, take the greatest care to banish licentious speech; for love of this above all frets the souls of the young. Before he is of age to try it, teach your child to be sober and vigilant...<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, John Chrysostom compares the child’s soul to a city that must be built on solid foundation and protected from all vices for the child to grow in wisdom and understanding. He wrote:

The child’s soul then is a city, a city but lately founded and built, a city containing strangers with no experience as yet, such as it is very easy to direct...draw up laws then for the city and its citizens, laws that inspire fear and are strong, and uphold them if they are being transgressed; for it is useless to draw up laws, if their enforcement does not follow.<sup>44</sup>

As the Greek cities had protected doors, the doors of the child’s soul, that is all the senses, ought to be protected by an early comprehensive education that is based on morals. Thus, he recommended that the child be taught to be fair and courteous; he should be punished whenever he loses the way to sanctity.<sup>45</sup> In the same way, the spirit also ought to be molded in order to beget rational thoughts.<sup>46</sup> Of all these, however, John Chrysostom believed that wisdom is the principle of control. He, therefore, concluded with an invitation:

Let us then implant in him this wisdom and let us exercise him therein, that he may know the meaning of human desires, wealth, reputation, power, and may disdain these and strive after the highest.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Saint John Chrysostom, *Vainglory and the right way for parents to bring up their children*, paragraph 16. (Translated by Max L. W. Laistner) (Stuttgart: Cornell University Press, 1951).

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* Paragraph 22.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* Paragraph 25.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* paragraph 31.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* paragraph 75.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* paragraph 86.

For John Chrysostom, education is the highest and holiest tasks of parents; it should not be for a period but for eternity.<sup>48</sup> Educationists of our time have certainly a lot to take from Chrysostom's pedagogy for knowledge and skills to be grounded on virtues and to be guided in the right direction.

## CONCLUSION

The intention of writing this text has been to make known the contribution of the Fathers of the Church to education. Since the beginning of the Church, the example that Jesus taught his disciples, thereafter embraced by many converts and followed by the Church Fathers, has inspired the entire Church to consider education, not as an option or an addendum but as an integrant part of the whole mission of the Church. Theodore M. Hesburgh says "that the Church has always been concerned with education, since among its other essential functions is a teaching body."<sup>49</sup>

So the Church's engagement to educating people in a comprehensive way was prolonged by the Church Fathers as we depict it in their lives and works. Actually, everything that works for the salvation of a person is to be transmitted to all. However, if knowledge and skills are to be taught, they should be rooted on values. The importance of humanities is first among other Faculties named in *Sapientia Christiana*:

Besides the Faculties of Sacred Theology, Canon Law, and Philosophy, other Faculties have been or can be canonically erected, according to the needs of the Church and with a view to attaining certain goals, as for instance: a) a more profound study of certain sciences which are of greater importance to the theological, juridical, and philosophical disciplines; b) the promotion of other sciences, first of all the humanities, which have a close connection with the theological disciplines or with the work of evangelization<sup>50</sup>

The illustrations of the Church Fathers are vivid examples of what education should be, where education should begin and where it should end. Moreover, the Church Fathers' lives and works testify to the kind people that could be called to teach and the way people should learn.

This should challenge our current education in order to create a way forward that will improve our education system not only for knowledge and skills but more importantly for salvation. The Church Fathers could assist us to reverse the hierarchy that we use to know; we should, therefore, move from knowledge and skills to values, knowledge and skills.

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