

**SELF-SUPPORT BY MICRONESIANS OF PROGRAMS AND INSTITUTIONS
OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN MICRONESIA: THE IDEAL AND THE
PRESENT REALITY**

Mission schools, while they are not the only Church institutions in the vicariate, are certainly the most prominent. Practically all the Sisters on the mission and over one-fourth of the Jesuits are engaged full-time in the staffing of the mission's 12 elementary schools and three high schools. Approximately half of the funds disbursed by the Bishop last year went into maintaining these schools. Because mission schools represent our largest investment in manpower and money, and because I am more familiar with education than any other of our apostolates, the remarks in this paper will be concerned mostly with educational institutions. They will not be without applicability to other Church institutions, however.

The primary aim of a good Christian school, it seems to me, is not to teach students "subjects"—not even religion, but to help them acquire a deep sense of personal worth or self-esteem. The psychological progression that is followed by any learner, whether he attends a religious school or not, follows this order: I am good; my neighbor is good; therefore, God is good. If the first step is missed along the way, no amount of sermonizing can possibly supply an interiorization of the second and third steps, as anyone who has worked with real juvenile delinquents well knows. Students may pay lip service to the love of God and neighbor, but it cannot go much deeper than that as long as their self-image is predominantly negative. The extreme example of this is the sociopath, who because he has learned early in life that he amounts to nothing responds in kind through a lifelong display of contempt for his fellowman.

All the religious instruction in the world, then, will amount to nothing unless a person possesses a real sense of his own personal worth. The fact that statements of our educational or apostolic goals often obscure this fundamental step in our preaching and teaching does not change things at all. Unless this aim is realized, nothing else will be accomplished.

There is reason to believe that Micronesian students have special need of learning self-respect and confidence in their abilities, particularly at this time in history. Our students cannot help but compare themselves to the "typical average

American" whom they regard as more knowledgeable, wealthier, more handsome, more resourceful, and better equipped to face the problems of modern life than themselves. "We are junk," they often remark, hoping that we will be able to convince them otherwise. When we rhapsodize on the glories of their past culture and the beauty of their islands, they think we must be kidding. Artfully designed sailing canoes and old handlooms count for nothing in this age of the jet plane and the department store. They want to know whether they can make it in this new world whose rules are set down by The Educational Testing Service and NASA. All too often they receive the answer they expected to hear, "Not quite, kid. You're a good fellow, but you're 35th percentile on the SAT Test."

Micronesian students submit to an eight or twelve-year ordeal during which they study from American textbooks subjects that their teachers feel are important. This in itself would not be so bad if they emerged from the ordeal with the awareness that they had succeeded. At least success would give them some cause for self-esteem. What happens instead, though, is that they gradually come to realize that they have never quite measured up to the standards that have been set for them. Having undergone the painful initiation rites, they soon discover that they are admitted into the western world as second-rate citizens at best. The blame cannot be laid to anything as simple as prejudice or covert hostility on the part of Americans, although this is a frequent rationalization for their failure. The fact is that they are regarded as underachievers and are treated as such, first by their teachers and later by their American supervisors, advisors, and sometimes pastors. As students and employees, they are subjected to the same well-intentioned, yet humiliating forms of condescension. In a thousand different ways we say to our Micronesian pupils, "Nice try, but I suppose this is all we can really expect of you."

Incidentally, it may be that our lack of vocations can be linked to the absence of self-esteem among the students we teach. "We're not good enough to be priests," is the frequent comment of students when the subject of vocations comes up. There may be more honesty and perception in this reply than we think. The stumbling-blocks to the priesthood, I suspect, are far more subtle than simply celibacy, lack of religious motivation, or the instability of family life. Students may be saying to us, "We can't hope to succeed in your ministry any more than we have succeeded in your schools. After all, we're only Micronesians!"

What has been said above is by no means only true of our schools. At his job the average Micronesian stands in the shadow of an American supervisor whose responsibility it is to show his charges a better way of getting work done. New Zealanders build his hospital; Filipinos put up his district legislature building; Okinawans do his fishing for him; and the parish priest plans and constructs his school and church. He is continually being told that he has not matured sufficiently to handle the most important jobs by himself, and when he does try something venturesome he is counseled that he has forgotten several important factors and thus impaired the quality of his work. His language is inadequate to the task of conveying precise information on technical matters; his customs are too hopelessly antiquated to be of much use in the modern life of the town; and his folklore is cute but irrelevant. What can he do? What is he good for?

We should not be shocked if our former students drop their books and pick up rocks, either literal or literary. It should come as no surprise if the boy whom we remember as a docile, well-behaved pupil becomes exasperated trying to prove himself by our elusive standards and begins to attack the whole "system". A fairly reflective graduate soon realizes that he must live in a twilight zone halfway between success and failure. He asks himself why he forever has to meet someone else's norms: why the measure of his success must be his CAT verbal scores, his mastery of English idiom, his ability to cope with four years of math and science.

The rabid rallying of disenchanted students behind slogans supporting Micronesian independence is only a symptom of a dissatisfaction whose source lies much deeper than merely concern for the political status of their islands. Political crusading among Micronesian students may be a futile gesture of protest against an order in which they can never come out on top. Sloganeering is as much an outcry against education and all the other institutions that deny him real achievement as it is against political subordination. Like the Cargo Cults in Melanesia some years ago, it is a desperate attempt to subvert the new order and replace it with another which promises a greater measure of dignity to the members of his society. Unfortunately, today's version of the Cargo Cult, the independence movement, provides no satisfactory answer to the deeper but unarticulated question that plagues Micronesians today—how can they regain their personal pride?

Even if much of this can be written of the people of any developing country, this experience is none the less painful for Micronesians here and now. What we missionaries must ask ourselves is what we can do to help assuage the self-doubt that seems to torment the people with whom we work? Can we provide avenues for achievement so that our people will realize their self-worth, a truth that we proclaim from the pulpit and in the classroom?

I would suggest that we begin by examining Church-sponsored institutions that are already in existence to see whether they may not be adapted to help meet this major need that has been outlined above. To dream up new mission projects, I'm afraid, would be to miss the point. The problem at present is not the kinds of institutions that the Church is sponsoring in Micronesia, but the way they are being run. Redeployment of our mission resources, human and material, in credit unions instead of in schools is no solution to anything if the credit unions will no more belong to the people than our schools.

Whatever institutions the Church supports, we must take all necessary steps for allowing Micronesians to taste the pride of ownership. We can't ask them to work for the "company store" forever, while telling them that their effort is really contributing to their own good. Our primary consideration must be to permit them the sense of achievement that stems from their knowledge that their churches and schools are really theirs. My impression is that most Micronesians feel that their church is for them, but that it is by no means theirs. Unfortunately, there is abundant evidence to bear out their suspicion.

Pride of ownership and the achievement that it brings only come when people have paid for their church or school and when they bear the responsibility for its operation. This axiom is generally found on the first page of any community development leaflets I have seen, and yet we have tended to ignore it time and again in our vicariate work. The pressure to get the job done, to have "quality" schools and the finest weather-proofed chapels proves too great for us most of the time. Consequently, our institutions are usually intrusions upon the community rather than outgrowths of it. However much they may be appreciated by the people who use them, they cannot possibly instill pride of ownership in Micronesians so long as we do the hiring and firing, pick up the bills for repairs and improvement, and make the major decisions that touch upon our schools and churches. While such

institutions have undoubtedly provided important outside assistance to the people, the question may be asked as to whether they actually bolster the self-esteem of the community-at-large.

We have made some progress in this area, to be sure. Most parishes in the vicariate now have some form of parish council functioning; in some the parishioners exercise a great deal of responsibility in important decisions. PATS has a board of trustees that is almost entirely composed of Micronesians. Mindszenty High School has gone further than any other private school, to my knowledge, in the degree to which it is locally controlled and supported. It is only fair to acknowledge that many honest attempts are being made to involve Micronesians in planning and decision-making.

It is the other prerequisite of genuine ownership, I fear, that is being overlooked—people must begin to build for themselves and at their own expense. We still insist on doing things for Micronesians instead of with them. The extent to which this is true can be seen from a cursory look at the mission financial statements for this past year. I have listed below all of the parish schools in the vicariate for which statistics were available. The first figure is the revenue collected from the local community, usually in the form of tuition; the second is the cost of library materials, school supplies and lay teachers' salaries. The second figure is by no means the total operating expense of the school for a year, for it excludes such items as Sisters' salaries, upkeep of school facilities, and major improvements. A comparison of the two figures should reveal the degree to which we depend on outside support for the running of our parish schools in all but one or two cases.

<u>Parish</u>	<u>Local Support</u>	<u>Expenses</u>
Koror	\$26,500	\$23,000
Yap	1,600	5,200
Tol	-----	4,900
Toloas	240	5,100
Kolonia	1,900	3,700
Kitti	365	5,000
Jaluit	-----	1,300
Majuro	3,300	4,800

There may have been a time when a good deal of outside financial support was necessary to get our missionary institutions off the ground. It is my belief, however, that that day is rapidly drawing to a close. What Micronesians need now is not so much money as the opportunity to spend their money on things that will bring them satisfaction. They crave authentic proprietorship over their land, their polity, their church, and especially themselves. The insidious danger in the perpetuation of a give-away program, regardless of whether it is the Church or the Government that is the benefactor, is that Micronesians may continue to believe that they can do nothing for themselves, and therefore that they are nothing.

People commonly look to the Government as a refuge in time of need and as the solution to all their problems, fiscal and otherwise. While it is easy for us to see in this simply a manifestation of their lack of responsibility, it could also be a sign that most Micronesians mistrust their own ability to provide for themselves. It would be a terrible misfortune if by our own example we encouraged them to always run elsewhere for help. Nonetheless, when our schools are short of funds our eyes instinctively turn towards Saipan for assistance rather than to the communities our schools serve. So often we are at the head of the breadline, our people lined up behind us, with our hands out. In so acting, are we denying our people the chance to discover that they can make it on their own if they wish?

We have a wonderful opportunity in some of our private schools to lead the way in the indigenization of education so that the mission school will become the property of the people, not of the pastor nor of the U.S. taxpayer. It is true that this ownership will not be acquired without some sacrifice on the part of the community, but then our people will know that at least one institution is truly and completely theirs. If we, in consultation with the people of the community, should decide that it is impossible or undesirable to bear the expense of the school, then let us either close it or turn it over to the government instead of maintaining it as the mission's school. If the people wish to maintain a mission school, they must be so convinced of its value that they are willing to pay for it. Otherwise, we should begin discussing with them other kinds of service that may mean more to them.

Private education in most of the western world has always been something of a luxury, one whose importance people have felt so strongly about that they have

decided to forgo other attractive bargains in order to educate their children in private schools. The splendid parochial school system in the United States has often been cited as a monument to the determination and the strength of beliefs of American Catholics. The danger here in Micronesia is that parochial schools will be a testimony to nothing but the fundraising ability of the pastor or the Bishop. Whether our private schools are supported by the Bishop or by the government, they will still remain a gift to the Micronesian community from above. As a gift, they can only reinforce the self-derogatory attitude of our people who are already too inclined to say, "I can't do it; you'd better take over."

But can Micronesians assume the burden of financing their mission schools? Circumstances, of course, vary from place to place; it may happen that in a few communities they cannot and will not be able to do so for some time to come. And yet, we should be wary of underestimating the capabilities of even those communities that are still strongly dependent upon a subsistence economy. On the whole, a new Micronesia has taken shape within the last decade. Five years ago the national income was six or seven million dollars; today it is 18 million and rising quickly. Over ten percent of the population now works for wages. Last year two-thirds of a million dollars was spent in the Trust Territory on beer and liquor alone, while over a half million dollars more went for tobacco. The fact that there are now 4000 privately owned cars and jeeps in the Trust Territory as compared with 1000 ten years ago may help us gauge the soaring rate at which material prosperity is growing in the islands. Is it unreasonable, then, to think that most of the five to seven hundred thousand dollars needed to support our private schools could come from other than U.S. sources?

The time may come when the vicariate is unable to furnish the resources that it has generously lavished on our church institutions in the past. Even if the mission could provide this same support, it would not be wise to do so. Self-support by Micronesians of their Church is imperative not in the far-distant future, but now. I have neglected many of the arguments commonly heard in favor of self-support because they seemed to me to be a little too pragmatic in tone. In this paper I have strongly advocated self-support primarily because it is an indispensable means for inculcating pride of ownership in the people of Micronesia. Authentic pride in themselves is probably the most crying need that Micronesians have right now. Mission money cannot give them this pride; only a genuine sense of

accomplishment can do that. By providing opportunities for the Micronesian people to discover how much they can do for themselves, we are helping them to build up the self-esteem that is the necessary condition for a love of God and love of fellowman.