

Teaching Within the Charism of Elizabeth Hayes

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Since it is my belief that every charism contains the elements of being and doing, I would like to examine the life of Elizabeth Hayes in terms of the ministry of teaching, which I believe to have been part of her charism. However, in writing on a topic such as this, one must be careful to present the values and convictions of the person under consideration and not one's own, except for the sake of endorsement when they clearly coincide.

We read in the preface of Regis Armstrong's book, *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, that it is not the shoe that falls out of fashion but the added buckle or ribbon. It is not the lamp that becomes strange but the decoration or style, not the Gospel but the commentaries. Those who have written about Elizabeth Hayes, later to become known as Mother Mary Ignatius, have written well, but each generation of her followers and each one of each generation must examine anew the significance of her life, of her contributions to her fellow human beings, better known in Franciscan terminology as brothers and sisters, and of her place in the history of the Church.

We know that new forms of religious life are being promoted in the new Churches today so as to manifest different aspects of Christ's mission. But *Ad Gentes* states that care must be taken that congregations pursuing the same charism are not multiplied with consequent damage to the religious life and the apostolate.

These latter statements are always true. The Church was and is a wise mother. Her approbation of any institute guarantees that the road designated by the call is a sure one, leading, if followed like Abraham in faith, to the promised land. But we know sadly that the essence of the call can be lost in the accretions that build up around it, in the false interpretations and the ease by which one can shift from the cutting edge to the middle and safer ground.

Given that in her day, Elizabeth Hayes did found a religious institute and that it received approbation from the Church, I will explore the manifestations of the charism in the ministry of education in the lifetime of the foundress and in that of those early followers who embodied the charism so well and imbibed her spirit so fully. The latter allegation is made on the basis of many eyewitness accounts and stories passed on from one generation to another. We are all keepers of the myth.

However, to isolate the unique charism of Elizabeth Hayes with the precision of the scientist would be an impossible task, for the charism may well be like a mosaic defying precise verbal clarification. Neither is it the function of this paper. But it is the function of this paper to see how the ministry of education fits into her call and mission, both of which constitute her identity in which the charism is manifested.

At this stage it may be well to say a few words about charism in general. A charism is defined as a gift or a special manifestation of the divine presence. We can say it is an ability or an inclination to be of service in a particular way. Father Futrell, SJ. describes charism as "simply a graced way of following Jesus for the service of the whole Church, which can cease to exist if and when this service and this vision cease to be a true good for the Church."

The charisms, we know, assure the growth of Christ's body, despite our inadequacies, imperfections, and wayward tendencies. The founding person's experience is followed by the formation of a community moved by the same spirit. The group unites under the guidance of the founder/foundress to search for the ways the spirit is leading them to live the gospel and work for the realization of the kingdom of God. The initial stages and the years following are important, as the founding charism is institutionalized in a variety of ways, such as community, cult, norms, and customs among which the apostolic priorities emerge. As the community's second generation grows, the members recount stories heard or experienced themselves. These stories reinforce the community's direction and establish its characteristic traits.

Now, let us look at the early life of our foundress. We know that Elizabeth Hayes' background prepared her for the field of education and can be looked upon as the hand of Divine Providence guiding her from her earliest years. We read in her biography, *Unless the Seed Die*, that her father, Philip, a chorister at Magdala College, Oxford, and a graduate of the same university, nevertheless, after his ordination to the ministry and his appointment as a curate to Saint Andrew's, "evidently felt himself to be more suited to teaching than to pastoral work." After his marriage, he moved from London to Guernsey, where he opened a private school for boys. The advertisement in the papers announcing the new school states "that the Reverend Philip Hayes had already been engaged in the education of youth in the neighborhood of London for many years."

Other circumstances can be cited to support the fact that formal education, schooling, was very much part of the Hayes family. We understand that in the field of teaching, there is well over a century of service which included Elizabeth's father, grandfather, brother, uncle, great-uncle, and earlier forebears. It comes as no surprise, then, that Elizabeth started her adult life as a teacher, since the aptitude for teaching and committed service to the Church seemed to be an inherited trait.

That teaching is a charism is well attested to in the history of the Church. Teaching or preaching remains a primary mission of the Church. Paul makes mention of them in his letter to the Romans. Our gifts differ, he says, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophecy, then use it as your faith suggests; if administration, then use it for administration; if teaching, then use it for teaching.

From the time of her arrival in England, in 1843-45, Elizabeth Hayes was engaged in teaching. Those years were trying years in the Church of England, as the turmoil surrounding the Oxford Movement heightened and the defection to Rome of many of its prominent members multiplied. It was on the occasion of Elizabeth Lochkart's conversion and her leaving the Wantage Penitentiary that Elizabeth Hayes arrived to help the same penitentiary. This was recorded as June 25, 1850.

We read, however, that one month later, July 29, 1850, the Reverend Butler appointed Elizabeth Hayes head of the new Girls' School, indicating that he discovered her forte was teaching. Neither is there anything written to lead us to believe that she resisted the appointment.

It would seem though, that by nature and grace Elizabeth Hayes had the aptitude to teach the slow, the unruly, and the obstinate. We deduce this from Reverend Butler's comments on her work in Wantage, where he had praise "for her tireless industry and respect for her capability in managing the girls who were rough and disobedient." Furthermore, she involved herself with the broader spectrum of education, opening a Work School in the parish in January, 1852; this, it is recorded, was for girls past school age (13 years), who learned needlework and household duties.

But, charisms, whether to teach, preach, administer, or other, must be exercised and strengthened in every way to keep them effective. Thus it was that Elizabeth Hayes went to Clevedon, near Bristol, to take the examination for the government certificate so as to qualify for the office of headmistress of a parochial school. Competency does give credibility to the message.

Having passed some years in this ministry, Elizabeth Hayes was now about to enter another phase of her life, though still in the ambit of education. We know that when the Bishop of Oxford came to Wantage in 1855, Elizabeth was still associated with the school system and the Anglican Church, or more specifically with Butler's "Church Schools." We also know that on July 25, 1855, Butler's dream of a School Sisterhood became a reality, and that the Bishop instituted Miss Hayes as superior of this new Sisterhood, "whose charge was to be the training of young children, servants and governesses." It is hardly out of place to call attention to the fact that the very title of the new community, School Sisterhood, surely implies the place of schools in the work of Sisters. Merely as an observation, we note that the formal training for a religious community was negligible—it was such in name only—while matters concerning schools got top priority, an arrangement which had dire consequences.

Was there any particular reason why education loomed so large in the mind of Butler? Two reasons may be put forward. The first is that he, the Reverend William Butler, was appointed Vicar of Wantage in 1847. Wantage at that time was known as "Black Wantage," and described by his biographer as a "refuge for runaway criminals and a haven for drunkards and brawlers." Therefore, education and religion were understandably relegated to a place of minor importance, if considered at all. Butler knew, however, that education was necessary to lift people out of this state of squalor and ignorance.

The second, related to the first but more cogently stated, is the fact that the Church needed schools to bolster and further its mission, for, quoting again his biographer, "he was convinced that the battle of the Church must be won in the schools."

Let us pause to reflect on that statement, for we shall see that Elizabeth Hayes shared the same conviction, though independently of Butler. Throughout history, the Catholic Church has always conducted schools, has always had a high regard for education, and not without a compelling reason. Was not her Divine Founder called Master, Rabbi (teacher), and sometimes directly teacher? How often we read in the gospels that Jesus entered the synagogue and began to teach.

In those days every synagogue had a school attached; some still have. Jesus would have been associated with that system, since we know he taught in the synagogue and was addressed as Rabbi. Teaching, therefore, is a sacred task; it has a spiritual connotation. To teach is also to perform a profoundly human service for others. Being the instrumental cause in the process of education, the teacher leads the student to the discovery of truth, to self-development and self-realization. In this way, the teacher interacts meaningfully in creation.

Education is not concerned solely with the transmission of faith and the teaching of religion, nor with academic achievement. Education, or more specifically teaching, is the profession par excellence which concerns itself with every aspect of human life, and the aim and desire of every teacher is to lead persons to their full potential, whatever their capabilities or whatever their walk in life. I read recently that it is written in the Talmud, "A teacher shall be venerated as much as God Himself." Strong words these!

For Elizabeth Hayes, the above must have been true, for the caliber of student she dealt with would not have been easy in either the natural or the supernatural order. Had she been interested in a lucrative position, she would hardly have chosen the teaching profession. It is strange that for all its importance, penury so often dogged the steps of teachers. The same fact only strengthens the conviction that teaching is among the charisms embedded in the human heart by the Creator himself and is operative in the world at large, while not depending on outside allurements.

Had she been concerned with the superior students or the middle- and upper-class milieu, she would hardly have merited Butler's observation in 1853, when he said that Miss Hayes was changing "the present workschool ... into a workhouse in which she proposes to employ four servant girls, lodging, clothing and feeding them. This is to cost me nothing, May God prosper this earnest effort to uphold these poor girls."

Elizabeth Hayes continued in the School Sisterhood for another year or so, but there seems to have been a growing disenchantment on the part of Butler towards Miss Hayes, as he always referred to her. No doubt, her frequent illnesses and fragile health, disrupting the school program, would have caused part of this disenchantment. Finally, she left Wantage and the Anglican Sisterhood. The actual date of her departure is not important for this paper. What is important is that within a few years she was received into the Catholic Church and the Franciscan Sisterhood. Her entrance into the Franciscan Sisters at Bayswater, London, took place on November 25, 1858. It was at this time that the change of name took place, as was customary in all Catholic Sisterhoods. Henceforth, she would be known as Sister Mary Ignatius. Thus begins the third part of her journey, the first being her years as a lay person in the Anglican Church, the second and more short-lived, her time in the Anglican Sisterhood.

Even now, in this new community at Bayswater, the Sisters are recorded as teaching in the poor school attached to the Oblate Church, as well as instructing proselytes, visiting the needy, and caring for orphans. It is noteworthy that schools did not constitute the only apostolate, though seemingly the main one. The other works of charity, and they were varied, were outreaches of or apart from the main one.

Again at Glasgow, where Sister Mary Ignatius went to imbibe more fully the Franciscan spirituality, she is assisting in schools, a parish school and a night school for working girls after factory hours. During this year she was seized by a desire for the foreign missions, but a mission where, according to her biographer, "she can make of her life a holocaust for the spiritually and intellectually benighted." She certainly must have had the spiritual and intellectual in mind when she communicated with Bishop Smith regarding the mission in Jamaica. Else he would not have replied thus: ". .. Even if they ever have a black school, the Catholic blacks are the best average Catholics I have met and I have a good knowledge of them."

It is easy to deduce from that reply that Sister Mary Ignatius had in mind a place where there could be scope for working and teaching poor blacks. In fact, for the while she stayed in Jamaica, she spent her days not with the poor but with the rich, though not by choice. The remark she made bears this out: "A mission without work for the poor and the needy ... has not a very enticing aspect."

After much tribulation and aborted attempts to make beginnings, Sister Mary Ignatius at last thought she had found a mission in Sevres. Everything seemed to be in order when she said: "We are beginning with a boarding school in order to afford us a means of assisting English converts ... as well as to have any work of charity that will aid them." Quite obviously, she

considered the school a sure means of deepening the faith of those converts, while not closing the door to other works of charity. Is not teaching, therefore, both a spiritual and a corporal work of mercy?

Again, disappointment struck and at a time when she had the nucleus of a religious Community growing around her. This time the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War caused the little Community to be disbanded. It is difficult to imagine anyone having the stamina to continue in the wake of such setbacks, were it not for the conviction that God was calling her on to establish an Institute which only after her death would be brought to fruition.

Divine Providence now sent her westward to Minnesota. How or why she chose Belle Prairie is not clear, but it is clear that she set about building a convent-school complex, and that without any previous income except her trust in God to provide, once she believed she was doing his will. It would seem that the school in each case was a projected source of income, and it was certainly what she could do well, if not best, but at no time was it opened without the apostolic thrust and a special consideration for many whom society would cast in the minority bracket. In this new academy, besides the three R's, painting, music, and foreign languages were offered. Sister Assumpta Ahles, in her book *In the Shadow of His Wings*, expressed this very well when she said:

Hers [Mother Ignatius] would be a school where not only the mind would be trained and cultivated in order to enable each individual to fend for the needs of the body but she would also undertake the enrichment of man's nobler faculties-the development of his aesthetic senses and the powers of the soul. In other words, her aim was to give the young girls of the area, a truly Christian education as also a well-rounded one which would develop all the faculties of soul and body. To this end, Mother Ignatius bent all her energy and strained every effort in order to make her dream a reality.

Amazingly, this remarkable and undaunted woman opened, simultaneously it seems, a school at Brainerd, not far from Belle Prairie, and this with only one professed Sister to help her. It is a prime example of risk-taking, without which there can be no progress. Saint Francis took risks. Mary, our Mother, took risks.

The example of love, deep faith, patient sacrifice, poverty, and prayer set by those heroic and saintly women religious left its mark on their young charges. We read that years later, one aged admirer exclaimed in a voice full of awesome respect: "Those were the Sisters!"

From Belle Prairie, where finally the Institute did take root, Mother Ignatius went south. In a short time, we find Bishop Gross of Savannah granting her permission "to work in the diocese of Savannah with the black population, exclusively, giving girls plain, simple English schooling, teaching them domestic duties, visiting and nursing sick coloured people and, eventually, establishing hospitals for them." Mother Ignatius decided on Augusta as the place to establish her headquarters for the negro missions, though not without much difficulty in weighing the pros and cons of its potential for helping the black people. That she did establish a community and a school in Augusta is quite clear from the letter of the Benedictine Father Oswald to his Abbot in reference to the Franciscans coming south to establish schools of industry for negro girls, and how despite discouragement from the clergy in the area "they got a hold in Augusta, Georgia, rented a house, opened a school, got 120 children, mostly Protestants, many are becoming Catholics; they have a little chapel in their house. .." and then he adds that it has the appearance of beginning a Negro parish in Augusta. It is natural to remark here that the Franciscan Sisters still conduct a school in

Augusta, largely attended by black students, mostly Baptists. Indeed one would wish that Mother Ignatius could have foreseen the future in, at least, this one mission of her early endeavors.

Other foundations, always including a school, industrial or academic, were established at the Isle of Hope and Harrisonville, but these were short-lived. All accounts of those days stress the never-failing presence of Lady Poverty. Conditions were stark, but accepted as part of the sacrifice one makes in following the footsteps of the Master. It was at this time, also, that Mother Ignatius accepted her first negro postulant, Frederica Law. Many noble precedents were set; why they were unable to be continued is another story. The lamp was not extinguished; perhaps it was the decorations and the style that shielded the light.

At this point in her life, Mother Ignatius, moved by the spirit, decided to explore the possibilities of opening a house in Rome, which her biographer suggests would give her a closer connection with the ecclesial authorities there. The rest of this story is well known to the readers of this paper. Suffering and failure continued to dog her steps, but she did succeed in establishing the Motherhouse in Rome. Besides, some time before her death, Mother Ignatius opened a convalescent home in Naples for the sick Sisters. This house, while serving her immediate needs, was also a stepping stone to the future, in such wise that Mother Mary of the Angels remembered herself and Mother Ignatius looking to the Dark Continent from there, reflecting on the desire of Mother Ignatius to inaugurate some social work in that part of the vineyard.

To return to the Foundress herself, weakened and exhausted from ill health, compounded by disappointments, betrayal, misunderstandings, and the weight of responsibility for the missions she had founded and for the remaining Sisters, she quietly left this world on May 6, 1894, to be with the Lord forever. Taking an apt quote from Sister Assumpta's book, we could ask: "Who would venture upon the journey of life if compelled to begin at the end?" On her deathbed she could say, "Oh! what a privilege to die a child of Holy Mother Church," that Church she had served so well and whose permission and counsel she had always sought.

After her death, those who succeeded her and were her contemporaries picked up the gauntlet, and fired with the same charism and trust in God, moved steadily into the future, fulfilling her unfulfilled dream. Thus it was that a school and orphanage for black girls opened in Savannah in 1897; a school and orphanage opened in Fayoum, Upper Egypt, in 1898, especially for the education of girls so badly needed at that time. School after school opened in Egypt and in North America; the school and convent dedicated to Our Lady of the Angels opened again in Belle Prairie, in 1911. The story goes on.

Over the years, many schools have closed, merged, or changed hands; many new ministries have come into being. One thing that is certain up to the present is that the Church maintains her interest in schools and the education of youth. The recent *Lineamenta* document, *Consecrated Life and its Role in the Church and in the World*, states that "a specific field though not an exclusive one, is that of the Catholic school for which so many Institutes, especially those of Religious, were founded. . . ."

In conclusion, I may be forgiven if I digress to quote that greatest and noblest of laymen, Thomas More, who when asked by Richard Rich for a position at court, simply replied, "Why not be a teacher?" When Rich remonstrated: "And if I was who would know it?" More responded, "You, your pupils, your friends, God. Not a bad public that." Mother Ignatius, I believe, would have little difficulty in concurring with them all, though she never sought public approval and seemed to care little about it. She sought only God's approval made known through the ordinary channels.

But much water has gone under the bridge since More's time and the period in which the foundress lived, and vast changes have taken place on every front, necessitating new ministries. The search for God's will goes on and, in phasing out some apostolates, retaining some, and adopting new ones, we assume the uncertainties common to all people. I am happy that among the ministries retained some schools have survived, and that in the underdeveloped areas and countries, education has broadened to include some facets of homemaking for women and girls, besides religious instruction, all very much in keeping with Mother Ignatius' ideal. Wherever we are and whatever we do-even if that means being--each one must be able to answer the question: How do I contribute to peace and justice in the world and to the evangelization of peoples?

Within that framework we must believe that God's call is also a promise of his fidelity to the person and the community, and, in good times and bad, He will be with us making all things work together for good.