

*A.M.D.G.*

## **THE PERSONAL VIEW OF KEN KHAN ON THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION AT SAINT STANISLAUS COLLEGE**

This is a personal view and readers are asked to treat it as such. This paper was prepared for the Reunion held from August 16-23<sup>rd</sup>, 2009 but it was decided by the organizers, that it should not be made public at the time. Some said it contained views in conflict with those of many attending the Reunion or that it was too controversial.

Almost two years after this paper was drafted, there are still active discussions about various ways that the Alumni may assist the College in restoring its former glory. I have therefore revised the original draft, and I sincerely hope it may help in the ongoing debate about the future of our alma mater.

### **1. EVENTS THAT SHAPED MY PHILOSOPHY**

I have been involved in education from the day I entered Saints in September 1948 until the present time. I won a Demerara County scholarship for Queen's College, located at the time at the bottom of Brickdam, at the site of the recently destroyed Ministry of Health. I well remember collecting my tie, uniform and books and preparing for an academic future at the reputedly best school in Guyana. However, my father decided that he wanted me to go to Saints. At the time, I objected, saying that I did not want to go to a Jesuit school, but in vain. When my father said jump, you can only reply – How high! My life would have been different if I had gone to QC, as I intended. However, I made lifelong friends at Saints, and 4 of us formed what we called the House, frequenting each other's home for meals, study, and recreation. I owe them a lot: Carlyle Moore, and Oswald de Haan now in USA, and Godfrey Persaud who unfortunately passed away a few years ago. RIP. We were very close friends and remain so to this day.

Here is a brief summary of my life:

1936-1948: moved around various primary schools as my father, an educator and Headmaster, was transferred from school to school.

1948-55: student at Saints, and influenced by the Jesuits on the College Staff, eventually entering the Jesuit Novitiate in UK.

1955-1972: Jesuit in formation for some 16 years, until taking Final Vows.

1972-1980: Jesuit HM of SSC. The Jesuit involvement ended with my departure.

1980-2011: Relocation to Barbados but still involved in promoting the welfare of my alma mater.

Understanding my history and background is the key to understanding my personal views on the subject of education in general and the future of education at Saints in particular.

## 2. PHILOSOPHY OF THE COLLEGE

The philosophy of the College can be gleaned from the changes noted over the years in the wording of the Prospectus which spells out its aims and objectives. There have been significant changes and my thesis is that the process of change is not over.

**Prospectus (1972)** spells out the aims of SSC

*“Saint Stanislaus College has been conducted for one hundred years by the Fathers of the Society of Jesus with the object, not only of giving to boys a sound liberal education, but also of imparting to them a love and knowledge of their religion”.*

This Prospectus has been in use since SSC was set up in 1866. Liberal Education was understood by some as a humanistic education, viz an appreciation of the arts, grammar, rhetoric, maths and science, as well as a philosophy that gives meaning to our lives.

**Prospectus (1973)** sees a dramatic shift, and owes a lot to the collective thinking of the Staff and the Board of Management and of the SSCA that was set up in 1943 by a great man, John Fernandes Snr, to whom and to whose family, I would like to pay tribute.

The Prospectus was reworded as follows:

*“SSC is a Christian institution.....It aims at imparting both intellectual and technical skills and at forming citizens of Guyana who are imbued with a reverence of God, a love of their religion and a spirit of service to their country. It offers an education that stresses academic excellence and respect for manual labour, and is at the same time based on a philosophy of co-operation, a spirit of sharing and working together for the good of all”.*

This was to lead to the setting up of the School Farm at Sophia and the construction of the Workshop at Brickdam.

**Prospectus (1980)** subsequent to the Government takeover of education in 1976, witnesses the change from “Christian institution” to “Government school” but the aims and objectives are unchanged.

**Prospectus (1993)** makes a further change to: *“Grade A, Senior Secondary school administered by the Government of Guyana”* and spells out its philosophy, centred on its motto “Aeterna Non Caduca, - not for this life only but for Eternity.”

**Prospectus (1995)** claims that SSC is *“owned and managed by the Government of Guyana through the Ministry of Education”.*

The ownership of the College at Brickdam, is actually that of the Jesuits. The school farm at Sophia is owned by the SSCA.

**Prospectus (2006)** includes the changes spelt out in the Prospectus of 1973 and subsequent years, but now describes the responsibility of a Board of Governors that was set up in 2005 *“to manage the College in its entirety, viz. maintenance and repairs, day to day operations, including hiring and firing of staff (except for HM and DHM). It receives an annual subvention to cover budgeted expenses and the wages and salaries of staff but must raise any additional funds”*.

There are quite a number of government-sponsored repairs which take place at SSC as well as in other government schools. The College Farm was expanded considerably to become a Caribbean institution second to none, and the Computer laboratories at the Brickdam site as among the best in Guyana. We need to keep promoting Agricultural and Technical education, as well as Information Technology (IT) with Examination results showing our claim for excellence, so that Parents choose us, albeit sometimes as their 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> choice.

The history of the College at Brickdam and the Farm at Sophia have been spelt out in great detail in the new website, set up by the Toronto Chapter, which I commend for your study. <http://www.torontosaints.com>

I submit that these changes represent the evolution of ideas, influenced by the changing political situation. The movement from Liberal education, to agricultural and technical education, with its present emphasis on computer-aided education, has introduced a new dimension unheard of or unimaginable in my time. The world has become a global village that has shrunk to the size of our palm, as we influence and are influenced by events across the globe by the click of a mouse or our Blackberry or hand-held computer. The present debate about the possibility of distance education coupled with Broadband access in all schools that offer IT, opens out boundless possibilities for learning.

After considering where we come from, we naturally want to consider whither we are going. But we must always remember the statement that if we forget the lessons of history, we are bound to repeat the mistakes of history. However, the past need not be seen as enslaving our thoughts but as helping us make decisions for our future.

### 3. INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY

My Philosophy is based on the Christian tradition that human values centre on the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, an event that many dispute and some fail to understand. Jesus is one example of a perfect human (mortal man and spiritual God)

I recognize that there are other religious traditions (Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Confucian etc) that were founded by prophets who also claim to be examples of human perfection.

In my view, when God became man, it was not as a god residing in a human body. I submit that God became the man Jesus so that every man (i.e. mankind) can become god-like or god-fearing.

Jesus was a real man who learnt by doing and grew up within the Jewish culture of his time.

He discovered over a period of time that he was God-made-man for us, the perfect combination of the physical or mortal “Man” and the spiritual “God”. The voice of conscience within each of us is the voice of God. The presence or absence of a religious tradition may not lead us to the Christian God but this does not condemn us to a limbo or no-man’s land. Each one of us, in some way, relives the life of Christ even if we may not have heard anything about the Christian tradition.

I do not accept an exclusivist view of Salvation, summed up in the adage: “Outside of the Church, there is no salvation”. One can ask what is meant by the “Church”, whether it is a community of believers who are groping towards the truth. Again, the age-old questions surface: What is truth? Your truth or mine?

We have seen the influence of Christian and non-Christian traditions with various oral and written traditions. So down the centuries, mankind has torn itself apart in the name of God. The Inquisition, the religious wars of the past, and the present worldwide conflagrations between the various ideologies, bear witness to this. More recently, the supposed dichotomy between science and religion has itself been a complicating factor, as we see in the debate about evolution as the way mankind progressed over the millions of years since earth spun out of the solar system, and life progressed from non-life to life, to animal, to prehominooids to mankind. This is not a magician God, as some tend to believe. God works through nature, and we are all caught up in the ongoing saga of mankind drawing closer to God through Jesus Christ, God-made-man for us.

## 4. My Philosophy Regarding Education

There are many qualities that define an educated person, not all of which are achievable at College, but also at University or post-graduate level.

The **first quality** is a **passion for excellence**. It is the force that prevents us from accepting the status quo, succumbing to complacency, and motivates us to do our best in every worthwhile activity.

A **second quality** is the **study of the humanities and the sciences, with specific reference to the present thrust into computer-aided education**. No matter what specializations may be offered, we want our students to be able to think and speak and write; to know something about history, literature and art; to have their minds and hearts expanded by philosophy; and to have a solid understanding of math and the sciences. We want students prepared for living as well as for working. With the demand for increased technological training in today's world, we need business leaders who read Shakespeare and computer scientists who understand the history and roots of world civilization.

A **third quality** is the preoccupation with questions of **ethics and values** for both the personal strength and professional witness of our graduates. Family values, personal integrity and business ethics have always been important. In recent years, this characteristic has taken on added dimensions, with attention on the great questions of justice and fairness that confront our age: economic inequality, racism and unemployment, the global imbalance of economic resources and opportunities, and poverty and oppression in the Third World, to cite some examples. These are not easy issues, nor do they have any certain and universally accepted solutions through sloganeering and political manoeuvring, except in a way that is proper for higher education, through learning and research, reflection and creative action. In some way, we have to integrate ethics and values.

A **fourth quality** is the **importance it gives to religious experience**. This is vital and needs to be integrated into the educational process so that a student has the opportunity to grow and develop his/her potential to the fullest. There is a need to try to open this all-important horizon for all our students, whatever their religious tradition. God is known by various names, and even those who deny the existence of God, are searching for meaning in their lives. We want a Jew to become a better Jew, a Hindu a better Hindu, a Christian a better Christian, a Muslim a better Muslim, an agnostic a better agnostic, an atheist a better atheist etc. Whatever the religious or non religious or anti-religious tradition of our students, we are not proselytizing or intent on converting to the Catholic faith.

A **fifth quality** is the **individual**. No matter how large or complex the institution, each individual is important and should be given as much personal attention as humanly possible, both in and out of the classroom. The reason for this **person-centered**

focus is because teaching is much more than a job - indeed more than a profession. It truly is a vocation - a way of life. It enables men and women to look on their work of teaching or administration as sharing in the service of others.

## **5. WHITHER ST. STANISLAUS COLLEGE?**

As with all government schools, the aim of Saints is the inculcating of secular values in keeping with respect for human rights and a high degree of tolerance for those holding different views.

However, public education in general tends to suffer whenever the economy experiences a downturn, and unfortunately Saints has not been spared. This has made it extremely challenging to establish a new Culture, or rallying point, for achieving educational excellence.

The Old Culture was supported by a vibrant SSCA that was set up in 1943. Creating a new culture will require continued support from the SSCA as well as the government-appointed BOG that was set up in 2005.

The problems experienced by some teachers stem from their perception that teaching is not an attractive profession, and hence their last choice.

In the meantime, a lot of work has to be done to ensure proper management of the College, with staff paid working salaries and where both teachers and students are committed to learning and not just surviving from day to day.

We should ask ourselves the following questions:

1. What are we teaching?
2. Why are we teaching it?
3. How are we teaching it?
4. Why are we teaching in that way?
5. How do we know the students are getting it?
6. What did we learn in the process of teaching it?

I know that Guyana society is seen by some as predatory, mendicant and beyond salvation as they join the exodus to greener pastures, but I am an optimist and still believe that better days are ahead, if we only avail ourselves of the opportunities as they arise. The overseas Alumni represent an opportunity that has so far remained untapped. These associations are currently run by former Saints students who experienced, and benefitted from, the old Culture and hence are keenly aware of the need for a new Culture at Saints. Also, thanks to the greener pastures, they are now keen to give something back. I believe it is a unique opportunity that should be vigorously explored.

A lot has happened since the Reunion of August 2009. The political situation has been fluid and impending national elections in the latter half of 2011 will undoubtedly influence the direction and future of education in Guyana at all levels.

I stress that the healthy sharing of Information and the strengthening of Communication are keys to the pursuance of the legacy of excellence as we try to influence the future of our alma mater.

I have personally strived to work within a communication model that supports regular and open dialogue between the key “agents of change”. The model shown supports both informal and formal exchanges.



Alumni can play a role in providing educational software on a major scale, refurbishing of Labs, maintenance of the College site in a way that gives regular informational updates from which parents and students can benefit etc. The Keynote Speech by Thomas Singh posted in [Things Educational](#), makes mention of the “tipping point” that is influenced by research on the relationship between culture and economic success, with emphasis on the extent to which school culture matters. We do acknowledge that professional development opportunities are now made available by the Ministry of Education, something that is very much welcomed.

I join in thanking the past Headteachers for their signal contributions as well as wishing the newly appointed HM the very best in her endeavours. My personal experience as HM has convinced me that team work is the only way to go, and my success was largely the result of finding others who shared my vision. The Principle of Subsidiarity, viz. letting others make their contribution while retaining ultimate responsibility, can be very difficult to implement.

The various overseas Chapters in Antigua, Barbados, NY, Toronto and UK as well as individual Alumni worldwide, have worked and continue to work towards promoting our alma mater in these difficult times. Their continued support is critical to the success of Saints.

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April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011

**L.D.S.**