

FROM HEROISM TO HOLINESS: REIMAGINING EDUCATION AS A SPACE OF CREATION, NOT DESTRUCTION

By Habineza Jean Paul (Dr. Simple)

My name is Habineza Jean Paul, a Rwandan, International Peace Builder, Religious and Ethics teacher, music artist, husband, and citizen shaped by responsibility toward education, faith, and social healing.

I write not as a detached expert, but as a practitioner formed by lived experience, critical questioning, and what the Apostle Paul would call “a thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7) that inner disturbance that refuses complacency and calls one toward deeper truth.

This text is offered as a reflective and advocacy contribution to families, State institutions, faith-based organizations, and education partners, at a time when Rwanda and the world continue to search for an education that truly builds life.

Why This Reflection Matters

For years, a disturbing question has accompanied my journey: How could the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi occur in a society largely educated and religious where churches themselves became sites of massacre?

This question is not asked to accuse, but to understand. As Johan Galtung reminds us, violence is often structural and cultural long before it becomes physical. Education, when poorly oriented, can normalize exclusion, silence conscience, and legitimize domination. Paulo Freire would describe this as an education that dehumanizes rather than liberates.

Rwanda’s annual Heroes’ Day invites us to remember not only those who resisted violence, but also those who perished because systems: educational, moral, and spiritual failed to protect human dignity.

This has led me to a deeper, unsettling question: Why do heroism and holiness so often meet only in death? Why can they not converge in life within schools, classrooms, and everyday educational decisions?

State, Religion, and the Educational Tension

Since the national rebirth of Rwanda, the State and Religious institutions have played complementary roles in rebuilding society. This partnership has been indispensable, yet marked by understandable tensions.

Recent developments such as the closure of some churches and the reduction of Religion hours in public and government-aided schools reflect not hostility, but a deeper struggle over meaning, authority, and responsibility within education.

The State, by its nature, operates through authority and regulation. Religious institutions, historically influential, now often find themselves in a vulnerable position, echoing what African social analysts describe as an imbalance of power where one partner must submit rather than dialogue.

Yet a striking paradox persists: Religion hours were reduced, but religion teachers were not dismissed. This silent contradiction reveals a lack of integration between the State's vision of heroism and the Church's vision of holiness.

When these two visions fail to meet, education becomes fragmented. As John Paul Lederach argues, peace building requires moral imagination: the capacity to hold together seemingly opposing goods within a shared ethical horizon.

The Core Educational Dilemma: Creation or Destruction

Through the lens of Real Inner Power; (constructive and life-giving power) the central crisis of contemporary education becomes evident: Education too often produces success by destroying people.

Globally, including in Africa and Europe, exclusionary disciplinary practices persist: expulsion for behavioural difficulties, permanent exclusion of learners labelled "problematic."

Research by UNESCO, UNICEF, and the OECD consistently demonstrates that exclusion increases dropout rates, violence, trauma, and long-term social instability. Expulsion does not resolve a problem; it transfers it from school to society.

From a peace building perspective, this constitutes what could be called educational self-destruction. Systems undermining their own social purpose.

Biblically, this contradicts the fundamental vision of education as formation into fullness of life: "I have come that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

An Alternative Path: G.S. St. Joseph Karuganda

At G.S. St. Joseph Karuganda, a conscious and countercultural educational choice is being made.

Students who would likely be expelled elsewhere are accompanied, listened to, rehabilitated, and reintegrated. Errors are neither denied nor celebrated; they are interpreted as pedagogical entry points for growth, not as final judgments.

This approach embodies what African peace education scholars affirm: education that creates rather than eliminates, discipline that restores rather than humiliates, authority that guides rather than crushes.

This is Real Inner Power in action: power exercised for reconstruction.

It consciously weaves together: heroism (moral responsibility and courage), holiness (respect for human dignity as sacred), faith and ethics, music and humour as restorative tools, and daily school life as the primary site of transformation.

As the Book of Micah states: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly?" (Micah 6:8)

From Heroism to Holiness: An Educational Imperative

Heroism without holiness risks becoming violent. Holiness without heroism risks becoming passive.

Education, especially in post-conflict and fragile contexts, must cultivate both simultaneously not abstractly, but concretely within school life.

This reflection therefore proposes a journey from heroism to holiness, not through martyrdom, but through daily educational practice.

As African philosophies of Ubuntu remind us: "I am because we are." Formation of the self is inseparable from responsibility toward others.

A Foundational Principle: The Philadelphia Root

Education today requires what I call the Philadelphia root from philia (love) and adelphos (brother): "Choose **Self-Realization** over **Self-Distorted**."

This principle calls: families to accompany rather than abandon, the State to discipline without dehumanizing, churches to sanctify life rather than retreat from it, schools to heal while teaching.

It echoes Saint Paul's exhortation: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:21)

An Open Invitation

To parents, policymakers, faith leaders, and education partners:

Come and see.

Come to G.S. St. Joseph Karuganda. Encounter an education that integrates: Real Inner Power, Spirituality, Discipline, Creativity, Humour, and Compassion. And today, in Rwanda and beyond that choice remains both heroic and holy.

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