

Tradition: A Call for Innovation

These days many youngsters view the word “**tradition**” with suspicion and the word “**innovation**” as trendy. For these youth, tradition is a password to the past; innovation is a buzzword to the future. Tradition brings in many minds images of rigidity and fanaticism. On the contrary, innovation brings to mind progress with smaller and faster smartphones, thinner and lighter computers, package delivering drones and self-driving cars. In other words, the trend is to overthrow tradition and embrace innovation.

Why would, then, St. Xavier’s College choose “Tradition: A Call for Innovation” as its theme for the 2017-18 academic year?

St. Xavier’s (1988-2018) is entering its 30th year of service to our nation and the world by forming the minds and hearts of young men and women to be **excellent** in academics, self-less in **leadership** and compassionate in **service**. Thirty is not a long time in terms of the years, but rich in terms of the tradition of education benchmarked by St. Xavier’s in our country Nepal.

Tradition is also important for us as here in St. Xavier’s because we continue an education practice which began in 1540 when the Society of Jesus (SJ), whose members are called Jesuits, saw that the best way to create a happy future for the world is to educate the youth. This “tradition” of education also connects us with schools, colleges and universities in over hundred countries in the world at present.

However, it may be surprising to many of you that this proud tradition of Jesuit education also has a 500 old legacy of “innovation.” In fact, as Chris Lowey observes in his book “Heroic Leadership”, the Jesuits had mastered the art of innovation in the 16th century while the corporate world caught up with the idea of innovation only in the late 20th century.

Did you know that the Jesuits were called “the school masters of Europe?” They achieved this honour through innovation. They took the best practices of the world’s best universities and codified them so that these best practices may survive time and distances. Later in the 20th century with the changing of times, the Jesuits had to *innovate* their educational approach by opening their famous colleges and universities to both men and women, rich and poor and start informal education practices like *Fo y Alogarta* which serves around 1,125,000 students in the world. It was innovation that led the Jesuits to join hands with the UNHCR in providing schooling to millions of refugees all over the world through Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS), including Nepal where the Jesuits ran around 42 schools educating over 40,000 students every year for over 15 years in the Bhutanese refugee camps in east Nepal.

Our College also has a rich history of innovation. From the humble beginnings in the premises of St. Xavier’s School Jawalakhel to opening the first Social Work Program in the country and to educating boys and girls from all the 75 districts of Nepal today, we have come a long way.

However, for us innovation is not all about overthrowing the past; but innovation is to stand strong on the pillars of the best practices of our tradition and thus confidently rise to greater heights, just like a building that rises high in the sky because its foundation is deep below the earth.

Innovation is unavoidable because it’s what human beings do – we change. Each individual’s life is a process of change and collectively that change shapes our human family. But as we innovate, we must not abandon the best practices of our tradition, so that we can stay true to the unchanging principles that make the Jesuit education the most wholesome in the world: a deep concern for the individual person and their eternal horizon; a desire to find God in all created things; and a sense of responsibility to do something about injustice, as a response of love and solidarity with our fellow human beings.