



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION
OF CATHOLIC INSTITUTES OF EDUCATION**

Saturday, 18 April 1998

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I am happy to meet you, as it gives me the opportunity to consider the important theme of educational commitment, which this congress has assembled to reflect upon, with the participation of many experts in so essential a matter.

I extend my cordial greeting to you, with special gratitude to Prof. Giuseppe Dalla Torre who, while expressing the sentiments of his colleagues, effectively explained the work of your convention.

"Educability" is undoubtedly a dimension which characterizes man and emphasizes his psychological wealth, which allows him to endlessly improve himself. Being able this morning to address not only the educators, but also educational theorists, leads me to dwell on some less obvious aspects of this complex matter, which holds so much importance for the life of each human being.

2. I would like to reflect with you *on the complexity of researching this delicate subject*. Yours is a research that has its own precise rules, which are nevertheless difficult to define. The term that best expresses and summarizes them could be that of "seriousness": research in the educational field must be carried out with a seriousness that cannot be reduced to simple correctness of the means, thoroughness of the analyses, or fidelity in approaching the sources. Seriousness means, above all, committed and conscientious personal responsibility in using the methods at your disposal in this field.

One need only make a few brief observations: in evaluating the practical results of your research, time limits cannot be set; the negative consequences are not, unfortunately, so immediate that they can be quickly remedied; positive results appear as such only after the variables have run their course. How, in the light of these numerous unknown factors, can we fail to acknowledge the need for a particular "seriousness" on the part of the researcher who studies such a complex

area?

A suitable approach to the object, which is the mystery of man with his historical and metahistorical values, is central to your particular kind of research. The approach must be such as to permit the full unfolding of the human spirit, which has its own ability to open itself to transcendence.

3. Serious research also means resisting the tendency to adopt narrow parameters or scientific forms which are inappropriate to the object. When research concerns man or the development of his capacity for improvement, even though restricted by influences of every kind, *it cannot lower its tone*, nor permit any degrading short cuts.

Besides, even before researching the person, you are "committed" *to the effort to fulfil yourselves as persons*. Your research, in fact, *is not solitary*: it takes place and is expressed in the copresence of the members of the university world: teachers and students. When the Academy was first founded a unique form of interaction was considered the high point of the educational process: it was the test of authenticity, also for the humanity of the teacher, while the student was given the chance to discover, "embodied" in him, values and ideals for entering into a strengthening synergy.

Whoever dedicates himself to the theoretical study or the practical application of the educational mission must feel committed to setting an example of successful humanity, thus to become a person in whom the splendour of the human can be glimpsed, a person who, by his witness of life even before that of his culture, invites others to complete self-fulfilment.

4. Two obstacles, in particular, can stop or divert the educational effort. There is first of all the risk of *directing research towards fleeting success*. If this is always unbecoming, it is all the more so when it involves the truth about man, his living and his dying, his joy and his sorrow. Here opportunistic concessions or utilitarian adaptations are absolutely unacceptable. Research on man always has something sacred about it, which forbids every kind of exploitation.

The other risk which one must be careful to avoid is the *fatal attraction of power*. The mind's eye is incapable of grasping the profound value of the human and of respecting its mysterious sacredness, if it is dazzled by the fascination of power: to be understood, man must be approached with a real attitude of service. But it is impossible to serve man and be slaves to the seduction of power. This would result in disregard for the human being precisely where one says that one wishes to probe his value in order to encourage accomplishments that best respond to the quality of personal and community living.

5. Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, the attentive service of man, the daily commitment so that he can progressively carry out the plan he bears within himself, is a difficult, sometimes even unpopular mission, but it is the way to provide a space where the eternal in man can find its fitting development. The educational mission is always a demanding, hard and rigorous service. To have chosen this area of study and this profession is therefore a noble commitment, worthy of the highest appreciation. I gladly take this occasion to express my great esteem and, in giving you my heartfelt encouragement to persevere despite the difficulties of the task you have undertaken, I wish to assure you of my special prayer that you will never lack the necessary help from above.

I accompany these wishes with a special Blessing, which I gladly extend to all those to whom your attentive study and teaching are directed.

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