

**ADDRESS OF HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL CHRISTOPHE PIERRE  
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

**PANEL DISCUSSION ON *THE RISK OF EDUCATION* BY MSGR. LUIGI GIUSSANI  
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Almost 20 years ago, when I was Nuncio in Uganda, a small team of people, led by Mr. Kizito Omala, Miss Clara Broggi and Miss Giovanna Orlando, started a very interesting experience. They went around to a few schools or institutions of education, like the Naguru Remand Home, and offered a short ongoing formation course to teachers and educators, focusing on the dynamics of education and the presentation and study of the various factors that make up a true educational process. They introduced these teachers to a new method of education, taking into consideration all these factors, and helped them to understand the “consequences” – in their own way of teaching, in the “education” of their students, and in their own personal lives – of the adoption of such method.

When I heard about such a project, although I felt it was quite appealing, I wondered if it would actually work. Over the next couple of years, the team of people grew, and it had a tremendously positive response among quite a significant number of professors from various categories, and coming from all over Uganda.

As we know, this course of formation, entitled “Education while teaching”, is inspired by the pedagogy contained in the study of Mgr. Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, which we are discussing today.

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At the time when this project began in Uganda 20 years ago, “education” had become a magic word. And of course, in the United States has been revered for a long time. Quite rightly, “education” is linked with development (of the individual and, as a consequence, of society), with promotion and with success. Parents want education for their children, priests and religious want to have “degrees” and the “graduation” seems at times more meaningful than one's ordination or religious profession. If you read the *curriculum vitae* of speakers and presenters at

conferences, it looks as though the “essence” of the person depends upon his or her degrees and academic achievements.

I am not against “degrees”. They are necessary and more than useful. However, the experience that is presented to us today and the book from which it draws its inspiration, *The Risk of Education*, tell us that “education” is wider and deeper, and that there would be a huge danger if we were to reduce education to instruction, to the acquisition of pieces of knowledge (bits and pieces!) and to the presentation of certain ways of living and behaving. How many of us, when we speak about education, present it as “forming good (whatever that means) citizens” or “giving effective leaders to society”. Is the nature and purpose of education only to prepare the people for the needs of society? We have been shifting from the person and his or her needs to the “role” this person has to play.

Maybe because we are taken by some kind of urgency, we don't take time to reflect, in our various curricula, upon the nature of education. In Latin, “*e-ducere*” means “to bring out”. The pupil is first and foremost a person with an original baggage of possibilities: he is originally in search of his destiny. The educator's task is to acknowledge and develop what is already there, and to help the pupil grow in the awareness of his or her identity and to open him or her up to the world. So it is much more than “imparting”, “inculcating”. It is “developing”, “fostering”, “stimulating” and “accompanying”. This is why the project “educating while teaching” proposes a “critical analysis of the concept of education, teaching and social-educational methodologies. According to the purpose of this project, the activities in each school will include a training about the concept of education, based on the following points:

Since the human person is made in God's likeness, his destiny and his desire are infinite. So his heart longs for great horizons and cannot be satisfied by anything lesser. Education is really an introduction into total reality. To do this a hypothesis of life is necessary that will enable one to face and interpret reality; the first hypothesis, which man is offered by nature itself, is the tradition in which he was born. Education has to start from tradition, presented as a positive and lively experience. Only someone who lives this experience for himself can communicate

it to others. This is why in education a teacher, an authority is necessary that will prompt, guide, and accompany the disciple in his discoveries. These discoveries must become the personal baggage of the person who receives education: during the educative progress the teacher must guide the disciple to verify personally what he has learned.

This implies the need not only of respecting, but above all of arousing freedom in the disciple. This is a risk the educator has to run, because it is the condition for speaking of conviction, without which it is impossible to speak of adulthood. In other words, it tells us that there is no proper education if we do not pay the proper attention to the person of the student (this applies first and foremost to the primary and secondary school, but also to the family, the seminary, the school of catechists, the relationships between priests and faithful).

But is it possible when a class has 100 pupils? Unfortunately, the fundamental relationship between educator and pupil is often reduced to a mere transmission of notions, leaving little room for a human relationship within which culture is passed on. And the key concept is this “human relationship” making true “education” possible.

This is why the purpose of the future “education school” inspired by the method contained in the book *The Risk of Education* will aim at the formation of teachers and social workers, in order to help them become true “educators”. And such task is an urgent one, because we live in a culture that is more and more secularized. Traditional and Christian value – those values that a father, a mother, a teacher, a priest, are proud to transmit to their children or students – these values seem to lose their power of persuasion. Many parents and teachers seem to have given up ... they are not “convinced”, they no longer appear as “authority” and are unable to offer a credible “meaning” to reality to explain where the world is coming from, where it is going, what we are on this earth for.

Let's take an example. Why should a man and woman marry, be faithful to each other, have children ...? So we prefer to offer some “skills” which will be

“useful” to succeed, to make money but do we also equip the student with the capacity to make a “moral judgment”?

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Years ago I came across an interesting study of Archbishop Caffarra of Bologna, showing that in present-day culture, it has become difficult to present the truth of any kind of reality. Nietzsche said that “there are no facts, but only interpretations”. People say that “every interpretation and its opposite are equally valid”. (For example, it has become difficult in our day to agree about what is marriage.) There is, therefore, dissolution of the real in an endless game of interpretations, which has a devastating effect on the spirit. Some people say that there is no truth and that the truth cannot be reached!

The second aspect is the loss of the sense of freedom, which is reduced to “free will”. I choose between two possibilities but they have the same value. It is up to me; there are no superior criteria!

The third aspect is that people have lost the sense of their own life as history, as part of a tradition, from where we are coming, upon which we build our existence, receiving from our “masters” values which have already been tested and checked, and which are offered to us in order to be checked and tested again, in the new context of today.

Education is indeed a challenge if such is the situation of our culture. And indeed it is. This is why it is so urgent for the educator today not to accept passively a general trend but, on the contrary, to challenge it. The method of Mgr. Giussani offers us the possibility to challenge today's cultural trends through his radical reflection on the factors of education. I consider it as a blessing that it was introduced to the Church and society in Uganda.

And the only way to challenge the situation is by helping teachers, professors, parents, priests to discover what is true education. They have to become aware of their responsibility to enter into a relationship with their children or students – how many parents, teachers, priests never communicate and remain on the edge!

They have to internalize and appropriate their own traditions, to receive the values and become living witnesses to such values, to understand the past and be able to make a proper and critical judgment upon it.

They have to be open to reality and be able to appreciate it, to give value to it and not to remain superficial about it. The modern culture cultivates an attitude of negative doubt and skepticism which is, as a matter of fact, a lack of courage and decisiveness in the face of human reality ... It is apparently easier not to take risks.

They have to accept to become, for the younger generation, an “authority” ... to present the meaning of life with authority (not in a dogmatic and “authoritarian” manner) ... mainly by the power of their convictions. (In his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope John Paul II said: “*The Church proposes; she imposes nothing.*”) This supposes that we are always ready to be challenged and to give the “reasons” for our positions and convictions.

They have to be ready to “educate” by “entering” into a real relationship ... so that the student may be introduced into the meaning of reality through a “Master”. We all need such Masters, good examples, people whom we admire and trust and who inspire us by their wisdom, their experimental knowledge, their honesty and their humility in the face of a reality which is bigger than themselves. They become servants of a truth that they have found and which they help us to encounter.

They have to be capable of “dialogue”. At times, today people think that all opinions are of equal value and that we have to dialogue endlessly, but without any right to “conclude”. This is not true dialogue. I need to find a master who will introduce me, through dialogue, into the truth of reality. He will not lead me to compromise with the truth ... But he will respect my freedom and help me, with patience, to recognize freely the truth of the reality.

Of course, there is a risk, the “risk of education”. But this is precisely what education is all about – to lead somebody else along the path towards the discovery of reality.

Remember what Pilate said to Jesus: “Truth, what is truth?” (John 18:38). Good question ... but Pilate did not want to hear the answer ... nor the Jews who had

led Jesus to his tribunal. They wanted to impose their own truth ... or, as happens in today's culture, to say that there is no truth.

Yet Jesus is the “master” leading us to the truth (“I am the Way, the Truth and the Life”). Truth is found in our pursuit of knowing more clearly the meaning of life and the purpose of our existence. Jesus invited his “friends” (his “disciples” – the “Master” has “disciples” and educates them!) to discover that the purpose of their journey is God, a loving God, who is the author of their life (the Creator) and calls them to himself, to live in everlasting communion and beatitude.

The “commandment” for the journey is love (love one another ... love yourself ... love God) because God is love and such love gives “meaning” to our life and destiny.

Jesus is the one introducing us to such a “path of truth” when we are led (by our educators ... the real ones) to discover, day after day, what it means to be fully human, developing in us, individuals, and in our communities, the beauty and all the potentialities of our humanity. On this path, we discover the truth. We become aware of God's presence, of His loving care for us, as He helps us to love in the same way He loves us. Such is the meaning and purpose of life at the center of education.

For such a task, we need Christian personalities who are mature enough and capable to make “reality” more human. They need to let their own humanity grow and mature, so that they may help their students ... to become, in return, truly human and Christian.