

1957 CONFERENCE ADDRESS
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EDUCATION FOR TODAY'S WOMAN

Someone is continually identifying a new revolution in American life. One of the most significant, however, is the rapidly changing status of women. Within a relatively short period of time they have achieved the right to vote, to hold office, to college and university education, admission to the professions and to the business world. They have achieved an economic independence that has made their claim to equality a reality rather than an ideal in law.

These changes have tremendous significance for the education of women. No longer is it sufficient for a woman merely to know some of the fine arts and how to grace a home. She is no longer a secluded and subservient housekeeper. Today she holds a significant position in the world as the partner rather than the servant of man. This means that new thought must be given to her education.

One of the difficulties associated with the education of men is that as adults they must be prepared to play several different and important roles: citizen, father, husband, breadwinner, and person. The situation is even more difficult in the case of women because in many cases they are called upon to play different roles at different stages of their lives. In the early years of marriage it may be necessary for a woman to earn a substantial portion of the family income while her husband is completing his education or beginning his business or professional career. Then for a period of time her principal efforts may be devoted to making a home and rearing children. As these responsibilities become less exacting she may increase her activities as a citizen or civic and social leader. She may even find herself finally free to take up again a business or professional career.

What kind of education will best insure that women will be able to pass successfully through these several stages and still play the roles of citizen, mother, wife, and self-realizing person? It is rather obvious that she may need several kinds of education to enable her to meet the challenges of her several roles. She may need professional education to enable her to earn an income; she may need special education for housekeeping and motherhood; she will surely need that basic education that will help her realize her destiny as a human being.

What kinds of courses will she need? What major should she choose? What kind of college should she enter? There are many paths to self-realization but to me the richest preparation for life is to be found in the liberal arts curriculum. Even though an A. B. Graduate may find it necessary to take a business course before she can find a job, and even though an A. B. graduate may not know the fine art of cooking and housekeeping, she should have many things more essential for facing the crises of life. She should have, for example, a philosophy of life that will enable her to accept her several roles with patience and equanimity. Her education should help her realize the importance of a wife in building a home of real quality: her importance in supporting and giving self confidence to a husband,

her role in the co-operative partnership of marriage, her responsibility for providing the kind of spiritual atmosphere for the development of children into persons of strong character. It is disturbing that many women with college degrees find themselves bored or impatient with the role of homemaker. The study of history should give perspective; religion should strengthen faith and serenity; literature should open new vistas for understanding human personality and character; philosophy should raise such basic questions as: What is good? What is beauty? Truth? Justice? And so on. Why should acquaintance with such things not make of a girl a better woman and therefore a better homemaker?

It is upon inadequacies in these areas that marriages fail and life loses meaning sending the victims to alcohol, drugs, and sleeping pills. It is not failures in housekeeping or bank balancing, costuming or grooming. The educated woman will act with good judgement and maturity. She will learn to seek facts, to read books, to think, to resort to logic for answers rather than to fly into fits of emotionalism. If women wish to play the role of the clinging vine, the helpless female, the dependent wife, then they must give up their claims to equality and independence. If woman is to play an equal role she must use her education to develop mental powers of analysis, she must criticize, she must reason logically, she must dare to think.

But education is more than books and classes, more than libraries and laboratories. Education is basically the guidance for the growth of a human being at a very impressionable age. It should be concerned with developing philosophies and affecting attitudes that determine action. For this reason campus life is important.

It is important that women participate in extra-class activities. It is here that they put into practice many of the basic ideas they read in psychology and literature. They learn how to get things done, how to secure the co-operation of their fellows, how to plan, to balance budgets, render accounts, make reports, lead devotionals, evaluate drives, account for success or failure. It is debatable as to whether a woman has more opportunity to display leadership in a woman's college or in a coeducational institution, in a small college or a large university. But wherever she finds herself a woman ought to be seeking to learn how to associate with men with self-confidence. These associations should not be so infrequent as to cause undue excitement. On the other hand too frequent association may result in a certain measure of disrespect. It is natural for men and women to associate with each other and for a woman to know how to talk to men, how to work and play with them, and maintain mutual respect.

It is equally important, however, for women to learn how to live with other women. After all most of a woman's association after marriage is with other women rather than with men. It is important for women to understand each other and be able to visit, work, and co-operate with one another.

For extra-class activities to be truly educational, helping significantly in the development of desirable qualities in students, they should put heavy responsibilities upon the students. Young people can and will assume responsibility when given the opportunity. This means that the Student Honor System should be truly a student enterprise with responsibility for administering and enforcing the system in the hands of students. At Emory only a dean can execute the sentence of the Honor Council but the students have demonstrated so well their

ability to exercise sound judgement that it is a rare thing for a dean not to accept their recommendation of punishment.

The same principle applies in other areas of student life. A student newspaper is a vapid enterprise where there is administrative censorship. Social clubs and sororities lose much of their true educational value unless responsibility for the conduct of affairs is placed squarely upon the students. The same goes for dormitory regulations for signing in and out, late leaves and the like. Detective systems, paternalism, excessive regulation and too much arbitrary control from the dean's office may secure certain desired results but they cannot be making much contribution to the self development and maturity of students. Responsibility is the key. Make students responsible and take this responsibility away if abused and a college administration will come as near solving even the complex drinking problem as with a corps of detectives.

In the final analysis it is the total atmosphere of the college--its spirit, personality, or soul--that is important in developing certain kinds of young people. If there is an atmosphere of serious devotion to study, if the classroom, library, and laboratory are kept central in importance, young people will get a different concept of the place of scholarship from what they get in an institution where everything else is just as important as studies. Quality performance may be expected in every area of life in the institution. This can be applied in meeting financial obligations, in registration, in conduct at sports events or social affairs. A student who spends four years of her life in an institution where the best is expected is bound to be affected by it.

This means, therefore, that educational leaders ought to be constantly alert to devising new methods for improving the total atmosphere of the institutions where formal education is secured. Women's needs are many. It is desirable that they be honest, courageous, idealistic, thinking human beings. It is desirable that they develop perspective and a faith that will sustain them in the face of illness, financial difficulties and even death. It is important that they develop homes concerned with essentials where love prevails and where this love is supported by discipline for children. It is important that women have opportunity to realize their potentialities to the fullest--to write, to sing, to teach, to provide leadership for civic enterprises. It is necessary that they find the satisfaction of achieving a destiny worthy of the best in them.

These things cannot be easily or completely achieved, but they can be achieved to a degree in an institution where there is a recognition of the goals, where there is genuine devotion to the development of people who have been introduced to quality in many areas of life, where there is a desire to help the student develop independence of thought, where there is sufficient courage on the part of the faculty to place upon the student heavy responsibility for his conduct--for his honesty, sobriety, and reliability.

Essentially I see no basic differences between the educational needs of young men and young women. They both need assistance along the road to developing their talents and achieving their destinies. Their roles may be different and yet the same at times, but in the final analysis they are fellow human beings, brothers and sisters, seeking the same God. In the final judgment the criteria for evaluating success or failure are likely to be the same.