CONCLUSIONS OF
THE SYMPOSIUM

AN EDUCATOR
FOR THE FUTURE

The object of the symposium on “The Relevance of Pierre de Coubertin Today”, organized at the IOC’s request by the Centre for Olympic Studies, was to study to what extent the reflection and work of the founder and spiritual father of the Olympic Movement could still be in keeping with contemporary times. In response to the IOC’s invitation, fifty scientific training participants and other experts in the field of Coubertinian research from twenty countries and four continents met at the University of Lausanne which kindly welcomed them in the very hall where the Olympic Congress was held in 1913.

The work of this symposium is closely related to the preparation of the publication of Coubertin’s writings in several volumes devoted to sport, sports education and Olympism, which is to appear in October.

The subjects chosen for discussion correspond to those found in nearly ten thousand pages of his work: teaching, philosophy, sociology and politics. These subjects have been treated in the form of communications given by qualified lecturers and discussed by experts.
Here we publish three of these lectures whose subjects — the Life Ideal, Art and Solidarity — enjoy the privileged attention of the Olympic Review. Of course, we are unable to give a full idea of these three working days, but they will form the subject of the September issue of the Olympic Message, in particular the contributions of the IOC members present. The work of this symposium will be recorded in a volume which is to supplement the publication of Pierre de Coubertin’s writings.

At the end of these three days of intensive exchanges, the steering committee has made a synthesis of the work carried out and has presented the following report:

1. This first international symposium on Coubertin and his work made possible a successful study which has long been awaited. In fact, previous research as it existed in a number of countries generally dealt only with the historical aspects of the man or his work, or with the Olympic Games alone.

2. With this symposium, the first step has been taken. The publication of the volumes will no doubt give rise to new studies which will take on an international dimension as soon as translations in English and Spanish are made.

3. The IOC and the authority of its President alone can make possible the attainment of such an international dimension. It is then that the time should be taken for more in-depth studies, avoiding all over-hasty exploitation.

4. The discussions showed that many of Coubertin’s ideas are still relevant today in the various fields examined. The participants did not attempt merely to demystify Coubertin, any more than to consider his ideas as possessing absolute value.

Even if many of Coubertin’s ideas cannot be understood except in relation to his time, a good number of them remain valid in various respects and may enable the Olympic Movement to find new bases for orientation.

It seems that; thanks to various forms of sport, mankind is able to improve the quality of his life and fulfill himself through the harmony of intellectual, artistic and physical performance.

5. Coubertin’s Olympism did not emerge in the course of this symposium as a rigid and dogmatic system, but as a dynamic idea which opens on to the future.

6. More precise conclusions were noted in the course of the discussions. They are as follows:

— In no sphere can Coubertin be considered as a great specialist in the academic sense of the term. He was primarily an educator.

— Ideas concerning sports pedagogy have been put into practice in a great many countries, even if the paternity of these ideas has been forgotten or is unknown as a result of distances and the passage of time. This situation exists to varying degrees depending on the Olympic and sports traditions of the countries concerned. In young States, sport is only just beginning to fulfill these educational and social roles. Often, ethnic, geographical and economic factors predominate. Nevertheless, the multiplicity of cultural development is part of Coubertin’s pedagogical thought.

— According to Coubertin, sports education should be regarded as “Olympic education”. Certain sporting values such as the joy aroused by movement and high performance, the surpassing of oneself, fair play, camaraderie and international understanding, inter alia, are part of Olympic education. The idea of fair play, in particular, takes on a far greater importance today even than in Coubertin’s time.

— The work of the IOA and National Olympic Academies, for example, can generate an awareness of certain values which are fundamental to education. Moreover, other institutions should be made aware of the ideas of Pierre de Coubertin, particularly institutions for the training of educators and sports officials; the same goes for the international and national federations and sports associations in general.

— Universities are particularly asked to take part in the scientific study of Coubertin and his work. However, great care should be taken to ensure that Coubertin is not used as a dogma or an alibi in intellectual debates on the future of sport and the Olympic Movement.

— Study and a new knowledge of Coubertin provide an opportunity to emphasise the spiritual dimension of sport. This can only be understood through personal experience. Anyone who reads the work of Coubertin and understands it will realise that it does not amount to an abstraction, but a balance
between excess and moderation, sport and spectacle, work and leisure, effort and repose... that is to say, eurhythmy.

— The IOC’s efforts to restore the arts to their rightful place at all levels of the sports Movement, up to the Olympic Games themselves, bring back to the fore a value which Coubertin regarded as essential.

— It was deemed important to encourage the Olympic Movement to pursue its efforts to ensure that sport remains outside political interference.

The specific recommendations and suggestions which were made by the lecturers, experts and participants during the symposium will appear in the moderators’ reports.

In conclusion, the general opinion is that the Olympic Movement will remain faithful to Coubertin’s vision inasmuch as it succeeds in evolving, changing, adapting its structures and its stature, and finally in finding new solutions for the achievement of its objectives.