

CHRISTIAN PARENTS, CHILDREN'S FIRST EDUCATORS ACCORDING TO THE DOCUMENTS OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

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Abstract: The first and irreplaceable mission of the Christian parents is to be real educators for their children. Having called their children to the banquet of life, Christian parents have the foremost and specific right and, at the same time the, duty to be involved in a total and responsible manner in children's growth and the whole education process. Aware of the fact that each of their children has the same human dignity as their parents' dignity, such parents have the duty to educate and train children so that the latter can fully live their vocation, in accordance with human dignity, while promoting personal and common good.

According to the Documents of the Second Vatican Council, the education children have to receive from their parents is complex and shall include all aspects of human life: physical, psychological, religious, moral, social and vocational. To adequately fulfil their mission, parents will make responsible choices in choosing the kindergarten, primary and secondary school and high school for their children; such institutions shall support children and help them in their pedagogical itinerary. From Christian perspective, the most important commitment made by spouses when receiving the sacrament of Matrimony is to transmit faith to their children by Baptism, and to preserve and develop this gift received through catechesis, prayer and personal example. The current education crisis – the result of erroneous ideologies – often encountered also in our families, can be overcome by changing this wrong mentality. This mentality refuses to accept the fact that children are a gift God makes to human family and society, while arguing that children are rather obstacles for the development of their parents or a right owed to such parents. The teaching of the Second Vatican Council is the most appropriate guide for Christian parents called to fulfil their mission of providing their children with a genuine human and Christian education.

Key words: parents, education, duty, right, document, education crisis, the Vatican Council.

Introduction

The Christian family, having its roots in the natural monogamous family transformed through the sacrament of Matrimony and aware of the

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divine teaching on its role as fundamental group unit of society and of the Church, the cell capable to heal the human beings affected by the original sin, is called to be actively involved in the promotion and protection of the human and Christian values. The quasi-generalized current crisis affecting the moral, religious, social and material values has its main origin in the family crisis. It is imperative that the Christian family rediscover its own intrinsic value in order to consistently promote the values neglected or lost by current society. The values to be constantly rediscovered and promoted by Christian parents include: truth, freedom, justice and charity. Without this educational activity entrusted by God to Christian parents, neither families nor the human society can overcome the current crisis with its multiple facets, so as to increase the value of all mankind. Parents, the first and main educators of their children, enrich the universal heritage of humanity and contribute to the common good of humanity. Christian spouses, upon becoming parents through conception and birth of children and bringing to life unique, unrepeatable and invaluable human beings, as well as being involved in their development, become the source and the means for the spiritual, material and economic potential of humanity.

The natural, monogamous family is undoubtedly the only essential reality at the basis of the entire human society, both as regards its existence and the perpetuation. No human society can last without the family, nor can it grow in observance of the dignity of the human being. If mankind exists and continues to exist, this is due to the existence of the family, generator and guardian of life, as well as transmitter of the values necessary for the preservation and development of natural human relations, all this being achieved through the education process within the family.

Unfortunately, we witness some current anthropological trends that appear and threaten and endanger the stability of the family, the fundamental group unit of society. These erroneous ideological trends, while discredit the family with its perennial values and its inherent mission as educator, lead to a real crisis with profound ramifications, undermining the very vital structures of society, having potential negative, unpredictable and incalculable consequences in a nearer or more distant future.

If we acknowledge the importance of the family for the authentic good of every human person and the genuine good of the society as a whole, it is necessary for society to defend family, to promote and support it in its role as generator and educator in view of promotion of the authentic values for the good of mankind and the fulfillment of our deepest human aspirations.

In fulfilling its role as educator for the future generations, the natural and Christian family has the task of presenting the real truth, the objective one and not a substitute for truth, a biased truth invented and developed

by certain erroneous philosophical and anthropological views, either older or more recent ones, or by a majority manipulated by certain political or materials interests. It is only the real truth that sets humans free from stressing anxiety and uncertainty, providing the opportunity to reach total balance and fulfilment. Nowadays, the right to full exercise of freedom is more and more mentioned by most of the people. However, there are a large number of people who misunderstand the exercise of personal freedom, defining it as discretionary autonomy, as possibility to perform any action without considering the rights of the others. Justice is another value very sensitive in our society and which needs to be patiently and consistently defended and promoted by the family. Family has to defend the fundamental right to life of every human being, as well as the right to a dignified life and to a natural and dignified end of life, according to human dignity. In order to be able to properly perform this role, family needs to be supported by Christian love expressed by solidary charity. Love or Christian charity, lived and promoted by responsible parents as educators, which must inspire, support and promote social justice, has to be patient and kind, free from pride and envy, capable to believe all, endure all, bear all and hope for all. The promotion of these values emphasizes the nobility and the crucial importance of education children receive from their parents, as skilled educators, both for the good of every person and for the good of the entire human society.

1. Children's Right to Education and Parents' Duty as Educators

Immanuel Kant, the famous philosopher, stated that man can only become man through education. Every human being, coming into this world as an unfulfilled yet perfectible person, has the inherent need to receive education and to educate itself throughout its entire life. It is important to note that there is a difference between teaching and educating.

Teaching means transmitting knowledge relating to a science, an art, a technique or supporting someone in acquiring a range of skills in order to perform an activity more easily and accurately.

Educating is getting involved in helping the "educated one", the person receiving education, in completing its itinerary for full development of all its human capabilities: physical, intellectual and moral. Teaching always implies educating, yet educating does not necessarily mean teaching!

The human education process is extremely complex. It includes a consistent process to be completed in view of ultimate fulfilment as human being. Only those who master the art of pedagogy are true educators. True

educators take the educated person by the hand and guide it in all competence and perseverance from childhood to maturity; from ignorance to science; from instinctual and impulsive actions to informed and responsible actions; from the selfish instinct of preservation to dedication for the good of the other; from indifference and passive attitude towards others to openness to the good and fulfilment of the other; from exaggerated selfish love of self to selfless, generous and kind love for the other; from simple emotions and superficial feelings of love to the human and Christian virtue of charity. It is only such a long-lasting, consistent and complex education process that can truly lead to fulfilment of the human person, i.e., to move from possibility to action. Education aims at gradually leading the human being from the status as intelligent and free being, inherent to human nature, to the status allowing it to act in a free and intelligent manner. There is a long distance between being born a human being and acting as conscious and responsible person. Such distance can be overcome by humans if constantly supported and encouraged by educators during childhood and adolescence, being then continued for the entire life through self-education, as the education process reaches its end when leaving this life for the eternal realities.

The most important objective of education is to render the educated person capable of facing, especially through culture, either alone or together with other people, the challenges that will arise in its personal or collective existence, as well as to support such person in choosing the genuine good for itself and for the society it is a member of, in order to reach the ultimate goal, that is the eternal life with God, the highest Good.

The right to education is emphasized by the Magisterium of the Church, being stipulated in the official Documents of the civilized world. On behalf of the States defending the right to education, the United Nations mentions the «the right to education» in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Each person is entitled to education. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups [1].

This right is also recognized in articles 10, 13 and 14 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Article 10 mentions as follows:

The widest possible protection and assistance should be accorded to the family, which is the natural and fundamental group unit of society, particularly for its establishment and while it is responsible for the care and education of dependent children [2].

Following article 10 which refers to family as «the natural and fundamental group unit of society» having the responsibility «to care and educate the dependent children», article 13 indicates the objectives of education represented by the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, so as to make it “participate effectively in a free society”, promoting “understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations” [3], thus contributing to world peace.

The same ideas are present in articles 23, 28, 29 and 40 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Thus, article 28 states as follows: “States Parties recognize the right of the child to education and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity” [4].

Article 29 provides:

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:
 - a) the development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;
 - b) the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;
 - c) the development of respect for the child’s parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own;
 - d) the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;
 - e) the development of respect for the natural environment.

If we believe that education is the transmission of values and knowledge, the connection with religion is quite obvious and natural, as religion teaches and transmits: dogmas, sacred books and liturgy. Religion calls for respect for the human person, for its assets, as well as for protection of nature. Even nowadays, when in certain social environments religious values are no longer regarded as core values, such religious values still inspire many projects of the faithful and of the human society.

Education crisis has led to other crises in our society. I believe we can say that we are dealing with two fundamental crises: the intelligence crisis and the crisis regarding the transmission of the cultural heritage.

Nowadays, as we over-informed, we could ask ourselves: do we still know how to think, to clearly evaluate things and reach the correct conclusions?

The continuous movement, the constant noise, the tremendous number of virtual messages subjects us to a real stress. We encounter a great number of people unable to structure their knowledge. It seems that the dominating rule is: "everything and immediately" to the point that what is called "inner life" has become a rarity.

The second crisis is the crisis regarding the transmission of the cultural heritage between generations. Family values, moral and religious values are no longer a granted patrimony for everyone. Religious ignorance seems to be a predominant in our secularized society. Being influenced up to the point of being determined to accept "forbidden to forbid", the famous slogan painted on the walls of Sorbonne in 1968, we transformed our society into a boat adrift. Given the current context, when our world is presented as a globalized space, and all cultures containing the religious component are questioned, one cannot neglect the key element for the understanding of the human society, namely religion: without religion, one cannot understand the consciousness of humanity, human history and universal brotherhood.

Unfortunately, nowadays we meet many young heirs with no heritage, and many people with no project allowing them to accurately and in a sustainable manner build their life and the society of the generations to come.

Under the pressure of these two crises and of other social factors, we witness a return of the religious and mystical component unpredictable some time ago.

Over decades, it is possible for man to master even to a greater extent the inert component and even to conquer greater sidereal spaces. We know that the seizure of living matter by human intelligence, supported by the highly advanced technology, is in continuous progress.

When almost all problems will have found a solution and when we will have had the most sophisticated tools and we will think on the manner to use them, there will still be a problem to solve, namely the mystery called man. In close connection to this mystery, there will still be evil, suffering and death that threaten human life and happiness, and to which man will have to find a satisfactory answer. With no exceptions, sooner or later we all question the meaning of our existence and, whether we want it or not, the «sacred» appears as essential component of the human soul.

The first Christian schools emerged around European monasteries proposed both intellectual education and moral training.

Christian education was also intended to be comprehensive, with a view to convey all human knowledge. Christians have always focused on the desire to reconcile reason with faith: "understanding to believe and believing to understand", as Saint Augustine said.

Education aims at developing the intellectual capacity to know, to analyze things, to put concepts in order, to have a coherent thinking in order to make decisions in accordance with the known truth. According to Pascal, “all human unhappiness comes from one thing: that it does not know how to stay still in a room”. Man is the intelligent creature who asks itself and the others, being the only creature that seeks “the meaning of meaning”. Man appears as a mystery to itself: the mystery relating to what lies in itself, its possibilities, its place in the universe, and its ultimate goal. It is due to this mystery that the religious dimension inevitably appears on the horizon of its life.

It is necessary for education to provide certain rules of conduct, such as:

- respect for the person seeking the truth regarding the enigma of what is human;
- critical sense which allows to differentiate between truth and falsehood;
- humanist education providing adequate answers to questions regarding man, world and God;
- promotion and dissemination of cultural traditions open to transcendence, expressing our aspiration to freedom and truth.

Education allows us to share:

- our human and Christian beliefs;
- solidarity that leads to involvement to the benefit of the poor, marginalized and excluded;
- responsibility reminding us that we owe explanations to God for what we have done or failed to do for justice and peace;
- freedom which implies a clear conscience and faith supported by reason;
- spirituality that reveals the religious dimension of man and illuminates his adventure;
- thirst for knowledge that makes us focus on what man, endowed with intelligence and conscience, achieves, whether good or bad;
- plurality that urges us to consider ourselves different, yet equal.

Education should not be reluctant and limited when it comes to the religious dimension of the human being. In the recent decades, scientific and technical education has developed in exponential manner. Meanwhile, human sciences, philosophy, history, literature and theology, have been pushed to the margins when it comes to transmission of culture, despite the fact that along the centuries, the peoples of the world have accumulated an artistic, literary and theological heritage common to all mankind and which has always expressed human spirit open to the values of the religious faith.

We, as Christians, believe and confess that God wanted to reveal himself to man through Jesus, the true God and true man.

2. Erroneous Ideologies Generate Education Crisis

We note, without too much effort, that nowadays we are facing a great education crisis. We notice how, at general level, the average education level has been drastically reduced, and this causes serious difficulties in the training of young generations. We see that, in many places, both children and young people learn always less. Teachers tend to enjoy reduced authority, whereas young people, in their apparent full physical energy, express a deep sense of loneliness and disorientation.

This is all happening right now, in our times, when pedagogy reached unprecedented levels of development. Never before have there been so many people who have studied this science as a result of so many pedagogical theories. What is very curious and interesting is that this crisis is present and acquires greater dimension in a time of increased material development, even in a welfare society. If we have so many competent people in the field of education and material resources sufficient to achieve an adequate education for our times, we inevitably ask ourselves: what is the real cause that generates such a profound education crisis? I think it is reasonable to take a closer look at the manner in which current culture looks at and treats children, as education primarily regards them.

The dominant culture has the ability to influence parents as to how way perceive, receive and treat children. Do we not see a profound change in the way children are perceived and treated nowadays, as compared to how they were perceived and treated decades ago?

Until the middle of last century, there was a clear idea on children. They were considered a gift from God, a gift offered to parents, to be looked after with attention and affection, as well as with great responsibility. Fatherhood and motherhood were considered a special contribution to God's creative power. Consequently, children were treated with respect, while life was received with joy and generosity.

This attitude was the result of the way of thinking and living of the people of the time, characterized by the Judeo-Christian teachings. The model observed was Eva's, the first mother in the world who confesses that "I have gotten a man from the Lord!" (Genesis 4:1), and of other women of the Bible, such as Hannah (see 1Samuel 1), a sterile woman who asked God several times for a son. God fulfilled the wish expressed by faithful prayers, and Hannah went every year to the temple to thank the Lord for the gift received. Hannah, mother of the prophet Samuel, was

fully convinced that human life comes from God, that it must return to him and that nothing is impossible to God.

Sigmund Freud dreamed that someday procreation of children would be separated from the family structure. This idea has gradually started to develop in society, being frequently and strongly presented at the moment of the cultural revolution of 1968. This new culture has totally abandoned and refused the biblical view on human dignity and on the meaning of human existence. As of that moment, the mind of young people was penetrated by the idea that children are an obstacle for their parents' personal development and a limitation to parents' freedom. Thus, children started to be considered a threat one must escape from, while pregnancy is considered a kind of disease to be avoided at all costs.

Currently, another idea is being suggested and disseminated. People who have reached a certain age and can no longer have children are inoculated with the idea that children are a "right", and that they have the right to have children, no matter the means.

However, Catholic doctrine is very clear on this: "Children are not something owed, they are a gift. «The greatest gift of marriage» is a human person. Children cannot be considered a property item, which would lead to acknowledgement of an alleged «right to children»" [5].

These theories which promote such a view on children, namely in a specific situation as being a "threat", while in another context they are a "right", influence the way in which parents deal with their children's education. Furthermore, parents' attitude as regards the education of children results in the low education level of the current generations of children, teenagers and young people and will undoubtedly be obvious in the cultural level of tomorrow's society. Is it not this that causes the very serious problems that society is now facing?

According to the latest data of the Census Bureau's American Community Survey, in the U.S. 15,000,000 children (one in three) grow up without a father, while 5,000,000 children grow up without a mother. On the other hand, in the U.K, in 2012, to have a father was one of the ten most important gifts children asked from Santa Claus. In Italy, there are over 2,800,000 children in single-parent families: other approx. 2,400,000 children do not have a father, while 400,000 children do not have a mother [6].

A great current risk is that adults consider their children "merchandise", a consumer dream to come true in a specific moment. Children are more and more the result of calculations made by parents and not the fruit of parents' available and generous love. Most often, this attitude leaves its mark in children's heart, causing great suffering in the future.

A significant step towards family and education destruction is especially the failure to see children as a gift from God, but rather as a result of human or medical techniques.

It often happens that parents, paradoxically, are over-protective as regards their children, in the intent to protect them from any danger, effort or suffering while, at the same time, they do not show a clear willingness to find time for the difficult duty of educating children. Children are sent to school without parents ever being involved in transmitting certain family values, thus teachers being forced to compensate for what was neglected by parents.

We also notice another serious danger: adults want to have children so as to have children's approval on their conduct rather than to transmit their children their total, gratuitous and unconditional love. Often, families witness almost unimaginable, if not grotesque situations: parents end up behaving like children, complaining about their own childhood, while children end up behaving like adults, forced by the attitude of their parents [7].

When such situation occurs, nobody takes family responsibility, and this is obvious in children's behavior and performance at school, as well as in young people's performance at the university.

With regard to family responsibility, I think that we should take a close look at the Gospel, the Book that shaped Western civilization and strongly influenced the civilization of all mankind. The Gospel presents Jesus' adolescence and "his education process". When Jesus was 12 years old, he went with his parents, Mary and Joseph, to the temple to attend the Passover (Luke 2). While the family was on its way home, the adult Jesus, without his parents knowing it, remained at the temple talking to the teachers. Finding him after three days of search, Mary, his mother, asks him, although being aware she was talking to the Son of God who became man: "Son, why have you done this? Behold, your father and I have sought thee with concern". Jesus, after having manifested full consciousness of his divine identity, said: "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" and returned home with his parents, being «obedient to them» (see Luke 2:41-51).

Truly impressive! Mary and Joseph do not run from their responsibilities, even though they are fully aware that the teenager Jesus standing before them is the Son of God. Jesus, the Son of God who became man, returns home with his family, is obedient to his parents and stays in Nazareth until the age of 30.

We see, therefore, that nobody runs from responsibility in the family of Nazareth. They all stay united in true love expressed by authority, humility and service, not authoritarianism or indifference.

Consequently, it is necessary to recover the meaning of true education in order to face the serious education crisis and to help families consider children as God's gift and, therefore, treat them with care and love, without delegating the responsibility on education to strangers or exclusively to public institutions.

This task is urgent and can be fully achieved only in the light of faith which has illuminated human society for centuries. In essence, we must follow the example of the Holy Family of Nazareth, going beyond the conflicting parameters of a «revolution» which only led to exaltation of selfishness, irresponsibility and greater suffering for the weak and the small ones.

3. Education, Exigency and Urgent and Crucial Challenge

It is possible that some of us have already heard the saying: "It is difficult for man to become man!" This saying reflecting true human wisdom rotted in the experience of the previous generations indicates that the education and training process of each generation is difficult and, therefore, has to be encouraged and supported by patient and persevering love. The passage from the status as human due to rational human nature to the status as person able to express oneself in a mature, conscious and responsible manner represents this very process of continuous and responsible education and training process performed first by parents and other education stakeholders, and then ensured through self-education.

The introduction to the *Gravissimum Educationis* Declaration reads as follows: "Attempts are being made everywhere to promote more education. The rights of men to an education, particularly the primary rights of children and parents, are being proclaimed and recognized in public documents" [8].

Gaudium et Spes Pastoral Constitution states under No. 7:

"Parents and educators experience greater difficulties day by day in discharging their tasks" because "a change in attitudes and in human structures frequently calls accepted values into question, especially among young people, who have grown impatient on more than one occasion, and indeed become rebels in their distress. Aware of their own influence in the life of society, they want a part in it sooner" [9].

God's gift of fatherhood and motherhood to Adam and Eve, the first human family, when blessing them by saying: "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it!" (Genesis 1:28), and applicable to all men and women called to start a family, becomes the foundation of the parents' mission to be educators for their children.

Gaudium et Spes Pastoral Constitution states under No. 50: "Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children. Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents" [10].

The dignity of the spouses as parents gives them the right and duty to be the first and main educators for their children.

Gaudium et Spes Pastoral Constitution states under No. 3:

Parents, because they gave life to their children, have a very serious obligation to educate them and, therefore, should be considered first and their main educators. This educational function is so important that, where there is little, can hardly be refilled. Indeed, it is the duty of parents to create a family atmosphere animated by love and piety towards God and respect for people, to foster integral education, personal and social development of children. The duty to give education is primarily family's duty [11].

The same document mentions under No. 7: "Parents, having the foremost and inalienable duty and right to educate their children, must enjoy real freedom in choosing the school" [12].

The education parents should give to children is complex and should cover all aspects of the human being.

Gravissimum Educationis Declaration states under No. 1:

All men of every race, condition and age, since they enjoy the dignity of a human being, have an inalienable right to an education that is in keeping with their ultimate goal (...). For a true education aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end and of the good of the societies of which, as man, he is a member, and in whose obligations, as an adult, he will share [13].

It is imperative that the education parents will give to their children be comprehensive, covering all aspects specific to the human being as a whole; both the aspects relating to the body and to the human and Christian ones. To this end, education to be given to children shall include:

3.1. Physical Education

Physical education aims at the harmonious development of children's entire body, the preservation and promotion of health through healthy, varied and balanced food, reasonable sports and spare time activities, in compliance to Christian ethics.

Gravissimum Educationis Declaration emphasized this idea under No. 1, stating that "children and young people must be helped to develop harmoniously their physical endowments" [14].

3.2. *Intellectual Education*

This type of education is intended to develop the mental capacities specific to human beings and to ensure the educational and vocational training of children.

Gravissimum Educationis Declaration states under No. 1:

Children and young people must be helped, with the aid of the latest advances in psychology and the arts and science of teaching, to develop harmoniously their intellectual endowments so that they may gradually acquire a mature sense of responsibility [15].

3.3. *Moral Education*

This education allows for the development of will and of the human and Christian virtues.

The same document mentions as follows:

Children and young people must be helped to develop harmoniously their moral endowments so that they may gradually acquire a mature sense of responsibility in striving endlessly to form their own lives properly and in pursuing true freedom as they surmount the vicissitudes of life with courage and constancy [16].

This sacred synod likewise declares that children and young people have a right to be motivated to appraise moral values with a right conscience, to embrace them with a personal adherence, together with a deeper knowledge and love of God [17].

The Inter Mirifica Decree on the Media of Social Communications reads under No. 10:

Parents should remember that they have a most serious duty to guard carefully lest shows, publications and other things of this sort, which may be morally harmful, enter their homes or affect their children under other circumstances [18].

Parents will have to help their children, teenagers and young people that they

accustom themselves to moderation and self-control in their regard. They should, moreover, endeavor to deepen their understanding of what they see, hear or read. They should discuss these matters with their teachers and experts, and learn to pass sound judgments on them [19].

The Dignitatis Humanae Declaration on Religious Freedom states under No. 8:

Wherefore this Vatican Council urges everyone, especially those who are charged with the task of educating others, to do their utmost to form men who,

on the one hand, will respect the moral order and be obedient to lawful authority, and on the other hand, will be lovers of true freedom-men, in other words, who will come to decisions on their own judgment and in the light of truth, govern their activities with a sense of responsibility, and strive after what is true and right, willing always to join with others in cooperative effort [20].

3.4. Emotional Education

This education develops and ordines inclinations towards affection through proper education of feelings and of sexuality.

As sexuality is closely connected to affectivity, Gravissimum Educationis Declaration states under No. 1 that “as children and young people advance in years, they should be given a positive and prudent sexual education” [21].

Parents and teachers should “give due consideration to the difference of sex and the proper ends Divine Providence assigns to each sex in the family and in society” [22], as stated under No. 8 of the same document.

No. 1 of the same document mentions:

All men of every race, condition and age, since they enjoy the dignity of a human being, have an inalienable right to an education that is in keeping with their ultimate goal, their ability, their sex, and the culture and tradition of their country [23].

3.5. Christian Religious Education

This education develops and educates on human and Christian faith, allowing for spiritual development in the light of Christian teachings.

The Lumen Gentium Dogmatic Constitution mentions under No. 11: “The family is, so to speak, the domestic church. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children” [24].

Gravissimum Educationis Declaration states under No. 3 that

it is particularly in the Christian family, enriched by the grace and office of the sacrament of matrimony, that children should be taught from their early years to have a knowledge of God according to the faith received in Baptism, to worship Him, and to love their neighbor. Here, too, they find their first experience of a wholesome human society and of the Church [25].

Under No. 48, the Gaudium et Spes Pastoral Constitution mentions parents' mission of being the religious educators of the children: “Graced with the dignity and office of fatherhood and motherhood, parents will energetically acquit themselves of a duty which devolves primarily on them, namely education and especially religious education” [26].

Parents have the duty of being children's first catechetical instructors, according to No. 4 of the *Gravissimum Educationis* Declaration.

Foremost among these is catechetical instruction, which enlightens and strengthens the faith, nourishes life according to the spirit of Christ, leads to intelligent and active participation in the liturgical mystery and gives motivation for apostolic activity [27].

The same Declaration provides under No. 2:

Since all Christians have become by rebirth of water and the Holy Spirit a new creature so that they should be called and should be children of God, they have a right to a Christian education. A Christian education does not merely strive for the maturing of a human person (...), but has as its principal purpose that the baptized, while they are gradually introduced the knowledge of the mystery of salvation, become ever more aware of the gift of Faith they have received, and that they learn in addition how to worship God the Father in spirit and truth (see John 4:23) especially in liturgical action, and be conformed in their personal lives according to the new man created in justice and holiness of truth (Eph. 4:22-24); also that they develop into perfect manhood, to the mature measure of the fullness of Christ (see Eph. 4:13) and strive for the growth of the Mystical Body. (...) but also to help in the Christian formation of the world that takes place when natural powers viewed in the full consideration of man redeemed by Christ contribute to the good of the whole society [28].

3.6. Vocational Education

Another Decree of the Second Vatican Council, namely *Perfectae Caritatis* states under No. 24 that "parents, too, should nurture and protect religious vocations in their children by instilling Christian virtue in their hearts" [29].

The *Lumen Gentium* Dogmatic Constitution mentions under No. 11: "Parents should (...) be the first preachers of the faith to their children; they should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each of them, fostering with special care vocation to a sacred state" [30].

Parents' duty in guiding children to freely discover and follow their vocation is also emphasized in the *Gaudium et Spes* Pastoral Constitution, under No. 52:

Children should be so educated that as adults they can follow their vocation, including a religious one, with a mature sense of responsibility and can choose their state of life; if they marry, they can thereby establish their family in favorable moral, social and economic conditions. Parents or guardians should by prudent advice provide guidance to their young with respect to founding a family, and the young ought to listen gladly. At the same time no pressure, direct or indirect, should be put on the young to make them enter marriage or choose a specific partner [31].

The same document mentions under No. 49:

Especially in the heart of their own families, young people should be instructed in the dignity, duty and work of married love. Trained thus in the cultivation of chastity, they will be able at a suitable age to enter a marriage of their own after an honorable courtship [32].

Presbyterorum Ordinis indicates under No. 11 the mission of Christian teachers in teaching children and young people to accept the divine call to apostolic life:

Parents and teachers and all who are engaged in any way in the education of boys and young men should so prepare them that they will recognize the solicitude of our Lord for his flock, will consider the needs of the Church, and will be prepared to respond generously to our Lord when he calls, saying: "Here I am Lord, send me!" (Is 6:8) [33].

3.7. Social Education

This education is as important as the other types of education, as they all prepare future generations for mature commitment and involvement in community and social life.

"Hence the family is the first school of the social virtues that every society needs" [34], as provided by the Gravissimum Educationis Declaration under No. 3.

The Declaration further notes: "By the family, children are gradually inserted in the life of the civil society" [35].

The same Declaration states under No. 1: "For a true education aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end and of the good of the societies of which, as man, he is a member, and in whose obligations, as an adult, he will share" [36].

Children should be so trained to take their part in social life that properly instructed in the necessary and opportune skills they can become actively involved in various community organizations, open to discourse with others and willing to do their best to promote the common good.

Conclusion

The aspects analyzed on the mission and foremost duty of the parents, that of being educators for their children, emphasize the complex character of education and the high level of preparation required from the current and future parents in order to perform their duty in an adequate and responsible manner. The documents of the Second Vatican Council reveal the pastoral concern of the Church for its specific mission on proposing Christian

truth to man and on making parents who received this mission from God to fulfil it with Christian love and in a responsible manner. Parents' involvement in fulfilling this mission and their duty of being the first and main educators for their children, in a responsible Christian spirit, lead to increase in the value of human society and in the number of those who feel the need to work with parents and with the other structures involved in education.

References

- [1] United Nations, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 26.
- [2] United Nations, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Art. 10.
- [3] United Nations, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Art. 13.
- [4] United Nations, Convention on the Rights of the Child, Art. 28.
- [5] The Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2378.
- [6] See http://www.agensir.it/pls/sir/v3_s2doc_b.rss?id_oggetto=252815.
- [7] See G. Cucci, La scomparsa degli adulti, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, II, 220-232, 3885, 5/5/2012.
- [8] Second Vatican Council, Gravissimum Educationis Declaration on Christian Education, Introduction.
- [9] Second Vatican Council, Gaudium et Spes Pastoral Constitution, No. 7.
- [10] Second Vatican Council, Gaudium et Spes Pastoral Constitution, No. 50.
- [11] Second Vatican Council, Gravissimum Educationis Declaration on Christian Education, No. 3.
- [12] Second Vatican Council, Gravissimum Educationis Declaration on Christian Education, No. 7.
- [13] Second Vatican Council, Gravissimum Educationis Declaration on Christian Education, No. 1.
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- [21] Second Vatican Council, Gravissimum Educationis Declaration on Christian Education, No. 1.
- [22] Second Vatican Council, Gravissimum Educationis Declaration on Christian Education, No. 8.
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- [25] Second Vatican Council, *Gravissimum Educationis* Declaration on Christian Education, No. 3.
- [26] Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* Pastoral Constitution, No. 48.
- [27] Second Vatican Council, *Gravissimum Educationis* Declaration on Christian Education, No. 4.
- [28] Second Vatican Council, *Gravissimum Educationis* Declaration on Christian Education, No. 2.
- [29] Second Vatican Council, *Prefectae Caritatis* Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life, No. 24.
- [30] Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* Dogmatic Constitution, No. 11.
- [31] Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* Pastoral Constitution, No. 52.
- [32] Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* Pastoral Constitution, No. 49.
- [33] Second Vatican Council, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, No. 11.
- [34] Second Vatican Council, *Gravissimum Educationis* Declaration on Christian Education, No. 3.
- [35] Second Vatican Council, *Gravissimum Educationis* Declaration on Christian Education, No. 3.
- [36] Second Vatican Council, *Gravissimum Educationis* Declaration on Christian Education, No. 1.