

Amoris Laetitia Chapter 7: TOWARDS A BETTER EDUCATION OF CHILDREN

This chapter is particularly relevant for those who have been called to serve in the field of Catholic education. It is clear that the synod participants, under the leadership of Pope Francis, believe that the primary educators of children are the child's parents. The importance of this message is reflected in the second paragraph of this chapter which explains how essential it is for parents to spend quality time with their children:

Only if we devote time to our children, speaking of important things with simplicity and concern, and finding healthy ways for them to spend their time, will we be able to shield them from harm. (260)

This devoted time is seen as a gift to be shared by both parents and children. The document underlines the importance of helping children to see the parental relationship as a positive experience when it says, "Obsession, however, is not education" (261). The focus is on encouraging children to develop habits of love and trust, not controlling them with fear of punishment. While it is true that inappropriate behavior must be corrected, the key is to do so with love and in a way that the children understand and learn from the situation.

It is interesting to note the understanding of the "real world" that comes through in this chapter. There is no illusion that all families are perfect and all adolescents listen to and respect their parents. This is reflected in the quotation:

... adolescents should be helped to draw analogies: to appreciate that values are best embodied in a few exemplary persons, but also realized imperfectly and to different degrees in others (272).

This gives parents permission to turn to others for assistance. His Holiness invites and encourages all parents to seek faithful assistance; this is especially true concerning the gift of Catholic education.

One of the most influential partners that parents can count on to assist them in the education of their children is the Catholic school systems available in many countries around the world. The education of children involves teaching of morality, Scripture study, and theology, as well as education on human sexuality. In speaking specifically about this area, the document gives several guiding statements which educators can look to for inspiration:

It can only be seen within the broader framework of an education for love, for mutual self-giving (280). The important thing is to teach them sensitivity to different expressions of love, mutual concern and care, loving respect and deeply meaningful communication (283).

While these statements are not a "how to" teach human sexuality, they give a clear direction and focus for the development of human sexuality education programs in Catholic schools.

In concluding the chapter, Pope Francis returns to the importance of the role of parents in raising their children.

Handing on the faith presumes that parents themselves genuinely trust God, seek him and sense their need for him, for only in this way does '*one generation laud your works to another, and declare your mighty acts*' [Ps 144:4] and '*fathers make known to children your faithfulness*' [Is 38:19] (287).

The education of children is a daunting challenge and a glorious calling for all of us. We, as educators and members of the Church, are a source of support for the parents of the children we serve.

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