



AMORIS LAETITIA

CHAPTER VII

TOWARDS A BETTER EDUCATION OF CHILDREN

Let's give a contemplative and prayerful look at the 7th Chapter of the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, on the "*Education of Children*", a task that must be incarnated in the hearts of parents ... and that implies observation, objectivity, tenderness, actions of the utmost care, becoming for them a mission of life with the sole purpose of achieving the integral development of their children; a task-mission that begins at an early age. Parents or guardians need preparation to be able to assume their role as companions and guides that stimulate and strengthen the process in those values that give them security and human and spiritual fulfillment as people. It is here that we as Capuchin Tertiary Sisters of the "Holy Family" are required to have the mission in Family Pastoral to guide, form and accompany. "Since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring and therefore must be recognized as the primary and principal educators" (*Gravissimum Educationis*, 3).

The structure of the Chapter motivates us to enter into a comparative reading, which leads us to enrich, change, propose and/or strengthen what in each of our Demarcations we are projecting in this sense. We can even observe that the proposal that he makes to us in this Chapter, favors a much more comprehensive and enriching development of the "Challenges four and six" of our Family Pastoral Project.

In this Chapter the introduction appears in number 259 and then the seven sections with their respective subtitles, like this:

1. Where are our children? (260-262)
2. The ethical formation of children (263-267)
3. The value of correction as an incentive (268-270)
4. Patient realism (271-273)
5. Family life as an educational setting (274-279)
6. The need for sex education (280-286)
7. Pass on the faith (287-290)





I. WHERE ARE OUR CHILDREN?

Pope Francis, moved by the urgency of work in the Church with the Family, has pronounced very clearly on the responsibility of parents in the education of their children. With the question "*Where are our children?*" (260-262), raises some questions related to the world of education and initiates some reflections that arouse the interest of parents. In these numerals, he describes the need for parents to be interested in the "existential situation" of their children, to make an effort to understand where they are "from the point of view of their convictions, their objectives, their desires, their Project of Life".

In the number 260 and 261, he expands on the harmfulness of parents becoming obsessed with controlling all the movements of their children. In this sense, it is explained that education implies strengthening the child so that he/she will be capable of facing challenges on his/her own. And, in number 262, this idea is further developed that "education involves the task of promoting responsible freedoms", an idea that will be reiterated throughout the entire Chapter, in an attempt to emphasize how adequate formation enhances autonomy, identity and freedom of children. But unfortunately there are obsessive parents who normally tend to over-protect their children so they are shielded from problems and dangers. They procure by all means that "they lack nothing", without adjusting to the fact that by doing so these parents impede them from learning how to manage frustration, freedom and self-determination. Today, there is a technological control that exist since the child was still a baby. In children and adolescents, the options for monitoring and "spying" through cameras, cell phones, smart watches, etc. have multiplied and these do not agree with the formative guidelines and nuances that Pope Francis proposes.



The education of children is a pending issue in many homes. In your opinion, what can be the causes of this situation?

II. MORAL FORMATION: Four sections

❖ *The ethical formation of children (263-267)*

In numbers 264 and 265, the Apostolic Exhortation explains that it is necessary to form children in virtues so that they will have a basis on which to lean..., since adequate judgments and solid convictions are not enough for this. In addition, it is necessary to help the child to grasp the moral good as something convenient for him/her and to form his/her will, customs, habits and affective inclinations in that direction. As clarified in number 267, virtue is an internal and stable principle of action, which safeguards and guides freedom.

❖ *The value of correction as an incentive (268-270)*

We all know how it has gone in recent years from an excessive and punitive use of punishment in education to an equally disastrous attempt to eliminate it completely affecting authority; as what our Pastoral for Family Document tells us when it talks about how "**Authority blurs itself**".

The function of the sanction is highlighted to sensitize the child or adolescent by warning them that bad actions have consequences and to awaken the ability to put themselves in the place of the other and to feel their pain when they have been harmed, teach them to ask for forgiveness. It is important to firmly guide them to ask for forgiveness and repair the damage done to others (268). But he severely warns against abusing it, so as not to get carried away by anger and end up "exasperating the children", but always correcting them with love; correction is a stimulus when efforts are also valued and recognized and when the child discovers that his parents maintain patient trust (269). The fundamental thing is that discipline does not become a mutilation of desire; in this way, the sanction will not restrict the positive impulse of the child, but will become a stimulus, a pedagogical resource to encourage him/her to go further (270). How can discipline be a constructive limit on the path that a child has to undertake and not a wall that cancels it or a dimension of education that makes it complex? It is necessary to know how to find a balance between two equally harmful extremes. One would be to pretend to build a world, tailored to the wishes of the child, who grows up feeling subject to rights, but not to responsibilities.



The other extreme would be to lead the child to live without awareness of his/her dignity, his/her unique identity and his/her rights, tortured by his/her duties and awaiting to fulfill the wishes of others.

❖ *Patient realism (271-273)*

For a "patient realism", parents are recommended a pedagogical gradualism to propose to their children small steps of moral progress (271 and 273). "Moral education entails asking of a child or a young person only those things that do not involve a disproportionate sacrifice, and demanding only a degree of effort that will not lead to resentment or coercion.. Ordinarily this is done by proposing small steps that can be understood, accepted and appreciated, while including a proportionate sacrifice. Otherwise, by demanding too much, we gain nothing. Once the child is free of our authority, he or she may possibly cease to do good" (271). It is also proposed to teach them to distinguish with comparison the different degrees of experience of values in each person, so that they can understand the situation of their parents and to recover what is positive in them.

❖ *Family life as an educational setting (274-279)*

In this sense, the great influence of the family as the first school of values for life stands out. The family is the primary setting for socialization, since it is where we first learn to relate to others, to listen and share, to be patient and show respect, to help one another and live as one (276). "In our own day, dominated by stress and rapid technological advances, one of the most important tasks of families is to provide an education in hope" (275). When children or adolescents are not helped to realize that some things have to be waited for, they can become obsessed with satisfying their immediate needs and develop the vice of "wanting it all now". This is a grand illusion which does not favour freedom but weakens it. Every day the family has to come up with new ways of appreciating and acknowledging its members (276).

"The task of education is to make us sense that the world and society are also our home; it trains us how to live together in this greater home" (276). "In the family, we learn closeness, care and respect for others. We break out of our fatal self - absorption and come to realize that we are living with and alongside others who are worthy of our concern, our kindness and our affection. There is no social bond without this primary, everyday, almost microscopic aspect of living side by side, crossing paths at different times of the day, being concerned about everything that affects us, helping one another with ordinary little things (276).

It is worth taking into account that contemplative formation, makes all realities to be seen, recognized, observed and valued, as it enables us to see what is beautiful, pleasant, and good. "This happens, for example, when illness strikes, since "in the face of illness, even in families, difficulties arise due to human weakness. But in general, times of illness enable family bonds to grow stronger... An education that fails to encourage sensitivity to human illness makes the heart grow cold; it makes young people 'anesthetized' to the suffering of others, incapable of facing suffering and of living the experience of limitation" (277).

Another important aspect is the use of mass media, which have become necessary. The technological means can help to facilitate greater and better communication in the relationship between parents and children, but they can also be obstacles (278). "We know that sometimes they can keep people apart rather than together, as when at dinnertime everyone is surfing on a mobile phone, or when one spouse falls asleep waiting for the other who spends hours playing with an electronic device" (278). Our Family Pastoral Project proposes in these cases, a dialogue "that families have to discuss and resolve in ways which encourage interaction without imposing unrealistic prohibitions.

In any event, we cannot ignore the risks that these new forms of communication pose for children and adolescents; at times they can foster apathy and disconnect from the real world. This "technological disconnect" exposes them more easily to manipulation by those who would invade their private space with selfish interests" (278).



- If we had “to measure” the level of socialization of the family, what grade could they be?
- What do parents do to ensure that the technological resources available to their children favor interpersonal relationships and reasonable and educational access to the digital world?



III. SEX EDUCATION: “The need for Sex Education”

Pope Francis has attributed a great importance to the sexual education of children within the family. It is a great challenge and a pending task in many families, in other educational institutions and, in general, in society as a whole. This section is also addressed in our challenges and action of the Congregational Family Pastoral Project.

“It is not easy to approach the issue of sex education in an age when sexuality tends to be trivialized and impoverished” (280). In this section, the need to integrate affective development and not limit it to mere genitality is repeatedly stressed: It can only be seen within the broader framework of an education for love, for mutual self-giving. In such a way, the language of sexuality would not be sadly impoverished but illuminated and enriched (280).

It is not helpful to overwhelm them with data without also helping them to develop a critical sense in dealing with the onslaught of new ideas and suggestions, the flood of pornography and the overload of stimuli that can deform sexuality (281). It is necessary to help them to recognize and look for positive influences, at the same time that they distance themselves from everything that disfigures their capacity to love (281).

“We also have to realize that “a new and more appropriate language” is needed “in introducing children and adolescents to the topic of sexuality” (281). “The important thing is to teach them sensitivity to different expressions of love, mutual concern and care, loving respect and deeply meaningful communication” (283). “But who speaks of these things today? Who is capable of taking young people seriously? Who helps them to prepare seriously for a great and generous love?” (284).

Finally, in numbers 285 and 286, what we could call a “Christian gender theory” is offered; that is, a balanced vision of the difference between masculine and feminine, which implies respecting it from the created corporeality, with awareness of the experiential and cultural elements, and avoiding excessive role rigidities.

Could it be that out there we should reinforce our work with couples, with families? We have many families in each of our works and apostolates... Who are directly responsible for sexual education? They are the parents, of course; but this is not so clear, in spite of all that has been stated in general so far. In addition, the Pope begins the topic by asking “if our educational institutions have taken up this challenge” (280).



- Have you known serious consequences of the lack of sexual education in the family? How could they have been prevented?





Hence moments of family prayer and acts of devotion can be more powerful for evangelization than any catechism class or sermon (AL 288).

IV. EDUCATION IN FAITH

It is our first challenge of the Congregational Family Pastoral Project: "*The crisis of faith and family life*". From the point of view of human knowledge, faith is the acceptance of a non-evident truth, founded on the testimony of a credible witness. Hence, educating in the faith always consists in transmitting the truths of the faith together with the testimony that makes them credible, beautiful and attractive for life.

Pope Francis has reaffirmed that, in Christian families, the transmission of faith in Christ Jesus is an essential dimension of the integral education of children, not an addition that can be dispensed with. Perhaps this is one of the weak points in many families. It often happens that parents consider that "*that of faith*" of their children is a matter of parish catechesis, and that they already comply by facilitating the catechists to do the work that corresponds to them.

However, Pope Francis insists that parents must be the first and irreplaceable in transmitting the faith to their children. That is to say, according to him, parents can count on the collaboration of the Christian community when it is convenient that their children require a special catechesis on the occasion of the reception of a sacrament, but this catechesis has reason to be when the parents have already helped to their children to take the first steps along the "path of faith" (287). The home, "The Domestic Family" must continue to be the place where we learn to appreciate the meaning and beauty of the faith, to pray and to serve our neighbour" (287).

Moments of family prayer and acts of devotion can be more powerful for evangelization than any catechism class or sermon (288). Children need symbols, actions and stories (288). Adolescents usually have issues with authority and rules, it is best to encourage their own experience of faith and to provide them with attractive testimonies that win them over by their sheer beauty (288). Children who grew up in missionary families often become missionaries themselves; growing up in warm and friendly families, they learn to relate to the world in this way, without giving up their faith or their convictions. Just the witnessing, even without inviting the children, is already a way for them to grow in a different way. They are taking on a way of relating to the world, without renouncing their faith and their convictions (289).

The transmission of the faith in the family cannot ignore that, today the whole Church is involved in promoting a new evangelization that responds adequately to the situation and conditions in which our society finds itself. Thus, this Chapter closes with a strong warning for the future of the Church: Only on the basis of this experience will the Church's pastoral care for families enable them to be both domestic churches and a leaven of evangelization in society (cf. 290).



➤ What specific causes can be attributed to the abandonment of living the faith by families that consider themselves Christian?





I - WORK PROPOSALS FOR THE FAMILIES

I - TIPS FOR READING, REFLECTION AND DIALOGUE:

1. Read numbers 259-290 of the Exhortation. Underline the phrases or ideas that you find most interesting.
2. Take note of the points that you do not understand and / or those that you want to clarify in the working group and raise them in the meeting.
3. What, in your opinion, are the current possibilities and limitations of families in relation to the sexual education of their children? Why?
4. In relation to the education of the faith, what possibilities and limitations do families have today? Why?
5. In your personal experience of family life and in relation to the education of your children, what are the most relevant challenges, effective resources, positive aspects, limitations, difficulties, supports ...? Why?

II - PRAYER MOMENT

We become aware that we are with the Lord, that He works within us. We take a moment of silence to allow three or four ideas, feelings, invitations that emerge from the text, to settle in us. And whoever wants to express it, to do it briefly.

- ✓ We welcome the Word of God: 1 Thes 5,14-22.

"This is what we recommend to you, brothers: admonish the lazy, encourage the depressed, help the weak, with all, be patient. Be careful, that no one returns evil for evil; always seek good among yourselves and for all. Always be joyful, pray without ceasing, give thanks for everything. That is what God wants of you as Christians. Do not stifle the spirit, do not despise prophecy, examine everything and hold fast to what is good, avoid all kinds of evil".

- ✓ In the text of Saint Paul, what light do we find for the educational task of the family?

III - VIDEO OF CHAPTER VII ON YOUTUBE:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddrMeZHTmgI&t=30s>

Sr. María Yalile Jurado Fajardo and Cecilia Shizuko Nacano, tc

