

## COMPENDIUM ON CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING PART 50

### **The social subjectivity of the family – The task of educating**

**By Nadine Bushell 21.05.06**

**Member of the Catholic Commission for Social Justice**

When we speak of education, the first things that come to mind are schools, universities and other learning institutions, academic subjects such as chemistry, mathematics and languages.

However, education is multi-faceted. Firstly, it is not limited to schools and other learning institutions. Secondly it covers more than academia, includes the transmission of cultural values, ethics, social, spiritual and religious values.

It allows human beings to live a life full of dignity, by ensuring that they understand the environment they live in, understand the factors that affect it, understand how they fit into it and understand how to come to decisions in their lives.

Education is therefore of critical importance to the functioning of society as it determines how individuals perceive themselves, others and life as a whole and affects the interaction of everything and everyone. Given the importance of education, it cannot be left up to schools and other such institutions; it must begin firstly in the family.

“In the work of education, the family forms man in the fullness of his personal dignity according to all his dimensions, including the social dimension. The family, in fact, constitutes ‘a community of love and solidarity, which is uniquely suited to teach and transmit cultural, ethical, social, spiritual and religious values, essential for the development and well-being of its own members and of society (*Charter of the Rights of the Family*).”

By exercising its mission to educate, the family contributes to the common good and constitutes the first school of social virtue, which all societies need (*Gracissimum Educationis*).’ In the family, persons are helped to grow in freedom and responsibility, indispensable prerequisites for any function in society. With education, certain fundamental values are communicated and assimilated (*Familiaris Consortio*).”

These values however are not only just communicated and assimilated, they must be taught in a particularly loving and caring environment, where the best interest of the children is at the forefront.

An important function of education is to develop the level of self-confidence in children – they must feel that they have the tools to deal with any situation that comes their way; it is not only about acquiring information.

This acceptance of self can only be obtained in the context of the love of a family. If children ‘fail’ at school, does that mean they are not able to live happily and as contributing members of the society? The family’s total package of education focussing on morals, values, ethics, acceptance of self and responsibility in the context of loving human relationships will ensure if someone is not good at mathematics, he/she is able to identify through the patience, love and

care of the family what other gifts he/she has, and develop them so that he/she is entitled to the same quality of life as someone who may succeed academically.

“The family has a completely original and irreplaceable role in raising children (*Gravissimum Educationis*). The parents’ love, placing itself at the service of children to draw forth from them (*e-ducere*) the best that is in them, finds its fullest expression precisely in the task of educating.

‘As well as being a source, the parents’ love is also the animating principle and therefore the norm inspiring and guiding all concrete educational activity, enriching it with the values of kindness, constancy, goodness, service, disinterestedness and self-sacrifice that are the most precious fruit of love (*Familiaris Consortio*).’

“The right and duty of parents to educate their children is “essential, since it is connected with the transmission of human life; it is original and primary with regard to the educational role of others, on account of the uniqueness of the loving relationship between parents and children; and its irreplaceable and inalienable, and therefore incapable of being entirely delegated to others or usurped by others (*Familiaris Consortio*).”

Parents have the duty and right to impart a religious education and moral formation to their children (*Dignitatis Humanae*), a right the State cannot annul but which it must respect and promote. This is a primary right that the family may not neglect or delegate.”

In Trinidad and Tobago, the level of delinquency among school children and young adults is high. There are reports of indiscipline in schools; there is a high level of criminal activity among the youth.

What is instructive, is that the population usually blames the absence of proper guidance in the home for the ills among the nation’s youth, and have by and large accepted that despite the best efforts of the school system, if there is no explanation in the home about morals and values and culture, the fruits of the best designed education system will come to naught.

Teachers often plea for the support of parents, and it is recognised that in line with the whole theme of the family as a community of persons, that education must be a community effort, where the efforts of the parents are combined with others. From this also follows the need for Parent-Teachers Associations and one on one meeting between parents and teachers among other things.

The parents have a key role in providing the moral, spiritual and emotional base for education to take place. The point is that education is essential to the development of the person and is spiritual in nature and therefore the family must take the lead role in the process working with other institutions.

Next week the discussion on education continues with a more specific examination of how the family and the state can work together in this task of educating.