

COMPENDIUM ON CHURCH'S SOCIAL TEACHING PART 51

The social subjectivity of the family – The task of educating 2

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The theme running through the family as the vital cell of the society, is “love and the formation of a community of persons” is quite evident in education. Educating children is an example of how in an increasingly individualistic society, an authentic spirit of community can develop in the shaping of the human experience of children. Family and other institutions must work together to ensure that every individual is a well adjusted and contributing member of the society.

“Parents are the first educators, not the only educators, of their children. It belongs to them, therefore, to exercise with responsibility their educational activity in close and vigilant cooperation with civil and ecclesial agencies. ‘Man’s community aspect itself – both civil and ecclesial – demands and leads to a broader and more articulated activity resulting from well-ordered collaboration between the various agents of education.

All these agents are necessary, even though each can and should play its part in accordance with the special competence and contribution proper to itself (*Familiaris Consortio*).’ Parents have the right to choose the formative tools that respond to their convictions and to seek those means that will help them best to fulfil their duty as educators, in the spiritual and religious sphere also. Public authorities have the duty to guarantee this right and to ensure the concrete conditions necessary for it to be exercised (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*). In this context, cooperation between the family and scholastic institutions takes on primary importance.”

It has largely been accepted that the task of education cannot be done by parents alone, but must be supported by other institutions. This however, does not remove the family’s role in education. It means that parents in particular must pay close attention to educational opportunities for their children. Parents and society as whole must ensure that firstly the standard of education institutions is of the highest degree to entitle all children to the very best experience.

Parents must exercise extreme caution in selecting educational institutions, because these institutions must support their duty as educators particularly in the spiritual and moral sphere. The state has a responsibility to ensure that parents in fact have this right to chose. It is therefore of critical importance for both parties to work together for the common good.

In Trinidad and Tobago recently there have been discussions on the role of the State in education. Questions have been asked as to the rights the State actually has in relation to parents and private education institutions. Outlined below is the perspective put forward in the *Compendium*.

“Parents have the right to found and support educational institutions. Public authorities must see to it that ‘public subsidies are so allocated that parents are truly free to exercise this right without incurring unjust burdens. Parents should not have to sustain, directly or indirectly, extra charges which would deny or unjustly limit the exercise of this freedom’ (*Charter of the Rights of the Family*).

The refusal to provide public economic support to non-public schools that need assistance and that render a service to civil society is to be considered an injustice. “Whenever the State lays claim to an educational monopoly, it oversteps its rights and offends justice. ...The State cannot without injustice merely tolerate so-called private schools. Such schools render a public service and therefore have a right to financial assistance (*Libertatis Conscientia*).”

One critical point of this is that while the State has a responsibility to ensure equal access to education by all, it must not do so ignoring the critical role that the parent and other private institutions have. It is in fact unjust to deny parents and the educational institutions they support the right to exercise a key role and in fact the lead role that is expected of them.

“The family has the responsibility to provide an integral education. Indeed, all true education ‘is directed towards the formation of the human person in view of his final end and the good of that society to which he belongs and in the duties of which he will, as an adult, have a share (*Gravissimum Educationis*).’

This integrality is ensured when children – with the witness of life and in words – are educated in dialogue, encounter, sociality, legality, solidarity and peace, through the cultivation of the fundamental virtues of justice and charity (*Familiaris Consortio*).”

“In the education of children, the role of the father and that of the mother are equally necessary (*Gaudium et Spes*). The parents must therefore work together. They must exercise authority with respect and gentleness but also, when necessary, with firmness and vigour: it must be credible, consistent, and wise and always exercised with a view to children’s integral good.”

“Parents have, then, a particular responsibility in the area of sexual education. It is of fundamental importance for the balanced growth of children that they are taught in an orderly and appropriate manner the meaning of sexuality and that they learn to appreciate the human and moral values connected with it.

‘In view of the close links between the sexual dimension of the person and his or her ethical values, education must bring the children to a knowledge of and respect for moral norms as the necessity and highly valuable guarantee for responsible personal growth in human sexuality (*Familiaris Consortio*).’ Parents have the obligation to inquire about the methods used for sexual education in educational institutions in order to verify that such an important and delicate topic is dealt with properly.”