

Let's take care of the family: Pious schools and family

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General Father

The first few days of Last July I attended the fifth World encounter of the family which took place in Valencia where I was invited by the Provincial Piarist of that city. This isn't the place to enter into an analysis of the development of the congress or in the contents of its talks, bulletins, debates and conclusions that preceded the arrival of Pope Benedict XVI who came in order to close the event. There has been extensive information in the media in diverse publications and magazines about both the congress and the Papal visit. More importantly, mentioning the encounter allows me to have an occasion to share, with a fraternal greeting, the challenge that the Piarist Order represents to the family, with our mission of Christian educators of children and youngsters.

The reality of the family is overtly present in our work, above all in our schools, through the children, boys and girls, who attend them. It is well known what the family means to the education of our new generation; for good when it's working, and for bad when it's not. Aware of all of this, when our rules speak about the Calasanz school and the educative community, they show decisiveness of "Commitment in its mission to the parents" (R119).

The attendance of Benedict XVI at the closure of the encounter, both in his presence and words upheld some deep convictions of a Christian and an anthropological view of the family. There wasn't a polemic tone or incitement for confrontation when other points of view occurred, but decisiveness to add to the well being of the family with an evangelical contribution. Many things were heard, but what I liked above all are these two that were said by the Pope and that I will share with you. The first refers to the experience of personal growth that occurs through love which has been tested, through receiving and offering: being loved we learn to love. From this principle the family came to occupy the universal and spontaneous place where the best conditions to carry this out arise. It's in the family and from the family that one feels love and learns to love. Later, school will bring about growth with its specific contribution of love. The

second was about the purpose of education, taking into account that the first school is the family; education is a formative task in freedom and for freedom. I unite both: if one has grown up freely in an atmosphere of love, later one will be able to carry out freedom in a responsible way. Listening to these words, thinking about our Order and in some Pious schools which have a close relationship with the families of their students and themselves being a scholarly family where one loves and is loved, it is possible to educate in freedom and for freedom. Here, I refer again to something that the Order already stated in the International Year of the family, celebrated in 1994 through the initiative of the United Nations.

We tend to forget things so easily, and even more so now with so much change and daily events that the media is concerned with, I want to recall what the Order proposed there and I am using it as the steps to follow for the future. We are still in that foreseen future, because what was said in a far off 1994 is now a reality which the Order had proposed then as an objective. (Actually, it was in a symposium that was held in Gandía, Spain, in December 1993 and also in an institutional letter of the General Father Josep Maria Balcells of the same date).

At that time real “institutional commitment in favor of the family” was spoken about and a declaration of intentions was made that took into account the decisive will on the part of the Order to create an “atmosphere of charity- love- and freedom” between parents, colleges, children/pupils, that had as a result to feel one another, each other together, “family of families”. Without doubt, this expression can be a description of the Piarist College.

I haven't strained at all the harmony between the declarations of the Order in 1994 and the words that Benedict XV1 used in the closure of the World encounter of the Family in Valencia. I would like to emphasis more what the Order proposed in 1994 as a special attention to the family. I'll do this in three points:

a) The implication of the family and of education.

Historically the family has carried out a fundamental role in the socialization process and as a critical support in ancient and modern societies. A society that values education of its generations, values permanent education itself. Why do we use so little

the word education or to educate, lately? The disassociation between permanent education (cultural, social, ethical, religious) of adults and that education desired for children and youngsters is the cause of the current bad educational results. A critical study on the results of the current education of children and youngsters shows us this clue: an adult family society that does not appreciate its own education demotivates children and young people in taking interest in their own education. On the other hand, a stable family unit concerned about the education of all its members, starting with the adults, is a decisive factor in motivating its children to acquire an education.

b) The relationship between family and school.

Both family and college, from their identity and place. College is not the family and vice versa. But they are two institutions that have a co-responsible relationship regarding the children/students. The college behaves from its educational project, which is respected and upheld. The family behaves as an active reference to be in first place responsible to look for and guarantee the education of its children. Two institutions that come together to act on the child in order to give him the best possible quality of education, as a whole. From this shared co-responsibility and from a respected identity arises the in practice developmental programs which are beneficial to the student in school. Family and college are not two independent entities. On the contrary, both form a unique system that in its actions and projections is something more than the sum of themselves. The result isn't what has been added up. It is something new to create and take care of.

c) *Steps to follow for the family in a piarist college.*

As I mentioned before, the Order has given some priorities to the area of the family for the next years. These priorities are still in existence. I'll summarize them in three points. 1) To promote the integration and participation of parents, making them co-responsible for the educative school process. 2) To encourage and increment the communication between the college and the parents so that the parents know about the teaching- learning process. 3) To encourage different forms of education, like schools for parents and other formative instruments that are at our reach, which favor personal growth, social growth and growth of the couple.

Finally, as a transversal line, it was said; we want to make it possible, in the warmest way, in all our centers, so that all the families have the opportunity to become evangelicals. The piarist colleges are platforms for religious guidance for the family.

What we want to do is to emulate the teachings of Jesus who embraced and blessed the children, who took them in, and who used them as a symbol to his kingdom “for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” (Mark 10, 13-16). Nowadays, to bless and to embrace means to prevent, to heal, guide, and enlighten. As an educational institute this is our aim and that’s where we want to be for the good and well being of our students and their families. It was heard in the Congress of the families that “It’s not good for the family to be alone.” Loneliness is unhealthy for mankind, and for the family. The church is the family of families (domestic church, according to the Vatican 11). The pious schools, in a humble and servile way, see themselves to have a cordial solidarity with families and above all to those who entrust their children in our education. So, we take care of the families and we accompany them, feeling at the same time that they accompany us, in their formative and educative vocation.