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VATICAN - THE WORDS OF DOCTRINE by Rev Nicola Bux and Rev Salvatore Vitiello - The 'answer' to the educational emergency is to extend the Church.

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - All baptised Christians know they are called to extend the Church, calling other men and women to be a part of it. The Church is the family of God, the heavenly communion of the saints come down to earth, so all the faithful form one body in Christ the Lord; this is the agape of charity. The more a priest extends this agape, the more he is a minister of Christ, St Augustine says. What, if not God's, love leads the Church to educate the new generations? The Church is Mater et Magistra and so she educates.

Jesus' final commandment to his followers was: “make disciples of all peoples…teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded you …” (cfr Mt 28,19-20). The priest is called not to found free thinking associations, or to takes sides for one against another, as long as it is a moral or social matter; and not even to combat the many types of mafia. He is called to a far loftier task: to strive to lead the evil to change their ways. The Christian's commitment in the world, following the example of Christ, is not to judge the world but to save it.

Addressing a recent assembly of Italian Bishops (29 May 2008) Pope Benedict XVI set at the centre of the work the 'educational emergency' which for the Church “takes on precise features: the transmission of the faith to the new generations ”, at a time “obstacles posed by relativism, by a culture that puts God in parentheses and that discourages every really committed choice and especially definitive choices, to privilege instead, in the various milieus of life, the affirmation of self and immediate satisfactions”.

Not content with mere analysis the Holy Father, urged those present to note what is happening: “To face these difficulties the Holy Spirit has already raised up in the Church many charisma and evangelising dynamism particularly alive and present in Italian Catholicism. It is the duty of we Bishops to joyfully welcome these new inputs, to support them, to favour their maturation, to guide and direct them so that they always remain within the great stream of faith and ecclesial communion”. He was referring to Church associations, Movements and new communities which before and even more since the Council shouldered the task of Christian education. This sort of experience, no longer only for young people, has led to the formation of many authentically Christian families.

The president of the Italian Catholic Bishops Conference, Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, declared “the educational task calls for a broad alliance of many subjects. First of all the family […] the principal subject of education, for which there can be no substitute”. The family– a word which comes from “famulus”, meaning mutual serving– in turn is the mature fruit of education of young people. In the Church this education is offered especially as part of ecclesial experience in movements and groups which consist in a journey of faith, hope and charity.

As in the past the an 'educational answer' to the educational problem is offered by the Holy Spirit: to enlarge the Church, an unceasing task from generation to generation. So the Catechism of the Catholic Church applies this doctrinal and existential doctrine to the family, and affirms: “In our own time, in a world often alien and even hostile to faith, believing families are of primary importance as centres of living, radiant faith. For this reason the Second Vatican Council, using an ancient expression, calls the family the Ecclesia domestica. It is in the bosom of the family that parents are "by word and example . . . the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children. They should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each child, fostering with special care any religious vocation” (CCC n. 1656). (Agenzia Fides 31/7/2008)

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