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K. D. Whitehead

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Judging from its name alone, we should image at first view that some form of "family life education" would be an eminently desirable and even necessary thing. The family is in trouble today. Surely we must do all we can to shore it up and inculcate and reinforce family values. Obviously, some form of education directed to the problems of the family should help.

Where the unique institution of the family is concerned, however, we should bear in mind a few other things.

The family has existed for as long as the human race has existed; but until our own day of exaggerated confidence in the knowledge of the "expert" and the power of education generally, it probably never occurred to anyone that family members needed to be "educated" outside the family for "family life." Family life is something that is lived, not taught in the classroom. Like an apprenticeship (or, indeed, like a medical internship), family life has always had its own unique type of education: in the family, learning comes from observing what is done and then doing it oneself. In the case of values, in particular, as the saying has it, values are "caught" and not taught; and values — actually, authentic *morality*, sound moral principles as the basis of one's action — are what principally need to be instilled and reinforced in family members if the institution of the family itself is to be successfully shored up today.

Now when it comes to instilling morality and values, it is well established that education alone, that is, the mere transmission of knowledge, is not enough. The oldest fallacy in Western civilization is the Socratic fallacy which assumes that if only we know what is good, we will irresistibly do it. St. Paul the Apostle knew better: "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do"

(Rom. 7:19) — because, the great Apostle to the Gentiles further observed, of “sin which dwells within me” (Rom. 7:20).

Pope Pius XII pointed out in 1951 that “in moral education neither initiation nor instruction offers of itself any advantage . . . indeed, it is seriously harmful and prejudicial where it is not firmly restrained by constant discipline, by a vigorous self-control, and, above all, by the use of the supernatural means of prayer and the sacraments.”¹ The same Pontiff had the year before warned scientists and professional practitioners against the indiscriminate communication of mere scientific knowledge to their clients, especially where there could be “danger to soul or body. . . . We want to put you on guard against the repetition of the error,” he said, referring to “the belief, . . . that mere knowledge renders man and his work good.” Pope Pius XII thought that this error, always dangerous, was “disastrous” in matters of marriage and the family.²

If we expect family-life education to be of any help in coming to the rescue of the beleaguered family, we must pay careful attention to the kind of education about which we are talking. No matter how self-evidently desirable the stability of the family may be, from all points of view, it will not be brought about merely by programs emphasizing the transmission of scientific information (It goes without saying, of course, that knowledge of our holy faith and of God’s law must be handed on in the inculcation of morality!)

A Look at ‘Family Life Programs’

When we look at the actual programs styled “family-life education” which have been developed and introduced into the public and sometimes also into the Catholic schools, we find that they deal almost exclusively with the transmission of scientific information. We also find that the information they transmit is of the most questionable nature if we assume correctly that instilling solid moral values to strengthen the family — what used to be called forming moral character — is the only real justification for family-life education, the only real justification for extending the formal education process into an area where it has never been before, namely, family life. (If we are not very careful, the very act of extending the formal education process into the already disturbed family will constitute still another usurpation by society of responsibilities which the family, functioning ideally, ought to be carrying out itself.) What we discover about today’s existing programs generically styled “family-life” programs, is that they are almost totally preoccupied with purveying clinical information about sex!

That sex is the great craze and obsession of our day we know from the typical contemporary entertainment and literature. We know it not only from this veritable explosion of pornography and X-rated or

semi-X-rated fare but also from the public and judicial tolerance and even celebration of these X-rated manifestations and of behavior formerly judged to be gravely sinful and socially harmful, before the concept of sin itself dissolved in today's curious amoral solvent of "self-fulfillment" and "growth towards maturity," with little regard for the possible demands of God's law.

In New Mexico early in 1978, a judge ruled that a woman, 23, who had been intimate with a boy, 15, had not contributed to his "delinquency," as we might once have believed in a similar case, but rather to his "education." "A consensual act of sexual intercourse engaged in by a young man," this New Mexico judge held, "is nothing more than sex education essential and necessary in his growth towards maturity and subsequent domestic family life." He also said that "sexual intercourse is recognized as normal conduct in the development of a human being" and that "this subject is taught to children in the public schools."³

In New York that same year, a civil court judge similarly dismissed prostitution charges against a 14-year-old on the grounds that sex is "recreational" and that interference by the law violates the constitutional right to privacy.⁴

These two court decisions certainly tell us something about the society we live in, its assumptions and its moral standards; and what they do tell us should certainly encourage us to be rather skeptical of the effectiveness of the educational programs for family life with which some of the experts living in our pagan society are likely to come up.

Our New Mexico judge is right on the mark, as far as the assumptions behind a certain type of family-life education are concerned, when he considers the "experience" of sexual acts desirable as contributing to the proper "development" of an adolescent, and when he himself explicitly links this amoral, "developmental" theory of the meaning and purpose of sex to what is "taught to children in the public schools."

It is an indisputable fact that much of what actually exists in school curricula under the rubric of "family-life education" today is what we would more accurately call "sex education." This sex education not only "exaggerates out of all proportion the importance and significance of the sexual element," as Pope Pius XII had already observed in his day;⁵ it is almost totally preoccupied with the physical facts of anatomy and the human reproductive system, with methods of contraception (and abortion), and even with sexual perversions and "alternative lifestyles." Christian morality gets only lip service if it even gets that in most of these sex education programs (including some of them in the Catholic schools). Indeed the very notion of morality is lost in the preoccupation of these courses with transmitting "scientific" information; the point and purpose of most of them would seem to be

indoctrination in the new sexual behavior of "recreational" sex before or outside of marriage, without having to worry about the consequences. This has been made possible by the development of modern contraceptives (and the legalization of abortion as a back-up when "failed contraception" nevertheless produces an "unwanted pregnancy").

We can soberly and precisely document direct causal links between the modern contraceptive mentality, legalized abortion, and classroom sex education in the schools. I myself have published several documented articles on this subject.⁶ Most of those involved in the field of so-called "family-life education" simply assume these links. The role played by the Planned Parenthood organization and other population control people in promoting and sponsoring sex education programs should provide us with a salient clue about the true nature and intent of most of these programs: they are designed and intended as indoctrination in the "new morality" of "sexual freedom" which effective artificial birth control has made possible in our day.

Birth Control Information in Schools

In Michigan, for example, the Sex Education Act, as it is officially entitled, provides for the teaching of birth control information in the schools.⁷ In Connecticut, a similar bill before the state Senate, entitled, significantly, "An Act Concerning Family Life Education Programs," is intended to bring information about birth control into the school curriculum.⁸ In Wisconsin, a state Family Planning Coordinating Council making recommendations for providing birth control assistance through publicly and privately funded clinics, is described as aiming to "aggressively promote sex education from kindergarten through 12th grade and provide all forms of contraception, pregnancy and abortion referral, infertility and voluntary sterilization services to thousands of persons as young as age 10, without parental consent."⁹ In Florida, part of a senior high school's released time work program includes stints at a local abortion clinic for interested high school girls.¹⁰

Sex education in the classroom has come a long way from what it was in my own public school experience when a single hour in my seventh-grade health class was devoted to a lecture on self-control and the need for respect for the opposite sex. In those days chastity and continence for the unmarried were equated with "responsible" sexual behavior, and the school reinforced what was assumed to be the morality inculcated by the parent at home.

Today, when it is explained that sex education is intended to encourage responsible sexual activity, what is meant by the latter is the employment of contraceptives, as has been frankly stated by the

director of public information of a New England abortion clinic, writing in the *Boston Globe*.¹¹

If what has been brought out here represents the true nature of the sex education or family life programs that actually are to be found in the schools today, then the hopes of those who see this type of education as a factor in arresting the progressive disintegration of the American family are not likely to be realized. Rather, this type of family life education is all too likely to *contribute* to the current paganism and permissiveness which are among the chief obstacles to stable family life in the United States.

What about the Catholic schools? Surely the family life programs found in them are imbued with Catholic values and teach Catholic sexual morality, and hence are not to be placed in the same category as the programs described above. I gladly concede that Catholic educators have the best intentions in promoting the programs which have actually come into the Catholic schools; no doubt they sincerely wish to encourage and foster chastity and morality as the Church understands them.

Nevertheless, a published analysis of the "Catholic" family life program which has been most popular up until recently, the so-called "Becoming a Person Program" (BAPP), demonstrates rather clearly that it also partakes of the same exaggerated emphasis on the sexual development in life, the same morally neutral "naturalism" in approaching the subject, and the same preoccupation with the physical aspects of sex, with modern methods of contraception, and with sexual perversions that we have described in the public school programs which are frankly intended to be indoctrination courses in the modern contraceptive ethic.¹² The public school programs are more explicit than the BAPP series but the fundamental, man-centered (indeed, really "body"-centered) approach to the problem remains unfortunately the same.

No doubt there are *ad hoc* family life programs within the Catholic schools which, both assuming and teaching Catholic morality, are intended to help young people cope with a modern situation where society's general permissiveness plus terrific "peer pressure" can sometimes lead them to believe that sexual activity apart from marriage is "the thing" today. However, I know of no published family life programs of this type, emphasizing Christian morality. To the extent that such programs do exist, or will be developed to meet the current need, we should probably not confuse the issue by even continuing to call them "family life education" or "sex education," considering what we have now discovered *those* terms to mean in society at large. Rather, we should call them classes in "family morality" or "sexual morality" or better still, "education in chastity," since only the latter is really going to help the present situation of institutionalized unchastity

which has become respectable in our society and is now trying to get established in our Church as well.

As Pope Pius XII once again stressed, speaking in this instance to a convention of psychotherapists:

There is . . . an effective sexual education which, quite safely, teaches calmly and objectively what the young person should know for his own personal conduct and his relationship with those with whom he is brought into contact. For the rest, special stress will be laid, in sexual education, as indeed in all education, upon *self-mastery and religious training* (emphasis added).¹³

If what has been brought forward as family life education, or sex education, had always been based on "self-mastery and religious training" there would be no controversy about this type of education today. No Catholic would question the suitability of classroom formation of the virtue of chastity, as prescribed for fallen mankind especially in the sixth and ninth commandments. This is manifestly what Vatican Council II called for when it said that as they grow older, children and young people "should receive a positive and prudent education in matters relating to sex" (Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, No. 1); for the meaning and import of any Church teaching can be rightly understood only in the context of the Church's total teachings on a given subject. The Church has always understood the temptations of our fallen nature and has therefore emphasized the need for modesty and chastity. A "positive and prudent education in matters related to sex" therefore *means* an "education in chastity," in the context of the Church's total teaching. We should now begin to speak always about "education in chastity" rather than continuing to use ambiguous terms such as "education in sexuality" or "family life education" which have a significantly different meaning for our contemporaries in the secular world.

A true "education in chastity" would reinforce and help revitalize the fundamental Christian morality that is needed more than any other single thing *if* we are going to succeed in restoring some semblance of family stability to our society — which is, in turn, a prerequisite for true social stability.

Teaching of Paul VI

The late Pope Paul VI taught in this area what we would have expected him to, considering what the tradition and emphasis of the Church has been:

There is . . . talk of sexual education, with praiseworthy pedagogical intent, but people sometimes forget some aspects of human reality, no less objective than those offered by immediate naturalistic observation, such as the necessity of modesty, the regard due to the differentiation of the two sexes, male and female, and above all the delicacy required by the disorder of the passions, introduced into the ethico-physico-psychological make-up of every

human being by original sin. All these things do indeed call for a sexual education but also for many, delicate precautions, particularly in the education of the young, and recommend to parents and teachers a wise and timely intervention in gradual, limpid and pure language. ¹⁴

If, by “sex education” or “family life education” we *mean* “education in chastity” conducted in accordance with Catholic sexual morality and surrounded by the safeguards which the Church has always required — separation of the sexes; imparting the necessary information on a one-to-one basis (or, at any rate, in a way which does not excite the passions); respecting the privacy of the individual and his readiness to take in information in this delicate area; emphasizing the commandments and the Church’s moral teaching; etc. — if all these factors are respected in accordance with the teaching and tradition of the Church, then we can agree that such an “education” or, more properly, “formation” would be desirable. Let us recognize the unhappy fact, however, that the typical “family life education” actually to be found in our school curricula today, including the programs in some Catholic schools, do *not* — sometimes not even remotely — meet the requirements which the Church appears to have always laid down in this matter. Unless and until we have a true “education in chastity,” the “family life education” that we do often have today is not really going to help.

Moreover, recalling the unique nature of the family itself, we must remind ourselves that no mere educational program can really make up, in the area of morality and values, for what is not done in the family. It is true that such educational programs are often called for *because* the family is in trouble, and is not doing its job. The fact that the parents are “not teaching it” is often brought forward as the reason and justification for classroom sex education. For some, no further reason and justification are thought necessary.

Even if it is true that the family is not doing its job, in this as in other respects in the midst of the current “crisis” in the family, it does *not* necessarily follow that what remain primary family responsibilities should be usurped by the school and by formal educational programs. Why not, rather, programs *for* the family as a family, for example? Why not programs which specifically encourage the family to stay together as a family and help each member of the family to do his job within it?

Why, in particular, take the kids off to the classroom to teach them about sex — something that has never been the primary responsibility of the school? If the parents aren’t doing their job in this area, why not have programs *for* the parents?

God designed the faculty of sex for use within marriage. Parents certainly have the competence and the sacramental grace to deal with

the true dimensions of sex that no merely "professional" sex education could ever possibly have. Parents also have a deeper knowledge of their own children's needs and more appropriate opportunities to teach them in this sensitive area than does an educator in the classroom dealing with scores of children at once.

Problems of Inappropriate Information

Parents have to live and deal with their children's problems which have sometimes been caused by inappropriate formation in this area of sex. Educators accept no responsibility for the results of their teaching after the children leave the classroom. Problems in this area have been particularly associated with public-school sex education; if we are going to institute the *same* kinds of sex education programs in the Catholic schools, we are all too likely to end up with the same kinds of problems.

Where both education and the family are concerned we should continue to pay careful attention to what the *Church* says about them, and design our educational programs dealing with the family accordingly. What the Church has said most recently on this subject at Vatican II fully accords with the entire thrust and argument of this paper. This is that we should support the family as a family and not imagine that moving into the classroom responsibilities which have traditionally belonged to the family is really going to be the most efficacious way to help the family.

Here is what Vatican II says on the subject:

As it is the parents who have given life to their children, on them lies the gravest obligation of educating their family. They must therefore be recognized as being primarily and principally responsible for their education. The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute. It is therefore the duty of parents to create a family atmosphere inspired by love and devotion to God and their fellow-men which will promote an integrated, personal and social education of their children. The family is therefore the principal school of the social virtues which are necessary to every society. It is therefore above all in the Christian family, inspired by the grace and the responsibility of the sacrament of matrimony, that children should be taught to know and worship God and to love their neighbor, in accordance with the faith which they have received in earliest infancy in the sacrament of Baptism (Vatican Council II, Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis*, No. 3).

The great truths expressed here by the Church are what we should especially bear in mind if we want to design educational programs that will really help the family.

As doctors, you can be of help in this area in the course of your medical practice. The modern medical science you have mastered pro-

vides enormous benefits for the welfare of mankind. As Catholics, however, the tradition of God-given morality reinforced by a reasoned and sophisticated moral theology in which you also share is fully as impressive as the corpus of modern medical knowledge — and is capable of providing even greater benefits to mankind if properly understood and followed.

The appeal which I would make to you physicians is to remember the words of Pope Pius XII, quoted earlier, to the effect that mere scientific knowledge is not enough in matters touching upon marriage and sex and the family. As physicians, follow the Church in what she decides and explains are the *moral* principles involved in the practice of medicine.

If there should ever be any doubt about which voice in the Church you should be following, that, too, is a simple answer: follow the Pope!

In the medical care given to your patients, moral issues will always arise and impinge on what you are doing. If in these situations you rigidly restrict your practice only to the science involved, you will not be serving your patients as well as you could. You will simply be imitating our contemporary pagan society which has erroneously decided that men can get by only on science, without taking morality into account.

This is not true. God's law, even more than the law of nature, cannot continue to be violated with impunity, without consequences. Indeed, we are *seeing* the consequences of the habitual violation of God's law in our society today; that *inter alia*, is among the reasons why the family is in trouble.

Nobody expects you as physicians to *be* priests or theologians. But you can in your practice, by the way you conduct it, by the things you say and advise, at least support and reinforce Christian morality and thus help your individual patients as well as the families to whom they belong. In the area of family life that we have been discussing, you can encourage your patients to try to function in ways which will support the family; in the matter of sex education you can provide that accurate scientific information which today's parents may think is all that is involved and which they think they don't know well enough to teach their own children. You can give them this scientific knowledge in a proper moral context and encourage them to pass it on to their own children in the same way. If all Catholic physicians were doing this, far fewer "programs" to support families would be required!

The authentic Christian morality you will want to encourage is not that mysterious or inaccessible. We all have a pretty good idea of what it is (the moral question always remaining, as for St. Paul, whether we will actually go on to *do* what we "know"). We do know the law of God because God has placed it in our hearts:

For this commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" But the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your hearts, so that you can do it (Dt. 30:11-14).

May God bless you in your medical — and moral — practice!

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