

## Where Should I Pitch My Tent? With Whom?

### BUILDING UP LOVE: Constructing a Masterpiece

*"Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock."*

(Mt 7:24)

Building a house, or pitching a tent, is a fitting metaphor for what it means to construct one's own life. For this reason, the important thing is where we lay **"the foundations"**, where we pitch the tent. It's not a technical matter of construction or resistance, but one of authentic wisdom that looks not at calculations, but rather at the purpose of life that always lies beyond. In the construction of his/her own "tent", each young person contemplates two inseparable aspects:

- **The gift** that is received and welcomed upon *"hearing"* the words of the teacher who accompanies and helps them to discover the foundations of their life.
- **The task** of *"putting it into practice"*. What has been received as true teaching must become a "wellspring of life", from which young person may draw life in abundance. They must be prepared to one day hand over the gift that they have received.

To each person is entrusted, in the words of St. John Paul II, "the task of crafting their own life: in a certain sense, they are to make of it a work of art, **a masterpiece**"<sup>1</sup>.

### AFFECTIVE-SEXUAL MATERIAL FOR YOUTH - WHY?

As indicated in the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* at number 280: "The Second Vatican Council advanced the need for" a positive and prudent sexual education ... Considering the progress of psychology, pedagogy and teaching. " -This Education - only it could be considered it in the context of education for love, the reciprocal giving. In this way the language of sexuality is not seen sadly impoverished, but enlightened. The sexual impulse can be cultivated in a path of self-knowledge and in the development of a capacity of self control, that can help to raise valuable skills of joy and loving encounter."

Why should we introduce a program and/or didactic units specifically regarding affective-sexual education in **Catholic Schools**?

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<sup>1</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to Artists*, n.2 (4-IV-1999).

It is absolutely necessary that it be implemented by all, always as complement or aid to the task of parents. It must be a teaching that keeps in mind the different stages in the construction of one's personality in relation to the configuration of his/her "sexual identity" or mature acknowledgement of his/her own sexuality, with moments that are differentiated according to the sexes. This will present the human foundations of **sexuality** and **affection**, their **moral** value in relation to the construction of the person and their meaning in the **plan of God**, in an integrated way, and taking the experiences of the youth as a starting point (cfr. VAH, 124).



Affective-sexual education, in keeping with the dignity of the human being, cannot be reduced to biological information about human sexuality. Nor can it consist of a few general instructions about behavior, at the mercy of the statistics of the time. Founded upon "adequate anthropology", as underlined by John Paul II (cfr. CAH XXIII, 3-6, 02-04-1980), affective-sexual education "must consist in the **illumination of the basic experiences** that every man lives, and in which he encounters the meaning of his existence. In this way, we will avoid the subjectivism that leads our youth to judge their actions only according to the feelings that they awaken, which makes them little less than incapable of building a life in the solidity of the virtues." (VAH, 124).

This entire program and the materials that it provides respond to the proposal of *Amoris Laetitia* (cfr. nn. 280-286).

## A "LIQUID" AFFECTIVE-SEXUAL EDUCATION, DEVOID OF FOUNDATIONS

Benedict XVI confirms a clear reality: "Educating, however, has never been an easy task and today seems to be becoming ever more difficult. Parents, teachers, priest and everyone who has direct educational responsibilities are well aware of this. Hence, there is talk of a great **"educational emergency"**<sup>[2]</sup>. He continues, noting that we live immersed in "a mindset and form of culture that induce one to have doubt about the value of the human **person**, about the very meaning of **truth** and **good**, and ultimately about the goodness of life."



In this **"liquid" society** (Z. Bauman), which is unstable and devoid of solid foundations, the deficiencies and great omissions in affective-sexual education become obvious. There is no shortage of occasions that insinuate to our youth the temptation of walking without a direction, of building without worrying about laying foundations, of ceasing to ask themselves about goodness and considering as good whatever they may do. If is sufficient for them to consider as good acting as they please and feeling good while doing it. Surrounded by an emotion-driven environment, in which the quest for truth contents itself with catering to their state of mind, many things lead them toward disorientation in the ends of their lives and the choice of their actions. Many young people become *beings directed by others*, who accept ideas and utilize things without worrying about understanding their meaning: they are incapable of reading and interpreting their own affections (**"affectively illiterate"**). Freedom disappears amidst a **saturation of information** that they cannot digest, and technology ends up dominating them. Emptied of their interior capacity for reflection and evaluation, they become, *de facto*, a machine of production...or destruction, incapable of building a life or a home.

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<sup>[2]</sup> BENEDICT XVI, *Letter to the Faithful of the Diocese and City of Rome on the Urgent Task of Educating Young People*, 21-I-2008.

This educational emergency must face various **challenges** that dominate our culture and social life:

- **RELATIVISM.** If it is impossible to recognize the truth, then education, too, becomes impossible. The light and certainty of the truth are determining factors that present the basic meanings of existence to generations to come. Benedict XVI notes in his discourse at the Catholic University of America: “Particularly disturbing, is the reduction of the precious and delicate area of education in sexuality to management of ‘risk’, bereft of any reference to the beauty of conjugal love”.

Education in affectivity and sexuality is not a technique (reducing the educational task to the transmission of information and specific skills), but a *true art* which requires a singular wisdom that makes it possible to transmit the truth about man and woman, in their similarity and in their difference. This is because sexuality and affectivity are human realities that contain a specific truth: the truth of love as a personal truth.

- **NIHIUSM.** Living as though God did not exist favors a vision of sexuality and affectivity in which they lose their intrinsic dimension of mystery. Reduced to simple, secularized realities, they end up being governed by the model of so-called “pure relationships”. Pure relationships are only maintained if both parties think that the relationship produces such satisfaction or benefit that each individual considers them fit to pursue.

- **“NATURALISM”.** This reduces man to a simple element of nature, whose body is seen as a machine with different parts that are functionally united and devoid of personal meaning. The body is viewed, therefore, as a mere instrument at the disposal of the tastes and preferences of an individual subject’s poorly understood freedom. In this way, hedonistic wellbeing becomes the fundamental criterion of education.

In the context of this “liquid” foundation, each educational unit is directed in such a way that the youth may be able to lay the foundation of “their own masterpiece”, according to the logic of love, anchoring it upon the rock.

## LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS ACCORDING TO THE LOGIC OF LOVE

In front of this darkness which disorients the lives of our youth and turns them to “liquid”, there is a **light** which allows them to open their eyes and encounter a path along which they may progress, some foundations upon which they may build. Without doubt, we are speaking of the joy of discovering oneself in the gaze of another, where they feel loved: the first step on a long path. “Instead of *informing* the adolescent and the youth, leaving him alone before the problems that surpass him, it is necessary to know how to **accompany him and encourage him** in these key moments of his life.” (FSV, 161).

In every education in love there is always a great invitation for each person to discover something wonderful. The mission of the collection of these units is that of guiding the youth so that they themselves may discover the truth: it is an interior, assumed, and integrated education. Bringing them to the truth is nothing more than an act of love.

The first requirement of every building is to ***search for the foundation***, a good anchor for the tent. This education must be directed, therefore, towards helping each young person to formulate his/her *own personal life plan* and to acquire the ability to fulfill it. Each one will choose where to anchor his/her tent; to each one is entrusted the task of building it, and each one must take responsibility for their results.

The paradox is that they will not be able to find this foundation within themselves. They must be open to *receiving* something previous that they can lean on through the conscious acknowledgement of a solidity that does not belong to them. They will find this foundation in the horizon of the meaning of the ***vocation to love***. Starting from this light, which orients the whole of life, we can offer a Christian educational proposal that is capable of facing a threefold challenge:

- We must demonstrate how the experience of love contains an original, personal and operative **truth**. In front of a truth without love (proper to romanticism), we must insist on the truth of love and on its strong unitary dynamism.
- We must be able to show how the mysterious and sacred dimension of sexuality is **inscribed in the heart** of every person. The body is, then, contemplated as a sacrament of the person, a living organism endowed with a spousal meaning, inviting us to respond to the vocation to communion that is inscribed in the sexual difference.

**Which blueprints will guide us in the construction of  
our masterpiece? Who will advise us on the best place to  
lay its foundations?**

## THE BLUEPRINTS: Discovering the Plan of God for Marriage and the Family

The youth must learn that, prior to all human plans, there exists a **plan of God** for each one of them, since he chose each one of them and desired them from the beginning. God wants to make a concrete history of love with each one of them.

It is essential to help them recognize that they are not called to invent new models using their imagination, but rather that they are called to “*read*” once again, in a new and original way, the **truth** of God’s design for them. “An adequate affective-sexual education requires, first of all, to look after the formation of the entire Christian community regarding the foundations of the **gospel of marriage and the family**” (VAH, 122).



For this reason, they must learn to **rediscover** the beauty of marriage and the family as a vocation to love that is lived in light of the loving design of God, especially given that the very terms of that design, with its own signs and meanings, are threatened by the confusion of today. This plan of God is (is) profoundly unitary and has two fundamental pillars:

- **Marriage is a plan of God:** “*From the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female’*” (Mt 19:4). The truth of marriage is bound to the truth of the human person created as man and woman, destined to enter into the full possession of his own humanity through reciprocal communion in the gift proper to conjugal love.
- **Marriage is the foundation of the family:** “*That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body*” (Gn 2:24). Christ’s response to the truth of the Beginning reveals a fundamental novelty in the design of God: the indivisible unity between marriage and the family. The reality of the mutual *gift of self* of the spouses is the only truly human foundation of a family.



Consequently, the announcement of the “**gospel of the family**” cannot be dissociated from the announcement of the “**gospel of marriage**”, which is its origin and source (cfr. GS, 48).

With an adequate affective-sexual education, we will help them to discover that which is most suitable to human beings: questioning oneself about the ultimate meaning of one’s path, about the meaning of what one does and lives, about the formula for happiness. It is not an exaggeration to think that, with this education, we are teaching them the very art of life, the goal of which is showing the meaning of a full life.

## What light illuminates this personal discovery?

### THE LIGHT: Discovering the Vocation to Love

The light of life projects the **vocation to love**. “*God created man in his own image and likeness: calling him to existence through love, He called him at the same time for love*” (FC, 11). In this “*for love*” man discovers his origin and foundation, while the invitation “*to love*” indicates the finality that ought to be given to his life and actions. This point from *Familiaris consortio* concludes: **love** is “*the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being*”, it is a call which demands a response from every person.

We are called to a love that we know only through revelation, and a love that is capable of *constructing a history*, which requires a *community* to make it grow - precisely that which is implicitly negated in a sentimentalistic vision.

When we discover the vocation to love, the truth of marriage and the family is revealed to us (cfr. DPF, 22). This discovery is a dynamic reality that continues throughout all of life and, at the same time, involves the very identity of man – all of man, in his *integral unity as a corporeal-spiritual being* (cfr. CCE, 362-368; DCE, 2 y 5)- and every man (DPF, 30).

The **vocation to love** points out the way through which God reveals to us his plan of salvation. Indeed, it is in the original conjunction of the different loves within the family – conjugal love, paternal/filial love, fraternal love, the love of grandparents and grandchildren, etc. – that the vocation to love finds the human channel through which it may manifest itself and develop, shaping the authentic *identity of man* as son or daughter, husband or wife, father or mother, brother or sister (cfr. DPF, 69). There are *three phases* that lead toward the full development of this vocation to love, which are integrated into the individual history/identity of each person:

- First, learning to **BE SONS/DAUGHTERS**: *welcoming the original gift of love with joyful gratitude.*
- Second, learning to **BE SPOUSES**: *maturation of the love that has been received, which gives of itself in donation and commitment.*
- Finally, learning to **BE PARENTS**: *fullness of fruitful love in the generation and education of children.*

The source of this vocation to love lies in the **love of God**, who invites us to walk along a path in response to his call, reveals to us the fullness of our vocation, and inscribes it in our very being, even in our own body. For this reason, the call to love is inscribed in the sexual difference itself, which interrogates the freedom of man and woman so that they may discover the construction of an authentic communion of persons as the purpose of their life. Sexuality is, then, experienced as a personal “way of being”, which is oriented toward the expression and fulfillment of the vocation of man and woman to love (SH, 11). For this reason, there is an intimate moral relationship between sexuality, affectivity, and the loving construction of a communion of persons who are open to life (DPF, 30), who must integrate themselves into a unitary, vocational history.

Therefore, the vocation to love will allow us to built up our own life, “our tent”, in all of its fullness (cfr. DPF, 28). “Let us ask the Lord to help us understand the **law of love**. How good it is to have this law! How much good it does us to love one another, in spite of everything!” (EG, 101).

## But how can we learn to love in this way?

### THE METHOD: “Learning to Build” starts with “Learning to Love”

Beginning with the logic of love that will help us to build, we see that “**teaching to love**” is the key component in attaining a personal project that culminates in the construction of a life, of a “dwelling place”. But, what is “teaching to love”? <sup>[3]</sup> *Isn't love the most spontaneous and uncontrollable thing imaginable? Isn't it something that happens, over which we have no power? What is love, then, that we can say it is necessary to learn to love?*

Yes, it is necessary to **learn to love**, and we all need to be helped in this learning process. If the end of our vocation to love is the *sincere gift of self* through which we discover our own identity (cfr. GS, 24), then we have a need to know, master and direct our heart. **Education in love** is increasingly necessary in our days, since our cultural environment presents us with degenerate forms of love that falsify the truth and freedom of man in his process of personalization; these forms of love are tainted with *individualism* and

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<sup>[3]</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, Plaza & Janés, Barcelona 1994, 132.



*sentimentalism*, leading people to let themselves be guided by their own simple, subjective feelings, unconscious even of their need to *learn to love* (DPF, 89; cfr. FSV, 22-26). Love is, therefore, the strength and guiding thread of both family life and the education of the person.

**The revelation of the vocation to love of each man or woman largely depends on the initial education in love that must be carried out within the family.**

## THE PLACE WHERE WE LEARN TO LOVE: The Family

This educational emergency creates the need for an educational community like the **family**, which is, without doubt, the *privileged and indispensable place* to teach how to love. The family is the channel where love, which shapes personal identity, is manifested and lived out. In the home is where each person is loved for his or her own sake, in an unconditional way. It is in the family where our most significant personal and affective relationships are developed, which are called to transmit the basic meanings of sexuality. The “specific unity between supernatural grace and the human experience is realized in the family in the measure in which it is an authentic ‘community of life and love’. **Love** is, then, the strength and the guiding thread of both the family and the education of the person” (DPF, 69). Neither books nor lectures teach us to love.



Parents are the **first ones responsible** for carrying out this education in sexuality. They must know how to offer their children age-appropriate explanations, in a context of trust, so that they may acquire knowledge of and respect for their own sexuality in a personalized way. This task is of such great importance that it cannot be *relinquished* to others. Moreover, parents must *keep watch over* the quality of the sexual education that their children receive from other authorities (cfr. DPF, 91).

From this basic, fundamental framework of the family founded on **marriage** as a community of life and love, young people must learn to **rediscover** the beauty of marriage and the family as a **vocation to love**, lived in light of the loving design of God, with a language that is proper to it.

## What is special about this grammar? Is it a special language that I have to learn?

### LANGUAGE: The Language of Love, the Language of the Body, the Language of the Gift

Educating in affection implies welcoming, sharing, communicating, purifying, strengthening and maturing the experience of love. For this, it is necessary to learn the **language of love**. Analogous to the way we learn to speak our mother tongue, we learn the language of love in contact with those persons who love us the most and, in this way, we become prepared to live according to the **language of the gift**.

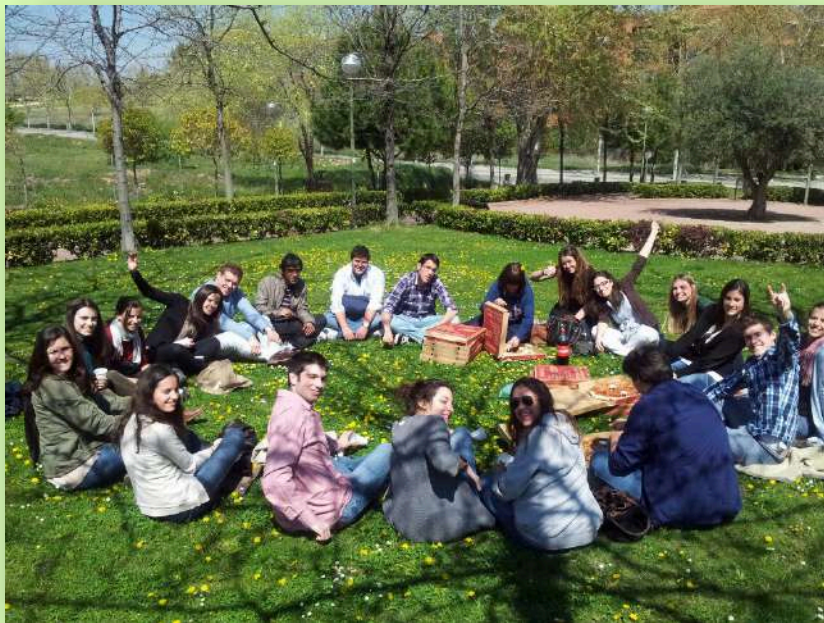
In order to learn affectivity and sexuality, as is necessary with language, we must also learn how to express, read and write affections. *Reading* our affections consists in knowing how to interpret them; *writing* our affective life consists in learning to integrate our affections into our actions. Both experiences must be inseparably united: the more, and better, that we read (interpreting), the better we are able to write and compose (integrating), as reading enriches our vocabulary and enables us to compose paragraphs with greater precision and beauty, and to complete more excellent actions.

This type of education is tightly united to the education of the body in the vocation to love: “Discovering the truth and meaning of the **language of the body** will allow us to know how to identify the expressions of **authentic love** and distinguish them from those that falsify it” (VAH, 125).

If this authentic love only finds its ultimate truth in the sincere **giving** of oneself to others in order to fulfill the *sincere giving of life* (cfr. GS, 24; FC, 37), then there is a need for an education in the knowledge, dominion and direction of the heart. As this includes the dimension of sexuality, the integration of the dimension that allows it to signify and express true love is called the **virtue of chastity** (cfr. SH, 65-76).

The virtue of chastity is the moral task of integrating and directing affections so that our exercise of sexuality may be the expression of true love within the edification of a communion of persons, namely marriage and the family (cfr. DPF, 90).

In this way, it opens to the young people a path toward self-knowledge, which, through the integration of the dimensions involved in sexuality – natural inclination, affective responses, psychological complementarity and personal decision -, will lead them to appreciate the wonderful gift of sexuality and the moral need to live it out in all its fullness. It is clear, then, that an authentic affective-sexual education is none other than an **education in the virtue of chastity** (cfr. FC, 37; OEAH, 90-93).



This will enable the youth to respond in a personal way to their vocation to love in marriage, in the priesthood, or in consecrated life.