

Education of children and young people in Pope Francis' *Amoris Laetitia* and *Laudato Si'*

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The issues concerning education of children and young people are deeply inscribed into Pope Francis' profound experience, as he gained knowledge and practised educating in Buenos Aires. He worked there in support of the universal education of children and young people who lived in the so-called *barríos* and *villas miseria*, which were the districts of poverty in the suburbs of this metropolis. This and other experiences of Jorge Mario Bergoglio contributed to his decisions to discuss the issues of education in the documents written during his pontificate in the Vatican. The author of the article would like to present the issues connected with education of children and young people in the teaching of Pope Francis. This issue is more relevant than in contemporary times, the emphasis was on upbringing rather than on education. Francis emphasises the importance of education as a method of influencing the development of man. It allows for the conscious and planned influencing of children and young people, while the aim of education is to form certain changes of personality. Pope Francis presents the issue of education in his apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* in a particular way, as he introduces ethical, moral and sexual education to the reader. In his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, the Pope refers to ecological education.

Contribution: This research relates to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) sustainable goals with regard to quality education. The article is an attempt to find the answers to the questions concerning the way Pope Francis perceives education and its influence on the development of children and young people, as well as to present its most important aspects.

Keywords: ethical; moral; sexual and environmental education; children; young people; upbringing; papal teaching.

Introduction

For centuries, education has been thoroughly examined by theorists and practitioners whose scientific interest concerns various scientific fields. The variety of approaches to education indicates the complexity of tasks assigned to the actions that aim at monitoring the processes of teaching, of learning and of upbringing as well as of reinforcing, which, as based on the achievements of civilisation, influences the quality and the degree of teaching aids use. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report of Jacques Delors (French politician and economist who served as the eighth president of the European Commission from 1985 to 1995) concerning education emphasises the fact that the transformation of civilisation also regards the elements that result from the ongoing changes of each particular society. Among the elements of education policy, there are, *inter alia*, the constant flexibility to the changes in education, alignment of schools and companies, out-of-system structural solutions of vocational education, the quality of education control, combating the phenomenon of marginalisation through the early education and the prolonged time of universality of education and, first and foremost, the equality of treatment of educational and material investments that result in treating education as a part of economy (ed. Delors 1998:230).

Education is perceived as the total of the processes and impacts that aim at changing a person's behaviour into the standard educational norms of a certain society. Pope Francis (Zani 2018:25–44), while discussing the issues of education, refers to the 17 aims presented in the document called, 'Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – 2030' signed by the leaders of member countries of the United Nations. The document was adopted at the UN summit in New York City in 2015. The assumptions of the document concern, among others, the transformation of the world with respect to the environment for the future generations and

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taking into account the needs of the least privileged social groups (ONZ 2015:7). The Pope refers to the issues concerning education mainly in his apostolic exhortation (Pope Francis 2016), in chapter VII called: 'Towards a better education of children' (No. 206–230) and in his encyclical (Pope Francis 2015)'. The indicated documents will constitute the conclusions of the discussed topic.

The method

The author of the article uses the scientific methods of synthesis and analysis that enabled getting to know the subject of the discussed issue. These methods also helped to eliminate randomness, making it easier to justify and systematise scientific truths. Using synthesis allowed to compare the items of the discussed issue distinguished by analysis and to incorporate them into one unity. The author did his best to prepare an extract from the Pope's teaching included in the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* and in the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, of the contents concerning education of children and young people. Using the method of analysis allowed for distributing the examined material into separate components and examining each part separately in order to thoroughly get to know the whole of it (Kamiński 2017:84–88).

Upbringing and education

In the teaching of the Catholic Church, upbringing is defined as introducing man to self-education. Until the time of the social transformation in Poland that took place in 1989, the term *upbringing* was more commonly used in Poland than in the Western culture, which mainly used the term *education* (which comes from the Latin word *educare*). Originally it meant the activity of introducing, adopting, and building, and only secondarily it was meant in a figurative sense, as leading someone from a worse state into the higher and better one, that is upbringing (Bołoz 1995:20). The term upbringing has a particular meaning mainly with regard to the Christian education, meant also as the human one, which everyone is entitled to (Second Vatican Council 1965:1). The aim of such an approach is to provide aid for the harmonious and complete development of a human being both individually and socially.

In order to achieve such goals, it is necessary to introduce education. Therefore, the development of a human being in social terms assumes the access to education free of charge and the education must be of good quality both at the primary and secondary level for children and for young people. It also includes the obligation of providing equal opportunities in the vocation and higher education for men and women, supporting education throughout the entire life of learners, improving the condition of educational facilities, and providing equal opportunities to access digital education. It is a fact that education constitutes the basic answer to the needs for transformation in the professional skills of society (Erickson & Schultz 1981:5–10; Garmann Johnsen, Torjesen & Ennals 2015:1–16). Therefore, it requires presenting ideas for

the future, which can be difficult to realise because of the constant disregard for the direction of transformation and of the actions that cause them. Consequently, taking into account the role of education, it should be noted that there are two levels of transformation: the content and the aim of education. Regarding the content, it means focusing on the universal culture meant as activity, creativity and understanding the nature of things. It also means developing the skills of judgement and of making decisions, knowledge acquisition and paying attention to the flexibility of education as a response to the pace of civilisation transformation. Regarding the aims of education, these changes indicate decentralisation, autonomy and innovation of educational aims, multidimensionality of education and departure from qualification to skills (Rostańska 2016:23–24).

The proper understanding of education should lead to the transformation of its role in the human life as well as to perceiving it as an ongoing process. Contemporary education faces various problems and challenges, which result from the economic, business, social and cultural transformations. Among the basic characteristics of society in which contemporary man lives, there are: globalisation mass scale, temporariness and consumerism. They also influence the progress in learning and in the provided knowledge through easy access to the factors which exert negative influences on children, young people, as well as the lack of control in the access to the sources of information. Education should be a factor influencing the development of man, the conscious and planned impact on him, while its aim should be the formation of certain changes of personality (Harris 1976:19–21).

Pope Francis and education

Pope Francis discusses the issues connected with education that in the hierarchy of its aims, apart from transferring knowledge, it influences the formation of attitudes (Kołaczek 2004:16). He discusses the issue more thoroughly in the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, referring to the ethical, moral and sexual education, while in the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, the Pope refers to ecological education.

In the ethical education Francis refers to understanding of freedom and the influence of tutors on the behaviour of pupils. In the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, he presents freedom that is one of the basic human rights guaranteed, among others, by the acts of the international law, as well as by constitutions of many countries (The Constitution of the Republic of Poland 1997:53). It is assumed that the freedom of religion consists of three elements: the freedom of thought, which mainly regards the intellectual aspect, the freedom of conscience in the ethical dimension and the freedom of religious beliefs with regard to the professed religion (Warchałowski 2004:77).

The freedom of thought is the possibility to possess and shape the opinion and views of various contents that man encounters. It should be noted that the freedom of thought

conditions the freedom of other freedoms (Sobczak & Gołda-Sobczak 2012:31). The freedom of conscience is perceived as the possibility to take personal decisions in the personal freedom and, first and foremost, as the views and convictions with regard to the professed religion. While the freedom of religion in the broader context allows man to freely choose his religious worldview, changing the professed religion allows for not professing any religion at all. Professing certain religions allows man to express and manifest his views and convictions both individually and collectively, privately and publicly (Pietrzak 2010:21–22). Therefore, Pope Francis emphasises that education for freedom must not consist in controlling the child by the parent, but:

What is most important is the ability to lovingly help them grow in freedom, maturity, overall discipline and real autonomy. Only in this way will children come to possess the wherewithal needed to fend for themselves and to act intelligently and prudently whenever they meet with difficulties. (Pope Francis 2016:261)

However, it is worth noting that in the pursuit of such an attitude, the child needs to be provided with safety by the adults. Therefore, the adults' responsibility is to create a safe available space for the child where he or she would be able to go beyond his or her limits of what he or she knows so well (Lasota 2017:84).

When Pope Francis refers to the moral education, he notices:

Moral education entails asking of a child or a young person only those things that do not involve a disproportionate sacrifice, and demanding only a degree of effort that will not lead to resentment or coercion. (Pope Francis 2016:271)

The aim of this education is the gradual process of changing behaviours of children and young people. When the child naturally develops, he or she thus enters the process of education. Therefore, education and development lead to creating the personality of a pre-schooler. Family is the natural environment for creating human personality. Family protects and transmits certain value systems to the next generations. It is essential for the contemporary society, which is dominated by pluralism of norms and values. It is worth noting that families represent a certain hierarchy of Christian values, which can be transmitted to children and young people. Such ideals come from the Gospels, such as overcoming weaknesses and evil which exist in man, the love of neighbours and even of the enemy, and leads towards perfection in the image of Jesus Christ and building a community of faith and love (Gielas & Głaz 2009:91). The main aim of pre-school institutions is to create proper conditions where the children's skills could be revealed and developed and where their deficiencies and negligence could be corrected (Surma 2011:195).

Pope Francis emphasises that moral formation should always be conducted with active methods and educational dialogue (Pope Francis 2016:264). Activating methods should enable children and young people to acquire new skills through playing and movement, through performing

scientific experiments, through conducting research and solving problems within the field adequate to the developmental needs and with regard to the individual capacities of each child. There are also certain indications and aids that can help children and young people develop new interests, build their creativity and inventiveness and help them to communicate and cooperate with others. Activating methods should also stimulate children's activity, influence developing the skills necessary in everyday life. It is essential for children and young people to prepare for acquiring basic skills such as the ability to draw one's conclusions, to combine cause-effect facts and to properly behave in various life situations. It is worth noting that the used activating methods will bring about the intended effects only when the assumed educational aim is understandable for children and young people. Therefore, it is said that while introducing activating methods, tutors should also provide children and young people with some space for making mistakes as well as find some time for discussing and correcting the mistakes. It is important that children and young people are aware that they can influence planning and making decisions, and the people who supervise the process should be aware that it is important to notice and appreciate the pupils' efforts and not only the effects of their work (Hernandez 2018:41–52).

In his apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis indicates the educational dialogue as a responsible task that should be implemented during every stage of education of children and young people. It seems to be one of the most important challenges as within the educational discussion monologue seems to be dominating over the dialogue (Baum & Mroz 2002:129–140). Learning the dialogue requires formation of the skills of the dialogue in a pupil in such situations as negotiating, posing questions, the standards of discussion, defending one's arguments or respecting the views of the others. In the educational process, the educational dialogue teaches many important skills, amongst others, the culture of discussion. It gives hope in finding answers to the nagging questions, motivates for posing questions, teaches partnership and cooperation in a group, teaches responsibility for what we say, triggers intellectual concern, and allows for realization of feedback between the teacher and the pupil. It enables one to get to know the personality of the other person in a deeper way and creates social bonds in a team (Ostrowska 2000:67). Pope Francis notices that:

Moral formation should always take place with active methods and a dialogue that teaches through sensitivity and by using a language children can understand. It should also take place inductively, so that children can learn for themselves the importance of certain values, principles and norms, rather than by imposing these as absolute and unquestionable truths. (Pope Francis 2016:264)

The process consists in drawing conclusions 'from the particular to the general' by realising that the truthfulness of reasons is based on the prerequisites that result from the accuracy of the consequences.

Furthermore, Pope Francis discusses the issue of sexual education of children and young people, which should mainly be realised in the context of love. The information that concern this sphere should be provided to children and young people 'at a proper time and in a way suited to their age' (Pope Francis 2016:281). Referring to the teaching of Francis, we should state that universal sexual education in contemporary times seems to be not only required but rather essential. Such knowledge allows man a more reflexive functioning in society, starting from taking care of one's health and hygiene to a more conscious approach to one's sexuality. Sexual identity or parenthood and the acquisition of the skill of autonomous education for future generations (Waszyńska, Groth & Kowalczyk 2013:165–180). Sexual education should also aim at transmitting reliable knowledge, adapted to the age of children and young people as well as at introducing and using proper terminology. Equipped with proper knowledge, man could be more aware of his sexuality and thus he could make proper decisions (Tyszkowa 1998:71, 75). It should be remembered that the sexual act between two people creates a bond and it is one of the most important events in human life. Therefore, it must not be ruled out from God's saving plan, from the unity of love between the woman and the man and from the openness to transmitting life. That is why Francis reminds that:

It is not helpful to overwhelm them [pupils] with data without also helping them to develop a critical sense in dealing with the onslaught of new ideas and suggestions, the flood of pornography and the overload of stimuli that can deform. (Pope Francis 2016:281)

It is essential for sexual education to help pupils "recognise and seek out positive influences, while shunning the things that cripple their capacity for love". We also have to realise that "a new and more appropriate language is needed" when introducing children and adolescents to the topic of sexuality (Pope Francis 2016:281; Goleń 2006:50–52; Wróbel 2018:106).

Pope Francis indicates that children and young people should not be educated in a *via negativa* kind of way.

Frequently, sex education deals primarily with 'protection' through the practice of 'safe sex'. Such expressions convey a negative attitude towards the natural procreative finality of sexuality, as if an eventual child were an enemy to be protected against. (Pope Francis 2016:283)

Therefore, during the teaching of the natural methods of family planning, educators should present the ethical aspect of marital sexual intercourse. It is important that pupils, while learning the methods of natural family planning, would not have the impression that these methods are meant only to help the spouses limit the number of offspring. Both educators and listeners should take into account the situation when the health conditions, material and housing conditions allow the spouses to raise a greater number of children. Therefore, the knowledge of the natural family planning should serve the spouses not only to avoid transmitting life as it would lead to using

methods in the opposite way to what was planned (Blackwell, Cooke & Brown 2018:26–34; Buxakowski 1999:189–190). Creating the woman and the man, God calls them to cooperate with him in transmitting human life. Therefore, it is necessary to see the sexual act as a gift of the spouses at a time and place chosen by God the Creator, for the unique miracle of giving life to man (Styczeń 1998: 374).

Furthermore, Pope Francis discusses the issue of ecological education. Even though this topic was also discussed by his predecessors both John Paul II and Benedict XVI, it is Pope Francis who introduced this subject for the Catholic reflection as the first in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*. Before the publication of this document, attention was paid to the fact that the aim of education is to make people aware of the influence of human behaviour on the condition of the environment (Begon, Harper & Townesend 1990:74). The key concept of the Pope's encyclical *Laudato Si'* is the integral ecology. Its starting point is man and his relationship with God the Creator, with other people and with the created world. Ecology is not only meant as taking care of the environment but also building relationships of between man and the environment (Bołoz 2007:17). Ecological education should deal with transmitting knowledge about the natural environment; it should warn against the activity which can be harmful to the natural environment, and about the results which man can experience when harming the environment. Holy Father indicates that the institutions responsible for the ecological education include school, family and the media as their educational activities for children and young people 'Good education plants seeds when we are young, and these continue to bear fruit throughout life' (Pope Francis 2015:213). The Pope indicates that:

In the family we first learn how to show love and respect for life; we are taught the proper use of things, order and cleanliness, respect for the local ecosystem and care for all creatures. (Bołoz 1995:20; Pope Francis 2015:213)

Conclusion

In *Amoris Laetitia* and *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis indicates the important problems that refer to the challenges of the contemporary world concerning ethical, moral, sexual and ecological education. It should be noted that with regard to the education of children, many societies still lack the awareness of proper planning of education despite the fact that it is essential, especially in the early childhood development. On the other hand, the possibility to leave the child in the kindergarten or at school is a pretext for the parents to shift their responsibility for upbringing and education of the child. It is noticeable that parents who are not able, or do not want to work on their children's development in the early stage of the children's lives, are even more detached from the children's education later on. Noticing the gaps in the education of their children, parents often try to shift the responsibility onto the teachers. When a child attempts to catch up on their learning and does not bring the expected results, instead of asking for help, for

example, among tutors, the parents make excuses explaining to their children that it is beyond their capabilities (Rostańska 2016:17–18).

Referring to the teaching of Pope Francis regarding education, it is worth noting that the hierarchy that he uses corresponds to a modern understanding of children and childhood. Children and young people should first be subjected to education and only then to upbringing. Easy access to the Internet constitutes another obstacle in transmitting knowledge to children and young people as the Internet poses many threats. Therefore, Francis indicates that certain spheres of life that concern educating children and young people must not be separated or treated fragmentarily. In order to ensure that the undertaken educational activities on the social, ecological, moral or sexual level are effective, they should be compact and implemented comprehensively.

In his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis directly refers to anthropocentrism that is one of the most controversial points of the contemporary ecological debate, thus opening the discussion on this issue. In the contemporary world, it is noticeable that Catholic teaching has become mainly anthropocentric and thus man has forgotten that animals and the earth are the subject of the divine covenant. And although the place of humans in God's plan of salvation is central, the proportions have been distorted. Therefore, in his ecological education, Pope Francis indicates that such an attitude leads to placing man in God's position. Francis teaches that "once the human being declares independence from reality and behaves with absolute dominion, the very foundations of our life begin to crumble. Instead of carrying out his role in cooperation with God and work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion against of nature" (Pope Francis 2015:117).

By doing so, man makes himself independent from the surrounding reality and becomes an absolute monarch. According to Pope Francis, ecology can help to avoid such a way of thinking as it is considered to be a science that deals with describing the relations in the world and it aims at examining and describing relations with organisms and the environment. In his integral vision of perceiving ecology, Francis indicates 'human ecology', which constitutes 'the relationship between human life and the moral law' (Pope Francis 2015:155). It should be noticed that such a way of perceiving ecology distinguishes the Pope from reasoning of numerous environmental associations. While talking about the integral understanding of ecology, the Holy Father does not limit it to protecting animals or the climate but he defends man: protects man's life from conception to natural death and for man's spiritual dimension and culture in man (Wyrostkiewicz 2002:103–104). (Wyrostkiewicz 2002:103–104).

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Author's contributions

G.J.P. is the sole author of this research article.

Ethical considerations

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Data availability

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