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Children in Rainbow Families, An Academic Reflection

By Iacopo Scaramuzzi, 30/05/2020

The theme is considered in the latest issue of the journal of the International Academy for Marital Spirituality, affiliated with the Catholic University of Louvain.

ROME: The International Academy for Marital Spirituality (INTAMS), affiliated with the Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium, has dedicated issue 25/2 of its journal "Marriage, Families & Spirituality" to the theme of children of same-sex parents.

In the opening editorial, David Dawson Vasquez, associate editor, states that the aim "is not to argue for a position but to provide a forum where serious proposals can be voiced and debated."

"Families composed of openly gay or lesbian couples raising children are a relatively new reality, with the first instances happening only in the 1980s," reads the introduction to the journal *Marriage, Families & Spirituality*, founded by theologian Aldegonde Brenninkmeijer-Werhahn [link here to a 2014 Vatican Insider article on Aldegonde and the synods]. "Their number has increased from year to year. Today, in western societies at least, they receive wide acceptance and are becoming common in the public imagination of film, television, and literature." The issue of the journal, with contributions in English, German and Italian, addresses the issue from different points of view. In addition to the testimony of three rainbow families, there are articles by, among others, Konrad Hilpert, who exposes the theological issues related to homosexuality, Angelika Walser, who addresses the issue of adoption, and Elena Canzi and Eugenia Scabini, of the Università del Sacro Cuore, who write about medically assisted procreation and "some serious issues that same-sex parenting must confront". Alina Tryfondiou, again, analyses the European rules on the subject and Gerhard Maschuetz examines homosexual parenting from a theological point of view.

The issue of INTAMS follows a symposium on the subject held in 2018 at the University of Louvain entitled "Troubled Love: Theology and Pastoral Care for All Families". Over the years, the journal has addressed the broader issue of homosexuality many times, beginning with the debate it hosted in 2001 with the contribution, among others, of the then Cardinal Archbishop of Paris André Vingt-Trois.

Vasquez points out that for the Christian tradition, and in particular that of Catholics and Orthodox, the reality of rainbow families has provoked more than one criticism, and mentions, in particular, the arguments used, starting from the fact that "Church has never even imagined replacing the union of man and woman with non-gender-specific partners as the cornerstone of the family", but he also notes how a "serious theological reflection" allows a more complex reading. It is not easy to deduce from the pages of the Bible a direct condemnation of today's same-sex couples, writes the theologian, and throughout history the Church has supported "families" where children were cared for by people of the same sex, by families where, in the absence of a man, it was mothers, aunts and grandmothers who raised the children, or in the cases in which a convent adopted an orphaned child. "My point is not to make a detailed argument here, only to point to the complexity of the reality," writes Vasquez.

In the concluding essay, Jochen Sautermeister emphasizes "the critical potential of theology, in order to do justice to the dignity of human beings, to identify effective signs of the gospel that is offered in people's lives and in their family contexts, and finally, to make it possible for everyone (and especially for those who need it most), and for children, to experience the gospel of the love of God."

“The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that persons with a homosexual gender orientation are to be treated with ‘respect, compassion, and sensitivity’ (n. 2358; Latin: *observantia, compassione et suavitate*),” the theologian continues. “It also emphasizes that ‘every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided’ (CCC n. 2358; Latin: *quodlibet iniustae discriminationis signum*). It is only logical that these requirements apply *a fortiori* to children and their families. Esteem or respect means the recognition that these persons exist; one must encounter them as persons in their relationships, and not disparage them and despise them with societal prejudices or discriminations. A lack of concrete personal encounters and experiences can, however, mean that they are not truly met with respect, sensitivity, and empathy.”

Sautermeister concludes that in the future the reflection should deepen, from an empirical-anthropological point of view, the reality of the children of rainbow families, oppose from a moral and legal point of view discrimination, explore, in theological and ethical terms, perspectives open to life and capable of forming consciences and develop a “pastoral logic of inclusion” both in language and in theological reflection: “It will be the task of a theology that is committed to *Amoris laetitia* to continue thinking academically about this theme under ecclesial and cultural conditions that are both complex and heterogeneous”.

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