

Church Documents and Scripture Support for Family Style Catechesis

The Church teaches that parents are the first and most important educators of their children. The following Scripture verses and Church documents express support for this teaching:

Sacred Scripture: The Great Commandment (**Deuteronomy 6:5-7**) “. . . love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength. Take to heart these words which I command you today. Keep repeating them to your children. Recite them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up.”

Psalms 78:4-7 “We do not keep them from our children; we recount them to the next generation, The praiseworthy deeds of the LORD and his strength, the wonders that he performed. God made a decree in Jacob, established a law in Israel: Which he commanded our ancestors, they were to teach their children; That the next generation might come to know, children yet to be born. In turn they were to recount them to their children, that they too might put their confidence in God, And not forget God’s deeds, but keep his commandments.”

Catechesi Tradendae (Catechesis in our Time) “The family’s catechetical activity has a special character, which is in a sense irreplaceable. This special character has been rightly stressed by the Church, particularly by the Second Vatican Council.³ Education in the faith by parents, which should begin from the children’s tenderest age, is already being given when the members of a family help each other to grow in faith through the witness of their Christian lives, a witness that is often without words but which perseveres throughout a day-to-day life lived in accordance with the Gospel. This catechesis is more incisive when, in the course of family events (such as the reception of the sacraments, the celebration of great liturgical feasts, the birth of a child, a bereavement) care is taken to explain in the home the Christian or religious content of these events. But that is not enough: Christian parents must strive to follow and repeat, within the setting of family life, the more methodical teaching received elsewhere” (68).

“There is also a pedagogy of faith, and the good that it can do for catechesis cannot be overstated. In fact, it is natural that techniques perfected and tested for education in general should be adapted for the service of education in the faith. However, account must always be taken of the absolute originality of faith. **Pedagogy of faith is not a question of transmitting human knowledge, even of the highest kind; it is a question of communicating God's revelation in its entirety.** Throughout sacred history, especially in the Gospel, **God Himself used a pedagogy that must continue to be a model for the pedagogy of faith.** A technique is of value in catechesis only to the extent that it serves the faith that is to be transmitted and learned; otherwise it is of no value.” (Catechesi Tradendae (CT) 58)

“...Catechizing is in a way to lead a person to study this mystery in all its dimensions: "to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery...comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth ...know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge...(and be filled) with all the fullness of God.”” (CT 5)

“Christocentricity in catechesis also means the intention to transmit not one’s own teaching or that of some other master, but the teaching of Jesus Christ, the Truth that He communicates or, to put it more precisely, the Truth that He is.(12) We must therefore say that in catechesis it is Christ, the Incarnate Word and Son of God, who is taught - everything else is taught with reference to Him - and it is Christ

alone who teaches - anyone else teaches to the extent that he is Christ's spokesman, enabling Christ to teach with his lips. Whatever be the level of his responsibility in the Church, every catechist must constantly endeavor to transmit by his teaching and behavior the teaching and life of Jesus." (CT 6)

Catechism of the Catholic Church "The fruitfulness of conjugal love extends to the fruits of the moral, spiritual, and supernatural life that parents hand on to their children by education. Parents are the principal and first educators of their children. In this sense the fundamental task of marriage and family is to be at the service of life" (1653). "In our own time, in a world often alien and even hostile to faith, believing families are of primary importance as centers 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' " (1656). "The fecundity of conjugal love cannot be reduced solely to the procreation of children, but must extend to their moral education and their spiritual formation. 'The role of parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute.' The right and the duty of parents to educate their children are primordial and inalienable" (2221).

"At the heart of catechesis, we find, in essence, a Person, the Person of Jesus of Nazareth ... to catechize is to **"reveal in the Person of Christ the whole of God's eternal design reaching fulfillment in that person. It is to seek to understand the meaning of Christ's actions and words and of the signs worked by him."** Catechesis aims at putting **"people ... in communion ... with Jesus Christ:** only he can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity." (CCC 426)

Evangelii Nuntiandi (Evangelization in the Modern World) "One cannot fail to stress the evangelizing action of the family in the evangelizing apostolate of the laity. At different moments in the Church's history and also in the Second Vatican Council, the family has well deserved the beautiful name of 'domestic Church.' This means that there should be found in every Christian family the various aspects of the entire Church. Furthermore, the family, like the Church, ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates. In a family which is conscious of this mission, all the members evangelize and are evangelized. The parents not only communicate the Gospel to their children, but from their children they can themselves receive the same Gospel as deeply lived by them. And such a family becomes the evangelizer of many other families, and of the neighborhood of which it forms part. Families resulting from a mixed marriage also have the duty of proclaiming Christ to the children in the fullness of the consequences of a common Baptism; they have moreover the difficult task of becoming builders of unity" (71).

Familiaris Consortio (The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World) "... parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children. Their role as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it. . . The right and duty of parents to give education is essential . . ." (36). "The sacrament of marriage gives to the educational role the dignity and vocation of being really and truly a 'ministry' of the Church at the service of the building up of her

members” (38). “. . . the Christian family [is] a true ministry through which the Gospel is transmitted and radiated, so that family life itself becomes an itinerary of faith and in some way a Christian initiation and a school of following Christ. Within a family that is aware of this gift, as Paul VI wrote, ‘all the members evangelize and are evangelized’” (39). “The ministry of evangelization carried out by Christian parents is original and irreplaceable. It assumes the characteristics typical of family life itself, which should be interwoven with love, simplicity, practicality and daily witness” (53). “The concrete example and living witness of parents is fundamental and irreplaceable in educating their children to pray. Only by praying together with their children can a father and mother—exercising their royal priesthood— penetrate the innermost depths of their children’s hearts and leave an impression that the future events in their lives will not be able to efface” (60). “The future of humanity passes by way of the family” (86).

Gaudium et Spes (The Church in the Modern World) “The family is a kind of school of deeper humanity. But if it is to achieve the full flowering of its life and mission, it needs the kindly communion of minds and the joint deliberation of spouses, as well as the painstaking cooperation of parents in the education of their children. The active presence of the father is highly beneficial to their formation. The children, especially the younger among them, need the care of their mother at home. This domestic role of hers must be safely preserved, though the legitimate social progress of women should not be underrated on that account. Children should be so educated that as adults they can follow their vocation, including a religious one, with a mature sense of responsibility and can choose their state of life; if they marry, they can thereby establish their family in favorable moral, social and economic conditions. Parents or guardians should by prudent advice provide guidance to their young with respect to founding a family, and the young ought to listen gladly” (52).

The General Directory for Catechesis “. . . Children thus perceive and joyously live the closeness of God and of Jesus made manifest by their parents in such a way that this first Christian experience frequently leaves decisive traces which last throughout life. This childhood religious awakening which takes place in the family is irreplaceable. It is consolidated when, on the occasion of certain family events and festivities, ‘care is taken to explain in the home the Christian or religious content of these events.’ It is deepened all the more when parents comment on the more methodical catechesis which their children later receive . . . Indeed, ‘family catechesis precedes . . . accompanies and enriches all forms of catechesis’ ” (226). “Parents receive in the sacrament of Matrimony ‘the grace and the ministry of the Christian education of their children,’ to whom they transmit and bear witness to human and religious values. . . . It is for this reason that the Christian community must give very special attention to parents. By means of personal contact, meetings, courses and also adult catechesis directed toward parents, the Christian community must help them assume their responsibility—which is particularly delicate today—of educating their children in the faith . . .” (227). “Parents are the primary educators in the faith. Together with them, especially in certain cultures, all members of the family play an active part in the education of the younger members. . . . The family as a locus of catechesis has an unique privilege: transmitting the Gospel by rooting it in the context of profound human values” (255).

Gravissimum Educationis (Declaration on Christian Education) “Since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring and therefore must

be recognized as the primary and principal educators. This role in education is so important that only with difficulty can it be supplied where it is lacking. Parents are the ones who must create a family atmosphere animated by love and respect for God and man, in which the well-rounded personal and social education of children is fostered. Hence the family is the first school of the social virtues that every society needs. It is particularly in the Christian family, enriched by the grace and office of the sacrament of matrimony, that children should be taught from their early years to have a knowledge of God according to the faith received in Baptism, to worship Him, and to love their neighbor. Here, too, they find their first experience of a wholesome human society and of the Church. Finally, it is through the family that they are gradually led to a companionship with their fellowmen and with the people of God. Let parents, then, recognize the inestimable importance a truly Christian family has for the life and progress of God's own people" (3).

Lumen Gentium (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church) "The family is, so to speak, the domestic church. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children; they should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each of them, fostering with special care a vocation to a sacred state" (11). ". . . where Christianity pervades the entire mode of family life, and gradually transforms it, one will find there both the practice and an excellent school of the lay apostolate. In such a home husbands and wives find their proper vocation in being witnesses of the faith and love of Christ to one another and to their children. The Christian family loudly proclaims both the present virtues of the Kingdom of God and the hope of a blessed life to come. Thus by its example and its witness it accuses the world of sin and enlightens those who seek the truth" (35).

Regarding the effectiveness of taking RE online. The Faith is about a personal relationship with a real Person. *We cannot build real relationships online.* There are so many studies about the current generation and their inability to build real, meaningful, intimate relationships because they are stuck behind a screen. Likewise, the love of Christ cannot be modeled and shown through a computer screen. If we want kids to have real, meaningful, intimate relationship with Jesus, it must necessarily be in person. Fr. VW regularly says in his homily's "maybe you should put the screens to the side and spend time as family" – if we are going to encourage putting screens to the side (which I agree with) we cannot only do this when it's convenient for us. If we are to be counter cultural, we have to do it when it's easy and when it is not.

"To put it more precisely: within the whole process of evangelization, the aim of catechesis is to be the teaching and maturation stage, that is to say, the period in which the Christian, having accepted by faith the person of Jesus Christ as the one Lord and having given Him complete adherence by sincere conversion of heart, endeavors to know better this Jesus to whom he has entrusted himself: to know His "mystery," the kingdom of God proclaimed by Him, the requirements and promises contained in His Gospel message, and the paths that He has laid down for anyone who wishes to follow Him." (CT 20)

- The goal of catechesis and evangelization is to “advance in fulness and to nourish day by day the Christian life of the faithful, young and old.” (CT 20) – this is a PERSONAL relationship that will NOT be transmitted with online classes. Perhaps many catechists are not able to do this but NO internet program will fulfill this aim.
- The method and language used must truly be means for communicating the whole and not just a part of "the words of eternal life" and the "ways of life." (CT 31) – how can the whole of the aim of catechesis be delivered online – a mechanism that eliminates completely, the human interaction.
- “Catechesis is likewise open to missionary dynamism. If catechesis is done well, Christians will be eager to bear witness to their faith, to hand it on to their children, to make it known to others, and to serve the human community in every way.” (CT24) – by going “on line” you remove the person and therefore remove missionary dynamism and set a dangerous precedence that it is someone else’s job, online, to transmit the faith.
- For adolescents, Saint John Paul points out that with all the dangers of this phase of one’s life, “A **catechesis capable of leading the adolescent to reexamine his or her life and to engage in dialogue**, a catechesis that does not ignore the adolescent's great questions - self-giving, belief, love and the means of expressing it constituted by sexuality - such a catechesis can be decisive. The revelation of Jesus Christ as a Friend, Guide and Model, capable of being admired but also imitated; the revelation of this message which provides an answer to the fundamental questions, the **revelation of the loving plan of Christ the Savior as the incarnation of the only authentic love and as the possibility of uniting the human race** - all this can provide the basis for genuine education in faith.” (CT38) – how are these accomplished online?

983

1095

2688

References:

CT: Catechesi Tradendae: http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae.html

GDC: General Catechetical Directory – Congregation for the Clergy – 1998

The GDC directly reiterates most of the points made by Saint John Paul II. In fact it is structured much the same but is written almost 20 years after CT and therefore has some updated information in its approach.

The Nature of Catechesis and the Mission of the Church

“Quite early on, the name of catechesis was given to the **totality of the Church’s efforts** to make disciples, to help men to believe that Jesus is the Son of God so that believing they might have life in his name, and to educate and instruct them in this life, thus building up the body of Christ.” (CCC 4)

Catechesis involves the TOTAL effort of the Church, encompassing:

- 1) Making Disciples
- 2) Helping men to believe that Jesus is the Son of God
- 3) Educating and Instructing

Catechesis begins with making disciples, not with educating and instructing.

Catechesis of our youth is given in context of the wider pastoral care of those young people and should include the “personal accompaniment of young people which should also include spiritual direction...” (GDC 184)

“While not being formally identified with them, catechesis is built on a certain number of elements of the Church’s pastoral mission which have a catechetical aspect, that prepare for catechesis, or spring from it. They are the initial proclamation of the Gospel or missionary preaching to arouse faith; examination of the reason for belief; experience of Christian living; celebration of the sacraments; integration into the ecclesial community; and the apostolic and missionary witness.” (CCC 6)

Notice that the CCC does not say that we start with catechesis but with these elements that are part of the Church’s pastoral mission. The elements listed in this CCC passage precede actual catechesis. These things are the foundation. **So, before we catechize we must:**

- 1) Proclaim the Gospel
- 2) Examine our reason for believe
- 3) Experience Christian living
- 4) Celebration of the Sacraments
- 5) Integration into the Ecclesial Community
- 6) Apostolic & Missionary Witness

“The whole concern of doctrine and its teaching must be directed to the love that never ends.

Whether something is proposed for belief, for hope or for action, the love of our Lord must always be made accessible, so that anyone can see that all the works of perfect Christian virtue spring from love and have no other objective than to arrive at love.” (Roman Catechism, Preface 10)

In a family the faith is transmitted by parents who have, by the virtue of their Sacrament of Matrimony, the grace and responsibility to hand on the faith. “Indeed, “family catechesis precedes...accompanies and enriches all forms of catechesis”” (GDC 226, quoting in part CT 68)

“By means of **personal contact, meetings, courses** and also **adult catechesis** directed toward parents, the Christian community must help them assume their (parents’) responsibility – which is particularly delicate today – of educating their children in the faith” (GDC 227)

Parents as Primary Educators

Our Church teaches us that parents are the primary educators of their children. By the grace of the Sacrament of Marriage, parents have everything they need to educate their children. Over and over this is stated in the Catechism and the Church documents.

CCC 1641 The grace proper to the Sacrament of Matrimony is intended to perfect the couples love and to strengthen their indissoluble unity. By this grace they “help one another to attain holiness in their married life and in welcoming and educating their children.”

*****CCC 2225:** Through the grace of the Sacrament of Marriage, parents receive the responsibility and privileges of evangelizing their children.

****** notice is does not say this is the Church’s responsibility, but rather that it is the PARENTS responsibility

GDC 226, quote in part CT 68 In a family the Faith is transmitted by parents who have by the virtue of their Sacrament of Matrimony, the grace and responsibility to hand on the faith. “Indeed, family catechesis precedes ... accompanies and enriches all forms of catechesis.”

CCC 2223: Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children.

*****Fr. John Hardon**

Parents are the first, most important and indispensable teachers of their children. Unless children are taught by parents, the children will be getting only a substitute education.

Under God parents are the first in time, first in authority, first in responsibly, first in ability and first in dignity to educate their children for eternal life.

CCC 2221: The fecundity of conjugal love cannot be reduced solely to the procreation of children but must extend to their moral education and spiritual formation. “The role of the parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to find an adequate substitute.” The right and duty of the parents to educate their children are primordial and inalienable.

