

# CATHOLIC FAMILY MINISTRY

*The Scientific Reflection  
and the Practical Ministry of the Church*

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**Preface of Kevin Cardinal Farrell**

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Wydawnictwo KUL  
Lublin 2018

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ISBN 978-83-8061-587-8

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## 9. Catechesis for Spouses and Parents

ANDRZEJ KICIŃSKI

Catechesis is one of the basic forms of ministry in the Church. The family has always been—and despite all the difficulties still remains—the primary “place of catechesis.”<sup>340</sup> The parents are their children’s first teachers in the faith, influencing them primarily by their example and word. The role of the Church is auxiliary and consists of reminding and supporting parents in the task of giving the children and adolescents a Catholic education. However, in today’s crisis and difficulties, the modern family has limited educational opportunities.

The Church, reading the signs of the times, is making a significant effort to include catechesis in the preparation for marriage and family life. However, in the context of a general educational crisis, without proper catechesis in the community of the faithful, people may have difficulty appropriating the contents and benefiting from the advice. The very idea of catechesis, focused until recently on children and adolescents, has also changed.<sup>341</sup> With the development of adult catechesis, there is a growing belief that the adult is a subject of catechesis.<sup>342</sup> The adult person, continuously developing, constantly needs catechesis.

Catechesis of spouses and parents is an important form of adult catechesis. John Paul II called it: “the principal form of catechesis, because it is addressed to persons who have the greatest responsibilities and the capacity to live the Christian message in its fully developed form” (CT 43). The *General Directory for Catechesis* emphasizes that “the discourse of faith with adults must take serious account of their experience, of their conditioning and of the challenges, which they have encountered in life” (GDC 172). “The faith of adults, therefore, must be continually enlightened, developed and protected, so that it may acquire that Christian wisdom, which gives sense, unity, and hope to the many experiences of personal, social, and spiritual life” (GDC 173).

The reasons for the development of the catechesis of spouses and parents should be recognized in the transformations of the role of the laity after Vatican II and in the clear pastoral option for the family (cf. FC 86). This development

<sup>340</sup> Places of catechesis (*de locis catecheseos*) is a classic expression of catechesis. Cf. CT 67a; GDC 255.

<sup>341</sup> A. Kiciński, “Katecheza dorosłych w procesie budowania Kościoła dojrzałego,” in: K. Misiaszek – J. Stala (eds.), *Katecheza dorosłych*, Tarnow, 2009, 417–28.

<sup>342</sup> A. Kiciński, “Dorosły jako podmiot katechezy,” in: K. Misiaszek (ed.), *Katecheza dorosłych we wspólnocie Kościoła*, Warsaw, 2002, 141–58.

is also inspired by the active role that Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis have given to the family in the pastoral care for families (cf. FC 72; AL 200). Preparing the family to be the subject of family ministry requires increased catechesis. The Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* says that in order for families to become active agents of the family apostolate and accompany other families, an effort of evangelization and catechesis effort within the family is necessary (AL 200). The motives behind the development of adult catechesis for spouses and families are also related to the changing sociocultural living conditions of spouses and families, and all that is threatening the development of faith, e.g., the secularization and dechristianization of family life, individualism, and the privatization of faith.

Catechesis of spouses and parents, as a fundamental part of adult catechesis, implies constantly accompanying adults in their discovery of God's plan for marriage and the family, and evaluating their ability to fulfill the basic tasks of the Christian family. The catechesis of the spouses and parents can be developed essentially in three areas: parishes, Catholic movements and communities, and the media.

### *The Catechesis for Spouses and the Family in the Parish*

The parish is undoubtedly the most noteworthy place where the Christian community, largely composed of spouses and parents, is formed and lives. It is the ordinary environment in which faith is born and grows. It is, therefore, the most appropriate communitarian space for the ministry of the word as a teaching, educational, and living experience. Generally, here three forms of catechesis are proposed: in preparation for the reception of the sacraments, in relation with preaching in the parish, and through parish family counseling.

The first opportunity for parental catechesis is when parents ask the community to baptize their child. Baptism, like every sacrament, is the sacrament of faith. It can only be received by those who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and want to live in accordance with His Gospel and the teaching of the Church.<sup>343</sup> However, it is now no longer possible to assume that parents who ask for baptism put faith first.<sup>344</sup> Therefore, the catechesis addressed to parents

<sup>343</sup> Cz. Krakowiak, "Udział rodziców w przygotowaniu do sakramentów inicjacji chrześcijańskiej," in: J. Stala – E. Osewska (eds.), *W poszukiwaniu katechezy rodziców. Studium teoretyczno-empiryczne*, 164–8.

<sup>344</sup> Z. Kiernikowski (ed.), *Wierzysz, przyjmij chrzest. Katechezy dla rodziców i rodziców chrześniych*, Siedlce, 2010, 6.

and godparents is intended to help them find the answer to this question: Why do people need baptism? Catechesis helps parents to discover and to take to heart the fact that children are baptized in the faith of the Church professed publicly. Catechesis is to remind them of their own baptism, prepare them to renounce sin, and confess their faith in God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the holy universal Church. These meetings also show that, soon after baptism, parents themselves become catechists because they accept the duty of daily educating their children in the faith of the Church and deepening their knowledge, and thus preparing for the next sacraments.

The second important step in parental catechesis is their participation in the preparation of the child for First Holy Communion. *The Pastoral Recommendations of the Polish Bishops' Conference appended to the "Directory for the Masses with children"*<sup>345</sup> obliges pastors and parents to prepare the children well, through catechism, to take part in Holy Mass and other liturgical celebrations, which should be connected with their education as a whole and the accomplishment of the universal and Christian duties. In special conferences, pastors and catechists are to indicate the importance of a common prayer in the family. It is true that the family has always been and, despite all the difficulties, remains the first and fundamental human environment to which God comes through the great sacraments of our faith. Spouses who give life to their children also invite the Giver of eternal life into their hearts. Before their First Holy Communion, the children also receive for the first time the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.<sup>346</sup> The catechesis for the parents must emphasize that, in their preparation for these two sacraments, they have the task of teaching their children to distinguish good from evil, i.e., to give them the proper hierarchy of values, in line with the teaching of Christ and the Church.

Catechesis of spouses and parents connected with preaching in the parish<sup>347</sup> covers two aspects: helping to form religious life within the family and supporting the apostolate of the family in the modern world. The catechesis should explain and implement the means used to achieve this goal, which include listening to the word of God, participating in the Eucharist, benefiting from the sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation, celebrating the liturgy in

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<sup>345</sup> This short document has been published in: J. Miazek (ed.), *To czyńcie na moją pamiątkę. Eucharystia w dokumentach Kościoła*, Warsaw, 1987, 236–40.

<sup>346</sup> P. Mąkosa, "Formacja sumienia w przygotowaniu do pierwszej spowiedzi i Komunii Świętej," in: J. Stala (ed.), *Eucharystia – pokuta i pojednanie w katechezie*, Kielce, 2007, 177–93; M. Zajac, "Wychowanie eucharystyczne dziecka przygotowującego się do pierwszej spowiedzi i Komunii Świętej," *Currenda* 155:2005, no. 3, 340–60.

<sup>347</sup> R. Kamiński, "Parafia miejscem realizacji duszpasterstwa," in: id., *Teologia pastoralna*, vol. 2, 60–8.

the family, preparing for the pastoral visit, celebrating anniversaries, participating in pilgrimages, retreats, and retreat days, and preserving the traditions of the religious feasts.<sup>348</sup> Without catechesis, the use of these remedies may remain at the level of ritual rites. Yet, the rapport is reciprocal—e.g., without catechesis, the liturgy becomes a kind of magical action, and without liturgy catechesis becomes indoctrination.<sup>349</sup>

Catechesis shapes the Christian spirit of marriage and the family, which should become an evangelizing community within its own milieu, in the work place, in the Church, and in society. Catechesis in the parish sensitizes people to the hardship of those who are vulnerable, poor, homeless, sick, disabled, addicted, and elderly. The spouses' love for Christ should be expressed in reference to and through assistance to the others in their parish. Many catecheses during the Divine Mercy Week or on other occasions show that the Church's ministry to these persons is carried out in fidelity to the example and teaching of its Founder. Jesus Christ firstly surrounded the suffering with special care, showing mercy and love in serving them, and manifesting in them the power of redemption, which embraces the whole person in his uniqueness. Through words and deeds, he announced that the marginalized, the wounded, the poor, the suffering, and the sick were the privileged recipients of the Good News of God's Kingdom. The spouses, thus formed and engaged in charitable work, will be credible witnesses of the Gospel as they face the challenges of the modern world.

Many couples already experience many difficulties at the beginning of their path together in marriage. Others enter into crises at different stages of their lives. Indispensable help is given to them in parish counseling centers, which differ from psychological clinics, especially through the presence of catechesis. The catechesis in parish counseling centers highlights the primacy of the grace of the sacrament of marriage over other human means. Attentive to the different fields of the health sciences, it shows that Christ is the source of the grace of the sacrament of marriage. Christ stays with the couple, giving them the strength to follow Him and to carry their cross, to get up again after the falls, to forgive one another and bear each other's burdens. This catechesis also indicates different proven ways of building a domestic church and attaining holiness in marriage and family.

<sup>348</sup> Cf. B. Mierzwiński, "Rodzin duszpasterstwo," LTP 741; W. Śmigiel, *Uczestnictwo wiernych świeckich w budowaniu Kościoła-Wspólnoty. Studium teologiczno-pastoralne w świetle nauczania Kościoła (1962-2009)*, Lublin 2010, 252-67.

<sup>349</sup> A. Kiciński, "Katecheza i liturgia," RT 54:2007, fasc. 6, 117-28; H. Słotwińska, *Związki katechetyki z liturgią*, in: A. Kiciński (ed.), *Katechetyka i katecheza u progu XXI wieku*, Poznań, 2007, 86-101.

*Catechesis for Spouses and Parents in Movements and Communities*

Catechesis for spouses and parents in the church community became particularly important during Vatican II, with the progressive development of groups, movements, and associations.<sup>350</sup> Many communities, or their branches, proposed catechesis for them, aimed at holiness through the personal growth of each spouse (e.g., Teams of Our Lady, Domestic Church). Other communities directed formation courses for married couples to help them grow in communion with God (for example, the Chemin Neuf Community with its program *Cana*).

The starting point of community activity is the catechistic character of the evangelization of marriages and families. Without entering into a broader discussion of the distinction between the stages – e.g., evangelization, catechesis, and new evangelization –, the communities are proposing a more or less consistent model of catechumenal catechesis. The catechistic assumptions of new communities emphasize that their religious formation set them apart from forms of family counseling, psychotherapy, and traditional retreats.

The specific characteristic of the first catechesis addressed to spouses and parents is the proclamation of the Christian kerygma (for example, in the Neocatechumenal Way). In many communities, marriage is presented as a part of God's plan. The catechism emphasizes that God created man out of love and calls him to love, in the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being (cf. FC 11). The word of God is proclaimed, where it is stated that man and woman were created for one another: "It is not good for a man to be alone." God gives him a woman, the "flesh of his flesh," in other words, a being equal and close to him. "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen 2:24). The catechesis presents the integral vision of man, marriage, and the family, emphasizing both the reality of sin and the grace of the sacrament of marriage.

The catechesis for spouses and parents most often prepares them to carry out the functions in different communities in life according to God's word, in the liturgy, and through testimony. The communities require their members to meet regularly around the word of God. They use a variety of methods for meditating the Bible, which is the basis of the dialogue in the couple and the family. Through Biblical catechesis, facilitators or community leaders habituate the community members to refer to the Bible in every undertaking, because it has the highest authority, not only as a source of faith but also as the

<sup>350</sup> H. Wrońska, *Katecheza a male grupy szkolne i parafialne*, Lublin, 2007; A. Kiciński, "Ruchy w służbie Kościoła," in: M. Boruc (ed.), *Nowa Wiosna w Kościele*, Siedlce, 1999, 87-97.

foundation of unwavering certainty. The Word of God is a call to faith and the beginning of its development, but it is also the first stage of building conjugal and family unity as well as the source of sanctification.

Through liturgical catechesis, spouses and families learn to correctly understand, prepare, and live the liturgy, which is the best way to materialize the living Church. Catechesis, showing the importance of the Eucharist as the sacrament of unity and sacrificial charity, emphasizes the connection between Holy Mass and the sacrament of marriage. The spouses are formed in the truth so that they may receive the pouring of future glory and draw the strength they need for sacrificial love and fidelity from Christ's limitless gift of love. The spouses thus recognize in the sacrament of matrimony the sign of His covenant with the Church. The catechesis leads the spouses to realize that Christ in the Eucharist strengthens the unity and indissoluble love of every Christian marriage. The catechesis also exposes how His sacrifice strengthens people so that they may be able to forgive in conflictual situations and overcome every crisis. The communities, emphasizing in their catechesis on the meaning of the holy sacraments that in each sacrament the faithful encounter the living God, who knows the spouses' difficulties and hopes, do not let themselves be limited by the liturgical rites and guide the spouses daily in self-giving love. The catechesis of the sacraments helps the members to consciously live the liturgical year as well as personal prayer and community prayer.

The catechesis addressed to spouses and families in movements and communities also stresses the need to bear witness to Christ. They are prepared to evangelize *ad intra* and *ad extra*. Spouses learn about the objective of Christian marriage and the obligations entailed by the sacrament of marriage, especially with regard to the Catholic education of children. They are catechized in accordance with the principle that they can preserve and develop their faith by sharing it with others. They are encouraged to evangelize the people they meet every day, in different circumstances. In some movements, the members are formed to carry out activities of evangelization in parishes and outside of the communities of the faithful. Their means of action are prayer, the spouses' life testimony, and commitment to the life of the Church.

### *Catechesis for Spouses and Parents in the Media*

Catechizing spouses and parents through the media is still a challenge for the Church. In the theory of catechesis, there is a growing awareness of this tool's effectiveness in the ministry of the Word. The attractive and

easy-to-understand language is appreciated along with the ability to overcome the barriers of time and space. In a time when most people get their information about the society and the environment from television, the internet, the radio and the press, these forums are also places for catechesis. Catechesis in the (mainly Catholic) media is characteristically systematic, occasional, and addressed to spouses and families in special situations.

Systematic catechesis aims at educating adults, primarily through the teaching of Christian doctrine, transmitting it in a systematic and holistic way, in order to lead the faithful into the fullness of Christian life. This teaching fits into the Church's pastoral mission.<sup>351</sup>

The transmission of Pope's systematic Wednesday catecheses and his reflections at the Angelus are especially valued because of their connection with the universal Church. In these interventions (transmitted and published in full, including on Vatican Radio), the Pope often gives important advice to spouses and parents.

Occasional catecheses, especially on topics discussed in the media, are also transmitted—e.g., among other topics, the Christian view on IVF, pro-family policy, infertility treatment, the notion of the Catholic family formed by a man and a woman. Such catecheses are also given on special liturgical feasts (St. Joseph, the Holy Family, St. Gianna Beretta Molla), at shrines, and on special events related to the Christian life of married couples and families (e.g., World Meetings of Families). Another form of occasional catechesis is the highly valued possibility to contact the facilitator directly (by phone, email, or letter) to discuss a particular problem concerning marriage or the family.

Catechesis in the media is also addressed to spouses and families in special situations—among others, to the childless, to people in mixed marriages, families with disabled children, those suffering from unemployment, to families with addicts, single mothers, and the elderly. Caring for people in special situations has been a Christian tradition since the earliest times. In catechesis, this is manifested primarily by the attention to the dignity of each human being and the role of these persons in the life of the Church and society. In her teaching after Vatican II, the Church shows her full awareness that the modern world promotes perfect, healthy and productive people, while the problems of the sick, the disabled, the addicts, and the unemployed are often pushed into the background by the interests of modern media. The Church,

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<sup>351</sup> The elements of this mission are the first proclamation of the Gospel, the missionary preaching through the kerygma to rouse the faith, the apologetic activity, the search for reasons to believe, the practice of Christian life, the sacraments, the full participation in the ecclesial community, and the witness of apostolic and missionary life. Cf. CT 18.

faithful to her Founder, is always seeking new ways to help that every human person to discover his/her calling in the world. The Church's teaching and action express the concern that every human being may receive, from her and from society, the support necessary to develop personally.<sup>352</sup>

Catechesis in the media also reflects the Church's concern for families in irregular situations, i.e., broken families, people living in non-sacramental unions and in free relationships. These people are firstly encouraged to accept the teaching about marriage in accordance with the divine plan, to participate in certain religious practices, to give their children a Christian education, to cultivate the spirit of penance, and to take part in parish activities and helping the needy.

## 10. Pastoral Visits to Families

*DARIUSZ LIPIEC*

Pastoral visits of families are a part of the Church's family ministry. They are among the ways used to help families in different situations and also serve to build the parish, understood as a community of communities and a family of families. They are also inscribed in the contemporary world, where people, suffering from loneliness and finding it hard to make the right choices in life, are waiting for assistance. In this context, the Church must adopt a dynamic attitude towards the human being and practice "offensive pastoral care,"<sup>353</sup> which implies the thoughtful presence of pastors among the people to whom they bring the Gospel.<sup>354</sup>

Jesus Christ himself, by his example, showed how to take part in family life. He visited the families of his friends and also those who opened themselves to the Good News of salvation that he was bringing in person. Jesus visited the family of Jairus, the synagogue leader, to heal his daughter. Although she died before he arrived, he raised her up again (Mt 9:18-19, 23-26; Mk 5:35-43; Lk 8:49-56). Likewise, in the family of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha, Jesus resurrected Lazarus who had died (Jn 11:1-43). Christ healed Peter's

<sup>352</sup> A. Kiciński, *Katecheza osób z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną w Polsce po Soborze Watykańskim II*, Lublin, 2011, 62-95.

<sup>353</sup> F.X. Kaufmann - J.B. Metz, *Zukunftsfähigkeit. Suchbewegungen im Christentum*, Freiburg-in-B., 1987, 104-5.

<sup>354</sup> Cf. R. Hajduk, *Apologetyka pastoralna*, 91-2.