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Changes in Religiosity as a Challenge to Family Catechesis: the Situation in Poland

Abstract

The concept 'catechesis' has always been vital to pastoral mission in the Roman Catholic Church and has been used officially with a basic fidelity to its etymological roots (an echoing of faith between believers and with fidelity to its context in the early Christian Church (systematic formation and participation in experiences within a faith community). However today, when the official Roman Catholic Church documents recall family catechesis, at the practical level, family catechesis is still ambiguous. This article opens a new window on a very topical issue in contemporary catechesis: strengthening the family as an important agent of catechesis. The author (taking into consideration the changes of religiosity of Catholics) proposes different models in which the family can be supported to assume its primary function as an educator for the faith using the example of Poland.

Keywords

Poland, changes in religiosity, models, family catechesis

Poland, like many other countries in Europe, is undergoing numerous changes of a religious nature. However, unlike the majority of countries in the European Union, Poland is still quite homogeneous in terms of culture, which influences its religiosity. What surprises many tourists who come to Poland is the fact that, despite strong migration movements, it remains a uniform country as far as nationality, culture and religion are concerned. Most of Poland's 39 million inhabitants are Christians (mostly Roman Catholic, with Orthodox Christian groups on the eastern parts of the country and Protestants in the south of Poland). Even though unwelcome changes become noticeable, they are much more gradual here than in the countries of Western Europe. According to CBOS¹ survey of 2018, many Poles still regard religiosity as a significant part of their social life. Invariably, systematic studies have shown that since the end of the 1990s, over 90% of respondents (92%–97%) consider themselves to be believers. At the end of 2018, 92% considered themselves to be believers, with every twelfth Pole regarding their faith to be deep (8%). The number of people who perceive themselves as 'rather non-believers' or 'complete unbelievers' has been relatively low for years (3%–8%).² After Poland joined the European Union in 2004, the percentage of non-believers has risen (8% now), while the ratio of deep believers, as well as non-believers, has remained nearly the same.³ These alterations in religiosity call for careful interpretation as to their fallout and future development. Changes in attitude among young people, as seen in the media and social networks, may be considered especially ominous.

It is surely a mistake to assess these changes one-sidedly and cry havoc. However, they pose a challenge to catechesis and pastoral activities of the Roman Catholic Church, including new forms of family catechesis.

¹ CBOS—Center for Public Opinion Research, an opinion polling institute based in Warsaw.

² Cf. R. Boguszewski, *Religijność Polaków i ocena sytuacji Kościoła katolickiego*, https://cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2018/K_147_18.PDF (10.08.2023).

³ Cf. R. Boguszewski, *Religijność Polaków i ocena sytuacji Kościoła katolickiego*, https://cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2018/K_147_18.PDF (10.08.2023).

1. Directions of transformation of contemporary religiosity

Nowadays, one may point to several characteristic features of religiosity which pose a significant challenge to the religious formation of the human person. The results of religious self-declarations, confronted by rather negative upshots of the analysis of attitudes and beliefs, are food for thought and induce us to explore contemporary religiosity, draw conclusions and take adequate pastoral steps. Studying and analysing religiosity is undoubtedly a difficult and complex process, both in terms of research and its interpretation. When one puts aside detailed and debatable issues, one may detect characteristic features of the present religiosity which, in a way, translate into a new form of devotion, with new traits and functions, when compared to its previous forms. Certainly, proclaiming the death of religion in society and culture is wrong. The contemporary sociology of religion no longer presages the end of religion. Rather, it focuses on the gradual opening of contemporary human being to spirituality and the sacred, though in a new way. The secularization process does not necessarily mean renunciation of religion, but a change of its form, character and functions.⁴

Gradually, a more private model of faith in God is being established, with no need to belong to the Church or to practice. One can notice alterations in attitudes with regards to acceptance of the teachings of the Church, and the need to be close to the institution or parish structures. Many truths are less and less known and understood, which intensifies the discrepancy between the Christian doctrine and religious awareness of the contemporary human being who, in the doctrinal and moral sense, accepts the truths of faith selectively. Some people who consider themselves to be believers or even attend the Church regularly, do not to believe in the fundamental tenets of faith. There is a growing variance between the normative teaching of the Church and its acceptance by the faithful. On the whole, faith becomes de-institutionalized, privatized and individualized. Selective Catholicism, together with criticism of the institution of the Church, are on the rise.

In the present culture of pluralism and freedom, faith is less and less inherited through culture and through the influence of one's social environment. Rather, belief or unbelief, is the result of one's personal choice, though not always a conscious one. Many young people decide to abandon Christianity under

⁴ Cf. J. Mariański, *Charakterystyka religijno-moralna współczesnej młodzieży*, in: *Katecheza młodzieży*, ed. S. Kulpaczyński, Lublin 2003, pp. 15–70.

the influence of the media, social networks, their peers, or the latest craze. Choosing faith is becoming more and more of an unaided step, which entails both opportunities and risks. The new attitude towards religion is more about religious experience than Church teaching, more about what is personal and private than institutional and official.⁵

Religiosity in the contemporary circumstances is changing its form: it assumes a strong existential character, becomes a significant part of one's life and gives aim. However, it also becomes 'fluid' and changeable, strongly internalized and oriented towards religious experience. The concept of 'private religiosity' is the keyword as regards the analysis of religious transformations. It refers to searching for the meaning of life that may be experienced and lived, takes various forms, and refers to manifold dimensions of existence.⁶

From the pastoral point of view, it is worth mentioning that family catechesis focused on awakening, developing and strengthening faith, is considered more natural than parish catechesis, as it is 'tied with the rhythm of family life and Christian education that takes place through witness. What is more, it is a steadier and daily form of education rather than divided into terms.'⁷ Thus, family catechesis produces a sustainable outcome and, when supported by Church catechesis, it may appear as the most effective means of formation of both Christians and the entire family communities.

2. Proposals of models for family catechesis

The above-mentioned sociological picture of changes in religiosity is surely not a complete or the only view of religiosity. Moreover, making predictions is always risky. However, expressing regret over the crisis of traditional structures of faith is not an adequate solution, neither is clinging to them. It is necessary to understand current alterations and search for new models. One cannot focus solely on 'traditional' ministry permeated by the idea to develop piety and strengthen sacramental practice. We must take actions of pastoral and catechetical

⁵ Cf. J. Mariański, *Religijność społeczeństwa polskiego w perspektywie europejskiej. Próba syntezy socjologicznej*, Kraków 2004, p. 176.

⁶ Cf. R. Polak, *Tęsknota za Bogiem. Wyzwania pastoralne w Europie w kontekście procesów transformacji religijnej*, „Homo Dei” 78 (2009) 4, pp. 13–20.

⁷ Kongregacja do Spraw Duchowieństwa, *Dyrektorium ogólne o katechizacji*, 15 VIII 1997, Poznań 1998, 255.

character that contribute to evangelization and formation of mature personal faith. It also seems reasonable to recognize the value of certain solutions present in the European thought. Even though we cannot compare the Polish situation to the changes taking place in other parts of the world, the initiatives taken there may provoke reflection and further studies. The essential question is: What kind of purpose does faith offer to human being in everyday life?

Pastoral renewal involves the need to look carefully at catechesis and seek such forms that will meet the requirements of the present culture. In a situation where individualization and privatization of faith are growing, the family, as the community of persons and basic catechetical milieu, gains importance. It is worth remembering that catechesis should not be limited to teaching catechism or transmitting the word of God, even though proclaiming Jesus Christ is an essential value here. Catechesis is a long process of awakening, developing and deepening faith which takes place in everyday life (testimony of faith, the community, liturgy of the Church, charity actions, prayer, morality). It is always an echo of encountering Jesus Christ. Hence, I am going to demonstrate certain models of family catechesis adapted to various levels of religiosity within a family, its structure and socio-cultural background. Surely my proposals may be modified and adapted to the needs, expectations and abilities of a given family.

2.1. A Model of support given to the family

When the adult members of a family hardly fulfil the task of education in their faith, though they still 'keep in touch' with the Church, the model of help (support) to the family will be suitable⁸. Here, the parish or Catholic school undertakes activities for the sake of the family, while the family's responsibility is, for example, to inform the catechist or religion teacher of the needs and problems noticed in the children. However, it is crucial to strengthen the awareness of parents, as merely emphasizing the task of transmitting faith within a family is not sufficient; sometimes it is even rejected by the family which perceives it as yet another task to be carried out. Therefore, it is necessary to promote family catechesis (in a narrow and broad sense) in a wise, responsible and interesting way. In the narrow sense (which may be compared to applying a specific medicine), we must remind the family that belonging to Jesus Christ

⁸ Cf. E. Osewska, *Rodzina i szkoła w Polsce wobec współczesnych wyzwań wychowawczych*, Kraków 2020, pp. 13–20.

is the centre of the Christian identity; it is initiated by the grace of baptism and lived in faith through one's whole life. Thus, the Christian identity entails a constant conversion to God. Clear and simple communication is required here. If parents recognize that being close to Jesus Christ is valuable, then they will engage in an integral education of their child, including education in the faith. Instead of pointing out the duty of transmitting faith, we may show the value of an integral education that encompasses education in the faith for the sake of the holistic development of a child. If a parent wants the best for their child, they will undertake all areas of education, including the initiation into religious life. Various forms of meetings with parents are central in this model since they often feel confused when confronted with the necessity of providing a religious education to their children. Therefore, it is worth organizing short, though attractive, gatherings with parents in Catholic schools and parishes, and arrange support groups of several people that will meet in homes, depending upon their needs and expectations (as part of family meetings, religious initiatives or parents' clubs).

Fewer and fewer parents are eager to participate in courses on theology or pedagogy. They would rather engage in practical workshops where they can learn practical skills, or gather in small domestic groups where they can share experiences, and thus acquire a fresh outlook on Christianity and find solutions to their problems. That is why we should promote various forms of meetings and catechesis for parents such as: online meetings, online family blogs, a website on matters of faith and education, TV and radio broadcasts, parish papers, liturgical catechesis based on the cycle of the Church liturgical year calendar, adoration days, family excursions, pilgrimages, weekend courses, marriage and family counselling, education by correspondence, involving parents in the sacramental initiation of their children, catechesis for engaged couples, sending text messages periodically, posters, printed material/books as well as audiobooks etc. It is important to indicate positive examples of educating in the faith in the contemporary world, and to make use of the latest information and communication technologies, which has been especially emphasized in the last year due to the pandemic. Thus, catechesis for families appears as the necessary form of helping the family in order that it may regain awareness of the truth about itself, deepens it and creates a truly Christian community of persons.

2.2. A Model of building a family community on the foundation of love

The family is the community of life. Therefore, it deserves to be called *communio personarum* more than any other community.⁹ The family is, as it were, the home of the human person who is made of love and strives for love.¹⁰ As the community of persons, it preserves the family bond by being rooted in the bond of the persons that is built on the foundation of love due to every person. The family is a collection of personal relationships initiated by marital love and complemented by parenthood. The relationship between husband and wife is the foundation of firm family ties. That is why the mainstay of the model of building a family community should be to support fiancées (and subsequently spouses) in discovering and developing of marital love, the importance and complementarity of spouses and parental bonds. Thus, shaping strong family relationships should be the basis for undertaking educational activities. The family community is a special space/area of participation where every person entrusts herself/himself to others. Through the daily actions, devotion and generosity, each person experiences love, which gradually leads to discovering God as the source of love. It is in the family that love reveals itself in the most disinterested manner through words, gestures and actions, in proportion to the capabilities of its members. Even in dysfunctional families (in terms of upbringing), the parent wants the best for his/her children who always long for closeness with their parents. The family in its core is 'love becoming real', love that—in the Christian perspective—comes from God.¹¹ When a child, a youth or even an adult begins to search for the meaning of life, they often refer to love. If it is experienced in the family, then by pointing to the love of its members, one may confirm the presence of God. Thus, fortifying the community of persons becomes the foundation of building a bond with Jesus Christ. In daily life, when we experience joys and hardships together, then we gradually invite and introduce God so that He nourishes and completes us. By experiencing good family relations, closeness to one's parents, and especially living in an atmosphere of love, care and kindness, human being

⁹ Cf. *Gratissimum sane* 7; T. Styczeń, *Człowiek darem. Na marginesie Jana Pawła II teologii ciała*, in: *Z badań nad rodziną*, ed. T. Kukołowicz, Lublin 1984, pp. 47–51; T. Kukołowicz, *Osoba i czyn a wychowanie w rodzinie*, „*Analecta Cracoviensia*” (1973–1974), t. V–VI, pp. 217–220.

¹⁰ Cf. *Rodzina w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II*, ed. J. Żukowicz, Kraków 1990.

¹¹ Cf. *Familiaris consortio* 18; J. Majka, *Proces sekularyzacji rodziny i problem odnowy jej religijnego charakteru*, in: *Ewangelizacja*, ed. J. Krucina, Wrocław 1980, p. 133; W. Piwowski, *Przemiany religijnej funkcji rodziny. Problematyka i hipotezy*, „*Studia Warmińskie*” 11 (1974), pp. 405–453.

discovers God most easily and most fully creates His adequate image. If family catechesis is based on life according to the commandment of love, then a child may accept the concept of God's authority, his concern for the world and people as well as His revelation through Jesus Christ. St. Augustine thus attests to this: *Immo vero vides Trinitatem, si caritatem vides* (If you see charity, you see the Trinity).¹² It is also confirmed by the early Church, in which the love of the followers of Jesus Christ was a sign that attracted others to join the community.

2.3. A Model of organizing family life

Another form of family catechesis is the model of organizing family life. Family catechesis flows from ordinary, daily life that is understood in the light of the Revelation, and it is discernible in prayer and domestic liturgy. Moreover, it expresses and shapes the family community, as well as accompanies the natural growth of a person.¹³ Special emphasis is placed on educating children in the faith, in collaboration with the adult members of a family. Psychological research reveals that the way parents and guardians communicate, exerts a significant influence on shaping the idea of God in children. For children it is important that parents, seriously and with love, turn in prayer to Someone whom they cannot see. If, for some reason, a child is devoid of family catechesis based on the testimony of life, then it will be hard for her/him to comprehend and experience the whole richness of the truth about God, who invites every man to communion with Him. It is crucial that the words of parents about God reach their children in everyday situations as their complementation.¹⁴ Thus, the reality of faith is closely connected with everyday life as its significant element, while the education in faith becomes as natural as physical or health education. Everyday experience in a family should be plainly interpreted with reference to God. However, it is not about imparting just theological knowledge, but rather simple references to the truths of faith, including replying to children's questions and doubts. In certain situations, a common interpretation by a parent and a child leads to a re-discovery of faith by the parent. When a particular experience is expressed in words, it may be then expressed in common prayer

¹² *De Trinitate*, VIII, 8.

¹³ Cf. E. Osewska, *Rodzina i szkoła w Polsce wobec współczesnych wyzwań wychowawczych*, Kraków 2020, pp. 127–151.

¹⁴ Cf. J. Król, *Psychologiczne aspekty badania fenomenu religii*, Opole 2002, pp. 143–172.

and presented to God in the liturgy of the Church. When an experience is tied with its interpretation, prayer and the Eucharist, it should be done in accordance with the principles of the Gospel. This results in a strong bond between daily life and faith. In the secure atmosphere of one's family, both adults as well as children may share their experience of faith, read the Bible, pray together, take part in the liturgy and undertake socio-moral education in keeping with the rhythm of a given family.

Many parents give up family catechesis claiming that they have no time. And yet family catechesis may be as natural as many other activities like eating, working or relaxing together. For example, praying together does not have to take long—it may be a simple, childlike response to God, with gratitude for the day, meal or joy. In many families in which children have been encouraged to be close to God from the very beginning, it is the children who remind their parents of the need to thank God, worship Him or ask for help when in trouble. Sometimes it is enough to listen to one's children when they talk about their faith, to respond to their questions regarding faith, to sing religious songs together or to interpret everyday events. It is crucial that family catechesis encompasses the needs of children, youth and adults, and that it is not about forcing religious practice. Due to their educational helplessness, parents often compel their children to undertake actions that they think are of great religious meaning. However, forcing a child to pray or participate in the Mass is often counterproductive. That is why wise parents will encourage, invite or accompany their children on their path of faith, rather than violate their freedom.

2.4. A Model of the path of beauty in the family

For many contemporary people, music, visual arts and creativity in virtual reality are a significant mode of expressing themselves. Since they intensely experience themselves, as well as everyday situations, they want to externalize these 'sensations'.¹⁵ Having entered the sphere of beauty, man gives voice to his wonder, admiration and rapture.¹⁶ Faced with the beauty of art, man may admire not only the creator of a given work of art, but gradually come to know, ontologically speaking, the First Creator. Contemplation of the beauty of art may lead

¹⁵ Cf. W. Kawecki, *Teologia piękna. Poszukiwanie locus theologicus w kulturze współczesnej*, Poznań 2013.

¹⁶ Cf. *Education and Creativity*, ed. E. Osewska, Warszawa 2014.

one from rapture to the experience of a religious, mystical character.¹⁷ Pictorial and musical forms in art refer to the human being's ability to see and hear. A religious experience originates in listening to the word (which may reach us in everyday life), as well as in seeing the works of Jesus Christ. For it is through His incarnation that God became audible and visible. One may even assume that in Jesus Christ there is the 'internal interchangeability' of the word and image, which is confirmed by the Christological titles: *Logos*—the Word—and *Eikon*—the Image. That is why family catechesis should include both verbal as well as visual processes, especially since the contemporary young generation extensively makes use of imagination and iconic language.¹⁸ If people search for a specific aesthetic of religion which will be consistent with their perception of beauty, then it makes sense to suggest that they may create a relationship with God while discovering beauty. Making family members more sensitive to the beauty of nature and art leads them to experience deep emotions, moves them and awakens a longing for beauty and infinity.

2.5. A Model of family solidarity

The awareness of socio-cultural, economic and religious conditions/circumstances prompts the family to take actions not only for the sake of itself, but for other people as well. The process of accepting Christian faith starts by acknowledging its authenticity and integrity.¹⁹ In this model, active engagement of a family in a specific socio-cultural situation proves the maturity of its faith. This includes

¹⁷ Cf. J. Królikowski, *Zobaczyć wiarę. Obraz i doświadczenie wiary w Kościele*, in: *Wierzyć i widzieć*, eds. K. Flander, D. Jaszewska, W. Kawecki, B. Klocek di Biasio, E. Mazur, N. Mojżyn, J.S. Wojciechowski, M. Wrześniak, D. Żukowska-Gardzińska, Sandomierz 2013, pp. 127–129; J. Królikowski, *Nieme słowo. Teologia w sztuce*, Tarnów 2008; J. Królikowski, *Widzialne słowo. Teologia w sztuce*, Tarnów 2009; W. Kawecki, *Czym jest locus theologicus kultury wizualnej?*, in: *Wierzyć i widzieć*, pp. 31–45; W. Kawecki, *Teologia wobec kultury wizualnej*, in: *Miejsca teologiczne w kulturze wizualnej*, Kraków—Warszawa 2013, pp. 15–29.

¹⁸ Cf. J. Królikowski, *Widzialne słowo. Teologia w sztuce*, Tarnów 2009; W. Kawecki, *Teologia wobec kultury wizualnej*, in: *Miejsca teologiczne w kulturze wizualnej*, Kraków—Warszawa 2013, pp. 15–29; *Kultura wizualna—teologia wizualna*, eds. W. Kawecki, J.S. Wojciechowski, D. Żukowska-Gardzińska, Warszawa 2011; J. Stala, *Punina postojanja osebe—civilizacija ljubavi u kontekstu postmoderne*, „Crkva u svijetu” (2015) nr 3, pp. 469–477.

¹⁹ Cf. E. Osewska, *Rodzina i szkoła w Polsce wobec współczesnych wyzwań wychowawczych*, Kraków 2020, pp. 226–229; J. Stala, *Die Polen angesichts der Umbrüche im politischen und gesellschaftlichen Bereich. Ein Vierteljahrhundert nach der Unabhängigkeit Polens*, „The Person and the Challenges” 5 (2015) nr 1, pp. 191–199; J. Stala, *Katechese im Zeitalter der Postmoderne*.

concern for the natural environment together with human ecology, charity work for the sake of the poor, and helping the sick. In this model, the image of a Christian is transformed: he/she is wise, mature, is engaged in his/her professional life as well as in the social, political and Church life. This model also reveals the value of a happy Christian family as a community of love, life and growth, open to the needs of one's neighbour. Here, the process of religious socialization of children is connected with the image of religiosity in the adults: their parents, guardians, grandparents, educators and teachers. Therefore, a family catechesis which is sensitive to the needs of human being and to social changes, overcomes egocentrism and shows mutual social dependence, consequently building the foundation of mature faith. It is worth revealing the daily experience of families living ordinary lives and showing support to every member in a family, from the youngest to the oldest.

Faith cannot be devoid of solidarity with people,²⁰ (whoever they are and wherever they live) suffering desolation, exploitation, enslavement and/or living in inhumane conditions. Reflection and appropriate actions taken in the spirit of the Gospel are inseparable from the formation of faith in adults. The profession of faith entails one's readiness to take responsibility for today's society. This commitment is considered indispensable for the growth of a reliable Christian identity in contemporary society. Of course, it will differ according to the circumstances: whether we deal with children, youth or adults. Shaping sensitivity to the needs of other people and the capability of responding to it requires that parents/guardians are endowed with Christian openness, insight, and the ability to describe, analyse and assess a given social situation. It is the appropriate diagnosis of reality that helps the person to take the right steps. In certain situations, it is the attentiveness of the younger generation to the needs of the other that encourages initiatives from adults, and prompts them to answer the question: what does it mean to be a Christian today?

„Grundsatzprogramm für die Katechese der Kirche in Polen“ aus dem Jahr 2010, „Bogoslovni vestnik“ 74 (2014) nr 1, pp. 107–117.

²⁰ Cf. E. Osewska, *Rodzina i szkoła w Polsce wobec współczesnych wyzwań wychowawczych*, Kraków 2020, pp. 235–255.

2.6. The ecclesial model

The ecclesial model is dedicated to families engaged in the parish community. Family catechesis thrives thanks to the family and the Church: on the one hand it is immersed in everyday life, nourishing and strengthening it; on the other, it participates in the life of the Church, fulfilling prophetic, priestly and pastoral (being of service) functions. As a domestic church, the family proclaims the Gospel and accepts it with faith, thus fortifying all its members. In taking up its priestly function, the family takes part in the liturgy of the Church, prayer and sacramental life, as well as offers God the toil of daily life. The Christian family is also called to perform the royal function, the constant 'service' in love towards God and neighbours. The full development of the ecclesial model of family catechesis requires the cooperation of parents, catechists, priests and leaders of religious groups in order to buttress the family and complement its prophetic, priestly and ministerial function. The Church expresses her responsibility for family catechesis through adequate ways of strengthening the family. Thus, formation in the family and parish plays a significant role. This is important as the future of religion in its social dimension is related to the family entering the ecclesial community, accepting the truths of faith and the patterns of behaviour on the level of interpersonal relations.²¹

2.7. A Model of the new evangelization of the family

In a situation in which the secularization of society is growing²² (including that of the family), it is essential that we focus upon evangelization²³ (in the spirit of the primary proclamation of the Gospel) in order to convert the human person or nourish their faith. Thus, the first aim of this kind of catechesis would be to organize an appropriate time for evangelization activities. For example, the engaged or the married couple should be evangelized in the first place, so that they may understand the essence of the communion they wish to establish, or in which they already live. The so-called pre-marital courses are not sufficient, especially if they are run in an average way. The contemporary family needs

²¹ J. Mariański, *Religijność społeczeństwa polskiego w perspektywie europejskiej. Próba syntezy socjologicznej*, Kraków 2004, p. 418.

²² Cf. E. Osewska, *Rodzina i szkoła w Polsce wobec współczesnych wyzwań wychowawczych*, Kraków 2020, pp. 67–85.

²³ Franciszek, *Adhortacja apostołska o głoszeniu Ewangelii we współczesnym świecie Evangelii Gaudium*, 24 XI 2013, Kraków 2013.

an evangelization that will lead to a change of mind and heart, and later to full conversion. The family should be able to receive a formative path from parish catechesis and other pastoral forms: a path from which it will draw sustenance in its specific situation and with manifold needs (of living, educational and cultural character) connected with its Christian growth.

In the postmodern era, when so many parents shift the responsibility for the catechesis of their kids to the school and parish, it is crucial that they are prepared to take responsibility for the education in the faith. If they abdicate this duty, it is often because they are hardly aware of their educational role, and their bond with the local Church and with God has weakened. That is why some parents think that if they are not witnesses to faith, they may exert a negative influence on their children if they start providing them with a religious education. However, it seems that as long as parents remain mindful of the needs of their offspring, there is always a chance for catechesis in the family, even if their faith is far from the ideal that may be expected of adults. What counts is the event that may prompt adults to re-discover the meaning of faith: sometimes it is a serious illness or the death of a loved one, encountering a person who bears witness to faith, or the sacramental initiation of their children which 'give food for thought.' Preparing children for the sacraments of Penance, Reconciliation and the First Holy Communion motivates parents to verify their own faith. Moreover, children express their doubts, ask questions, and together with parents search for answers to questions regarding faith. Therefore, family catechesis is not only about the impact of adults on children, but the other way round as well. The sacramental initiation of children is an opportunity for parents to meet and recall the kerygma. It is crucial that these meetings with parents do not boil down to discussing organizational issues, but include basic questions regarding the meaning of faith in everyday life. Family catechesis cannot be limited to proclaiming the Gospel theoretically, but must include the spreading of the Good News in the context of the real problems of people. For it is the Gospel that is the solution to these problems, as it contains the unchanging truth about man and family. God never leaves families stranded, but comes to their aid.

2.8. A Model of formation of the family with the help of religious movements

Families involved in various religious movements may be formed in the spirit of the objectives and charism of a given association. Otherwise, they may refer to the experience of certain members of the family associated with a given

religious movement. Here, methods of catechesis applied by parents are of less importance as they reflect the originality of a particular family.

Parents who are members of religious groups or movements should carefully choose methods that are in line with the age and abilities of their family members. For example, methods that have proved useful when applied to children should not be transferred to teenagers who are often rebellious. Methods of catechesis should be altered according to the needs and expectations of a given age group.

Religious movements adopt various presumptions, and yet they are all focused on deepening faith,²⁴ a process which is associated with internal motivation and with answering the question: Why do I believe? Faith is not only something one is born into, an element of one's cultural background, but above all, it is a consequence of one's conscious decision to follow Jesus Christ. Catechesis in the family connected to a religious movement is an echo, a reflection and an image of this act of following Jesus. As such, it should be a continual confirmation of this clinging to Jesus Christ, rather than mere communication of information. It is especially important now when religion has been pushed to the private sphere and is no longer reflected in the public. The family, as the community of persons caring for one another and for their integrity, should also be concerned with the growth of their faith, a process assisted by religious groups or communities. When family members are able to express their conviction that faith is valuable, then their inner motivation to live their daily life in accordance with the principles of the Gospel is strengthened. Here, family members do not perceive catechesis as something external and imposed on them. Rather, they treat it as a natural consequence of a Christian life in which every day brings new opportunities to meet Jesus Christ who calls man to seek the truth about oneself and discover the meaning of one's life. Family catechesis may find assistance in grandparents or older siblings who are engaged in religious groups. Their witness may inspire or encourage others, especially the youngest family members. In this context it is also worth utilising religious groups for children and youth that will fortify the foundations of faith in the family.

²⁴ Cf. A. Potocki, *Wychowanie religijne w polskich przemianach. Studium socjologiczno-pastoralne*, Warszawa 2007, pp. 363–480.

2.9. A Model of family catechesis in a religious dialogue

In the present socio-cultural context, the Christian family keeps in touch with families of various religious and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, a Christian should get to know other religions so that she/he may enter more easily into a dialogue required by the Christian kerygma. The kerygma and dialogue, each in their scope/capacity, are integral parts and authentic forms of one and the same mission of the Church, and their aim is to share the saving truth.

In order to maintain a fruitful dialogue with families of different religions, the Christian family needs to learn more about the kerygma, the Holy Scripture, and the tradition and teaching of the Church, so that it may consciously present Christianity not only with words, but also with the witness of daily life in the spirit of the Gospel. Showing respect to families that represent other religions should lead us to an in-depth search for the truth of Christianity and to discover the originality conveyed in following Jesus Christ. A family catechesis that is engaged in religious dialogue should be especially concerned about the consistency of its 'message' with the revealed truth and in putting Jesus Christ first.

2.10. A Model of family catechesis that combines faith with culture

A human being who believes in God cannot shun culture and escape into a spirituality which is misunderstood. He/she needs to enter into a dialogue with culture, searching for 'tangent points'. The Gospel should permeate culture and transform it. Each family has its cultural background. Moreover, it introduces the younger generation into culture. And yet it is never isolated from a broader culture which shapes the spirituality, morality, social and even economic situation of the family. This is accompanied by opportunities as well as risks. Promotion of the so-called mass culture, which undermines the educational authority of parents, and relativizes values and principles of Christian life, is particularly disturbing.²⁵ Therefore, we must emphasize significant elements of the spiritual culture of the family which, to a great extent, determine the implementation of family catechesis. These elements include: the word, sensitivity to symbolism, habits and rituals of a given family and hierarchy of values.²⁶ The Word passed on in the family has a particular value, as it reaches members of the family

²⁵ Cf. *Dyrektorium katechetyczne Kościoła katolickiego w Polsce*, Kraków 2001, nr 7.

²⁶ Cf. J. Wilk, *Pedagogika rodziny. Zagadnienia wybrane*, Lublin 2016, pp. 67–79.

in everyday situations and helps them meet God in their lives. Simple, domestic experience should be complemented with the word ‘thanks’ to which it acquires a religious meaning. ‘Faith comes by hearing’, that is why words uttered by parents and other significant persons become the word of prophecy as well as the interpretation of events.²⁷ Unfortunately, the situation of contemporary families reveals the crisis of the word. The fast pace of life curbs time and the content of verbal communication in the family. For that reason, it is worth rebuilding the custom of ‘exchanging words’ in the family through telling family stories, reading the Bible together, and holding conversations about everyday events. The function of proclaiming the Word is fulfilled not only by adults (including grandparents), but by children as well.

The family is still an environment where the language of faith can be shaped in a way that is clear and understandable, within a given cultural context. In the past, family catechesis was unduly focused on passing on the doctrine in theological jargon, which resulted in repeating catechism rules without understanding their meaning and implications. Few parents had an opportunity to learn how to pass on faith. However, when devoid of this skill, one contends not only with the use of adequate language but also with education. Some of these difficulties spring from a mutual misunderstanding. It is therefore advisable to devote time and energy towards a common effort to create a language with theological content which would be transparent to all the members of the family, in order that the verbal communication of faith is confirmed in daily life.

When the family is open to culture, its members become sensitive to the presence of signs and symbols at home, especially those of a religious character: the table, bread, water, light. These signs point to the reality that surpasses the human descriptive capacity and enables the encounter with God.²⁸ A family which is capable of awakening the sensitivity of children and adults to the realm of signs and strengthens their ability to admire and delight, not only reveals the religious meaning of a symbol, but leads them to encounter God in the sacraments.

It is also important for the family to create its own rituals which refer to its tradition, uniqueness and bond with God. Even simple family habits, such as praying before and after a meal, blessing children, or preparing holiday

²⁷ J. Wilk, *Pedagogika rodziny. Zagadnienia wybrane*, Lublin 2016, pp. 68–69.

²⁸ Cf. J. Stala, E. Osewska, *Fundamentalne podstawy i obszary katechezy rodzinnej*, Tarnów 2000, pp. 96–97.

decorations together, contribute to the spiritual culture of the family and encourages other families to follow suit. Supporting cultural life in the family also includes going to the theatre, cinema, museum, exhibitions and concerts.²⁹

The family tries to transmit a specific hierarchy of values to future generations, which is especially significant in the present society dominated by pluralism of norms and values. Thus, a family with an aptly internalized and clear hierarchy of Christian values exceeds contemporary ethical codes. It passes on evangelistic ideals such as: overcoming evil in human, loving every person including enemies, striving for holiness and building a community of faith, hope and love.³⁰ Today, family catechesis faces many challenges, including the transformation of religiosity and educational relationships. Religiosity is changing its form, becoming changeable, private, individualized and oriented towards a religious experience³¹. Educational relationships are also undergoing changes. Traditionally, parents provided input which was interpreted only as 'top-down'; they were responsible for religious formation of the younger generation. Now, the parent-child relationship is weakening, whereas bonds between peers, as well as the external influence on children and youth (especially through information and communication technologies), are flourishing. The young share their experience and inspirations thanks to countless websites, blogs and social networks. The ties between an adult and a child begin to fade, whereas bonds between a child and her/his peers take root.

3. Conclusion

The successful implementation of family catechesis has never been easy. It seems that in the postmodern era it is even more difficult: it requires great responsibility, wisdom and integrity of parents who receive less and less support from the modern society and culture. The rapid development of information and communication technologies and the increasing pace of life contribute to chaos and confusion of parents. Can we still hope that the family supported by the Church

²⁹ Cf. J. Wilk, *Pedagogika rodziny. Zagadnienia wybrane*, Lublin 2016, pp. 73–76.

³⁰ Cf. W. Piwowarski, *Funkcje rytuału religijnego*, in: *Rytuał religijny w rodzinie*, eds. W. Piwowarski, W. Zdaniewicz, Warszawa—Poznań 1988, pp. 82–84.

³¹ Cf. E. Alberich, *Katecheza dzisiaj. Podręcznik katechetyki fundamentalnej*, Warszawa 2003.

and specific organizations will create the environment that assists its members in their quest for religious and personal integrity?

Surely, in the present situation of religious transformation, it is necessary to restore to the family the task entrusted to it by the Creator and confirmed by the Church. While searching for adequate models of family catechesis, it is worth remembering that they should engage all members of the family and respond to their needs. If the family hardly stays in touch with the Church, one may start with the catechesis supporting the family or catechesis in the spirit of evangelization, so that the family becomes thoroughly permeated by the Gospel.

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