

Adult Evangelization & Catechesis in the Church Documents



Some Excepts on Adult Evangelization and Catechesis from the following documents:

Catechesi Tradendae (CT), John Paul II - Apostolic Exhortation, 1979	Pg #2
Ecclesia in America (EA), John Paul II - Apostolic Exhortation, 1999	Pg #3
Evangelii Nuntiandi (EN), Paul VI - Encyclical, 1975	Pg #5
General Directory for Catechesis (GDC), Congregation for the Clergy 1998	Pg #6
National Directory for Catechesis (NDC) USCCB 2005	Pg #12
Guadium et Spes (GS), Vatican II Pastoral Constitution 1965	Pg #14
Lumen Gentium (LG), Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution 1964	Pg #14
Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community Intn'l Council for Catechesis 1990	Pg #15
+ Were not our Hearts Burning Within Us, USCCB 1999	Pg #15

[Catechesi Tradendae \(CT\)](#), John Paul II - Apostolic Exhortation, 1979

(emphasis added)

Adults

43. To continue the series of receivers of catechesis, I cannot fail to emphasize now one of the most constant concerns of the synod fathers, a concern imposed with vigor and urgency by present experiences throughout the world: I am referring to the central problem of the ***catechesis of adults. This is 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.***(90) The Christian community cannot carry out a permanent catechesis without the direct and skilled participation of adults, whether as receivers or as promoters of catechetical activity. The world, in which the young are called to live and to give witness to the faith which catechesis seeks to deepen and strengthen, is governed by adults. ***The faith of these adults too should continually be enlightened, stimulated and renewed, so that it may pervade the temporal realities in their charge.*** Thus, for ***catechesis to be effective, it must be permanent***, and it would be quite useless if it stopped short at the threshold of maturity, since catechesis, admittedly under another form, proves no less necessary for adults.

Quasi-Catechumens

44. Among the adults who need catechesis, our ***pastoral missionary concern is directed to those who were born and reared in areas not yet Christianized***, and who have never been able to study deeply the Christian teaching that the circumstances of life have at a certain moment caused them to come across. It is also ***directed to those who in childhood received a catechesis suited to their age but who later drifted away from all religious practice and as adults find themselves with religious knowledge of a rather childish kind.*** It is likewise ***directed to those who feel the effects of a catechesis received early in life but badly imparted or badly assimilated.*** It is directed to those who, although they were born in a Christian country or in sociologically Christian surroundings, have never been educated in their faith and, as adults are really catechumens.

Diversified and Complementary Forms of Catechesis

45. Catechesis is therefore for adults of every age, including the elderly-persons who deserve particular attention in view of their experience and their problems - no less than for children, adolescents and the young. We should also mention migrants, those who are by-passed by modern developments, those who live in areas of large cities which are often without churches, buildings and suitable organization, and other such groups. It is desirable that initiatives meant to give all these groups a Christian formation, with appropriate means (audio-visual aids, booklets, discussions, lectures), should increase in number, enabling many adults to fill the gap left by an insufficient or deficient catechesis, to complete harmoniously at a higher level their childhood catechesis, or even to prepare themselves enough in this field to be able to help others in a more serious way.

It is important also that the catechesis of children and young people, permanent catechesis, and the catechesis of adults should not be separate watertight compartments. It is even more important that there should be no break between them. On the contrary, their perfect

complementarity must be fostered: adults have much to give to young people and children in the field of catechesis, but they can also receive much from them for the growth of their own Christian lives.

It must be restated that nobody in the Church of Jesus Christ should feel excused from receiving catechesis. This is true even of young seminarians and young religious, and of all those called to the task of being pastors and catechists. They will fulfill this task all the better if they are humble pupils of the Church, the great giver as well as the great receiver of catechesis.

[Ecclesia in America \(EA\)](#), John Paul II - Apostolic Exhortation, 1999 (emphasis added)

The importance of catechesis

69. *The new evangelization in which the whole continent is engaged means that faith cannot be taken for granted, but must be explicitly proposed in all its breadth and richness. This is the principal objective of catechesis, which, by its very nature, is an essential aspect of the new evangelization. "Catechesis is a process of formation in faith, hope and charity; it shapes the mind and touches the heart, leading the person to embrace Christ fully and completely. It introduces the believer more fully into the experience of the Christian life, which involves the liturgical celebration of the mystery of the Redemption and the Christian service of others".*
(256)

Well realizing the need for a complete catechesis, I made my own the proposal of the Fathers of the 1985 Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to compose "a catechism or compendium of all Catholic doctrine regarding both faith and morals", which could serve as "a point of reference for the catechisms or compendia that are prepared in the various regions". (257) This proposal was implemented with the publication of the typical edition of the [Catechismus Catholicae Ecclesiae](#). (258) In addition to the text of the Catechism, and for a better utilization of its contents, I intended that a [General Directory for Catechesis](#) should also be compiled and published. (259) I heartily recommend the use of these two resources, of universal value, to everyone involved in catechesis in America. It is to be hoped that both documents will be employed "in the preparation and the evaluation of all parochial and diocesan programs of catechesis, bearing in mind that the religious situation of young people and adults calls for a catechesis which is more kerygmatic and more organic in its presentation of the contents of the faith". (260)

Places of encounter with Christ

12. *Trusting in the help of Mary, the Church in America desires to lead the men and women of the continent to encounter Christ. This encounter will be the starting-point of authentic conversion and of renewed communion and solidarity. Such an encounter will contribute greatly to strengthening the faith of many Catholics, helping them to mature in strong, lively and active faith.*

Lest the search for Christ present in his Church become something merely abstract, we need to indicate the specific times and places in which, in the Church, it is possible to encounter him. Here the reflections of the Synod Fathers offered abundant suggestions and observations. They pointed above all to “Sacred Scripture read in the light of Tradition, the Fathers and the Magisterium, and more deeply understood through meditation and prayer”.(24) A recommendation was made to promote knowledge of the Gospels, which proclaim in words easily understood by all the way Jesus lived among the people of his time. Reading these sacred texts and listening to Jesus as attentively as did the multitudes of the mount of the Beatitudes, or on the shore of the Lake of Tiberias as he preached from the boat, produces authentic fruits of conversion of heart.

A second place of encounter with Jesus is the sacred Liturgy.(25) Thanks to the Second Vatican Council, we have a very rich account of the manifold presence of Christ in the Liturgy, the importance of which should lead to it being a theme of constant preaching. Christ is present in the celebrant who renews at the altar the one and only Sacrifice of the Cross; he is present in the Sacraments through which he exercises his efficacious power. When his word is proclaimed, it is he himself who speaks to us. He is also present in the community, by virtue of his promise that “where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (*Mt* 18:20). He is present “especially under the Eucharistic species”.(26) My Predecessor Paul VI deemed it necessary to explain the uniqueness of Christ's real presence in the Eucharist, which “is called 'real' not to exclude the idea that the others are 'real' too, but rather to indicate presence *par excellence*, because it is substantial”.(27) Under the species of bread and wine, “Christ is present, whole and entire in his physical 'reality', corporally present”.(28)

The Scriptures and the Eucharist, places of encounter with Christ, are evoked in the story of the apparition of the Risen Jesus to the disciples of Emmaus. The Gospel text concerning the final judgment (cf. *Mt* 25:31-46), which states that we will be judged on our love towards the needy in whom the Lord Jesus is mysteriously present, indicates that we must not neglect **a third place of encounter with Christ: “the persons, especially the poor, with whom Christ identifies himself”.**(29) At the closing of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI recalled that “on the face of every human being, especially when marked by tears and sufferings, we can and must see the face of Christ (cf. *Mt* 25:40), the Son of Man”.(30)

[Evangelii Nuntiandi \(EN\)](#), Paul VI - Encyclical, 1975 (emphasis added)

41. Without repeating everything that we have already mentioned, it is appropriate first of all to emphasize the following point: ***for the Church, the first means of evangelization is the witness of an authentically Christian life, given over to God in a communion that nothing should destroy and at the same time given to one's neighbor with limitless zeal.*** As we said recently to a group of lay people, "***Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.***"[67] St. Peter expressed this well when he held up the example of a reverent and chaste life that wins over even without a word those who refuse to obey the word.[68] ***It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world, in other words, by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus- the witness of poverty and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity.***

44. A means of evangelization that must not be neglected is that of catechetical instruction. The intelligence, especially that of children and young people, needs to learn through systematic religious instruction the fundamental teachings, the living content of the truth which God has wished to convey to us and which the Church has sought to express in an ever richer fashion during the course of her long history. No one will deny that this instruction must be given to form patterns of Christian living and not to remain only notional. Truly the effort for evangelization will profit greatly- at the level of catechetical instruction given at church, in the schools, where this is possible, and in every case in Christian homes- if those giving catechetical instruction have suitable texts, updated with wisdom and competence, under the authority of the bishops. ***The methods must be adapted to the age, culture and aptitude of the persons concerned, they must seek always to fix in the memory, intelligence and heart the essential truths that must impregnate all of life.*** It is necessary above all to prepare good instructors- parochial catechists, teachers, parents- who are desirous of perfecting themselves in this superior art, which is indispensable and requires religious instruction. ***Moreover, without neglecting in any way the training of children, one sees that present conditions render ever more urgent catechetical instruction, under the form of the catechumenate, for innumerable young people and adults who, touched by grace, discover little by little the face of Christ and feel the need of giving themselves to Him.***

The catechesis of adults (50)

Adults to whom catechesis is directed (51)

172. 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. Their questions of faith as well as their needs are many and varied.(52) Consequently, the following categories may be distinguished:

- adult Christians who consistently live their faith option and sincerely desire to deepen it;
- adults who have been baptized but who have not been sufficiently catechized, or have not brought to fulfilment the journey begun at Christian initiation, or who have fallen away from the faith, to such a degree that they may be called 'quasi catechumens'; (53)
- non-baptized adults, to whom the catechumenate truly and properly corresponds.(54)

Mention must also be made of those adults who come from Christian confessions which are not in full communion with the Catholic Church.

Elements and criteria proper to adult catechesis (55)

173. Adult catechesis concerns persons who have a right and a duty to bring to maturity the seed of faith sown in them by God.(56) It is addressed to individuals who are charged to fulfill social responsibilities of various types and to those who are also prey to all kinds of changes and crises, sometimes profound. 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. Adult catechesis requires the accurate identification of the typical characteristics of Christian adults. It must translate them into objectives and content, and determine certain constants of presentation. It must establish the most effective methodological approaches and choose formats and models. The role and identity of the catechists who work with adults and their formation—the people who are responsible for the catechesis of adults in the community—are vitally important.(57)

174. Among the criteria which assure an authentic and effective adult catechesis, mention must be made of the following: (58)

- attention to those to whom it is addressed, to their condition as adult men and women, requires taking account of their problems and experiences, their spiritual and cultural resources, with full respect for their differences;
- attention to the lay condition of adults, on whom Baptism confers the task of "seeking the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's Will", (59) and whom it calls to holiness; (60)
- attention to the involvement of the community so that it may be a welcoming and supportive environment;
- attention to ensure systematic pastoral care of adults, with which liturgical formation and the service of charity have been integrated.

General and particular tasks of adult catechesis (61)

175. So as to respond to the more profound needs of our time, adult catechesis must systematically propose the Christian faith in its entirety and in its authenticity, in accordance with the Church's understanding. It must give priority to the proclamation of salvation, drawing attention to the many difficulties, doubts, misunderstandings, prejudices and objections of today. It must introduce adults to a faith-filled reading of Sacred Scripture and the practice of prayer. A fundamental service to adult catechesis is given by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and by those adult catechisms based on it by the particular Churches. In particular, the tasks of adult catechesis are:

- *to promote formation and development of life in the Risen Christ* by adequate means: pedagogy of the sacraments, retreats, spiritual direction...
- *to educate toward a correct evaluation of the socio-cultural changes of our societies in the light of faith*: thus the Christian community is assisted in discerning true values in our civilization, as well as its dangers, and in adopting appropriate attitudes;
- *to clarify current religious and moral questions*, that is, those questions which are encountered by the men and women of our time: for example, public and private morality with regard to social questions and the education of future generations;
- *to clarify the relationship between temporal actions and ecclesial action*, by demonstrating mutual distinctions and implications and thus due interaction; to this end, the social doctrine of the Church is an integral part of adult catechesis;
- *to develop the rational foundations of the faith*: that the right understanding of the faith and of the truths to be believed are in conformity with the demands of reason and the Gospel is always relevant; it is therefore necessary to promote effectively the pastoral aim of Christian thought and culture: this helps to overcome certain forms of fundamentalism as well as subjective and arbitrary interpretations;
- *to encourage adults to assume responsibility for the Church's mission and to be able to give Christian witness in society*:

The adult is assisted to discover, evaluate and activate what he has received by nature and grace, both in the Christian community and by living in human society; in this way, he will be able to overcome the dangers of standardization and of anonymity which are particularly dominant in some societies of today and which lead to loss of identity and lack of appreciation for the resources and qualities of the individual.

Particular forms of adult catechesis (62)

176. Certain situations and circumstances require special forms of catechesis:

- catechesis for the Christian initiation or catechumenate of adults: this has its own express form in the RCIA;
- traditional forms of catechesis of the people of God, duly adapted to the liturgical year or in the extraordinary form of missions;
- the on-going catechesis of those who have a task of formation in the community: catechists and those involved in the lay apostolate;
- catechesis for use in particularly significant events in life, such as Marriage, the Baptism of children and the other sacraments of initiation, at critical times during youth, in sickness etc.: in such circumstances, people are disposed more than ever to seek out the true meaning of life;

– is for special events and experiences, such as beginning work, military service, emigration etc.: these are changes which can give rise to interior enrichment or bewilderment and in which the need of God's saving word should be emphasized;

– catechesis for the Christian use of leisure time, especially during holidays and travel;

– catechesis for special events in the life of the Church and society.

These and many other forms of special catechesis, complement, but do not replace, the ongoing, systematic, catechetical courses which every ecclesial community must provide for all adults.

The baptismal catechumenate of adults (250)

256. The baptismal catechumenate is a typical *locus* of catechesis, instituted by the Church to prepare adults, who desire to become Christians and to receive the Sacraments of Christian initiation. (251) In the catechumenate, it is realized "that specific formation by means of which the adult, converted to the faith, is brought to a confession of baptismal faith during the Easter Vigil". (252) The catechesis given in the catechumenate is closely linked with the Christian community. (253) From the moment of their entry into the catechumenate, the Church surrounds catechumens "with her affection, her care, as though they are already her children and joined to her: indeed, they belong to the family of Christ". (254) Thus the Christian community assists "candidates and catechumens during their initiation process, from the precatechumenate to the catechumenate, to the period of mystagogy". (255) This continual presence of the Christian community is expressed in different ways and appropriately described in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. (256)

The parish as an environment for catechesis

258. In order that the parish may succeed in activating effectively the mission of evangelization, some conditions must be fulfilled:

a) Adult catechesis (262) must be given priority. This involves "a post-baptismal catechesis, in the form of a catechumenate, ...presenting again some elements from the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* with the purpose of allowing a person to grasp and live the immense, extraordinary richness and responsibility received at Baptism". (263)

b) With renewed courage, the proclamation of the Gospel to those alienated or who live in religious indifference (264) must be planned. In this task, pre-sacramental meetings (*preparation for Marriage, Baptism and First Holy Communion of children*) can be fundamental. (265)

c) As a solid reference point for parochial catechesis it is necessary to have a nucleus of mature Christians, initiated into the faith, for whom the pastor should have an adequate and differentiated pastoral care. This objective can be more easily achieved by the formation of small ecclesial communities. (266)

d) While the preceding points refer mainly to adults, at the same time catechesis for children, adolescents, and young people—which is always indispensable—will also benefit greatly.

Other selected quotes for the GDC

29. The vitality of catechesis in recent years has been amply demonstrated by many positive aspects. Amongst others the following must be highlighted:

- the great number of priests, religious and laity who devote themselves with enthusiasm to catechesis, one of the most important ecclesial activities.
- the missionary character of contemporary catechesis and its ability to secure adherence to the faith on the part of catechumens and those to be catechized in a world in which religious sense is obscured must also be underlined: in this dynamic there is an acute awareness that catechesis must have a catechumenal style, as of integral formation rather than mere information; it must act in reality as a means of arousing true conversion; (54)
- consonant with what has been said, concerning the expanding role of adult catechesis (55) the catechetical programmes of many particular Churches assume extraordinary importance. This option appears to be a priority in the pastoral planning of many dioceses, and also plays a central role in many ecclesial groups and movements;
- promoted no doubt by recent directions of the Magisterium, catechetical thought, has gained much in our times in terms of quality and profundity. In this sense many local Churches already have at their disposal suitable and opportune pastoral programmes.

The process of continuing conversion

56. Faith is a gift destined to grow in the hearts of believers. (156) Adhering to Jesus Christ, in fact, sets in motion a process of continuing conversion, which lasts for the whole of life. (157) He who comes to faith is like a new born child, (158) who, little by little, will grow and change into an adult, tending towards the state of the "perfect man", (159) and to maturity in the fullness of Christ. From a theological viewpoint, several important moments can be identified in the process of faith and conversion:

a) *Interest in the Gospel*. The first moment is one in which, in the heart of the non believer or of the indifferent or of those who practise other religions, there is born, as a result of its first proclamation, an interest in the Gospel, yet without any firm decision. This first movement of the human spirit towards faith, which is already a fruit of grace, is identified by different terms: "propensity for the faith", (160) "evangelic preparation", (161) inclination to believe, "religious quest". (162) The Church calls those who show such concern "sympathizers". (163)

b) *Conversion*. This first moment of interest in the Gospel requires a period of searching (164) to be transformed into a firm option. The option for faith must be a considered and mature one. Such searching, guided by the Holy Spirit and the proclamation of the *Kerygma*, prepares the way for conversion which is certainly "initial", (165) but brings with it adherence to Christ and the will to walk in his footsteps. This "fundamental option" is the basis for the whole Christian life of the Lord's disciple. (166)

c) *Profession of faith*. Abandonment of self to Jesus Christ arouses in believers a desire to know him more profoundly and to identify with him. Catechesis initiates them in knowledge of faith and apprenticeship in the Christian life, thereby promoting a spiritual journey which brings about a "progressive change in outlook and morals". (167) This is achieved in sacrifices and in challenges, as well as in the joys which God gives in abundance. The disciple of Jesus Christ is then ready to make an explicit, living and fruitful profession of faith. (168)

d) *Journeying towards perfection*. The basic maturity which gives rise to the profession of faith is not the final point in the process of continuing conversion. The profession of baptismal faith

is but the foundation of a spiritual building which is destined to grow. The baptized, moved always by the Spirit, nourished by the sacraments, by prayer and by the practise of charity, and assisted by multiple forms of ongoing education in the faith, seeks to realize the desire of Christ: "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect". (169) This is the call to the fullness of perfection which is addressed to all the baptized.

57. The ministry of the word is at the service of this process of full conversion. The first proclamation of the Gospel is characterized by the call to faith; catechesis by giving a foundation to conversion and providing Christian life with a basic structure; while ongoing education in the faith, in which the place of the homily must be underlined, is characterized by being the necessary nourishment of which every baptized adult has need in order to live. (170)

There are, moreover, situations in which, in a definite socio-cultural context, "there are Christian communities with adequate and solid ecclesial structures. They are fervent in their faith and in Christian living. They bear witness to the Gospel in their surroundings and have a sense of commitment to the Universal mission". (174) These communities demand an intense "pastoral action of the Church" since they are made up of people and families of profound Christian outlook. In such contexts it is vital that catechesis for children, adolescents and young people develop various processes of well articulated Christian initiation which permit these to arrive at adulthood with mature faith which makes evangelizers of those who have been evangelized. Also in these situations adults are also in need of different types of Christian formation.

"The model for all catechesis is the baptismal catechumenate when, by specific formation, an adult converted to belief is brought to explicit profession of baptismal faith during the Paschal Vigil". (180) This catechumenal formation should inspire the other forms of catechesis in both their objectives and in their dynamism.

– "Catechesis for adults, since it deals with persons who are capable of an adherence that is fully responsible, must be considered the chief form of catechesis. All the other forms, which are indeed always necessary, are in some way oriented to it". (181) This implies that the catechesis of other age groups should have it for a point of reference and should be expressed in conjunction with it, in a coherent catechetical programme suitable to meet the pastoral needs of dioceses.

In this way catechesis, situated in the context of the Church's mission of evangelization and seen as an essential moment of that mission, receives from evangelization a missionary dynamic which deeply enriches it and defines its own identity. The ministry of catechesis appears, then, as a fundamental ecclesial service for the realization of the missionary mandate of Jesus.

72. It is fundamentally important that initiatory catechesis for adults, whether baptized or not, initiatory catechesis for children and young people and continuing catechesis are closely linked with the catechetical endeavour of the Christian community, so that the particular Church may grow harmoniously and that its evangelizing activity may spring from authentic sources. "It is important also that the catechesis of children and young people, permanent catechesis and the

catechesis of adults should not be separate watertight compartments... it is important that their perfect complementarity be fostered". (219)

159. Groups play an important function in the development processes of people. The same is true of catechesis, both for children where it fosters a rounded sociability, and for young people where groups are practically a vital necessity for personality formation. The same is true of adults where they promote a sense of dialogue and sharing as well as a sense of Christian co-responsibility.

National Directory for Catechesis (NDC) USCCB 2005

48. It invites and enables adults "to acquire an attitude of conversion to the Lord." This attitude views the Christian life as a gradual transformation in Christ, in which the Christian takes on the mind of Christ, trusts in the Father's love, accepts the Spirit's guidance in searching out and obeying God's will, and seeks holiness of life within the Church. It fosters baptismal spirituality in which the Christian's faith in Jesus is continuously deepened through participation in the sacraments, the works of charity and justice, and prayer life of the Church.

Catechesis for adults helps them to make "a conscious and firm decision to live the gift and choice of faith through the membership in the Christian community." It fosters active participation in the Church as she is realized in families, small faith-based communities, parishes, dioceses, and the communion of saints. It helps adults to develop a deeper sense of their cooperation with the Holy Spirit for the mission of the Church in the world and for her internal life as well.

Catechesis for adults helps them to become "more willing and able to be a Christian disciple in the world." It enables adult disciples to accept their rightful place in the Church's mission to evangelize, to hear the cry for justice, to promote unity among Christians, and to bear witness to the salvation won by Jesus Christ for all.

[Guadium et Spes \(GS\)](#), Vatican II Pastoral Constitution 1965

50. Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the begetting and educating of children. Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute very substantially to the welfare of their parents. The God Himself Who said, "it is not good for man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18) and "Who made man from the beginning male and female" (Matt. 19:4), wishing to share with man a certain special participation in His own creative work, blessed male and female, saying: "Increase and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). Hence, while not making the other purposes of matrimony of less account, the true practice of conjugal love, and the whole meaning of the family life which results from it, have this aim: that the couple be ready with stout hearts to cooperate with the love of the Creator and the Savior. Who through them will enlarge and enrich His own family day by day.

Parents should regard as their proper mission the task of transmitting human life and educating those to whom it has been transmitted. They should realize that they are thereby cooperators with the love of God the Creator, and are, so to speak, the interpreters of that love. Thus they will fulfil their task with human and Christian responsibility, and, with docile reverence toward God, will make decisions by common counsel and effort. Let them thoughtfully take into account both their own welfare and that of their children, those already born and those which the future may bring. For this accounting they need to reckon with both the material and the spiritual conditions of the times as well as of their state in life. Finally, they should consult the interests of the family group, of temporal society, and of the Church herself. The parents themselves and no one else should ultimately make this judgment in the sight of God. But in their manner of acting, spouses should be aware that they cannot proceed arbitrarily, but must

always be governed according to a conscience dutifully conformed to the divine law itself, and should be submissive toward the Church's teaching office, which authentically interprets that law in the light of the Gospel. That divine law reveals and protects the integral meaning of conjugal love, and impels it toward a truly human fulfillment. Thus, trusting in divine Providence and refining the spirit of sacrifice,(12) married Christians glorify the Creator and strive toward fulfillment in Christ when with a generous human and Christian sense of responsibility they acquit themselves of the duty to procreate. Among the couples who fulfil their God-given task in this way, those merit special mention who with a gallant heart and with wise and common deliberation, undertake to bring up suitably even a relatively large family.(13)

62. Although the Church has contributed much to the development of culture, experience shows that, for circumstantial reasons, it is sometimes difficult to harmonize culture with Christian teaching. These difficulties do not necessarily harm the life of faith, rather they can stimulate the mind to a deeper and more accurate understanding of the faith. The recent studies and findings of science, history and philosophy raise new questions which effect life and which demand new theological investigations. Furthermore, theologians, within the requirements and methods proper to theology, are invited to seek continually for more suitable ways of communicating doctrine to the men of their times; for the deposit of Faith or the truths are one thing and the manner in which they are enunciated, in the same meaning and understanding, is another.(12) In pastoral care, sufficient use must be made not only of theological principles, but also of the findings of the secular sciences, especially of psychology and sociology, so that the faithful may be brought to a more adequate and mature life of faith.

52. 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. At the same time no pressure, direct or indirect, should be put on the young to make them enter marriage or choose a specific partner.

Thus the family, in which the various generations come together and help one another grow wiser and harmonize personal rights with the other requirements of social life, is the foundation of society. All those, therefore, who exercise influence over communities and social groups should work efficiently for the welfare of marriage and the family. Public authority should regard it as a sacred duty to recognize, protect and promote their authentic nature, to

shield public morality and to favor the prosperity of home life. The right of parents to beget and educate their children in the bosom of the family must be safeguarded. Children too who unhappily lack the blessing of a family should be protected by prudent legislation and various undertakings and assisted by the help they need.

Christians, redeeming the present time⁽¹³⁾ and distinguishing eternal realities from their changing expressions, should actively promote the values of marriage and the family, both by the examples of their own lives and by cooperation with other men of good will. Thus when difficulties arise, Christians will provide, on behalf of family life, those necessities and helps which are suitably modern. To this end, the Christian instincts of the faithful, the upright moral consciences of men, and the wisdom and experience of persons versed in the sacred sciences will have much to contribute.

Lumen Gentium (LG), Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution 1964

41. Furthermore, married couples and Christian parents should follow their own proper path (to holiness) by faithful love. They should sustain one another in grace throughout the entire length of their lives. They should imbue their offspring, lovingly welcomed as God's gift, with Christian doctrine and the evangelical virtues. In this manner, they offer all men the example of unwearying and generous love; in this way they build up the brotherhood of charity; in so doing, they stand as the witnesses and cooperators in the fruitfulness of Holy Mother Church; by such lives, they are a sign and a participation in that very love, with which Christ loved His Bride and for which He delivered Himself up for her.^(11*) A like example, but one given in a different way, is that offered by widows and single people, who are able to make great contributions toward holiness and apostolic endeavor in the Church. Finally, those who engage in labor-and frequently it is of a heavy nature- should better themselves by their human labors. They should be of aid to their fellow citizens. They should raise all of society, and even creation itself, to a better mode of existence. Indeed, they should imitate by their lively charity, in their joyous hope and by their voluntary sharing of each others' burdens, the very Christ who plied His hands with carpenter's tools and Who in union with His Father, is continually working for the salvation of all men. In this, then, their daily work they should climb to the heights of holiness and apostolic activity.

31. The term laity is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in holy orders and those in the state of religious life specially approved by the Church. These faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world.

What specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature. It is true that those in holy orders can at times be engaged in secular activities, and even have a secular profession. But they are by reason of their particular vocation especially and professedly ordained to the sacred ministry. Similarly, by their state in life, religious give splendid and striking testimony that the

world cannot be transformed and offered to God without the spirit of the beatitudes. But the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven. In this way they may make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity. Therefore, since they are tightly bound up in all types of temporal affairs it is their special task to order and to throw light upon these affairs in such a way that they may come into being and then continually increase according to Christ to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer.

[Adult Catechesis in the Christian Community](#) Intn'l Council for Catechesis 1990

[Were not our Hearts Burning Within Us](#), USCCB 1999