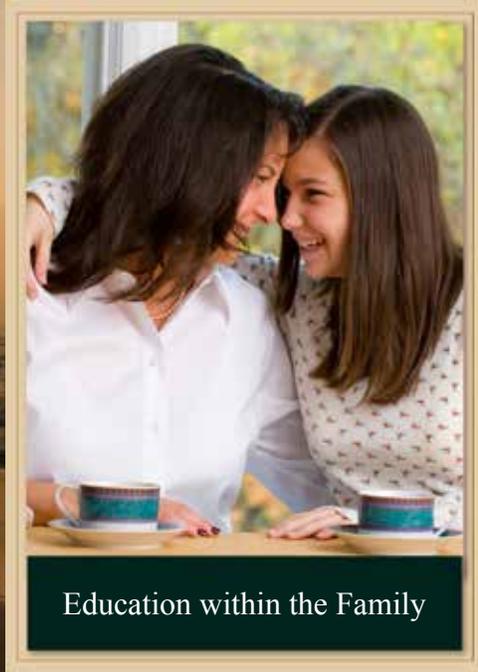


A Way of Life: Education within the Family



Education within the Family

The[♂]ology
of the BO[♀]dy for families
& single people
plus Family Chastity Formation in Virtue & Purity of Heart

Universal Truths about Human Sexuality for People of All Ages
With extensive references to the official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church

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Chapter Five

The School of the Home: God's Plan for Education in the Family

Parents on a Mission from God

236 God gave parents the mission of procreating and educating their children in love. Parental love comes directly from the heart of God the Father, and therefore the Church teaches that parental love must be the source, inspiration, norm, guide, and model for all educational activity both within and outside the family.²⁰¹ This also means that, in the absence of parental love, educational activity loses its original meaning, purpose, and, as it were, its very soul.

237 The Church is very clear in its message that fathers and mothers educating their children in the family home is the normal and preeminent method of Catholic education, since it is a vocation and mission given to them by God: "The family environment is thus *the normal and usual place* for forming children and young people to consolidate and exercise the virtues of charity, temperance, fortitude and chastity. As the domestic church, the family is *the school of the richest humanity*."²⁰²

238 Unfortunately, modern methods of education and even procreation are being carried out in the absence of parental love, and this situation has been accepted as normal by many people. God's plan and truth must once again be proclaimed as the norm, simply stated, that the family home and parental love are just as indispensable in procreation as they are in the education of children. The Church teaches that a father and mother's mission in education is intimately connected to their chaste love in the transmission of human life, and that they have an inalienable right and duty to teach their children. This responsibility cannot be entirely delegated to or usurped by others, except in the case of physical or psychological impossibility.²⁰³

239 God has commissioned and equipped parents with unique and special graces they alone possess, so they can have great confidence in their ability to educate their children in love. They are "rich in an educative potential which no one else possesses. In a unique way they know their own children; they know them in their unrepeatable identity and by experience

²⁰¹ Cf. FC, 36.

²⁰² TMHS, 48.

²⁰³ Ibid., 41.

they possess the secrets and the resources of true love.”²⁰⁴

Motherly and Fatherly Love in the Early Years of Life

240 A common misconception about chastity formation is that it should begin at puberty when young boys and girls begin to mature physically, emotionally, and psychologically. However, the Church is in agreement with modern science that the most influential years of chastity formation begin in infancy and early childhood, “and perhaps also during the prenatal stage, because children’s deep emotional patterns are established in these phases.”²⁰⁵

241 Deep emotional patterns are ingrained within a child during these early years as they absorb the affection given to them and deeply internalize the emotional climate that prevails between the mother and father and within the home. Since a child’s identity is determined in large part by how he is loved, it is particularly important to have both parents physically providing reassuring affection to one another and to the child.²⁰⁶

242 Of course, no marriage or home is perfect, and most children will experience, in varying degrees, some lack of affection because of the physical absence of a parent or a lack of serenity in the home for various reasons.

Depending on the severity, this can cause emotional and affective disturbances in children which can seriously upset their adolescence and sometimes mark them for life.²⁰⁷

243 The best way to prevent privations and imbalances of affection between a husband and wife and a parent and child is for a loving husband to support the presence of a mother in the heart of the home. This also provides an example of love for children to follow:

A mother who values her maternal vocation and her place in the home greatly helps develop the qualities of femininity and motherhood in her daughters, and sets a clear, strong and noble example of womanhood for her sons. A father, whose behaviour is inspired by masculine dignity without “machismo”, will be an attractive model for his sons, and inspire respect, admiration and security in his daughters.²⁰⁸

244 An atmosphere of affection, security, and trust will open the hearts of parents to one another and to their children and foster loving communication or dialogue within the family. This dialogue is the very heart of chastity formation. Dialogue means that parents respect their children as a gift of God, be present and available to them, and place themselves at the child’s level so, eye to eye, they can speak and listen to one another in love. Career-oriented parents, in particular, must realize that their children are more important than

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

²⁰⁷ TMHS, 51. Definition of affective: expressions of affection, love, feelings and emotions.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

work, entertainment, and social position. By being available and ready to listen, they will help their children channel their anxieties and aspirations correctly, reason and reflect with greater wisdom.²⁰⁹

245 The parents' presence and example of affection, serenity, and loving dialogue will help children be better disposed to live the moral truths they see practiced in their parents' life. Knowing they are loved, and seeing their parents' love for one another, children will have a serenity and confidence that overcomes all fear. Love strengthens and refines the intellect, the will, and the emotions, making it easier to reject everything that could degrade or devalue the gift of human sexuality.²¹⁰

Home Education in Modesty and Moral Virtue

246 St. Maria Goretti is a modern example of a child well-formed in chastity by her parents. Maria was exceptionally well-trained in virtue at home by her mother. Although Maria's mother had no formal education, her maternal way of teaching was filled with love and the grace of God. Maria learned and practiced all the virtues essential for preserving and protecting the holiness of her body as a temple of the Holy Spirit, even to the point of dying rather than sinning. At twelve, a young man tried to rape her, but she resisted saying, "No, no, it's a sin!" Enraged, the young man stabbed her repeatedly. On her death bed, Maria forgave her attacker hoping he might one day get to heaven. Years

later, he did repent, her mother forgave him, and together they attended Maria's canonization as a saint and virgin martyr.

247 Maria's mother may not have been able to read Church documents, but, by grace, she carried out Church teaching in an exemplary manner and is an excellent role model for parents in training a child in modesty within the home.

248 St. Maria Goretti's attacker was a young man exposed to pornography at an early age in the early 1900s. When he repented of his actions and reflected on his early life, he clearly saw that exposure to pornography was a primary cause of his moral deterioration, which led to the attempted rape and murder of an innocent girl. Most young people today are inundated with much worse material on a daily basis, often within the family home. With moral deterioration everywhere, the Church urges parents not to just avoid evil, but to go on the offensive and be proactive by providing a positive education in virtue, self-control, and sacrifice:

Aware of this and of the real difficulties that exist for young people in many countries today, especially when social and moral deterioration is present, parents are urged *to dare to ask for more and to propose more*. They cannot be satisfied with avoiding the worst – that their children do not take drugs or commit crimes. They will have to be committed to educating them in the true values of the person, renewed by the virtues of faith, hope and love: the values

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 51.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 52.

of freedom, responsibility, fatherhood and motherhood, service, professional work, solidarity, honesty, art, sport, the joy of knowing they are children of God, hence brothers and sisters of all human beings, etc.²¹¹

249 Chastity is rooted in self-control, which is gained by the exercise of such virtues as modesty, temperance, and respect for self and neighbor.²¹² Practicing self-control, while at the same time redirecting energy to acts of virtue and self-giving love, helps a child to “live in an orderly way, to make personal sacrifices in a spirit of love for God, self-respect, and generosity towards others, without stifling feelings and tendencies, but channeling them into a virtuous life.”²¹³

250 A spirit of self-sacrifice for others must be lived out within the home to overcome the culture of self-indulgence and the spirit of the world which promotes materialism, consumerism, individualism, hedonism, and selfishness. The Church asserts that parents need to educate their children with a correct attitude of freedom with regard to material goods by adopting a simple and austere life-style and by teaching that a person is more precious for what he is than for what he has through acts of service to the poor and those in most need.²¹⁴

251 Chastity and modesty take root in a home dedicated to reverence for the sacred dignity of the human body:

*The practice of decency and modesty in speech, action and dress is very important for creating an atmosphere suitable for the growth of chastity, but this must be well motivated by respect for one’s own body and the dignity of others. Parents, as we have said, should be watchful so that certain immoral fashions and attitudes do not violate the integrity of the home, especially through misuse of the *mass media*...” because “... there are many shows and publications abounding in all sorts of violence with a kind of bombardment of messages that undermine moral principles.”²¹⁵*

252 Impurity in many forms invades the family home, and the Church admonishes parents not to abandon their watchfulness and responsibility to protect and educate their children: “‘Evasion of this duty is made easy by the presence of television and of printed materials in the home. These occupy the time for children and young people.’ ...Another circumstance that facilitates this is the fact that both parents are busy with their work, in and outside the home. ‘There is the duty...to protect the young from the aggressions they are subjected to by the media. May no one shirk from this duty by using the excuse that he or

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 55.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 58.

²¹⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, 60.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

she is not involved'. 'Parents as recipients must actively ensure the moderate, critical, watchful and prudent use of the media.'²¹⁶

253 Chastity is formed well in a home with a deep respect for personal privacy, particularly in regard to the body and sexual development. From the time of infancy, privacy of the body should be respected within the home, teaching that our most intimate selves must be veiled and treasured as sacred. In this way, a young person will learn that his or her body is a sacred gift of God, a temple of the Holy Spirit, to be preserved in virginity until it is unveiled only and exclusively to one's spouse in marriage. The Church says: "Respect for *privacy* must be considered in close connection with decency and modesty, which spontaneously defend a person who refuses to be considered and treated like an object of pleasure instead of being respected and loved for himself or herself. If children or young people see that their legitimate privacy is respected, then they will know that they are expected to show the same attitude towards others."²¹⁷

Establishing Healthy Relationships

254 Chastity formation in the family will not be successful by only using negative reprimands and the threat of negative punishments. The Church states that parents must be proactive

in helping their children, with a lot of positive encouragement, to love others in purity as brothers and sisters of our one Father: "Children, adolescents and young people should be taught how to enter into healthy relationships with God, with their parents, their brothers and sisters, with their companions of the same or the opposite sex, and with adults."²¹⁸

255 Healthy relationships require careful cultivation and an ability to manage one's emotions and feelings. Children will develop healthy friendships when parents invest, as the Church asks, in an "education of one's spirit, one's sensitivity, and one's feelings. The attitude toward other persons depends largely on the way spontaneous feelings toward them are handled, the way some feelings are cultivated and others are controlled. Chastity as a virtue is never reduced to merely being able to perform acts conformed to a norm of external behaviour. Chastity requires activating and developing the dynamisms of nature and grace."²¹⁹ With the grace of God, parents and children together can build up one another in love and radiate this love in building up pure and holy relationships outside the home.

The Importance of Family Associations to Assist Parents

256 In their mission to educate their children within the home, parents are encouraged and

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 57.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 53.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

free to unite together to form or join Catholic associations²²⁰ with parents of like mind to support one another in living the Catholic faith and to foster chastity in marriage and family life. Sharing personal experiences, forming friendships, developing chastity formation aids, and helping to educate other parents to fulfill their rights and duties in forming their children in purity and holiness are an important part of building up a culture of life and civilization of love.

257 Forming or joining Catholic associations of parents is a viable means to both defend the family against damaging forms of sex education and to promote true Catholic chastity formation assistance to other parents to give them confidence and support in educating their children: “Frequently parents are not lacking in awareness and effort, but they are quite alone, defenceless and often made to feel they are wrong. They need understanding, but also support and help by groups, associations and institutions....”²²¹ Therefore, “it is recommended that *parents associate with other parents*, not only in order to protect, maintain or fill out their own role as primary educators of their children, especially in the area of education for love, but also to fight against damaging forms of sex education and to ensure that their children will be educated according to Christian principles and in a way that is consonant with their personal development.”²²²

258 Within the Church community, the path of one family cultivating chastity formation will naturally intersect and join together with the path of other families who are on the same road to our heavenly Father. Family associations are an important part of God’s plan for education since just as “Chastity represents an eminently personal task; it also involves a *cultural effort*.”²²³ Catholic associations of families, which assist parents in carrying out their mission in God’s plan for education within the family, are at the forefront of building up a new culture of life and serve to illuminate the path to holiness that God is calling all families to walk.

259 The Catholic Church is the family of God, and its evangelical witness is dependent in large part on the vitality of its individual households or families who strive to live the faith in the midst of an often alien and hostile world.²²⁴ The Church is clear that family associations are the most effective way to promote, support, protect, and defend authentic Catholic teaching on marriage and family life; and these associations should be active in every parish:

The parish should be a “family of families”, helping in every way possible to nourish the spiritual life of parents and children through prayer, the word of God, the sacraments, and the witness of holiness and charity. Bishops and priests should be eager to

²²⁰ Cf. Code of Canon Law, 298, 299.

²²¹ TMHS, 113.

²²² Ibid., 114.

²²³ CCC, 2344.

²²⁴ Cf. Ibid., 1655.

help and encourage families in every way, and should give their support to groups and associations which promote family life. While it is important that the local Church respond to the needs of people in problem situations, pastoral planning should also give adequate attention to the needs of ordinary families seeking to live up to their vocation. These families are the backbone of society and the hope of the Church: the principal promoters of Christian family life are couples and families themselves, who have a special responsibility to be servants of other couples and families.²²⁵

260 In 1981, Pope John Paul II called bishops, priests, and parents to establish and promote family associations at the parish level as the most effective way to provide pastoral care directly to families and children: “Animated by a true apostolic spirit, this assistance from family to family will constitute one of the simplest, most effective and most accessible means for transmitting from one to another those Christian values which are both the starting point and goal of all pastoral care.”²²⁶

261 The *Pontifical Council for the Family* said: “Families joined together in the parishes, institutions and different forms of association, help create a social atmosphere in which responsible love will be healthy.”²²⁷ Family associations, which are faithful to Catholic teaching on sexuality, help parents provide

chastity formation within the home, help couples prepare for marriage, and help families establish social relationships rooted in honorable courtship and marriage.

262 Parents and families in associations powerfully assist one another in successfully defending and carrying out their mission, rights, and duties in the area of chastity formation:

In fulfilling a ministry of love to their own children, parents should enjoy the support and cooperation of the other members of the Church. The rights of parents must be recognized, protected and maintained, not only to ensure solid formation of children and young people, but also to guarantee the right order of cooperation and collaboration between parents and those who can help them in their task. Likewise, in parishes or apostolates, clergy and religious should support and encourage parents in striving to form their own child.²²⁸

263 God’s plan for education in human sexuality is that it take place within the family. Education in sexuality involves the delicate and intimate core of a child’s personality; therefore, parents cannot be replaced in their mission of carefully cultivating a right understanding and expression of sexuality in their children. To accomplish this goal, parents will find it necessary to band together, not only to create a wider culture of life and chaste love, but

²²⁵ Address of John Paul II to the Bishops of the Church in the States of Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota (USA) on their *Ad Limina* visit (June 6, 1998), 5.

²²⁶ FC, 69.

²²⁷ Pontifical Council for the Family, *Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage* (May 13, 1996), 31.

²²⁸ TMHS, 148.

also to take up arms against associations and organizations which work against them and their children:

In the face of what hedonistic groups propose, especially in affluent societies, it is very important to present young people with the ideals of human and Christian solidarity and concrete ways of being committed in Church associations, movements and voluntary Catholic and missionary activities.²²⁹

It is recommended that parents associate with other parents, not only in order to protect, maintain or fill out their own role as the primary educators of their children, especially in the area of education for love, but also to fight against damaging forms of sex education and to ensure that their children will be educated according to Christian principles and in a way that is consonant with their personal development.²³⁰

264 Family associations, especially associations of family prayer, will support parents in living and defending the Catholic faith within the family and enable these families to be a beacon of light and hope in the midst of a culture of impurity and death. Associations at the parish level will help parents, and those called to marriage, to fulfill their mission of responsible procreation and education within

the home, according to the teachings of the Church.

265 The blessings and benefits of participating in family associations are many. Families united together in the true faith create a wholesome environment, positive socialization, and offer better role models for their children. Children and young people will be provided with a better peer influence, so that chaste friendships, honorable courtship, and holy marriages can develop.

266 Family associations help parents to be more vigilant, communicate with one another, and take concerted action regarding the use of mass media in their homes, schools, and communities as well as find strength in numbers to take action in defense of purity. Parents can organize to protect and defend their rights and duties as primary educators within educational institutions and fight against destructive forms of sex education.

267 Most importantly, family associations help parents fulfill their mission of love, to lead their spouse and family to holiness and eternal life with God. Especially at the parish level, family associations help all family members deepen their participation in the sacramental, liturgical, and devotional prayer life of the Church enabling them to grow in grace and in the supernatural virtues of faith, hope, and charity.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 106.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

Summary Points

268 God's plan for education is the "school of the home," and He established parental love as the source, inspiration, norm, guide, and model for all educational activity within and outside the family.

269 The parents' God-given mission of education is intimately connected to their chaste love in the transmission of human life, and so the responsibility to educate their children in love cannot be entirely delegated to or usurped by others, except in the case of physical or psychological impossibility.

270 The most influential years of chastity formation begin in infancy and early childhood, and even during the prenatal stage, since deep emotional patterns are established in the personality of the child during these years.

271 A father and mother's affectionate love and presence in the home creates an atmosphere

of security and trust that opens hearts to healthy dialogue within the family. The parent's loving words and example is the heart of chastity formation.

272 Home education in modesty, moral virtue, and self-control underlies chastity.

273 Respect for personal privacy and reverence for the sacredness of the body teaches children that the most intimate self must be veiled, treasured as a holy gift to be given only to God or to one's spouse in marriage.

274 Catholic family associations offer parents the assistance of other parents, families, and friends to develop healthy, chaste relationships and a culture of life.

275 Family associations of prayer and catechesis at the parish level are the most effective way to provide pastoral care and direct assistance to parents to help them in their mission as the primary educators of their children.

