

## Chapter Two

### *The Literature Review*

*Those who have given life to children and have enriched them  
with the gift of Baptism have the duty continually to nourish it.  
(General Directory for Catechesis 1997, #177)*

The framework of this paper lies with the understanding that “the real motivating forces in a child’s life, which become the child’s real religion, are taught all day long in the home even though parents may not realise they are teaching religion” (Girzone 1989, p.8). Over the years much has been written on the religious education of children within the Catholic school context. There has been much less written about how faith is nurtured within the home (Morse 1996).

### **Background**

Dolores Curran (1978) in her book, *In the beginning there were parents*, shares her perspective as to why Catholic Americans have lost their confidence and ability to pass on their faith to their children. She comments that in the past, one’s faith was not a private matter but one that was embedded in daily life. “They spread the Good News from generation to generation as easily as they planted and harvested the seed” (Curran 1978, p.5). She points out that these people were not highly educated and had no formal faith education yet they lived their faith and were able to pass the faith traditions to their children. The whole culture was centred on the life of the Church community and this went unchanged for many centuries. As immigration was opened, many of these people moved out of the villages of Europe to a new world. Being able to adapt to a new land was at times difficult because it was counter to the culture that once was so sacred to them. Now they had to embrace a new culture in order to belong. For many the Church was a place to make sense of this new culture and at the same time preserve some of their faith traditions. The Catholic Church took it upon itself to preserve the faith in the new culture by providing Catholic schools for the religious education of Catholic children (Curran 1978, p.5). As a result the Catholic school became the centre for faith development of children and not the home.

Curran (1978, p.6) proposes that with the development of Catholic schools, what began to emerge unintentionally, no doubt, was the belief that the religious sisters and brothers were the experts in teaching about the faith. Faith was no longer seen

as a lived experience which was modelled firstly in the home as it had been for the previous generation. Faith quickly became associated with doctrines and teachings of the Church, and parents no longer saw themselves as the primary educators of faith of their children, as that was now the responsibility of the Catholic school and of the parish. As a result, “eventually parents forgot how to pass on the Word to their children. They forgot how to pray together as a family. They became embarrassed to sing together. They no longer spoke about God or religion comfortably” (Curran 1978, p.6). In other words the “tribal culture” where once religious beliefs were expressed as part of the overall social group was now slowly becoming extinct (Doherty 1997; Drane and Drane 1995; Finely and Finley 1995). Australia, even though more recent in foundation as a country, has a similar history to that of the American experience as described by Curran (1978). In the following pages the Australian perspective will be further developed.

## **Approach to the Literature**

The literature review will be approached from four perspectives: historical, theological, sociological, and pastoral. Within each perspective is a strong foundation for family catechesis. The historical perspective will provide the background on how the Church over time has viewed the role of parents in the nurturing of their children. A brief account will be given of the various Church documents which have influenced and shaped the theology and understanding of the Church on the role of the parents in relation to the faith of their children. The theological perspective explores relevant Church documents since the Second Vatican Council which have renewed and reformed the understanding of the role of parents as the first and foremost educators of their children. The sociological perspective presents the influences on society which have impinged on the family, the role of the family in the faith and religious development of children. The emphasis in the final part of this Chapter is on the pastoral considerations which are crucial to the nurturing the faith of children within the context of family life.

## **Historical Perspective**

Throughout history, the Catholic Church has regarded the family as the most influential factor in shaping and nurturing the faith of each generation. Within the family, parents are considered as the first and primary educators of their children in faith (Proctor 1996, Gallagher 1982).

*For the first 1500 years of the Church's history, most Christians lived their faith primarily in the everyday-ness of family life. They took it for granted that the family was the most basic form of faith community.*

*(Finley 1993, p.37)*

The discussion in this section concentrates on issues pertinent to the historical development of the nurturing of faith within the home. It examines the influence of the Judaeo-Christian tradition in the understanding of the home as the place for nurturing faith; the influence of the reformation on the view of the role of the family in the Catholic Church, and the response from the Council of Trent; and the influence of the introduction of compulsory education within Europe on the nurturing of faith within the home will also be outlined. Finally the renewal of the Second Vatican Council will be discussed along with the response from the Australian Church to parents in the role as faith nurturers.

### ***The Role of the Family within the Early Church***

The Christian understanding of the role of the family emerges from the Jewish tradition in which the family is seen as the first teacher of the faith. It is the home and not the synagogue that is the centre of religious life. In the Jewish tradition the home is the place for nurturing the faith and the parents are considered to be the primary catechists (Proctor 1996, Finley 1993; Gallagher 1982). "The primary teaching method is the observance of the rituals for the Sabbath and for special holidays or feast days" (Proctor 1996, p.43).

For the early Christians too, parents were the primary educators of their children. The home was the primary place where the early Christians met to pray and celebrate the Eucharist before they moved into Churches (Finley 1993, p.36). There are no clear guidelines in the New Testament that address the role of parents in teaching faith to their children (Proctor 1996, p.45). St Paul gives some instructions to the early Church of the role of parents in his writings to Timothy (1Tim 3:4 and 12). Paul outlines one traditional model of how most children learn their faith when he describes Timothy as possessing "a faith that lived first in your grandmother, Lois, and your mother, Eunice, and now, I am sure, lives in you" (cited in Proctor 1996, p.45). Proctor claims that "by this remark Paul implies that parents and grandparents play a significant role in the spiritual development of their children" (1996, p.45).

### *The First Centuries*

As the Church established itself in the first centuries there were still no specific guidelines addressing how parents were to instruct their children in the faith. What had been established was that “the Christian nurture of children was the parents’ fundamental duty, a duty which could not be delegated” (Westerhoff 1980, p.85). So, “during the first five centuries of the Church there were three major educational influences on children; the family, the liturgy and the community” Gallagher (1982, p.166). These influences were consistent with the model being attributed to the Jewish tradition which had a well established system for teaching scriptures, moral behaviours, rituals, and values (Proctor 1996, p.44).

A movement is noted in the sixth century when St Augustine specifies a broadening of the parental role as the primary educators of the faith to include the godparents. The role of the godparent was significant in preparing and presenting the child for baptism. They were allocated the task of teaching children, who were old enough to answer for themselves, the foundational prayers such as the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer. If a child was not old enough to answer for themselves then the godparents would speak on their behalf. The instruction given by the sponsor or godparent took place in the home and it was assumed that it was not part of an organised program for religious instruction (Proctor 1996, p.46).

By the twelfth century, the responsibility of passing on the faith traditions of the Church was given to the godparents, as parents were seen to have neglected their God-given responsibility of preserving the faith (Westerhoff and Edwards 1981). The godparents had the responsibility for teaching children the basic formularies of the faith and “had the duty of inculcating the young with essential moral teachings of the Church” (Gatch 1981, p.88). This continued in a variety of ways within different communities until the sixteenth century. It is interesting to note that at the same time there was an emerging movement within the Church that saw “raising children and teaching them ... as a less important than [vocation] the spiritual disciplines of the celibate religious orders” (Proctor 1996, p.47).

### *The Reformation*

A major concern during the period of the Reformation was the perception that parents had continued to neglect their primary responsibility of educating their

children in the faith. The sixteenth century reformers, such as Martin Luther [1483–1546], founder of the German reformation, “looked to the family as the basic building block of human society” (Haugaard 1981, p.131). Reformers recognised once again that the parents were the primary educators of the faith and acknowledged that the best place for ‘religious instruction’ was within the context of the home. Luther went so far as to proclaim that “no one should become a father unless he is able to instruct his children ... so that he may bring up true Christians” (Westerhoff 1980, p.86). The translation of the scriptures and liturgies into the vernacular enabled people in the reformed Churches to access the scriptures that became the tool for religious instruction within the home. Luther developed his own catechism as the standard text for religious instruction, which all who were true to the faith were required to learn by rote; hence the role of the parents became more of a teaching role.

*The reformers, in general, held believing parents responsible for their children’s catechesis. ... Christian faith was to be nurtured in the home, not only by parental love and example, but also by explicit and systematic examination and exposition.*  
(Haugaard 1981, p.135)

However, disillusioned with the efforts of parents in carrying out their responsibility effectively, Luther then established schools in which children would learn the foundations of faith by studying the catechism (Haugaard 1981, p.137). In establishing his case for Christian nurture in the schools Luther remarks:

*Even if parents had the ability and the desire to do it [religious instruction] themselves, they have neither the time nor the opportunity for it, what with their other duties and the care of the household.*  
(Haugaard 1981, p.137)

### *The Council of Trent [1545–1563]*

The Catholic Church also had concerns about the neglect of families in passing on the faith traditions. At the Council of Trent [1545–1563] the Church saw the need to fight the rise of protestant popularity and to ensure the preservation of the Catholic faith. In an effort to address these problems, the Catholic Church took the opposite approach to that of the Protestant Churches. To ensure the preservation of the faith, new orders of religious men and women were instituted to run schools so that children could receive “proper” religious education outside the family. Two such groups were the Ursulines [1535] and the Jesuits [1540] (Bryce 1981, pp.211–213). Groups of laity emerged also whose main purpose was to provide organised religious instruction mainly on Sundays before or after Mass. The rise of

professional religious educators led to a situation where “in the mid sixteenth century, the parish was at the centre of religious life ... not the home. The Parish Priest replaced parents as the one ultimately responsible for teaching children about their faith” (Finely 1993, pp.36–37). “Since the Council of Trent [1545–1563] the Church has lost a family dimension in its understanding of religious life ... we have now relegated most of our religious life to the parish to the detriment of the family” (Finely and Finely 1995, p.13). In light of this movement, the family was no longer regarded as the place in which faith was nurtured. The prime responsibility for the religious development of children was now the responsibility of the emerging Catholic schools.

### ***The Introduction of Compulsory Education***

After the Council of Trent [1545-1563] until the late 1800s, life in Europe was changing rapidly. Universal schooling and compulsory education were introduced for children between the ages of seven and approximately twelve years in many European countries, such as Germany (1606), Denmark (1721), England (1802), France (1882) and some parts of America (1882) (Hall in Bryce 1981, p.206). With the emergence of schools the poor were becoming more educated and were able to be socially mobile, thus the middle class was growing (Bryce 1981, p.206).

With the event of compulsory education becoming more the norm, Church authorities became more persistent in preserving the faith. As the threat of state–run schools began to emerge, papal encyclicals concentrated on the importance of setting up Catholic schools with the purposes of preservation of the faith and the moral education of Catholic children. The catechism became the main text for formal religious instruction. Learning the catechism by rote became the main method of instruction in the faith. This method continued until the 1960s in the Catholic Church.

Pius IX, in his *Instruction of the Holy Office to the Bishops of the United States*, November 24, 1875 clearly stated that those who were responsible for teaching the faith were to preserve the Catholic teachings.

*[P]arish Priests and missionaries will teach the catechism with great attention and will take special care to explain the truths of the faith and of morals that are opposed by the incredulous and heterodox.*

(#63)

In the same document parents who did not send their children to Catholic schools were addressed. This group of parents was told that they could not celebrate the Sacrament of Penance and thus, as was the requirement of the time, were excluded from receiving the Eucharist.

*This instruction and this necessary Christian education of their children is often neglected by those parents who allow their children to frequent schools where it is impossible to avoid the loss of souls or who, notwithstanding the existence of a well-organised neighbouring Catholic school or the possibility of having children educated elsewhere in a Catholic school, entrust them to publics without sufficient reason and without having taken the necessary precautions to avoid danger of perversion; it is a well-known fact that, according to Catholic moral teaching, such parents, should they persist in their attitude, cannot receive absolution in the Sacrament of Penance.*

(#63)

This statement clearly shows a shift in the responsibility for the nurturing of faith from the home to the Catholic school, further emphasising the movement from home to Church.

Leo XIII in his encyclical *Officio Sanctissimo* (Common Duties and Interests) December 22, 1887 to the bishops of Bavaria, addressed the duties and rights of parents. The document “urges education of children under the auspices of Church warns against freemasonry” (Carlen 1990, p.49). It recognised parents as the educators of their children in faith, however, it also states that if they are unable to carry out this duty effectively then they were obliged to send their children to teachers authorised by the Church.

*Hence, let parents reflect that, while they are under the grave obligation to support their children, they have also the other much important duty of bringing them up in the nobler life that concerns the soul. If they themselves cannot ensure this, they must allow themselves to be substituted, but in such a manner that the children receive and learn the necessary religious doctrine from approved teachers.*

(*Officio Sanctissimo 1887, #112*)

In a later encyclical (Christian as Citizens) January 10, 1890, Leo XIII sums up the rights and duties of the parents. The encyclical acknowledges again that parents are the primary educators of the faith of their children. It calls parents to preserve the faith by instructing parents to protect their children from secular influences. The call of previous encyclicals to send children to a Catholic school is also reiterated.

*By nature parents have a right to training of their children, but with this added duty that the education and instruction of the child be in accord with the end of which, by, God's blessing, it was begotten. Therefore it is the duty of parents to make every effort to prevent any invasion of their rights in this matter, and to make absolutely sure that the education of the children remain under their own control keeping with their Christian duty, and above all to refuse to send them to those schools in which there is danger of imbibing the deadly poison of impiety.*  
(*Sapientiae Christiana* 1890, #42)

Parents, within this period of Church history, were instructed by the Church to have their children educated by religious within Catholic schools. Parents were no longer regarded as the first and foremost nurturers of the faith. The understanding of the early Church of the role of parents had been hijacked in this period by the Church's commitment to preserve the faith.

## **The Early Twentieth Century**

Entering the twentieth century, the theory of Horace Bushnell, an American religious educator in the Protestant Church, was drawing attention within Protestant circles. "For Bushnell, the true function of parenting was to nurture the faith that is already at work within children" (Proctor 1996, p.50). This new perspective claimed that children develop faith through the nurture of the family and the community of faith. Bushnell "tended to emphasise the catechesis of the individual in the context of the family, assisted by the insights of psychology and the general understanding of human nature and human development" (Booty 1981, p.280). "It is through our parental example that our children's faith is determined" (Bushnell in Westerhoff 1980, p.87). He opened the door to discovering how faith was actually passed on to children.

Meanwhile the Catholic Church also made an attempt to re-establish the understanding that the first educators of the faith are the parents. The Church maintained that the three influential societies necessary for the transmission of the faith were the family, the Church, and the State. Here family takes precedence over the State. In 1929 Pope Pius XI released what is considered to be one of the most significant pre-Vatican II documents of the 20th century on the discussion of the role of parents in the Christian education of their children. The encyclical, *Divini Illius Magistrii* (Education of the Redeemed Man) December 1929 "strongly stated the family's responsibility for the religious education of children" (Westerhoff 1980, p.88). In addressing *'those who educate'* the encyclical states:



*In the first place the Church's mission of education is in wonderful agreement with that of the family, for both proceed from God, and in a remarkably similar manner. God directly, in the natural order, fecundity, which is the principle of education of life, hence also the principle of education for life, together with authority, the principle order.*

*(Divini Illius Magistri 1929, #257)*

This encyclical was published in English under the title *The Christian Education of Youth* and became the authoritative statement on Catholic education (Fogarty 1959, p.385). Many scholars suggest that this encyclical was timely as it re-established within Catholicism the true Christian basis of education. With the event of state-run education systems which were thoroughly secular in many countries, the Christian way of being was seen to be under threat. Pius XI gave the world his new encyclical letter to “point out the dangers and to re-establish the true Christian basis of education” (Fogarty 1959, p.385). He also reminded parents that they were the first teachers and education would be efficacious in proportion to their teaching and example. “According to the divine plan, the parents are the first educators of their children ... parents should, therefore, give the best time they have at their disposal” (Divini Illius Magistri 1929, #379). This encyclical was to be the foundation of the Second Vatican Council’s document on Christian education, *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965).

However, even as late as 1951, many Church documents still echoed the fear that parents were neglecting their God-given responsibility of passing on the faith traditions of the Church to their children. Proctor remarks that at this time “the locus of religious education had almost totally shifted away from the family to the Church school with its formal and organised programs” (1996, p.50). In addressing the role of the educator at the Inter American Congress of Catholic Education August 15, 1951, educators were instructed “here is the first and very serious task incumbent on the Catholic educator of today: to make up for the deficiencies of home training” (The Image of God 1951, #547). In relation to parents, most documents at this point reflected mainly the role of parents as the ones to provide children with a healthy environment that will safeguard the children’s faith, religious and moral development so that the child would be able to take his or her place in society.

Until the Second Vatican Council, Catholic schools tended to assume dominant roles in the education of faith in such places as Australia and the United States. Parents were not fully trusted by the Church to adequately educate their children in

the truths of the faith and consequentially parents were becoming less involved in the faith development of their children.

## **History of Faith Education in Australia**

Faith education in Australia was heavily influenced by the trends which arose in both Europe (1600–1800) and the USA (1800). Australia was establishing itself as a colony when Europe was experiencing rapid change, revolutions, and unrest. In early Australian homes “the only provision for religious education for Catholic children was that which was provided by the parents. Some Catholic families met in each others’ homes to pray, sing and sustain each other in the faith” (Ryan and Malone 1996, p.31). These Catholics were poor and had to fight hard to keep their religion alive in a predominantly Protestant culture. Yet some new fears arose; “one of the greatest perceived threats was the new secular school system which, they [Australian bishops] believed, was designed to undermine the religious ethos of the Catholic people” (Dwyer 1996, p.1).

In Australia, as was true of most of Europe and America at this time, the purpose of the Catholic school was to “preserve the religious culture of the Catholic people [and] also to be a means of their rising from poverty in which so many of them found themselves” (Dwyer 1996, p.2). The Catholic schools in Australia had a closeness with the poor and were successful due to the hard work of both the members of religious congregations and of parents. Parents “in turn were promised a preservation of faith and, where possible, social mobility” (Dwyer 1996, p.2).

### *Education in Australia 1788–1900*

As State run schools began to surface, funding from the governments for Church run schools was slowly withdrawn. In 1872, in Victoria, an Act of Parliament abolished aid to Church schools. In 1880, in New South Wales, aid to Church schools was abolished through the Public Instruction Act. Eventually government aid to Church schools was withdrawn in all Australian colonies. Bishops within the Colony became concerned about the secular influence on the moral education of Catholic children and became more persistent in preserving the faith. To deal with this concern of the secular influence on Catholic children, the Catholic bishops issued a statement in 1869 making it clear to parents that Catholic children were to attend Catholic schools.

*The only schooling acceptable to Catholics ... was one which be conducted in a religious atmosphere that nourished the Catholic faith. Secular education of the kind offered in state schools was unacceptable.*

*(Dwyer and English 1988, p.57)*

With the elimination of government aid, the Catholic community was not able to pay the teachers a just salary, buildings were in need of repair and “there was not a great deal of parental interest in education” (Dwyer and English 1990, p.77). One way to cope with the financial burden was to replace teachers with religious sisters and brothers and they were “almost without exception from Ireland” (Turner 1992, p.162).

The decision was made to persevere with a Catholic system. In order to keep Catholic schools open enrolments were crucial. In 1885 in the First Plenary Council of Australian bishops relied on such documents as the Instruction of the Holy Office to the Bishops of the United States, November 24, 1875, (cf. pp.18–19) to threaten parents with refusal of Holy Communion if they chose to send their children to schools run by the state system. “Catholic parents were obliged to send their children to Catholic schools and those who sent their children to state schools without cause were to be denied absolution in the confessional” (Dixon 1996, p.6).

*In some dioceses, bishops gained from the Pope the right to offer rewards to the obedient Catholic laity, the elite, who could seek out those parents and whose children did not attend Catholic schools and urge them to see the error of their ways.*

*(Turner 1992, p.162)*

Furthermore, it was made explicit as a principle of the Provincial Council of 1844 that a primary or elementary school was to be established in every mission where there was a Priest (Fogarty 1959, p.309). The Second Plenary Council 1905 adopted the Penny Catechism as the religious syllabus for primary schools.

In some Australian colonies the bishop forbade Priests from visiting State schools as a protest to state school education. This meant that those children who for whatever reason were attending state schools and children who lived in isolated areas were not receiving any form of religious instruction outside the home. As it became more evident that these children were not being instructed in the faith some Priests and lay Catholics arranged a suitable place for these children to be instructed. Priests were asked to provide catechists to undertake this responsibility. In isolated areas children were instructed after Sunday Mass or at another suitable time.

### *Progress of Catholic Education in Australia 1900–1930s*

The twentieth century was a time of rapid expansion for the Australian Church. At the First Australian Catholic Congress 1900 the cardinal and bishops of the colonies continued to push for Catholic children to be educated in Catholic schools. The cardinal and bishops clearly stated that the “Christian education of a people cannot be accomplished at home and that therefore it must be accomplished in the school” (cited in Turner 1992, p.230). At this point, “parishes offered catechism classes in Sunday schools [for adults as well as children]. The aim was to have a common form of religious instruction between home, school and parish” (Ryan 1997, p.23). The use of the catechism meant that parents were able to participate in the education of their children and at the same time they too were being educated in the faith. “The simple catechism gave parents confidence that the interpretation of the faith was orthodox, answers were clear and accessible” (Ryan 1997, p.3).

The 1905 Victorian Education Act decreed that all teachers in Victoria had to be trained. In response to this decree a number of the teaching congregations established their own training colleges. At the same time the bishop ordered that Catholic schools conform to the standards laid down for the state. The Third Plenary Council 1905 repeated the injunction that the religious syllabus for primary schools was the Penny Catechism and this was reinforced again at the Fourth Plenary Council in 1937.

The population of the Catholic schools in the early to middle 20th century increased rapidly and many more Catholic schools were built throughout the country. Primary schools became the core of parish life. The Fourth Plenary Council made reference to the encyclical *Divini Illius Magistri* (1929). Pius XI reminded parents that they were the first teachers and education would be efficacious in proportion to their teaching and example. This point about the influence of the home was instantaneously taken up by the Australian bishops. It became a priority to educate girls for “the proper education of our females depends the spiritual and temporal welfare of the family and, by consequent necessity, that of society” (Bishop Shiel cited in Fogarty 1959, p.386). Consequently, the Fourth Plenary Council retained the 1869 prohibition of the sacraments against Catholic parents who sent their children to the state school to ensure that children were properly educated in the faith.

### *Religious Education of Children in Isolated Areas*

Despite all efforts made by the bishops, two large groups of Catholic children were not receiving any form of religious instruction. These were children who for whatever reason were attending the state schools and those who lived in isolated areas. Priests were asked by the bishops to provide catechists to undertake the religious instruction of these children. As this catechesis became difficult some bishops suggested that the families take on the role of catechist and educate their own children.

In Western Australia in 1923 Fr J.T. McMahon initiated a correspondence course known as '*Religion by Post*' for children living in isolated areas. Fr McMahon (1936, p.77) states that the main objective of the correspondence course "is communication with each child". His idea was to bring to Catholic parents and children some support and to assure them that the Church had not forgotten them. The scheme was carried out by the religious congregations. They would send a personal letter to each child monthly with an instruction. These instructions included ordinary prayers for the children to learn and the truths of the faith. Other Australian states began to run similar courses. By the end of 1935 in New South Wales, a year after it had been introduced in that state, 14,000 children had enrolled (Turner 1992, p.246).

In 1925 Fr McMahon introduced another initiative, the Religious Holiday Camps. The aim of the camps was "to provide a Catholic atmosphere for the children (Turner 1992, p.246). The camps occurred during the holidays when "children board in Convent Schools in country districts for two or three weeks, during which they are instructed and prepared for the reception of the Sacraments" (McMahon 1936, p.5). The Sacrament of Confirmation was also made available for those who were of age. The camps were a mixture of organised sport activities and time for instruction and prayer.

### *The Influx of Post War Immigration 1940–1962*

With the influx of immigration after the Second World War there was a notable increase in the Catholic population. In only a few years many Catholic schools had a larger number of immigrant children than children who were Australian born. This placed stresses on Catholic schools. Many parishes took it on themselves to build new classrooms and even new schools without government assistance. The aim was to provide for every Catholic child a place in a Catholic school. A further

problem noted by Dwyer and English (1990, p.82) was that the number of people entering the religious life was beginning to decline, especially in the 1960s, and thus once again the Catholic schools relied on lay teachers to staff the schools. The catechism continued to be the main tool for religious instruction. During this time the Catholic school was still the main educator of the faith for children and the Church still lamented that parents were not taking seriously their fundamental duty and obligation of educating their children.

## **The Influence of the Second Vatican Council [1962–1965]**

The Catholic Church was to experience a renewal through the efforts of the Second Vatican Council. The Second Vatican Council is seen by most Catholics as “the most important event in the life of the Catholic Church during the twentieth century. The Council has ... had a powerful impact on the human family throughout the world” (Joseph Cardinal Bernardin in Flannery 1996, p.xxii). Pope John XXIII “had observed the need to provide an update of Church practice and language to more adequately address the modern world” (Huebsch 1997, p.53).

In the renewal demanded by the Second Vatican Council the Church reclaimed the right of parents as the first and primary educators of the faith. The first document of the Second Vatican Council that referred to the family was *Lumen Gentium* (1964). Here the family is referred to as the “domestic Church” a concept which derived from the Jewish tradition in which the family is the central place for nurturing faith.

*The family is, so to speak, the domestic Church. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children.*

*(Lumen Gentium 1964, #11)*

The call for the family to be recognised as the domestic Church gave a renewed insight to the purpose of the role of the parents. The Catholic school had played the major role so far in educating the children in the faith. The Council wanted to emphasise that the nurturing of faith is more than the learning of religious facts in isolation from the experiences of life. The Council recognised the value of the traditions of the early Church in which the family together with the worshipping community were the main instruments for nurturing the faith.

*It is particularly significant that the Second Vatican Council discussed the family not in a separate document but in the context of all its Church documents. It's as if the Council said that if we are going to talk about the Church we must talk about family life too. Also, we can't talk about family life without talking about the Church.*

*(Finely and Finely 1995, p.13)*

Other early documents of the Second Vatican Council referred to the family as “the principal school of social virtues which is necessary to every society” (Gravissimum Educationis 1965, #3) and “the primary [basic] cell of society given by God himself (Apostolicam Actuositatem 1965, #11). The Council claimed that:

*The family is the place where different generations come together and help one another grow wiser and harmonise the right of the individuals with other demands of social life; as such it constitutes the basis of society.*

*(Gaudium et Spes 1965, #52)*

In re-establishing the understanding of the family as the ‘domestic Church’, the Council was strong in recognising that it is within the family that children come to understand their faith. The Second Vatican Council recalled that since parents have given life to their children God has entrusted them with the responsibility for the education of their children in faith. The Council proclaimed this role is of such importance that it cannot be adequately substituted as it is connected with the transmission of life.

*The role of the parents in education is of such importance that it is almost impossible to provide an adequate substitute.*

*(Gravissimum Educationis 1965, #3)*

The Church called the family the ideal place in which the faith of children is to be nurtured and nourished and a place conducive to promoting Christian values. The documents refer to the home as the first educational environment of children, and urge parents to set good Christian example to their children through living their own lives in a true Christian spirit. As these Christian values permeate through the life of the home they will become the norm for daily living.

*It is therefore the duty of the parent to create a family atmosphere inspired by love and devotion to God and their fellow-men which will promote an integral, personal and social education of their children.*

*(Gravissimum Educationis 1965, #3)*

This understanding of the role of the family in the life of the Church was reiterated in subsequent documents of Paul VI and John Paul II.

*The Christian Family, as the 'domestic Church', also makes up a natural and fundamental school for formation in the faith: father and mother receive from the sacrament of matrimony the grace and the ministry of Christian education of their children, before whom they bear witness and to whom they transmit both human and religious values.*

*(Christifideles Laici, 1989, #62)*

In the writings and speeches of John Paul II, the family emerges as a strong theme within the concerns of the Church. In an effort to raise the consciousness of parents of their privileged role in the Church he brings to mind the renewal of the Second Vatican Council in regard to the family. In *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), John Paul II considers the role of the Christian family in the modern world. "He sees the family's apostolate as being exercised in the first place within each individual family" (Gregory 1988, p.39). He emphasises that the parents have a God-given duty to educate their children in the faith because they are the bearers of life. He sees the family home as the first community children experience. It is within this community that they learn the meaning of love and in turn how to love others. *Familiaris Consortio* (1981) states clearly the Church's view about the family and society. On the family it states:

*The family, like the Church, ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates.*

*(Familiaris Consortio 1981, #42)*

John Paul II reminds parents that they are the ones entrusted with the raising and education of their children. One of the key ways parents nurture faith is through their witness of living the Gospel values.

*Through this witness families become tools for evangelisation. As family members accept the Gospel challenges and faith is nurtured and matures the document suggest that the family becomes 'an evangelising community'.*

*(Familiaris Consortio 1981, #52)*

In *Christifideles Laici* (1989), John Paul II reminds parents once again that their role in educating their children is irreplaceable and thus should be taken seriously and with care.

*The lay faithful's duty to society primarily begins in marriage and in the family. This duty can only be fulfilled adequately with the conviction of the unique and irreplaceable value that the family has in the development of society and the Church herself.*

*(Christifideles Laici 1989, #40)*



*The Christian Family*, in *The Teaching of John Paul II* (1990), contains many dialogues delivered by the Pope on the role of parents as prime educators of their children in the faith. Most of the dialogues are taken from John Paul II's most important document on this issue, *Familiaris Consortio* (1981). One of the dialogues was given at the visit of John Paul II to Australia in 1986. At his homily at Belmont Park Racecourse, Perth, in Western Australia (22–23 November 1986), the Pope restated the role in the family in the life of the Church by quoting extensively from *Familiaris Consortio* (1981) and early Vatican II documents already discussed in this section.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994, #2223–2226), while making no new contributions, reaffirms and restates what had been presented in earlier documents on the role and mission of the family in the contemporary Church. The *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997), the most recent document addressing the role of the family as the source of nurture of the faith in the life of the Church, refers to the family as “an environment or means of growth in faith” (#255). It again reminds the Church that parents are the primary educators in the faith and that the community, which the family forms, is a domestic Church where “the Gospel is transmitted and from which it extends” (#255). This document calls the family to catechesis rather than religious education as mandated in *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979). These two documents will be further discussed in the theological perspective.

### *Outcomes from the Second Vatican Council for Australia*

With the renewed spirit of the Second Vatican Council, it became obvious that the Church recognised that most of the faith development of a person did not take place in the school or the parish but rather in the home (Ryan 1997; Flynn 1979). For countries such as Australia and the United States of America this was a new way of being Church. Until this point Australia and the United States of America had poured money and effort into Catholic schools in order to preserve the faith. After the renewed call by the Church to reclaim the right of parents as the first and primary educators of the faith, the Catholic Church in the United States took note of the influence of the family on the faith development of the child. The bishops chose to redirect the resources of the Church from the Catholic schools into parish-based catechetical programs, appointing Directors of Religious Education (DRE) to oversee the programs. These programs were catechetical in nature, addressing not only the needs of the children but also the needs of the parents as suggested in the documents on education and catechesis of the Second Vatican Council. With this

redirection of energy came a decline in the numbers of new Catholic schools in America. “No new Catholic schools have been established in the past twenty years ... there has been no serious attempt to re-establish US Catholic Schools to the same extent as before” (Ryan 1997, p.149).

The bishops in Australia, on the other hand, chose to keep the Catholic schools as the prime source of religious education. Graham observes “the Australian Church kept improving its Catholic schools and only recently returned to the family question in earnest” (1994, p.4). He also argues strongly that because most of the resources of the Australian Church are being poured into the Catholic school system little time and few resources are being made available “to provide support and infrastructure for family religious education.” Ryan concludes, “this neglect of family education [in Australia] ignored the official Church directives which gave primacy to families in education” (1997, p.147). The Church in Australia did not relinquish the dominant role of educating children in the faith from the Catholic schools.

It was not until 1970s that the Catholic Church in Australia recognised a variety of family concerns pertaining to family life, one of which was family catechesis.

*During the 1970's in response to changing pastoral patterns, social changes in the family, re-finding of the parental role in religious education, family ministry, as it was called, grew in significance.*

*(Treston 1982, p.20)*

Different styles of family catechesis were initiated, resources were developed, and the focus of sacrament programmes became family-based giving an impetus to family catechesis. However, the Church in Australia was not successful in sustaining such an initiative. Many dioceses made some attempts but family catechesis did not become an established ministry.

In summary, throughout its history the Church has assumed a diversity of positions regarding the role of parents as the prime educators of the faith of their children. From time to time the emphasis changed from assigning a significant role to parents and the family to other times when teaching responsibility rested on lay persons, such as godparents and then the Catholic school. The early Church based its understanding of the role of the family on the Hebrew heritage that faith is taught first within the context of the home. By the Middle Ages the Church authority was becoming disillusioned by the neglect of parents in their duty of passing on the faith

tradition to their children and therefore gave godparents responsibility for teaching children the basic rules of the faith. For the Churches of the Reformation the focus shifted to the instruction of adults. At the same time the Catholic Church was consumed with the notion of preserving the faith and this gave rise to religious orders to educate children in the faith outside the home. The Catholic school continued to be the main educator of children in the faith. This practice continued until the renewal of the Second Vatican Council which urged the Church to reclaim the role of parents as the primary educators of the faith of their children.

## **Theological Perspective**

A second perspective that will be explored in this Chapter is the theological understanding with regard to family catechesis. “One of the objectives of family catechesis is to enable families to discover that spirituality is inherent in family life. Spirituality in this context refers to the ... recognition of the extraordinary in the ordinary, the presence of God” (Gallagher 1982, p.167). Over the years much has been written and debated in the legal arena about the rights and duties of family, of parents and of children. For Christians the duties and rights are “primarily theological, and their theological formation is clear: ‘Follow me’ (Mark 1:17) that is, model your life after mine” (Lawler 2002, p.204). The call for parents to be the first educators of the faith of their children is based on Christian action more than “pious Christian talk” (Lawler 2002, p.204). The challenge of being a Christian family is “to provide active hospitality [and] to ‘promote justice’. The family is to manifest Christ’s presence in the world” (Lawler 2002, p.205).

In discussing the theological perspective of family catechesis two approaches are considered; one is scriptural and the other relates to Church documents. This study will pay particular attention to the theological perspectives of family catechesis within post conciliar Church documents.

### ***Theology of Family in Scripture***

From a theological viewpoint family catechesis seeks to give family members insights into their lives which will help them see things in a way that brings meaning to existence. The scriptures provide families with insights into how their lives are in intimate relationship with God. They “point to the God–life in the family” (Gallagher 1982, p.166). There are many images within scripture which pertain to the family. “One senses that the scripture writers could not think of a better way to tell people of

their intimate relationship with God than to use family images (Gallagher 1982, p.167). Balswick and Balswick (1989, p.27) claim that “through scripture we can know something of God’s ideal for family relationship.” Gallagher (1982, p.168) suggests “it [the scriptures] is certainly a place to begin.”

### *Understanding of Family in the Old Testament*

*The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away.*  
(Deuteronomy 6:4–7)

The Old Testament image of family is entrenched in the understanding that “God desires all humankind to be in relationship with the Creator as well as in relationship with one another” (Balswick and Balswick 1989, p.21). Examples from Old Testament scripture use family imagery to illustrate the intimate relationship God desires. “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son ... Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk ... I took them up in my arms ... and I bend down to them and fed them” (Hosea 11:1–5)<sup>2</sup>. The imagery of God as a parent is the central message especially in the Book of Isaiah. God’s relationship for all people is further strengthened when the Old Testament writers also symbolise God as a mother: “Can a woman forget her nursing child or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even if these forget, I will not forget you” (Isaiah 49:15).

Throughout the scriptures of the Old Testament God is in the role of parent, loving, forgiving, guiding and in intimate relationship with humankind.

*A reading of the Old Testament Scriptures reveals the cycle of Israel's turning away from the true God and getting into difficulty, God's reaching out and forgiving them, Israel's being reconciled into intended parent/child relationship, and Israel being blessed and renewed in their relationship to God.*  
(Balswick and Balswick 1989, p.23)

Reflections on such passages affirm parents and enable them to identify elements of how family life fosters growth in faith.

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<sup>2</sup> The New Revised Standard Version

## *Understanding of Family in the New Testament*

The New Testament reveals a theology of family that is grounded in the understanding that the family is the domestic Church. This understanding comes from the Hebrews who believed that faith is taught first in the home. Proctor (1996, p.44) suggests that it was not necessary for Jesus to spell out a theology of family because it was ingrained within his cultural and religious experience.

*Jesus did not propose a method or system for religious instruction to be used by the Church. More specifically he gave no guidance to households or parents for teaching faith to children. It can be assumed, then, that Jesus expected such education to occur in much the same manner as that of the ancient Hebrew culture, namely, through family rituals and observances of the holy days and through the teaching in the synagogues.*

*(Proctor 1996, p.44)*

Gallagher (1982) advocates that even though the Gospels are scant on the family life of Jesus they do provide a blueprint for a healthy family life.

*Jesus constantly affirmed people; he made friends rather easily; he shared meals; he experienced confusion; he studied scripture and understood the patterns in them; he used a lot of common sense; he trusted and was betrayed. This is the stuff of family life. This is where holiness is found.*

*(Gallagher 1982, p.168)*

In the writings of the early Church there are several examples of Christian families as small Church communities within homes. St Paul speaks of house Churches (1 Cor 16:19; Rom16:3–5) and that the following of Jesus was the guiding principle of those house Churches (Lawler 2002, p.209).

*In Romans 16:3–5, Paul cites couples such as Prisca and Aquila as living examples of the faith in the home. This couple welcomed other Christians into the circle for small communities of faith. In their life together, Prisca and Aquila embodied the message of Christ and communicated it to others.*

*(Heaney–Hunter 1996, p.62)*

The household codes of Colossians and Ephesians state the principle concisely: “And whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col 3:17–25; Eph 6:1–9).

*In these writings the family is exhorted, urged to love each other, forgive each other, worship together, and accomplish all the tasks of life in the name of Jesus Christ.*

*(Heaney–Hunter 1996, p.62)*

Theologians such as Heaney–Hunter (1996) believe that Ephesians 5 has become the foundation stone of the domestic Church, for it clearly states the ways in which Christian families can live out their calling to be like Christ in all they do. Families exhibit the love of Christ by their lives. Lawler adds, “a further specification is that this family following of Jesus is required for full Christian fruitfulness” (2002, p.209).

Two theologians of the early Church, John Chrysostom and Augustine, expounded on this principle. Chrysostom urged spouses to “make your home a Church” and to live your family lives “in Christ and in the Church” (cited in Lawler 2002, p.209).

Augustine acknowledged the family as “a little Church, *ecclesia domestica*”, required of it respect for elders, love and justice and begged prayers from the entire domestic Church” (cited in Lawler 2002, p.209). The theology of the family as the domestic Church is grounded in the renewal of the Second Vatican Council.

### ***Theology of the Christian Family in Church Documents***

This section revisits some of the documents already discussed, and explores the theological underpinnings that the Church has named as essential to the process of sharing faith within the family. “The Second Vatican Council reintroduced to the Catholic theological tradition the designation of family as ‘domestic Church’ (Lawler 2002, p.209). Various documents of the Second Vatican Council, post conciliar documents and theological writings since have revived the notion of the family as the domestic Church, the “foundational Church where holiness is nurtured and lived out” (Heaney–Hunter 1996, p.59). Groome (2001, p.26) suggests “this implies that the family, within its own life, and as appropriate, should carry on the standard functions of Christian ministry”.

As already noted, the image ‘domestic Church’ has its roots in biblical references to the first Christian Churches and in the writings of the early fathers, like John Chrysostom, and Augustine. Contemporary theologians describe the ‘domestic Church’ as a way in which the family can embody Christ in the day–to–day experiences of life and are connected precisely as foundational Churches to the whole people of God (Heaney–Hunter 1996; Rubio 2003). “In principle, the domestic Church, ... incarnate ideals of reconciliation, justice, peace, hospitality, and prayer” (Heaney–Hunter 1996, p.59).

*The ethos of every home should reflect a community of Christian faith, hope and love. And every family must practise compassion toward those in need and justice toward all, both within it and out toward the world. Because a family's faith is more "caught than taught", its common life is the curriculum.*  
(Groome 2001, p.25)

Several documents of the Second Vatican Council allude to the sacredness of the family and the role of parents in the nurturing of faith of their children. These documents include *Lumen Gentium* (1964); *Apostolicam Acituositatem* (1965); *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965) and *Gaudium et Spes* (1965). Within these documents the idea that Church is initiated and flourishes within the home is a noteworthy teaching. These documents recognise that parents are "the architect of family life" (Amendolara 1994, p.16). The documents "discuss in detail ways in which Christian families function as domestic Churches and why this idea is important" (Heaney–Hunter 1996, p.63).

As already established, *Lumen Gentium* (1964, #11) declares parents as the first and foremost educators of their children; 'pastors' of the domestic Church. The document proclaims that Christian family life is prophetic.

*In connection with the prophetic function, that state of life which is sanctified by a special sacrament obviously of great importance, namely, married and family life. For where Christianity pervades the entire mode of family life, and gradually transforms it, one will find there both the practice and an excellent school of the lay apostolate. In such a home husbands and wives find their proper vocation in being witnesses of the faith and love of Christ to one another and to their children. The Christian family loudly proclaims both the present virtues of the Kingdom of God and the hope of a blessed life to come. Thus by its example and its witness it accuses the world of sin and enlightens those who seek the truth.*

(*Lumen Gentium* 1964, #35)

*Apostolicam Acituositatem* (1965) describes the Christian family as "the first and vital cell of society".

*Christian husbands and wives are cooperators in grace and witnesses of faith for each other, their children, and all others in their household. They are the first to communicate the faith to their children and to educate them by word and example for the Christian and apostolic life.*

(*Apostolicam Acituositatem* 1965, #11)

*Apostolicam Acituositatem* claims that the apostolate of the Christian family is crucial in the Church and society and that family life is the basis for the formation of the laity in mission and ministry in the Church (*Apostolicam Acituositatem* 1965, #30).

Post conciliar papal writings have echoed the understanding that the family is the domestic Church and that parents are the first educators of the faith of their children. Paul VI refers to *Lumen Gentium* as the basis for his approach to the family in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*.

*At different moments in the Church's history and also in the Second Vatican Council, the family has well deserved the beautiful name of the: "domestic Church". (Lumen Gentium 1964, #11). This means that there should be found in every Christian family the various aspects of the entire Church.*  
(*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 1975, #71)

He declares that the family is "where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 1975, #71).

John Paul II builds on these thoughts, particularly in his apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (1981) where he presents a vision of the Christian family. He states that "the Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial community, and for this reason too it can and should be called "the domestic Church" (*Familiaris Consortio* 1981, #21). Akin to Paul VI, he also declares that one of the primary functions of the Christian family is the transmission of Gospel values and the building of the kingdom of God (*Familiaris Consortio* 1981, #42). "The Christian family also builds up the Kingdom of God in history through the everyday realities that concern and distinguish its state of life" (*Familiaris Consortio* 1981, #50).

### *The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World*

The role of the contemporary Christian family is made clear in *Familiaris Consortio* (1981). John Paul II advocates that Christian families are not to think of themselves as an exclusive sanctuary "but as a community with a mission that goes beyond itself" (Rubio 2003, p.105). In this document the Pope defines the family as "a community of life and love" that has four key tasks that provide the basis through which parents can carry out the mission of nurturing faith of their children. Each task has a community aspect. These tasks include: 1) forming a community of



persons, 2) serving life, 3) participating in the development of society and 4) sharing in the life and mission of the Church (Familiaris Consortio 1981, #17).

The first task calls the family to “guard, reveal and communicate love” (Familiaris Consortio 1981, #17). John Paul II considers that love is the beginning point of the mission of the Christian family because “love among family members is primary ... because it serves as the foundation for the rest of what the family does” (Rubio 2003, p.106).

The second task is ‘serving life’. Serving life means more than procreating; it includes the transmission of life and the transmission of faith through education. Here the Pope calls to mind the responsibility of parents to serve life by nurturing children and by bringing them up within the world and not parallel to the world. Parents are reminded of their responsibility to the education of their children (#36) with the task of instilling in children “the essential values of human life’ (#37). The Pope insists that parents teach their children about the Gospel as the passing on of faith is as important a task as passing on life (Rubio 2003, p.106).

The third task to which the Pope calls the family is to participate in the development of society. This task indicates that families “cannot stop short at procreation and education” (Familiaris Consortio 1981, #44). This task brings to mind the call from *Apostolicam Acituositatem* (1965, #11) that the Christian family is “the first and vital cell of society”. The Pope declares that the Christian family is an experience of communion and sharing (Familiaris Consortio 1981, #43) and asks families first, to practise hospitality, open their table and their home to those less fortunate; second, to become politically involved, assisting the transformation of society; and third, to practise the preferential option for the poor and disadvantaged manifesting “love of all poor, ... the hungry, the poor, the old, the sick, drug victims and those who have no family (Familiaris Consortio 1981, #47). The third task invites families to be actively involved in the political and social concerns of society.

The final task calls families to share in the mission of the Church. “He again places emphasis on the public dimension of the family’s call [and] suggests that families must serve the Church as well as one another ” (Rubio 2003, p.107). As a domestic Church the family evangelises its members (Familiaris Consortio 1981, #50–52), gives witness to the world (#53) and uses its home as a sanctuary (#55–62). Significantly, the document names family prayer, moral teaching, and witness of

Christian love as means through which catechesis within the domestic Church is achieved. The final task of the family is to serve the wider community (#63–64).

These four tasks outlined by John Paul II are fundamental to what it means to be a Christian family in the modern world. “The genius of Catholic teaching on the family is that it refuses to limit families by telling them to just take care of their own”, the responsibility is to contribute to the ecclesial mission (Rubio 2003, p.107).

## ***The Theology of the Christian Family and Catechesis***

*Catechesis is a ministry of the Church, which helps recognize and respond to that loving presence [God] ... Catechesis seeks the conversion of the whole person in community. ... Catechesis is a ministry in which the catechist acts as an activator, facilitator, leader and catalyst for the assembled community. The catechist leads the community to reflect critically on its life and then interpret the meaning of life through Scripture, through sacramental rituals, through doctrine, through the Church's living and acts of justice... No one can program an experience of God nor faith growth. Those are grace filled gift moments.  
(Mongoven 2000, pp.107–111)*

For the Christian family the ministry of catechesis begins within the home. Within the home the parents are the catechists who activate, facilitate, lead and are the catalyst for the family community. It is through reflecting on experiences of daily life in light of the Scriptures, worship and acts of justice that the family discovers the presence of God. The Christian family is asked to give witness to the world and uses its home as a sanctuary. Huebsch comments that the catechesis “is most powerful when parents take the time to explain to their children the religious significance or meaning of certain events including holy days and family moments, and of social, political or moral questions” (2003, p.90).

The first document, which is crucial in shaping a process for the sharing of faith within family life as a form of catechesis, is *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979) written by John Paul II. The essential understanding portrayed in this document is that “family catechesis ... precedes, accompanies and enriches all other forms of catechesis” (#68).

*The family's catechetical activity has a special character, which is in a sense irreplaceable. ... Education by parents, which should begin from the tenderest age, is already being given when the members of a family help each other to grow in faith through the witness of Christian lives, a witness that is often*

*without words but which perseveres throughout a day-to-day life lived in accordance with the Gospel.*

*(Catechesi Tradendae 1979, #68)*

This document adds that catechesis within family life is more effective when it honours moments which are part of everyday living.

*This catechesis is more incisive when, in the course of family events (such as the reception of the sacraments, the celebration of the great liturgical feasts, the birth of a child, bereavement) care is taken to explain in the home the Christian or religious content of these events.*

*(Catechesi Tradendae 1979, #68)*

John Paul II continued to encourage parents to nurture faith by setting good Christian examples to their children through living their own lives in a true Gospel spirit (Familiaris Consortio 1981, #17).

*By virtue of their ministry of educating, parents are, through the witness of their lives, the first heralds of the Gospel for their children. Furthermore, by praying with their children, by reading the word of God with them and by introducing them deeply through Christian initiation into the Body of Christ – both the Eucharist and the ecclesial Body- they become fully parents, in that they are begetters not only of the bodily life but also of the life that through the Spirit's renewal flows from the Cross and the Resurrection of Christ. ... The family, like the Church, ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates.*

*(Familiaris Consortio 1981, #39–#42)*

As these values permeate through the home they become the norm for daily living in the lives of their children.

The *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997) calls the family to catechesis rather than religious education. The document describes the process for family catechesis as an on-going process which is grounded in the experience of family life.

*It [family catechesis] is indeed a Christian education more witnessed to than taught, more occasional than systematic, more on-going and daily than structured in periods.*

*(General Directory for Catechesis 1997, #255)*

The *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997) quotes from *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979, # 68) to remind the Church that the role of the family is about “transmitting the Gospel by rooting it in the context of profound human values” (#255). The family is called to awaken within its members the sense of God through a means of catechesis which comes from within the experiences of everyday life.

*This childhood religious awakening which takes place in the family is irreplaceable. It is consolidated when, on the occasion of certain family events and festivities, care is taken to explain in the home the Christian or religious content of these events.*  
(General Directory for Catechesis 1997, #226)

This approach portrays the family as the domestic Church and describes it as “a locus of catechesis” (#255). It states that the family has a unique privilege in the role of catechesis.

In summary, current theological insight on the Christian family is contained within the understanding which emerged in the early Church that the family is a domestic Church. The documents of the Second Vatican Council and post conciliar documents speak of the Christian family as a true expression of Church. The task of the Christian family in the nurturing of faith cannot be ignored if it is to manifest the presence of Christ to the world. The Christian family carries out the mission of the Church by giving witness to Gospel values in ordinary ways within family life. Families do so when they love; profess their faith in God through prayer and worship; educate their children in the ways of the faith; by serving others and forgiving and seeking reconciliation. The Christian family is called to celebrate life within community. Through the ministry of catechesis within the home, parents invite the family to recognise within daily life signs which manifest the presence of God and to understand them with the eyes of faith. Catechesis becomes the means through which families can come to the understanding that faith is integrated with life experiences.

## **Sociological Perspective**

A third perspective discussed is the role of the family as a conduit of socialisation. Like the Church, society recognises that one of the most powerful socialisation agencies is the family. Shmay describes the family as “a mirror of society” (2002, p.2). Recent psychological and sociological thinking confirms that the family is the institution primarily responsible for the development of its members, particularly in their formative years.

*[T]he family is a critical social institution in the organisation of any society. As one of the basic social institutions of any people the family reflects the core of society. The family performs the crucial role of social control, economic production, religious propagation, procreation and socialization.*

(McDaniel 1990, p.225)

Socialisation is a life-long process that begins at birth and continues through life. The principal agent for socialisation is the family, and it is here that most children learn among other things, the beliefs and a prescribed set of values of our society and culture so that they can function within it (Shmay 2002; Eastman 1999; Kelly and De Graaf 1997; Carlson 1996; Myer 1996; Hammerston 1995; Ratcliff 1995; McDaniel 1990; Durka 1988; Elias 1980; Moran 1980; Natale 1979). By nature the family, like any social institution, best socialises its members to values which are necessary for its own survival (Elias 1980, p.39). Through this process, culture and religious values are transmitted from one generation to the next.

Studies have shown that the learning of religious and societal values is strongly related to home influences. Religious beliefs are intimately linked to attitudes and behaviours within family structures.

*The most significant factors in transmitting values ... are: (a) democratic relationship between parents and children, (b) parental example, (c) encouraging children to do their own thinking, and (d) positive experiences of both religion and the social dimension of the religious community.*

*(Kuusisto 2003, p.292)*

Myers (1996), in a study on the effects of childhood, parental and family influence on the religiosity of adult offspring, concluded that the factors that contribute to the transmission of faith include parental religiosity, quality of family relationship and traditional family structure (p.864).

*Adult religiosity is determined largely by parental religiosity ... Parental influences have considerable staying power even as offspring move out of home and form independent households. ... Parents maximize religiosity transmission if they agree on religious beliefs so that offspring do not receive mixed messages about the role of religion in life.*

*(Myer 1996, pp.863–864)*

Other studies conducted by Hayes and Pittelkow 1993; Greely and Jenks in Elias 1980; McGready in Gallagher 1980; Flynn 1979 and Hyde 1975, have conferred that the religious behaviour of a child is influenced by the religious behaviour of the parents and by the quality of the relationship between spouses.

A further factor that aids the transmission of faith is the quality of family relationship. Myer (1996, p.865) claims that “positive parent-child relationship foster continuity in religious behaviours between generations.” Flynn in his conclusion to how parents influence the faith of their children states:

*Not only do parents influence the development of their children's faith directly through their own example and religiousness, but they also influence their growth in the faith indirectly through the manner they relate to them in the most ordinary actions of everyday life in the home.*

*(Flynn 1979, p.201)*

Blum (cited in Eastman 1989, p.86) in a study on the religious influence of the family, reported that the religious beliefs of families underlay their insistence that the core of the family was love, respect, forgiveness, and understanding. Parents, through their love, guidance and modelling share in the experiences of their children, and in turn, children share in these experiences by "listening to family stories, personal experiences, hopes and dreams" (Meehan 1995, p.19). It is an ongoing process of faith growth which matures as the family experiences different stages of life.

It is through the everyday concerns of life that parents are able to foster the spiritual growth of their family and instil in their children the Gospel teachings of love, forgiveness, trust, and patience. "The meaning of these events is inextricably woven with personal, family and religious associations" (Eastman 1989, p.86).

### ***Nurturing Faith within the Family***

The nurturing of faith within the family culture was highlighted by Horace Bushnell's work *Christian Nurture* (1876). In this work Bushnell provides an insight into Christian socialisation for the modern world. Bushnell proposed that "rather than waiting for conversion at a later age, the child is to be nurtured as a Christian from his or her earliest years" (cited in Groome 1980, p.116).

*What is the true idea of Christian Education? ... That the child is to grow up a Christian, and never know himself as being otherwise.*

*(Bushnell 1876, p.10)*

Bushnell (1876) grounded his case for Christian nurture to what he called the 'organic unity' of society. He described that organic unity takes place unavoidably between parent and child. The responsibility of the parent, in Bushnell's understanding, is to be of witness to their children of what it is to have Christian faith. Bushnell claims "have it [faith] first in yourselves; then teach it as you live it; teach it by living it; for you can do it in no other manner" (1876, p.71). Bushnell named the home as the primary source of Christian nurture, an idea that is steeped in most current Church documents pertaining to the family. He stresses that parents

must ensure that they create a culture that is thoroughly Christian because “the children grow into faith, as it were, by a process of natural induction ... because their faith is both quickened and grown in the atmosphere of God’s own Spirit, always filling the house” (Bushnell 1876, pp.346–347). He argues that Christian nurture must begin as early as possible and it is to be the foundation of all educational efforts. Bushnell’s emphasis on the primary role of parents (both father and mother) and the home as the main avenue for Christian formation became a forerunner for the modern socialisation approach to Christian nurturing (Groome 1980, p.116).

Modern theories of modern culture and religion reflect Bushnell’s idea that the family unit is foremost in nurturing faith. Wunthow (1999) argues that Christian nurture takes place primarily “through embedded practices; that is, through specific, deliberate religious activities that are firmly intertwined with the daily habits of family routines, of eating and sleeping, of having conversations, of adorning the spaces in which people live, of celebrating the holidays, and of being part of a community” (Carroll, Williams and Williams 1999, p.1). He adds, that though formal religious education is important it “pales in significance” when compared with these socially embedded practices. Faith is nurtured through the lived realities of life.

### ***Socialisation Institutions that Influence the Nurturing of Faith***

John Westerhoff identifies six social institutions that have enabled parents to nurture and pass on the faith traditions. “These six institutions intentionally worked together to produce an effective educational ecology” (Westerhoff 1976, p.15). He states:

*(1) The community as a social institution in which [all denominations] lived and were nurtured in their homogeneous communities. (2) Stability, in which both parents were frequently home and shared family life and had the support of the extended family as there was little mobility. (3) School systems supported the Christian ethos. For most Catholics this was through the Catholic schools. (4) The parish was central to the local neighbourhood and all those who attended knew each other. A variety of social activities centred on parish life. (5) Religious publications were readily available which provided families with materials which promoted religious education within the home. (6) There was deliberate engagement in religious education, which for Catholics was mainly through classes run by nuns which were held in the parish.*

*(Westerhoff 1976, p.13)*

Westerhoff’s patterns of family life have changed and diversified. These six institutions no longer serve as the basis by which parents pass on traditions of the faith. Societies which parishes are a part of today have become heterogeneous and

much more complex than in earlier times. The Church is rarely at the centre of the social and community life of people. “The community can no longer be called to transmit a particular set of understandings” (Westerhoff 1976, p.15).

The composition and understanding of ‘family’ also have changed (White 1995; Drane and Drane 1995). Drane and Drane propose that “today’s families are ... striving to redefine what it means to be a family” (1995, p.20). The term ‘family’ has been extended to include divorced families, single parent families, blended families as well as the traditional heterosexual two parent families (Drane and Drane 1995, pp.20–36). By comparison, modern families have become smaller and more often nuclear (White 1995, p.209). The interaction with extended family is minimal compared to that of previous generations. Due to economic necessity in many families both parents work in full time employment outside the home. Interfaith marriages are more acceptable within a diversity of cultures. Many households do not have one set of religious beliefs that binds them. With the mobility of the modern family, the population is more transient and thus families are no longer rooted to one part of the world. State school systems have become religiously neutral and a falling percentage of children are attending parish schools. At the same time there is easy access to the secular media through technological information (Westerhoff 1976, p.15).

Smith states that, “the religious profile of today’s parent has also changed” (1998, p.18). The parents of today were born after the Second Vatican Council, and many received their own religious education in a time when new curricula reflecting the renewal of the Second Vatican Council were being developed in the Church. This generation is the “fuzzy Jesus generation” because “they express confusion about how to integrate what they learned with the Church’s body of theology, moral and social teachings” (Smith 1998, p.18). Proctor believes that “most parents of this generation feel incapable, or at best ill prepared, for teaching faith to their children” (1996, p.41). In the lives of most parents today the home of their childhood was not seen or understood as central to the faith education of the young. The main educators of faith for many parents were the religious sisters, brothers, or catechist within the parish setting (Curran 1978; Amendolara 1994; and Brady 1994).

In summary the family is considered as the most important agent for socialisation for children. It is through the family that children learn the values and core beliefs the family holds. In the family religious development is shaped, faith traditions are



experienced and passed on to the next generation. Patterns of family life have altered and expanded and therefore, structures that enabled parents to nurture and pass on the faith traditions in the past are no longer conducive to be an effective *educational ecology* for today's families.

## Pastoral Perspective

Finally, the pastoral viewpoint regarding family catechesis is examined. When considering the pastoral considerations of family catechesis, many components worthy of reflection emerge from the literature. As discussed in the last section, changes in the understanding and dynamics of family and family life raise implications for the mission of the Church in its task of family catechesis. Emswiler comments:

*[T]he need for family catechesis has never been greater than at the present time in Church history. With the contemporary state of busyness and frenzy in family life, the Church has a unique opportunity to serve the core communities of its membership.*

*(1988, p.127)*

Gregory suggests that “the issue is not what the Church can do for the family; it is rather, how essential the mission of the family is to Church” (1988, p.39). Pastorally what is of significance is how the Church can work in partnership with families “in order to guide them to understand their mission and to encourage them to fulfil it” (Gregory 1988, p.39).

In *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979) John Paul II “affirms the responsibility for catechesis which is carried by all members of the Catholic Church community, not only appointed officials” (Malone 1992, p.7). It places the family at the centre of the parish and establishes the primary settings for the nurturing of faith.

*Encouragement must ... be given to the individuals or institutions that, through person-to-person contacts, through meetings, and through all kinds of pedagogical means, help parents to perform their task: the service they are doing to catechesis is beyond price.*

*(Catechesi Tradendae 1979, #68)*

*Catechesi Tradendae* represents a profound turning point in how family catechesis is to be understood within parish life.

Much of the literature in the area of family catechesis advocate that the success of family catechesis lies in “viewing (the) family as pivotal to all of our religious

education" (De Gidio 1979, p.81). Gregory emphasises that "in the parish opportunities should be found for nurturing wholeness at each stage of life's journey" (1988, p.46).

*All parishes, nevertheless, through their ministry network of worship, sacrament, education, justice, and social concerns, and through their relationship to the local community, are in a strategic position to respond pastorally to the developing family life-cycle.*

*(Gregory 1988, p.56)*

Hence family catechesis is to be seen as integral to the parish and contributes to other aspects of the life of the faith community.

Roberto in his work with the Archdiocese of Melbourne in 1984 on ministry with families, calls for "a shift in paradigm" from the current parish structure if family catechesis is to be at the centre of parish life.

*[Family Catechesis] encourages parishes to move from the parish at the centre, to families at the centre of Church and community, from administering to families, to ministering with families, from families serving the parish to parish serving the family.*

*(Roberto 1994, p.3)*

The new paradigm calls for an integrated family perspective in all parish ministries whether or not their focus is 'family'. Such a paradigm suggests the family perspective pervades all parish ministries and that all ministries become aware of their impact on family life in the parish.

*Every parish community must make it a priority to 'nurture the nurturer', providing families with the resources, training, encouragement, and suggestions that they need to function effectively as 'domestic Church'.*

*(Groome 2001, p.25)*

The *General Directory for Catechesis* asserts that to support families in their responsibility as nurturers of faith, the parish must be "the prime mover and pre-eminent place for catechesis" (General Directory for Catechesis 1997, #257). The Directory goes on to suggest that parishes need to address the needs parents experience by promoting meetings and courses and providing adult catechesis directed towards parents (General Directory for Catechesis 1997, #227). In order for parents to rediscover and reclaim their duty as first educators of their children in faith and have an awareness of the ways they can nurture the faith of their children, parents need firstly to be secure in their faith.

*Until they [parents] experience the depth of faith possible in family centred catechesis, it is wise to continue to offer some kind of class or occasional workshop for the children, not [only] for the sake of the children, but [also] for the sake of the parents from the concern that their children might not “learn” enough from them.*

*(Curran 1980, p.38)*

Curran is suggesting that the way forward requires a bridging process. Curran infers that as parents become actively involved with the faith sharing of their children, they begin to focus on their own faith life and they examine their own understandings (1980, p.38).

*If parents are secure in their faith, if we help them to live that faith life, ritualising it, be aware of the numerous teachable [faith] moments they have every day, then the faith will indeed be passed on to the next generation.*

*(De Gidio 1980, p.18)*

By supporting parents in coming to a deeper understanding of their faith a spark is ignited within them and allows them to recognise that faith is above all a gift coming to them through the initiative of God.

A further shift in understanding lays in the ways faith is nurtured within the context of the family; a result of the distinction between family catechesis and religious education. Authors such as Darcy–Berube (1995); Roberto (1992); Dunlap (1991); Chesto (1988); Emswiler (1988); Meehan (1985); Saris (1980); Westerhoff (1980); Curran (1978, 1980); and Hill (1980) claim that family catechesis is not an extra program but rather “a perspective from which to examine everyday actions within family setting” (Gregory 1988, p.52). One of the aims of family catechesis, therefore, should be to affirm parents in what they are already doing just by being a Christian family.

As discussed (cf. pp.36–38) the Church recognises four key tasks that provide the basis through which parents can carry out the mission of nurturing faith of their children. These tasks include: 1) forming a community of persons, 2) serving life, 3) participating in the development of society and 4) sharing in the life and mission of the Church (Familiaris Consortio 1981, #17). Within the context of the home such tasks are carried out through the events of everyday life. These include the celebration of rituals, the telling or sharing of faith stories, praying together as a family, performing acts of justice and service and relating as a family to the wider

community (Roberto 2005, p.1). These elements within family life provide a structure for family faith sharing.

*Passing on the faith is not merely a matter of particular formulations or cognitive learning. If faith wants to be something that is truly alive in the coming generations as well, it must be experienced in practice: in everyday actions and behaviours in the celebration of worship, in experiences that are emotional in kind.*

*(Greinacher and Elzondo 1984, p.ix)*

From the pastoral perspective it is important to acknowledge that the family is primarily concerned with the nurturing and maturing of faith within the family at the various stages of family life. If family catechesis is to be understood as being grounded in the everyday experiences of family life pastorally “there are few, if any, family faith sharing experiences which fail [as long as the] focus is in the sharing rather than doctrine” (De Gidio 1979, p.17).

In summary, when considering the pastoral implications of family catechesis the parish has a major role to play. Pastorally the parish is ideal for supporting family catechesis because it is important to the faith life of the community. Parishes provide a structure that supports the catechesis of the home. As parents are supported by the worshipping community in nurturing the faith of their children they cannot help but grow in faith themselves. In all that parishes offer parents “is the need to affirm families in their efforts to hand on their faith and values to their children” (Staffa Geoghegan 1993, p.299).

## **Conclusion**

This Chapter was divided into four parts; each part addressing one of the four perspectives which have shaped the Catholic understanding of the role of parents in the faith development of their children. First consideration was given to the historical perspective of the role of the family throughout Church history. It explored the understanding of the role of the family from the early Church through to the renewal of the Second Vatican Council. The historical perspective also outlined the affects the introduction of compulsory education had on the Church and the ways in which the Church responded to the threat of secularism. Finally, this first section traced the response from the Australian Church to parents in their role as faith nurturers.

In the second part, consideration was given to the theological understanding of the Christian family. This section explored several key documents of the Second Vatican Council and post conciliar papal writings which were pertinent in shaping much of the Catholic understanding of the role and task of the Christian family in the world today. The third consideration was given to the sociological perspective. Here attention was given to the changing understanding of family and to the societal influences which affect the faith life of the family. Finally, attention was given to the pastoral perspective. This part of the discussion centred on the preferred process the Church promotes for nurturing faith with the context of family life.

To conclude, through these four perspectives, historical, theological, sociological, and pastoral, this Chapter has sought to identify the understandings and practices which have affected and influenced the way the Church has understood the role of families as nurturers of the faith. Current Church thinking acknowledges;

1. Within the Church, parents have the prime responsibility to nurture the faith of their children.
2. The Church has always maintained that the nurturing of faith begins in the home even though, as history shows, this role has at times been confused and delegated to the Catholic school.
3. With the renewal of the Second Vatican Council, the role of the family was made more explicit. Vatican II called parents to be firstly witnesses of faith for their children.
4. The task of the family is to make the message of the Gospel a lived reality in the lives of their children.
5. The message of the Gospel as a lived reality is achieved through nurturing faith within the life experiences rather than solely through the teaching of doctrines.

In relation to the research question of the study, the literature confirms that the Church today regards the Christian family as the domestic Church. Within this community parents are the first and foremost educators of their children in faith. It is through the Christian witness of parents that children learn how to live the values of the Gospel. The argument is that the Church needs to embrace this understanding if this vision of nurturing faith is to be sustained. This understanding has led to the research project that is reported in the remainder of this dissertation. In the next Chapter, the methodological issues associated with the research will be discussed together with the procedures used to acquire the data for analysis.