

# When our kids are no longer Catholic

**A child's rejection of the faith often shakes Catholic couples, forcing them to make adjustments to preserve family bonds.**

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*The passing on of values takes place mainly during childhood and adolescence. (Photo by CORINNE SIMON/ CIRIC)*

In some cases, the break-up is brutal. Monique, 80, looks back on the day when her then-17-year-old son stood in front of her, shouting his hatred against "this God who manipulates us like pawns".

Despite prayers and promises of healing, his best friend had just died of leukemia. Jean-François, who had just been confirmed, felt betrayed.

"He was angry. The wound was deep and never healed," recalls Monique.

The death of a classmate through suicide at the age of 11 was the breaking point for François, the son of Brigitte and Pierre, now in their sixties.

They were helpless in the face of such a tragedy.

Very often, however, the estrangement is unspoken.

Parents realize this when their children begin making their first life choices as adults: they no longer practice their faith, refuse to marry or have their children baptised.

### **For many parents, this rejection is a painful challenge**

"It's normal to feel guilty," admits Mireille, now 70.

[Christian life](#) was a deep part of her family. In addition to going to Mass and praying as a family at home, they also attended evenings of prayer for renewal and made pilgrimages. She was committed to the Church's mission and a Salesian co-operator.

Yet none of her three children have remained Catholic. Was all this too much for them?

Were they influenced by the distance displayed by her politically active husband and his rejection of the faith when facing illness and death?

Mireille refuses to blame herself and prefers to "put everything in the hands of the Lord".

"In my prayer, I say to God that we have done what we could, as best we could. Now it's up to God," she says.

Martine, whose two children have left the Church, has also chosen "trust".

"My journey as a convert explains that I have never been worried," says the former Buddhist.

"I have always been careful to respect their freedom. I pray for them to live their lives to the fullest, whatever they may be, and for them to meet God. But that is their story. From experience, I know that only an inner experience can change things," she says.

### **In some families, the situation remains conflictual**

Monique is still dealing with her son's aggression.

"He thinks I'm crazy because I talk about my faith," she says

"For a long time, whenever our family got together I would keep quiet. I couldn't say anything without making him sneer. So I decided to write to him to clear the air, so that he would stop scorning God and disrespecting me," she recalls.

Michèle, 66, has reconnected with her daughter, but she's upset about what she sees as her daughter's "irrational" and even "delusional" behaviour regarding belief.

"Alice is obsessed with shamanism. She went to Peru to drink a sacred drink and go into a trance. She thinks she has had other lives, believes in elves... Yet, at Christmas, two years ago, she took communion!"

### **In other families, reconciliation came with time**

When Francis stopped going to Mass, his father Peter was angry at first, feeling that the boy's grandparents and some other parishioners blamed the father.

Gradually, Francis became less spiteful and his parents allowed him to go his own way, confident that he had the necessary knowledge and resources to move forward.

"In any case, trying to force them is useless," say Sylvie and Hubert.

They are now in their fifties and five of their six children have drifted away from the Church.

"We gave up when our second daughter turned 15 and started 'priest bashing'," they recall.

"It was essential that faith should not become a place of confrontation," the couple explain.

They are still disappointed that their children seem to have made so little effort "to mature spiritually".

It is not easy to let go without feeling that you are giving up. Sylvie says her involvement in marriage preparation for young couples has helped her.

"We were confused when our children moved in as a couple without getting married," she remembers.

"In the context of marriage preparation, we have seen couples return to the Church with real questions of faith. That gave me hope," she says.

"We decided that the only thing we could do is witness to our faith. We simply talk to them about what we are living, about our commitments," she explains.

### **At a fair distance**

Sometimes it can be helpful for parents to directly speak to adult children about faith matters.

"François has helped us grow, he shakes us up," explains Brigitte.

She smiles as she recalls the debates they had with him at breakfast when they were all under the same roof during the coronavirus lockdown.

"At the time he started to rebel against religion, we were living in a new community," she remembers.

"He criticised things that were not right: too much investment on our part, a certain submission... It was he who led us to leave," she says.

"Since then, his need to understand, before joining, and his rejection of any institution made me think about the Church. It's imperfect, but it has still helped me encounter the Lord. I now feel freer towards the Church," Brigitte admits.

In the same way, Mireille was forced to become more sincere in her faith because of her own children's skepticism.

"I pay attention to the meaning of the Mass. I don't go just out of habit, but in order to encounter the Lord and my brothers and sisters; I let it nourish my entire week," she says.

Michèle has always vacillated "between faith and doubt". But now she has found a middle-ground with her son.

"My faith is intellectual, rational, I like to study texts," she explains.

"Felix likes to talk about the Bible. His questions - "Why would God leave us free not to believe?" - as well as his objections - "Moses never existed!" - compel me to read, to seek precise answers," she explains

### **A true example**

Dialogue and mutual acceptance are important for these parents.

But they finally found peace of mind when they accepted the fact that the best thing they could for their children was to share their faith without specifically talking about it

"Though he does not talk about God, Francis gives to the poor, he invites people who are alone to Christmas dinner and he's honest in his work..."

In the same way, Michèle admires how her son selflessly helps her sick ex-husband. And Monique marvels at the love between her son and her granddaughters...

These Catholic parents recognise these attitudes and behaviour in their non-practicing children as profoundly Christian and at the very heart of their faith.