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## How the Catholic Church's Trinitarian-Christocentric theology of Communion might inform the way in which spouses are formed for the apostolate of family life

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**HOW THE CATHOLIC CHURCH'S  
TRINITARIAN-CHRISTOCENTRIC THEOLOGY  
OF COMMUNION MIGHT INFORM THE WAY IN  
WHICH SPOUSES ARE FORMED FOR THE  
APOSTOLATE OF FAMILY LIFE**

**Submitted by  
JOSHUA PAUL BITTING  
MA (Theo.)**

**A thesis submitted in total fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**



**School of Education  
Sydney Campus**

**August, 2021**

## **AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

This is to certify that:

I. This thesis comprises only my original work towards the Doctor of Philosophy Degree.

II. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the text of the thesis.

III. This thesis does not exceed the word length for this degree.

IV. This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

V. All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees (where required).

VI. In the pursuit of the research and preparation of the thesis I received editorial writing assistance, critical analysis and advice solely from my supervisor Dr Gerard O'Shea. I received no other form of assistance from any other person.

**Signature:**

**Name: Joshua Paul Bitting**

**Date: 16 August, 2021**

## ABSTRACT

This project explores the nature and mission of the Christian family viewed theologically as a domestic Church. Drawing upon the Catholic Church's robust Trinitarian and Christocentric *communio* theology, it is the aim of this endeavour to demonstrate how a robust Trinitarian anthropology, complemented by a culture-first approach, may pave the way for an ongoing marriage catechumenate that will equip spouses to embrace and put into effect the universal call to holiness and mission expressly called for by the Second Vatican Council and contemporary popes.

The first part of the project will articulate the biblical, historical, and theological foundations upon which the identity and spirituality of the domestic Church should be built. This will involve examining the ways in which the identity and mission of the domestic Church has been impacted by challenges issuing from both within and without.

After the theological foundations have been laid, an authentic spirituality of the domestic Church will be explicated under the rubric of the *triplex munera*—the trifold office by which the baptized come to share in Christ: Priest, Prophet, and King *par excellence*. This will include bringing to bear Catholic teaching on the laity as articulated through the Magisterium of the Church

The second part of the project is an original course of formation designed for Catholic spouses that represents a creative response to the call of recent popes for a marriage catechumenate whereby spouses are led to enter more deeply into the mystery of the Sacrament of Matrimony which they have received and which they have become. This course gives due consideration to couples' need for ongoing catechesis; a community to support, encourage, and challenge them; and the incorporation of the Christian disciplines into daily married and family life. The intended outcome of this formation is that spouses will be inspired, equipped, and empowered to grow in holiness within their vocation and to integrally pass on the Catholic faith to their children.

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# Chapter One

## Theological Foundations of the Domestic Church

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### 1.1 Introduction

*The family finds in the plan of God the Creator and Redeemer not only its identity, what it is, but also its mission, what it can and should do. The role that God calls the family to perform in history derives from what the family is; its role represents the dynamic and existential development of what it is. Each family finds within itself a summons that cannot be ignored, and that specifies both its dignity and its responsibility: family, become what you are.* (John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 17)

Since the Second Vatican Council re-introduced the term “domestic Church” to refer to the Christian family, extended and deepened by subsequent popes, there has been a renewed interest in the properly theological understanding of this designation.<sup>1</sup> Though it was not previously included in formal magisterial documents of the Church, the term has an ancient pedigree, reaching back into both the Old and New Testament Scriptures. In the patristic age some of the Church’s most prolific bishops such as Saint John Chrysostom and Saint Augustine, as well as other early bishops and teachers, produced sermons and addresses unpacking the meaning and significance of the domestic Church.

In his post-synodal apostolic exhortation on the Christian family in the modern world, Pope John Paul II challenged each Christian family in these words: “Family, become what you are.”<sup>2</sup> Complementary to his emphasis on how Christ reveals man to himself,<sup>3</sup> the pontiff teaches that it is only by looking to God’s own Trinitarian life of love that the family can truly discover its own deepest identity: “*the primordial model of the family is to be sought in God himself, in the Trinitarian mystery of his life.*”<sup>4</sup> In this chapter, it will be argued that the recovery of a robust understanding of the Christian family that flows

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<sup>1</sup> The Documents of Vatican II: *Lumen Gentium* 11; Cf. Documents of Vatican II: *Apostolicum Actuositatem* 11.

<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (Vatican City: *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, 1981), 17.

<sup>3</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis* (Vatican City: *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, 1979), 8. Cf. Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

<sup>4</sup> John Paul II, *Gratissimam Sane* (Vatican City: *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, 1979), 6.

out of an ecclesiology of communion built upon a Trinitarian and Christological foundation is key to both a better understanding of the identity of the domestic Church and an articulation of a praxis that can guide and sustain a spirituality of communion and mission.

We will look first at how the mystery of the Holy Trinity sheds lights on and informs our understanding of the mystery of the human person and of the family. It will be argued that it is only by looking at the Christian family in the light of God's own Trinitarian life of self-giving love that one can appreciate the Trinitarian stamp of the *imago Dei* in marriage and family and thus its own deepest identity.

In the second part of the chapter, we will focus in on the Christological foundations of marriage and of the family. We will explore Christ's relationship to the Church as understood by the Catholic tradition in relation to the Sacrament of Matrimony. We will highlight the intrinsic relationship between the Sacrament of Matrimony and the Sacrament of the Eucharist and how they reciprocally shed light on one another.

The last part of the chapter will consist in an exploration of the perichoretic relationship of the Trinity with the domestic Church and the domestic Church with the Church at large. The argument will be advanced that for the wider Church to flourish, the domestic Church must be living its own vocation to the full. Conversely, the health of the domestic Church depends on a robust effort on the part of the wider Church to provide formation, support, and encouragement to Christian families as they seek to live their vocation to holiness and mission in the midst of the world.

### ***1.2 The Trinitarian Stamp of the Imago Dei in Marriage and the Family***

Perhaps one of the most significant statements from the Second Vatican Council is paragraph 24 of *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. In this passage, the Council Fathers begin by reflecting on the likeness that exists between the unity of the divine Persons of the Trinity and the unity of Christians in charity and truth. They explain that "this likeness reveals that man, who is the only

creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.”<sup>5</sup> The significance of this statement cannot be understated; for it makes clear that to say that man is created in the image and likeness of God is tantamount to saying that he is created in the image and likeness of the Trinity. Catholic teaching that God is a Trinity of Persons united in a communion of self-giving love reveals the deepest truth about the human person, created in the image and likeness of God and called to personal communion with the tri-Personal God and with other human persons.

The very notion of person has its origins in the efforts of early Christian thinkers to come to terms with the full import of God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ. The Greek term *persona*, later specified as *hypostasis*, was introduced by Tertullian, one of the Latin fathers of the Church. In a significant essay, “Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology,” Joseph Ratzinger points out that the usage of the term in reference to human persons was subsequent to and flowed out of the Church’s explication of the mystery of the Trinity.<sup>6</sup> He emphasizes that one cannot properly understand the meaning of the word “person” as it relates to the human being unless one first understands how it applies preeminently to the divine Persons of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Ratzinger goes on to articulate the way in which the biblical data guided how early Christian theologians came to a deeper understanding and articulation of God’s revelation by grappling with the question as to whether God truly is who he shows himself to be.<sup>7</sup> The radically new understanding that resulted from a disciplined reflection on the data of biblical revelation revealed that both the Jewish as well as the classical Greek philosophical understanding of God as absolutely one and solitary was transfigured by the fuller understanding of God’s nature revealed in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. For now, it became clear that God’s unity was not the unity of a monad, but the unity brought about by self-giving love.

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<sup>5</sup> Documents of Vatican II: *Gaudium et Spes*, 24.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, “Concerning the Notion of Person in Theology,” *Communio* 17, no. Fall (1990): pp. 439-454, <https://doi.org/https://www.communio-icr.com/files/ratzinger17-3.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, J. R. Foster, and Michael Miller, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 165.

In perhaps his most well-known work, *Introduction to Christianity*, Ratzinger develops this line of thought by articulating the archetypal relationship between the Holy Trinity—the divine *communio personarum*—and the human person created for communion. In the fifth chapter, after acknowledging the importance of the truth of the *via negativa* in approaching the mystery of God’s inner life that in any analogy between God and creation the dissimilarity infinitely surpasses any similarity between the two as taught by the fourth Lateran Council,<sup>8</sup> Ratzinger develops three theses by which he seeks to articulate the significance of the Trinitarian dogma, one of which is “*una essentia tres personae*.”<sup>9</sup> The author begins by noting that contrary to ancient thought, both Jewish and Greek, the novelty of Christian revelation consists in the confession of faith that both unity and plurality are equally primordial realities. As the Three-in-One, God simultaneously surpasses and embraces both categories. In the thought of the Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, plurality was understood as a falling away from the unity that marked the divine nature. In Christian thought, unity and plurality—the “One and the Many”—are held together in tensive unity within the tri-unity of a relationship of love. What this means is that the unity of God is ultimately a unity in love. A God who *is* love must be triune, for love entails a lover, a beloved, and love itself.

In light of the newness of the event of Christ, it became evident that the philosophical terminology and categories of Greek thought were insufficient to the task of explicating the mystery of God’s own being without a radical re-working of concepts and language. In order for theologians to be able to speak about the reality of the Trinitarian life, a radical transformation of vocabulary needed to take place. For example, the two words that were taken up by early Christian thought to describe the three Persons in God—the Greek word *prosopon* and the Latin *persona*—were terms taken from the theatre. These two terms, meaning respectively “look toward” and “sounding through,” are both terms of relationship. Ratzinger notes that for Christian thought “there is no such thing as

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<sup>8</sup> “Fourth Lateran Council (1215),” CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA: Fourth Lateran Council, accessed November 27, 2020, <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09018a.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, J. R. Foster, and Michael Miller, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 178.

person in the categorical singular.”<sup>10</sup> To say God is a Person— or more precisely, tri-Personal— is to say that God’s very being is communion, an interplay of relationships. In God, relationship is not merely one aspect of the divine Persons; rather, the divine Persons— Father, Son, and Holy Spirit— *are* the very relationships that relate each to the other. God is not only *Logos* or reason; God is also *dia-Logos*, love.<sup>11</sup> In other words, reason and love mark the very being of God through and through. Ratzinger demonstrates this by pointing the reader to the many instances in Scripture—especially in the Gospel of John—where God seem to be in conversation with himself, beginning with the creation account in the Book of Genesis (e.g., “let us make,” *Genesis* 1:26ff).

For Ratzinger, this truth about God’s own inner life of love reveals how we are to understand the whole of creation, and in a particular way, how we come to understand the human person. For if it is the case that God is tri-Personal, and if the human person is created in the *imago Dei*, then it follows that man, as person, is created in the *imago Trinitatis*. For classical Catholic theology, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist absolutely *as* relationship. In other words, God is Father only in the relationship he has with the Son. The Second Person of the Trinity is Son only in relationship with the Father. And the Holy Spirit is Person only as the mutual communion and gift of the Father and Son. As *imago Dei*, man’s very existence is relational. The individual human being cannot be understood in the absolute singular, in the sense of an “autonomous self.” More significantly, man cannot understand or fulfill himself apart from loving relationships with other persons— first, with other human persons; and then, ultimately, with God. This can be seen by reflecting on the origin of each human being. For the very being and existence of each one is tied to a father and a mother and thus existence is a gift bestowed. One’s existence is always first and foremost a gift, something received from another.

Developing his thesis further, Ratzinger explains how the category of *relatio*, relatedness, sheds significant light on the distinctiveness of the Christian understanding of God. To

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<sup>10</sup> Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 180.

<sup>11</sup> Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 183.

profess that the Trinity is tri-Personal entails that he is “relatedness, communicability, fruitfulness.”<sup>12</sup> In the thought of Aristotle, the category of relation was considered one of the accidents of being, as distinct from the substance, that which is truly real. With the advent of Christianity, Aristotelian thought on the concept of relation underwent a significant transformation. For if God is *dia-Logos* and not simply *Logos*, a “we” instead of simply an “I”, then relation is no longer peripheral but is in fact quite central. The divine “We” is the consequence of there being an “I” and a “Thou” in God’s very identity. Following on from this, we can see the true significance of the statement in 1 John 4:8 that “God is love.” For if love is what God is in the very depths of his divine being, and love is a relational reality, then to say that God is love is equivalent to saying that God is a play of relationships. Having said this, we will see below that the Western tradition of Christian thought tended to approach the doctrine of the Trinity by way of an intra-personal rather than an inter-personal route of access, resulting in a perhaps one-sided picture of God’s intra-Trinitarian life as well as leading the way to an excessively individualistic understanding of the human person.

### ***1.2.1 The Development of Trinitarian Thought and Its Application to Anthropology***

As the development of Trinitarian thought continued from the early Church into the Medieval period, the predominant Western tradition tended to approach the articulation of the doctrine of the Trinity using the intrapersonal or psychological model, which sought analogies between the faculties interior to the individual human being and the three Persons of the Trinity. Both Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, the two most influential theologians in the West, articulated an understanding of the Trinity in this manner. Nevertheless, in the Eastern Church and in several lesser-known thinkers in the West (e.g. Bonaventure and the theologians of the Victorine school) tended toward a more interpersonal approach to understanding of the Trinity.<sup>13</sup> This tradition remained as a lesser-known current of Trinitarian theology up through the Medieval and into the

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<sup>12</sup> Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 180.

<sup>13</sup> Marc Ouellet, Philip Milligan, and Linda M. Cicone, *Divine Likeness: toward a Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2006), 24-26.

Modern period. Though this history would be fruitful to explore in more depth, it exceeds the scope of our project.

However, this interpersonal approach to the Trinity gained a strong advocate upon the election of Pope John Paul II in 1978. In his first trip to the American continent in 1979, during an address to CELAM, the Bishops' Assembly for Latin America, Pope John Paul II made this striking statement: "We must make this beautiful and deep consideration: our God is not a solitude but a family..."<sup>14</sup> Later, during his Wednesday series of catecheses on human love, known popularly as the Theology of the Body, the pontiff explored in great depth the Trinitarian dimension of the *imago Dei*, shown forth in a particular way in the relationship of complementarity between man and woman united in marriage.<sup>15</sup> John Paul would continue to reflect on this central mystery of Christian faith and life in numerous magisterial documents throughout the course of his pontificate. Drawing on his experience as one of the principal drafters of the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, the pontiff developed a Trinitarian and Christocentric anthropology based on paragraphs 24 and 22, respectively. As John Paul eloquently put it in his first encyclical: "Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it."<sup>16</sup>

Marc Cardinal Ouellet, in an essay entitled "Theology of the Family: An Ongoing Project," argues that rather than approach an understanding of the Trinity by starting "from below" with the human family and then trying to find touchpoints with the Trinity, a preferable approach is to begin "from above" with the Trinity and ask how, from the light of God's self-revelation, we may come to better understand the nature of the family. In other words, if God is a Trinity of divine Persons, and if we as human persons are

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<sup>14</sup> John Paul II, quoted in Francis *Amoris Laetitia* (Vatican City, Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2016), 11.

<sup>15</sup> John Paul II and Michael Waldstein, *Man and Woman He Created Them: a Theology of the Body* (Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 10.

created in the image and likeness of the Trinity, might it not be better to begin with the archetype in order to understand the image rather than the other way around? This “katalogical” approach, exemplified in the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar, emphasizes the primacy of God and the dynamic relationship between the uncreated exemplar and the created image.<sup>17</sup> This seems to comport well with the words of John Paul II with which we opened the chapter: “*The primordial model of the family is to be sought in God himself, in the Trinitarian mystery of his life.*”<sup>18</sup> It also sheds light on a point of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* that the mystery of the Trinity illuminates all of the other mysteries of the faith, in this case the mystery of marriage and the family.<sup>19</sup>

From an Orthodox Christian perspective, Paul Evdokimov similarly highlights the “top down” approach that Ouellet takes in understanding the human image in light of the divine archetype. In his book, *Sacrament of Love*, Evdokimov argues that personhood only properly and absolutely exists in God. Created to the image of God, the human person is a dynamic reality straining towards the goal of full personhood in God.<sup>20</sup> This comports with the teaching of Vatican II that “Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear.”<sup>21</sup> The life of the Christian disciple consists in “putting on Christ,” becoming more and more conformed to Christ the “final Adam.”<sup>22</sup> For Evdokimov, personhood is ultimately a spiritual reality that carries within itself a dynamic drive toward fulfillment in Christ. As opposed to a “mere individual,” the person is the one who has been opened toward God by becoming a “new creation” in Christ.<sup>23</sup> Hans Urs

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<sup>17</sup> Marc Ouellet, Philip Milligan, and Linda M. Cicone, *Divine Likeness: Toward a Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2006), 14-15; Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, Adrian J. Walker, and Graham Harrison, *Theo-Logic: Theological Logical Theory*, vol. 2 (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2000).

<sup>18</sup> John Paul II, *Gratissimam Sane (Letter to Families)* (Vatican City, Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), 6.

<sup>19</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 1997), 234

<sup>20</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *The Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 53.

<sup>21</sup> Documents of Vatican II: *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Rom 5:12-21.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. 2 Cor 5:17.



von Balthasar, in his *Theo-Dramatics*, also makes this distinction, thus tying together the dynamic nature of the human person oriented toward fulfillment in Christ, and the intrinsically social nature of the human person whose fulfillment is inextricably linked with being progressively conformed to the absolute identity of person and mission exemplified in Jesus Christ. This will be explored in greater depth in the next part of this chapter.

Taking one step further in our exploration of the relationship between the uncreated archetype and the created image, it is helpful to look at the important concept *communio personarum* (communion of persons) and how it illuminates man as *imago Dei*. In his apostolic exhortation on the dignity of women, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, Pope John Paul II shows that, in a significant development from the Old Testament Scriptures which emphasize the oneness and unity of God, the New Testament revelation stresses the divine communion of persons. For as we have seen, the unity of God is not an absolute unity, but rather a play of loving relationships—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Man, created from the beginning as male and female, is a “unity of the two,” just as God is also a unity of two. The divine “We” is the source and model of the human “we.” The pontiff elaborates that because the Father, Son, and Spirit subsist *in* and *through* their relationships with one another, the very essence of the divine life is a communion of persons, a family. Since man and woman are created in the image of God, they also come to maturity within a communion of persons.<sup>24</sup> In contradistinction to the Enlightenment’s predominant emphasis on the human person as an autonomous individual, Catholic theology has consistently emphasized the truth that the human being, as person, can never be conceived as a monad; for, as we have seen, both substance and relation are equally bound up with the nature of persons, whether uncreated divine Persons or created human persons. Later, we will explore in greater depth the concept of *communio personarum* as it applies specifically to the family.

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<sup>24</sup> John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* (Vatican City: *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, 1988), 6 & 7.

Summarizing what we have seen thus far, we have shown that a fully rounded anthropology can only be had by looking to the inner life of Trinity and seeing man in light of the Trinitarian *communio personarum*. Without a robust Trinitarian theology that accounts for the dialogical play of relationships constituting God's own life of love, one cannot sound the depths of the human person, called to fulfillment in a relationship of communion with the Trinity and other human persons. Additionally, we have shown that God's very existence is loving communion, and that love is an essential characteristic of relationships between persons. The stage has now been set for an investigation into the mystery of the unity between Christ and Church as expressed in the Sacrament of Matrimony.

### ***1.3 The Christological Foundations of the Sacrament of Matrimony***

The Christological foundations of the Sacrament of Matrimony flow organically from its Trinitarian foundations. In this part of the chapter, it may be helpful to first situate our Christological exploration within a Trinitarian horizon. Hans Urs von Balthasar suggests that the Sacrament of Marriage has its deepest roots, not in the relationship of Christ and the Church, but in the depths of the mystery of God's own Trinitarian life of love.<sup>25</sup> Balthasar argues that the very ground of the unity-in-difference of man and woman is in fact the unity-in-difference of the Father and Son. As we saw earlier, what unites the Persons of the Trinity within the Godhead is the relations between them. Union in love is possible only when there is difference, complementarity. The Father is Father in his total self-gift of begetting the Son. The Son is the Son only in receiving his being from the Father and reciprocating the gift. The Holy Spirit's personhood is precisely both Gift and Communion between the Father and Son. Because man and woman are created in the image of God and called to be conformed progressively to his likeness, they have the capacity, in both body and soul, to mirror the divine archetype, albeit to a very inferior degree.

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<sup>25</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar et al., *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), 577.

Following Balthasar, Angelo Scola sets out to explore what he calls the “nuptial mystery” through a series of soundings into the mystery of God and of man. He notes three factors of the nuptial mystery—difference, love as gift, and fruitfulness—as analogously applying both to God and to the dual unity of man and woman.<sup>26</sup> He argues that all the mysteries of the Christian faith (e.g., Trinity, Christ, Church, the sacraments) reflect in different ways aspects of this one mystery. If the fullness of the nuptial mystery resides in the Trinity, then the Christological dimension takes on a profound depth of richness. For if the Son first receives his being as a gift within the intra-Trinitarian life of love, it becomes clear that it is he who sets the pattern of obedience and receptivity in which man is called to participate. This is because, as both the Bible and the Tradition make clear, Christ is the new Adam.<sup>27</sup> This fundamental dynamic of the dual unity of man-woman that John Paul expresses ultimately finds its source in the dual unity of Father-Son.<sup>28</sup> In this regard, Marc Ouellet point out that, for Thomas Aquinas, the very essence of marriage is *relatio*.<sup>29</sup> For it is in the interplay, the unity-in-difference, of the man and the woman that the divine archetype can be mirrored in a creaturely manner.

Moving from the Mystery of the Trinity to that of Christ by following the thread of dual unity, theologians have argued that the hypostatic union— the union of the divine and human natures of Christ in the one divine Person of the Son— is also an archetype for the dual unity of man and woman. In the one Person of the Son, the same interplay of unity-in-difference is on display as in the Trinitarian mystery. The Fathers of the Church, as well as the Church’s public worship, refer to the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word as a “marriage.”<sup>30</sup> Just as in marriage the two become one, in the Incarnation of the Word in Jesus, God and man are united together in an unbreakable bond. It is precisely because the divine and human natures of Christ are *different* that they can be united nuptially in the one Person of Christ the Son.

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<sup>26</sup> Angelo Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005), xxiii.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Rom 5:12-18.

<sup>28</sup> John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Marc Ouellet, Philip Milligan, and Linda M. Cicone, *Divine Likeness: toward a Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2006), 20-21.

<sup>30</sup> *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Monday, Week II, Evening Prayer, Antiphon 2 Psalm Prayer.

Scola stresses that the unity of two natures found in the hypostatic union is a fundamental reference point for the “unity of two” of man and woman united in marriage. This is so because man— male and female— is created in the “image of the Image,” Jesus Christ.<sup>31</sup> The Incarnation of Christ is at one and the same time both God’s “yes” to man and man’s “yes” to God. Because human nature has been taken up into the divine life through the Second Person of the Trinity, the marriage between God and man is indissoluble.<sup>32</sup> This indissolubility becomes the ultimate ground and guarantor of the indissolubility of marriage. Nevertheless, as von Balthasar is at pains to point out, the two-way covenant between God and man, as well as between man and woman, is fundamentally anchored in the prior one-way initiative of God, who became man in Jesus Christ and enabled by his gracious act the response on the part of man.<sup>33</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI, noting the prevalence of the imagery of marriage throughout the Bible, describes how throughout the Old Testament there is a growing emphasis on describing the covenant between God and Israel in terms of betrothal and marriage.<sup>34</sup> John Paul II notes in his *Letter to Families* that the communion of love between God and his people finds its definitive enfleshment in the coming of Jesus Christ.<sup>35</sup> In the first of his three volume work on Jesus, Benedict XVI—commenting on the image of Jesus as the true vine in John 15—speaks of Jesus’ identification with the vine. Noting how the imagery of the vine and the vineyard were throughout the Old Testament images of marriage, the pontiff points out that in the Incarnation of Christ, God has “grafted himself” into our humanity in an irrevocable manner, uniting forever God and mankind and fulfilling in himself both God and man’s sides of the covenant.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Angelo Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005), 350.

<sup>32</sup> Marc Ouellet, Michelle K. Borrás, and Adrian J. Walker, *Mystery and Sacrament of Love: a Theology of Marriage and the Family for the New Evangelization* (Grand Rapids Michigan: Eerdmans Pub. Company, 2015), 128.

<sup>33</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Explorations in Theology. Spouse of the Word* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1991).

<sup>34</sup> Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (Vatican City, Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005), 9.

<sup>35</sup> John Paul II, *Gratissimam Sane*, 19.

<sup>36</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 2011), 259.

Throughout the canon of Sacred Scripture, the theme and language of marriage is on display. The account of the creation of man and woman recorded in Genesis chapters 1-2 lays the foundation for the marital language prominently featured throughout Sacred Scripture. From Genesis through Revelation, beginning to end, nuptial language is used to describe the covenant relationship between God and his People. Viewing marriage as a *leitmotif* that figures prominently in Scripture sheds light not only on God's relationship with his People, but also on the relationship between man and woman in marriage. For example, John Paul II notes that Jesus' presence at the Wedding Feast of Cana highlights the extent to which the truth concerning marriage and the family is bound up with the God's revelation of himself throughout the history of salvation, as recorded in Sacred Scripture.<sup>37</sup> Not only does marriage serve as a powerful analogue to God and his People's covenant relationship; it also unlocks the depths of the mystery of marriage as an icon of the *definitive* marriage, that of God and humankind.<sup>38</sup>

The theme of covenant-as-marriage is important to consider, because it reflects at one and the same time the one-flesh union of the two covenant partners— Christ and the Church/ man and woman— as well as the mutual belonging of the two partners. This mutuality is important for understanding why covenant is key to penetrating both God's relationship with his People/Christ's relationship with the Church and the extent to which the marriage between man and woman is directed from the beginning toward fulfillment in Christ and how it illuminates Christ's fulfillment and provides concrete grounding for it. The union between the two in no way militates against but rather supports an authentic and robust mutuality, because, as we have seen above, the highest union is that of love.

In the section "The Bridegroom is with You" in his Letter to Families, Pope John Paul II reflects in depth on the beautiful meditation on marriage found in the famous fifth chapter of Ephesians. The pope teaches that sacramental marriage both sheds light on and participates in the marriage between Christ and the Church. Noting that marriage, from

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<sup>37</sup> John Paul II, *Gratissimam Sane*, 19.

<sup>38</sup> Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of Marriage: Human Marriage as the Image and Sacrament of the Marriage of God and Creation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020), 18.

the beginning of creation, is oriented toward fulfillment in Christ and the Church, John Paul argues that the “definitive marriage” is that of Christ and his Church, which is simultaneously the fulfillment of God’s nuptials with his People and the concrete realization of an unbreakable bond between God and man.<sup>39</sup> For the pontiff, the deepest significance of sacramental marriage is that, along with the other sacraments, it is a fruit of Christ the Bridegroom’s nuptials on the Cross.

For Ignace de la Potterie, as for many other biblical theologians, the Cross is the ultimate “wedding,” because in the Crucifixion of Jesus, through the definitive self-gift of Christ, God and mankind are brought into an indissoluble bond.<sup>40</sup> In addition to the bond, it is clear that the marriage of Christ and the Church, represented by Mary at the foot of the Cross, is uniquely fruitful: as the Second Vatican Council constitution on the liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, puts it, “it was from the side of Christ as He slept the sleep of death upon the cross” that there came forth “the wondrous sacrament of the whole Church.”<sup>41</sup> Ephesians 5 enjoins Christian husbands to “love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”<sup>42</sup> As both Scripture and the magisterium attest, marriage is a “great mystery” that participates in Christ’s definitive marriage with his Bride. Because this is so, the definitive marriage between Christ and his Church becomes the reference point for the spousal love of husbands and wives.<sup>43</sup> Christ’s love “to the end” (John 13) becomes the ultimate rule and measure of Christian marital love.

The theme of marriage as found in the Gospel of John is particularly fruitful as it relates to the topic at hand. From the very beginning of his gospel, John stresses the nuptial relationship between Christ and the Church. For example, the first “sign” recorded by

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<sup>39</sup> Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine*, 19.

<sup>40</sup> La Potterie Ignace de, *The Hour of Jesus: The Passion and Resurrection of Jesus According to John: Text and Spirit* (Staten Island, NY: St Paul Publications, 1989).

<sup>41</sup> Documents of Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 5.

<sup>42</sup> Eph 5:25-27.

<sup>43</sup> John Paul II, *Gratissimam Sane*, 19.

John is the miracle of the Wedding Feast of Cana, wherein Jesus transforms approximately 150 gallons of water into choice wine. Ouellet notes the sacramental significance of this act, which points to the wedding feast of the Cross in John 19.<sup>44</sup> Theologians and biblical scholars have noted the clear parallelism between John 2 and John 19: Jesus, the new Adam and Mary, the “woman” as the new Eve; the nuptial language apparent in both instances (John 19:30 is translated in the Latin Vulgate Bible as *consummatum est* (“it is consummated”)); the water and blood flowing from the opened side of the crucified Christ “asleep” on the Cross representing the Church as Bride, just as Eve was drawn from the side of the sleeping Adam at Creation. By reading John 2 and 19 in light of one another, Ouellet stresses, the mystery of the Cross and the mystery of marriage mutually illuminate one another.<sup>45</sup>

From a different perspective, Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians expresses this same truth. Though we are not able to enter into an in-depth exegesis of Ephesians Chapter 5, it is important for our purposes to stress in particular the significance of 5:32, which reads, “This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the church.” Commenting on this verse, Scola emphasizes the complementarity of the Christ-Church and man-woman relationship in reciprocally shedding light on one another. The Crucifixion of Jesus makes clear that in the marriage that Christ effects on the Cross, God’s initiative always takes priority. As Pope Benedict puts it, Christ is and always remains the one who loves us first, both in a chronological and in an ontological sense.<sup>46</sup> The Son generates his Bride, the Church, through his Passion and death. Christ’s total gift of self makes possible both the existence of the Church, as well as the answering response that the Church gives precisely as a fruit of the Cross. In this regard Scola writes that the “truth of nuptiality is thus contained in the modality by which Christ generates his bride in the total self-gift of the Cross.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ouellet, *Mystery and Sacrament of Love*, 149.

<sup>45</sup> Ouellet, *Mystery and Sacrament of Love*, 149.

<sup>46</sup> Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis* (Vatican City, Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2007), 14.

<sup>47</sup> Scola, *Nuptial Mystery*, 99.

Here again it is important to reiterate Christ's twofold nature and the nature of a covenant. For, in any covenant, there are two partners involved. Throughout the history of salvation God remained a faithful covenant partner despite his People's repeated unfaithfulness and failure to keep the terms of the covenant. In the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures, Jesus represents both the faithful God, the Bridegroom, and faithful humankind, the Bride. Within the one Person of the Son, a play of freedoms is taking place whereby two freedoms—God's and man's—come into profound unity, the unity of love. The marriage of God and man is not a static reality but an event full of dynamism that opens a space of freedom into which man's own freedom can enter and by which it can be guided toward its *telos*. This is significant for sacramental marriage when we reflect that the true, definitive marriage has already been consummated—that of Christ and the Church. Because Christ has already led the way, blazed the trail so to speak, he becomes the exemplar and the norm of authentic human freedom and a new beginning for man.<sup>48</sup>

Marc Ouellet, following Hans Urs von Balthasar and the Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, elucidates the relationship between Christ and the Church as between Christ's "original sacramentality" and the Church's "derivative sacramentality."<sup>49</sup> Though Christ and the Church together are the *Christus totus*, nevertheless the Church's being and existence, as well as her fruitfulness, are entirely dependent of the primacy of Christ in the order of grace. The Church's being "*in Christo*" flows out from the original sacrament of Christ's human nature. As Bride, the Church participates as "one flesh" in the sacramentality of Christ. Augustine puts it thus: "Christ dies so that the Church can be born...After his death, his side is pierced by a lance so that from it can flow the sacraments that build up the Church."<sup>50</sup>

From Ouellet's line of argument, we can extrapolate that just as the Church participates in the original sacramentality of Christ so the Sacrament of Matrimony also flows from

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<sup>48</sup> Angelo Scola, *Hans Urs Von Balthasar: A Theological Style* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 25-26.

<sup>49</sup> Ouellet, *Mystery and Sacrament of Love*, 27.

<sup>50</sup> Ouellet, *Mystery and Sacrament of Love*, 27.



the relationship between the archetypal marriage of Christ and the Church and the participatory relationship of Christian marriage. Heinrich Schlier speaks of human marriage as a “reproduction” of the heavenly marriage of Christ and Church, and as “taken up into” the marriage feast of the Lamb. This same emphasis can be found in *Gaudium et Spes*, which speaks of married love being “caught up” in Christ’s love for the Church.<sup>51</sup> *Lumen Gentium* also echoes this when the Council fathers speak of the Sacrament of Matrimony both signifying and partaking of the mystery of Christ’s marriage with the Church.<sup>52</sup>

“The Eucharist is the very source of Christian marriage.”<sup>53</sup> With these words, Pope John Paul II stresses the importance of the Eucharist for the very being and life of marriage and the family. In his apostolic exhortation, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, John Paul describes the Eucharist as the “sacrament of Bridegroom and Bride” and emphasizes the intrinsic link between the marriage bond of husband and wife and the Eucharistic unity of Christ the Bridegroom and the Church his Bride.<sup>54</sup> As was seen earlier, the Catholic Church understands the Sacrament of Matrimony as not only imitating *outwardly* the union of Christ and the Church but as participating *inwardly* in that union, such that the “great mystery” of man and woman in marriage refers ultimately to Christ and the Church.<sup>55</sup>

Though it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore in depth the Eucharistic theology of the Church, it is important for our purposes to look briefly at what, or rather whom, the Church speaks of when she speaks about the Eucharist. In reflecting on the Church’s meditation of the Cross of Christ, we saw that both Scripture and Tradition bear witness to a sacramental understanding of the Paschal Mystery of Christ’s Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension. The blood and water that flow from the side of Christ as he hangs dead upon the Cross represent the new Eve, the Church, flowing from Christ’s side. More specifically, the water represents the waters of Baptism, and the blood

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<sup>51</sup> Documents of Vatican II: *Gaudium et Spes*, 48

<sup>52</sup> Documents of Vatican II: *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

<sup>53</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 57.

<sup>54</sup> John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 26

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Eph 5:32.

represents the Eucharistic Blood of Christ. From these two sacraments of initiation the Christian receives both new life in Christ and the sustenance that progressively transforms him into what he receives.<sup>56</sup> The Cross, says Pope Benedict XVI, is the nuptials of Christ with the Church. This is apparent in the words of Jesus to Mary, “Woman, behold, your son!” and his words to the Apostle John, “Behold, your mother!”<sup>57</sup> De la Potterie, in his commentary on this passage, sees in these words of Jesus an indication of the spiritual fecundity of the Cross. The new Adam and the new Eve beget a son, represented by John, who is the fruit of their spiritual union.<sup>58</sup>

From the Cross flows the Eucharist, the font and sustenance of the Church. At the Last Supper, the night before his Crucifixion, Jesus entrusted to his apostles the gift of the Eucharist, transforming an outward act of violence into a free, total, and fruitful gift of self. In his post-synodical apostolic exhortation on the Eucharist, Pope Benedict writes that “the indissoluble, exclusive, and faithful bond uniting Christ and the Church... finds sacramental expression in the Eucharist.”<sup>59</sup> In a profound sense, the Eucharist is the nuptial sacrament *par excellence*. From the Eucharist spouses discover the rule and measure of their own covenantal love and receive the grace necessary for their marriage to be healed, transfigured and perfected from within. The “mystery” of Christian Marriage is precisely the mystery of the Eucharist, the source from which marital love flows and the goal toward which it is oriented. In a mysterious way, there exists a mutual indwelling between the covenant of man and woman united in marriage and the Covenant of Christ the Bridegroom and his Bride made present in the Eucharist. Pope John Paul II speaks of this mystery thus:

The Covenant [of Christ and the Church] not only inspires the life of the couple, but it is accomplished in it, in the sense that the Covenant unfolds its own energy within the life of the spouses. It “shapes” their love from within: they love one

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<sup>56</sup> Augustine and Maria Boulding OSB, *Confessions*, second edition (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012), 173.

<sup>57</sup> Jn 19:26-27.

<sup>58</sup> La Potterie Ignace de, *The Hour of Jesus*, 108.

<sup>59</sup> Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis* (Vatican City, Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005), 28.

another not only as Christ loves, but already, mysteriously, with the very love of Christ, since his Spirit has been given to them...to the extent that they allow themselves to be shaped by him.<sup>60</sup>

As John Paul posits, the Covenant of Christ and the Church indwells the marriage covenant between a man and woman such that the love between the spouses—their mutual and total gift of self—becomes a revelation of Christ love for his Bride, the Church. As Christ’s Eucharistic Covenant sheds light on the mystery of marriage, so also the mystery of marriage illuminates and makes concrete and tangible the “great mystery” to which Paul refers in Ephesians 5:32. Moreover, as the elements of bread and wine, through the ministry of the ministerial priest become the Body and Blood of Christ, so through Christian sacramental marriage the conjugal love of man and woman is taken up and transfigured to such an extent that they express Christ’s Eucharistic love for the Church. As Marc Ouellet elaborates “marriage incarnates the spousal figure of Christ and the Church at the heart of the world. It translates the reality of the eucharistic mystery into the spouses’ flesh.”<sup>61</sup>

To recapitulate, it is clear from the above that there is an intrinsic unity between the Sacrament of the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Matrimony. The Eucharist is the very source of Christian marriage, as well as its *telos*. By the Lord’s own gift, human love is taken up into divine love and participates in a real way in the supernatural love of Christ and the Church, the definitive Bridegroom and Bride. When this intrinsic unity is revisited in the third chapter, it will be made clear how the Eucharist structures the spirituality of marriage and the domestic Church.

#### ***1.4 The Spirit and the Bride: The Place of the Holy Spirit and the Church in the Sacrament of Matrimony***

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<sup>60</sup> John Paul II, “God’s Gift of Life and Love: On Marriage and the Eucharist,” *Communio*, vol. 41 (Summer 2014), 465.

<sup>61</sup> Ouellet, *Mystery and Sacrament of Love*, 155.

In the first two sections of the chapter, our aim was to articulate the Trinitarian and Christological foundations of the domestic Church. In this final section, we will endeavor to explore its pneumatological foundations by examining the place of the Holy Spirit within the intra-Trinitarian life of God as well as the Holy Spirit's economic mission—first in relation to Christ's saving work on the Cross; and then as the supernatural bond of communion between spouses brought about in the Sacrament of Matrimony.

The third century bishop and martyr Saint Cyprian aptly described the Church as “a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>62</sup> As we have seen, by virtue of their creation in the *imago Dei*, man and woman, as a “unity of two,” have the capacity to mirror in their conjugal union and their family something of the inner life and love of the Trinity. We saw that by a total gift of self, they echo in a certain way the love that is God's very nature.

Very early in his pontificate, Pope John Paul expressed in a striking formulation the very heart of God's being and existence: “Our God in his deepest mystery is not solitude, but a family, for he has within himself fatherhood, sonship and the essence of the family, which is love. That love, in the divine family, is the Holy Spirit.”<sup>63</sup> St. Bernard of Clairvaux in his own daring language describes the Holy Spirit as the substantial “kiss” reciprocally given by the Father and the Son, the Father initiating the kiss, and the Son receiving and kissing the Father in response.<sup>64</sup> What both the Pope and Bernard are getting at is the very identity of the Holy Spirit as both a bond of unity between the Father and the Son, as well as the Person-gift of love.

Within the life of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is the “seal” of the love of the Trinity. As Augustine notes in Book IX of *De Trinitate*, one may approach an understanding of the Trinitarian mystery that “God is love” by way of a reflection on the dynamics of human love. For in any relationship of love, Augustine points out, there are three aspects: the

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<sup>62</sup> Saint Cyprian, *De Dom. Orat* 23: PL 4, 553, excerpted in CCC 810.

<sup>63</sup> John Paul II. “Homily of his Holiness Pope John Paul II at the Eucharistic Celebration in *Puebla de los Angeles*.” Accessed November 25, 2020. Vatican.va.

<sup>64</sup> Yves Congar, *The Word and the Spirit* (London: G. Chapman, 1986), 108-109.

lover, the beloved, and love itself.<sup>65</sup> John Paul II, developing this line of thought in his *encyclical Dominum et Vivificantum*, refers to the Holy Spirit as both “Person-Love” and “Person-Gift.” The Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity, is both the bond uniting the Father and the Son, and also the fruit of their reciprocal love.

It might be helpful at this juncture to emphasize a point that has been made throughout the tradition of Catholic thought and teaching regarding the Holy Spirit. The most succinct way to express this point can be found in the words of Yves Congar: “no Christology without pneumatology and no pneumatology without Christology.”<sup>66</sup> In other words, Christ and the Spirit cannot be separated, neither in the immanent life of the Trinity, nor in the economic missions of each in the work of redemption and sanctification. It is clear even from a cursory reading of the Gospels that that the mission of the Holy Spirit is conjoined and ordered to that of the Son, beginning at the moment of the Annunciation to Mary, and proceeding throughout his life up through the passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.<sup>67</sup> It is important to emphasize this point strongly, as this conjoined unity of the Son and the Spirit will be critical in understanding their respective roles in the Sacrament of Matrimony and in the life of the domestic Church.

Marc Cardinal Ouellet, in a chapter devoted to the place of the Holy Spirit within the conjugal covenant of man and woman, unpacks the progressive involvement of the Holy Spirit throughout the course of salvation history. Ouellet notes three moments in particular that show forth this progression of the relationship between God and his People: “preparation, celebration, and fulfillment of the covenant.”<sup>68</sup> First, throughout the course of the Old Testament is recorded the place of the Holy Spirit in preparing for the coming of Christ as the definitive covenant uniting God and his People. Through the

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<sup>65</sup> Augustine, *On the Trinity* (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 2012), Book IX, Chapter 2.

<sup>66</sup> Congar, *The Word and the Spirit*, 108-109, xi.

<sup>67</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 695.

<sup>68</sup> Ouellet, *Divine Likeness*, 80.

prophets, God promises a “new and everlasting covenant”<sup>69</sup> that will bring the nuptials of the divine Bridegroom and his Bride to consummation.<sup>70</sup>

Next, we have the celebration of the definitive covenant, in which the “messianic wedding” is consummated upon the “altar of the Cross.”<sup>71</sup> Ouellet notes that the Fathers of the Church, deploying an allegorical interpretation of Sacred Scripture, read the account of the Wedding Feast of Cana in harmony with the account of the Crucifixion, and also of the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. On the Cross, Christ— perfect God and perfect man— gives the definitive “yes” of the divine Bridegroom, as well as the “yes” of the Bride, clearly alluded to in the Gospel of John 19:30, when Christ speaks his final word from the Cross, “It is finished” and hands over his Spirit. Mary, standing in the place of the Bride taken from the body of the second Adam, as Eve was taken from the body of the first Adam, is there to receive the Holy Spirit.<sup>72</sup>

Ouellet concludes by pointing to the Resurrection and the Ascension of Christ into heaven as paving the way toward the “confirmation” of the disciples at Pentecost, when the Church, having been born from the side of Christ and washed in the regenerating waters of Baptism,<sup>73</sup> receives the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit, “re-creat[ing] humanity as the holy bride” and filling her with the divine life through the Holy Spirit, Person-Love and Person-Gift poured out into their hearts.<sup>74</sup> Tying the end to the beginning, Ouellet writes: “The spousal meaning of the resurrection reveals that the ‘Person-Gift of the Father and Son’ in God, the seal of their consubstantial unity, becomes the spousal bond between God and man in the Crucified and Risen One.”<sup>75</sup>

In the Church, the Bride born from side of the Crucified, the Holy Spirit becomes the seal of the conjugal covenant. As the Holy Spirit is, in the inner life of the Trinity, the bond

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<sup>69</sup> Jer 31:31-35.

<sup>70</sup> Ouellet, *Divine Likeness*, 81-84.

<sup>71</sup> Ouellet, *Divine Likeness*, 85.

<sup>72</sup> Gen 2:21-23; Rev 12:1ff.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Eph 5:26.

<sup>74</sup> Ouellet, *Divine Likeness*, 86.

<sup>75</sup> Ouellet, *Divine Likeness*, 87.

and “seal” of the mutual love of the Father and the Son— their real and substantial “kiss”— he is also, within the Christ-Church covenant, and the covenant of man and woman in marriage, the supernatural principle of their unity, *with* Christ and *in* Christ. This is possible because in the Sacrament of Matrimony man and wife already belong to Christ through the seal of the Sacrament of Baptism and (normally) Confirmation. Hans Urs von Balthasar notes that because the baptized man and woman are already joined to Christ through Baptism, Christ, through the Holy Spirit, can join them together and make them participants in his nuptial union with the Church, his Bride. Within a sacramental marriage, the Holy Spirit serves as the divine “third” who unites the spouses together and makes them participants in the divine “embrace” between the Father and the Son.<sup>76</sup>

In the solemn nuptial blessing at the conclusion of the Liturgy of Matrimony, the priest invokes God’s blessing upon the newly-married couple in these words: “Send down on them the grace of the Holy Spirit and pour your love into their hearts, that they may remain faithful in the Marriage covenant...may these your servants hold fast to the faith.”<sup>77</sup> John Paul II writes that “the Holy Spirit who is poured out in the sacramental celebration offers Christian couples the gift of a new communion of love that is the living and real image of that unique unity which makes of the Church the indivisible Mystical Body of the Lord Jesus.”<sup>78</sup>

In the next chapter, the relation between the Church at large and the domestic Church will be treated. Here we will look specifically at the relationship between Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Church in the Sacrament of Matrimony, focusing in on how the covenant of Christ and the Church is “actualized” through the Sacrament. This will involve, first, looking at the actual celebration of the matrimonial liturgy, focusing especially on the role of the Holy Spirit in joining together the spouses in the conjugal covenant. Second, the enduring element of the Sacrament of Matrimony, the conjugal seal, will be

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<sup>76</sup> Ouellet, *Divine Likeness*, 94.

<sup>77</sup> “The Order of Celebrating Matrimony Within Mass,” *The Order of Celebrating Matrimony: The Roman Ritual*, 2nd ed. (Magnificat, 2016), 74.

<sup>78</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 19.

explicated, with a view toward how the spouses are transformed progressively by the Holy Spirit into the likeness of the divine archetype, the Holy Trinity.

#### ***1.4.1 The Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Matrimony Received and Lived***

In the sacramental sign of marriage (*sacramentum*) there are two fundamental dimensions. The first is the liturgical celebration itself, in which the sign is made up of the mutual consent of the wife and husband within the liturgical celebration. In the marriage of two baptized Christians, it is Christ himself, through the Holy Spirit, who actualizes his covenant with the Church.<sup>79</sup> Ouellet shows that the efficacy of the “word” that the spouses speak to one another in their exchange of vows is ultimately rooted in the mystery of Christ’s covenant with the Church, which is then expressed and extended through the Holy Spirit in the Church.<sup>80</sup> Ouellet also notes that it is in fact the Holy Spirit who “is the invisible protagonist” in the participation of the spouses in the Christ-Church covenant.<sup>81</sup> Significantly, theologians have emphasized that matrimony is not simply a sacrament that is *received*; one could say it is a sacrament that the married couple *becomes*. This is where the second dimension comes to the fore. In the Sacrament of Matrimony, spouses are consecrated, set apart, for a particular ecclesial mission: to build up God’s holy People. This line of thought will be pursued in what follows.

In his encyclical *Casti Connubii*, Pope Pius XI quotes Robert Bellarmine in order to draw a comparison between the Sacrament of the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Marriage:

The sacrament of matrimony can be regarded in two ways: first, in the making, and then in its permanent state. For it is a sacrament like to that of the Eucharist, which not only when it is being conferred, but also whilst it remains, is a sacrament; for as long as the married parties are alive, so long is their union a sacrament of Christ and the Church.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Ouellet, *Mystery and Sacrament of Love*, 60.

<sup>80</sup> Ouellet, *Mystery and Sacrament of Love*, 60.

<sup>81</sup> Ouellet, *Mystery and Sacrament of Love*, 63.

<sup>82</sup> Pius XI, *Casti Connubii* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1930), 11.



Pius goes on to speak about the importance of each of the spouses cooperating actively in the grace of the sacrament. As the Eucharist continues to perdure as long as the sacramental species remain intact, so also a sacramental marriage continues as long as both spouses are alive. This means that by virtue of the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the Sacrament of Matrimony, an ever-present source of grace for the spouses is available and, as John Paul II reminds us, “the gift of Jesus Christ is not exhausted in the actual celebration.”<sup>83</sup> What this means, in other words, is that the Sacrament of Matrimony is by its nature a dynamically unfolding reality in which the spouses can continue to grow into the reality they signify—the perfect and total self-gift of Christ on the Cross. In von Balthasar’s language, this dynamism consists in moving ever more from being a “conscious subject” into a “theological person,” thus progressing into a deeper participation in Christ the divine archetype.<sup>84</sup>

The foundation for this dynamic growth into the reality that spouses signify by the grace of Matrimony is the sacramental seal. Significantly, the Second Vatican Council marked a step forward in the magisterial teaching on the perduring nature of the sacrament, stressing the abiding presence of Jesus Christ in their union and the continual outpouring of sacramental grace available to spouses.<sup>85</sup> Though not considered a character sacrament like Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders, there has been a development in theological thinking about the quasi-character nature of Matrimony. In fact, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that the Holy Spirit is “the seal of their covenant, the ever available source of their love and the strength to renew their fidelity.”<sup>86</sup> More profoundly, Ouellet argues that the “Holy Spirit, ‘seal’ of Trinitarian love, is given to the spouses as the ‘seal’ of the covenant between God and humanity in Christ.”<sup>87</sup> Throughout Sacred Scripture, the “seal” signifies belonging—“set me as a seal upon your heart”<sup>88</sup>—as well as consecration, the setting apart of someone or something

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<sup>83</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 56.

<sup>84</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 3 (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1992), 207-208.

<sup>85</sup> Documents of Vatican II: *Gaudium et Spes*, 48.

<sup>86</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1624.

<sup>87</sup> Ouellet, *Divine Likeness*, 79.

<sup>88</sup> Song of Sol 8:6.

for divine worship. In the New Testament, “seal” frequently refers to the gifts of the Holy Spirit.<sup>89</sup> In sum, the seal is the guarantee of the continuing presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the marital and familial life of the Christian couple.

As we conclude this chapter, it is helpful to set the stage for the next, where an examination of the ecclesial nature of the family will be undertaken. John Paul II uses the language of “a community of life and love” to express the permanent dimension of the Sacrament of Matrimony.<sup>90</sup> In saying this, it seems that the Holy Father wants to stress the real core of the identity and mission of Christian marriage and the domestic Church: the vocation to love which embraces the entirety of the spouses’ existence. In the book *Mystery and Sacrament of Love*, Cardinal Ouellet stresses that “the mutual ‘yes’ expressed verbally in the liturgical celebration is then translated into the ‘language of the body,’ that is to say, not only in the conjugal encounter (consummation) but also in the spouses’ shared life, daily fidelity, friendship, reciprocal forgiveness, fecundity, education, etc.”<sup>91</sup> As the married couple cooperates with the grace of the sacrament by living their vocation together day-in and day-out, their union is progressively conformed to the heart of Christ and sanctified by the Holy Spirit so that they might more fully signify the reality of self-giving Trinitarian love and of Christ’s love for the Church.

## Chapter Two

### Identity and Mission of the Family Understood as a Domestic Church

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#### *2.1 Introduction*

As we have seen thus far in our investigation, the Christian family finds its theological source in the Trinitarian life of God; in the archetypal union of Christ the Bridegroom and the Church, his Bride; and in the charism of the Holy Spirit, the supernatural bond of

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<sup>89</sup> For example, 2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13ff, 4:30.

<sup>90</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 11, 17, 50.

<sup>91</sup> Ouellet, *Mystery and Sacrament of Love*, 71.

communion between spouses. The sacramentality of the Church, symbolized by the blood and water flowing from Christ's pierced side, is actualized and incarnated in the Sacrament of Matrimony.

In this Chapter, we will first elaborate the theological foundations of the ecclesial identity of the family and the fittingness of the term *Ecclesia domestica* to refer to a Christian husband and wife united in the Sacrament of Matrimony, along with their children. Second, it will be argued that a profound identity crisis of marriage and the family has been underway in the Western world (i.e., Europe, North America, Oceania), accelerating over the last fifty years, and that this identity crisis has its origins in factors both within the Church itself and in the wider Western society. In order to carry out this argument, we will begin by marshalling the necessary evidence from sociological studies, as well as from the philosophy and theology of culture. Following this, we will propose that the Church—its teaching and its grace—possesses within itself the theological and cultural resources needed to respond to this identity crisis and to effect renewal both in the Christian family and in the wider Church Catholic. The chapter will conclude by elaborating a Eucharistic ecclesiology of the domestic Church that demonstrates the Paschal core of Christian marriage and family life.

## ***2.2 Biblical and Historical Context of the Domestic Church***

Though the scope of this project does not allow for a full historical survey of the development of the concept of domestic Church, it is helpful to provide a cursory overview of the biblical and patristic sources upon which Catholic teaching and theology have built and from whose deep wells it has drawn. We will begin with the Old and New Testament scriptural foundations and then move on to consider a small selection of the Church Fathers.

It is significant that, throughout the Old Testament and into the New, household language is used to describe the covenant between God and his People. In the Greek Old Testament, the word *οἶκος* (house) is used to refer to the Temple structure, the “place” where God dwells in the midst of his People. In the New Testament, it is no longer a

physical structure that constitutes God’s dwelling; rather, the Christian community— the People of God— is called *ναός του Θεού* as well as the *οἶκος του θεου*, the sanctuary or “dwelling place” of God.<sup>92</sup> What Catholic biblical scholars and theologians call the “economy of salvation” refers to God’s “household management.” Maurice Eminyan points out that the word translated in English as “church” is derived from the Greek *κυριακή Οἴκία*, the “family of the Lord.”<sup>93</sup> In ancient Jewish tradition— the root stock onto which the Church is grafted— it is the home, not the synagogue, that is considered the center around which the religious life of the family revolves, with specific rituals that parallel and echo Jewish liturgical worship in the Temple.<sup>94</sup> It is important to note that even here, God works his salvific purposes through the family; for we shall see that it is through a family, the Holy Family of Nazareth, that God bears his covenant with the Israelites to the whole world.

It is also important to recognize the extent to which Christian households and families played a central role in the growth and development of the early Church. Paul the Apostle makes this clear in several of the letters he wrote to the early Christian communities he founded. For example, Paul refers several times to a married couple, Aquila and Priscilla, and to the “church in their home.”<sup>95</sup> We also learn from the Acts of the Apostles that this missionary married couple carried out an evangelizing and catechizing mission, taking time to carefully instruct Apollos in the ways of the Lord.<sup>96</sup> Aquila and his wife were one of many families who hosted other Christians in their home, forming a “house church” where the proclamation of the Scriptures and the celebration of the Eucharist took place prior to the construction of church buildings. Based on the testimony of Acts and the Letters of St. Paul, it is clear that from earliest times it was not only the Christian community in a certain city or region that was referred to as a “church”, but also the domestic Church, the Christian household.<sup>97</sup> In one of his Wednesday General Audiences, Pope Benedict XVI stressed the importance of Christian spouses in the early

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<sup>92</sup> Ouellet, *Divine Likeness: toward a Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family*, 40.

<sup>93</sup> Maurice Eminyan, “The Family as the Domestic Church,” *Melita Theologica*, 53, no. 1 (2002), 66.

<sup>94</sup> See, for example Joseph C. Atkinson, *Biblical and Theological Foundations of the Family: the Domestic Church* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 2014).

<sup>95</sup> 1 Cor 16:9; Rom 16:3-5; Phil 2:2; 2 Tim 1:16, 4:19.

<sup>96</sup> Acts 18:26.

<sup>97</sup> Eminyan, “The Family as the Domestic Church,” 66-67.

Church in providing the *humus* in which the Christian Faith could take root and grow. Pointing to Priscilla and Aquila, the Holy Father noted that

Every home can transform itself in a little church. Not only in the sense that in them must reign the typical Christian love made of altruism and of reciprocal care, but still more in the sense that the whole of family life, based on faith, is called to revolve around the singular lordship of Jesus Christ.<sup>98</sup>

In the post-Apostolic Fathers, though the specific language of “domestic church” was not in wide use, the notion conveyed by this term was undoubtably present. For example, the very language of *oikonomia* refers to God’s “household management,” and this term was used widely by Irenaeus. As we have seen from the above, early Christian pastors and thinkers inherited the Jewish vision of the family as both the carrier and the image of the covenant, as has been explored by Joseph K. Atkinson.<sup>99</sup>

Perhaps the most well-known and certainly the most prolific Fathers of the Church known for their contribution to the theology of the domestic Church are John Chrysostom in the East and Augustine of Hippo in the West. Chrysostom highlighted in a particular way the ecclesial identity of the Christian family, from the role of the father as *episkopos* (overseer) of the domestic Church to the way in which husband and wife together participate in and reflect the relationship of Christ and the Church. Chrysostom admonished fathers to “make your home a church” where the Word of God is proclaimed and pondered, the bodies and souls of the members are nourished, unity and concord prevails, God is petitioned and thanked in prayer, and welcome and hospitality is extended to those in need.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Benedict XVI, “Inauguration of the Ecclesial Convention of the Diocese of Rome at the Basilica of Saint John Lateran (May 26, 2009): BENEDICT XVI,” Inauguration of the Ecclesial Convention of the Diocese of Rome at the Basilica of Saint John Lateran (May 26, 2009) | BENEDICT XVI, May 25, 2009, [http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2009/may/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20090526\\_convegno-diocesi-rm.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2009/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20090526_convegno-diocesi-rm.html).

<sup>99</sup> Joseph C. Atkinson, *Biblical & Theological Foundations of the Family: The Domestic Church* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 91-114.

<sup>100</sup> Saint John Chrysostom, *Homily XX on Ephesians*; PG 62.143A; Roth, p. 57; Women and Men, p. 83.

As mentioned in the first chapter, though the term *Ecclesia domestica* is of ancient pedigree reaching back to the Old and New Testament Scriptures as well as the writings and homilies of the Church Fathers, the term largely fell into disuse until its reintroduction at the Second Vatican Council.<sup>101</sup> Within the Council documents, the term is found first in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, in the chapter on the laity; secondly, it is found in the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, paragraph 11. *Gaudium et Spes* devotes an entire chapter to the subject of marriage and the family, stressing marriage's identity as an intimate partnership of life and love "caught up," as it were "into divine love."<sup>102</sup> The Council Fathers go on to stress the link between Christian marriage, family, and the call of the lay faithful to holiness and mission in the midst of the world. Interestingly, they use very similar language to speak about Christian marriage and family, on the one hand, and the Church, on the other. As noted, *Gaudium et Spes* speaks of the family in terms of a "community of life and love"; whereas in *Lumen Gentium* the Council Fathers describe the Church as a "fellowship of life, charity, and truth."<sup>103</sup> This suggests that the bishops of the Second Vatican Council wanted to emphasize in a pointed way the reciprocal and mutually reinforcing relationship between the family and the Church.

Ten years after the conclusion of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI developed the concept of the *Ecclesia domestica* in his post-synodal apostolic exhortation on evangelization, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, paragraph 71, where he draws a specific connection between the evangelizing activity of the Church and that of the domestic Church, noting that "there should be found in every Christian family the various aspects of the entire Church." This statement is extremely significant, for it suggests that the Christian family has its own ecclesial identity. As the most fundamental cell in the organism of the Church, the Christian family manifests the Church as a whole, as a single cell in a living organism is a microcosm of the whole. As an *ecclesiola*, or "Church in miniature", the Christian family is both an

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<sup>101</sup> Basilio Petra, "Bishop Pietro Fiordelli at the Council: The Bishop of Prato and the Strange Origin of the Theology of the Family as a 'Domestic Church,'" *INTAMS Review*, no. 19 (2013): pp. 13-33.

<sup>102</sup> Documents of Vatican II: *Gaudium et Spes*, 48.

<sup>103</sup> Documents of Vatican II: *Gaudium et Spes*, 48; *Lumen gentium*, 9.

evangelized and evangelizing community, as the Church at large is also evangelized and evangelizing.

During the pontificate of Pope John Paul II, the domestic Church was highlighted in a particular way, as the “Pope of the Family” moves the Christian family to the very top of his priority list. This can be demonstrated by the fact that, as Carl Anderson notes, in the first five years of his pontificate, the pontiff put into place seven different initiatives in support of marriage and the family. In addition to his Wednesday catecheses on human love—the Theology of the Body—and the 1980 Synod of Bishops on the family, followed by the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul II institutionalized his teaching by establishing the Pontifical Council for the Family and the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family. Finally, in 1983 he promulgated the Charter on the Rights of the Family followed by a revised Code of Canon Law, which took a more pastoral approach toward the institution of marriage.<sup>104</sup>

In *Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul teaches that “the Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason too it can and should be called the domestic Church.”<sup>105</sup> The Pope goes on to note three dimensions of the domestic Church which incarnate the defining characteristics of the wider Church: communion, mission, and worship. In sum, the family, like the Church at large, is a “believing and evangelizing community,” a “community in dialogue with God,” and a “community at the service of man.”<sup>106</sup> These three dimensions correspond, respectively, to the prophetic, priestly, and kingly *munera* of Jesus Christ in which all Christians share by virtue of their baptism. John Paul also lays great stress upon the ecclesial task of the Christian family, emphasizing that the family, as a “Church in miniature,” is a “living image and historical representation of the mystery of the Church.”<sup>107</sup> To summarize, the pope wants to point out that the Christian family is not only part of the Church but is truly ecclesial by its very nature, the smallest unit and a living cell in the Church Catholic.

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<sup>104</sup> Carl Anderson, “The Enduring Call to Love,” *Columbia Magazine*, July (2015).

<sup>105</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 21.

<sup>106</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 50.

<sup>107</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 49.

Marc Ouellet points out that the many references to the domestic Church in *Familiaris Consortio* fall into three general categories. The first category affirms the family's ecclesial identity by virtue of its participation in the word, the sacraments, and the unity of its members.<sup>108</sup> The second category of references emphasizes the evangelizing mission of the domestic Church, where John Paul writes that “the future of evangelization depends in large part on the domestic Church.”<sup>109</sup> In the last category, we see a reference to the Christian family as a “domestic sanctuary” centered on prayer and the worship of God.<sup>110</sup>

As a community of life and love, the family is an “authentic manifestation of the Church” entrusted with the mission to “guard, reveal, and communicate love.”<sup>111</sup> In his post-synodal apostolic exhortation on the vocation of the laity *Christifideles Laici*, John Paul made clear that it is precisely in and through the ordinary circumstances of the daily life of the family that each member lives out their vocation to love.<sup>112</sup> In other words, the pontiff emphasizes that the priestly, prophetic, and kingly roles of the laity are exercised within the day-to-day life of marriage and family. Later in his pontificate, John Paul writes in *Ecclesia in America* an encouragement to families: “In a special way, I invite Catholic families to be ‘domestic Churches’, in which the Christian faith is lived and passed on to the young as a treasure, and where all pray together. If they live up to the ideal which God places before them, Catholic homes will be true centres of evangelization.”<sup>113</sup>

Following two successive Synods on the family in 2014 and 2015, Pope Francis released the post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love), in which he ties together the threads introduced by the Second Vatican Council and developed throughout the pontificates of Popes Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI. Francis recapitulates many of the points that had been articulated in previous magisterial documents, but with a renewed emphasis on the pastoral care of the family and the

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<sup>108</sup> See, for example, paragraphs 21, 38, 48, and 49.

<sup>109</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 52; see also 51, 53, and 54.

<sup>110</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 55, 59, 61.

<sup>111</sup> Ouellet, *Divine Likeness*, 40.

<sup>112</sup> John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1988), 14.

<sup>113</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia in America* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1999), 76.



importance of accompaniment at all stages of marriage and family life. The Holy Father also stresses the presence of Christ and of the Holy Spirit within the concreteness of the daily life of couples and families.

A particular area of emphasis of *Amoris Laetitia* is the complementary and mutually reinforcing relationship between the Church and the Christian family. Francis explains that the “Church is a family of families, constantly enriched by the lives of all those domestic churches...The Church is good for the family, and the family is good for the Church.”<sup>114</sup> One notes a sense of urgency both in this document and in the preparatory and working documents for the two synods on the family to drive home the mutual connectedness of the Church and the families which constitute a microcosm of her life. To the extent that marriages and families are strong and are united in love, welcoming Christ as Lord, the wider Church herself will be strengthened. Conversely, when Christian marriages and families are wounded or broken, the Church at large is wounded and shares in that brokenness. If in fact the Christian family is a Church in miniature, one should not be surprised to find a link between the relative health of the family and that of the wider Church. If the Church is in fact the “family of God” and the Christian family is a “domestic Church,” then the domestic Church must be renewed and built up in order to renew and strengthen the Church in her communion and mission in the world. As Pope John Paul II eloquently put it, “the future of the world and of the Church passes through the family.”<sup>115</sup>

From the above brief historical survey, it is clear that the term *Ecclesia domestica* has a rich heritage that spans the Old and New Testament Scriptures and the experience and testimony of the Church. Though somewhat neglected over time, the term was revitalized at the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and has since been increasingly stressed by successive popes for the past fifty years. We have seen that Scripture, the testimony of the Fathers of the Church, and popes and bishops make clear that the Church is the family of God, and the Christian family is a domestic Church. A complementary and mutually reinforcing relationship exists between these two realities such that the health of each one

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<sup>114</sup> Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* (Vatican City: *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, 2013), 87.

<sup>115</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 79.

relies upon the other. By God's grace, husbands and wives receive a share in the Mystery of the Church, the reality of the loving union of Christ the Bridegroom with the Church his Bride. Because of this close relationship between the Church and the family, we can see that the universal Church has been at her best when she is buttressed by the robust Catholic culture and sacramental life of Christian families who are centered on the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Conversely, when the living cells that make up the larger organism of the Church Catholic are weakened or destroyed, the Church as a whole is weakened. And when the Church as a whole is weakened, she is hindered in her ability to provide adequate support for the flourishing of the family. As we shall see in the next section, the identity crisis of the family and the weakening of marriage and family life has had a deleterious effect on the wider Church.

### ***2.3 The Identity Crisis of the Domestic Church in the Contemporary West***

In the second part of his *Letter to Families*, "The Bridegroom is with You," Pope John Paul II opens with an extended meditation on Jesus' revelation of himself as the Bridegroom, and his presence at the Wedding Feast of Cana. In so doing, he seeks to direct the reader's attention to the inner truth of marriage: that the love of spouses reveals in some way the demanding love that brought Jesus Christ to the Cross. Elsewhere, the pope stresses to married couples that they are a "permanent reminder to the Church of what happened on the Cross."<sup>116</sup> As is the Church as a whole, spouses joined in the Sacrament of Matrimony are a sign and instrument of the unity of men with God and with one another through Christ.<sup>117</sup> By the will of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit, husband and wife—along with their children—signify and make present the "great mystery" of the Christ-Church union and participate in and show forth the Trinitarian missions of Christ and the Holy Spirit.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 13.

<sup>117</sup> Documents of Vatican II: *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

<sup>118</sup> Ouellet, *Mystery and Sacrament of Love*, 189.

As we have seen in our investigation thus far, the Christian family has the vocation to “guard, reveal, and communicate love,”<sup>119</sup> and by so doing plays its part in the mission of the Church to bring every man, woman, and child into communion and intimacy with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The family is, and is called to be, first and foremost a communion of persons. The soul of the communion of persons, its “inner principle, permanent power and final goal” is nothing other than love, mutual self-giving.<sup>120</sup> We have seen that the health and flourishing of the domestic Church is a fundamental condition for the overall fruitfulness of the Church in carrying out her mission to be a sacrament of communion between God and human persons among themselves. John Paul, referring to the passage in Ephesians 5:31-32, argues that “the ‘great mystery’, which is the Church and humanity in Christ, does not exist apart from the ‘great mystery’ expressed in the ‘one flesh’.”<sup>121</sup>

Further on in his *Letter to Families*, John Paul shows how modern rationalism, exemplified in the thought of Rene Descartes, has led to a progressive estrangement of humankind— especially husbands and wives— from the “great mystery” of marriage. Making reference to the statement of *Gaudium et Spes* that Christ, the “Word made flesh,” “reveals man to himself,” John Paul argues that it is only in reference to Christ than the human person can come to understand the mystery of his nature as embodied spirit.<sup>122</sup> With rationalism’s separation leading to opposition of spirit and flesh, the human person has come to see his own body and those of others as something extraneous to himself and as “raw material” for his own selfish use. As a result, sexuality has been sundered from the realm of personhood and has become subject to utilitarian manipulation, resulting in deleterious effects in the man-woman relationship and the family. In a rather striking statement, the John Paul asserts that modern rationalism “does not tolerate mystery. It does not accept the mystery of man as male and female, nor is it willing to accept that the full truth about man has been revealed in Jesus Christ.”<sup>123</sup> In

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<sup>119</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 17.

<sup>120</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 18.

<sup>121</sup> John Paul II, *Gratissimam Sane*, 19.

<sup>122</sup> Documents of Vatican II: *Gaudium et Spes*, 19.

<sup>123</sup> John Paul II, *Gratissimam Sane*, 19.

rejecting mystery, rationalism strikes at the very heart of Christianity, the Incarnation, by which God joined humanity to divinity in an everlasting, unbreakable union.

In this section, it will be our aim to gather evidence from the fields of the philosophy and theology of culture as well as a cultural study of secularization to draw connections between the identity crisis and breakdown of the Christian family, on the one hand, and the progressive de-Christianization of the West, on the other. We will begin by surveying the thought of the theologian Angelo Scola, focusing on his engagement with the thought of Pope John Paul II. Following this, Charles Taylor's work on the genealogy of the secular will provide insights into philosophical anthropology. Mary Eberstadt's work examining the relationship between the decline of the family and the decline in Christian faith and practice as it relates to mainstream secularization theory will conclude the section.

Angelo Cardinal Scola, in a penetrating exploration of the family and contemporary culture, argues that a culture's understanding of marriage and family serves as an effective "litmus test" for the overall state of a society.<sup>124</sup> Scola notes that the extensive efforts of Pope John Paul II on behalf of the family as the "way of the Church"<sup>125</sup> are indicative of the urgency of the task and the grave crisis of the family which he discerned taking place in the technological society of the West in the late twentieth century and the beginning of the third millennium. In a well-known statement uttered during the Pope's apostolic visit to Australia in 1986, John Paul stated: "The economic, social and cultural transformations taking place in our world are having an enormous effect on how people look upon marriage and the family... As the family goes, so goes the nation, and so goes the whole world in which we live."<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Angelo Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005), 141-142.

<sup>125</sup> John Paul II, *Gratissimam Sane*, 2.

<sup>126</sup> John Paul II, "30 November 1986, Perth: John Paul II," 30 November 1986, Perth | John Paul II, November 30, 1986, [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1986/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19861130\\_perth-australia.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1986/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19861130_perth-australia.html). .

Scola draws attention to what he sees as a profound transformation taking place in civilization, especially on the continent of Europe, and argues that marriage and the family have suffered the most casualties as a result. He argues that the family has been involved in this process in two ways. First, the family is the *object* of the crisis, which he describes as a crisis of the couple. Second, the family is also the *subject* of the crisis insofar as it has contributed to a process of de-Christianization. This is significant considering what we have already said about the complementarity between the health of marriage and family, on the one hand, and the health of the Church and of society, on the other. If the family is in fact the “first society,” it would stand to reason that its breakdown at this most basic level would have a ripple effect on the wider society. As the core of the family, says Scola, it is the man-woman relationship that is at the root of this crisis.

Citing John Paul II, Scola points out that the pope identifies the connection between individualism and the crisis of freedom as being at the very core of the identity crisis of marriage and the family. Concerning freedom, the pontiff argues that in contradistinction to the prevailing notion of freedom as absolute and unrestricted license, it must be understood instead as the capacity to make a free and total gift of oneself to another person. Concerning individualism, which conceives of the other person as an object for one’s own use rather than as another “I” made in God’s image and likeness, John Paul argues that this constitutes a denial of the “structural relationality” of the person.<sup>127</sup> In other words, the person is not a “monad,” hermetically sealed off from others. An individualistic conception of the person makes one incapable of any kind of meaningful ties or authentic love with another person. This crisis of freedom, argues Scola, is traceable to the untethering of freedom’s relationship with truth, such that freedom is construed as an end in itself. Truth, classically understood as *adaequatio intellectus et rei* (the conformity of the intellect with reality), has been discarded, leaving freedom as a capacity without an object. Lacking the tether between freedom and truth and an understanding of the structural relationality of the person, the family loses a sense of its

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<sup>127</sup> Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery*, 144.

identity as a mediating body between the individual and civil society, and society is conceived of as a sum of individual monads.<sup>128</sup>

Charles Taylor, in his monumental study *A Secular Age* describes a significant shift in man's own self-understanding from what he calls a "porous self" to the "buffered self" from the late Medieval period up to the present.<sup>129</sup> Taylor uses the term "social imaginary" to describe how persons in a particular milieu "take" the world to be at a pre-conscious level.<sup>130</sup> In the year 1500, for example, the social imaginary was such that it was almost impossible to entertain the question of whether God exists, as it was simply unimaginable to conceive of God not existing. This was because one lived in an "enchanted" world in which creation itself as well as the society was charged with the presence and power of God.<sup>131</sup> The medieval self was porous, open to the influence of blessing and curse. The porous self was marked by the commerce and mutual influence between persons and creation; persons in relation to one another; and, most importantly, persons in relation to God.

In contradistinction to the porous self, says Taylor, the modern, buffered self is the result of several contributing factors that led to an "anthropocentric shift" away from porosity to a "bounded" existence. Whereas the medieval porous self was vulnerable to outside influence and engaged in the world "outside" the mind, the modern buffered self is aware of and experiences the possibility of a certain ability to disengage by virtue of a buffer or boundary that makes invulnerability a real possibility.<sup>132</sup> Rather than the world impeding on the self, it is the self that defines and delineates the meaning of what is outside in relation to the self. Taylor, like John Paul II, identifies Descartes as a crucial figure in this anthropocentric shift. With the mechanization of the body and of the world as a result of his stress on a strong distinction between the *res cogito*, the mind, and the *res extensa*, the body, Descartes helps put into place the intellectual scaffolding for the buffered self. The

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<sup>128</sup> Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery*, 146-148.

<sup>129</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 39-42.

<sup>130</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age* 171-176.

<sup>131</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 25-26.

<sup>132</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 285 & 363.

mind becomes the “place” of meaning; and it is only in relation to the mind that anything outside the mind has meaning.<sup>133</sup>

What is important for our purposes in this discussion of the shift from the porous to the buffered self is the degree to which this new construal of the human person affects vulnerability and intimacy between human persons. A new norm of “detachment” creates the conditions for a disengaged, buffered self who exercises rational control over his own body and passions. This disciplined self allows for the creation of boundaries whereby one person can choose—from a perceived position of rational disengagement—the extent to which he will allow another person to influence him. In addition to doing violence to the integral unity of the human person as a composite of body and soul possessing intellect, will, and emotions, this conception of the modern identity has deleterious effects on the defining relationships between persons, most especially between those bound by ties of affection—husbands and wives, parents and children. The takeaway from Taylor’s observations in relation to our investigation is the strong connection between the buffered self and the *dis*-integration of the constitutive relations of marriage and family.

Transitioning from our discussion of theological and philosophical considerations in relation to the identity crisis of the family, we turn now to an examination of supporting evidence. In her book *How the West Really Lost God*, Mary Eberstadt advances the thesis that the secularization of the West and the decline of the family are inextricably linked as both causes and effects of each other, as in two interlocking strands of DNA. Eberstadt argues that the thesis that family decline is solely the result of decline in religious practice alone is not sufficient to the evidence in terms of explanatory power. Rather, she argues that not only is family decline a consequence of religious decline, family decline itself helps to *drive* religious decline.<sup>134</sup> The alternative explanation she makes the case for is that the dramatic transformations within the family as an institution (e.g., divorce,

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<sup>133</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 136-137.

<sup>134</sup> Mary Eberstadt, *How the West Really Lost God: a New Theory of Secularization* (West Conshohocken: Templeton Press, 2013), 5.

single-parent households, contraception, legalized abortion, a steep decline in birth rates) have resulted in the diminishment of the family and in the decline in belief and practice among believers, especially Christians.

In an attempt to make sense of this double decline—of family and of Christian faith and practice—Eberstadt puts forward what she calls the “family factor”: “*The active effect that participation in the family itself appears to have on religious belief and practice.*”<sup>135</sup> Using the image of DNA, she argues that the double helix of society is made up of two strands—family and faith—which exert a mutually reinforcing influence on one other. Similarly, Eamon Duffy in his book *The Stripping of the Altars* demonstrates from a historical perspective that Christianity is strongest when the family is strongest, and weakest when the family is weakest.<sup>136</sup> Conventional secularization theory, says Eberstadt, cannot adequately account for why religion has flourished in certain periods of history and in certain places and not in others. Marshalling evidence from sociological studies, she demonstrates the strong connection between strong, intact families and the flourishing of a robust life of faith. With W. Bradford Wilcox, the author shows the strong ties between healthy homes and a healthy faith life.<sup>137</sup> Eberstadt states that “the family is not merely a *consequence* of religious belief. It can also be a *conduit* to it.”<sup>138</sup>

In her provocatively titled chapter six, “Assisted Religious Suicide,” Eberstadt levels a critique of many Christian bodies in the Western World who, she argues, not only *failed* to stem the tide of the cultural tsunami of the Sexual Revolution, but *actively aided and abetted* (though unintentionally in many cases) the breakdown and identify crisis of the family and the drop-off in belief and practice among Christians. In addition to other contributing factors such as lack of doctrinal clarity or in some cases doctrinal change, Eberstadt argues that Christian bodies “failed to protect their base: thriving families

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<sup>135</sup> Eberstadt, *How the West Really Lost God*, 21.

<sup>136</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, C.1400-C.1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 36.

<sup>137</sup> Eberstadt, *How the West Really Lost God*, 93.

<sup>138</sup> Eberstadt, *How the West Really Lost God*, 101.



whose members would then go on to reproduce both literally and in the figurative sense of handing down their religion.”<sup>139</sup>

In the final chapter of the book, Eberstadt suggests that a turnaround of both faith and family is possible insofar as the renewal of the family can be brought about. Though she believes that this may be difficult using a “top down” approach, a grassroots movement of “creative minorities”<sup>140</sup> (a term coined by Joseph Ratzinger) could progressively lead to a resurgence of the faith. In the Catholic Church, this can already be seen in many of the new ecclesial movements, as well as in many strong parish, school, and home-school communities that stress both the integral transmission of and witnessing to the teaching of the faith and strong communities of support to build up healthy families. The “double helix” approach put forward by Eberstadt— the strength of the natural family and the strength of Christianity as mutually reinforcing— seems to possess strong explanatory power and to make the best sense of the data available.

To recapitulate, we have deployed theological, philosophical, cultural, and historical studies to support the thesis that the domestic Church has indeed undergone a significant crisis in identity. This crisis is rooted in a fundamentally flawed anthropology which views the person in a dualistic manner that bifurcates the composite body-soul integrity of man and denies his essential relationality. In addition, the essential relationship between the freedom of the human person and the truth has been ignored or denied, reducing freedom to a capacity without a proper terminus. The modern social imaginary in which each person lives and moves and has their being is one which envisions him as a “buffered self” existing in the posture of a supposed rational disengagement from reality outside his own confines. The breakdown of the family and the falling off of Christian belief and practice, especially over the last fifty years, have had catastrophic effects on the domestic Church’s identity and mission. In the final section of this chapter, we will bring to bear the insights gained from chapter one regarding the Trinitarian and

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<sup>139</sup> Eberstadt, *How the West Really Lost God*, 139-140.

<sup>140</sup> Benedict XVI et al., *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006), 120-121.

Christological foundations of the family to articulate a Trinitarian anthropology that provides a robust response to the poverty of the buffered self.

#### ***2.4 Icon of the Trinity: A Trinitarian Anthropology of the Domestic Church***

In this last section, I will make the argument that the ultimate point of reference for a sufficient anthropology of the domestic Church is the Trinity. The conviction that guides authentic Catholic anthropology is that the human person can only be understood rightly when seen in his or her relation to God. As we have seen from our first chapter, not only is the individual made in the image of God through the faculties internal to him; in a complementary way, man is constituted in the *imago Dei* most profoundly in the bipolarity of the male-female unity-of-two. Hans Urs von Balthasar asserts that sociality is constitutive of personal being: the individual is not and cannot be the whole of man.<sup>141</sup> Reiterating *Gaudium et Spes*, man can only find himself by making a sincere gift of himself to another.<sup>142</sup>

In our first chapter, we explored how the Catholic Church's understanding and articulation of the mystery of the Trinity and her Christological doctrine informs her understanding of man. Regarding her Christological doctrine, the key text is *Gaudium et Spes*, paragraph 22, which states: "The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light... Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear." Paragraph 24 of the same document ties together the Christological and Trinitarian dimensions:

Indeed, the Lord Jesus, when He prayed to the Father, "that all may be one. . . as we are one" (John 17:21-22) opened up vistas closed to human reason, for He implied a certain likeness between the union of the divine Persons, and the unity of God's sons in truth and charity. This likeness reveals that man, who is the only

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<sup>141</sup> Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery*, 156.

<sup>142</sup> Documents of Vatican II: *Gaudium et Spes*, 24.

creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.

Earlier in this chapter we articulated the theological bases for referring to the Christian family as *Ecclesia domestica*. In this final section, our goal is to show how the Catholic Church can bring to bear these resources in order to respond adequately to the identity crisis of the domestic Church that has been identified. In order to accomplish this task, we will draw on the work of Angelo Scola in the field of theological anthropology, with specific reference to his focus on the dynamism of the “nuptial mystery” essential to all loving relationships, divine and human. Following this, we will revisit the thought of John Paul II, with specific reference to his apostolic letter *Mulieris Dignitatem*, as well as the thought of the theologians Hans Urs von Balthasar and Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI.

It is significant that when Scripture and the Catholic Church speak of marriage and family, they do so in relation to “mystery,” analogously to how they do so in relation to the mysteries of the Holy Trinity, of Christ, and of the Church. For example, St. Paul refers to marriage in Ephesians as a “*magnum mysterium*” (great mystery) and goes on to note that marriage ultimately refers to the nuptial union of Christ the Bridegroom and the Church, his Bride. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that the word mystery derives from the Greek word *mysterion*, which is then translated into Latin by two phrases, *mysterium* and *sacramentum*. *Sacramentum* (from which the Church derives the term sacrament) refers to a visible sign, of which *mysterium* is the hidden reality. In this sense, the incarnate Christ is the pre-eminent “sacrament” insofar as his humanity is the visible sign of his invisible divinity.<sup>143</sup> Speaking about the seven sacraments of the Church, the Catechism explains the importance of “initiat[ing] people into the mystery of Christ...by proceeding from the visible to the invisible, from the sign to the thing signified, from the ‘sacraments’ to the ‘mysteries’.”<sup>144</sup> Therefore, when the Church uses the word “mystery,” she is referring to a reality the ultimate meaning and significance of

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<sup>143</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 515.

<sup>144</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1075.

which can only be understood in relation to God. The Church also wants to stress that the physical and the spiritual are not two separate air-tight compartments; rather, for man—in the words of Charles Péguy— “the spiritual is always incarnate.”<sup>145</sup>

Scola’s driving concern in his theological-pastoral project is to stress the necessarily *relational* character of love. Love is always nuptial because it always brings into play three factors: difference, love as gift, and fruitfulness.<sup>146</sup> We have seen how this nuptial character obtains to the supreme degree within the inner life of the Trinity. Because this is so, marriage can never be reduced to a merely this-worldly reality. Rather, its dynamism is always directed toward the fullness of nuptiality, whose archetype is the Trinitarian life of love. The man-woman duality is a sacramental reality that has its terminus in God. In this context, Scola identifies four features that are essential to properly understanding the man-woman pair: First, “man exists always and only as a masculine or feminine being”;<sup>147</sup> second, the man-woman difference must be understood ontologically as reciprocally oriented;<sup>148</sup> third, sexuality belongs to man’s being *imago Dei*; and last, the nature of love is nuptial, expressed in a total gift of self, one to another. These four features together express that man— male and female— is an integral unity, and that the body “expresses the person.”<sup>149</sup> Furthermore, this understanding of man’s dual unity at the same time affirms both identity and difference. In other words, man and woman are both fully human, but neither can be viewed in isolation from the other. No individual man considered in himself is the fullness of humanity.

Earlier in this chapter we saw how the crisis of freedom and the crisis of the individual ultimately derive from an untethering of the constitutive relationship between freedom and truth. When conceived of as absolute license, freedom loses its terminus and ultimately does violence to man’s nature, for freedom is a faculty given to man whose *telos* is ultimately oriented toward making a total gift of self in love. If man’s freedom

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<sup>145</sup> Imbelli, “Taylor and Transfiguration,” *Commonweal Magazine*, November 3, 2020, <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/taylor-and-transfiguration>.

<sup>146</sup> Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery*, xx.

<sup>147</sup> Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery*, 7.

<sup>148</sup> Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery*, 8.

<sup>149</sup> Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery*, 10; cf. *TOB*, 61.

finds its *telos* in a sincere gift of self, it can only realize itself in a relationship of authentic mutuality with another person. For John Paul II, the deepest truth of the human person is that he can only fulfill his nature through making a sincere gift of himself to another.<sup>150</sup> Man is also a contingent being and can only receive himself from another. At the same time, however, he has the potential to bestow being on another. It is here that we can draw the connection back to the family, for the family is the natural setting of this being-in-relationship. Within the family, each member learns the deepest truth about who they are and grows in the capacity to make a gift of himself to others, as well as receiving others as a gift.

*Mulieris Dignitatem* contains perhaps John Paul II's most mature thought on Christian anthropology. For in this document the Holy Father provides a synthesis of what he laid out over several years in his Theology of the Body addresses. The key to John Paul II anthropology is that man is never considered a mere "individual" because, being created in the image and likeness of God, he can exist only in relation to another "I." Man and woman— in their unity-in-difference— have the capacity to make an integral and sincere gift of themselves to one other, one that mirrors the giving and receiving love that constitutes the Trinitarian life.<sup>151</sup> Sociality is thus constitutive to personal being: the human person is not an isolated monad but rather a being-in-relation. Within the nexus of relationships in the family— fatherhood, motherhood, spouses, filiation, brotherhood— the human person first discovers his identity.

Joseph Ratzinger, in his *Introduction to Christianity*, offers a Trinitarian and Christological explication of the Christian's theological personhood by drawing on Johannine theology. In the fifth chapter, Ratzinger draws a parallel between Christ's relationship with the Father and the Christian's relationship with Christ. He notes that the two terms found in John's gospel to describe Christ— Son and Word— are both relational terms. The language of Sonship points back to the Father, from whom the Son is begotten. Likewise, as *Logos* or "Word," Christ is "spoken" by the Father, is "from"

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<sup>150</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 10.

<sup>151</sup> John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 7.

the Father and is directed “toward” another. As was pointed out in our first chapter, God is not only *Logos*, word or reason, but is also *dia-Logos*, loving communication. Ratzinger points out that the statements of Jesus that are seemingly contradictory— e.g., “The Son can do nothing of his own accord,” and “I and the Father are one”— are resolved when Christ’s oneness with the Father is understood as a unity of relational love. The Son is “one” with the Father because he does not exist from himself but always from the Father. In other words, Christ’s very existence is relational—his very being is received as a gift from the Father and lives as a gift for others.

Ratzinger shows that Christian existence is by its nature a *relational* existence, existence *from* the Son and *for* others. Being a Christian, says Ratzinger, is being a “son in the Son” living “from” the Son and “toward” others.<sup>152</sup> This can be seen by comparing how Christ in the Gospel of John speaks of his own relationship with the Father: “the Son can do nothing of his own accord”; and how he speaks to the disciples of their relationship with him: “apart from me you can do nothing.”<sup>153</sup> Likewise, the unity of Christ with the Father—“I and the Father are one”—is paralleled by Christ’s prayer to the Father “that they may be one, even as we are one.”<sup>154</sup> The highest unity, according to Christ, is not the absolute and singular unity of the atom but rather the unity brought about by love. As *imago Dei*, man—male and female—is created for a unity in complementarity.

Regarding the parent-child relationship, Hans Urs von Balthasar offers the analogy of the mother’s smile as that which awakens the young child to his own subjectivity by means of knowledge and love. The smile of the mother is a gift bestowed upon the child the bring forth an answering response on the part of the child— at some point the child will learn to smile back. This smile and the response of the child is not only an interpersonal reality but carries deep metaphysical weight, for it suggests an entire ontology of being as being-given. This first, foundational, relationship with his mother brings the child out of himself and into a relationship of reciprocal giving and receiving with his mother and

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<sup>152</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 187.

<sup>153</sup> Jn 5:19, 39; Cf. 12:5.

<sup>154</sup> Jn 17:11, 22.

indeed with the created world. The phenomenon of the mother's smile, says Balthasar, is analogous to how God reveals himself to man. As the capacity for interpersonal knowledge and love lies dormant in the child until the mother's smile awakens him to consciousness, so the *imago Dei* in man is awakened through the gift of God's grace, made concrete in the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. The important point, in both cases, is that the initiative comes from the one who bestows being to the one who receives it.<sup>155</sup>

Reflecting on the denaturalization of the family—by which he means the loss of its constitutive nature—Scola identifies a fundamental problem in many parents' ability to exercise their office: the man or woman who does not experience in a personal way his or her own identity as a child of God, and who views himself or herself as the author of their own freedom, cannot be a father or mother. Drawing on Paul's Letter to the Galatians, Scola argues that if man is not oriented toward an authority—from *auctoritas*, "he who gives growth"—he cannot experience a freedom that leads to full human flourishing. Simply put, "either freedom is filial or it does not exist at all."<sup>156</sup> In a complementary way, John Paul II emphasizes that the dual unity of man and woman in marriage is the precondition for the exercise of fatherhood and motherhood. Scola echoes John Paul, explaining that "the spousal relation...is the condition of fatherhood and motherhood, understood as that capacity of generating and introducing the child into an experience of freedom in its confrontation with reality."<sup>157</sup>

Pope John Paul II famously counter-posed two cultures: on the one hand, the "culture of death" marked by use and consumption (Pope Benedict refers to this reality as an "anti-culture" and Pope Francis, a "throwaway culture"); on the other hand, the "culture of life" marked by self-giving love and sacrifice. In his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, the Pope reminded the domestic Church of its centrality to the culture of life, calling families to "proclaim, celebrate, and serve the Gospel of Life."<sup>158</sup> Because the culture of death has had such disastrous effects on the domestic Church, John Paul prioritized marriage and

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<sup>155</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Love Alone Is Credible* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2004), 76-77.

<sup>156</sup> Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery*, 153.

<sup>157</sup> Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery*, 154.

<sup>158</sup> John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), 9.

family as the beating heart of the new evangelization by calling the family to “become what it is,” a community of love and life and an authentic expression and incarnation of the Church’s essential nature as a sacrament of unity—a *communio* called to *missio*. Pope Paul VI likewise highlighted the importance of the domestic Church, writing that “in each Christian family we should find the various aspects of the entire Church.”<sup>159</sup> The ecclesial character of the Christian family may be described as “a presence of Christ, a locus of evangelization, and a place of prayer and charity.”<sup>160</sup>

As we have seen, there is peripheral evidence that the decline of the Christian belief and practice and the decline of the family are reciprocally connected and that an impoverished anthropology informed by a crisis of truth and a reductionist conception of freedom has resulted in an identity crisis of epic proportions for the Christian family. It is our contention that the recovery of a robust Trinitarian-Christocentric anthropology is necessary but not sufficient in restoring the domestic Church to its full health. In the next chapter, the argument will be advanced that it is only by recovering and putting into practice a Catholic spirituality of the domestic Church that integrates faith and life through concrete practices and disciplines— through an authentic and fully-orbed Catholic culture— that the Christian family will become salt, light, and leaven to other families, as well as a force for renewal in the Church and the world. Pope Francis speaks of the necessity of Christian families being a source of hope and credible witness in this way:

It is starting from the experience of this desert, from this void, that we can again discover the joy of believing, its vital importance for us men and women. In the desert we rediscover the value of what is essential for living; thus in today’s world there are innumerable signs, often expressed implicitly or negatively, of the thirst for God, for the ultimate meaning of life. And in the desert people of faith are needed who, by the example of their own lives, point out the way to the Promised

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<sup>159</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelium Nuntiandi* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1975), 71.

<sup>160</sup> Ouellet, *Divine Likeness*, 41.



Land and keep hope alive. In these situations, we are called to be living sources of water from which others can drink.<sup>161</sup>

## Chapter Three

### The Spirituality of the Domestic Church

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#### *Introduction 3.1*

The goal of this chapter is to articulate the spirituality of the domestic Church within the wider context of the lay vocation understood as a participation in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Jesus Christ. This will involve articulating a praxis that flows out from the truth about the identity and mission of the domestic Church, grounded in the Trinitarian and Christocentric ontology and anthropology of marriage and the family laid down in our first two chapters. A fundamental axiom of Thomistic thought that we will take as our own is the following: *agere sequitur esse* (acting follows being). In other words, the type of reality that the family *is* by its very nature determines how it should *act*. To echo the words of Pope John Paul II, “The family finds in the plan of God the Creator and Redeemer not only its identity, what it is, but also its mission, what it can and should do...family, become what you are.”<sup>162</sup> In other words, the spirituality of the Christian family should flow from the truth about the Christian family, expressed through divine revelation and interpreted by the Catholic Church. The spirituality of the of the Christian family is intrinsic to the reality that has come about through the Sacrament of Matrimony. An authentic Catholic spirituality of the *Ecclesia domestica*, therefore, is not a kind of overlay that sits on top of Catholic doctrine concerning its identity but is rather the unfolding of its own inner nature opened out into *mission*. To this end, John Paul stresses that “Every particular task of the family is an expression and concrete actuation of that fundamental mission.”<sup>163</sup> Like the Church at large, the domestic Church doesn’t simply *have* a mission; it *is* a mission.

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<sup>161</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), 66.

<sup>162</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 17.

<sup>163</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 17.

In an intervention during the 1981 Synod of Bishops on the family in the modern world, Cardinal Daneels of Belgium gave voice to a commonly held critique of the perception of the Catholic Magisterium's teaching on the family: "Too much morality and not enough spirituality."<sup>164</sup> Should we accept this critique, the following question arises: what, in fact, *is* the spirituality of the family? This query is critical; for, as Angelo Scola argues, a false spirituality, what he calls "spiritualism," is a serious temptation for many Christians in our time.<sup>165</sup> What he means by this term is a one-sided emphasis on spirituality that is forgetful of the reality of the bodily Incarnation of God the Son in Jesus Christ. The result of such a spirituality is a separation of what God himself has united by the hypostatic union: God and man, flesh and Spirit, *logos* and *sarx*.<sup>166</sup> The remedy to such a distorted view of spirituality, says Scola, is "the logic of the Incarnation."<sup>167</sup> What this means, practically speaking, is that, at its best, the Catholic tradition has emphasized in myriad ways the characteristic *bodiliness* and *particularity* of the Christian faith. John Paul II, echoing a passage from *Gaudium et Spes*, taught that not only did Christ unite himself with each individual human being; he also, by becoming incarnate within a family, united to himself the entire reality of the family, thus entering into profound communion with each and every family.<sup>168</sup>

Scholars and cultural commentators have noted of late that in many parts of the secularized West a proliferation of various forms of spirituality that stress the primacy of personal experience over objective reality and a syncretistic "remixing" of various elements from different religious traditions.<sup>169</sup> What seems to link these seemingly disparate spiritualities is a strongly anthropocentric and disembodied sensibility that gives expression to the reductive anthropology we explored in the last chapter. What characterizes these contemporary spiritualities is their ability to coexist quite comfortably

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<sup>164</sup> Ouellet, *Divine Likeness*, 58.

<sup>165</sup> Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery*, 98.

<sup>166</sup> Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 193-194.

<sup>167</sup> Scola, *The Nuptial Mystery*, 98.

<sup>168</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptoris Custos* (Vatican City: *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, 1989), 21.

<sup>169</sup> See, for example, Tara Isabella Burton, *Strange Rites: New Religions for a Godless World* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, Hattchette Book Group, 2020).

within the secularized society of Taylor’s buffered self, while at the same time directly undermining the classical Christian conception of marriage and family. Speaking about this phenomenon, Marc Ouellet — contrasting classical Christianity with the contemporary secularized West, — claims that “The Christian ideals of unity, fruitfulness, and indissolubility in marriage have been undermined by the values of individual autonomy, the technological mastery of fertility, and love freed from every institutional constraint.”<sup>170</sup>

In *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor introduces the concept of “excarnation” to express the tendency, prevalent in modernity, to downplay bodily, historically situated, and communal ties to others. Central to Taylor’s understanding of modernity is the supposed “view from nowhere” which posits that all true knowledge comes by way of a pure “objectivity” whereby disengaged reason, untethered from any attachment, views an object as something independent of itself. Taylor gives examples of philosophers, poets, and theologians who were able to escape the gravitational pull of excarnation and rediscover the meaning and implications of the Incarnation.<sup>171</sup> Robert Imbelli, commenting on Taylor’s concept of excarnation, points to the need for a “Christological re-Sourcement” in which Catholic theology and praxis go beyond mere “theoretical appropriation” of the significant of the incarnate Lord and “promote and sustain a personal and communal realization of the unique Headship of Jesus Christ.”<sup>172</sup>

In response to the challenges levelled by both secularization and heterodox spiritualities, Ouellet suggests that the solution is to “develop a positive vision of domestic values, a truly ‘personalist’ family spirituality that grounds conjugal and familial relationships within the Trinitarian communion *incarnated* and *revealed* in Jesus Christ.”<sup>173</sup> Our project in this chapter is to do just that, drawing on the richness of Catholic tradition and deeply rooted in the beauty, goodness, and truth of divine revelation, and bringing it to

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<sup>170</sup> Ouellet, *Divine Likeness*, 59.

<sup>171</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 751 & 753.

<sup>172</sup> Robert Imbelli, “No Decapitated Body,” *Nova et Vetera* 18, no. 3 (2020): 773, <https://doi.org/10.1353/nov.2020.0041>.

<sup>173</sup> Ouellet, *Divine Likeness*, 59.

bear in our contemporary moment. In so doing, we will have recourse to the writings and addresses of Popes John Paul II and Francis, as well as the work of theologians and practitioners, to explicate a robustly and authentically Catholic conjugal and family spirituality. Our approach finds its inspiration in the Holy Family of Nazareth, the model for all Christian families.<sup>174</sup> Our central claim in this chapter is that the spirituality of the family is grounded in its sacramental and Paschal identity intrinsically linked to the Eucharistic union between Christ the Bridegroom and the Church his Bride.<sup>175</sup> With John Paul II, we aim to show that the Eucharist is very source and sustenance of Christian marriage and of the Christian family and that the Eucharist is not only the ideal toward which the domestic Church should strive, but is in fact its foundation and the inexhaustible source of its grace to “become what it is.”

It is important at this juncture to reiterate the distinction the Catholic Church makes between the actual liturgical celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony, which takes place only once, and the permanent expression of the Sacrament that continues throughout the lives of the spouses. As noted earlier, the Sacrament of Matrimony, like the Sacrament of the Eucharist, is an ongoing sacrament wherein Christ continues his presence through the “species” of man and wife. At the heart of Christian marriage and family, then, is the abiding presence of the Lord Jesus Christ and his Paschal Mystery. It is here, suggests Ouellet, that the Christian married couples and families of our time are called to a “theological turn” toward the Person of Christ.<sup>176</sup> This theological turn involves three dimensions that are necessarily dependent on one another: First, a spirituality that is “original and specific,” characterized by the unique and unrepeatable union of this particular man and woman united in marriage; second, a spirituality that is “lay and incarnate,” grounded in and flowing from the actual life of the family; third, an “ecclesial spirituality” that bears witness as an icon to the *magnum mysterium* of Christ and the Church, Bridegroom and Bride.

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<sup>174</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 86.

<sup>175</sup> John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 26.

<sup>176</sup> Ouellet, *Divine Likeness*, 60.

An important clarification to make here is the way in which the term “spirituality” will be employed henceforward. Within the context of our argument, conjugal spirituality refers to the praxis—the putting into effect—consequent upon the reality expressed and made present in the Sacrament of Matrimony. The spirituality of the domestic Church is grounded in its participation in the Christ-Church unity brought about through the Sacrament of Matrimony and in the common Baptism of each of the members of the family, which results in an ontological configuration to Christ and makes the baptized an adopted son of the Father; a member of Christ and of Christ’s Body, the Church; and a temple of the Holy Spirit.<sup>177</sup> Spirituality, then, is Christian life lived *in* and *through* the power of the Holy Spirit, who by his grace unites us to Christ and his Paschal Mystery and who brings us into living communion with God the Trinity. In short, spirituality is the life of grace and virtue directed toward holiness. Pope John Paul II expresses it thus:

Christian spouses have a special sacrament by which they are fortified and receive a kind of consecration in the duties and dignity of their state. By virtue of [the Sacrament of Matrimony], as spouses fulfil their conjugal and family obligations, they are penetrated with the Spirit of Christ, who fills their whole lives with faith, hope, and charity. Thus they increasingly advance towards their own perfection, as well as towards their mutual sanctification...<sup>178</sup>

The spirituality of Marriage is a spirituality of the *one flesh union* brought about through the sacramental bond that creates a new ontological reality: the sacramental couple. This union is a *gift* bestowed through the mutual consent of the baptized man and woman; it is also a *call* and *challenge* that impels spouses to grow daily in their union with one another through a total gift of self, involving all of the constitutive dimensions of each one: body, character, heart, intelligence, will, and soul.<sup>179</sup> Through the grace of the Holy Spirit poured out on the spouses in the sacramental celebration, man and wife are given the “gift of a new communion of love that is the living and real image of that unique

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<sup>177</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1279.

<sup>178</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 56.

<sup>179</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 19.

unity which makes of the Church the indivisible Mystical Body of the Lord Jesus.”<sup>180</sup> This communion of the spouses is in fact an *indissoluble* communion by virtue of its participation in and expression of Christ’s unconditional covenant love for the Church, his bride.<sup>181</sup> The Holy Spirit, given through the celebration of Matrimony, is the supernatural bond of communion that empowers and sustains the spouses through the grace of the sacrament.<sup>182</sup>

In this chapter, we will begin our exploration of the spirituality of the domestic Church by showing how its identity and mission is grounded in the Sacraments of Baptism and Matrimony and in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly dignity of the Christian disciple. Further, we will explore the Christian family’s ecclesial task within the life and mission of the entire Church. In the second section, the mystery of the domestic Church as a mystery of communion and the mission that flows out from its identity as a mystery of communion will be examined. The third section will focus on the priestly *munus* of the domestic Church by examining the place of prayer and sacrifice within its daily life. This will involve looking at how the very being and action of the family finds its source and summit in the Church’s liturgical worship, most especially the Sacrifice of the Eucharist. In the final section of the chapter, the kingly dimension of service will be explicated. Our fourth chapter will explicate the prophetic dimension as it relates to the mission of evangelization and catechesis within the domestic Church.

### ***3.2 Baptism and the Threefold Office***

The domestic Church is a community of life and love with the fundamental mission to “guard, reveal, and communicate love.”<sup>183</sup> The daily work of growing in mutual self-giving through sacrifice and self-denial is the heart and soul of marriage and family life. Through the sacraments of Baptism and Matrimony, Christian spouses and families are profoundly configured to Jesus Christ—Priest, Prophet, and King. Additionally, not only

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<sup>180</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 19.

<sup>181</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 20.

<sup>182</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 21.

<sup>183</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 17

do each of the spouses individually give expression to their threefold mission; additionally, by virtue of the bond of communion they also through the charism of Matrimony, husband and wife as a “unity of the two” exercise their baptismal identity as priest, prophet, and king precisely through their consecration as a sacramental couple. Pope John Paul II explains:

It is in the love between husband and wife and between the members of the family...that the Christian family’s participation in the prophetic, priestly, and kingly mission of Jesus Christ and of his Church finds expression and realization. Therefore, love and life constitute the nucleus of the saving mission of the Christian family.<sup>184</sup>

Since the Second Vatican Council, the magisterium of the Catholic Church has increasingly sought to articulate a theology and praxis of the laity in positive rather than merely negative terms, as had been her practice. Prior to Vatican II, there was a tendency to define the laity in terms of what they were not (e.g., priests, members of religious life), rather than what they were. In articulating a positive theology of the laity, the Church grounded her understanding of the laity in the Sacrament of Baptism and in the universal call to holiness of all the baptized. *Lumen Gentium* highlights this call to holiness in its fifth chapter, which emphasizes that holiness—the perfection of love—is that which unifies all the Christian faithful, regardless of their status in the Church. Crucial to the Church’s understanding of sanctity is its twofold character as both a profound *gift* of God’s grace and the graced *response* of each person to the gift given. Through Baptism, the believer is radically configured to the person of Jesus Christ; receives an outpouring of sanctifying grace; and becomes a living temple of the Holy Spirit.<sup>185</sup> Baptism is therefore the foundation of the entire Christian life, which is a life lived in response to God’s gracious initiative.

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<sup>184</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 50.

<sup>185</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1272.

Along with its emphasis on Baptism as the foundation for the lay apostolate, *Lumen Gentium* also highlights the distinctively *secular* character of the lay vocation. In the fourth chapter of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, the Council Fathers stress the extraordinary ordinariness of the lay apostolate thus:

The laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven.<sup>186</sup>

Building on this understanding, the Council document on the apostolate of the laity teaches that the distinguishing quality of the secular vocation of laypersons is the fact that they progress in the life of holiness not by relinquishing the ordinary, day-to-day responsibilities of their state in life but rather by fully embracing them. For Christian married couples, the field of their apostolate is found precisely in the everyday realities of family life. Within the domestic Church, each member is at once the object and the subject of their apostolate. As the Council Fathers explain, “the whole family in its common life...should be a sort of apprenticeship for the apostolate.”<sup>187</sup>

Because the vocation of the laity is a *secular* vocation, there is a consistent stress throughout the magisterial documents of the Catholic Church on the necessity of the laity’s unity of life. Distinct from those who are members of the hierarchy or religious life, lay Christians are called in a particular way to be salt, light, and leaven in the heart of the world. The ever-present challenge for the laity is to be “in the world” but not “of the world.” The danger for lay Christians is to lose sight of the tension inherent in this reality by living parallel lives: on the one hand, a “spiritual life” that revolves around

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<sup>186</sup> Documents of Vatican II: *Lumen Gentium*, 31.

<sup>187</sup> Documents of Vatican II: *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 30.



participation in Mass, the sacraments, reading of Sacred Scripture, and participation in parish ministries; and, on the other, a “secular life” consisting in everything that happens outside the Church proper. John Paul II strongly warned against this ever-present temptation by pointing to the Johannine image of the vine and the branches: “The branch, engrafted to the vine which is Christ, bears fruit in every sphere of existence and activity.”<sup>188</sup>

The image of the vine and the branches, found in John 15, sheds light on several dimensions of the lay Christian’s existence. First, the vine and branch imagery is strongly Trinitarian. The Father is the vinedresser, the Son is the vine, and the Holy Spirit is the sap that bears fruit on the branches (i.e., the baptized).<sup>189</sup> This passage brings to the fore the intimate union and communion existing between Christ and the Christian and between Christians as a body. The imagery of mutual indwelling found in John 15 is also prominent in John 17, where Christ, in his high priestly prayer, prays that his disciples might be one, even as he and the Father are one.<sup>190</sup> Second, this imagery is strongly Christological and profoundly nuptial. Christ is himself the vine, who engrafts the branches into himself. To the extent that the branches “remain” in the vine, they will bear fruit. Third, the branches are totally dependent upon the vine for their existence: “apart from me you can do nothing.”<sup>191</sup> Furthermore, the branches are not only completely dependent on the vine; they *belong* to the vine. Even more daringly, the vine *belongs* to the branches. In other words, the mystery of the vine and the branches is a mystery of mutuality and communion, of mutual indwelling, indeed of a profoundly Trinitarian indwelling.<sup>192</sup> Within the *communio personarum* of Christian marriage and family, the mutuality exists not only at the level of each individual member but also between the image and the archetype.

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<sup>188</sup> John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1988), 59.

<sup>189</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1108.

<sup>190</sup> Jn 17:21.

<sup>191</sup> Jn 15:5.

<sup>192</sup> Benedict, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2011), 254, 259.

Through the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist, each Christian is engrafted on the vine that is Christ. In this way, the Christian comes to share personally and intimately in the communion of the Father and the Son, in their Spirit of love. At the same time, however, Christ identifies himself with the vine and binds himself to the vine. The vine and branches become an ecclesiological image that parallels St. Paul's language of the Body of Christ. This is the profound significance of the conviction expressed by the Fathers of Vatican II that Christ, through his Incarnation, has in a certain sense united himself with every person.<sup>193</sup> The *gift* of holiness given through Baptism becomes the profound *call* to holiness and responsibility on the part of the baptized to bear fruit by manifesting that holiness in every sphere of their existence. The Council Fathers speak thus about the unity of life: "To respond to their vocation, the lay faithful must see their daily activities as an occasion to join themselves to God..."<sup>194</sup>

For the lay Christian, and for Christian spouses and families in particular, this radical sharing in and identification with Jesus Christ forms the core of their identity. Through faith and Baptism, the believer is clothed with Christ and is mystically united with him in his death and Resurrection. In Baptism, the Christian becomes a new creation; is made a sharer by adoption in Christ's divine Sonship; is incorporated into the Body of Christ; and becomes a living temple of the Holy Spirit. By virtue of the grace of Baptism, the baptized come to share in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office of Christ. It is important to note that the spirituality of marriage and the family can never be separated from the warp and woof of normal married and family life, including the cares and concerns of child-rearing, the daily round of chores paying bills, education, and work. It is not *apart* from these daily realities that the spirituality of couples and families is lived, but precisely *in* and *through* them. This is a central point that gives pointed expression to the universal call to holiness of all the baptized within their own state in life.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Documents of Vatican II: *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

<sup>194</sup> John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 17.

<sup>195</sup> Documents of Vatican II: *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

At this point, it becomes clear why it is that the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph is held up by the Catholic Church as the original domestic Church and the prototype and model of all Christian families.<sup>196</sup> It is *in* and *through* the family that God enters into the midst of humanity to recapitulate, elevate, and transfigure his creatures. Christ unites himself, not only to every human being individually, but in and through the whole web of relationships to which each person belongs in order to bring them to their *telos* in himself.<sup>197</sup> The Holy Family of Nazareth blazes the trail, so to speak, for every family by its perfect conformity and participation in the Trinitarian *communio personarum*.

In the course of the next three sections of this chapter, we will explicate the identity and vocation of the domestic Church under the three rubrics set forth by Pope John Paul II: 1) communion and mission; 2) prayer and sacrifice; and 3) service and practical charity. In so doing, the complementarity and interpenetration of the prophetic, priestly, and kingly *munera* will be illuminated. Chapter Four will treat more fully the prophetic office as it relates to evangelization and catechesis in the Christian family.

### ***3.3 Communion and Mission in the Domestic Church***

In this section, our focus will be on translating the ontological and anthropological foundations laid out in the first two chapters into a spirituality of communion and mission for the *Ecclesia domestica*. John Paul II, in *Familiaris Consortio*, emphasizes four general tasks of the family by which it carries out its fundamental mission to “guard, reveal and communicate love”: 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.<sup>198</sup> Ultimately, all of these tasks may be summed up in the sacramental reality of the domestic Church whereby it incarnates in a real way the Trinitarian *communio*. Here, we will focus in a particular way on the first task, forming a community of persons, that

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<sup>196</sup> Ouellet, *Divine Likeness*, 118; cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Custos*, 7.

<sup>197</sup> Imbelli, “No Decapitated Body”, 774.

<sup>198</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 17.

which John Paul highlights as foundational for the other three because it corresponds to the participation of the married couple and the domestic Church in the life of the Trinity.

As a *communio personarum*, the domestic Church both mirrors and participates in the Trinitarian *communio* of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus, the Christian family shares in the very life of self-giving love of the Trinity. Like the Church at large, the Christian family is a sacrament of unity—both within its own internal life; and in its mission of evangelization.<sup>199</sup> The Holy Spirit, poured out in the sacramental celebration of Matrimony, is the supernatural bond of love that abides with spouses and progressively leads them toward deeper maturity in Christ by making a purer and more total gift of self. Moreover, the Holy Spirit, as both “Communion” and “Gift,” is both the source and the strength of the supernatural communion of the domestic Church.<sup>200</sup> John Paul II notes that the Holy Spirit is the “living source and inexhaustible sustenance” of supernatural communion between believers.<sup>201</sup>

As we have already seen, the Holy Spirit is the supernatural bond of communion between two baptized spouses. Therefore, in a profound way, we can see that a marital spirituality is a spirituality of the bond.<sup>202</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that, by virtue of the sacramental epiclesis of Matrimony, spouses receive the gift of a sacramental charism through the Holy Spirit poured out upon them. The seal of the Holy Spirit they receive becomes an inexhaustible and ongoing source of grace to empower the couple to carry out their mission in the Church and to remain faithful to one another as Christ is ever faithful to his Church.<sup>203</sup> The charism of marriage endures through the spouses’ entire life together—despite their own sins, personal failures, and flaws. In this way, the objective reality brought about in the sacramental celebration is guaranteed by the gift of the Holy Spirit irrevocably given to the sacramental couple, taking them up into the greater reality of Christ’s definitive covenant with the Church. The key point to

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<sup>199</sup> Documents of Vatican II: *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

<sup>200</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 21.

<sup>201</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 21.

<sup>202</sup> Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 315.

<sup>203</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1624.

emphasize here is that the strength of sacramental marriage does not rely on the subjective dispositions of the spouses; rather, by their participation in the covenant bond between Christ and his Bride, the Church, their marriage is given an objective and unbreakable durability founded on the definitive and irrevocable faithfulness of God.

In order to unpack sufficiently the spirituality of marriage, it is important first to articulate the essence of marriage between the baptized as understood by the Catholic Church. We have seen that, as an intimate community of life and love, Christian marriage is a *communio personarum* rooted in the *communio* of the Trinity. This conjugal communion of the spouses includes three constitutive goods: fidelity, indissolubility, and fruitfulness.<sup>204</sup> The good of fidelity is rooted in God's own fidelity to the covenant, first with the people of Israel, then with his Church. The good of indissolubility, very closely related to fidelity, has to do with the durability of the covenant, that what God has joined together as one flesh cannot be separated by any person. Last, the good of fruitfulness related to the integral union of the unitive and procreative dimensions of marriage. As God is himself a communion of life-giving love, so also man and wife— as *imago Dei*— are called to open themselves to both supernatural fruitfulness and to the natural fruitfulness of children.

Within the Rite of Matrimony, these three goods are specifically requested from God. All three of these marital goods provide the structure or inner logic of the essence of marriage as a *communio personarum*. These goods are constitutive of marriage because they flow from the reality that marriage is—a perpetual covenant, a solemn and definitive gift of persons. As Christ gives himself definitively and irrevocably to his Bride, the Church, so spouses—by their participation in Christ's definitive covenant—give themselves to one another.

In transitioning from the objective reality brought about through the celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony to the ongoing sacrament extended throughout the shared life of

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<sup>204</sup> Cahall Perry J., *The Mystery of Marriage: a Theology of the Body and the Sacrament* (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2016), 82-83.

spouses, it is important to note that the reality of family is intrinsic to a Catholic understanding of marriage rather than something viewed as an “optional extra” after the fact. Children do not “come from outside [marriage] as something added on to the mutual love of the spouses, but spring from the heart of that mutual giving, as its fruit and fulfilment.”<sup>205</sup> Keeping in mind that fruitfulness is one of the constitutive goods of marriage and that marriage is a vocation within the Catholic Church, I would like to suggest that the family understood as a domestic Church is integral to marriage understood as a sacrament. As will be seen, this has implications for the spirituality of the domestic Church—for the “unity of the two” about which Pope John Paul II spoke, is by its very nature opened to a “third”: first, the divine “third” in the Person of the Holy Spirit; and then the child, who is the fruit of the one flesh union of spouses.<sup>206</sup>

In chapter one, we examined how Christian marriage participates in the Eucharistic unity of Christ and his Church. We saw that, by virtue of the Sacrament of Matrimony, spouses not only imitate outwardly but participate inwardly in this covenant union of Christ-Church. In this section, our aim is to show how the Eucharist, the sacrament of bridegroom and bride, provides the structuring logic for a Trinitarian and Christocentric spirituality of the domestic Church. Our elaboration of this structuring logic will involve examining the parallels between the Eucharist and Matrimony. Afterward, we will unpack in personalist language the nuptial character of the Eucharist in order to illuminate the Eucharistic character of Matrimony.

As we have seen, the Sacrament of Matrimony has two different dimensions: the actual liturgical celebration of the sacrament, and the enduring reality of the sacrament through the sacramental quasi-character or seal that comes about as a result of the charism of the Holy Spirit. We have shown that the charism of the sacrament establishes the sacramental couple objectively within the Christ-Church covenant. This reality, however—in order to achieve its full effect—requires the active cooperation of the spouses, who must correspond to the grace of the sacrament both in the liturgical celebration itself and in

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<sup>205</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2366.

<sup>206</sup> John Paul II, *Gratissimam Sane*, 8.

their day-to-day living out of the sacramental reality—the reality that they have received; and the reality that they become. In other words, the one-flesh union that is brought about *ontologically* on the wedding day, must then become an *existential* reality throughout the rest of their life together as spouses. It exists as both a *gift* and a *call*. As in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist at Mass when Christ becomes present under the appearance of bread and wine at the words of consecration by the priest and continue to perdure as long as the species subsist; so also, through the Sacrament of Matrimony, the spouses become a sacramental couple, a new ontological reality, at the words of consent; but then are called to grow more fully into the reality they are in their conjugal life together. John Paul II speaks of this reality when he describes the gift of the Holy Spirit as “a commandment of life for Christian spouses and at the same time a stimulating impulse so that every day they may progress towards an ever-richer union with each other on all levels—of the body, of the character, of the heart, of the intelligence and will, and of the soul...”<sup>207</sup>

The hinge of the transition from the communion of the domestic Church to its mission is grounded in the inner dynamism of the Eucharist and of the reality that the Eucharist brings about—the existence and the communion of the Church as the Body of Christ. The Eucharist, source and summit of the Church as a whole, is also the source and summit of the domestic Church. As it does at the level of the universal Church, the Sacrament of the Eucharist brings about a real participation in the Trinitarian life of God by inserting the spouses into the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ. The Body of Christ received in the Eucharist constitutes the being and the mission of both the miniature Church of the Christian family and the Church as a whole. Because Christ’s being is entirely being-from and being-for, the one who receives Christ in the Eucharist is taken up into the inner dynamism of his Pasch. In other words, just as with Christ communion and mission are two sides of the same coin, so it is with the Christian disciple. The life of the Christian disciple, therefore, is lived in the gap between the “ego drama” of the self-enclosed

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<sup>207</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 19.

buffered self, and the “Theo-drama” of being-in and being-for Christ.<sup>208</sup> Christian existence is therefore a paschal existence, going out beyond the prison of the ego “*duc in altum*” (into the deep).<sup>209</sup>

By its inner unity with the Holy Eucharist, the Sacrament of Matrimony participates in its paschal character. The mission of the domestic Church is the expression *ad extra* of its identity *ad intra* as a communion of persons. In his apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis speaks of this reality by first noting the inherently social dimension of every human person.<sup>210</sup> The Holy Father then goes on to explain that the social dimension of man is first modeled in the family. This complements well the words of the Council Fathers in *Gaudium et Spes* that the family is a “school of deeper humanity.”<sup>211</sup> The Christian family, says Francis, “lives its spirituality precisely by being at one and the same time a domestic church and a vital cell for transforming the world.”<sup>212</sup> The spirituality of the family is an *incarnate* spirituality—one in which each person’s inherently social dimension is taken up into the Trinitarian life through the incarnate Son, Jesus Christ. This incarnate spirituality is deeply rooted in the joys and struggles of daily life.<sup>213</sup> These everyday realities—the Pope points out—are not foreign to their spirituality, but rather are constitutive of it. It is by consciously and intentionally welcoming Christ into that Christian families can draw on the grace needed to grow in communion together as an *Ecclesia domestica*.

In the ninth chapter of *Amoris Laetitia*, the importance of hospitality is singled out as a particularly significant aspect of the mission of each domestic Church *ad extra*. Francis touches on this in relation to the Christian family’s mission to serve life. He explains that “the family circle is not only open to life by generating it within itself, but also by going

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<sup>208</sup> Joseph Serwach, “Bishop Barron: ‘God Is an Actor in History,’” Medium (Catholic Way Home, December 13, 2019), <https://medium.com/catholic-way-home/bishop-barron-god-is-an-actor-in-history-bfea23ccaea5>.

<sup>209</sup> John Paul II, *Novo Millenio Inuente* (Vatican City, Vatican: *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, 2001) 1, 15.

<sup>210</sup> Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 316.

<sup>211</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 52.

<sup>212</sup> Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 324.

<sup>213</sup> Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 316.



forth and spreading life by caring for others and seeking their happiness.”<sup>214</sup> As is the case with the Church at large, the domestic Church is a “mother,” bearing forth new life through its witness to and accompaniment of other families, as well as those most in need. Pope John Paul II emphasized that hospitality cannot be limited to a family’s opening the doors of their home to others but that, at a deeper level, it must include opening the doors of their heart in welcome to others.<sup>215</sup> For John Paul, as for Francis, hospitality is a simple yet powerful way that families can share forth their life to others, not becoming a circle closed in on themselves, but embracing with open arms other couples, families, and individuals, especially the elderly, the poor and the lonely. This hospitality calls forth and cultivates within the domestic Church a spirituality of generosity, of being-for others.

### ***3.4 Prayer and Sacrifice in the Domestic Church***

In the first section of this chapter, we looked at the *triplex munera* all Christian share in by virtue of their Baptism. We also saw how the Sacrament of Matrimony specifies the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office in the service of building up the kingdom of God within the family, especially in parents’ relation to their children. Here we want to explore in greater depth and specificity the priestly office of spouses and parents. Pope John Paul II articulates three expressions of the priestly role in which the Christian family participates: the celebration of the sacraments; the gift of one’s life; and the life of prayer. We will begin by looking first at sacramental marriage as both a means of mutual sanctification and an act of worship and how the reality brought about in the celebration of the Rite of Matrimony is continued and deepened in the domestic liturgy of the home. Next, the centrality of self-gift, sacrifice, and the Cross as it relates to marriage and family life will be articulated. Last, the essential importance of prayer at the personal, spousal, and family levels will be elaborated.

#### ***3.4.1 Matrimony as a Means of Sanctification and an Act of Worship***

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<sup>214</sup> Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 324.

<sup>215</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 85.

It is helpful to note first of all that Matrimony, like all of the sacraments of the Catholic Church, is a liturgical act, part of the the public and official worship of the baptized. In the liturgy of the Church, it is primarily Christ himself at work, making present by the power of his Spirit the Paschal mystery of his Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension. The Vatican II Council Fathers teach that the liturgy involves both the worship of God and the sanctification of men.<sup>216</sup> In the Church's liturgy, then, there is both an ascending dimension—the worship and glorification of God; and a descending dimension—the sanctification of man. The liturgy is primarily *opus Dei*, the work of God; nevertheless, Christ, true God and true man, has united the Church with himself in the liturgy in such a way that his Bride may participate *with* him in the glorification of God and may receive *through* him the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit. Because Jesus has willed it to be so, he has established the ministerial priesthood to continue his work of sanctification through the celebration of the sacraments.

The Sacrament of Matrimony is the actualization of the Paschal mystery of Christ. We have also already noted that there is a strong bond of connection between the Eucharist and Matrimony. However, in contradistinction to the Sacrament of the Eucharist, where only a ministerial priest may validly confect the Body and Blood of Christ, in the Sacrament of Matrimony it is the spouses themselves who are the ministers of the sacrament to one another. As the ministerial priest, acting in the name of Christ, validly celebrates the Eucharist, so baptised spouses, acting in the name of Christ, minister the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony to one another.<sup>217</sup> Through the exchange of consent by each of the spouses, a new ontological reality is brought about—the sacramental couple. In a way analogous to the Eucharist, in which the species of bread and wine convey the incarnate Christ, in the Sacrament of Matrimony, the spouses themselves in their very bodies convey the one flesh union of Christ and his Church and receive a new sharing in the Paschal mystery. This reality is brought about by virtue of Christ's action.

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<sup>216</sup> Documents of Vatican II: *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7.

<sup>217</sup> Renzo Bonetti, *Signs of Love: Christian Liturgy in the Everyday Life of the Family* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed Publishing, 2017), 4-5.

As an “ongoing sacrament,” the gift of Jesus given during the Rite of Matrimony is not exhausted in the liturgical celebration but continues to accompany the spouses throughout the rest of their lives together as a sacramental couple. Because Matrimony is not merely a sacrament that spouses *receive* but also a sacrament that they *are*, the embodied reality of the sacramental couple perdures as long as both spouses are living.<sup>218</sup> Matrimony, then, is not only a gift received, but also a vocation given. In the Latin Church’s Rite of Matrimony, spouses are reminded that “God, who has called the [them] to the marriage, continues to call them in the marriage.”<sup>219</sup> These words communicate that the Liturgy of Holy Matrimony continues to unfold in the day-to-day life of the spouses within the context of their domestic Church. As in the public liturgy of the Church, the domestic liturgy also includes an ascending and descending dimension—both worship of God and human sanctification. Msgr. Renzo Bonetti puts it thus: “Domestic liturgy is not ritual, but the love of God expressed through the normal activities of everyday life.”<sup>220</sup> The gestures that make up daily life—washing dishes, driving children to school, preparing dinner — are all a means by which spouses express worship of God. Spouses are made capable of this act of worship and mutual sanctification by virtue of the death and Resurrection of Christ in which they participate, and from which flows a constant source of grace. In this way, Christ continues to accompany couples throughout the entirety of life together. And through the grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony, they become the means of sanctification, not only for each other, but also for their children and for the wider community.

### ***3.4.2 The Centrality of Self-Gift, Sacrifice, and the Cross***

Closely connected to the theme of worship and sanctification in Christian married life is the theme of sacrifice. In a striking manner, Pope John Paul II exhorts spouses that they “are a permanent reminder to the Church of what happened on the Cross.”<sup>221</sup> The Holy Father goes on to describe the necessity of a spirit of sacrifice that must pervade the family—a spirit of sacrifice that leads each member, beginning with husband and wife,

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<sup>218</sup> Bonetti, *Signs of Love*, 8.

<sup>219</sup> *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, 11.

<sup>220</sup> Bonetti, *Signs of Love*, 9.

<sup>221</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 13.

into a deeper and more profound gift of self. This spirit of sacrifice involves the willingness to give and to ask for forgiveness, to bear with one's own faults and the faults of others, and to put others' needs ahead of one's own.<sup>222</sup> This is often one of the most difficult lessons to learn for many married couples, largely because the wider culture of the materialistic and consumeristic West inculcates a culture of use over that of self-gift. As a result, the very understanding of marriage has effected a tremendous shift in men and women's understanding and expectations for married life. If a person has not learned and practiced within their own family of origin the lesson of self-mastery and instead become habituated to a way of life inimical to the call of the Gospel to deny oneself and take up one's cross, it is very difficult indeed to relate to others in mutual self-gift. Nevertheless, it is of the essence of a Christian understanding of marriage that it participates in and demonstrates to the world the very love of Christ shown upon the Cross.

In a profound meditation on the thirteenth chapter of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, the famous "hymn to love," John Paul highlights the demanding nature of love within marriage and family life, noting the importance of cultivating this "demanding" love: "Nowadays people need to rediscover this demanding love, for it is truly the firm foundation of the family, a foundation able to 'endure all things'."<sup>223</sup> The Holy Father goes on to explain precisely why this demanding love is so central to the flourishing of family life: it is because it "creates the good of persons and communities" and "gives it to others."<sup>224</sup> Only the one who can live in a relationship of mutuality and of self-gift has the capacity to build strong bonds of communion with others. As Mathew Levering has noted, "in a world gone wrong, there is no communion without sacrifice."<sup>225</sup> Within the interior life of the Trinity the divine Persons are constituted by their very giving and receiving of one another. Because of the reality of sin and its effects on humanity— especially in the relationship between man and woman in marriage— this

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<sup>222</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 21.

<sup>223</sup> John Paul II, *Gratissimam Sane*, 14.

<sup>224</sup> John Paul II, *Gratissimam Sane*, 14.

<sup>225</sup> Mathew Levering, *Sacrifice and Community: Jewish Offering and Christian Eucharist* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 42.

total gift of self necessarily involves the practice of self-denial and of sacrifice. This total self-gift even unto death is modeled for us *par excellence* in the obedient offering of Christ on the Cross, which constitute Jesus' nuptials with his Bride, the Church.

It is important at this juncture to call attention to an aspect of Christian spirituality that can serve as a necessary corrective to the excesses of a hedonistic culture that privileges use over love. From the very beginning of Christianity, the practice of asceticism has been a central component of Christian discipleship. St. Paul in several of his letters refers to the essential place of self-denial in the life of the disciple of Christ. He is fond of drawing an analogy between the self-discipline of a soldier or an athlete who strives for earthly glory, and the self-denial of the disciple striving for eternal glory.<sup>226</sup> Asceticism is derived from the Greek word *ἀσκησις*, which refers to bodily training—specifically athletic training. For the early Christians, ascetical practices were not reserved only for the monastics; rather the spiritual disciplines of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving were expected of every member of the Church. Though the practice of asceticism continued unabated among the laity up through the 1960s in the West, it notably dropped off in the post-Vatican II period and continues to lag in our time. Likewise, the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience though intended for all Christians (even if only religious brothers and sisters make a public profession), have also been downplayed as of late.<sup>227</sup>

Within the sphere of sexual relations in marriage, the proliferation of “the pill” and widespread contraceptive use among the Catholic laity have had devastating effects on the integrity of the marital act.<sup>228</sup> Coupled with the commonly held opinion that sex is reducible to mutual pleasure-seeking, the “throwaway culture” excoriated by Pope Francis has led many married persons, especially men, to approach the marital act as “consumer” rather than as a mutual gift of self-oblation love. Thanks to the Theology of

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<sup>226</sup> See, for example, 1 Cor 9:25-27; Phil 3:12-14.

<sup>227</sup> Frederick Miller, “Practicing What We Preach,” *Homiletic & Pastoral Review*, April 16, 2015, <https://www.hprweb.com/2015/04/practicing-what-we-preach/>.

<sup>228</sup> Mary Eberstadt, “The Prophetic Power of *Humanae Vitae*: Mary Eberstadt,” *First Things*, April 1, 2018, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2018/04/the-prophetic-power-of-humanae-vitae>.

the Body articulated by John Paul II, the Catholic Church's teachings concerning marital love have gained some traction among devout Catholics. Coupled with Natural Family Planning, TOB offers a framework for understanding the significance of the marital act as a means for married couples to participate in the inner life of the Trinity. Thus, the Church now has both the intellectual and scientific resources to engage contemporary Catholics in a winsome way. Nevertheless, these resources seem like a very small David in front of the very large Goliath of consumer capitalism. In order to be able to have a fighting chance within this culture, Catholic couples will need to take up again and cultivate in their children the ability to deny themselves; to practice the virtue of temperance; and to take up again the spiritual disciplines, especially that of fasting and abstinence. Ultimately, an over-emphasis on the spiritual dimension of man to the detriment of the bodily undermines both the incarnational reality of the Catholic faith and the composite nature of the human person, body and soul.

### ***3.4.3 The Essential Importance of Prayer in the Domestic Church***

Along with the liturgy and sacraments and the centrality of the Cross, the third expression of the priestly role of spouses and parents is prayer. For the Christian life, prayer is absolutely essential, the life breath of the disciple. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes prayer as “a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God”<sup>229</sup> and as an encounter between the thirst of God for man and the thirst of man for God.<sup>230</sup> Within the domestic Church, prayer can be articulated in terms of concentric circles. The most interior circle, personal prayer, is that which is foundational. The next circle, spousal prayer, is one which has been emphasized more and more emphatically over the course of the last hundred years, but which is still relatively unfamiliar to many Catholics, even to those who otherwise would be considered actively practicing their faith. The last circle is that of family prayer. Family prayer has also been highlighted by many modern popes, and the term “the family that prays together, stays together” was coined by the “Rosary priest,” Holy Cross Father Ven. Patrick Peyton. We will proceed first by looking at spousal prayer, and then conclude by looking at family prayer.

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<sup>229</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2258.

<sup>230</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2560.

### 3.4.4 Spousal Prayer

Spousal prayer is rooted in the deep ontological reality brought about by the Sacrament of Matrimony: by virtue of the exchange of consent of the two baptized spouses, a new reality comes into being—the sacramental couple. Man and woman, through the exchange of consent, bind themselves to one another in a union that is both physical and spiritual. Pope Francis speaks of it in terms of the two spouses becoming “one flesh” both in their bodies and in the unity of their “hearts and lives.”<sup>231</sup> Within the celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony, the spouses are taken up into Jesus’ Paschal mystery and receive the gift of the Spirit of Christ as their interior “guide and rule of life.”<sup>232</sup> Moreover, because Matrimony is an ongoing sacrament, the spouses continue to operate *in persona Christi* in relation to one another, even after the wedding day. Consequently, in a sacramental marriage, spouses should come to an ever deeper and more profound appreciation for the presence of Christ in each other. Spouses are called to be a gift to one another, as well as to receive the other as gift.<sup>233</sup> This gift, if it is to be reflective of Christ’s love for the Church and of the inner life of love in the Trinity, must be a total giving of oneself to the other in vulnerability and a receiving the gift of the other. In order to realize at an existential level what they have received sacramentally, spouses must make a conscious and ever-deepening journey into the mystery of each other.

Saint John Henry Newman took for his cardinal motto the words “*cor ad cor, loquitur*” (heart speaks unto heart) in order to emphasize the deeply personal and—in his terms—“real” nature of the Christian life of discipleship, and the mutual thirst between God and the human soul. One might reasonably suggest that these words could also be applied in an analogous way to the sacramental couple united in Holy Matrimony. The heart-to-heart relationship between husband and wife is not merely a two-way dialogue but in fact involves a dialogue of three. As Ven. Fulton Sheen was fond of saying, it takes three to get married: the husband, the wife, and God himself—the transcendent third.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 13.

<sup>232</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 63.

<sup>233</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 11.

<sup>234</sup> Fulton J. Sheen, *Three to Get Married* (Princeton, NJ: Scepter Publishers, 2004).

This three-way dialogue involves an openness on the part of both spouses to grow in union with each other precisely by opening themselves up to intimacy and communion together with God. John Paul II notes that the Holy Spirit who is poured forth on the spouses continues to overflow in their sacramental union, drawing them ever deeper into the “fairest love” that God intends for them, and which becomes the source of the love that overflows into family prayer.

### ***3.4.5 Family Prayer***

Building upon what has already been said regarding the importance of spousal prayer, we turn now to the practice of family prayer in the domestic Church. With increasing urgency, the popes of the twentieth century have stressed the importance of prayer in the Christian family. Both the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and modern popes have spoken of the family as a “school of prayer” modeled after the Holy Family of Nazareth.<sup>235</sup> Not only is the family a school of prayer, but it is also a communion of persons centered on Jesus Christ as Lord, an *ecclesiola* or “church in miniature.” Through the grace of the Sacrament of Baptism, each member of the family, sharing in the baptismal priesthood, exercises their office in a particularly powerful way when gathered in the presence of Christ. Through family prayer, each member grows in the capacity to offer his or her life as a spiritual sacrifice in union with Jesus. Pope John Paul II explains how, through the progressive transformation that occurs as the family prays together, each one becomes more deeply configured to Christ the High Priest, each in their own state in life.<sup>236</sup>

The role of parents as the first educators of their children comes to the fore especially in the context of family prayer. Benedict explains that, as the domestic Church, the Christian family is the place where children “learn to perceive the meaning of God, thanks to the teaching and example of their parents: to live in an atmosphere marked by

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<sup>235</sup> Benedict, “General Audience of 28 December 2011: BENEDICT XVI,” General Audience of 28 December 2011 | BENEDICT XVI, December 27, 2011, [http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20111228.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20111228.html).

<sup>236</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 59.



God's presence."<sup>237</sup> This atmosphere includes both the physical atmosphere (e.g., sacred art, the Crucifix, candles, holy water, etc.) and the spiritual atmosphere brought about by the spiritual disciplines and the practice of the virtues. One might think of this atmosphere along the lines of a greenhouse, wherein the spiritual life of the children is supported and nurtured, in order that it might be transplanted and thrive outside the family in proper time.

In a Wednesday address given by Pope Benedict XVI, the pontiff explained that Jesus would have learned the practice of prayer and the rhythms of the Jewish festal calendar from Joseph and Mary.<sup>238</sup> As the father of the household, Joseph would have led the Holy Family in prayer and would have taken them to the Temple for the principal feasts of the Israelites. On the other hand, Benedict explains, it was Christ who introduced to his human parents the mystery of his own filial relationship with the Father. This on clear display when the twelve-year-old Jesus is found in the Temple by Mary and Joseph after three days' absence. When asked by his mother why he has treated them so, Jesus replies, "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"<sup>239</sup> Benedict concludes by stressing the importance of parents cultivating within the family home an "atmosphere of being with the Father."<sup>240</sup> Along the same lines, John Paul II stressed the significance of parents modeling prayer to their children:

The concrete example and living witness of parents is fundamental and irreplaceable in educating their children to pray. Only by praying together with their children can a father and mother—exercising their royal priesthood—penetrate the innermost depths of their children's hearts and leave an impression that the future events in their lives will not be able to efface.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Benedict, "General Audience of 28 December 2011: BENEDICT XVI," General Audience of 28 December 2011 | BENEDICT XVI, December 27, 2011, [http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20111228.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20111228.html).

<sup>238</sup> Benedict, General Audience of 28 December 2011.

<sup>239</sup> Lk 2:48-49.

<sup>240</sup> Benedict, General Audience of 28 December 2011.

<sup>241</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 60.

It should be pointed out that rather than being a distraction from the mission proper to them or a form of escapism the practice of family prayer is the means by which each member and the family as a whole receives the strength to participate fully in that mission.<sup>242</sup> To return to the image of the vine and branches from John 15, family prayer is how the domestic Church remains in the vine who is Christ. In centering their life around Christ in a spirit of thanksgiving, of petition, and of abandonment to the will of God, it is reminded of its profound identity and is empowered to carry out its mission in the world. In other words, the Christian family “becomes what it is”<sup>243</sup> by receiving, embracing, and growing into the reality which it is by God’s grace.

In speaking about family prayer, it is helpful to distinguish between the domestic Church’s participation in the public, liturgical prayer of the Church, principally at Mass, and its own “private” devotional prayer within the home. Romano Guardini, in his book *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, makes this helpful distinction, and it is one which seems particularly helpful in providing guidance to families seeking to make family prayer a priority.<sup>244</sup> Pope John Paul II in *Familiaris Consortio* speaks of the “deep and vital bond” between these two forms of prayer<sup>245</sup> and emphasizes how the two reinforce and complement one another. The pontiff teaches that the devotional prayer of the domestic Church is meant both to prepare for the celebration of the Eucharist and the other sacraments and to extend that celebration into daily life. As the “source and summit” of the Christian life, the Eucharist is both the font of grace from which the Christian disciple is nourished and the goal toward which the disciple strives. In order for the fruit of the Eucharist and of the other sacraments to have their full effect, it is necessary for the recipient of the sacrament, preeminently the Eucharist, to have the proper disposition. The Catholic Church uses the term *ex opere operato* to articulate that the grace of the sacrament is objectively available and the term *ex opere operantis* to speak about the necessary subjective disposition of the recipient of the sacrament.<sup>246</sup> The Eucharist is then

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<sup>242</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 60.

<sup>243</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 59.

<sup>244</sup> Romano Guardini and Joseph Ratzinger, *Spirit of the Liturgy* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 2018), 277-278.

<sup>245</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 61.

<sup>246</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1128.

extended into daily living through the prolongation of the liturgy in the devotional life of prayer. To this end, the holy father teaches that an “important purpose of the prayer of the domestic Church is to serve as the natural introduction for the children to the liturgical prayer of the whole Church.”<sup>247</sup> The fruitful participation of each member of the domestic Church in the liturgy is prepared for by a rhythm of prayer in the home; and the liturgy flows over into the piety and devotional life of the family. In this way, children learn to perceive the link between the domestic Church to which they belong and the Church at large, while also cultivating a relationship with God that extends into every area of their life.

In summary, we have seen how the domestic Church carries out the priestly office in the celebration of the sacraments, the life of sacrifice and self-gift, and the discipline of prayer. By the grace of Baptism, each member of the domestic Church has a share in this priestly role. Spouses and parents by the grace of Matrimony are consecrated to lead by their own example and to model a life of service, self-gift, and sacrifice. By building a culture of prayer through their prayer together and through rhythms of liturgical and devotional prayer centred on the Eucharistic Christ, they give to their children a living witness of Christian discipleship and assist their children in forming habits of discipline leading to self-mastery that will free them to make a sincere gift of self in a life of service and practical charity. To this we will turn in our final section.

### ***3.5 Service and Practical Charity in the Domestic Church***

Thus far, we have been investigating the threefold office of Christ in which the Christian family participates. As with the wider Church, the domestic Church is, in the words of John Paul II, a “prophetic, priestly, and kingly people endowed with the mission of bringing all human beings to accept the word in faith, to celebrate and profess it in the sacraments and in prayer, and to give expression to it...in accordance with the gift and new commandment of love.”<sup>248</sup> The grace of God received in the sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, is ordered to a new life in Christ, a life of service and of self-gift. There is a

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<sup>247</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 61.

<sup>248</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 63.

certain perichoretic relationship that exists within the threefold office of Christ and the Christian's participation in it. Christ's priesthood is both prophetic and kingly. Likewise, his kingship is priestly and prophetic. The link between the priestly and kingly dimensions is especially strong; for it is only through a fruitful participation in the Sacred Liturgy that the Christian becomes capable of a rightly-ordered love for and service to neighbor. As Pope Benedict puts it, "[love] is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us."<sup>249</sup>

In striking fashion, Pope Benedict draws out the implications of fruitful reception of the Eucharist when he uses the term "Eucharistic consistency" to express that the worship and reception of the Eucharist is never a merely private matter but rather relates intimately to one's public living out of the faith in all aspects of life.<sup>250</sup> The pontiff teaches that a "Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented."<sup>251</sup> Benedict wants to emphasize here the unavoidably *social* dimension of the Eucharist and of the Christian life of discipleship. He goes on to explain that one of the earliest names for the Eucharist was *agape*—the Greek word for self-giving love, translated in Latin as *caritas*. To be in communion with Christ is to be drawn into his own self-giving love for others. Put simply, it is inconsistent and deeply *dis-integrated* to receive the Body of Christ in the Eucharist and then to neglect the Body of Christ in one's brother or sister in need. This Eucharistic mysticism, says Benedict, is rooted in Christ's own life and teaching and in the letters of Paul. It is also brought into striking relief by these words of John Chrysostom to his congregation:

Do you want to honor Christ's body? Then do not scorn him in his nakedness, nor honor him here in the church with silken garments while neglecting him outside where he is cold and naked. For he who said: *This is my body*, and made it so by his words, also said: *You saw me hungry and did not feed me, and inasmuch as*

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<sup>249</sup> Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 2.

<sup>250</sup> Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 83.

<sup>251</sup> Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 14.

*you did not do it for one of these, the least of my brothers, you did not do it for me.*<sup>252</sup>

Further on in *Deus Caritas Est*, Benedict sums up the three essential activities of the Church: the proclamation of the word of God (*kerygma*), the worship of God in the liturgy (*leitourgia*), and the ministry of charity (*diakonia*)—all of which express her identification with Christ as prophet, priest, and king, respectively.<sup>253</sup> It is important to note that, for Benedict, these three responsibilities of the Church are all interdependent and mutually supportive. They also carry over from the Church to the lived discipleship of each of the baptized. As the First Letter of John emphasizes, one cannot claim to love God if one fails to love his brother.<sup>254</sup> It is also true, however, that the ministry of charity can only be effective to the extent that the Christian enters into the very dynamic of Christ’s own self-giving love, made present and active in the Sacrament of Eucharist. Should one receive the Eucharist and fail to be a neighbor to his brother in need, Benedict teaches, his reception is “intrinsically fragmented.”<sup>255</sup> The Great Commandment to love God and one’s neighbor is an integral whole. Likewise, the prophetic and kingly offices are also integrally linked. While noting that the service of charity proper to the kingly office of the Christian may never be used in proselytizing, the pontiff points out that witnesses such as Teresa of Calcutta, Lawrence the Deacon, and Martin of Tours, in addition to carrying out the kingly service of charity, were also powerful proclaimers of the Gospel.<sup>256</sup>

Regarding the kingly office of the baptized, we turn now to a specific focus on the domestic Church and its kingly mission of service. Perhaps the first thing to note is the specific newness which Christ brought to traditional Jewish understanding of the family and the significance of the fourth commandment to “honor thy father and thy mother.”

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<sup>252</sup> St. John Chrysostom, “Don't Adorn the Church & Ignore the Poor - John Chrysostom,” Crossroads Initiative, March 5, 2019, <https://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/media/articles/dont-adorn-the-church-but-ignore-the-poor-john-chrysostom/>.

<sup>253</sup> Benedict XVI *Deus Caritas Est*, 21-22, 25.

<sup>254</sup> 1 Jn 4:20.

<sup>255</sup> Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 14.

<sup>256</sup> Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 40.

For the People of Israel the family was considered the carrier of the covenant between God and humanity and the very center of the whole social order.<sup>257</sup> Joseph Ratzinger notes that Christ relativized the family, and thus set it upon a higher foundation that of doing the will of God.<sup>258</sup> Ultimately, therefore, the family, though still essential, is not at the center—Christ himself is; and the Christian family is taken up into the greater service of building the kingdom of God. It does this in what John Paul II calls an “original and specific” manner by putting itself, as an “intimate community of life and love,” at the service of the Church and of the wider society.<sup>259</sup> The unity in love that is exhibited by the Christian household is a microcosm of the universal Church and should manifest to others along with its priestly and prophetic aspects, the witness of kingly service.<sup>260</sup> By becoming more fully what it is, the domestic Church fosters a culture of loving service within the home (*ad intra*), so that it can bear witness to loving service both in the Church and in the world (*ad extra*). We will examine each of these dimensions in turn.

### ***3.5.1 The Kingly Service of the Domestic Church Ad Intra***

As a community of life and love, the family’s service in the building up of the kingdom begins with the family culture that husband and wife, along with their children, build in the household. John Paul II emphasizes that it is by the New Commandment of love that the Holy Spirit both inspires and guides within the members of the domestic Church that which leads them to grow in self-denial and self-mastery to overcome the reign of sin in themselves to the end that they are freed for service to one another. Following the example of Christ, who came “not to be served but to serve,”<sup>261</sup> Christians learn first in the home the priority of loving service and practice the “law of the gift” promised by Christ: “He who loses his life for my sake will find it.”<sup>262</sup> Pope Francis echoes this in *Amoris Laetitia*, where he quotes St. Ignatius Loyola: “Love is shown more by deeds than by words.”<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Joseph C. Atkinson, *Biblical and Theological Foundations of the Family: The Domestic Church* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Univ. of America Press, 2014), 91-127.

<sup>258</sup> Benedict, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 112-115; Cf. Matt 12:46-50.

<sup>259</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 50.

<sup>260</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 47.

<sup>261</sup> Mk 10:45.

<sup>262</sup> Mt 16:25; Lk 9:24.

<sup>263</sup> Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 93.

In his book, *Signs of Love*, Msgr. Renzo Bonetti, reflecting on paragraph 48 of *Gaudium et Spes* which speaks of the abiding presence of Christ within the sacramental couple, explains that Christ wants to express his total gift of self “in, with, and through the couple” in order to make visible the invisible mystery of the Eucharist.<sup>264</sup> This “ministry of visibility” is exercised by the spouses so that they can be for each other, for their children, and for the world a sacrament of Christ’s love for the Church and God’s love for the world. Within the life of the domestic Church, the home becomes a “Trinitarian greenhouse” where mutual gift of self is modelled and cultivated by an atmosphere of service and sacrifice<sup>265</sup> and where the gift of Christ Body and Blood participated in at Mass is extended into the day-to-day life of the domestic Church.

### ***3.5.2 The Kingly Service of the Domestic Church Ad Extra***

In *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II teaches that the family, as a “community of love,” is the “first and fundamental school of social living,” wherein the love of husband and wife for one another serves as a model and measure for all of the other relationships within the family.<sup>266</sup> It is precisely within the family that children are apprenticed into a “school of the social virtues,” where they learn by example and practice the basics of living in relationship with others.<sup>267</sup> It is through the experience of communion and sharing in the home that children witness and participate in that they learn and practice the disciplines of self-mastery and self-gift.<sup>268</sup>

*Apostolicam Actuositatem* refers to the family as the “first and vital cell of society” and describes the role of parents in relation to their children as one of apprenticeship in the apostolate whereby children learn from the witness and instruction of their parents the importance of loving service to neighbor.<sup>269</sup> In this regard, the apostolate of the family involves a “prophetic mission” whereby they demonstrate to the those in their circle of

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<sup>264</sup> Bonetti, *Signs of Love*, 12-13.

<sup>265</sup> Bonetti, *Signs of Love*, 21-22.

<sup>266</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 37.

<sup>267</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 36.

<sup>268</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 42.

<sup>269</sup> Documents of Vatican II: *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 11, 30.

influence that “love is possible.”<sup>270</sup> This means that the family, like the Church, must not shutter itself. Pope Francis adds the suggestion that Christ not only is knocking at the door to get inside the family; he is also asking to the family to let him out, so that the love they have received from Christ can be shared with as many others as possible.<sup>271</sup> Here we see the importance of the baptismal call to holiness and mission, strengthened by the Sacrament of Confirmation, whereby each member becomes a gift of Christ to the world. Consequently, parents must teach their children to become a unique and unrepeatable gift not only for the Church but for the world at large.

We have seen from our exploration of the spirituality of the domestic Church that it is anchored in and draws its life from the sacraments of Baptism and Matrimony. Through the Sacrament of Matrimony, spouses are consecrated as a “unity of the two” to carry out their baptismal share in the *triplex munera* of Christ as priests, prophets, and kings. By the enduring grace of Matrimony, man and wife are empowered to “become who they are,” a community of life and love called to the proclamation of the word of God, worship and sanctification, and kingly service. The lay vocation to holiness is specified by Matrimony so that the domestic Church builds up the kingdom of God through the everyday realities of marriage and family life. Christian marriages and families do not exist for themselves but are to be at the service of the greater family of God, the Church, as well as the transformation of the temporal order. By God’s grace, they participate in the Paschal Mystery of Christ through sharing in the Cross and Resurrection. As we have already treated the priestly and kingly offices, we turn in our next chapter to a consideration of the family’s sharing in the prophetic office of Christ.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Evangelization and Catechesis in the Domestic Church**

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<sup>270</sup> Bonetti, *Signs of Love*, 35-36.

<sup>271</sup> Neliswa Mdluli, “Jesus Is at the Door and Knocks,” Catholic Diocese of Manzini, October 20, 2019, <http://www.dioceseofmanzini.org/2019/09/30/jesus-is-at-the-door-and-knocks/>.



#### **4.1 Introduction**

In chapter three, we explored the spirituality of the laity and of the domestic Church with reference to the priestly and kingly mission of each of the baptized. We saw that there is a mutual interdependence and complementarity between the different aspects of the threefold mission of the Christian disciple and of the domestic Church. By exploring Benedict XVI's articulation of the three constitutive dimensions of the Church's activity—*kerygma*, *liturgia*, and *diakonia*—it has become evident that each of these aspects presuppose and reinforce one another. The image of the vine and the branches from John 15 illustrates the relationship for the Christian disciple between abiding in the vine through prayer and participation in the sacraments and bearing fruit in the work of kingly service and prophetic proclamation and witness.

In this chapter, the prophetic dimension of the laity and of the domestic Church will be explicated. We will begin by providing an overview of the Catholic Church's vision of evangelization and of the work of catechesis as an important "moment" in her evangelizing mission. Within this larger context, the specific place of evangelization and catechesis within the domestic Church will be examined. Having laid out this vision, the question will be posed: has the domestic Church been successful in its mission of being an evangelized and evangelizing community? In order to answer this question, we will look at sociological studies that explore this question. In response to this evidence, we will make the case that the Church as a whole and the domestic Church in particular has been most successful in its evangelizing mission when the faith has been handed on within a culture of the Incarnation. Last specific examples of a culture-first approach to transmission of the Catholic faith at key points in the Church's history, followed by a specification of a culture of the Incarnation within the domestic Church proper.

#### **4.2 The Catholic Church's Vision for Evangelization and Catechesis**

Christ's last words to the apostles before his Ascension are recorded in *Matthew 28:18-20* as follows:

*Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.”*

From the beginning, the Catholic Church has understood herself to be the sacrament of the saving mission of Jesus Christ, called and sent as his emissary to bring the *evangelion*, the glad tidings of the Gospel, to all humanity. The consistent aim of her evangelizing activity has always been the formation of disciples of Jesus Christ, that is, persons who have accepted by God’s grace the saving sovereignty of Jesus Christ and who have been configured by faith and the sacraments to the very Person of Christ, within the context of the entire Mystical Body of Christ that the Church understands herself to be. Discipleship of its very nature leads to apostolic mission, whereby the disciple is sent forth as an emissary of Jesus Christ. Central to the Church’s understanding and articulation of discipleship is the reality that the disciple must not only “keep the faith” but must confidently “confess it, confidently bear witness to it, and spread it.”<sup>272</sup> This evangelizing and catechizing task is deeply personal while at the same time being completely communitarian, reflecting the unity-in-complementarity of the Trinity.

This evangelizing mission of the Church is, according to Pope Paul VI, “the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity.”<sup>273</sup> Therefore, evangelization is understood as not one activity among others but as the very *raison d’être* of the Church’s life. As the Catholic Church envisions it, catechesis is a significant and remarkable “moment” in the overall process of evangelization.<sup>274</sup> The specific identity of catechesis is characterized by its approach to handing on in an organic and systematic fashion the Deposit of Faith, divine revelation, with a view to forming mature disciples of Jesus Christ. The 1997 *General Directory for Catechesis* specifies that catechesis is a “school

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<sup>272</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1816.

<sup>273</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14.

<sup>274</sup> John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae* (Vatican City: *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, 1979), 18.

of faith, an initiation and apprenticeship in the entire Christian life.”<sup>275</sup> At the center of catechesis stands the Person of Jesus Christ, who is himself the fullness of divine revelation. The fullness of truth, then, is not a *something* but rather a *Someone*. This Christocentricity of all catechesis opens out to a Trinitarian-Christocentricity in which the catechumen is put into communion with God the Father, through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>276</sup> The “personalist principle” of authentic catechesis emphasizes that the “definitive aim” of catechesis is not knowledge but rather “communion and intimacy” with Jesus Christ.<sup>277</sup> This is key, since it situates the handing on of doctrine within the context of relationships—relationships with God the Trinity, and relationships with other persons, who apprentice the growing disciple into the fullness of Christian life.

In the encyclical *Lumen Fidei* Pope Francis elaborates a vision of evangelization and catechesis that is deeply informed by an integral understanding of the human person that emphasizes the necessarily personal nature of the transmission of the Catholic faith and the essential importance of the liturgy and sacraments in its integral transmission and fully embodied reception and personal appropriation. Essential to this transmission and reception of the Catholic faith for Pope Francis is its progressive nature aimed at transformation in Christ along a journey of discipleship.<sup>278</sup> Evangelization necessarily requires a personal encounter with the living Jesus Christ, leading to a loving knowledge of him mediated through the liturgy and sacraments, as well as participation in the life of the Church. The knowledge proper to faith is a personal knowledge, not limited to a merely theoretical understanding of doctrinal propositions but opening out to a participatory knowing that comes about through deepening personal intimacy with Jesus. The pope emphasizes that this personal loving-knowledge of God could only come about through the bodily Incarnation of Christ. Francis intimates that it is an absolute necessity that this intimacy come about in and through the fleshly body of Jesus Christ: “By his

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<sup>275</sup> Catholic Church. Congregation for the Clergy. *General Directory for Catechesis* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1998), 30.

<sup>276</sup> Congregation for Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, 99.

<sup>277</sup> John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 5.

<sup>278</sup> Francis, *Lumen Fidei* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), 29.

taking flesh and coming among us, Jesus has touched us, and through the sacraments he continues to touch us even today...”<sup>279</sup>

In the section of the encyclical entitled “The Sacraments and the Transmission of Faith,” Francis quotes from *Dei Verbum*, the Second Vatican Council Dogmatic Constitution on divine revelation, to the effect that “the Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes.”<sup>280</sup> In this way—the Pope writes—the Catholic faith is transmitted in an integral manner, which respects not only the integrity of the truth as a Person, Jesus Christ, but is aimed at an integral personal appropriation by the embodied human person. Further into this section, it will be argued that in order for the faith to be transmitted effectively, it necessarily needs—in the words of Francis—a “setting in which it can be witnessed to and communicated, a means which is suitable and proportionate to what is communicated.”<sup>281</sup> What, one might ask, is the nature of this “setting” of which Francis speaks?

If it were simply a matter of handing on ideas or concepts, the transmission of the faith could be accomplished through words alone. However, because what is communicated in catechesis is rooted in a personal encounter with the living God that engages one not only intellectually but as a person in his totality—body, heart (affect), and intellect—it necessarily calls for a setting appropriate to this holistic engagement of the embodied person. The Holy Father reminds us that because it is an “incarnate memory” that is communicated, the transmission of the faith is necessarily reliant upon the Church’s Liturgy and sacraments, the means by which the whole person is put into a living encounter with Jesus Christ, and through Christ and the Holy Spirit to the Father. Thus, the faith, if it is not to devolve into another philosophy or simply an abstraction, must be made accessible precisely in and through the body. Francis grounds this sacramentality of the faith in the singular event of the Incarnation of Christ, a concrete event in which God

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<sup>279</sup> Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, 31.

<sup>280</sup> Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, 40; Documents of Vatican II: *Dei Verbum*, 8.

<sup>281</sup> Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, 40.

encounters man precisely in and through the body and which is extended through space and time in the communion of the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ.<sup>282</sup>

In addition to the liturgy, *Lumen Fidei* notes that “faith itself possesses a sacramental structure.”<sup>283</sup> In speaking of the intimate relationship between a lived faith and a fully-orbed participation in the sacraments, Francis links the realities of faith and the liturgy with one’s own perception of the meaning of reality in its true depth, a sacramental sensibility, which he describes thus:

The awakening of faith is linked to the dawning of a new sacramental sense in our lives as human beings and as Christians, in which visible and material realities are seen to point beyond themselves to the mystery of the eternal.<sup>284</sup>

In this way, we see that faith is a reality that involves a response of the whole human person, an integral composite of body and soul, to the incarnate Christ made present through the liturgy and sacraments. This opens onto a new, deeper perception, a distinctively sacramental imagination, in which visible, material realities disclose invisible, spiritual realities. It is precisely in and through deep engagement with created reality that the human being is led, step by step, into a capacity to plunge below the surface of things, in order to see reality in its own profound depth and breadth.<sup>285</sup> This sacramental sense is not limited to the liturgy but spills out and overflows into the whole of life, adding to its richness.

Becoming Christian, then, is not reducible to an intellectual assent to doctrinal propositions; rather, in order for faith to be awakened, it must be translated into a way of life, a disciplined program of progressive initiation into the faith that involves the whole human person— body, heart, and intellect—as pointed out by Sofia Cavaletti.<sup>286</sup> It is in this context that the baptismal catechumenate comes to the fore for Francis; for it is the Church’s catechumenal process that provides the model and pattern for all of her

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<sup>282</sup> Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, 47.

<sup>283</sup> Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, 40.

<sup>284</sup> Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, 40.

<sup>285</sup> Gerard O’Shea, *Educating in Christ: a Practical Handbook for Developing the Catholic Faith from Childhood to Adolescence, for Parents, Teachers, Catechists and School Administrators* (Brooklyn, NY: Angelico Press, 2018), 28.

<sup>286</sup> O’Shea, *Educating in Christ*, 9.

catechizing activity. As a progressive process of full initiation into the Faith, the ancient catechumenate of the Church provides the “soil” for the faith to take root in the catechumen’s life through an integrated approach involving the proclamation of the Gospel *kerygma* followed by catechesis; an experience of a lived Christian faith within the context of a community; the personal accompaniment of a baptismal sponsor; and liturgical rites and celebrations that are directed toward full incorporation into the Church at Baptism. The significance of the catechumenate is grounded in its unity of Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition within the living nexus, the “natural and supernatural habitat” of the Church’s liturgy.<sup>287</sup> Evangelization and catechesis find their source and summit within the living, organic reality of the People of God perpetuated through the Church’s liturgy.<sup>288</sup>

Especially significant for our purposes the way in which Francis situates the creed within the context of the living liturgy of the Church:

In the celebration of the sacraments, the Church hands down her memory especially through the profession of faith. The creed does not only involve giving one’s assent to a body of abstract truths; rather, when it is recited the whole of life is drawn into a journey towards full communion with the living God. We can say that in the creed believers are invited to enter into the mystery which they profess and to be transformed by it.<sup>289</sup>

From what is noted above, we see that the vision of evangelization and catechesis as articulated through the magisterium of the Church is one that is centered on the Person of Jesus Christ and is aimed at putting people into intimate communion with him, and through him, with the Trinity. Because truth is ultimately a Person rather than merely an idea, the work of catechesis as a “school of faith” aimed at personal apprenticeship to Jesus Christ is the means by which a mature disciple of Christ is formed.<sup>290</sup> This apprenticeship requires a community of faith, a “network of communitarian

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<sup>287</sup> Scott W. Hahn, *Letter and Spirit: From Written Text to Living Word in the Liturgy* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2005), 9.

<sup>288</sup> Documents of Vatican II: *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10

<sup>289</sup> Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, 45.

<sup>290</sup> Congregation for Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, 30 and 91.

relationships”<sup>291</sup>—thus its necessary ecclesial nature; and it requires the rich soil in which the disciple can grow—thus the importance of the liturgy. All of this led us to reflect on the Church’s baptismal catechumenate as the paradigm for all her catechizing activity. The liturgy of the Church provides the *humus* for an awakening of faith that leads to a new sacramental sense for the Christian disciple. In the following paragraphs, we will examine briefly the call of contemporary popes for a renewed mystagogical catechesis, in order to awaken or re-awaken this sacramental sense.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his apostolic exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, echoes this call for a mystagogical approach to catechesis, one in which the sacraments are seen as the fulfilment of God’s mighty deeds in the history of the People of God in the Old Testament and culminating in the Paschal Mystery of Christ’s Passover, death, Resurrection and Ascension in the New. Benedict asks that this catechesis assist catechumens in experiencing the sacraments as encounters with Christ and perceiving the deep meaning of the signs and symbols of the sacraments, especially in an age where technological advances have conduced toward seeing truth as conveyed by mere transmission of information.<sup>292</sup>

Pope Francis himself repeats this call for a mystagogical catechesis in his *exhortation Evangelii Gaudium*, which he describes as

a progressive experience of formation involving the entire community and a renewed appreciation of the liturgical signs of Christian initiation... Catechesis is a proclamation of the word and is always centered on that word, yet it also demands a suitable environment and an attractive presentation, the use of eloquent symbols, insertion into a broader growth process and the integration of every dimension of the person within a communal journey of hearing and response.<sup>293</sup>

We may conclude from the above that catechesis is situated in the overall work of evangelization; that it is centered on the Person of Jesus Christ and, through Christ, to the Holy Trinity; it is an organic and systematic initiation into the faith that comes to us from

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<sup>291</sup> Francis, *Lumen Fidei*, 40.

<sup>292</sup> Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis* (Vatican City: *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, 2007), 64.

<sup>293</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Vatican City: *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, 2013), 166.

Christ through the apostles and the Church; and that, as a school of faith, it relies on a setting in which an incarnate memory can be communicated with a goal of putting the catechumen into a living union with Jesus Christ through a liturgical and sacramental catechesis.

#### ***4.3 The Domestic Church: A Privileged Place for Evangelization and Catechesis***

This chapter began by looking at the Catholic Church's overarching vision for evangelization and catechesis as articulated by recent popes. We would like to turn now to a specific focus on the domestic Church as both the object and the privileged subject or agent of evangelization and catechesis. Pope John Paul II stressed throughout his pontificate the essential and vital place of the apostolate of the laity in the Church's mission, emphasizing that "formation is not the privilege of a few, but the right and duty of all."<sup>294</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, in a bold step forward, spoke of the laity as not merely collaborators with or assistants to the clergy in the work of the Church's mission but rather as being "co-responsible" with them. The mission of the clergy in relation to the laity is primarily one of equipping and empowering the laity to carry out their proper mission to be salt and light in the world. The entire Church as the People of God, says Benedict, shares in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission of Christ, though the way this is carried out is distinctive to the state in life of the faithful and does not negate the qualitative difference between the ministerial priesthood and the baptismal priesthood. The Church, for Benedict, is at heart a mystery of communion on mission.<sup>295</sup> In other words, the Church exists to evangelize,<sup>296</sup> and the People of God is most effective in carrying out this mission when each member understands and exercises its proper vocation. The one People of God, then, shares in the mission to "declare the wonderful deeds"<sup>297</sup> of God in creation, redemption, and sanctification.

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<sup>294</sup> John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, 63.

<sup>295</sup> Benedict XVI and Adrian Walker, *Called to Communion: Understanding the Church Today* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1996).

<sup>296</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14.

<sup>297</sup> Cf. 1 Pet 2:9.



In an important address to the Pastoral Convention of the Diocese of Rome, the Holy Father suggests that the tendency on the part of many to identify the whole of the Church with the hierarchy has led to a forgetfulness of the priesthood of the baptized and the common mission of all the faithful, clergy and laity alike. It has also led to a distortion of the ministerial priesthood of the ordained and an atrophy of properly lay-led initiatives and apostolates within the Church. This does not, however, negate the essential role of the ministerial priesthood in forming the laity for the apostolate proper to them. Benedict explains:

It is precisely your task, dear parish priests, to nurture the spiritual and apostolic growth of those who are already committed to working hard in the parishes. They form the core of the community that will act as a leaven for the others.<sup>298</sup>

How, one might ask, are the clergy to “nourish the spiritual and apostolic growth” of the laity whom they serve? First, by carrying out the priestly, prophetic, and kingly office proper to them by celebrating the liturgy and sacraments, proclaiming the Gospel, and shepherding their flock through their pastoral engagement. In addition, the clergy are being asked to foster and promote the lay apostolate, especially in those places where the clergy are unable reach directly, those places proper to the laity—the workplace, the family, the worlds of business and politics. For our purposes, we will focus particularly on the mission of the laity to evangelization and education within the domestic Church, specifically with reference to parents in relation to their children.

Pope John Paul II, in *Familiaris Consortio*, points out that the mission of parents with regard to their children’s education is rooted in their having cooperated with God in giving life to their children. John Paul notes that this mission to educate is specified further by the Sacrament of Marriage, which sets them apart, or “consecrates” them for the Christian education of their children.<sup>299</sup> Quoting no less an authority than Thomas

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<sup>298</sup> Benedict XVI, “Inauguration of the Ecclesial Convention of the Diocese of Rome at the Basilica of Saint John Lateran (May 26, 2009): BENEDICT XVI,” Inauguration of the Ecclesial Convention of the Diocese of Rome at the Basilica of Saint John Lateran (May 26, 2009) | BENEDICT XVI, May 25, 2009, [http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2009/may/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20090526\\_convegno-diocesi-rm.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2009/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20090526_convegno-diocesi-rm.html).

<sup>299</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 38.

Aquinas, he describes Christian parenthood as a true ministry within the Church, directed toward the building up of the Body of Christ:

Some only propagate and guard spiritual life by a spiritual ministry: this is the role of the sacrament of Orders; others do this for both corporal and spiritual life, and this is brought about by the sacrament of marriage, by which a man and a woman join in order to beget offspring and bring them up to worship God.<sup>300</sup>

Christian parents, according to St. Thomas, participate in a true ministry by which they share in the Church's identity as both teacher and mother. Parents are particularly well suited to foster a culture where the family is both a "school of the Gospel"<sup>301</sup> and a "school of the lay apostolate."<sup>302</sup> Strengthened by the grace of the sacraments—particularly that of Matrimony, Reconciliation, and the Eucharist—parents' living union with Christ empowers them to carry out their proper vocation and mission within the Church's wider mission, both within the domestic sanctuary of the home, and in the apostolate to other families.<sup>303</sup>

In addition to recognizing the family as an object of evangelization, the Church hierarchy has a responsibility to form and support parents and the Christian family through her threefold mission of teaching, governing, and sanctifying so that they can carry out their mission as true subjects or agents of evangelization through their unique family apostolate.<sup>304</sup> The Church proclaims the word of God in order to reveal to the family their identity as a domestic Church. She likewise celebrates the sacraments both to enrich and to strengthen the family with the grace needed to persevere in their vocation. Last of all, the Church proclaims the commandment of love by guiding and encouraging parents and families to grow in authentic self-giving and sacrifice.<sup>305</sup> In the strongest terms, Pope John Paul II emphasizes the urgency of the Church's pastoral solicitude toward the family, stressing that "every effort should be made to strengthen and develop pastoral

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<sup>300</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, IV, 58, quoted in John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 38.

<sup>301</sup> Documents of Vatican II: *Gaudium et Spes*, 52.

<sup>302</sup> Documents of Vatican II: *Lumen Gentium*, 35.

<sup>303</sup> Documents of Vatican II: *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 4, 11.

<sup>304</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 66, 71.

<sup>305</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 49.

care for the family...in the certainty that future evangelization depends largely on the domestic church.”<sup>306</sup>

The Magisterium of the Church has also emphasized with increasing frequency that the domestic Church is a true subject or agent of evangelization and of the apostolate of the Church. *Ad intra* the Christian family is a subject of evangelization insofar as all members are both evangelized and evangelizers of one another. Pope Francis encourages a greater effort of toward evangelization and catechesis within the family, and specifically encourages parents to carry out their vocation as active agents in their own children’s catechesis.<sup>307</sup> The Holy Father also points out that, *ad extra*, the entire domestic Church is to be understood as an agent of the family apostolate, primarily through their “joy-filled witness.”<sup>308</sup>

At the most basic level, parents carry out their educational mission by first *creating a home* where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule.”<sup>309</sup> Pope John Paul II called parental love both the source and the “animating principle” that both inspires and guides all educational efforts within the domestic Church.<sup>310</sup> The most fundamental education that parents provide to their children is to teach them, both by their words and their actions, that “it is good that you exist.”<sup>311</sup> In doing so, parents affirm in the most elemental way possible the being and existence of their children. This cannot be emphasized enough, for if this foundation is lacking, no amount of formal education or evangelizing effort on the part of the parents will be sufficient. This truth is borne out by sociological studies and empirical evidence.<sup>312</sup> This comports well with Pope Francis’ emphasis on the deeply incarnate spirituality of the domestic Church, specifically the parents’ role as icons of the love of God the Father. In particular, it has been shown that a child’s relationship with their earthly father is

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<sup>306</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 65.

<sup>307</sup> Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 287.

<sup>308</sup> Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 200.

<sup>309</sup> *Gravissimum Educationis*, 3.

<sup>310</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 36.

<sup>311</sup> Benedict XVI, *The Yes of Jesus Christ: Spiritual Exercises in Faith, Hope, and Love* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2018), 89-90.

<sup>312</sup> See, for example, “Ask Your Father and He Will Tell You: A Report on American Catholic Religious Parenting”, University of Notre Dame.

determinative of how they will then relate to their heavenly Father. Even at the most basic level, parents are teaching their children by the way they do (or do not) show affection for them.

Building upon this most basic level, and following the Thomistic principle *gratia non tollit naturam, sed perficit* (grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it),<sup>313</sup> the grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony bestows on parents the privilege and responsibility of being their children's first evangelizers and teachers. *Lumen Gentium* calls parents the "first preachers of the faith" to their children<sup>314</sup> and *Gravissimum Educationis* speaks of parents as their "primary and principal educators."<sup>315</sup> Pope Paul VI emphasizes in the strongest terms that it is within the domestic Church that the Gospel ought to "radiate" such that each member is both the giver and receiver of evangelization, parents and children alike.<sup>316</sup> By virtue of the reception of Baptism and Matrimony, parents are empowered to be, both in word and witness of life, the heralds and teachers of their own children. The goal of the education that parents impart to their children is not merely notional information but is directed rather to fostering their integral maturity in Christ as his disciples. John Paul speaks of the aims of this evangelistic and educational activity:

Its principal aims are these: that as baptized persons are gradually introduced into a knowledge of the mystery of salvation, they may daily grow more conscious of the gift of faith which they have received; that they may learn to adore God the Father in spirit and in truth (cf. Jn. 4:23), especially through liturgical worship; that they may be trained to conduct their personal life in true righteousness and holiness, according to their new nature (Eph. 4:22-24), and thus grow to maturity, to the stature of the fullness of Christ (cf. Eph. 4:13), and devote themselves to the upbuilding of the Mystical Body.<sup>317</sup>

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<sup>313</sup> Thomas Aquinas and Laurence Shapcote, *Summa Theologiae Prima Pars, 1-49* (Lander, WY: The Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012), Q.1, A.7, Reply Obj. 2.

<sup>314</sup> Documents of Vatican II: *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

<sup>315</sup> Documents of Vatican II: *Gravissimum Educationis*, 3.

<sup>316</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 71.

<sup>317</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 39.

Both the Rite of Matrimony and the Rite of Baptism for children refer to the role of parents as the first heralds and teachers of their children. In the Questions Before the Consent, the Priest asks the spouses: “Are you prepared to accept children lovingly from God and being them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?”<sup>318</sup> In the Rite of Baptism, the parents are referred to as heralds and teachers of their children and their educative role is mentioned no less than four times by the celebrant:

First, at the very beginning in the reception of the child:

In asking Baptism for your child, you are undertaking the responsibility of raising him (her) in the faith, so that, keeping God’s commandments, he (she) may love the Lord and his (her) neighbor as Christ taught us.<sup>319</sup>

Next, at the renunciation of sin and profession of faith:

For your part, you must strive to bring him (her) up in the faith, so that this divine life may be preserved from the contagion of sin, and may grow in him (her) day by day.<sup>320</sup>

Third, at the handing on of the candle:

Parents and godparents, this light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly, so that your child, enlightened by Christ, may walk always as a child of the light and, persevering in the faith, may run to meet the Lord when he comes...<sup>321</sup>

And, last, at the blessing and dismissal at the conclusion of the celebration:

May the Lord God Almighty, the giver of life both in heaven and on earth, bless the father of this child, so that, together with his wife, they may, by word and example, prove to be the best witnesses of the faith to their child, in Christ Jesus our Lord.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> *Order of Celebrating Matrimony*, 60.

<sup>319</sup> *Order of Baptism of Children*, 77.

<sup>320</sup> *Order of Baptism of Children*, 93.

<sup>321</sup> *Order of Baptism of Children*, 100.

<sup>322</sup> *Order of Baptism of Children*, 105.

Based on the principle of *lex orandi, lex credendi*, we can see that the evangelizing and educational mission of parents is heavily emphasized. It is by the grace of God, working in concert with the natural relationship of love and affection that exists between them, that parents and children can become an evangelized and evangelizing community and to carry out their part in the Church's mission of building the kingdom of God.

It may be asked what the specific priorities and contours of this educational activity consist of. Above all, it should be emphasized that following the Christocentric thrust of magisterial teaching, the catechesis that parents provide to their children should be aimed above all at familiarizing them with the Person of Jesus Christ and, through Christ, introducing them into the dynamism of the Blessed Trinity. John Paul II speaks of this familiarization as not merely a brief "fleeting encounter" with Jesus, but as introducing them into an authentic friendship with him over time. In his apostolic exhortation on catechesis, the Holy Father describes the aim of catechesis as "developing understanding of the mystery of Christ... so that the whole of a person's humanity is impregnated by that word."<sup>323</sup> Ultimately, "the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but in communion, in intimacy with Jesus Christ..."<sup>324</sup> Because this is a personal knowledge that comes by way of relationship, it is necessarily ongoing and involves an apprenticeship suited to the age and maturity of the child.

The Holy Father describes this apprenticeship with Jesus as a process of deepening discipleship that respects and follows the natural developmental stages of children and young people, as well as the degree to which they respond to the invitation of the Lord. Here we see the proper place of Maria Montessori's sensitive periods in identifying and capitalizing on the "exigencies" that children show at key stages of development. The work of Sofia Cavaletti and the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is quite helpful in this regard, as one of the findings of Cavaletti is that different images and aspects of Jesus seem to speak more directly to children at different stages of development.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 20.

<sup>324</sup> John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 5.

<sup>325</sup> O'Shea, *Educating in Christ*, 20-22.

In addition to an attentiveness to the developmental stages of their children, the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997) and the *Directory for Catechesis* (2020) both emphasize that the evangelizing and catechizing activity of parents must be one that intentionally and purposefully brings about a way of life, a culture, in which the faith is received and personally appropriated. John Paul speaks of as “giving growth, at the level of knowledge and in life, to the seed of faith sown by the Holy Spirit with the initial proclamation and effectively transmitted by Baptism.”<sup>326</sup> In other words, catechesis in the family necessarily involves translating the faith into concrete daily practices which embody and incarnate the faith. As a privileged locus of Catholic culture, the family is the primary agent of the incarnate transmission of the faith, creating a milieu in which the faith and life are woven together into a single cloth.<sup>327</sup>

In addition to the properly evangelistic and educational activity of parents in relation to their children is the apostolic activity carried out by the entire domestic Church as a *communio personarum*. *Familiaris Consortio* teaches that the apostolate of the family sinks its roots in the common Baptism of each member, though it is also strengthened by the grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony.<sup>328</sup> Pope Francis, in his own way, has continually emphasized that it is families themselves who are “the principal agents of the family apostolate,”<sup>329</sup> which complements Pope Benedict’s emphasis on pastoral co-responsibility on the part of the laity. Highlighting in a particular way the importance of a kerygmatic proclamation, Francis teaches that both within the family and among families “the Gospel message should always resound.”<sup>330</sup> This is because, as Pope Benedict has said, marriage and family is itself a Gospel, good news for the world.<sup>331</sup> In other words,

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<sup>326</sup> John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 20.

<sup>327</sup> *General Directory for Catechesis*, 207.

<sup>328</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 52.

<sup>329</sup> Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 200.

<sup>330</sup> Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 58.

<sup>331</sup> Benedict XVI, “7 October 2012: Holy Mass for the Opening of the Synod of Bishops and Proclamation of St John of Avila and St Hildegard of Bingen as ‘Doctors of the Church’: BENEDICT XVI,” 7 October 2012: Holy Mass for the opening of the Synod of Bishops and proclamation of St John of Avila and St Hildegard of Bingen as “Doctors of the Church” | BENEDICT XVI, October 6, 2012, [http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_hom\\_20121007\\_apertura-sinodo.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20121007_apertura-sinodo.html).

marriage and the family are a proclamation of God's faithful and indissoluble love for his people.

#### ***4.4 The Extent to Which the Domestic Church Has Been Successful in Handing on the Faith***

It has become increasingly clear that the domestic Church, as a privileged setting for evangelization and catechesis, is uniquely situated to integrally and fruitfully transmit the Catholic faith. Further, the teaching of the Church is clear that parents are the first and best heralds and teachers of their children in the ways of faith.<sup>332</sup> Tracey Rowland, in speaking about the crisis of faith aided and abetted by the culture of death, argues that John Paul II made the family such a high priority of his pontificate because he recognized that it was the family that we indeed the “primary battlefield in which the soul of Western culture [is] taking place.”<sup>333</sup>

With increasing urgency, the popes of the last sixty years have sounded the alarm regarding the increasing indifference, leading to active hostility, on the part of baptized Catholics towards the Catholic faith, most especially toward her teaching regarding marriage and family life. For example, Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* asserted that “today there is a very large number of baptized people who for the most part have not formally renounced their Baptism but who are entirely indifferent to it and not living in accordance with it.”<sup>334</sup> Twenty-five years later, John Paul II wrote: “Entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel.”<sup>335</sup> As will be seen in the next section, some sociological studies support the substance of the concerns of the Catholic Church's popes, bishops, and theologians that in fact a chasm has opened up between the Catholic faith professed and the proclamation, reception and

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<sup>332</sup> *Gravissimum Educationis*, 3.

<sup>333</sup> Tracey Rowland, *The Culture of the Incarnation: Essays in Catholic Theology* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2017), 94.

<sup>334</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 56.

<sup>335</sup> John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990), 3.



living out of the faith in the everyday lives of the laity. To these we now turn for consideration.

#### ***4.4.1 Sociological Evidence***

At the beginning of the chapter the question was posed: Has evangelization and catechesis been successful in forming mature disciples of Jesus Christ? In two separate studies conducted over a period of several years—the CARA national survey<sup>336</sup>, and the Pew Research Center’s study entitled “America’s Changing Religious Landscape”<sup>337</sup>—it seems that, in fact, this has not been the case. Both studies suggest a quantitative decline in Mass attendance and in sacramental marriages, a significant drop in the number of children being baptized, and a decrease in the number of Catholics actively practicing the Catholic faith.<sup>338</sup> In addition, the number of persons leaving the Catholic faith for no faith at all (the so-called “nones”) has been progressively on the rise, even precipitously so in the past ten years. The Pew Research Center indicates in their most recent poll results that nearly a third of all American adults under the age of thirty are currently religiously unaffiliated.<sup>339</sup> This does not include those who still self-identify as Catholic but do not practice the faith. The largest exodus from a Christian body in the U.S. is the Catholic population—for every person who enters the Catholic Church as a convert, six more people leave the Church.<sup>340</sup> The influx of Spanish-speaking immigrants to the States is the only force that offsets this hemorrhage. In terms of the typical age of those leaving

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<sup>336</sup> Mark M Grey, “The Catholic Family: 21st Century Challenges in the United States,” CARA, June 2015, <https://cara.georgetown.edu/staff/webpages/CatholicFamilyResearch.pdf>.

<sup>337</sup> “America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project, July 27, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

<sup>338</sup> “Sacraments Today: Belief and Practice among U.S. Catholics,” CARA, August 14, 2021, <https://cara.georgetown.edu/sacramentsesum.pdf>

<sup>339</sup> “America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project, July 27, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

<sup>340</sup> “America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project, July 27, 2020, August 7, 2021, <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/chapter-2-religious-switching-and-intermarriage/>

the Catholic faith, the median age self-reported by respondents to the Pew Research poll is thirteen.<sup>341</sup>

Perhaps most distressing is the phenomenon described by Notre Dame sociology professor Christian Smith—Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. Smith and his fellow researchers have carried out a multi-year study of Catholic children, teenagers, and young adults from throughout the U.S., who consider themselves Christians, entitled “The National Study of Youth and Religion.” This study has uncovered a prevailing creed by which these young people make sense of their relationship with God and their view of questions regarding how their faith impacts their life. The creed of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism can be summarized in five statements:

1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when he is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.<sup>342</sup>

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, as defined by Christian Smith, is a vague moralism centered on one’s own “needs” and the role of religion is reduced to a kind of therapy in which the cult of self-esteem is the priority. It is a form of Deism in that its adherents view God as a distant first cause who is primarily concerned with fixing problems as they arise. In fact, nearly half of the respondents polled did not believe in a personal God. This anthropocentric view of God goes counter to the classic Theocentric understanding of a personal God as taught by historical Christianity.

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<sup>341</sup> Robert J. McCarty and John M. Vitek, *Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2017), 6.

<sup>342</sup> Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist. Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 162-63.

In addition to the research of Christian Smith and his associates, a recent study by Saint Mary's Press in Minnesota in conjunction with the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), examines the dynamics of disaffiliation in young Catholics aged 15 to 25. The study, "Going, Going, Gone,"<sup>343</sup> indicates alarming trends in disaffiliation, especially among those born 1985 and after. The study notes that among older millennials (those ages 25-33), 34% are "nones" (those who claim no religious affiliation). Among younger millennials (ages 18-24), the numbers are even more alarming- fully 37% are "nones."<sup>344</sup> In addition to the quantitative results of the study, complemented by the work of the Pew Research Center, the CARA study endeavors to understand and describe in a qualitative manner three main categories of disaffiliation: the Injured, the Drifter, and the Dissenter.<sup>345</sup> Here, the study notes a dynamic of progressive disaffiliation taking place. For example, among those participants interviewed a significant portion who still identify as Catholics are on the verge of moving into a position of disaffiliation. Rarely is it the case that a person abruptly goes from a fully practicing Catholic to a "none"; most of the time, it is a matter of a progressively tenuous relationship with the Catholic Church. Among the most frequent responses of the Drifters is the lack of a familial and ecclesial support structure. This lack of "thick" Catholic culture in both the home and the parish has the effect of alienating young persons from the tether of a community, weakening their sense of belonging. This coheres well with the finding of the Pew Research Center that indicates that the degree to which both parents—the father in particular—were committed to practicing their faith, was closely linked with the active practice of the faith for the young person into adulthood.<sup>346</sup> The presence of an active culture of the faith in the home is critically important to handing on the faith in such a way as to ensure that when the young person leaves the home, they don't leave the faith behind.

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<sup>343</sup> Robert J. McCarty and John M. Vitek, *Going, Going, Gone: The Dynamics of Disaffiliation in Young Catholics* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2017).

<sup>344</sup> McCarty & Vitek, *Going*, 4.

<sup>345</sup> McCarty & Vitek, *Going*, 13.

<sup>346</sup> "Shared Religious Beliefs between Parents and Teens," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, September 10, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/2020/09/10/shared-beliefs-between-parents-and-teens/>.

The CARA study elaborates six common dynamics of disaffiliation, two of which we will focus on for our purposes. First, one of the main rationales given for religious disaffiliation was the opinion that religious faith and practice was viewed as one option among many.<sup>347</sup> In a situation where there is no thick culture of the faith present in the home and the local parish, a lack of a sense of identity and belonging seems to result. Without clarity on the distinctive characteristics of one's Catholic and Christian identity, one is left open to seek this identity and belonging elsewhere. For example, it is estimated that about one third of Catholics in the United States—those who attend Mass at least once a month—do not believe in the Real Presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist, a distinctive and core belief among Catholics.<sup>348</sup> The other rationale given is the lack of perceived plausibility of key doctrines and practices of the Catholic Church. Many of the respondents indicated that if they were given a reasoned explanation, they would be open to reconsidering the faith in which they were raised. This seems to suggest that the explosion of different “options” in the religious marketplace along with a perceived lack of plausibility or distinctiveness of their own religious tradition leads to disaffiliation. Without a firm grounding in and integration of faith and life, belief and practice, the Christian faith is seen as dispensable or optional.

These indications suggest that we are facing a looming crisis in the United States in which a lived Catholicism is no longer supported by the surrounding culture and one in which both adults and youth are leaving the Catholic Church in sizeable numbers. The absence of a thick culture of the faith in the home and the parish community seems to have had a fragilizing effect leaving young people especially vulnerable to falling away from the practice of the faith. Based on this evidence, it would seem that evangelizing and catechizing efforts have been largely ineffective in inculcating and fostering a relationship with God. If the aim of evangelization and catechesis is intimacy with the Person of Jesus Christ, leading to lives of discipleship and apostleship, these findings suggest that the failure in forming disciples of Jesus Christ is not only a matter of poor

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<sup>347</sup> McCarty & Vitek, *Going*, 26.

<sup>348</sup> Gregory A. Smith, “Just One-Third of U.S. Catholics Agree with Their Church That Eucharist Is Body, Blood of Christ,” Pew Research Center (Pew Research Center, May 30, 2020), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/08/05/transubstantiation-eucharist-u-s-catholics/>.

intellectual formation but also, and more deeply, a matter of personal connection with the living God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

#### ***4.4.2 Historical Currents that Contributed to the Current State of Affairs***

In his book *A Secular Age* Charles Taylor, a Catholic philosopher, seeks to answer this question: “Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?”<sup>349</sup> In his endeavor to answer this question, Taylor aims to provide a genealogy of the age in which we live, its distinguishing characteristics, and the historical forces that helped to bring it about. In what follows, it will be shown that Taylor’s ethnography of our secular age can shed light on why efforts at catechizing and evangelizing have been less than effective. Though Taylor’s represents a particular approach to secularization theory and has been critiqued by other thinkers such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Cyril O’Regan<sup>350</sup>, it’s explanatory power coheres well with complex nature of contemporary secularization in the West.

Taylor begins by articulating what he means when he says that we live in a secular age. What he does *not* mean is that we live in a “godless” age. Rather, the milieu in which we live is a “cross-pressured” space of “contested belief,” where belief in God is seen as one among many other possible options.<sup>351</sup> In the contemporary Western world (i.e., Canada, United States, Europe and Oceania), we live in what Taylor terms a “cross-pressured” existence, one in which we are bombarded with a variety of different contested and contestable beliefs, all vying for our attention.<sup>352</sup> As cross-pressured beings we inhabit not a world of a simple binary belief/unbelief in God, but one in which many different plausibility explanations seem possible.<sup>353</sup> He uses the term “social imaginary” to describe not a theory or an idea but rather the narratives and images that enkindle our

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<sup>349</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.

<sup>350</sup> Cyril O’Regan, *The Anatomy of Misremembering*, vol. 1 (Chestnut Ridge, NY: Crossroad Publ., 2014), 5, 22-23

<sup>351</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 15.

<sup>352</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 299-304.

<sup>353</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 594-595.

imagination and condition what seems plausible or believable to us. The social imaginary describes how each person, as well as societies as a whole, pre-reflectively “take” the world to be. A social imaginary is less a theory or argument than it is an all-encompassing milieu, the water in which each of us swims. The social imaginary not only affects *whether* one believes but *how* one believes by way of what Taylor calls “plausibility structures.”<sup>354</sup> Because the social imaginary of the West has shifted, what used to be simply taken for granted by the majority of people is now seen as one possible option among many others. What is relatively new to our period in history is the possibility of an exclusive humanism, one in which human flourishing is seen as achievable without any reference to God or to transcendence.

In tracing the historical arc that led to the possibility of an exclusive humanism, Taylor identifies three obstacles to unbelief of the Medieval social imaginary that made the possibility of atheism close to unimaginable:

1. The natural world is constituted as a cosmos in which both creation and time pointed toward God (sacramentality of creation).
2. Society itself was seen as grounded in a higher reality (earthly kingdoms were grounded in a heavenly kingdom).
3. People lived in an “enchanted world” in which they were porous selves, open to the transcendent and to the possibility to blessing or curse.<sup>355</sup>

What all three of these obstacles have in common is the way in which they support a sacramental vision of creation—the recognition that nature, time, and society are all open to the transcendent, to God. What made unbelief so implausible for most people in times past was that the surrounding culture itself, the stories that were told, the narratives in which people understood themselves to exist, all pointed toward God. The liturgy of the Church was seen as an especially intense specification of this sacramental sensibility. It

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<sup>354</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 13.

<sup>355</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 25.

was simply a “given” that creation was a window transparent to the divine, that creation was a cosmos filled with the presence of God.

What, then, were the forces that served to upset this balance? The answer to this question, says Taylor, lies in a shift in how the self came to be understood. Throughout recorded history up through most of the Medieval period, the individual experienced himself as a “porous” self, open to and oriented toward God and, as such, cognizant of the sacramentality of creation.<sup>356</sup> Creation was experienced as a revelation of God and society was seen as ordered to God. As a result of “disenchantment,” a consequence of increasing reliance on the natural sciences and a reductive approach to truth as fact, the porous self was displaced by the “buffered self.” As opposed to the “porous self” of the medieval world, the lived reality of the “buffered self” of the contemporary West is one in which meaning and significance are no longer *discovered* in the cosmos, in the sacraments, in sacred times and seasons, but rather are *determined* by each individual person, who decides what is significant for himself or herself. The mind becomes the criterion for the truth of things and shapes reality according to its own lights. This has the effect of tending towards both an extreme subjectivism and a reductive rationalism that views any truth claims not legitimized by the scientific method as suspect.

The phenomenon of excarnation, touched upon in chapter three, is particularly germane to our understanding of how this shift in social imaginaries has affected evangelization and catechesis. This is the term that Taylor employs to describe the process by which Christianity—Catholicism in particular—is dis-embodied and de-ritualized. The “meta-cause” to this process of excarnation, as Taylor puts it, is the movement toward “reform” as a result of the Protestant Reformation and certain reform movements within the Catholic Church. Also implicated in this meta-cause is the effect of the ascendancy of natural science and the progressive disenchantment of the natural world, articulated between the shift from seeing creation as a “cosmos” to seeing it as “nature.” Excarnation, according to Taylor, has been particularly virulent and pervasive in its effect

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<sup>356</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 35.

on the formation of the “social imaginary” of a culture.<sup>357</sup> Where there are no objects of direct, concrete experience that can mediate and communicate the divine, the social imaginary conducive to the flourishing of Christian culture is unable to form. In its place grows a very stripped-down Christianity that reduces the Christian faith to articulated propositions, to moralism, and to ideology. Perhaps the most significant impact for Catholics are the attempts to rationalize the liturgy—downplaying sacramental signs and symbols, gestures and orientation, so as to make the liturgy “relevant” with the times. This suppression of the “smells and bells” of the Church’s liturgical expression is seen by Taylor as part of the movement of “excarnation.”<sup>358</sup>

At one point in his book, Charles Taylor suggests that, in order to proclaim the Christian *evangel* anew, we must “recover a sense of what the Incarnation can mean.”<sup>359</sup> Henri de Lubac, writing several decades prior to Taylor, explains what the process of excarnation and rationalization means for the Christian faith and its ability to be effectively transmitted:

A doctrine without mystery, a moralism deprived of any mystical element, cannot satisfy a soul that has, despite everything, remained religious. If therefore the sense of mystery and the sense of the sacred come to be lacking, something else would have to be found to replace them. These are often found, it seems to me, in a certain sentimentalism, which is characterized notably by the abuse of devotions.<sup>360</sup>

Because “the spiritual is always incarnate,”<sup>361</sup> a move away from the fleshiness of the Incarnate Christ is deleterious to integral formation in the faith. If it is the case that the phenomenon of excarnation that does violence to the integrity of the Christian faith, the

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<sup>357</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 613.

<sup>358</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 614.

<sup>359</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 753.

<sup>360</sup> Henri De Lubac, “Internal Causes of the Weakening and Disappearance of the Sacred,” *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 18, no. 1 (2011), 47.

<sup>361</sup> Quoted in Robert P. Imbelli, *Rekindling the Christic Imagination: Theological Meditations for the New Evangelization* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), xxvi.



answer to incarnation is a rediscovery of the full significance of the bodily Incarnation of Christ. Taylor proceeds later in his book to prescribe concrete initiatives to recover a sense of what the Incarnation can mean. For Taylor—as for John Henry Newman who will be explored in more detail later—the Incarnation is the organizing principle and unifying center of Christianity and, specifically, of Catholicism. To the extent that the Church in her evangelizing and catechizing mission emphasizes the full reality of the bodily Incarnation of Christ, she will be successful in transmitting the faith in an integral manner that respects not only the “logic” of the Incarnation but also gives due consideration to the embodied nature of the human person, created in God’s image and likeness. In the final section of this chapter, we will see how the Church’s historical culture of the Incarnation provides the resources for an integral transmission and personal appropriation of the Catholic faith.

#### ***4.5 The Church’s Historical Approach of Integrally Handing on the Catholic Faith through a Culture of the Incarnation***

In his 1975 post-synodal exhortation on evangelization, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI argues that the “split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time.”<sup>362</sup> In their own way, following the lead of Pope Paul VI, both John Paul II and Benedict XVI sought to heal this split. In our own time, Pope Francis has highlighted the importance of culture in handing on the faith, specifically his emphasis on the *via pulchritudinis* (way of beauty).<sup>363</sup> In the following section it will be shown that throughout the Church’s history, the Church has been most effective in transmitting the faith when a strong “culture of the Incarnation” is present.<sup>364</sup> Because culture is such a polyvalent term, we will first articulate some of the ways in which it is specified. Next, the phrase “culture of the Incarnation” will be elaborated, in order to better understand what constitutes an authentic culture of the Catholic faith. Following this, we will then sketch in broad strokes two opposing approaches to providing a rapprochement between

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<sup>362</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20.

<sup>363</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 67.

<sup>364</sup> I am indebted to Tracey Roland, who points out this term first used by Pope Benedict XVI to describe the distinctive culture brought of the Catholic Church.

contemporary “mass culture” and the culture of the faith. Last, through an historical sketch, it will be shown that the Catholic Church has been most fruitful in her evangelizing and catechizing mission when she has provided an authentic culture of the Incarnation.

#### **4.5.1 Two Definitions of Culture and the Original Culture of the Catholic Faith**

Terry Eagleton, in his book *Culture*, describes several different ways the term “culture” may be approached. First, it may refer to “a body of artistic or intellectual work.” It may, second, refer to “a process of spiritual development.” Third, it could refer to “the values, customs, beliefs, and symbolic practices by which men and women live.” Last, it may refer to an entire way of life.<sup>365</sup> Tracey Rowland lays out three different senses of the word culture as they have been emphasized by Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, respectively. In her essay, “Culture in the Thought of John Paul II and Benedict XVI,” Rowland argues that culture may refer to: 1) *Kultur* (civilization); 2) *Bildung* (self-development or education); or *Geist* (ethos).<sup>366</sup> She suggests that the pontificate of John Paul II placed the emphasis on the first and third senses of culture, whereas that of his successor, Benedict XVI, emphasized predominantly the second sense. For our purposes, we will focus particularly on two senses: first, culture understood as a kind of “social unconscious,” the way one “takes” things to be at a pre-reflective level; second, culture viewed as self-development or education. This term will be utilized to illustrate both the wider, “popular” culture as well as what I will argue is a distinctive culture of the Incarnation.

If culture is understood as both the way people “take” things to be at a naïve, pre-reflective level, as well as a process of formation and education, the question may be asked: does the Catholic Church have her “own” culture; or is her culture dependent upon the civilization in which she takes root (e.g., “European culture” vs. “Asian culture”). For Benedict XVI, the Catholic Church herself is the creator and subject of her own

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<sup>365</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2018), 1.

<sup>366</sup> Tracey Rowland, *The Culture of the Incarnation: Essays in Catholic Theology* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2017), 90.

distinctive culture. In other words, Benedict argues that the Catholic faith shapes individuals and societies by introducing a culture altogether distinctive to the faith. What distinguishes this culture of the faith above all is that it is a “culture of the Incarnation.” As Rowland puts it: “The Incarnation means that the invisible God enters into the visible world so that those who are bound to matter can know him.”<sup>367</sup> In the first sense in which we have delineated the term, a culture of the Incarnation is one that shapes at a pre-reflective level the sensibilities of people and societies. A culture in this sense is a milieu, an environment in which one comes to perceive God, the world, and oneself in the world in a distinctive way. For Ratzinger, culture is never “neutral”; it always influences how we perceive and live in the world. Precisely because this is so, culture in this first sense necessarily seeps into every aspect of life. The Catholic faith for Ratzinger is never reducible to an ideology, an intellectual system, or a theory. This is so precisely because the Catholic faith is something that is embodied: first, in Christ himself; and then, in the Christian community, the mystical Body of Christ. In other words, the practices of the Christian life—participation in the liturgy, prayer, fasting, works of mercy, and reading the Bible—inscribe in man an embodied narrative, a way of making sense of reality by performing the story in which one understands oneself to be a protagonist.<sup>368</sup> In his many writings both as a theologian and later as Pope Benedict XVI repeatedly emphasizes the importance of culture in this wider sense, as the cultural practices in which we participate have an effect on our ability to see as plausible what the Catholic faith teaches.

John Henry Newman in his great work *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* lays out several distinguishing features by which the doctrines of Christianity unfold throughout the history of the Church. Newman asserts that it is the “Incarnational principle” that serves as the litmus test of whether the Church is or is not developing in a healthy manner. For Newman, the bodily Incarnation of God informs Christian doctrine at every level, from the way one understands authority in the Church to the way in which the sacraments are understood. When a Catholic culture is healthy, it is shown forth in the many different expressions of lived Christianity of individuals and societies. For

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<sup>367</sup> Rowland, *The Culture of the Incarnation*, 11.

<sup>368</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1981), 117.

example, a healthy Catholic culture is one in which the human body is affirmed in its inherent goodness. Whenever the human body is denigrated, it is a sure sign that something is amiss. A healthy Catholic culture affirms the goodness of creation and expresses it in myriad different ways: through artistic works of great beauty; through song and dance; in the affirmation of ordinary married life; and through embodied forms of religious devotion such as veneration of sacred images, the making of pilgrimages, and the worship of the sacrament of the Eucharist. Further, a healthy Catholic culture of the Incarnation has what Newman calls the “power of assimilation.”<sup>369</sup> In a healthy culture, as in a living organism, the culture can take up into itself aspects of the wider culture that express authentic beauty, goodness, and truth without fear of contamination. One example might be the Church’s use of classical Greek and Latin literature and philosophy. Inasmuch as these works of pagan civilizations are good, true, and beautiful, they can be assimilated to the living body of the Church. On the other hand, when a Catholic culture is not healthy, in a way similar to a sick or dying organism, it becomes itself assimilated to its environment. This will be discussed at greater length when we revisit the two main approaches to Catholic engagement with mass culture.

The second sense of the term culture is that of education or formation. In his pontificate, Pope Benedict XVI emphasized this aspect of culture perhaps even more so than the first. For Benedict, it is the Church’s liturgical worship that most integrally forms the Christian and progressively initiates him into the culture of the Incarnation. Central to Benedict’s thought on the liturgy is the importance of the harmonization of the different dimensions of the human person through the embodied practices of the liturgy. Here, Benedict finds himself in the company of the Catholic philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, who emphasizes the role of practices in the transmission and personal appropriation of a Catholic sensibility. For both Benedict and MacIntyre, practices are “embodied narratives” in which one comes to understand oneself as situated as an actor in a drama that is being played out through salvation history, the story of God’s own engagement with and salvation of humanity.<sup>370</sup> The liturgy, for Benedict, becomes the place where the essence

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<sup>369</sup> John Henry Newman, *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (South Bend, IN: Notre Dame, 1989).

<sup>370</sup> Rowland, *The Culture of the Incarnation*, 17.

of Christianity, contained in the great creeds of Christian faith, comes alive and is enacted in a particular manner. Through the signs and symbols of the liturgy, the Gospel is “actualized” and becomes tangibly present in a very concrete way. The liturgy is powerfully formative both because it embodies the narrativity of the Gospel and makes it present in word and sacraments and because it makes concrete for the faithful a deeper perception of reality. The importance of mystagogy for Benedict is related to how the liturgy integrally forms the personality of the Christian and orders his loves toward God as ultimate beauty, truth, and goodness.<sup>371</sup> To the extent that the Christian disciple is assimilated to the reality that the liturgy brings about through an encounter with Christ, he will personally appropriate and embody that reality. In summary, a culture of the Incarnation is brought about through the Church’s taking the full reality of the Incarnation to its fullest extent: that what is brought about through the bodily Incarnation of Christ continues to echo forth through the liturgy as an embodied narrative that transfigures the human person’s relationship with and perception of God, himself, and created reality.

#### ***4.5.2 Two Opposing Paradigms for Evangelization***

We will now turn to a consideration of two opposing positions regarding the Church’s engagement with the wider culture, both of which have significantly impacted the way practitioners in the fields of evangelization and catechesis have carried out their work. The first position, referred to by Tracey Rowland as the “correlationist paradigm,” is represented by the Concilium school of theology, and seeks to adapt itself to contemporary culture.<sup>372</sup> The second, represented by the *Communio* school and by Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, views the Church as a subject of her own culture, a culture which is meant to transfigure the authentically true, good, and beautiful elements of human culture as well as to challenge and call to conversion aspects of human culture at odds with the Gospel.<sup>373</sup> These two schools of theology represent in broad strokes two

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<sup>371</sup> Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, 64.

<sup>372</sup> Rowland, *The Culture of the Incarnation*, 8.

<sup>373</sup> Rowland, *The Culture of the Incarnation*, 10 & 15.

divergent ways theologians have envisioned the Church's relationship to the wider culture in the years following the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council.

The correlationist paradigm exemplified by the Concilium school makes a distinction between the "substance" of the Christian faith, on the one hand; and its "form" or method, on the other. This paradigm leads by seeking either common ground with the wider "mass" culture or attempts a *rapprochement* through a kind of compromise. This approach is on display in many of the contemporary debates regarding the Catholic Church's moral teaching, such as same-sex marriage and Communion for the divorced and remarried. The aim of proponents of this approach is often well-intentioned, seeking to stem the tide of those leaving the Catholic Church or hoping to strengthen the Church's relationship with secular culture. However, as we shall illustrate in the next section, this approach has been shown itself to be less than successful in practice.

In contradistinction to the correlationists, the proponents of the culture of the Incarnation—the *Comunio* school—seek to ground their efforts in a *ressourcement* (re-sourcing) of the Church's historic doctrines and practices. This school is convinced that with the coming of Christ a new culture comes about: a culture which is distinctive; a culture which heals, perfects and transfigures all merely human cultures. Members of the *Comunio* school seek to strike a balance between fidelity to the living inheritance of Christianity, namely the Person of Christ and his self-revelation through Scripture, Tradition and the magisterial teachings of the Church, and discernment of the "seeds of the Word," within the wider culture through which the one Word, Jesus Christ, is shown forth in all that is true, good, and beautiful. Nevertheless, the incarnationalists affirm that all that is good, true, and beautiful in created reality participates in the Incarnate Christ who, with the Father, is Truth, Goodness, and Beauty itself. Because of this, and because in the words of Irenaeus of Lyons to the effect that with Christ God brings all newness, Christianity in word and sacrament has something to offer to humanity that can only come as a gift and thus cannot be compromised in its integrity. The Catholic Church has been at her best when she affirms this culture of the Incarnation in all her many-splendored ways: from the fine arts; to her saints; to a new ethos which is brought about as a result.

### ***4.5.3 Three Examples of the Culture of the Incarnation in Action***

Now that we have painted with broad strokes the contours of the culture of the Incarnation, it is fitting to offer some specific examples of how a profound engagement with the reality of the bodily Incarnation of Christ has allowed the Catholic Church to bear great fruit in her evangelizing and catechizing mission. Robert Louis Wilken, in his essay entitled “The Church as Culture,”<sup>374</sup> offers three examples from the history of the Catholic Church of how the culture of the Incarnation has borne great fruit in the wider culture of the time. These three examples illustrate the power of the culture of the Incarnation to heal and transform the broader culture in which it takes root. Wilken is at pains in this essay to emphasize the reality, the concreteness, the *materiality* of the bodily Incarnation and how the implications of the Incarnation brought about the conversion of individuals and societies.

The first example is that of the understanding of the human person and the dignity of the body. Before the first churches were built in the Roman empire, the Christians of the third century built beautiful underground burial chambers for their deceased. These concerted efforts sought to provide an adequate space in which to honor the bodies of their dead and to emphasize their continued communion with them through the liturgies celebrated therein. What is most fascinating about these first Christian places of worship is that they were not only a testament to the dignity of the body (e.g., burying rather than burning the bodies of their deceased), but also the beginning of a great tradition of Christian sacred art. For below the surface of the ground and surrounding the sarcophagi were beautiful intricate artistic renderings of scenes from the Old and New Testaments. These renderings testified to a distinctive Christian memory in which the communion of saints was experienced as a lived reality. These pictorial narratives of biblical scenes drove home the point to the Christians who worshiped there that they shared a common narrative and that this common narrative was distinctive of Christian identity.

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<sup>374</sup> Robert Louis Wilken, “The Church as Culture: Robert Louis Wilken,” *First Things*, April 1, 2004, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2004/04/the-church-as-culture>.

In addition to consecrating space through the building of the catacombs, later in the fourth century Christ became culture in the establishment of the Christian liturgical calendar. This calendar revolved around the unfolding of the Mystery of Christ—especially his birth and passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension—through a yearly cycle of feasts. Participating in the mystery of Christ were the saints of the Church, those Christians whose lives were transfigured by the Person of Christ—first among them Mary, the mother of God. This sanctification of time expressed through the liturgical calendar allowed the Gospel to permeate the entire year and to inscribe the narrative of God’s plan of salvation into the bodies, hearts, and minds of Christians. The feasts celebrated throughout the Church’s year were concrete reminders of the continuation of the Incarnation in space and time.

Last of all, Wilken speaks of the transformation of language and specifically of the distinctive parlance of Christians, a language proper to Christianity. In an essay entitled, “The Church’s Way of Speaking,” Wilken unpacks the phrase “*in doménico eloquio*,” the Lord’s way of speaking. Learning to be Christian, Wilken says, is more than memorizing the creed or receiving instruction in the Christian mysteries. Even more, it involves “learning the distinctively Christian language whose lexicon was the Bible.”<sup>375</sup> The faith is “a whole world of discourse” that transmits a whole way of being in the world, shapes our sensibilities, and forms our relationship with God and with each other. Learning the Christian faith is a process of apprenticeship that involves a whole culture rooted in the Biblical narrative that becomes tangibly present and effective in the Church’s liturgical worship. The Christian faith, therefore, cannot be separated from the language in and through which it is communicated. The distinctive language of the faith is not simply a set of words that can be exchanged at will but an entire world, a living memory that constitutes the Christian’s identity. As the biblical language impresses itself upon the minds and hearts of believers it shapes a distinctive sacramental imagination through which the narrativity of the Christian “thing” serves a sacramental purpose, leading from

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<sup>375</sup> Robert P. Imbelli, *Handing on the Faith: The Church's Mission and Challenge* (Chicago, IL: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2017), 92.



the words to the realities those words express. This “constitutive view” of language profoundly shaped the sensibilities of people and societies through hundreds of years.

From the three examples above, we can see that the bodily Incarnation of Jesus informed an entirely new way of perception, forming the sensibilities of men and women to perceive the depths of reality, including space and time. The very materiality of these examples—catacombs, the liturgical calendar, and language—show forth the power of the Incarnation to transform and transfigure peoples and cultures. Christianity at its best has affirmed the Incarnation in all its dimensions. The concreteness and earthiness of the appearance of God in and through a human body has brought about an “incarnational imagination”<sup>376</sup> (to specify slightly the words of Robert Imbelli) that bound Christian believers together around a common incarnate memory and shaped not only the intellect, but the heart and body as well. We turn now to a specification of this rich culture of the Incarnation within the domestic Church.

#### **4.5.4 Fostering a Culture of the Incarnation in the Domestic Church**

In the previous section, we saw how the Church’s culture of the Incarnation has borne great fruit in integrally and effectively transmitting the Catholic faith. Here, we want to specify how—especially in our own time—the Christian family exercises a critical function in ensuring that the faith once delivered to the saints is transmitted and received by the next generation of Christians. In many ways, we find ourselves in a time similar to that of the early Christians living amid a largely pagan world. At that time as well, it was the domestic Church of the family that carried the torch of the faith and ensured that it was passed on to others. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* speaks of those early Christian households as “islands of Christian life in an unbelieving world.”<sup>377</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI has emphasized the strong connection between the family and the formation of culture, stating that “the evangelization of the family is a pastoral priority,”

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<sup>376</sup> Imbelli, *Rekindling the Christic Imagination*.

<sup>377</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1655.

and “only faith in Christ and only sharing the faith of the Church saves the family...on the other hand, only if the family is saved can the Church also survive.”<sup>378</sup> For when the family—especially spouses themselves—is evangelized, the faith will naturally form culture in all of the ways we have already seen: as an ethos, a process of formation, and a milieu. As a microcosm of the larger macrocosm of the Church, the Christian family in our time is at the heart of rebuilding Catholic culture from the ground up.

How, then, is this Catholic culture to be built and fostered in the domestic Church? How does the Christian family form the next generation in the Catholic faith? Though it is absolutely essential to hand on the Deposit of the Faith using propositional statements and through the use of memorization of the catechism, Sacred Scripture, the prayers of the Church, it is even more foundationally central to foster an environment wherein the faith may be transmitted, received, and lived in an incarnate manner. Yves Congar spoke felicitously about how this incarnate transmission of the faith takes place:

We do not bring up a child by giving him lectures in morality of deportment, but rather by placing him in an environment having a high tone of conduct and manners whose principles, rarely expressed as abstract theories, will be imparted to him by the thousand familiar gestures. Education does not consist in receiving a lesson from afar, which may be learned by heart and recited, but in the daily conduct and inviting example of adult life... <sup>379</sup>

Following on from Congar’s statement, an incarnate transmission of the faith within the domestic Church may be likened to the way the soul both informs the body and is then expressed in and through the body. The soul, so to speak, of the faith cannot be separated

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<sup>378</sup> Benedict XVI, “To Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family (December 1, 2011): BENEDICT XVI,” To participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family (December 1, 2011) | BENEDICT XVI, November 30, 2011, [http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/december/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20111201\\_pc-family.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/december/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20111201_pc-family.html).

<sup>379</sup> Yves Marie Joseph Congar, Avery Robert Dulles, and A. N. Woodrow, *The Meaning of Tradition* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2004), 22.

from the body of articulated doctrine; for—as with the body of a human being—the separation of soul and the body results in death.

Pope Paul VI spoke of this incarnate transmission when he emphasized that the first means of evangelization in the proclamation of the Christian faith is witness: “It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world, in other words, by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus- the witness of poverty and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity.”<sup>380</sup> As was seen in our exploration of the Rite of Baptism, parents are reminded at key points in the celebration of their child’s baptism that they are to be their first and best witnesses of the Christian faith.

How then, one might ask, can this ambitious task be accomplished? What are the components that together constitute a milieu in which the faith is witnessed to, transmitted, and lived? John Paul II reminds us that it is in the family that the cultural heritage of a society is handed down. The Pontifical Council for the Family, in its *Compendium on Family and Human Life*, notes that the family transmits culture by inducting the next generation into the faith in a process of apprenticeship into a way of life, much as a carpenter or an artist would learn their craft.<sup>381</sup> Parents, in effect, are transmitting—whether consciously or not—through their words and their witness of life those values, truths, and priorities that inform the trajectory of their lives. If parents desire to transmit the faith in an incarnate manner to their offspring, they must do so by creating a culture where “the truths of the faith are applied by the laity in their daily lives.”<sup>382</sup>

What, then, are the elements that conduce towards an incarnate transmission of the faith through culture? Here we turn to a series of Wednesday catecheses given by Pope Francis

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<sup>380</sup> Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14.

<sup>381</sup> Pontifical Council for the Family, *Compendium on the Family and Human Life* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2015), 482.

<sup>382</sup> G. C. Dilsaver, *The Three Marks of Manhood: How to Be Priest, Prophet, and King of Your Family* (Charlotte, NC: TAN Books, 2010), 97.

on the theme of family life. R. Jared Staudt points out six principles provided by Francis that are essential to fostering a Catholic culture in the home: celebration, work, prayer, education, evangelization, and community.<sup>383</sup> We have already seen the importance of many of these principles above, so it is not necessary to articulate these in detail. It is important to note, however, that these six principles correspond very well with the threefold office of priesthood (celebration and prayer), prophecy (education and evangelization), and kingship (work and community) that we explored in detail in chapter three. It is important for families to balance these three dimensions of their baptismal office in a way that gives due importance to each. If one is emphasized to the exclusion of the others, a faith-sustaining culture cannot be nourished in the domestic Church.

Finally, though it should be quite apparent, the evangelizing and educating mission of the domestic Church—both *ad intra* and *ad extra*—simply cannot bear fruit unless sustained and supported by a robust intentional community composed of other spouses and families, including couples who can serve as mentors to younger couples, as well as peer couples accompanying one another through the stages of married and family life. It must be emphasized, however, that this community must never become a circle closed in upon itself but rather must be directed ultimately to the engagement of the wider culture, especially the evangelization—primarily through witness and hospitality—of other families. This family-to-family apostolate is one that has been repeatedly emphasized by the popes but which for various reasons has not yet been fully embraced at either the diocesan or grassroots levels. It is then especially important to create opportunities that provide both a strong network of support and accountability to spouses and families, as well as a continuing marriage mystagogy that unfolds a liturgical and sacramental catechesis and a catechesis aimed at forming spouses in holiness according to their state in life and geared toward equipping and empowering them to act as the primary educators of their own children.<sup>384</sup> This includes a formation for the family apostolate by which

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<sup>383</sup> R. Jared Staudt, *Restoring Humanity* (Belmont, NC: Divine Providence Press, 2020), 98-99.

<sup>384</sup> Salvatore Cernuzio, “There Are ‘Too Many Null and Inconsistent Marriages. A ‘New Catechumenate’ Is Necessary For Spouses’ - ZENIT - English,” ZENIT, January 23, 2017, <https://zenit.org/2017/01/23/there-are-too-many-null-and-inconsistent-marriages-a-new-catechumenate-is-necessary-for-spouses/>.

spouses and their families are sent forth on mission to evangelize—primarily through hospitality and personal influence—other couples and families.

To conclude this chapter, we have seen that the Catholic Church offers a robust vision for evangelization and catechesis, a vision that has developed in significant ways while still maintaining a rootedness in her rich tradition. Likewise, over the past fifty plus years, the magisterium of the Church has stressed the significance of the domestic Church as a privileged locus for an incarnate transmission, appropriation, and living out of the faith. Through the Sacrament of Matrimony, parents are empowered to act as their children’s primary heralds and teachers. By the Sacrament of Baptism, all members of the Christian household come to share in the family apostolate. Though there has been a significant uptick of disaffiliation from the Catholic Church, the Christian family remains a last bastion for the handing on of the faith through the building of an authentic Catholic culture in the household. Engaging the domestic Church not only as a recipient of evangelization and catechesis but as an active agent will be key to rebuilding Catholic culture and re-energizing the Church for mission.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Conclusion**

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The Christian family is, according to the Catholic Church’s teaching, a domestic Church, a “specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion.”<sup>385</sup> Thanks to the rediscovery of the properly theological understanding of the Christian family as a domestic Church, as well as developments in the theology of the laity in the twentieth century, the Catholic Church possesses the intellectual and spiritual resources needed to proclaim the Gospel of the Family anew. However, though the Church has undertaken this rediscovery and renewal at the speculative or theoretical level, cultural currents of

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<sup>385</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 21.

secularism, the breakdown of the family, and increasing disaffiliation from the Catholic Church have made it very difficult for this rich teaching to trickle down to Catholic spouses and their families. As we have seen in our exploration of the sociological and historical evidence above, the battle for the family is one which is fought not only from the outside, but also from within. Along with the larger cultural matrix, the Catholic Church at the local level of dioceses and parishes finds itself unequipped to properly form the laity—specifically the domestic Church—for their proper apostolate of the family.

Our driving concern throughout this project is how those charged with the formation of the laity can marshal the rich resources to form, equip, and send the domestic Church out on mission to become not only recipients of evangelization but to be agents of the family apostolate toward others, especially those spouses and families whose connection to the Catholic Church is tenuous at best. It is clear that, for the domestic Church to be equipped for its mission, it must first understand what it is and, more importantly, what it is *for*. The argument we have advanced throughout is that for it to flourish, the *Ecclesia domestica* must “become what it is.” All Christian families have, in the language of St. Thomas Aquinas, potency that is directed toward actuality. What brings the domestic Church into actuality is its cooperation in the grace and truth that comes from God through Christ’s Church. God’s grace brings supernatural life to spouses and their families; and God’s truth reveals to spouses and their domestic Church who they are and for what purpose they exist.

We have seen the ways in which the Catholic Church’s robust Trinitarian and Christocentric anthropology sheds light on the truth of the human person, created in the *imago Dei*. This anthropology also throws light on the relationality of the human person called to the vocation of self-giving love. The natural similitude of the family to the Trinity is elevated to a participation—by the grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony—in God’s own life of love. The perichoretic relationship between the Trinity and the family is mediated by the Sacrament of Matrimony, an ongoing sacrament that perdures throughout the life of the spouses together. Furthermore, Christian marriage is a *magnum mysterium*—a great mystery—in and through which baptized spouses serve as icons of

Christ's unbreakable covenant with his Bride, the Church. Through the charism of the Holy Spirit received in Matrimony, spouses are capacitated to become a holy dwelling for the Lord, a "Trinitarian greenhouse." As the supernatural bond of communion between the spouses, the Holy Spirit as Lord and life giver pours out inexhaustible grace upon them to strengthen and sustain their consecration for mission, a mission to "guard, reveal, and communicate love."

The domestic Church, like the Church universal, is the *οἶκος τοῦ θεοῦ*, the sanctuary of God. As was the case in the early Church, the Christian family is a cultural force that has the capacity to renew and strengthen the Church for her mission to holiness and mission. As the sanctuary of life and love, the domestic Church is the primary place of humanization, where children learn who they are, and to whom they belong. Parents are for their children icons of God the Father, from whom they receive the grace of consecration to reveal something of God's own steadfast love and faithfulness.

Through their participation in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission of Jesus Christ, parents and their children are summoned to prayer and sacrifice; to the proclamation of the Word of God; and to service. As a communion of persons, the entire domestic Church carries out its mission to love by being a sacrament of unity, as the Church at large is a sacrament of unity. The domestic Church, however, is not simply a cell with the larger communion of the Church, though it is that as well. The Christian family has its own ecclesial identity and mission, a mission that only it can fulfill. Through prayer and worship in common, Christian spouses and children unite themselves to Christ's priesthood, through which they are sanctified, give glory to God, and are sent out to sanctify others. Through evangelization and catechesis, each member receives and proclaims the Word of God. In humble service to one another, the members of the domestic Church pattern themselves after Jesus, who came to serve and not to be served.

In order to carry out its mission, the domestic Church must first center its life around the Lordship of Jesus Christ, turning from sin and selfishness and undergoing deep conversion by taking up the Cross each day through self-denial and docility to correction. Spouses are encouraged to forgive one another readily and to model to their children the life of continual conversion directed toward holiness. The role of parents in relation to

their children is to be heralds and teachers, apprenticing their children to authentic Christian discipleship. This involves making their home a school of virtue and a school of prayer. It also includes turning to the Church's witnesses of sanctity, the saints, and learning from them the meaning of heroic virtue. By its witness to a life of conversion directed toward holiness, the domestic Church becomes a luminous witness of the beauty, goodness, and truth of the Gospel of the family.

We have seen that it is not enough for the domestic Church to focus upon itself; it must also turn outward to seek intentional community with other spouses and families seeking to grow in holiness and transmit the Catholic faith to the next generation. Because the wider culture and its social imaginary run contrary in many ways to the Catholic faith, it is necessary that Christian households support and encourage one another in their endeavor to embrace the fullness of God's plan for marriage and family. This is necessary not only as a form of "self-preservation," however; it also is the response to the call of all the baptized to evangelization. The domestic Church must not seek fellowship with other families as an end in itself; rather, it must see this communion as a means by which it is strengthened for its apostolic mission in the world through its properly secular vocation. This cannot be emphasized strongly enough.

In the course that forms the second part of this project—part of what is envisioned to be a seven-year marriage mystagogy—I have incorporated the key principles identified in this dissertation into a formation and enrichment process designed for spouses in the first few years of marriage. Studies show that 20% of all marriages end in divorce within the first five years.<sup>386</sup> It is therefore crucial that spouses be empowered and equipped, not only prior to the wedding day, but also during the crucial first years of marriage. These first years are the time in which spouses form habits—whether good or bad—that will set the course for their life together. This is why the course includes not only catechesis on the identity and mission of the domestic Church but also the formation of small circles of 3-5 couples that foster an authentic Catholic community of peers who support one another in their common vocation. The circle gatherings are envisioned to take place in seven

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<sup>386</sup> "Home," Healthy Marriage and Responsible Fatherhood, accessed December 8, 2020, <http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org/research>.



sessions throughout the year in couples' homes, with each couple taking a turn hosting. To complement the circle gatherings, there are specific "bring it home" sessions in which spouses begin to inculcate practices within their domestic Church that will aid them in forming an authentic Catholic culture of the home.

The theme I have begun with, "The Family, a Domestic Church," is the foundational course, from which six other courses will be developed to explore more deeply the themes set forth in this initial series. The aim of this mystagogical formation is to respond to a real need within the Catholic Church for the domestic Church to be formed, supported, and encouraged, with a view to building an network of marriages and domestic Churches engaged in apostolate to one another and contributing to the upbuilding of their existing parish and diocesan communities. This approach has the benefit of mobilizing couples as agents of evangelization to other couples, while at the same time building a culture of encounter that encourages domestic Churches to reach out to one another in love, thus beginning to overcome the "buffered self" mentality inculcated by the wider culture.

St. John Chrysostom wrote that "the love of husband and wife is the force that welds society together."<sup>387</sup> If this is true, and if the "future of the world and of the Church passes by way of the family,"<sup>388</sup> as Pope John Paul II preached, then the flourishing of the domestic Church is indeed integral to the present and future fruitfulness of the Church's mission as the light to the nations and the sacrament of salvation.

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<sup>387</sup> John Chrysostom, Catharine P. Roth, and David Anderson, *On Marriage and Family Life* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 44.

<sup>388</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 75.

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# Appendix A: Identified and Applied Research Principles

The following are the key principles identified in Part 1 (Chapters One through Four) of this doctoral research that will contribute to the development of the proposed marriage enrichment formation series for spouses in the first few years of marriage. The specific sections of the doctoral research from which these principles are drawn are specified in brackets after each principle. Each of the seven sessions in the series will identify the key principles being applied in the section entitled “Research Principles Covered.”

## Principles Identified

### Chapter One

- 1.0. Articulate that man and woman are created in the image of the Trinitarian God (1.1; 1.2.1)
- 1.1. Explain that the communion of persons in marriage and family is an image of the communion of Father, Son, and Spirit within the Trinity insofar as it echoes and participates in communion of persons united in self-giving love (1.1; 1.2.1)
- 1.2. Show how God’s Trinitarian life of love reveals the deepest dimension of man’s being, called to personal communion with God and other persons (1.1)
- 1.3. Demonstrate that to be a person is to be in relationship with other persons and cannot be understood apart from the vocation to a total gift of self in love (1.1; 1.2.1)
- 1.4. Show how man and woman, by the grace of the Sacrament of Marriage, participate in Christ’s relationship with the Church in the Eucharist (1.2; 2.2)
- 1.5. Lay the foundations of a Trinitarian and Christocentric anthropology of the human person (1.2.1.; 1.5.1.; see also 2.5.9.)
- 1.6. Express how marriage finds its deepest roots in the Trinity and the nuptial union of Christ and his Church (1.2)
- 1.7. Demonstrate the centrality of the Cross and suffering to marriage and family (1.2; 1.3; 2.2; 3.4.2)
- 1.8. Accentuate the primacy of grace in the covenant relationship between God and man and, specifically, in the Sacrament of Marriage (1.5.2.1)
- 1.9. Reveal the place of the Holy Spirit as a fount of love and intimacy within marriage, poured out in the epiclesis of the Sacrament of Matrimony (1.3)

## Chapter Two

2.0. Show the historical development and theological richness of the designation domestic Church (2.2)

2.1. Articulate the reciprocal relationship that exists between the Church at large and the domestic Church (2.2)

2.2. Demonstrate the archetypal relationship between Christ-Church and husband-wife in sacramental marriage (2.3)

2.3. Help spouses to view relationality as integral to their marriage and family (2.3)

2.4. Show how the Christian family an icon of the Trinity (2.4)

2.5. Articulate that the vocation of all human persons is love (2.4)

2.6. Explain how the ethos of the family flows out of the logos of the domestic Church's identity (2.4)

2.7 Elucidate how the domestic Church is an integral part of God's economy of salvation (2.2)

2.8 Demonstrate the meaning and importance of the kingly authority of parents in relation to their children (2.2)

2.9 Show that the domestic Church is an authentic manifestation of the Church (2.2)

2.10 Acknowledge the real challenges that spouses face in the contemporary world (2.3)

2.11 Emphasize that it is necessary for couples to build strong bonds of communion and support with other, like-minded couples (2.2; 2.3; see also 4.5.4)

## Chapter Three

- 3.1. Teach that the spirituality of marriage and family flows from its theological identity (3.1)
- 3.2. Express how the Eucharist is the source and sustenance of Christian marriage and family life (3.2)
- 3.3 Articulate that the domestic Church has a priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission (3.2)
- 3.4 Show the ways in which the spirituality of the family is an incarnate spirituality (3.3)
- 3.5 Unpack how domestic Church's spirituality is discovered and accomplished in the ordinary events of daily life (3.3)
- 3.6 Explain the ways in which the domestic Church must consciously and intentionally open its doors to Christ (3.3; 3.4.1)
- 3.7 Discover how, through the Sacrament of Marriage, spouses become a means of sanctification for each other, for their children, and for the world (3.4.1)
- 3.8 Emphasize that marital love is a demanding love that requires self-sacrifice and asceticism (3.4.2)
- 3.9 Demonstrate that cultivation and expression of the gift of self takes form in the daily life of each member of the domestic Church (3.4.2)
- 3.10 Teach that prayer at the personal, spousal, and family levels is essential to a flourishing domestic Church (3.4.3; 3.4.4; 3.4.5)
- 3.11 Express that through prayer Christian parents and families receive strength for their mission (3.4.5)
- 3.12 Show that service and practical charity are integral to the mission of the domestic Church (3.5; 3.5.1; 3.5.2)
- 3.13 Emphasize that Baptism brings an equal personal dignity to all members of the domestic Church (3.2; 3.4)
- 3.14 Articulate that the mission of the domestic Church is to guard, reveal, and communicate love (3.2; 3.3; see also 2.1)
- 3.15 Show how Christian marriage and family life is connected to the Paschal Mystery of Christ's death and Resurrection (3.1; 3.3; 3.4.1; 3.4.3)

## Chapter Four

- 4.1 Teach that parents are their children's first heralds and teachers (4.1)
- 4.2 Articulate that evangelization is the mission of the domestic Church of the family (4.2)
- 4.3 Explain that the domestic Church is both a recipient and an agent of handing on the Catholic faith (4.3)
- 4.4 Emphasize that Christian parents' evangelizing mission to their children is rooted in Baptism and Matrimony (4.3)
- 4.5 Elucidate why the fundamental and necessary foundation and context of parents' catechizing mission is creating a loving home (4.3)
- 4.6 Show how several times during the Baptism of their children, parents are reminded of their mission to hand on the faith to them (4.3)
- 4.7 Express the primacy of the Incarnation in fostering a culture of the faith in the home (4.5; 4.5.3)
- 4.8 Reveal that the "way of beauty" is integral to handing on the faith through culture (4.5.3)
- 4.9 Explain how marriage and family are a Gospel in themselves (4.5.4)
- 4.10 Teach that parents hand on the faith through both words and witness of life (4.5.4)
- 4.11 Emphasize that family culture needs to strike a balance between the priestly, prophetic, and kingly dimensions of the baptism office to integrally hand on the faith (4.5.4)
- 4.12 The marriage catechumenate should be sensitive to different levels of spiritual maturity and engage couples at each level (4.5.3)
- 4.13 Incorporate practices of the Catholic faith by which spouses and the domestic Church might integrate the faith into daily life (2.3; 3.4.2; 4.2; 4.5.1)

**Principles Applied in Sessions 1-7 (Marked by X)**

<b>Principle Applied</b>	<b>Session 1</b>	<b>Session 2</b>	<b>Session 3</b>	<b>Session 4</b>	<b>Session 5</b>	<b>Session 6</b>	<b>Session 7</b>
1.0	X	X					
1.1	X	X				X	
1.2	X	X				X	
1.2.1	X	X					
1.3		X		X		X	X
1.4	X	X				X	
1.5	X	X	X	X			
1.6				X			
1.7	X	X	X	X		X	
1.8	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
1.9			X	X		X	X
2.0		X				X	
2.1		X	X		X		X
2.2	X	X					
2.3	X	X	X		X		X
2.4		X					X
2.5	X					X	X
2.6		X	X	X			
2.7	X						
2.8				X			
2.9				X	X		X
2.10				X	X	X	X
2.11							X
3.1		X	X	X		X	X
3.2		X	X				X
3.3				X			

**Principles Applied in Sessions 1-7 (Marked by X)**

<b>Principle Applied</b>	<b>Session 1</b>	<b>Session 2</b>	<b>Session 3</b>	<b>Session 4</b>	<b>Session 5</b>	<b>Session 6</b>	<b>Session 7</b>
3.4		X			X	X	X
3.5		X	X	X			
3.6		X	X				
3.7					X	X	X
3.8		X	X	X		X	
3.9		X		X		X	
3.10			X				
3.11			X				
3.12				X			X
3.13		X	X	X			
3.14							X
3.15			X	X		X	
4.1			X	X	X		
4.2					X		X
4.3					X		X
4.4				X	X		X
4.5	X	X		X	X		
4.6					X		
4.7		X	X	X	X		X
4.8	X	X	X	X	X		
4.9	X						X
4.10			X		X	X	
4.11		X		X			
4.12		X	X	X	X	X	
4.13		X	X	X	X	X	X

# FAMILY, A DOMESTIC CHURCH

## SESSION OUTLINES

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*“Christian families, by the grace of the sacrament of matrimony, are the principal agents of the family apostolate. . . . Enabling families to take up their role as active agents of the family apostolate calls for an effort at evangelization and catechesis inside the family.”*

Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, 200)

### Session Format

**Each session lasts approximately 1 ½-2 hours. Sample schedule:**

- Meal and conversation (30-45 Minutes)
- Opening prayer and reflection (5-10 Minutes)
- View video (10 Minutes)
- Group reflection and discussion (30-45 minutes)
- Closing prayer and wrap-up (10 minutes)

### Components

**Couple Circle** – A group comprised of a facilitator couple and three to five couples who accompany one another as an intentional community of friends with the goal of growing together in holiness and forming their children in the Catholic faith

**There are two contexts in which formation takes place: 1) Within the Couple Circle 2) At Home**

#### At Circle Gatherings:

- THE WORD – Scripture reading and prayer
- THE TEACHING – Outlines of the content of each video
- DISCUSS – Questions to provoke fruitful group discussion
- WITH THE SAINTS – Information about a model and intercessor that exemplifies the topic covered
- CLOSING PRAYER

#### At Home:

- BRING IT HOME – A specific activity that the couple completes between each group gathering
- GOING DEEPER – Excerpts from Church Documents that further elaborate the teaching
- RESOURCES – List of Church documents, books, websites, and podcasts relating to the topic



# FAMILY, A DOMESTIC CHURCH

## SESSION ONE: FROM THE BEGINNING

### Exploring God's Plan for Marriage

**Research Principles Covered (See Appendix A):**  
1.1; 1.2; 1.2.1; 1.3; 1.4; 1.5; 1.7; 1.8; 2.2; 2.3; 2.5; 2.7; 4.5; 4.8; 4.9

## OPENING PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth. Amen.

## THE WORD

### Genesis 1:26-27

*Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*

## IN THIS SESSION

### You will . . .

- Explore God's beautiful and life-giving plan for your marriage and family
- Be inspired by the awesome dignity and call of Christian marriage and family
- Discover what the Cross teaches about love and marriage
- Appreciate how the Holy Eucharist models the total gift of self for spousal love

## THE TEACHING

### John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, 17

*The family finds in the plan of God the Creator and Redeemer not only its identity, what it is, but also its mission, what it can and should do . . . . Each family finds within itself a summons that cannot be ignored, and that specifies both its dignity and its responsibility: family, become what you are.*

### **Key Points**

- God created man and woman *by* love and *for* love
- The identity and mission of the family comes from God's plan of love
- From beginning to end, Scripture speaks of this mission of men and women
- God the Holy Trinity has revealed himself as a communion of Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- Created in the image and likeness of God the Holy Trinity, man and woman are created to image by the complementarity of their bodies and souls God who is love
- Though damaged by the Original Sin of Adam and Eve, marriage has been restored by the Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection
- The Church speaks of marriage and family is a gospel in itself that expresses the good news that spouses and children are a part of God's plan of salvation
- The Cross of Christ and the gift of the Holy Eucharist inspire and make possible the radical gift of self that marriage is called to be and heal our brokenness, challenging us to grow in love daily
- Christ's first miracle at the Wedding Feast of Cana shows his sanctification of marriage, and he invites all married couples to allow him to turn their water into wine
- Christian marriage is a mystery that participates in and expresses the loving union of Jesus Christ and His Bride, the Church

## **DISCUSS**

- St. John Paul II teaches that “The family finds in the plan of God the Creator and Redeemer not only its identity, what it is, but also its mission, what it can and should do . . . Each family finds within itself a summons that cannot be ignored, and that specifies both its dignity and its responsibility: family, become what you are.” Have you ever thought of your family as a “mission”? Why or why not?
- Do you consider your marriage part of God’s plan of salvation for humanity? What are the practical implications in taking this truth to heart?
- The mission of the family, says John Paul II, is “to guard, reveal, and communicate love.” Scripture reveals that Jesus Christ on the Cross is the ultimate revelation of love. What can Jesus’s Crucifixion teach us about the true meaning of love?
- Bearing in mind Jesus’s miracle of changing water into wine at the wedding feast In Cana, where do you need for Christ to transform the water of your marriage into the best of wine?

## FROM THE TRADITION

Selection from *Homily on Ephesians*, by St. John Chrysostom  
Also quoted in *CCC*, 2365

I have taken you in my arms, and I love you, and I prefer you to my life itself. For the present life is nothing, and my most ardent dream is to spend it with you in such a way that we may be assured of not being separated in the life reserved for us. . . . I place your love above all things, and nothing would be more bitter or painful to me than to be of a different mind than you.

## WITH THE SAINTS

*The Holy Family of Nazareth*

**Feast Day: The Sunday after Christmas Day**

*The covenant of love and fidelity lived by the Holy Family of Nazareth illuminates the principle which gives shape to every family, and enables it better to face the vicissitudes of life and history. On this basis, every family, despite its weaknesses, can become a light in the darkness of the world. “Nazareth teaches us the meaning of family life, its loving communion, its simple and austere beauty, its sacred and inviolable character. May it teach how sweet and irreplaceable is*

*its training, how fundamental and incomparable its role in the social order”* (Pope Saint Paul IV, Address in Nazareth, 5 January 1964).

In the Gospel we do not find discourses on the family but an *event* which is worth more than any words: *God wanted to be born and to grow up in a human family*. In this way he consecrated the family as the first and ordinary means of his encounter with humanity.

In his life spent at Nazareth, Jesus honored the Virgin Mary and the righteous Joseph, remaining under their authority throughout the period of his childhood and his adolescence (cf. Lk 2: 41-52). In this way he shed light on the primary value of the family in the education of the person.

When he was 12 years old, he stayed behind in the Temple and it took his parents all of three days to find him. With this act he made them understand that he "had to see to his Father's affairs," in other words, to the mission that God had entrusted to him (cf. Lk 2: 41-52). This Gospel episode reveals the most authentic and profound vocation of the family: that is, to accompany each of its members on the path of the discovery of God and of the plan that he has prepared for him or her.

Mary and Joseph taught Jesus primarily by their example: in his parents he came to know the full beauty of faith, of love for God and for his Law, as well as the demands of justice, which is totally fulfilled in love (cf. Rom 13: 10).

The Holy Family of Nazareth is truly the "prototype" of every Christian family which, united in the Sacrament of Marriage and nourished by the Word and the Eucharist, is called to carry out the wonderful vocation and mission of being the living cell not only of society but also of the Church, a sign and instrument of unity for the entire human race.

-Excerpt from Pope Benedict XVI, Angelus Address, 31 December 2006

- In this address, Pope Benedict XVI speaks of the mystery of God becoming man and growing up in the Holy Family of Nazareth, living an ordinary life as the son of Mary, a homemaker, and of Joseph, a laborer. Why do you think God decided to become man in such an ordinary way rather than growing up in a palace?
- When you hear the Holy Family described as the “prototype” of every family, what is one aspect of their life in Nazareth that you can relate to?

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

### **Collect Prayer for the Feast of the Holy Family**

O God, who were please to give us

the shining example of the Holy Family,  
graciously grant that we may imitate them  
in practicing the virtues of family life and in the bonds of charity,  
and so, in the joy of your house,  
delight one day the eternal rewards.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

## **BRING IT HOME**

### ***Heart Speaks to Heart: Strengthening Your Marriage through Dialogue***

*Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

- 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia* (The Joy of Love), Pope Francis reminds spouses of the importance of spending time together to sustain and grow their intimacy with one another. The Holy Father explains:

Love needs time and space; everything else is secondary. Time is needed to talk things over, to embrace leisurely, to share plans, to listen to one other and gaze in each other's eyes, to appreciate one another and to build a stronger relationship. (p. 224)

Within the Sacrament of Marriage, it is important to remember that it is Christ who has united them together with the Holy Spirit as the bond of their unity. Woman and man have the awesome privilege of sharing in and mirroring to the world the love between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit!

There are many books available that propose to help couples “fix” their marriage. In the Catholic view, it is not we who fix our marriage but our marriage which fixes us! In other words, the Sacrament of Marriage is the way that God teaches us to love in the way that he loves. Marriage between two baptized Christians is a constant source of grace poured out to give husbands and wives the ability to love in a divine and supernatural way.

St. John Henry Newman, a famous convert to the Catholic Church from Anglicanism, took as his motto a phrase from another great saint, Saint Francis de Sales: *Cor ad Cor, loquitur* (“heart speaks to heart”). Cardinal Newman emphasized the importance of personal relationships and especially of the relationship between the heart of the Christian and the heart of Christ. Sacramentally married couples are united together in a one flesh union so that where they were once two, they are now made one by the power of the Sacrament. Not only that, but Christ

himself dwells with them in the midst of their marriage. It is fitting, then, to talk about the loving dialogue between spouses as “heart to heart,” always open to the heart of God. In this regard, Saint John Paul II reminds spouses that “the discovery of and obedience to the plan of God on the part of the conjugal and family community must take place in ‘togetherness,’ through the human experience of love between husband and wife, between parents and children, lived in the Spirit of Christ” (*Familiaris consortio*, 51).

As spouses, it is important that the discovery of the “other” is a lifelong process. Ask any husband who has a few years of marriage under his belt and he will be the first to admit that he still has a lot to learn about his bride! In this exercise, you will have the opportunity to establish a monthly dialogue together as spouses, a dialogue that involves not only husband and wife but is also open to the voice of God.

Below, you will find a simple format to follow in your dialogue as a couple. It is important to remember that this time together is a privileged opportunity to come to a deeper discovery of one another and God’s plan for you in the presence of the Lord.

General Guidelines: Set aside at least 2 hours once a month to spend together away from distractions. Make it a priority by putting the dates on your calendar before anything else. This can be challenging with children in the home but remember that the more solid your intimacy and communication as spouses is, the better parents you will be to your children! The time you invest in your marriage will be multiplied back to you in all areas of your life.

#### **Laws of Dialogue:**

- Begin with the opening reading, calling to mind God’s presence and spending some time in silence together
- Holds hands and ask God for the grace to see your spouse’s beauty and goodness as God sees them
- Take turns responding to each of the questions, making sure to give your spouse time to reflect
- As your spouse shares their response to the questions, practice active listening by giving them your full attention
- Listen patiently and with humility
- Listen first to understand, not to respond
- Mirror back to each other what each spouse has said, thanking them and affirming them
- When you do respond, do so with attentiveness to the need expressed by your spouse

#### **Opening Reading:** 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

*Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*

## Discussion Points:

- Personal: For this point, the aim is not to reveal all of your issues or recounting your sins, but to examine yourself in light of the Gospel and your vocation. The goal is for each spouse to come to know themselves and the other more deeply. Both spouses should come away from this with a concrete resolution for the next month.
- You and I: Take turns reflecting on where you are in terms of your relationship. Focus on all dimensions of intimacy: physical, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional. In what area do you feel particularly called to grow in intimate unity with each other?
- Our Children and Us: Place your thoughts on each child, asking the Lord to see each one as he sees them, so as to better understand how to best value them as persons and provide for their physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual needs.
- God and Us: Focus together on your relationship as a married couple with God. This is the fundamental relationship that all other relationships should flow from. Distinguish between religious practices such as prayer, sacraments, religious education on the one hand, and your general orientation to God together as a couple, on the other. Ask these two questions: 1) What is God's will for us at this time? 2) What does God expect of us?

Close your time together with a simple prayer from the heart or an Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be.

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## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER LEARNING

### Church Documents

Available for free online at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

*Casti connubii* (On Christian Marriage), an Encyclical of Pope Pius XI

*Humanae vitae* (Of Human Life), an Encyclical of Pope Paul VI

*Familiaris consortio* (The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World), a Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II

*Gratissimam sane* (Letter to Families), a Letter of Pope John Paul II  
*Deus caritas est* (God is Love), an Encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI  
*Amoris laetitia* (The Joy of Love), a Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis  
*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraphs 1602-1617

## **Books**

*First Comes Love: Finding Your Family in the Church and the Trinity* by Scott Hahn & Published by Image Books  
*Jesus the Bridegroom: The Greatest Love Story Ever Told* by Brant Pitre & Published by Image Books  
*Life-Giving Love: Embracing God's Beautiful Design for Marriage* by Kimberly Hahn & Published by Servant Publishing  
*Love is Our Mission: The Family Fully Alive* Published by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and the Pontifical Council on the Family  
*Men, Women, and the Mystery of Love* by Edward Sri & Published by Franciscan Media  
*One Body: A Program of Marriage Preparation and Enrichment for the New Evangelization* by John and Claire Grabowski & Published by Emmaus Road Publishing  
*Three to Get Married* by Fulton Sheen & Published by Scepter Publishing

## **Websites & Blog Posts**

Fathers for Good ([www.fathersforgood.org](http://www.fathersforgood.org)), an initiative of the Knights of Columbus for building up marriage and family  
*For Your Marriage* ([www.foryourmarriage.com](http://www.foryourmarriage.com)), a marriage resource provided by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops  
*Theology of the Body Evangelization* Team ([www.tobet.org](http://www.tobet.org)), a resource for children and adults on God's Plan for love and marriage

## **YouTube Videos**

[Back to the Garden of Eden](#) (World Meeting of Families) by Scott Hahn  
[Marriage and Family in Scripture](#) (Franciscan University Presents) by Fr. John Riccardo  
[Marriage is a Dance](#) (Ascension Presents) by Christopher West



[Reflecting the Image of God](#) (EWTN) by Joy & Jim Pinto

## **Podcasts**

**All Things Catholic with Edward Sri:** Marriage Reality Check

**How-To Catholic with Kevin & Lisa Cotter:** How-To Marriage: What we Wish We Had Known

# FAMILY, A DOMESTIC CHURCH

## SESSION TWO: FAMILY: BECOME WHAT YOU ARE

### The Identity of the Domestic Church

#### Research Principles Covered (See Appendix A):

1.0; 1.1; 1.2; 1.2.1; 1.3; 1.4; 1.5; 1.6; 1.7; 1.8; 2.0; 2.1; 2.2; 2.3; 2.4; 2.6; 3.1; 3.2; 3.4; 3.5; 3.6; 3.8; 3.9; 3.13; 4.5; 4.7; 4.8; 4.11; 4.12; 4.13

### OPENING PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth. Amen.

### THE WORD

#### Ephesians 5:21-32

*Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, and I mean in reference to Christ and the church.*

### IN THIS SESSION

#### You will . . .

- Learn how the Church is the family of God and the Christian family is a domestic Church
- Discover the significance of Jesus's entering humanity through a family

- Appreciate how the family mirrors the communion of love of the Holy Trinity
- Explore the characteristics that make the Christian family a domestic Church

## THE TEACHING

**John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, 51**

*The discovery of and obedience to the plan of God on the part of the conjugal and family community must take place in "togetherness," through the human experience of love between husband and wife, between parents and children, lived in the Spirit of Christ.*

### **Key Points**

- From the beginning of time until now, God has been forming a family after his own heart through a series of covenants, beginning with Adam and Eve and reaching fulfillment in the Church
- As a communion of persons joined in love, the Holy Trinity is the model and source of familial love
- By being born and growing up in a family, Jesus Christ brought God's presence into each family, sanctifying family life
- The domestic church is a school of the Gospel where each member grows in knowledge and love of Christ and service to one another
- The domestic church is a Eucharistic community nourished and strengthened by a common celebration of the Eucharist
- In the Sacrament of Marriage, husbands and wives mirror the faithful and fruitful love of Christ and the Church through daily sacrifices offered with love
- To faithfully live out their call to live as a domestic church, families need the encouragement, strength, and support of other like-minded families
- The domestic church will fulfill its great calling to the extent that it opens its doors to Christ

## DISCUSS

- Reflecting on the opening reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, how does God's vision for marriage differ from the world's vision?
- What does it mean for you personally that Christ entered humanity through the family? What implications does this have for your own family?
- Looking back over the characteristics of the domestic church, what are some of the characteristics that you already practice? What are some characteristics you feel called to grow in?
- How can your own marriage and family become more fully a Eucharistic community?

## FROM THE TRADITION

Selection from *To His Wife* by Tertullian

Also quoted in *Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1642*

How can I ever express the happiness of a marriage joined by the Church, strengthened by an offering, sealed by a blessing, announced by angels, and ratified by the Father? . . . How wonderful the bond between two believers, now one in hope, one in desire, one in discipline, one in the same service! They are both children of one Father and servants of the same Master, undivided in spirit and flesh, truly two in one flesh. Where the flesh is one, one also is the spirit.

## WITH THE SAINTS

*Louis and Zélie Martin*

**Feast Day: July 12**

Saints Louis and Zélie Martin are best known as the parents of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux (the Little Flower), yet they are models of holiness in their own right. In the history of the Church, they became the first married couple to be canonized together.

Louis was born in 1823 in Bordeaux, France. After giving up his hope of entering religious life due to difficulties in studies, he became a watchmaker. Zélie Guerin was born in 1831. She also hoped to become a religious, but eventually decided that it was not God's will and became a successful lacemaker.

Louis and Zélie were both raised in faithful Catholic families by devoted parents. Both were successful and diligent tradespeople who were generous toward the less fortunate. They met in Alençon, France and were married in 1858 after a three-month courtship. During their first year of marriage the couple practiced celibacy, until a priest advised them to have as many children as possible for the glory of God. Zélie gave birth to nine children, four of whom died at an early age, as was unfortunately common at the time. The remaining five, all daughters, entered religious life.

On her deathbed from breast cancer in 1877, at age 45, Zélie consoled her family, admonishing them to trust in God rather than worry about her suffering. Soon after she died, Louis and his daughters moved to Lisieux where he finished raising his daughters with love and care. The girls left one by one to join religious life as they grew into adulthood. Despite his loneliness, Louis said: “It is a great, great honor for me that the Good Lord desires to take all of my children. If I had anything better, I would not hesitate to offer it to him.” He died in 1894 after suffering greatly from cerebral arteriosclerosis, which left him paralyzed and almost unable to speak near the end of his life. Even to the end, however, he was reported to have great joy and charity, as did his bride in her passing.

Louis and Zélie Martin were beatified by Pope Benedict XVI in 2008 and canonized by Pope Francis in 2015.

- How do Louis and Zélie Martin provide a model for married couples and families today?
- The Martin family suffered tragedy early on with the death of several children and the death of Zélie at a young age. What lessons can we learn from them about coping with physical suffering, loss, and loneliness?

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

[Adapted from the Prayer for the Canonization of Louis and Zélie Martin](#)

God of eternal love, you give us  
Saints Louis and Zélie Martin,  
the parents of Saint Thérèse  
as an example of holiness in marriage.  
They remained faithful to you and your  
commandments in all the duties and trials of life.  
They desired to raise their children to become saints.  
May their prayers and example help Christian  
family life to blossom in our world today.

## **BRING IT HOME**

### ***Building Your Domestic Church: Welcoming Christ into Your Home***

*And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.*

- Deuteronomy 6:6-9

On the day of your marriage something truly profound happened: Christ united together two people in a one flesh union and consecrated you and your spouse as a domestic church! Through the power of the Sacrament of Marriage, the Holy Spirit, bond of love between the Father and the Son, gave you the ability to be a living sign of Christ's unbreakable covenant with his bride, the Church. Your marriage and family are the place where Jesus Christ is meant to reign! Just as in your parish church where the tabernacle containing Christ's Real Presence in the Eucharist is prominently on display, our homes and families are the place where Christ should be at the center. As a domestic Church, each family is meant to be a location in time where Christ is known, loved, and served.

Though God's plan for family is universal, your domestic church is unique and unrepeatable, entrusted by God with a unique and unrepeatable identity and a mission that you and your spouse alone can fulfill. Once joined in the Sacrament of Marriage, wives and husbands discover that their vocational discernment has not ended but has only just begun! One of the mysteries of marriage is how God can bring together two people, each with their own distinctive personalities, quirks, and gifts, and bring about something entirely new in the history of the world!

When we look at the saints throughout the Church's history, one of the things that stands out is how unique each of them are. Though all of them responded fully to the call to love as Christ loves, they all found that their path to holiness was unique. God does not take away our individuality when he calls us to holiness. Rather, he wants to use all of our unique gifts to glorify him!

You may have perhaps heard the term "Catholic culture" but didn't know what it meant. Catholic culture refers to a way of living the Catholic faith that impacts every aspect of our lives: intellectual, moral, emotional, and social. A culture is a whole way of life, an environment that shapes our thoughts, our choices, our imagination, and our priorities. Think about the kind of culture you want to build in your family. Though there are certainly some significant elements that should be common to all Catholic households – prayer, the virtues, celebration of Mass and the sacraments, devotion to Mary, reading Sacred Scripture, and learning the faith – each family will have its own unique way of expressing its culture. How can your family culture reflect the unique personalities, interests, and gifts that you bring, while bringing glory to God? Use the questions below as prompts to help you build a Catholic culture in your domestic church.

### *Patron Saint(s)*

Just as each parish is under the patronage of a saint (or saints), it is also appropriate that your little “church of the home” be entrusted to models and intercessors who can be a good example of holiness for your family, and to whom you can turn in the challenges of practicing the faith day-to-day. What saint or saints would you like to entrust your domestic church to? Consider the saint whose name you took on your confirmation day or perhaps look into whether or not there was a saint’s feast day on your wedding day. Research married saints, or saints who were family and see if any of them strike you.

### *Family Motto*

Many saints are known for a particular word or phrase. This word or phrase encapsulates what they are about. For example, St. John Bosco’s motto was “Give me souls, take the rest.” Similarly, the Bible is rich with great passages such as “let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18). Think about a word or phrase from Sacred Scripture or from the life of a saint that sums up what you aspire to as a couple and as a family. Write it down in the space below.

### *Celebrating the Liturgical Seasons*

Talk together about your experience growing up in your family of origin. How did you celebrate the liturgical seasons of the year? Think particularly of how your family celebrated (or did not celebrate) Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter. Spend some time discussing what traditions you would like to continue or perhaps research some new traditions to begin in your own family.

### *Home Blessing/Enthronement to the Sacred Heart*

Just as a new church is consecrated by the bishop of a diocese, your domestic church should be sanctified as a dwelling for the Lord. Invite your parish priest over for dinner and a house blessing and, while he is there, have your home enthroned to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

### *Incorporating Beauty into Your Domestic Church*

One of the wonderful gifts that we have as Catholics is that our faith is an incarnational faith, concretely expressed not just in the written or spoken word but also through sight, touch, smell, and sound. Our Catholic faith is rich in works of beauty, from the hymns of St. Thomas Aquinas to the paintings of Caravaggio. And just as we beautifully adorn our church buildings to glorify God and inspire us to worship, our homes should also be a reminder that Christ dwells in our midst. Talk together about how you can remind yourselves and your guests of Christ’s presence in your homes through beautiful images (especially the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Immaculate Heart of Mary), crucifixes, music, holy water, blessed candles, and a home altar or prayer corner. Remember: your home is a little church!

### *Observing the Lord’s Day*

Each Sunday is a “little Easter” when we gather for Mass and observe a day of rest and leisure. Because of our fast-paced lives, Sunday can easily become lost in the shuffle and lose its sacred identity. Come up with a “game plan” together to reclaim Sundays for the Lord. Discuss together

how to make this day a day that is distinctive, marked by a true spirit of joy and holy leisure! Consider any extras that can be given up like going to the store, eating out, or any extracurricular activities that meet on Sundays. Come up with ways to spend time together as a family.

### *Honoring the Word of God*

Recent popes have highlighted the importance of the “Family Bible” placed in a prominent location in the home and used frequently by the members of the family. In addition to placing the Sacred Scriptures in a prominent, accessible location in your home, it is also important to have a copy of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* readily available. For young children, have age-appropriate books available on the Catholic faith, the Bible, the saints, and the Mass and sacraments.

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## **RESOURCES FOR FURTHER LEARNING**

### **Church Documents**

Available for free online at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

*Casti connubii* (On Christian Marriage), an Encyclical of Pope Pius XI

*Humanae vitae* (Of Human Life), an Encyclical of Pope Paul VI

*Familiaris consortio* (The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World), a Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II

*Gratissimam sane* (Letter to Families), a Letter of Pope John Paul II

*Amoris laetitia* (The Joy of Love), a Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraphs 533, 1655-58, & 2201-2206

*Family: Become What You Are*, a Pastoral Letter of Archbishop Samuel Aquila

*Complete My Joy*, an Apostolic Exhortation of Bishop Thomas Olmsted



## **Books**

*Building Your Domestic Church* by Ken Judice & Published by Christian Faith Publishing

*The Catholic Family Handbook: Time-Tested Ways to Help You Strengthen Your Marriage and Raise Good Kids* by Fr. Lawrence G. Lovasik & Published by Sophia Institute Press

*The Domestic Church Room by Room* by Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle & Published by Servant Publishing

*Feast! Real Food, Reflections, and Simple Living for the Christian Year* by Daniel and Haley Stewart – Independently Published

*Theology of Home: Finding the Eternal in the Everyday* by Carrie Gress, Megan Schrieber, and Noelle Mering & Published by TAN Books and Publishers

## **Websites & Blog Posts**

[The Family as the Domestic Church](#) from Dr. Marcellino D'Ambrosio

[How to Bless Your Children](#) from the Catholic Gentleman

[How \(+Why\) to Build Your Domestic Church](#) from Blessed Is She

[Our Domestic Church](#) from the Knights of Columbus

[Saints Who Were Family](#) from the Cora Evans blog

[Tools for Building a Domestic Church](#) from United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

## **Podcasts & Talks**

**The Catholic Man Show:** The Purposeful Domicile with Dr. John Cuddeback

**The Fountains of Carrots:** The Sacramental Table: Food, Hospitality, and God's Love

**The Messy Family Podcast:** Building a Family Culture

**The Messy Family Podcast:** Elements of a Family Culture

**Our Lady of the Cul-de-Sac:** Making Our Home a Domestic Church by Mark Hart

# FAMILY, A DOMESTIC CHURCH

## SESSION THREE: A FAMILY OF PRAYER

### The Place of Prayer in the Family

#### Research Principles Covered (See Appendix A):

1.5; 1.7; 1.8; 1.9; 2.1; 2.3; 2.6; 3.1; 3.2; 3.5; 3.6; 3.8; 3.10; 3.11; 3.13; 3.15; 4.1; 4.7; 4.8; 4.10;  
4.12; 4.13

## OPENING PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth. Amen.

## THE WORD

### Philippians 4:4-7

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

## IN THIS SESSION

### You will . . .

- Discover the essence of prayer as an encounter and a relationship with God
- Learn about the benefits of prayer and how prayer can strengthen your relationship as a couple
- Appreciate the connection between the Mass, the sacraments, and family prayer
- Explore three types of prayer within the domestic church: personal, spousal, and familial

## THE TEACHING

**John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, 59**

*Family prayer has for its very own object family life itself, which in all its varying circumstances is seen as a call from God and lived as a filial response to His call. Joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments . . . should be seen as suitable moments for thanksgiving, for petition, for trusting abandonment of the family into the hands of their common Father in heaven. The dignity and responsibility of the Christian family as the domestic Church can be achieved only with God's unceasing aid, which will surely be granted if it is humbly and trustingly petitioned in prayer.*

### **Key Points**

- For Saint John Paul II, witnessing his own father in prayer was a pivotal part of his spiritual journey
- Prayer, placing ourselves in God's presence, is supposed to be the heart and soul of the domestic church
- There are three kinds of prayer in family life: personal, spousal, and familial
- Personal prayer is the vital and personal relationship that each Christian has with God
- Spousal prayer is a powerful way in which couples can grow in intimacy with each other by inviting Christ into the heart of their marriage and drawing deeply on the graces of the Sacrament of Marriage
- Family prayer teaches each member of the family to turn to God in their joys and sorrows and to grow in love for each other and God
- Parents witness to their children the importance of turning to God in all things, and children can help their parents with this as well
- By planning ahead, starting small, and embracing the messiness of growing closer to God, praying together as a couple and as a family is possible

## DISCUSS

- As you heard the witness couples discuss their own experiences with spousal and family prayer, what stood out to you?

- John Paul writes that “family prayer has for its very own object family life itself which in all its varying circumstances is seen as a call from God and lived as a filial response to His call. Joys and sorrows, hopes and disappointments . . . should be seen as suitable moments for thanksgiving, for petition, for trusting abandonment of the family into the hands of their common Father in heaven.” How can you bring your daily life into your prayer?
- Of the three kinds of prayer, which one are you the best at? Which one do you feel God is leading you to grow in?
- What is one concrete step you can take, beginning today, to grow your prayer life as a couple?

## FROM THE TRADITION

### Selection from *Story of a Soul*, by St. Thérèse of Lisieux

How great is the power of *Prayer!* . . . To be heard it is not necessary to read from a book some beautiful formula composed for the occasion . . . . There are so many [beautiful prayers] that it really gives me a headache! And each prayer is more *beautiful* than the others. I cannot recite them all and not knowing which to choose, I do like children who do not know how to read, I say very simply to God what I wish to say, without composing beautiful sentences, and He always understands me. For to me, *prayer* is an aspiration of the heart, it is a simple glance directed to heaven, it is a cry of gratitude and love in the midst of trial as well as joy; finally, it is something great, supernatural, which expands my soul and unites me to Jesus.

## WITH THE SAINTS

### *Karol Wojtyła, Sr. (Father of Saint John Paul II)*

Undoubtedly the biggest influence on the man whom history would know as Saint John Paul II was his father, Karol Wojtyła Sr. From his earliest memories, Saint John Paul remembered his father kneeling at his bedside at all hours of the night conversing with the Lord. The future pope described his father as “a man of constant prayer.” The biographer of the pope, George Weigel, noted that one of the biggest lessons that the son learned from his father was that manliness and prayerfulness were not opposed; that in fact the dignity of the human person is expressed most deeply when on his knees.

After his wife Emilia passed away when young Karol was only nine, the Captain (as he was universally known) devoted the best of his time and energies to forming his son in a deep life of prayer and sacrifice. In the midst of the most trying of circumstances, such as the Second World War and the Communist occupation of Poland, the elder Wojtyła remained a steadfast rock of faith, anchored in a profound spiritual life. In addition to attending Holy Mass together daily,

father and son frequently took time to read the Sacred Scriptures, pray the Rosary, and make visits to pilgrimage sites throughout their country. The young Wojtyła learned from his father's witness that prayer was the lifeblood of a disciple of Christ.

When young Karol was 11 years old and struggling in math class, his father taught him a prayer to the Holy Spirit called the *Veni Creator Spiritus* (Come, Creator Spirit), and suggested that he pray to the Holy Spirit each day. Looking back, John Paul recalled that he had heeded his father's advice to pray the *Veni Creator* every day afterwards for the rest of his life.

In the midst of the tragedy of losing his mother and his older brother, this young man was sustained by the example of the man who became for him the greatest witness of a life lived for Christ and for others. From the "seminary of the home," the father of the man the world would know as John Paul II planted a seed that would grow and bear great fruit for many millions of people. From this simple man of faith parents can learn how important and irreplaceable their role is in raising up future saints. We can learn from his example that daily perseverance in prayer overflows in a life lived entirely for love of God and neighbor.

- What does Saint John Paul's father have to teach us about prayer and the importance of the father as a spiritual model and mentor?
- Prayer strengthened young Karol and his father through very difficult times. How has prayer helped you through your own difficulties?

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

### *Veni Creator Spiritus*

Come, Holy Spirit, Creator blest,  
and in our souls take up Thy rest;  
come with Thy grace and heavenly aid  
to fill the hearts which Thou hast made.

O comforter, to Thee we cry,  
O heavenly gift of God Most High,  
O fount of life and fire of love,  
and sweet anointing from above.

Thou in Thy sevenfold gifts are known;  
Thou, finger of God's hand we own;  
Thou, promise of the Father,  
Thou Who dost the tongue with power imbue.

Kindle our sense from above,  
and make our hearts overflow with love;  
with patience firm and virtue high  
the weakness of our flesh supply.

Far from us drive the foe we dread,  
and grant us Thy peace instead;  
so shall we not, with Thee for guide,  
turn from the path of life aside.

Oh, may Thy grace on us bestow  
the Father and the Son to know;  
and Thee, through endless times confessed,  
of both the eternal Spirit blest.

Now to the Father and the Son,  
Who rose from death, be glory given,  
with Thou, O Holy Comforter,  
henceforth by all in earth and heaven. Amen.

## **BRING IT HOME**

### ***Hearts Afire: Praying with Your Spouse***

*On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples. When the wine failed, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."*

- John 2:1-5

*Family prayer has its own characteristic qualities. It is prayer offered in common, husband and wife together, parents and children together.*

- Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, 59

Prayer is at the very heart of the domestic church. This is because we live as we pray. The Church has an ancient maxim to describe the inextricable bond of prayer, belief, and life: "*lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*," or loosely translated, the law of praying is the law of believing is the law of living. Spouses and families who open the door of their hearts to Jesus regularly in prayer find that he accompanies them throughout the day. In particular, spousal prayer is essential in helping couples to grow together in intimacy with the Lord and each other. Yet, praying together as a couple can seem like a daunting thing. Sometimes, spiritual intimacy

is more challenging than physical or emotional intimacy as a couple. How then can we make prayer a reality in our marriage?

It is important to remember that through the Sacrament of Marriage, Christ is already present in your relationship. If we keep this in mind, prayer is really a matter of becoming aware of that fact! The Lord is already there, knocking on the doors of your hearts. Whether you are just beginning to pray as a couple or have been praying together for some time, Jesus Christ wants you to experience the fullness of life in him through your prayer together. Below is a three-stage process that will help you begin or deepen your prayer life together. Remember the words of St. Paul that remind us that it is the Holy Spirit who moves us to prayer, and also the Holy Spirit who prays in us even when we don't know what to say: "The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words" (Romans 8:26).

### **1. Dip Your Toes In**

The first thing to remember is that there is no specific "right way" to pray. The key is to establish a daily routine of prayer and to determine a time that will be workable. Each couple's prayer will be as unique as that couple. If you are just starting out, a great way to begin is to use simple prayers you both know. Start with an *Our Father* or *Hail Mary*. Perhaps read a Psalm together. Next, take turns naming any specific prayer intentions each one has. Last, take time to give thanks to God for answered prayers, blessings, or anything else that comes to mind. Conclude your prayer time with a *Glory Be* or another simple prayer. Remember that your spouse may not be as comfortable praying in this way, so be patient with yourself and each other!

### **2. Go Snorkeling**

Once you are comfortable with the basic habit of praying together, it can be time to go a bit deeper. Consider introducing Scripture into your prayer together by reading one of the Mass readings for the day. You may also have a devotional book or book of prayers that you both enjoy. After reading a passage of Scripture or a reflection from a devotional, spend some time in silence together reflecting on what you have just heard. Many couples also enjoy praying the Rosary together. Consider praying one decade or more of the Rosary and spend time meditating on the mysteries of Jesus's life. For the prayer intentions, consider writing down prayer intentions and then sharing them during prayer. Some couples find it helpful to text, call, or email each other any prayer intentions they have so they can be praying about them throughout the day. Take time to be reconciled with each other by asking for forgiveness for anything you have said, done, or neglected to do. End with a time of thanksgiving and praise, perhaps introducing a song or hymn to conclude the prayer.

### **3. Deep-Sea Diving**

If you have been praying together as a couple for a while, you can grow still closer to God and one another by incorporating new kinds of prayer into your time together. You might read Scripture aloud to one another and meditate on its meaning – a form of *Lectio Divina*. Or you might learn more about the practice of Ignatian prayer, the Liturgy of the Hours, or other kinds of meditation or contemplation that are part of our Catholic tradition. Consider spending at least one day a week in silent prayer together before the Lord either in front of a tabernacle at church or in a Eucharistic Adoration Chapel. This is an excellent way to begin or end a date night! Jesus is always calling us deeper into prayer and relationship. Challenge yourselves always to go deeper in your prayer time together!

### ***Let the Children Come: Praying with your Children (While Maintaining Your Sanity!)***

*Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.*

- Matthew 19:14

The above ideas for couples can also apply to beginning to pray together as a family. Starting small is key to not giving up and not feeling like you have failed before you even begin. Here are some more practical ideas to consider:

- Attach prayer to certain times of the day. The *Angelus* is a formal prayer that is meant to be prayed at 6:00 am, noon, and 6:00 pm. This is a beautiful tradition, but even if you are not usually together at those times, you can make it a habit to pray the *Angelus* or another small prayer together before leaving the house for school or work. Praying before meals is easy enough, but you might also try praying before naptime, during the ride to school, or before turning on the TV at night. The key is to attach prayer to habits you have already established.
- Vary the ways that you pray. There is no one right way to pray together as a family, and family prayer time is an opportunity to introduce your children to the richness of our faith tradition. You can practice memorized prayers, pray a litany, sing a Psalm, read from the Bible, pray a Divine Mercy chaplet, or simply take turns, each of you praying aloud, thanking God for one thing and asking God for one thing. Your children with their different preferences and personalities might like certain prayers more than others. Having variety in your family prayer allows them (and you!) to learn which ones ignite their hearts most.



- Pray to your guardian angels. Teach your children about their guardian angels! They will love knowing that God has given each of us the gift of a heavenly helper that we can call on to give us strength and protection when we need it. Even very young children can memorize this traditional prayer and pray it with you: *Angel of God, my guardian dear, to whom God's love commits me here, ever this day, be at my side, to light and guard, rule and guide. Amen.*

Here is a sample structure for family prayer time to help you get started:

**Pray Together:**

*Sign of the Cross*

Each person takes a turn, praying aloud, asking God for one thing and thanking God for one thing. A 3-year-old might ask God to bless his mommy and thank God for his blankie. A high schooler might ask God to bless a struggling friend and thank God for a good grade in Algebra. Everyone has an opportunity to bring petitions and thanksgiving before God, and then the whole family can pray together for these intentions.

Once everyone has had a turn, dad or mom or an older child can choose some memorized prayers to pray together. For example:

*Our Father*

*Hail Mary*

*St. Michael Prayer*

*Glory Be*

*Sign of the Cross*

*Amen*

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## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER LEARNING

### Church Documents

Available for free online at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

*Marialis cultus* (For the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary), an Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI

*Familiaris consortio* (The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World), a Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II

*Gratissimam sane* (Letter to Families), a Letter of Pope John Paul II

*Amoris laetitia* (The Joy of Love), a Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraphs 2559-2565 & 2623-2745

### Books

*The Catholic All Year Compendium: Liturgical Living for Real Life* by Kendra Tierney & Published by Ignatius Press

*Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers* from the U.S. Catholic Bishops

*The Little Oratory: A Beginner's Guide to Praying in the Home* by David Clayton & Leila Marie Lawler & Published by Sophia Institute Press

*A Missal for Children* Published by Magnificat Press

*A Missal for Little Ones* Published by Magnificat Press

*A Missal for Toddlers* Published by Magnificat Press

*A Psalter for Couples* by Pierre-Marie Dumont & Published by Magnificat Press

*A Short Guide to Praying as a Family* from the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia

*St. Gregory Prayer Book* Published by Ignatius Press

### Websites & Blog Posts

*For Your Marriage* ([www.foryourmarriage.com](http://www.foryourmarriage.com)) a marriage resource provided by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

[5 Saint Therese Quotes to Help You Live the "Little Way" in Marriage](#) from Spoken Bride

[Divine Romance: A Collection of Patrons & Prayers for Your Relationship](#) from Spoken Bride

[How to Pray with Your Spouse](#) from Joined By Grace

### **YouTube Videos**

[Catholic Family Prayer Time](#) from A Catholic Mom's Life

[How to Get Kids to Pray](#) from Jackie & Bobby Angel

[Prayer for the Family](#) from Catholic Online

[A Short Guide to Praying as a Family](#) from EWTN

[Ways to Start the Day With Jesus](#) from Matt Fradd

### **Podcasts**

**The Girlfriends Podcast with Danielle Bean:** Making Family Prayer Time Happen

**The Messy Family Podcast:** Family Prayer

**The Messy Family Podcast:** The Spiritual Life of Children

# FAMILY, A DOMESTIC CHURCH

## SESSION FOUR: PRIESTS, PROPHETS, AND KINGS

### How Families Build the Kingdom of God

#### Research Principles Covered (See Appendix A):

1.3; 1.5; 1.6; 1.7; 1.8; 1.9; 2.6; 2.8; 2.9; 2.10; 3.1; 3.3; 3.5; 3.8; 3.9; 3.12; 3.13; 3.15; 4.1; 4.4;  
4.5; 4.7; 4.8; 4.11; 4.12; 4.13

### OPENING PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth. Amen.

### THE WORD

#### 1 Peter 2:4-5, 9

*Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ . . . [For] you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*

### IN THIS SESSION

#### You will . . .

- Learn how families build up the Kingdom of God through the ordinary circumstances of daily life
- Discover how the Sacrament of Baptism gives all members of the family equal dignity as sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly offices of Jesus Christ
- Appreciate the distinctive ways in which the Sacrament of Marriage consecrates Catholic spouses and parents to exercise their priestly, prophetic, and kingly vocation

- Explore how each member of the family is called to live in accord with the dignity they have received by offering their lives as a sacrifice to God the Father in union with Christ

## THE TEACHING

**John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, 50:**

*The Christian family also builds up the Kingdom of God in history through the everyday realities that concern and distinguish its state of life. It is thus in the love between husband and wife . . . that the Christian family's participation in the prophetic, priestly and kingly mission of Jesus Christ and of His Church finds expression and realization. Therefore, love and life constitute the nucleus of the saving mission of the Christian family in the Church and for the Church.*

### **Key Points**

- Through the Sacrament of Baptism each Christian becomes a sharer in Christ's office as Priest, Prophet, and King
- As *priests*, spouses love each other and their children with the tender love of God the Father and unite themselves with Christ's sacrifice on the Cross
- As *prophets*, they teach their children God's truth and by their word and example model the life of a Christian disciple
- As *kings*, they receive from God the authority to lead and guide their children in loving service
- Living out priesthood, prophecy, and kingship helps all members of the family to live in the image and likeness of God
- Christian families have a unique opportunity to build up the Kingdom of God on earth as leaven in the world, transforming the world from within

## DISCUSS

- Saint John Paul writes that "the Christian family builds up the Kingdom of God in history through . . . everyday realities." What are your "everyday realities" that you can transform into a means of building God's Kingdom?

- Have you thought of yourself before as a sharer in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission of Christ? What does this mean to you?
- How can you cultivate a deeper appreciation of the gifts of baptism in each member of your family?
- What is one concrete step you can take as a family to develop your mission of service to one another?

## FROM THE TRADITION

### **Pope Saint Leo the Great** **Selection from Sermon 21**

Christian, remember your dignity, and now that you share in God's own nature, do not return by sin to your former base condition. Bear in mind who is your head and of whose body you are a member. Do not forget that you have been rescued from the power of darkness and brought into the light of God's kingdom. Through the Sacrament of Baptism you have become a temple of the Holy Spirit. Do not drive away so great a guest by evil conduct and become again a slave to the devil, for your liberty was bought by the blood of Christ.

## WITH THE SAINTS

### ***King Louis IX of France*** **Feast Day: August 25**

When his father died, Louis became the king of France. It was five months before his thirteenth birthday, and Louis VIII had died after returning from a battle against a heretical and rebellious sect in southern France.

Louis's mother, Blanche, ran the kingdom until he turned 21, when he took full power as monarch. Blanche was devoted to her son, ensuring that he had the finest education and formation befitting the boy who would become King of the Catholic nation. Yet her first devotion was to Jesus Christ, and her great piety and wisdom would be reflected in the faith and character of the king she raised from infancy. As is so often the case with the formation of great souls, character was born of pain and tragedy: Louis was the fourth child of the king and queen, the previous three dying early in life.

Louis acquired not only his mother's piety, he also followed in her footsteps as a strong ruler. Both would quell revolts and repel attacks from outside forces with great force, maintaining and in some cases strengthening the position of the throne. Although one should not romanticize what must have in some cases been imperfect and at times ruthless efforts, there is also evidence

of prudence and even political savvy. Louis, who fought as a knight alongside his soldiers, also became known for his humility and his justice—often personally dining with the poor, and sharing the family’s wealth with those who suffered.

As was the custom of the day, the queen mother arranged the marriage of her royal son. Louis and Margaret married in May 1234, and the devoted parents would have eleven children. Louis used his great wealth and power to administer justice equitably among those with disputes, to foster vocations to the priesthood and religious life, to build churches, including the spectacular Saint Chappelle in Paris, and to care for those who were suffering.

Louis led the Seventh Crusade in 1249, sailing with 35,000 men to attack Egypt and use it to ransom Muslim-captured cities in Syria. After a long and tortuous effort, he was victorious, though the army was decimated by losses from battle and disease. Louis, who also suffered from the plague that had overtaken his surviving forces, was captured upon retreating, and managed to hear daily Mass during his captivity along other daily pieties. Upon his ransom and release, he remained to negotiate relief for Christians in Syria, before returning to France after learning of his mother’s death.

During the ensuing years he became a major patron of the Church, the arts, higher education, and charities that he often personally oversaw. Maintaining strong personal habits of mortification and piety, he further strengthened the throne through various alliances and laws before returning to Northern Africa to lead another crusade in Tunisia. Though victorious in their battle, the plague again ravaged the French forces, including their king, who succumbed in August 1270. Knowing that the end was near, Louis prepared his son, Philip, as best as he could to be king, emphasizing the need for faith, virtue, and great concern for the poor.

In death, Louis IX was immediately revered as a saint by his subjects, though he was not canonized until 1297. In the story of St. Louis, we see one of the rare cases of a leader who did not let earthly power corrupt him, who put his authority into the service of those he ruled over, and who exemplifies the priestly, prophetic, and kingly dignity of the baptized.

- What did King Louis’s mother Blanche teach him about building up the Kingdom of God?
- How can Louis’s life inspire you to prioritize the Kingdom of God in your own life?

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

### **Adapted from the Prayer of Anointing after Baptism**

God of power and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
you have freed us from sin, and you gave us a  
new birth by water and the Holy Spirit.

You welcomed us into your holy people as your sons and daughters.  
You anointed us with the chrism of salvation  
that we might participate in Christ's own  
Priesthood, Prophecy, and Kingship.  
Help us to remember our baptism, and to abide in  
your goodness, that we might always live as members of  
your body, even unto life everlasting. Amen.

## **BRING IT HOME**

### ***Offer it Up: How to Build a Family Culture of Joyful Sacrifice***

*I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*

- Romans 12:1

Marriage and family life offer countless opportunities to offer sacrifice. This exercise will help couples cultivate a supernatural perspective on the joys and struggles of life and offer them up with Jesus in the Holy Eucharist.

Living with and making accommodations for another person, day in and day out, is no easy thing. In marriage, couples have endless opportunities to practice sacrifice. Often, we don't need to go looking for things to offer up -- they come to us. Just as Jesus gave his life for us on the Cross, we are called to unite our sufferings with his for our own sake and for the sake of others. Our suffering takes on new meaning and we can especially grow in love, grace, and holiness when we offer up our sufferings for one another inside of marriage.

Do you offer up things for your spouse and for your marriage? Beginning this week, practice being intentional about offering up small sacrifices for your spouse. You can sacrifice in ways that help to nurture your relationship and that communicate love to your spouse. If you also unite your sacrifice with Christ's and offer up these things for the sake of your marriage, the blessings will multiply. It is a particularly beautiful prayer to offer these sacrifices to Christ during the celebration of the Holy Eucharist at Mass. In the midst of your other prayers during Holy Communion, also think of what you're trying to offer up on your spouse's behalf. To help you see that your relationship is rife with opportunities for offering up, each day of the week, focus on one kind of sacrifice. Below is a suggested list of themes:

#### *Communication*

Make sacrifices in your verbal communication with your spouse. You might ask about his or her day, and then listen with love, when you are tired and would rather watch TV. You might hold your tongue when you are tempted to have the last word in a disagreement. You might offer a compliment when you are tempted to criticize.

#### *Service*



Look for ways that you can offer a gift of service to your spouse. You could offer to take the kids to soccer when it's really his turn. You could wash her car. You could make their favorite dessert, empty the dishwasher, take out the trash, or pick up the screaming baby. Offer the gift of service for the sake of your marriage.

### *Offer it Up*

Think of something you usually enjoy and give it up for just one day, offering this sacrifice for your spouse. You might skip sugar in your coffee, an afternoon snack, watching a TV show, or scrolling through Instagram. Whatever you choose to give up, offer it silently and without complaint, united to Christ's suffering on the Cross, for the sake of your spouse.

### *Prayer*

Could you offer a little more prayer today for your spouse? Perhaps pray a *Memorare* on your commute to work or pray a decade of the Rosary during your lunch. You might simply add something extra to your daily prayer time, offering it as a gift to God for your marriage. Offer this extra time in prayer especially for your spouse's intentions, asking God to bless him or her and help them to grow in holiness.

### *Gifts*

Think of something small you can give as a surprise gift to your spouse. Bring home a treat from that bakery she likes or buy him a pair of those socks he likes. Think about what he or she likes and will enjoy, and then offer up your efforts for your marriage.

### *Get Inspired*

Spend some time in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to guide you in your marriage. Ask for the wisdom to know in what specific ways you are being called to love and serve your spouse right now. After praying, spend some time in silence. Open your heart to what God wants to tell you and be ready to act on it.

### *Time*

Put away your phone! Turn off the TV! Spend some time doing something together with your spouse. Even better if you can get outdoors and away from distractions. Maybe go for a walk, or take a hike and really give yourselves time to talk and re-connect.

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## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER LEARNING

### Church Documents

Available for free online at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

*Lumen gentium* (Light of the Gentiles), The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church from the Second Vatican Council, paragraphs 10-12, 30-38

*Familiaris consortio* (The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World), a Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II

*Christifideles laici* (On the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful), a Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II

*Gratissimam sane* (Letter to Families), a Letter of Pope John Paul II

*Amoris laetitia* (The Joy of Love), a Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraphs 1141, 1213-1284, 1544-1547, 1657

### Books

*Catholic Laity in the Mission of the Church: Living Your Personal Vocation* by Russell Shaw – Independently Published

*The Household and the War for the Cosmos* by C.R. Wiley & Published by Canon Press

*The Three Marks of Manhood: How to be Priest, Prophet, and King of Your Family* by G.C. Dilsaver & Published by TAN Books

### Websites & Blog Posts

[Priests, Prophets, Kings](#) from Word on Fire

[Priest, Prophet, and King – Who Me?](#) From Catholic Digest

[The Three Munera of Fatherhood](#) from the Catholic Gentleman

[The Father as Prophet](#) from the Catholic Gentleman

[The Father as Priest](#) from the Catholic Gentleman

[The Father as King](#) from the Catholic Gentleman

## **YouTube Videos**

[Priest, Prophet, King Lesson 1](#) from Bishop Robert Barron

[Priest, Prophet, King: The Mission of Christ's Lay Disciples](#) from JD Flynn

## **Podcasts & Talks**

**Changed Forever:** The Sacrament of Baptism by Fr. Mike Schmitz, available on FORMED

**The What We're Dealing With Podcast:** Are You Living Out Your Baptism?

# FAMILY, A DOMESTIC CHURCH

## SESSION FIVE: HERALDS OF THE GOSPEL

### The Educational Mission of the Family

#### Research Principles Covered (See Appendix A):

1.8; 2.1; 2.3; 2.9; 2.10; 3.4; 3.7; 4.1; 4.2; 4.3; 4.4; 4.5; 4.6; 4.7; 4.8; 4.10; 4.12; 4.13

### OPENING PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth. Amen.

### THE WORD

#### Psalm 78:3-6

*All that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us, we will not hide from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders which he has wrought. He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children; that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children.*

### IN THIS SESSION

#### You will . . .

- Come to realize the essential role of parents as heralds of the Gospel and teachers of the Catholic Faith
- Appreciate the awesome privilege and responsibility of introducing children into a relationship with Jesus Christ
- Discover what the Rite of Baptism and the Rite of Matrimony teach parents about their critical educational mission to their children

- Learn practical ways that you can make your domestic church into a “school for following Christ”

## THE TEACHING

### John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, 63

*The educational mission of the Christian family [is] a true ministry through which the Gospel is transmitted and radiated, so that family life itself becomes an itinerary of faith and in some way a Christian initiation and a school of following Christ. . . .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 Eucharistic and the ecclesial Body—they become fully parents, in that they are begetters not only of bodily life but also of the life that through the Spirit's renewal flows from the Cross and Resurrection of Christ.*

#### **Key Points**

- The educational mission of parents is a true ministry in the Church
- Parents are both the first “heralds” and the first teachers of the faith for their children
- By the grace of the Sacrament of Marriage, parents are empowered to be the first heralds and teachers of their children in the ways of faith
- As heralds, parents are called to introduce their children to a loving knowledge of Jesus Christ
- As teachers, parents form their children in the Catholic Faith through their witness of life and through catechetical instruction, prayer, regular celebration of the sacraments, and cultivating the virtues
- The seed of faith received at baptism is entrusted into the hands of fathers and mothers in order to provide the soil for that faith to grow
- At their child’s baptism, parents are reminded of the privilege and responsibility of raising them in the practice of the Catholic Faith
- In order to hand on the Catholic Faith to their children, mothers and fathers must cultivate their own intimate loving knowledge of Christ and the Church

- The domestic church is the first and primary place for proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ and handing on the Catholic Faith
- The Great Commission that Christ gave to make disciples of all nations is entrusted in a special way to Christian parents

## DISCUSS

- Saint John Paul II teaches that the educational ministry of parents is a true ministry in the Church. What are the implications of really taking this truth to heart?
- What are some of the “false gospels” the world proposes that you need to be prepared to combat?
- What are you already doing to grow in your loving knowledge of Christ and the Catholic Faith?
- John Paul reminds us that educating in the Faith is more than communicating information—it is an apprenticeship in a whole way of life including prayer, celebration of the sacraments, and prayerfully reading the Bible. What do you see as areas for growth for your domestic church so that it can become a “school of following Christ”?

## FROM THE TRADITION

Selection from *Summa contra gentiles* by Thomas Aquinas  
 Also quoted in *Familiaris consortio*, 38

Some only propagate and guard spiritual life by a spiritual ministry: this is the role of the sacrament of Orders; others do this for both corporal and spiritual life, and this is brought about by the sacrament of Marriage, by which a man and a woman join in order to beget offspring and bring them up to worship God.

## WITH THE SAINTS

*Saint Stephen of Hungary*

**Feast Day: August 16**

*“Saint Stephen was conscious of transmitting this legacy to future generations... Your holy king, dear sons and daughters of the Hungarian nation, has left you as a legacy not only the royal crown received from Pope Sylvester II. He left his spiritual testament, a legacy of fundamental*

and indestructible values: the real house built on the rock. *This building founded on the rock is not only a doctrine or a set of laws and councils or a human institution: it is above all a firm witness of Christian life. Saint Stephen was a Christian who believed in revealed truth, fixed his heart on Jesus, true God and true man, and followed his word without hesitation*” (Pope John Paul II, Homily given in Budapest on August 20, 1991).

St. Stephen of Hungary is known as the Apostle of Hungary for his diligence in spreading the Faith in Eastern Europe. Born to the Duke and Duchess of Hungary, his family converted to Christianity and Stephen grew up in knowledge of and love for Christ. When he was 20, he married Gisela – the sister of St. Henry II who later became the Holy Roman Emperor. Stephen and Gisela worked together to spread the Faith to their people because they desired to use their position of power to extend and further the message of the Gospel. The couple used their wealth to build many churches, convents, and monasteries, and invited the clergy to convert and instruct the people. Gisela made liturgical objects and vestments that she donated to the various churches, monasteries, and convents. Together they were very generous to the poor and made themselves available to their subjects. Stephen suppressed revolting pagan factions among his people, and established laws that favored Christianity over paganism. With the help of St. Asteriscus, Stephen established several dioceses in Hungary and petitioned for their approval and his own kingship from Pope Sylvester II. He was anointed and crowned King of Hungary on Christmas Day in 1001 by St. Asteriscus.

Stephen and Gisela were models of Christian love and devotion to their children, all but one of whom died in childhood. Stephen conscientiously taught the Faith to his only surviving son, Emeric, who was to follow in his father’s footsteps as a great Christian king. Stephen wrote several *Admonitions* to his son with words of advice such as, “My dearest son, if you desire to honor the royal crown, I advise, I counsel, I urge you above all things to maintain the Catholic and apostolic faith with such diligence and care that you may be an example for all those placed under you by God and that all the clergy may rightly call you a man of true Christian profession.”

Stephen had such a great devotion to the Blessed Mother that he named her the patroness of Hungary and built several beautiful shrines in her honor. He asked that she be called “the Great Lady” by his subjects, and when someone made reference to her, everyone would bow their heads or bend their knees. He died on the Solemnity of the Assumption of Mary, and rose his crown to “the Great Lady” with his dying breath. Having encouraged his family in holiness to the last, Stephen was canonized with his son Emeric in 1083 and Gisela was beatified in 1975. Stephen was a king, a father, and a man dedicated to spreading the Gospel in his home and to his people.

- Stephen saw it as his sacred duty to educate his people and his son in the faith. What does it mean to you that parents are meant to be the first educators of their children in the faith?

- How do you (or how do you want to) teach your children about Christ and his Church?

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

### **A Parent's Prayer**

All praise to You, Lord Jesus,  
Lover of children:  
Bless our family,  
And help us to lead our children to You.

Give us light and strength,  
And courage when our task is difficult.  
Let Your Spirit fill us with love and peace,  
So that we may help our children to love You.

All glory and praise are Yours, Lord Jesus,  
For ever and ever. Amen.

## **BRING IT HOME**

### ***“Who? Me? An Evangelizer?”: How Spouses and Parents Can Proclaim the Gospel***

*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and love, I am with you always, to the close of the age.*

- Matthew 28:19-20

You might not remember many of the details from the ceremony on your wedding day. There were a lot of distracting details to attend to! But the Rite of Marriage -- the words we use and prayers we say in the Sacrament of Matrimony -- are a beautiful reminder of who God calls us to be within our marriages and families.

Together, read aloud these passages taken from the Nuptial Blessing, which is part of the Wedding Liturgy:

*“Look now with favor on these your servants, joined together in Marriage, who ask to be strengthened by your blessing. Send down on them the grace of the Holy Spirit and pour your love into their hearts, that they may remain faithful in the Marriage covenant . . .*

*And now, Lord, we implore you: may these your servants hold fast to the faith and keep your commandments; made one in the flesh, may they be blameless in all they do; and with the strength that comes from the Gospel, may they bear true witness to Christ before all; (may*



*they be blessed with children, and prove themselves virtuous parents, who live to see their children's children.)”*

After reading, take turns answering the following:

- What kind of calling do you hear in the words of this blessing? Do you feel encouraged by it?
- Why do you suppose the Church prays for couples to be virtuous parents even before they have any children?
- Do you ever feel anxious about your responsibilities as parents? How might focusing on these parts of the blessing encourage you? “Send down on them the grace of the Holy Spirit and pour your love into their hearts” and “with the strength that comes from the Gospel, may they bear true witness to Christ before all (may they be blessed with children, and prove themselves virtuous parents, who live to see their children's children).”

Next, let's consider the words used in the Rite of Baptism. You probably dressed your child in white, ordered a cake, and invited the grandparents that day; but in the midst of all the activity, did you notice how the priest addressed you, as your child's parents, at the start of the ceremony? Here is what he said:

*“In asking Baptism for your child, you are undertaking the responsibility of raising him (her) in the faith, so that, keeping God's commandments, he (she) may love the Lord and his (her) neighbor as Christ taught us. Do you understand this responsibility?”*

And then later in the rite, the priest reminds the parents again:

*“For your part, you must strive to bring him (her) up in the faith, so that this divine life may be preserved from the contagion of sin, and may grow in him (her) day by day.”*

And from the Blessing and Dismissal:

*“May the Lord God Almighty, the giver of life both in heaven and on earth, bless the father of this child, so that, together with his wife, they may, by word and example, prove to be the first witnesses of the faith to their child, in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Read these passages aloud, and then take turns answering the following:

- What do you think of the word “responsibility” here?
- How often do you think about your duty as a parent with regard to your child's faith?
- Do you consider this responsibility as important as the responsibilities to feed and clothe your child?

Choose one or two lines from the Rites of Marriage or Baptism above that inspire you and write them on a note card or small piece of paper. Keep this note somewhere in the house where you will see it daily, perhaps taped to a calendar or near the kitchen sink. Every time you see these words, re-read them and remind yourself that God had a plan for you and your spouse to be parents to your children even before your children were conceived. He calls you to be the first witnesses and teachers of your children in the faith and gives you the grace you need to do it.

Be prepared to share your thoughts on the above questions and your favorite lines from the Rites with your Circle at the next Circle gathering.

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## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER LEARNING

### Church Documents

Available for free online at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

*Divini illius magistri* (On Christian Education), an Encyclical of Pope Pius XI

*Gravissimum educationis* (The Gravity of Education), the Declaration on Christian Education, from the Second Vatican Council

*Evangelii nuntiandi* (On Evangelization in the Modern World), a Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI

*Catechesi tradendae* (On Catechesis in Our Time), a Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II

*Familiaris consortio* (The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World), a Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II

*Lumen fidei* (The Light of Faith), an Encyclical of Pope Francis

*Evangelii gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), a Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1655-1658 & 2221-2231

## **Books**

*Around the Year with the von Trapp Family* by Maria Augusta von Trapp & Published by Sophia Institute Press

*Bless Me, Father, For I Have Kids* by Susie Lloyd & Published by Sophia Institute Press

*The Catholic Family Handbook: Time-Tested Ways to Help You Strengthen Your Marriage and Raise Good Kids* by Fr. Lawrence G. Lovasik & Published by Sophia Institute Press

*Discovering God Together: The Catholic Guide to Raising Faithful Kids* by Greg and Lisa Popcak & Published by Sophia Institute Press

*How to Raise Good Catholic Children* by Mary Reed Newland & Published by Sophia Institute Press

*Keep Your Kids Catholic: Sharing Your Faith and Making It Stick* by Marc Cardaronella & Published by Ave Maria Press

## **Websites & Blog Posts**

[Building Catholic Character: 5 Things Parents Can Do](#) from Catholic Education Resource Center

[Catholic Parenting – How to Do Everything You Can to Get Your Kid to Heaven!](#) from Catholic Missionary Disciples

[How to Keep Your Kids Catholic: Apologetics for Kids](#) from Not So Formulaic

[How to Raise Devoted Catholic Kids When they Attend Public School](#) from National Catholic Register

[Teaching the Faith Effectively](#) from EWTN

## **YouTube Videos**

[Cardinal Burke – Message to Parents](#) from the Lumen Fidei Institute

[Everyday Blessings for Catholic Moms - First & Foremost Educator](#) from EWTN

[Raising Your Kids Catholic!](#) from Matt Fradd

[Raising Children](#) from Ken Yasinski

[See How They Love One Another: The Family and the Faith](#) Dr. Gregory and Lisa Popcak from the World Meeting of Families

## **Podcasts**

**The Messy Parenting Podcast:** Passing on the Faith

**The Messy Parenting Podcast:** Evangelizing Your Kids

**The Messy Parenting Podcast:** Introducing our Children to the Blessed Mother

**The Messy Parenting Podcast:** Scripture and the Family

**The Messy Parenting Podcast:** The Irreplaceable Role of Parents

**Catholic Sprouts: Daily Podcast for Catholic Kids**

# FAMILY, A DOMESTIC CHURCH

## SESSION SIX: ORGINARY PEOPLE, EXTRAORDINARY LOVE

### The Call to Holiness in the Family

#### Research Principles Covered (See Appendix A):

1.1; 1.2; 1.3; 1.4; 1.7; 1.8; 1.9; 1.10; 2.5; 2.10; 3.1; 3.4; 3.7; 3.8; 3.9; 3.15; 4.10; 4.12; 4.13

## OPENING PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth. Amen.

## THE WORD

### Ephesians 1:3-6

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.*

## IN THIS SESSION

### You will . . .

- Discover how each and every Christian is called to holiness by making a total gift of self in love
- Explore how the vocation of marriage and family is a path to growing in holiness
- Appreciate how the path to holiness passes by way of the Cross of Christ
- Learn how the ordinary events of marriage and family life can become opportunities for loving in an extraordinary way

# THE TEACHING

## John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, 11

*God created man in His own image and likeness: calling him to existence through love, He called him at the same time for love. God is love and in Himself He lives a mystery of personal loving communion . . . God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion. Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being.*

### **Key Points**

- By virtue of the Sacrament of Baptism, every Christian is called to holiness, which is ultimately the perfection of love
- The heart of holiness is union with Jesus Christ and learning to love as Christ loves
- God gives the grace of the Holy Spirit through the sacraments to empower us to live lives of holiness
- Following in Christ's footsteps, Christians are entrusted with the grace necessary to become holy
- Christ reveals to us how to love in the Paschal Mystery of his suffering, death, and Resurrection
- Spouses and families are called to holiness in the ordinary tasks of their daily life
- Married couples are called to unite their sufferings to the Cross of Christ and grow in love
- Through the Sacrament of Marriage, husbands and wives are given special graces to love their spouse in an extraordinary way
- Marriage is meant to be a channel of God's grace to the entire family, the Church, and the world

### DISCUSS

- Have you thought about how you and your spouse are called to holiness in and through each other? What does this call mean to you?

- John Paul writes that spouses are “for one another and for the children witnesses to the salvation in which the sacrament makes them sharers.” How do and how can you be a witness to Christ’s salvation to one another?
- What is something you are good at offering to the Lord? In what way can you grow in offering up sacrifices out of love for your family?
- What is one concrete step you can take this week to love your spouse in an extraordinary way?

## FROM THE TRADITION

### Selection from *Casti connubii*, 23, by Pope Pius XI

This outward expression of love in the home demands not only mutual help but must go further; must have as its primary purpose that man and wife help each other day by day in forming and perfecting themselves in the interior life, so that through their partnership in life they may advance ever more and more in virtue, and above all that they may grow in true love toward God and their neighbor, on which indeed "dependeth the whole Law and the Prophets." For all men of every condition, in whatever honorable walk of life they may be, can and ought to imitate that most perfect example of holiness placed before man by God, namely Christ Our Lord, and by God's grace to arrive at the summit of perfection, as is proved by the example set us of many saints.

## WITH THE SAINTS

### *Gianna & Pietro Molla*

**Feast day: April 28**

*“Gianna Beretta Molla was a simple, but more than ever, significant messenger of divine love. In a letter to her future husband a few days before their marriage, she wrote: “Love is the most beautiful sentiment the Lord has put into the soul of men and women.” Following the example of Christ, who “having loved his own... loved them to the end” (Jn 13: 1), this holy mother of a family remained heroically faithful to the commitment she made on the day of her marriage. The extreme sacrifice she sealed with her life testifies that only those who have the courage to give of themselves totally to God and to others are able to fulfil themselves. Through the example of Gianna Beretta Molla, may our age rediscover the pure, chaste and fruitful beauty of conjugal love, lived as a response to the divine call” (Pope St. John Paul II, Canonization of Six Blessed Homily, May 16, 2004).*

In the 1950s, Pietro Molla and Gianna Berretta met. He was an engineer, and she was a doctor, but they were first and foremost faithful Catholics. After several fleeting encounters, they established a friendship after being invited to a mutual priest friend's first Mass. They fell in love; and their love for one another was grounded in their shared love for Christ. Together they built a marriage in the knowledge that their call was to lead each other and their children to heaven.

The Mollas loved each other in the everyday things: balancing work and family life, partaking in the sacraments as often as possible, writing love letters when one was out of town, taking time to be outdoors together, and treasuring their children. Gianna and Pietro also loved each other in the difficult moments: two miscarriages, painful and difficult pregnancies, frequent long distance work trips, and, ultimately, the sickness and death of Gianna. During her fourth pregnancy, Gianna developed a fibroid in her uterus and the doctors gave her three options, two of which would end the life of the child in her womb. She chose instead the life of her child and carried the pregnancy to term. She died a week later from an infection after her c-section delivery.

Gianna and Pietro loved each other, their children, and the Lord with an extraordinary sacrificial love. Virtue was the norm for them in living out their marriage vows so that when the crisis point arose with Gianna's fourth pregnancy, the choice for sacrificial love was the natural choice. For better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, Gianna and Pietro loved and cherished one another and their children with a holy, joyful love.

- John Paul II said that, "only those who have the courage to give of themselves totally to God and to others are able to fulfil themselves." Have you seen this proven true? Has someone in your life been a witness to this?
- What is one way you can choose extraordinary love in ordinary situations in your marriage?

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

### **St. Augustine's Prayer to the Holy Spirit**

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.  
Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my works too may be holy.  
Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love but what is holy.  
Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy.  
Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy. Amen.

## **BRING IT HOME**

### ***School of Love: Putting Together a Family Rule of Life***



*Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of the time...*  
- Ephesians 5:15-16

We sometimes fall into the trap of thinking that the call to holiness is only for monks and nuns who live out their vocations in monasteries and convents. But we are all called to become saints, and for those of us who are married, the place where we are called to do that is right in the domestic church -- right there in the midst of our homes and families.

Religious orders often have a “rule of life” that guides their daily living. A rule of life establishes how and when the religious do their prayers and their work. It thoughtfully examines virtues especially important to the community and sets boundaries for any disciplinary actions that might be necessary. A rule of life establishes the rhythm and flow of activity, but more importantly, it guides the culture within the monastery. A rule of life is a helpful tool for couples and families as well. We have many obligations and many goals we want to accomplish as a family; and a rule of life helps us to set up our daily living in accordance with our priorities and values – the most important family goal being heaven!

In the Bring it Home activity for Session Two, you and your spouse discussed different ways to welcome Christ into your home and strengthen your identity as a domestic church. Discuss what Catholic culture elements you are already implementing in your home. Are there others either of you have wanted to take on? Is there one that maybe is not working for your family? Take some time to continue evaluating what kind of culture you want in your home. The culture of the domestic church will shape how your children, and you, see and interact with the world. The love and virtue with which the tasks of daily life are done will guide your spouse, and your family further down the path of holiness. Below are several suggestions in how to manage your time as a family. Often, where we place our time is where we place our attention and importance. Religious orders build the structure of their day based on their priorities and charisms. Build the structure of your family’s rule of life based on your desires for your family culture and your timely obligations.

Sit down with your spouse and consider the following topics. Talk about what some reasonable goals are for each of these and make an intentional plan for how you will spend your time each day. This can be detailed or general – depending on what your family needs. If you are a married couple without children, suit this best to your goals and responsibilities right now. If you have a lot of little children at home, your day probably needs lots of flexibility. If your kids are in school and involved in extracurricular activities, more structure could be beneficial. Make it as inspiring and useful as possible for your particular family.

**1) Purpose Statement:** Spend some time together evaluating the responses in the Bring it Home activity for Session 2. In 1-2 sentences, describe your responses to the following questions: 1) For what purpose does our domestic church exist? 2) What are the defining characteristics that make our domestic church unique and unrepeatable?

**2) Personal:** What are your goals and limits for personal time as individuals? Some kinds of activities you might consider include time spent on kids’ sports and lessons as well as time for exercise, recreation, pursuing hobbies, reading, watching TV, using social media or spending

time with friends. How much time should be allowed for each of these things? Will your rule differ on weekdays and weekends?

**3) Work:** For children, this means time spent in school, on homework, and on chores at home. For parents, this includes work outside the home and chores at home. What are some basic duties each person can and should be responsible for, and how much time should be allotted to these duties each day?

**4) Rest:** Sometimes the hardest discipline is making time for adequate rest. Make a plan for bedtimes, nap times, and waking up times for all members of the family, as well as for how you will observe Sunday as a day of rest.

**5) Prayer:** Your family rule should include time for each of the three levels of prayer: personal prayer, couple prayer, and family prayer. What commitment do you feel called to make to spend time in quiet prayer, spiritual reading, adoration, Mass, confession, and retreats? Make your goals specific for each member of the family, as well as for the family as a whole, with commitments you want to make on a daily, weekly, monthly, and annual basis.

**6) Formation:** Are your kids enrolled in faith formation at the parish? How much time do you spend teaching your kids about the Faith at home? Do you have special books to read with them? Do you make time to go to Bible study? What about the time spent on this Formation series? Consider the time you, your spouse, and your family spends on learning more about Jesus Christ and the Church.

**7) Marriage:** Make sure there is a plan in your rule for spending time nurturing your marriage. Your commitment might be to share a cup of coffee each morning before the kids get up and the day is started, to take a walk together after dinner 3 days a week, or to plan a weekly date night or a bi-annual weekend away. Prayerfully decide what your commitment to your marriage should look like every day and on special occasions.

**8) Family:** What goals do you have for time spent together as a family? How often will you eat dinner together? How often will you visit extended family together? How often will you travel together? What kinds of daily or weekly events do you want to make time for, such as bedtime stories, Friday night movies, or Sunday hikes?

Once you have discussed each of these categories, decide if there are any others your family should consider. Share your plans with your children and get their input. As parents, you have the final say on what your family rule will look like, but children offer their own unique perspective and may add some things you would not think of, especially regarding the spirit with which things are done in the home.

Finally, write down your plan for how you will spend your time on a daily, weekly, monthly, and annual basis. This can be general or specific, long or short, depending on how detailed your goals are. Using the template below can help with outlining your family rule. You can write yours in a notebook or type it up and make it into an official document. It could become a family project to decorate the family rule with inspiring quotes from the saints, sacred images, and pictures from your family's history. Consider adding to it a list of the feast days

you would like to celebrate, baptismal anniversaries, or other ideas for how you want to celebrate holy and special days in your family. Put the rule in an accessible place in your home where everyone can look at it and be reminded or inspired. Once you have completed your rule, note that your commitments and goals may change as your family grows or circumstances change, and so make a plan for the next time you will review it as a family. Then, have some ice cream or enjoy an outing as a family to celebrate your new family rule!

### **Sample Template for Family Rule of Life**

I. **PURPOSE STATEMENT:** In one or two sentences, describe the characteristics that make your marriage/family unique and unrepeatable. How will the culture of your home reflect this?

II. **PERSONAL PURSUITS**

**For each family member** (What? How often?)

III. **WORK**

**For each family member** (What? How often?)

IV. **REST**

**For each family member** (bedtimes, nap times, waking up times)

V. **PRAYER**

Individuals:

Couple:

Family:

VI. **FORMATION**

Individuals:

Couple:

Family:

VII. **MARRIAGE** (How will we grow in love with each other?)

**Daily check-in:**

**Weekly review:**

**Monthly dialogue:**

**Special annual plans:**

VII. **FAMILY TIME** (What family activities will become part of our family culture?)

### QUESTIONS FOR MONTHLY REVIEW

- What is one thing that we should be doing that we currently are not doing?
  - What is one thing we are doing that we should be doing more of?
  - What is one thing we are doing that we should be doing less of?
  - What is one thing we are doing now that we should stop doing completely?
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## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER LEARNING

### Church Documents

Available for free online at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

*Casti connubii* (On Christian Marriage), an Encyclical of Pope Pius XI

*Lumen gentium* (Light of the Gentiles), Dogmatic Constitution on the Church from the Second Vatican Council

*Familiaris consortio* (The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World), a Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II

*Gratissimam sane* (Letter to Families), a Letter of Pope John Paul II

*Mulieris dignitatem* (On the Dignity and Vocation of Women), an Apostolic Letter of Pope John Paul II

*Novo millenio inuente* (At the Beginning of a New Millenium), an Apostolic Letter of Pope John Paul II

*Amoris laetitia* (The Joy of Love), a Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis

*Gaudete et exsultate* (On the Call to Holiness in Today's World), an Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraphs 1601-1658 & 2331-2391

## **Books**

*The Fulfillment of All Desire* by Ralph Martin & Published by Emmaus Road Publishing

*The Heart of Perfection* by Colleen Carroll Campbell & Published by Howard Books

*Be Healed and Be Transformed* by Bob Schuchts & Published by Ave Maria Press

*Holy Marriage, Happy Marriage* by Chris & Linda Padgett & Published by Servant Publishing

*The Journey of Our Love: The Letters of Saint Gianna Beretta and Pietro Molla* & Published by Pauline Books & Media

*Married Saints & Blesseds Through the Centuries* by Ferdinand Holböck & Published by Ignatius Press

*Saint Gianna Molla: Wife, Mother, Doctor* by Pietro Molla & Elio Guerriero & Published by Ignatius Press

*Three Secrets to Holiness in Marriage: A 33-Day Self-Guided Retreat for Catholic Couples* by Dan and Amber DeMatte & Published by Ave Maria Press

## **Websites & Blog Posts**

[Living Our Baptismal Identity & the Universal Call to Holiness](#) from Blessed Is She

[Embracing Our Universal Call to Holiness](#) from Rev. Robert J. Hater

[Called to Holiness](#) from Ralph Martin

## **YouTube Videos**

[Marriage as a Path to Holiness](#) by Meg Hunter-Kilmer

[What is Stopping You from Becoming a Saint?](#) from Fr. Mike Schmitz

[The Path to Holiness](#) from Breaking In the Habit

[Dr. John Bergsma: “The Universal Call to Holiness”](#) from Franciscan University of Steubenville  
[The Call to Holiness](#) from Archbishop Alexander K. Sample

### **Podcasts & Talks**

The “Passion” of Marriage: Foundation of the Family by Dr. John Bergsma, Available from Ascension Press

Building Holy Families: Lessons from Genesis by Dr. John Bergsma, Available from Ascension Press

**The Abiding Together Podcast:** A Call to Holiness

**The Just One Small Thing Podcast:** The Call to Holiness

# FAMILY, A DOMESTIC CHURCH

## SESSION SEVEN: ON A MISSION FROM GOD

### The Evangelizing Mission of the Domestic Church

#### Research Principles Covered (See Appendix A):

1.3; 1.8; 1.9; 2.1; 2.3; 2.4; 2.5; 2.9; 2.10; 2.11; 3.1; 3.2; 3.7; 3.12; 3.14; 4.2; 4.3; 4.4; 4.7; 4.9;  
4.13

## OPENING PRAYER

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth. Amen.

## THE WORD

### John 15:4-5

*Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*

## IN THIS SESSION

### You will . . .

- Discover how each and every Christian family shares in the Church's evangelizing mission
- Explore the intimate relationship between the family's call to holiness and its evangelizing mission in the world
- Appreciate how the mission of the family is to guard, reveal, and communicate love
- Learn practical ways that the Sacrament of Marriage empowers couples to be missionaries of love and life to others

# THE TEACHING

**John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, 49**

*The Christian family is grafted into the mystery of the Church to such a degree as to become a sharer, in its own way, in the saving mission proper to the Church: by virtue of the sacrament [of Marriage], Christian married couples and parents in their state and way of life have their own special gift among the People of God. For this reason, they not only receive the love of Christ and become a saved community, but they are also called upon to communicate Christ's love to their brethren, thus becoming a saving community.*

## **Key Points**

- There is an intimate connection between the family's call to holiness and its evangelizing mission in the world
- The mission of the family is to “guard, reveal, and communicate love”
- The Blessed Mother provides an excellent model of evangelization as she went in haste to share the Good News with her cousin Elizabeth
- Through the Sacrament of Marriage, Christian spouses receive grace to become missionaries to their family and other families
- Marriage and family are the first mission fields for spouses and children, but then the family is called to bear witness to the joy of the Christian life
- Marriage is a “Gospel in itself,” bearing hopeful witness to the ever-faithful love of God
- Each domestic church is called to radiate the joy of Christ as salt and light in the world
- The evangelizing mission of the family takes place in the ordinary events of daily life
- The family has a critical role in the saving mission of Christ and his Church: “The future of the Church and of the world passes through the family”
- Only by remaining in Christ as branches on a vine can the domestic church bear fruit in mission
- Christian married couples and families are sent out by Christ as apostles to work in his vineyard



## DISCUSS

- John 15:4-5 reveals the connection between abiding in Christ and bearing fruit. In what area of your life do you feel like you are bearing fruit for Christ? In what area do you feel challenged to grow?
- St. John Paul II taught that the mission of the family is to “guard, reveal, and communicate love.” What does this look like practically in your own home?
- Pope Benedict XVI wrote that marriage is a Gospel in itself and St. John Paul II stressed the missionary nature of marriage. Why is marriage so important for spreading the Faith?
- At the end of each Mass, the congregation is sent forth by the priest or deacon to spread the Gospel. How do you and your family share the Gospel in your daily lives?

## FROM THE TRADITION

### Selection from *Letter to Diognetus*

The Christian is to the world what the soul is to the body. As the soul is present in every part of the body, while remaining distinct from it, so Christians are found in all the cities of the world, but cannot be identified with the world. As the visible body contains the invisible soul, so Christians are seen living in the world, but their religious life remains unseen. . . . It is by the soul, enclosed within the body, that the body is held together, and similarly, it is by the Christians, detained in the world as in a prison, that the world is held together.

## WITH THE SAINTS

### *Saints Priscilla & Aquila*

**Feast Day: July 8**

*“[Priscilla and Aquila] in particular demonstrate how important the action of Christian spouses is. When they are supported by the faith and by a strong spirituality, their courageous commitment for the Church and in the Church becomes natural. The daily sharing of their life prolongs and in some way is sublimated in the assuming of a common responsibility in favor of the Mystical Body of Christ, even if just a little part of it. Thus it was in the first generation and thus it will often be. A further lesson we cannot neglect to draw from their example: every home can transform itself in a little church. Not only in the sense that in them must reign the typical Christian love made of altruism and of reciprocal care, but still more in the sense that the whole of family life, based on faith, is called to revolve around the singular lordship of Jesus Christ...Therefore, we honor Aquila and Priscilla as models of conjugal life responsibly*

*committed to the service of the entire Christian community. And we find in them the model of the Church, God's family for all times” (Pope Benedict XVI, General Audience, 7 February 2007).*

St. Paul came across a husband and wife in Corinth during his missionary travels. It is not clear whether the friendship began through their shared work of tent making or through a shared faith, but it would be the shared faith that would make the friendship grow. Priscilla and Aquila had been kicked out of Rome because of Aquila’s Jewish heritage (Acts 18:1-3), but they made a place for themselves working hard in Corinth. After some time working alongside Paul in Corinth making tents and spreading the faith, they went with him to Ephesus to build up the Church.

These two were not an average couple, but they were zealous and joyful followers of Christ. Before churches could be built after the legalization of Christianity, Christians would meet in “house churches” to hear the Word and celebrate the Eucharist. Priscilla and Aquila hosted these meetings in their own house. Paul also tenderly regarded them as “my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life” (*Romans 16:4*). There was nothing they would not do for Christ’s own flock and for the sake of furthering the Gospel. As Pope Benedict said in a General Audience, “This couple in particular demonstrates how important the action of Christian spouses is. When they are supported by the faith and by a strong spirituality, their courageous commitment for the Church and in the Church becomes natural.”

Both husband and wife knew what had been handed on by the apostles well, and taught the faith to others. A well-recorded instance of this is in Acts 18 when together Priscilla and Aquila corrected a zealous young convert, Apollos, who had more enthusiasm than accuracy. With their help and guidance, Apollos went on to preach and he “greatly helped those who through grace had believed for he powerfully confuted the Jews in public” (Acts 18:26). Together, Priscilla and Aquila evangelized with joy. Their evangelizing efforts fostered the evangelistic spirit in those they encountered and helped spread the faith far and wide in the early Church.

- What is something you want to imitate about the faith of Priscilla and Aquila?
- Are there complementary gifts that you and your spouse have that you can use to evangelize as a tag-team?

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

### **Prayer for Evangelization**

[\(taken from Pope Francis’s Apostolic Exhortation \*Evangelii gaudium\*\)](#)

Mary, Virgin and Mother,  
you who, moved by the Holy Spirit,  
welcomed the word of life  
in the depths of your humble faith:

as you gave yourself completely to the Eternal One,  
help us to say our own “yes”  
to the urgent call, as pressing as ever,  
to proclaim the good news of Jesus.

Obtain for us now a new ardor born of the resurrection,  
that we may bring to all the Gospel of life  
which triumphs over death.  
Give us a holy courage to seek new paths,  
that the gift of unfading beauty  
may reach every man and woman.

Star of the new evangelization,  
help us to bear radiant witness to communion,  
service, ardent and generous faith,  
justice and love of the poor,  
that the joy of the Gospel  
may reach to the ends of the earth,  
illuminating even the fringes of our world.

Mother of the living Gospel,  
wellspring of happiness for God’s little ones,  
pray for us. Amen.

## **BRING IT HOME**

### ***Mission: Possible: Living Your Marriage and Family as a Mission***

*Do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.*

- Matthew 10:19-20

The dismissal at the end of every Mass is a “commissioning” by Jesus. He sends us forth, fortified with the gift of grace we receive in the Eucharist, to bring Him into the world, into our daily lives – our homes, workplaces, friendships and, of course, our families and marriages.

Is your marriage a mission? It’s meant to be! St. John Paul II taught that the family has the mission to “*guard, reveal, and communicate love.*” This is an awesome call! Just by being you, you can evangelize others and lead them toward greater holiness. You might worry that you are not “perfect” enough in your faith and therefore are not prepared to evangelize, but we can find peace in the knowledge that it is God who does the work of evangelization through us. How much greater is his glory when he uses weak and flawed human beings to do his holy work!

But exactly how can we make meaningful connections with others so that our marriages and families can accomplish their unique mission? Spend some time reading through the following ideas with your spouse and then make a plan for how you will take action on them in your life.

### **Evangelizing Prayer**

One aspect of evangelization, perhaps the most important, is that of evangelizing prayer. Recall that Jesus often spent entire nights at prayer in preparation for his mission of preaching, teaching and healing. If our Lord spent significant time at prayer, so should we! Keep a running list of all the persons in your family's circle of influence- people from school, the grocery store clerk, members of your parish, family members, friends, acquaintances- and spend time each day praying for them. Remember that prayer makes all things possible! Pray in confidence that the Lord will open the "door of faith" and that God will give you the words to speak at the right moment!

### **Connect with Couples**

Do you know other couples in your parish or community who are in a similar stage of life, or maybe are even just a little bit younger than you are? Befriending other couples and sharing time together in a social setting provides opportunities to learn from each other's experiences and example. Ask another couple you know out for a double date. You might offer to pay their babysitter to sweeten the deal. You don't have to preach to them -- just connect and share about life, being honest about the ups and downs of family living. It really does help for couples to see that they are not alone in facing everyday challenges of marriage and family life.

### **Family to Family**

It can feel daunting to invite another entire family over for dinner, so start small if it makes you more comfortable. You might ask another family to meet you at the park or to go on an afternoon hike together. Is there a new family at your parish or your kids' school that you would like to get to know better? Give them the gift of welcoming friendship by inviting them to connect on a social level. Your kids might make new friends, and you and your spouse will have the opportunity to authentically share the gift of your faith as it is played out in your marriage and family life. You don't need to be perfect or have all the answers to share in a helpful way. Just sharing your own small steps in faith through everyday struggles and challenges can be very encouraging to others.

### **Invite Single People**

With so many programs and activities focused on kids and families, single people can often feel left out of the parish social scene. Who do you know in your parish or community who might welcome a friendly invitation to your house for dinner? Invite them over and get to know them. Give them the gift of an evening spent inside of your domestic church and open yourselves up to learning from their unique perspective.

### **Serve Your Community**

Consider taking on a volunteer commitment as a family. You might spend time serving at a nearby food pantry or soup kitchen once a week. You could bake cookies together and deliver them to a local police or fire station. Or visit a nursing home and offer to read aloud, write letters, play board games, or just sit and visit with some of the residents there. You might also get to know your neighbors and find out how you can be of service to them, helping with babysitting, lawn care, or offering to drive elderly folks to appointments. Even just visiting your neighbors regularly, checking in on them to find out their needs, is a beautiful way to connect with others through service. Think of something regular that you can all commit to together. The bonus is that you spend time together as a family and set a great example of loving service for your children.

### **Be Prepared to Witness**

When you are out with your family, whether it's going to Mass or running errands, others may talk with you, interact with your children, or ask questions about your family. Don't shy away from this opportunity to bear witness to your Catholic faith through your marriage and family! When kids are small, they often attract attention, but there are other quiet ways to bear witness to your faith as a family and invite conversation. Do you wear a crucifix, for example or have a faith-inspired bumper sticker on your car? Many teens like to wear Catholic t-shirts that might inspire curiosity and questions from others.

Even if strangers are occasionally rude, their communication with you is an opportunity to connect. Think of the kinds of questions or comments you usually hear when you are out with your family and consider positive ways you might respond. A little forethought can help you remain poised and positive in the moment. If you often hear "You've got your hands full!" or "Better you than me," for example, offer a pleasant smile and an encouraging word or two about the blessings of family life. Let your family's light shine!

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## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER LEARNING

### Church Documents

Available for free online at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

*Apostolicum actuositatem* (Apostolic Activity), The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity from the Second Vatican Council

*Evangelii nuntiandi* (Evangelization in the Modern World), an Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI

*Redemptoris missio* (On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate), an Encyclical of Pope John Paul II

*Novo millennio inuente* (At the Beginning of a New Millennium), an Apostolic Letter of Pope John Paul II

*Evangelii gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), a Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis

*Disciples Called to Witness: The New Evangelization* from the USCCB Committee on Evangelization

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraphs 849-856

### Books

*Building the Benedict Option: A Guide to Gathering Two or Three Together in His Name* by Leah Libresco & Published by Ignatius Press

*Evangelizing Catholics* by Scott Hahn & Published by Our Sunday Visitor

*Everyday Evangelism for Catholics: A Practical Guide to Spreading the Faith in a Contemporary World* by Cathy Duffy & Published by TAN Books

*The Hope of the Family a Dialogue with Gerhard Cardinal Müller* Published by Ignatius Press

*How to Share Your Faith with Anyone* by Terry Barber & Published by Ignatius Press

*Nudging Conversions: A Practical Guide to Bringing Those You Love Back to the Church* by Carrie Gress & published by Wellspring Press

*The Soul of the Apostolate* by Jean-Baptiste Chautard & Published by TAN Books

### **Websites & Blog Posts**

[Families: Essential Agents of Evangelization](#) from the Knights of Columbus

[The Family: Center of Evangelization](#) from Fathers for Good

[Marriage and Family: Home of the New Evangelization](#) from the USCCB

[Pope: New Evangelization depends on good Catholic Families](#) from Catholic News Agency

### **YouTube Videos**

[The Domestic Church and Witness](#) from Dr. Wendy Wright

[The Joy of the Gospel: “The New Evangelization and the Family”](#) from Scott Hahn

[Legacy of Love: “A Witness to the World”](#) from Kimberly Hahn

### **Podcasts & Talks**

**Catholic Phoenix:** Dr. Ryan Hanning on the Role of the Family in the New Evangelization from Catholic Phoenix

**Every Knee Shall Bow Podcast:** Spiritual Warfare in Everyday Christian Life

**Every Knee Shall Bow Podcast:** The Role of Laity in Evangelization

**The Way of Beauty Podcast:** The Domestic Church and the New Evangelization

**The Word on Fire Podcast:** Evangelization and the Need for Community

# FAMILY, A DOMESTIC CHURCH

## GENERAL RESOURCES

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### GENERAL RESOURCES FOR FURTHER LEARNING

#### Church Documents

Available for free online at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

*Divini illius magistri* (On Christian Education), an Encyclical of Pope Pius XI

*Casti connubii* (On Christian Marriage), an Encyclical of Pope Pius XI

*Lumen gentium* (Light of the Nations), the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church from the Second Vatican Council

*Gaudium se spes* (Joy and Hope), the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World from the Second Vatican Council

*Gravissimum educationis* (The Gravity of Education), the Declaration on Christian Education from the Second Vatican Council

*Humanae vitae* (Of Human Life), an Encyclical of Pope Paul VI

*Familiaris consortio* (The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World), a Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II

*Christifideles laici* (On the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful), a Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John II

*Gratissimam sane* (Letter to Families), a Letter of Pope John Paul II

*Deus caritas est* (God is Love), an Encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI

*Amoris laetitia* (The Joy of Love), a Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis

*Catechism of the Catholic Church*

#### Available online for free elsewhere:

[\*Family: Become What You Are\*](#), a Pastoral Letter of Archbishop Samuel Aquila

[\*Complete My Joy\*](#), an Apostolic Exhortation of Bishop Thomas Olmstead

#### Books



*Building Your Domestic Church* by Ken Judice & Published by Christian Faith Publishing

*The Catholic Family Handbook: Time-Tested Ways to Help You Strengthen Your Marriage and Raise Good Kids* by Fr. Lawrence G. Lovasik & Published by Sophia Institute Press

*First Comes Love: Finding Your Family in the Church and the Trinity* by Scott Hahn & Published by Image Books

*The First Society: The Sacrament of Matrimony and the Restoration of the Social Order* by Scott Hahn & Published by Emmaus Road Publishing

*For Better for Ever* by Greg and Lisa Popcak & Published by Our Sunday Visitor

*Forever: A Marriage Devotional* by Jackie Francois Angel and Bobby Angel & Published by Pauline Books & Media

*Holy Marriage, Happy Marriage* by Chris & Linda Padgett & Published by Servant Publishing

*In Defense of Purity* by Dietrich von Hildebrand & Published by Hildebrand Press

*Jesus the Bridegroom: The Greatest Love Story Ever Told* by Brant Pitre & Published by Image Books

*Life-Giving Love: Embracing God's Beautiful Design for Marriage* by Kimberly Hahn & Published by Servant Publishing

*The Little Oratory: A Beginner's Guide to Praying in the Home* by David Clayton and Leila Marie Lawler & Published by Sophia Institute Press

*Love is Our Mission: The Family Fully Alive* Published by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia and the Pontifical Council on the Family

*Love & Responsibility* by Karol Wojtyla & Published by Pauline Books & Media

*Marriage: The Mystery of Faithful Love* by Dietrich von Hildebrand & Published by Sophia Institute Press

*Married Saints & Blesseds Through the Centuries* by Ferdinand Holböck & Published by Ignatius Press

*Men & Women He Created Them: A Theology of the Body* by Pope John Paul II & Published by Pauline Books & Media

*Men, Women, and the Mystery of Love* by Edward Sri & Published by Franciscan Media

*One Body: A Program of Marriage Preparation and Enrichment for the New Evangelization* by John and Claire Grabowski & Published by Emmaus Road Publishing

*Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body in Simple Language* Published by Philokalia Books

*Praying for (And With) Your Spouse: The Way to Deeper Love* by Greg & Lisa Popcak & Published by Word Among Us Press

*A Short Guide to Praying as a Family* by the Dominican Sisters of St. Cecilia & Published by St. Benedict Press

*Theology of the Body in One Hour* by Jason Evert & Published by Totus Tuus Press

*Three to Get Married* by Fulton Sheen & Published by Scepter Publishing

## **Websites**

Blessed Is She (<https://blessedisshenet.net>), an online Catholic women's community committed to deepening a life of prayer

Catholic All Year (<https://catholicallyear.com>), a blog with insights on liturgical living for families

The Catholic Gentleman (<http://www.catholicgentleman.net>), a blog to inspire Catholic men to grow in holiness

Fathers for Good ([www.fathersforgood.org](http://www.fathersforgood.org)), an initiative of the Knights of Columbus for building up marriage and family

*For Your Marriage* ([www.foryourmarriage.com](http://www.foryourmarriage.com)), a marriage resource provided by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

*Theology of the Body Evangelization Team* ([www.tobet.org](http://www.tobet.org)), a resource for children and adults on God's plan for love and marriage

Spoken Bride ([www.spokenbride.com](http://www.spokenbride.com)), a Catholic lifestyle blog for brides and newlyweds

## **YouTube Channels**

Ascension Presents

Catholic News Service

EWTN

Franciscan University Presents

## **Podcasts**

### **Available from Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, and YouTube**

All Things Catholic with Edward Sri

Catholic Sprouts: The Daily Podcast for Catholic Kids

Every Knee Shall Bow Podcast with Michael Gormley and Dave VanVickle

Girlfriends (A Podcast for Catholic Women) with Danielle Bean

The Messy Family Podcast with Mike and Alicia