

Ecclesiology of the Domestic Church:

History & Implications

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Master of Arts (Theology)

By

Charisse D. Rubio

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Abstract

This thesis will show that the Second Vatican Council set in motion new directions that enabled subsequent ecclesiology to regard the family as a *Domestic Church*.

The *Introduction* provides normative definitions of key terms and an overview of the thesis.

Chapter One briefly examines the history and theology of the Domestic Church before the Second Vatican Council from evidence in the New Testament, by patristic writings about marriage, and in magisterial teachings through the ages up to Vatican II.

Chapter Two has three sections covering the development of the theology of the Domestic Church during and since the Second Vatican Council: two significant developments during Vatican II that had profound implications for family life as the Domestic Church, the ecclesiological insights that emerged out of the Council, and subsequent papal ecclesiological development.

Chapter Three addresses the new ecclesiological directions for the Domestic Church in three sections: the status of the expression “Domestic Church,” the sacramentality of the Domestic Church, and the implications for parish and family ministry.

The *Conclusion* highlights the most notable of these new directions and implications.

The teachings of “Theology of the Body” are not covered in this thesis.

This thesis by Charisse D. Rubio fulfills the thesis requirement for the master's degree in Theology and is approved by:

Advisor: Rev. Robert J. Hater, Ph.D.

Readers: Rev. Andrew J. Moss, J.C.L.

Dr. Bradford Manderfield, Ph.D.

Dedication

To all Christian families, who though broken or suffering, strive to become Domestic Churches; to build communities of life and love, and to bear vital witness for the conversion of the world and for the transformation of a culture that does not respect the dignity and beauty of life or the marital union.

The family is truly the “school of humanity,” which is much needed today. . . . The family is uniquely important to the Church and in these times, when all believers are invited to think of others rather than themselves, the family needs to be rediscovered as the essential agent in the work of evangelization.

— From paragraph 2 of *Relatio Synodi* of the extraordinary general assembly of bishops in October 2014.

“All of us are called to keep striving towards something greater than ourselves and our families, and every family must feel this constant impulse. Let us make this journey as families, let us keep walking together. What we have been promised is greater than we can imagine. May we never lose heart because of our limitations, or ever stop seeking that fullness of love and communion which God holds out before us.”

Prayer to the Holy Family

Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
in you we contemplate
the splendor of true love;
to you we turn with trust.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
grant that our families too
may be places of communion and prayer,
authentic schools of the Gospel
and small domestic churches.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
may families never again experience
violence, rejection and division;
may all who have been hurt or scandalized
find ready comfort and healing.

Holy Family of Nazareth,
make us once more mindful
of the sacredness and inviolability of the family,
and its beauty in God's plan.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph,
graciously hear our prayer.

Amen.

*Given by Pope Francis in Rome, at Saint Peter's Basilica,
during the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy,
on 19 March, the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, in the year 2016.
(See Amoris Laetitia [on Love in the Family], 325)*

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Forward

By Rev. Robert J. Hater, Ph.D.

December 8, 2019

Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are “disciples” and “missionaries” but rather that we are always “missionary disciples.”
(Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, # 120)

Reflecting on Pope Francis’ words reminds us of St. Paul’s enthusiasm after Jesus encountered him on the road. The *Acts of the Apostles* says, “..... immediately he [Paul] began to proclaim him.....” (9:20) This same enthusiasm is evident in the first house Churches of the New Testament. The dynamics that motivated these early followers of Jesus moved me to conclude that paramount among the priorities of these “domestic churches” was their conviction that they were sent by the Lord to continue his work and that of the first Apostles to proclaim the Gospel. They internalized the words of Matthew 28, spoken by Jesus as he sent his first missionary disciples to proclaim the gospel to all the nations.

What a difference today! If only Christian spouses would recognize that they, too, are missionary disciples, sent to continue Christ’s mission, beginning in their relationship with each other and eventually with their children! This conviction of which Pope Francis speaks, challenges them to ask, “So what are we waiting for?” (E.G., # 120)

To look more deeply into today’s challenges for contemporary families, Charisse Rubio’s enthusiasm reflects that of the early house churches. With great sensitivity to contemporary families and the challenges they face, she does a masterful job of

researching the first domestic churches (house churches) and follows their presence through the early patristic period and subsequent Church history, when appropriate.

Her greatest contribution, however, is her development of the significance of the domestic church during and after Vatican II, beginning with the dynamics operative at the Council in the formulation of *Lumen Gentium*, especially the persistence of Bishop Pietro Fiordelli to link the family with the larger church. His contribution set the stage for the subsequent theology of the family that moved from an “analogical” use of the term “church” used for the family to an “essential” approach that came to recognize the family in an entirely new theological way. Ms. Rubio shows how this advancement in theological awareness was first introduced by St. Paul VI, and subsequently nuanced by St. John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis.

Concurrent with the developments coming through these popes, came new theological insights, arising from the academic sector of the Church. Today, the academic world is gradually recognizing the implications of the new directions, described so well by Ms. Rubio.

Ms. Rubio’s thesis sets firm grounds for new and exciting directions for pastoral ministry, especially with the implications that follow for taking seriously the insights of the early house churches. More research is needed in the area of their belief that house churches were called to develop missionary disciples that went into the whole world and proclaimed Jesus’ gospel. Because of these early missionary disciples, formed in families, we are here today, reflecting on new insights that subsequent Christians will use to continue to share the “Good News” until the end of time.

I felt privileged to direct Ms. Rubio's thesis. She did an excellent job. Her faith, enthusiasm, and persistence inspire me to glean more insights into the mystery of how God moves us to be missionary disciples.

Rev. Robert J. Hater, Ph.D.
December 8, 2019

Acknowledgment

I would thank God for never giving up on me, and for His great mercy, unending love, and many blessings that led me to the Catholic Church and have continued to sustain me. I am very grateful for my Catholic faith and for being received into the Church during the Easter Vigil in 1998. Special thanks to all those who prayed for me and guided me during the many years leading to my conversion and thereafter.

I would also like to thank all of my instructors at the Athenaeum of Ohio, where I have gained greater knowledge, understanding, and love of the Catholic faith. My time as a student here has fulfilled a long-time desire and far exceeded my expectations. I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Rev. Steven Beseau, S.T.D., who organized and conducted a new “Thesis Seminar” course, where I learned the structure for successful completion of the initial stages of a master’s thesis.

I am especially grateful for the unwavering academic and spiritual support of Rev. David J. Endres, Ph.D., who was Dean of Special Studies during most of my time at the Athenaeum. Thank you also to Rev. Ryan T. Ruiz, S.L.D., current Dean of Special Studies, for sharing his experience and practical suggestions during the Thesis Seminar and for directing the final semesters of my degree program.

I want to express my deepest appreciation to Rev. Robert J. Hater, Ph.D., for being my thesis advisor. I am deeply indebted to Fr. Hater for all his valuable guidance, encouragement, and continuous support throughout the planning, research, and writing of this paper. His extensive knowledge and insightful suggestions were a tremendous help. I can not imagine having a better advisor and mentor.

I also gratefully acknowledge the help I received from Connie Song, Library Director, and Claire Ballinger, Associate Librarian, who provided excellent research assistance and writing resources. Particularly helpful to me during the final stages of my writing was Connie Song, who read my thesis and offered constructive criticism.

I cannot begin to express my thanks to my husband, Oscar Antonio (Tony) Rubio, who put up with my long hours of research and writing and gave me his unwavering support and enthusiastic encouragement, even during many weeks of all-consuming focus on completing this project. He also proofread the final draft. In the three and one-half years of our marriage, I have known the blessing and beauty of sacramental marriage for the first time, and I am forever grateful for the unconditional love, unity, and trust that we share. May God continue to bless our marriage and our ministry, Our Domestic Church, which promotes sacramental marriages and offers personal accompaniment for families or individuals in the particular challenges and needs related to their family life.

To finish, I would like to give thanks for our children and extended family and pray that we may grow together in faith and love, always following Christ and helping to build the Kingdom of God on earth. Amen!

Introduction

This thesis will show the development of the ecclesiology of the Domestic Church. A chronological synthesis of the family is used to illustrate the constant teaching of the Church and new directions that emerged from the Second Vatican Council, which enabled subsequent ecclesiology to regard the Christian family as a Domestic Church.

Before beginning, however, it is helpful to understand how some key terms are used. The *family* “proceeds from marriage”¹ and is the “first and most basic community to which every person belongs.”² The Church has broadly defined it as “an intimate community of persons bound together by blood, marriage, or adoption, for the whole of life.”³ This definition of family is not limited to the nuclear family of two parents and their children living in the same household. Instead, it “refers to two or more people, united by common bonds, who share commitment, values, and traditions, and whose relationship is marked by some degree of permanence.”⁴

[The Church’s definition of the family] is broad enough to recognize that family ties bind tightly, even when members live in different households. It recognizes that many persons are involved simultaneously in several families . . . It also includes single persons . . . [with regard to] their family of origin . . . [and] other covenantal relationships . . . [such as] siblings, grandparents, and family dependents . . . Finally, the definition acknowledges the special relationships established in families that are created by adoption.⁵

¹ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Committee on Marriage and Family, *A Family Perspective in Church and Society: A Manual for All Pastoral Leaders*, 10th anniversary ed. (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1998), 7.

² National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Committee on Marriage and Family, “Follow the Way of Love,” ed. Robert N. Lynch, United States Conference of Bishops, November 17, 1993, 1, accessed August 18, 2018, <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage/follow-the-way-of-love.cfm>.

³ *A Family Perspective in Church and Society*, 17.

⁴ Robert J. Hater, *Holy Family: Christian Families in a Changing World* (Valencia, CA: Tabor, 1988), 8.

⁵ *A Family Perspective in Church and Society*, 17.

The *Christian family* originates through the Sacrament of Matrimony, which unites one baptized man and one baptized woman through a sincere gift of self, and they become a channel of God's life-giving grace for each other, their family, and the world. Although marriage is a natural institution that was established by God, Jesus Christ raised this irrevocable covenant to the dignity of a sacrament. Canon Law describes marriage as permanent, life-giving, and unifying:

The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life and which is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring, has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament between the baptized. . . . The essential properties of marriage are unity and indissolubility, which in Christian marriage obtain a special firmness by reason of the sacrament. . . . Matrimonial consent is an act of the will by which a man and a woman mutually give and accept each other through an irrevocable covenant in order to establish marriage. . . . Marriage possesses the favor of law; therefore, in a case of doubt, the validity of a marriage must be upheld until the contrary is proven.⁶

Also, the Sacrament of Matrimony “bestows an ecclesial status upon the conjugal bond between a man and a woman.”⁷ This status is acknowledged by the expression “*ecclesia domestica*,” or “Domestic Church,” which is applied to the Christian family. (For more on the Sacrament of Matrimony, see Section 3.2)

The roots of the Domestic Church can be found in the early Church, and *Chapter One* offers examples that form the foundation for it from Sacred Scripture and Tradition. As a backdrop, this chapter will survey the early house church and take a brief chronological look at the development of family theology through the ages up to the Second Vatican Council.

⁶ John P. Beal et al., eds., *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, Study Edition. (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 1240–1256, c. 1055–1060.

⁷ Marc Ouellet, “The Ecclesiology of Communion, 50 Years after the Opening of Vatican Council II,” *Adoremus Bulletin - Online Edition* XVIII, no. 6 (September 15, 2012): B1, <https://adoremus.org/2012/09/15/The-Ecclesiology-of-Communion-50-Years-after-the-Opening-of-Vatican-Council-II/>.

Chapter Two examines two developments during the Council that had profound implications for family as Domestic Church, as well as the new ecclesiological directions that emerged out of Vatican II that were further developed by subsequent popes.

Bishops and theologians have also built upon the new ecclesiological directions set in motion at Vatican II. After discussing the current status of the expression “Domestic Church” and the family’s sacramental role as priest, prophet, and king, *Chapter Three* will examine the primary implications of these new ecclesiological directions for parish and family ministry.

The *Conclusion* highlights the most notable of the new ecclesiological directions and implications for the Domestic Church.

Research was based on primary and secondary sources in English. The teachings of “Theology of the Body” are not covered in this thesis.

Chapter 1: History and Theology Before the Second Vatican Council

The expression “Domestic Church” does not appear in Scripture, and the New Testament does not contain a fully developed theology of the family.⁸ Also, the expression is used explicitly in documents by only a few Church Fathers – especially Saints Augustine and Jerome. However, the concept of family as an ecclesiological structure is deeply rooted in Sacred Scripture and Patristic Tradition. To demonstrate these roots and provide a backdrop for subsequent chapters, *Chapter One* will briefly examine the foundations for family as Domestic Church:

- 1.1 from evidence as depicted in the New Testament;
- 1.2 by patristic writings about marriage; and
- 1.3 in magisterial teachings through the ages up to Vatican II.

Christian accounts of marriage and family reveal how the love of God lived out in a household transformed the Roman household into a Domestic Church. There are many contrasting perspectives regarding family life in the first and second centuries, and this chapter will not provide a comprehensive review of them all.

1.1 The Early House Church in Scripture

Various theologians trace the scriptural roots of the Domestic Church to the New Testament letters of St. Paul. These letters substantiate the existence of specific households of Christians and support family life as a legitimate choice for living the call to holiness and following Christ.

⁸ Joseph C. Atkinson, *Biblical and Theological Foundations of the Family: The Domestic Church* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 208.

The early Church called the Christian household a *church of the home* or *house church* because it was in these family assemblies, as centers of Christian fellowship and mutual love, where the community often gathered for prayer, Eucharist, and religious instruction. These early communities met in the house of a particular Christian and comprised a broad group of blood relations, slaves, and Christian neighbors. Contrast this with the contemporary Christian household, which generally consists solely of immediate family members who are related by blood, marriage, or adoption.

Several New Testament passages⁹ uphold the importance of these household families in the early Church and the role of the house church in bringing the love of Christ to the world. Here are some examples:

- Col 3:18—4:6 encapsulates St. Paul’s mandate to do all things in the name of Jesus, giving thanks in the home as family and in the world as universal Church.
- St. Paul sent greetings to Priscilla and Aquilla and “the church at their house” in two of his letters (Rom 16:5 and 1 Cor 16:19), thus establishing a connection between the Church and the familial environment.
- St. Peter insists upon the equality of men and women in the Kingdom of God, primarily because they are “joint heirs of the gift of life” (see 1 Pet 3:1-7). Husbands and wives are exhorted to love and respect each other, working cooperatively in a graced partnership of mutual service for the life of the family and the good of each family member.

⁹ All biblical citations in this paper are taken from the *New American Bible*, Rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, 2010), unless otherwise noted.

- Jesus strengthened marriage to “the nobility of its primeval origin”¹⁰ when He sanctioned this union as a permanent bond by commanding: “what God has joined together, no human being must separate. (Matt 19:6)”
- Just before His Passion, Jesus prayed for unity when He prayed that His disciples and all those who would come to believe through them “may be one, as we are one” (see John 17:20-23). The marital state, from a biblical standpoint, echoes this same call for unity and gives the world a sign of the love of Christ for His Church.
- Eph 5:22—6:4 is a key passage about Christian marriage in relation to the ecclesial-like role and structure of the family as a Domestic Church. St. Paul equates the relationship between husband and wife with the loving relationship between Christ and His Church (Eph 5:22-33): a relationship of self-giving love and service – not one of dominion and control. He also discusses the relationship between parents and their children (Eph 6:1-4): parents are to instruct their children for the children’s own good, and the children are to obey their parents.
- Throughout the Gospels, the Holy Family is a shining example of love, unity, and virtuous living, which all families should strive to achieve. Amid challenges, struggles, and sorrows, they demonstrated fidelity and courage while making evident the power of unconditional love.

¹⁰ Leo XIII, *Arcanum Divinae [Christian Marriage]*, Vatican Website, February 10, 1880, para. 8, http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_10021880_arcanum.html.

Scripture makes clear that since the beginning of time, all humanity is interconnected, with Adam as the “father of the human race” (see Genesis 1 – 2). These sacred texts portray the “one-flesh” unity of marriage as an image of God and a sign of Christ's love for His Church (see Gen 2:24, Matt 19:4-6, Eph 5). Because of this, families have a unique mission. God carries out His plan of salvation, in the history of humanity and in everyone’s personal history, with and through the family. Even when only one member of the family was a baptized Christian, the influence was felt by all of its members, as 1 Cor 7:14 makes known: “the unbelieving husband is made holy through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is made holy through her husband.”¹¹

The next section shows that the Early Church Fathers were keenly aware of this transforming effect of baptism on the whole family, giving it a new identity in Christ and establishing the role of the Domestic Church in the order of salvation. These great Christian theologians passed on and clarified the teaching of the Apostles during the crucial first centuries of the Church, from approximately the second through the eighth centuries.

1.2 Patristic Teachings about Family

Excerpts from patristic writings and homilies reveal that Christian marriage was acknowledged to be an indissoluble bond – an image of God and a sign of Christ's love for His Church (see Gen 2:24, Matt 19:4-6, Eph 5). These excerpts also demonstrate an awareness that the Christian household was a suitable and appropriate place for gatherings of the local ecclesiastic community. Moreover, Church Fathers emphasized the Christian family’s primary duty is to increase the faithful through procreation and

¹¹ 1 Cor 7:14. *The Holy Bible, NRSV*, Catholic Edition, eBook. (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2014).

Christian education. Patristic teachings affirm that Christians from the first centuries considered the baptized family to have an ecclesial nature:

. . . [E]ven within the early Church the baptized family was understood to have an ecclesial structure. Because the family had a Church-like nature, it would follow that its structures would, therefore, reflect the structures of the Church in some recognizable manner. That is, the structures that define the Church would also be found in the family, but in a manner that was consistent with family life. This is vital, because only if such structures can be found operating within the family can the Christian family be legitimately called a “church.”¹²

The Fathers of the Church are discussed in chronological order except for Chrysostom and Augustine, who are considered first because of the considerable impact they had on the development of the ecclesiology of the family. Their teachings, which were cited during the Second Vatican Council, provided a foundation for acknowledging the family as a holy and legitimate state of life as well as illustrating the Church-like structure of the family. They taught that the same structures could be seen in both the Church and in the family, but in a way that is appropriate for each. They also presented the father’s role and duties as head of his family to be equivalent to those of the bishop.

St. John Chrysostom (c. 347 – 407)

Although Chrysostom did not use the expression “Domestic Church,” he confirmed the idea that “a house is a little Church [*micra ecclesia*].”¹³ According to Chrysostom, it is logical to call the family a “little Church” because it is an extension of marriage, which symbolizes the Church.

Chrysostom also presented similarities between the ecclesiastic and familial communities based upon the roles and responsibilities of Christian spouses, who are

¹² Atkinson, *Biblical and Theological Foundations of the Family*, 273.

¹³ John Chrysostom, *Homily 20 on Ephesians*, ed. Kevin Knight, trans. Gross Alexander, New Advent, 2017, v. 33, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/230120.htm>.

partners in the administration of their house church and family life as well as in sanctifying each other. He urged them to turn their home into a church:

On returning home [from Church], let us prepare two tables, one for food and one for the Word of God, whereupon the man should repeat the things that were said in Church. Let the wife learn and the children hear; nor should the servants be deprived of this reading. Make of your home a church, because you are accountable for the salvation of your children and servants.¹⁴

Moreover, in an exegesis of 1 Timothy, Chrysostom describes the episcopal function of fatherhood as being analogous to that of a bishop. He points out that any misuse of position to dominate or abuse others is in direct conflict with the legitimate exercise of authority and the authentic role of fatherhood, which “is always other-centered.”¹⁵

Chrysostom encouraged Christians to organize their households and domestic lives so that they would be transformed into little churches, with a definitive ecclesial structure. In other words, he taught that baptism alone would not turn a home into a Domestic Church. He asserted that Christians need to take concrete actions typically associated with the Church (such as reading Scripture, teaching the faith, praying, serving each other, exercising authority for the common good, maintaining the peace of Christ, etc.) to intentionally conform their homes to their true ecclesial nature and to allow Christ to reign among their households.

St. Augustine of Hippo (c. 354 – 430)

Augustine explicitly used the expression “domestica ecclesia” (Latin for Domestic Church or a household Church) in his writings, and he did so on at least two

¹⁴ John Chrysostom, “Homilies on Genesis 6.2,” vol. 54, *Patrologia Graeca* (Paris: J.P. Migne, 1862), 607; quoted in Ouellet, *Divine Likeness*, Loc. 517-519.

¹⁵ Atkinson, *Biblical and Theological Foundations of the Family*, 287–288.

occasions. First, in a letter to a widow, he asked the recipient and her “household Church” to include him in their prayers.¹⁶ Because of the significance of that reference, the Second Vatican Council cited this letter.¹⁷ His other explicit use of this expression occurred in a letter that was discovered in 1980 – too late to cite at the Council:

I know how much you love Christ and that your whole household is his family, just as the Apostle speaks of “a household Church” [*domestica ecclesia*]. I know how greatly you desire that among your possessions the possession of Christ bear fruit and grow.¹⁸

In this excerpt, Augustine unquestionably identified the household as Christ’s family. He recognized and articulated the deep-rooted connection between the Church and the Christian home, both in its nature and in its structure.

Writing at length about the indissolubility and sacredness of marriage in several works, Augustine affirmed that Christian marriage is an earthly sign of the union between Christ and His Church (see *City of God*, *On the Morals of the Catholic Church*, *Of the Good of Marriage*, *Of the Good of Widowhood*, and *On Marriage and Concupiscence*).

Augustine is credited as presenting the first systematic theological argument on marriage in his work titled *Of the Good of Marriage* (c. 401), where he established the basis for what would become the classic Catholic teaching on the three “goods” of marriage: offspring, faithfulness, and the Sacrament.¹⁹

Moreover, Augustine indicated that family is an indispensable component of Christian society when he declared in *City of God* (c. 413 – c. 426) that “the house is the

¹⁶ Augustine, *Of the Good of Widowhood*, ed. Kevin Knight, trans. C. L. Cornish, New Advent, 2017, para. 29, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1311.htm>.

¹⁷ Atkinson, *Biblical and Theological Foundations of the Family*, 271.

¹⁸ Augustine, “Letter 14,” in *Letters, Volume 6 (1*–29*)*, trans. Robert B. Eno, vol. 81, The Fathers of the Church (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), para. 1.

¹⁹ Augustine, *The Good of Marriage (Book 1)*, trans. C. L. Cornish, New Advent, 2017, para. 32, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1309.htm>.

first circle of human society.”²⁰ He explained that an important responsibility of what he called a “true father” is to inspire all members of their household to worship God and strive for their salvation.²¹ His commentary on John 12:12-26 equates the role of a father with that of a bishop in terms of their comparable duties:

Accordingly, brethren, when you hear the Lord saying, “*Where I am, there shall also my servant be*,” do not think merely of good bishops and clergymen. But be yourselves also in your own way serving Christ, by good lives, by giving alms, by preaching His name and doctrine as you can; and every father of a family also, be acknowledging in this name the affection he owes as a parent to his family. For Christ's sake, and for the sake of life eternal, let him be warning, and teaching, and exhorting, and correcting all his household; let him show kindness, and exercise discipline; and so in his own house he will be filling an ecclesiastical and kind of episcopal office, and serving Christ, that he may be with Him forever.²²

Augustine points out in his work titled *On Marriage and Concupiscence* (419 – 420) that St. Paul evoked the passage from Genesis – “the two shall become one flesh” (Eph 5:31) – to illustrate the great mystery of love between Christ and the Church. For Augustine, “conjugal lives lived in and for Christ” clearly differentiate Christian marriage from non-Christian unions, making them a church of the home.²³

Both Chrysostom and Augustine provide an important basis for validating the ecclesial identity of the family and for acknowledging the family as a holy and legitimate state of life within the Church. The following chronological discussion of select writings and homilies from additional Church Fathers further demonstrates that Christian families were thought to have an ecclesial nature from the earliest centuries of the Church.

²⁰ Augustine, *City of God (Book XIX)*, trans. Marcus Dods, New Advent, 2017, chap. 7, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120119.htm>.

²¹ Ibid., chap. 16.

²² Augustine, “Tractate 51 [John 12:12-26],” in *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, trans. John Gibb, New Advent, 2005, para. 13, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1701051.htm>.

²³ Augustine, *On Marriage and Concupiscence (Book 1)*, trans. Peter Holmes and Robert Ernest Wallis, New Advent, 2017, chap. 23, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/15071.htm>.

St. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150 – c. 215)

Clement led the way for “the patristic theology of the married couple” and has been called “the great catechist of the ‘domestic Church.’”²⁴ The third book in his trilogy of works on Christian life called, the *Stromata* (or *Stromateis* or *Miscellanies*), contains the majority of his teachings on marriage. His philosophy regarding marriage can be summarized as “a bond of man and woman based on a free and rational choice, whose greatness lies in the opportunity to bear children which assimilates man to God, the Creator.”²⁵

For Clement, members of the Christian family share in the ecclesial dimension because of their baptism into Christ. For example, when discussing Matt 18:20, he asks: “who are the two or three gathered in the name of Christ in whose midst the Lord is?”²⁶ Clement then expounds upon this Gospel passage to show that Christ is in the midst of the Christian family and, as a result, they become a Church of the home:

Does he not by the “three” mean husband, wife, and child? . . . Through his Son, God is with those who are soberly married and have children. The agreement of many, which is indicated by the number “three,” with whom the Lord is present, might also be the one Church . . . And was not the third the one which is made out of the two into a new man in which he walks and dwells, in the Church itself?²⁷

Furthermore, Clement asserts the validity of marriage as a legitimate vocation by explaining: “Both celibacy and marriage have their own different forms of service and

²⁴ Marc Ouellet, *Divine Likeness: Toward a Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family*, trans. Michelle Borrás, Ressourcement: Retrieval and Renewal in Catholic Thought (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, Kindle Edition, 2006), Loc. 515-516.

²⁵ Jana Plátová, “Arguments for Marriage in Clement of Alexandria’s *Stromateis* II–III,” *Graeco-Latina Brunensia*, no. 2 (2016): 248.

²⁶ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, ed. D. P. Curtin, trans. W. H. Fremantle, G. Lewis, and W. G. Martley (Philadelphia: Dalcassian, 2017), Loc. 2994-3012.

²⁷ Ibid.

ministry to the Lord,” and that by fulfilling them, each “may be free in Christ and receive the proper reward of his ministry.”²⁸

St. Jerome (c. 343 – 420)

Jerome also explicitly used the expression “Domestic Church” in his writings. In his letter to a woman named Paula (c. 384), Jerome wrote: “*saluta reliquum castitatis chorum et domesticam tuam ecclesiam*” (Latin for “greet the remaining choir of chastity and your Domestic Church”).²⁹

In another letter (c. 403), he responds to a request from Paula’s mother, Laeta, for guidance regarding the education of her daughter. Jerome shows evident confidence that this household is living well their Christian faith. He quotes 1 Cor 7:14 to indicate how Laeta, as a Christian, sanctifies her unbelieving spouse. This household – where the baptism of one spouse has a transforming effect on the whole family and where Christian education is given priority – is the type of household to which Jerome applies the Pauline expression “Domestic Church.”

Pope Saint Gregory the Great (born c. 540, pope 590 – 604)

A Gregorian Sacramentary called the *Hadrianum* is traditionally attributed to Gregory I, also known as Gregory the Great. Pope Adrain I sent this sacramentary to Charlemagne (first emperor of the Holy Roman Empire; 800 – 814) in response to his request for an authentic and unadulterated model of Roman liturgical practices.

²⁸ Ibid., Loc. 3074.

²⁹ Jerome, “A Letter to Paula,” trans. Joan Ferrante, et al, *Epistolae*, para. 14, last modified 384AD, <https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/278.html>.

This collection of liturgical prayers contains a nuptial blessing that builds on a seventh-century Roman version called the *Verona Sacramentary*.³⁰ The following excerpt, from the sub-section of the *Hadrianum* titled “Prayer at the Veiling of Spouses,” is the blessing given before “the peace of the Lord”:

The blessing: O God, you who made all things out of nothing by the power of your goodness, at the beginning of the creation of the universe you established for man, made in the image of God, the inseparable assistance of woman. Out of the man you gave to the woman the origin of her flesh, thereby teaching that what had been created out of one ought never to be separated. O God, you have consecrated the conjugal union with so excellent a mystery in order to signify the sacrament of Christ and the church in the bond of married persons. O God, by your agency woman is united to man, and society is ordered from the beginning by the gift of that blessing, which is the only decree that was not removed either by the penalty of original sin or by the flood.³¹

In addition to acknowledging that marriage is part of God’s plan since the beginning of time, this blessing also affirms the intimate permanence of marriage and recognizes the role of marriage in uniting human society.

Venerable Bede (c. 675 – 735)

Bede affirmed marriage as a legitimate vocation, listing it among the three orders of the faithful included in the Church: the married, the celibates, and the clerics.³² Furthermore, discussing the greeting from the house church of Aquila and Priscilla in 1 Corinthians, Bede pointed out that this married couple not only served Christ faithfully, but they also had a community of the faith meeting in their home.³³

³⁰ David G Hunter, *Marriage in the Early Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 27–28.

³¹ Gregory I, “Hadrianum,” in *Marriage in the Early Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 152, para. 838a.

³² Bede, “Expositio in Evangelium S. Joannis [Presentation on the Gospel of St. John],” in *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 92:661 (Paris: Migne, 1850), para. II, sec. I; quoted in Atkinson, *Biblical and Theological Foundations of the Family*, 300.

³³ Bede, “Retractatio in Actus Apostolorum [Reconsideration of the Acts of the Apostles],” in *Corpus Christianorum*, ed. M.L.W. Laistner and D. Hurst, vol. 121, Patristic Latin Series CPL 1358, 1983, cap. 19, linea 26; quoted in Atkinson, *Biblical and Theological Foundations of the Family*, 300.

1.3 Through the Ages

After the patristic period, the concept of family went through a long period of decline, and celibacy was considered to be the best choice for those who wished to follow Christ. However, the value of marriage and the importance of family as Domestic Church in Catholic theology did not completely die out.

Many Church Fathers through the ages have affirmed marriage, and by extension family life, as a valid state of life for attaining sanctity. Implicit illusions to the Domestic Church can be found in magisterial teachings up to the time immediately before the Second Vatican Council when the role and respect for the vocation of holy matrimony were greatly enhanced.

Six examples were selected to represent the teachings about the Domestic Church after the Patristic Fathers until Vatican II: Saint Thomas Aquinas, the Council of Trent, Pope Leo XIII, Pope Pius XI, Pope Pius XII, and Pope Saint John XXIII.

Saint Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225 – 1274)

According to Aquinas, a doctor of the Church, the marital union of a baptized man and a baptized woman symbolizes sacred reality, and therefore, matrimony is one of the four sacraments which are called great. He explains why these four sacraments are considered to be great:

[B]aptism by reason of its effect, since it blots out sin and opens the gate of paradise; confirmation by reason of its minister, since it is conferred only by bishops and not by others; the Eucharist because of what it contains, the whole Christ; and *matrimony by reason of its signification, for it symbolizes the union of Christ and the Church* [emphasis added].³⁴

³⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, trans. Fabian Larcher, Aquinas Institute, Inc., 2018, chap. 5. lect. 10. para. 334., <https://aquinas.cc/216/218/~1>.

Aquinas also argues that matrimony, and thus the family community, are established by both Divine and human law – while other communities, such as business and military, are governed solely by human law.³⁵ He, furthermore, affirmed that the family’s primarily role is to engage in procreation and the raising of children.³⁶

Council of Trent: Twenty-Fourth Session (1563)

Church Fathers at the Council of Trent, under Pope Pius IV, defended the Sacrament of Matrimony against heresy by asserting the Church’s teaching since the times of the apostles.³⁷ They exposed a tendency to overemphasize marriage as a contract because it was governed by divine and ecclesiastical law. The Fathers emphasized that marriage, as a sacrament of grace, “perfected the natural love, confirmed its indissolubility, and sanctified the spouses.”³⁸

Pope Leo XIII (1878 – 1903)

Pope Leo XIII used the Wedding at Cana to demonstrate that Jesus conferred new holiness upon marriages. He insisted that the Sacrament of Matrimony establishes and sustains family unity. He also argued that Sacred Scripture and Tradition have unmistakably handed down this universal doctrine of unity in marriage:

Christ our Lord raised marriage to the dignity of a sacrament . . . He gave power to attain holiness in the married state; and that, in a wondrous way, making marriage an example of the mystical union between Himself and His Church, He not only perfected that love which is according to nature, but also made the naturally indivisible union of one man with one woman

³⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Laurence Shapcote, Aquinas Institute, Inc., 2018, Supplement, Q. 44, A. 3, <https://aquinas.cc/88/89/~1>.

³⁶ Ibid., Supplement, Q. 44, A. 1.

³⁷ Council of Trent, 24th Session, “De Doctrina Sacramenti Matrimonii [Doctrine on the Sacrament of Matrimony],” in *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, trans. J. Waterworth, Papal Encyclicals, November 11, 1563, 193–195, accessed July 1, 2019, <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/trent/twenty-fourth-session.htm>.

³⁸ Marc Ouellet, “Theological Perspectives on Marriage,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 31, no. 3 (2004): 427.

far more perfect through the bond of heavenly love.³⁹ (see also Eph 5:25-32)

This excerpt shows that Leo XIII saw marriage as a valid state of life for attaining holiness. He recognized that the indissoluble spousal union in marriage is a mysterious sign of the permanent unity between Christ and His Church.

Pope Pius XI (1922 – 1939)

Pius XI taught of the greatness of chaste wedlock. He also upheld the constant tradition of the Church, which declared and established from Scripture that “God is the Author of the perpetual stability of the marriage bond, its unity and its firmness.”⁴⁰ He recalled from Eph 5:32 that marriage signifies the ideal of unity, which exists between Christ and the Church, and argued that society benefits from the stability of marriages:

[W]hat the families and individuals are, so also is the State, for a body is determined by its parts. Wherefore, both for the private good of husband, wife and children, as likewise for the public good of human society, they indeed deserve well who strenuously defend the inviolable stability of matrimony.⁴¹

Pius XI also stressed the value of spouses helping each other to improve their understanding of the Catholic Church’s teachings and to strive for holiness of life.

Pius XII (1939 – 1958)

Pius XII wrote the 1943 encyclical *Mystici Corporis Christi* [*On the Mystical Body of Christ*] which had a profound impact on Bishop Fiordelli, who was a key promoter of the concept of family as a “minuscule church” in the period leading up to and during the debates at the Second Vatican Council (see Section 2.1). The starting point for Fiordelli’s ecclesiology of the family is the outline by Pius in *Mystici Corporis Christi*

³⁹ Leo XIII, *Arcanum Divinae*, para. 9.

⁴⁰ Pius XI, *Casti Connubii* [*Christian Marriage*], Vatican Website, December 31, 1930, para. 5, accessed June 1, 2019, https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19301231_casti-connubii.html.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, para. 37.

because it explicitly states the ecclesiological roles of matrimony⁴² – to sanctify, to evangelize and educate, and to build the Kingdom of God:

Through Matrimony, in which the contracting parties are ministers of grace to each other, provision is made for the external and duly regulated increase of Christian society, and, what is of greater importance, for the correct religious education of the children, without which this Mystical Body would be in grave danger.⁴³

Pope Saint John XXIII (1958 – 1963)

In an encyclical released seventeen months before his address at the opening of the Second Vatican Council, John XXIII described the human and Christian concept of family in his 1961 encyclical, *Mater et Magistra [Christianity and Social Progress]*, as “a community of persons working together for the advancement of their mutual interests in accordance with the principles of justice and Christian teaching.”⁴⁴ He further applied these principles, along with the duty to obey Divine law, specifically to marriage and family life:

We must solemnly proclaim that human life is transmitted by means of the family, and the family is based upon a marriage which is one and indissoluble and, with respect to Christians, raised to the dignity of a sacrament. The transmission of human life is the result of a personal and conscious act, and, as such, is subject to the all-holy, inviolable and immutable laws of God, which no man may ignore or disobey.⁴⁵

The constant teaching of the Church is that Christian spouses form a family and have the responsibility to share Christ and transmit Christian values within their

⁴² Basilio Petrà, “Bishop Pietro Fiordelli (1916-2004) at the Council: The Bishop of Prato and the Strange Origin of the Theology of the Family as a ‘Domestic Church,’” *INTAMS review* 19 (2013): 13, 20–21.

⁴³ Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis Christi [The Mystical Body of Christ]*, Vatican Website, June 29, 1943, para. 20, accessed July 6, 2019, http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_29061943_mystici-corporis-christi.html.

⁴⁴ John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra [Christianity and Social Progress]*, Vatican Website, May 15, 1961, para. 142, accessed June 2, 2019, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_15051961_mater.html.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, para. 193.

household, especially to their children, and to society at large – helping all to grow in holiness. Pope John XXIII stressed that families will only accomplish this when they strive for harmonious and lasting unity from within.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ John XXIII, *Ad Petri Cathedram [Truth, Unity and Peace, in a Spirit of Charity]*, Vatican Website, June 29, 1959, para. 51, accessed June 3, 2019, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_29061959_ad-petri.html.

Chapter 2: Development of Theology During and Since the Second Vatican Council

The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) was a turning point in the development of the ecclesiology of the Domestic Church. Although there was no systematic treatment of the Domestic Church in conciliar documents, the notion of family as a separate theological topic was introduced at the Council.

Since Vatican II, there has been a significant and steady development in the theological basis for the Domestic Church. Referring primarily to papal and Church documents, this chapter will discuss the emergence of the Christian family as Domestic Church during and following the Council by examining:

- 2.1 two significant theological developments during Vatican II,
- 2.2 ecclesiological insights that emerged out of the Council, and
- 2.3 subsequent papal ecclesiological development.

Four of the sixteen final Council documents affirmed the holiness and dignity of marriage, and by extension, the Christian family (see *Lumen Gentium*, sections 11 and 35; *Gaudium et Spes*, sections 47-52; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, section 11; and *Gravissimum Educationis*, section 3). Subsequent development by bishops and theologians will be treated in *Chapter Three*, along with the implications of the new ecclesiological direction for parish and family ministry.

2.1 Two Significant Developments during Vatican II

Discussions about the Church's teaching on marriage during the Second Vatican Council centered on interpreting and prioritizing two foundational passages from Genesis: the divine command to "be fertile and multiply (Gen 1:28)" and the natural

consequence of the loving unity between husband and wife to “become one body (Gen 2:24).”⁴⁷ These discussions culminated with two significant developments:

1. The first development was a shift to the image of Church as community, constituted by its people and grounded in the Person of Christ.⁴⁸ Vatican II balanced the prevailing image of the Church as hierarchical and institutional with more relational and symbolic expressions of the Church as communion, as sacrament, and as People of God.
2. The second development was the recovery of the apostolic and patristic concept of family as Domestic Church. The Council recognized the Christian family as a vital part of the ecclesial community, a People of God, and the Domestic Church. However, during the Council, the Christian family was not portrayed literally *to be* the Domestic Church, but rather analogously and metaphorically *like* a Domestic Church.⁴⁹

The Church as Community – the People of God

On December 1, 1962, the Council began its discussion on the *Schema De Ecclesia* about the structure of the church.⁵⁰ These discussions strongly influenced later developments by introducing pivotal ideas that recast the “institutional Church” as a relational community – the People of God. The Church as the People of God also has

⁴⁷ Roberto De Mattei, *The Second Vatican Council: An Unwritten Story*, ed. Michael J Miller, trans. Patrick T Brannan and K. D. Whitehead (Fitzwilliam, NH: Loreto Publications, 2013), 389–393, accessed July 7, 2019, <http://public.ebookcentral.proquest.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=4931737>.

⁴⁸ *Lumen Gentium [Dogmatic Constitution on the Church]*, Vatican Website, November 21, 1964, sec. 31, accessed August 17, 2018, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

⁴⁹ Joseph C. Atkinson, “Family as Domestic Church: Developmental Trajectory, Legitimacy, and Problems of Appropriation,” *Theological Studies* 66, no. 3 (September 1, 2005): 593.

⁵⁰ Ennio Pasquale Mastroianni, “Christian Family as Church? Inquiry, Analysis, and Pastoral Implications” (Ph.D. Diss., Duquesne University, 1999), 21, accessed June 16, 2019, <https://dsc.duq.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1904&context=etd>.

deep symbolic significance in Sacred Scripture. This shift from Church as an institution to Church as a community both “informed and structured the renewal of the theology of the family.”⁵¹

The *Schema De Ecclesia* was the basis for *Lumen Gentium* [Dogmatic Constitution of the Church], which states that the Church “is truly present in all legitimate local congregations of the faithful . . . [where] Christ is present, and in virtue of His presence there is brought together one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.”⁵² It explains that the faithful are made into the one body of Christ – the People of God – through the Sacrament of Baptism, where “they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world.”⁵³

Both *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes* use similar phrases to describe both the Christian family and the Church. The Christian family is portrayed as a “community of love . . . and communion of life,”⁵⁴ while the Church is called “a communion of life, charity and truth.”⁵⁵ In addition, *Gaudium et Spes* affirms that the Church is “a visible association and a spiritual community,” called to “form the family of God's children during the present history of the human race, and to keep increasing it until the Lord returns.”⁵⁶

⁵¹ Atkinson, “Family as Domestic Church,” 596.

⁵² *Lumen Gentium*, sec. 26.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, sec. 31.

⁵⁴ *Gaudium et Spes* [the Church in the Modern World], Vatican Website, December 7, 1965, secs. 47–49, accessed August 18, 2018, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

⁵⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, sec. 9.

⁵⁶ *Gaudium et Spes*, sec. 40.

Sacrosanctum Concilium proclaims that “most of all in the divine sacrifice of the Eucharist, is the outstanding means whereby the faithful may express in their lives, and manifest to others, the mystery of Christ and the real nature of the true Church.”⁵⁷ The whole universal Church – the People of God – becomes a living reality through local communities of Christian believers, especially when they celebrate the Eucharistic liturgy. This People of God was inaugurated by Christ in His Blood according to God’s Divine Plan as a community united in Christ on the principles of life, love, trust, and salvation: “God gathered together as one all those who in faith look upon Jesus as the author of salvation and the source of unity and peace, and established them as the Church.”⁵⁸

As the Council’s vision shifted to the community aspects of Church as the People of God, the role of the institutional, hierarchical Church became more evident: “to serve and not to be served.”⁵⁹ This shift, along with a renewed understanding that all believers share in the Church’s mission because of their baptism, gave support to substantiate a developing theology of the Christian family as Domestic Church.

Recovering the Domestic Church

Bishop Pietro Fiordelli (1916 – 2004) of Prato, Italy, has been called “the father of the theology of the family as a ‘domestic Church’” because he initiated the dialogue and proposed the language that would be adopted by the Council.⁶⁰ His priestly experience included extensive work with Christian families and defense of the Sacrament

⁵⁷ Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* [Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy], Vatican Website, December 4, 1963, sec. 2, accessed September 18, 2019, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html.

⁵⁸ *Lumen Gentium*, sec. 9.

⁵⁹ *Gaudium et Spes*, sec. 3.

⁶⁰ Petrà, “Origin of the Theology of the Family,” 28.

of Matrimony, which uniquely prepared him to be a protagonist at the Council on behalf of families as the *church of the home*. One of his main pastoral objectives after being appointed Bishop of Prato, Italy, was to reestablish the high regard for Christian marriage and family life, based on the sacred nature of the Sacrament of Matrimony.

Fiordelli led an effort at the Second Vatican Council to establish the Christian family as “the first organic structural level of the Church” – what he called a “minuscule Church” – where the father and mother stand at its head, “by divine precept.”⁶¹ During the 34th General Congregation on December 5, 1962, Fiordelli made his initial intervention on the *Schema De Ecclesia* in order to propose the inclusion of a chapter “expressly dedicated” to affirming the sacramental state of matrimony and “the structurally ecclesiological value of the family.”⁶² However, he was interrupted by Cardinal B. Alfrink, archbishop of Utrecht and one of the Council presiders, who objected because he felt the discussion on marriage and family fell “outside the structure of this schema.”⁶³ Fiordelli immediately countered with the affirmation that marriage and the Christian family are central to the very life of the Church. However, because of this interruption, Fiordelli decided to omit the ontological foundation for his proposal at this time but presented it later in writing.

He intervened again on October 17, 1963, during the time allocated for discussion about the People of God, to reaffirm and explain in more detail “the ecclesiological meaning of his proposal.”⁶⁴ Fiordelli argued the importance of the state of Christian matrimony. He offered forthright ecclesiological reasoning for his proposal that the

⁶¹ Ibid., 23.

⁶² Ibid., 22–23.

⁶³ Ibid., 22.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 24–25.

Christian family be considered a *little church* based on its participation in the mystical union between Christ and the Church. He also identified four ecclesial forms in what he called “the organic structure of the Church”: the universal Church, dioceses, parishes, and the Christian family.⁶⁵

Christ wanted the Church herself to be . . . a Mystical Body whose invisible Head he himself is, Christ; and the Supreme Pontiff is his vicar on earth. The universal Church is divided into particular . . . dioceses, headed by the bishops . . . [which are] further divided . . . into smaller communities called parishes, headed by parish priests. . . . But the parish community is further divided, by the will of Christ himself (not of the Church), into even smaller communities or cells of the Mystical Body, holy and fertile. These are the Christian families, headed by a husband and wife, . . . Through the holiness of their marriage, Christian spouses have been . . . consecrated to carry out their mandate and the divine mission of attaining the sublime goal that Christ has allocated to the Christian family in the building up of his Mystical Body.⁶⁶

Although Fiordelli’s interventions became the lynchpin that triggered the ecclesiology of the Domestic Church at Vatican II, aspects of this concept were to be confirmed in three documents of the Council (see *Lumen Gentium*, section 11; *Gaudium et Spes*, section 48; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, section 11). Paul VI also confirmed Fiordelli’s notion that the Christian family is the smallest cell of the Church in his remarks after the closing of Vatican II:

It is an interior spiritual reality that transforms the couple's community of life into what could be called, according to the authorized teaching of the Council, “the Church of the home,” a true “cell of the Church.” . . . It is a basic, germinal cell – the smallest, to be sure, but also the most fundamental one in the body of the Church.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Fiordelli Pietro, “Animadversiones Scriptae de Ecclesia,” in *Acta Synodalia*, vol. II/1, 1962, 794–795; quoted in Petrà, “Origin of the Theology of the Family,” 24–25.

⁶⁶ Pietro, “Animadversiones Scriptae de Ecclesia,” 794–795; quoted in Petrà, “Origin of the Theology of the Family,” 24–25.

⁶⁷ Paul VI, “The Transformation of Married Love Through Christian Self-Giving: Address of Pope Paul VI to the International Meeting of the Teams of Our Lady,” 1970; quoted in National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *A Vision and Strategy: The Plan of Pastoral Action for Family Ministry* (Washington, D.C.: USCC Office of Publishing and Promotion Services, 1978), 31.

Fiordelli emphasized that his proposal was derived both from ecclesiological and pastoral reasons. His persistence intervention had a crucial impact on the recovery of the Domestic Church.

2.2 *Ecclesiological Insights on the Domestic Church from Vatican II*

The Second Vatican Council was not only “the first of the 21 ecumenical councils to consider the lay apostolate as a separate matter,” but it was also the first time the concept of Domestic Church was included in a conciliar document.⁶⁸ Sixteen documents were promulgated by the Council: four Constitutions, three Declarations, and nine Decrees. Two of the four Constitutions (see *Lumen Gentium*, section 11 and *Gaudium et Spes*, section 48) and one of the three Decrees (see *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, section 11) treated the concept of family as Domestic Church. Also, the Council’s *Declaration on Christian Education* (*Gravissimum educationis*, section 3) considered the vital role of education in the family. These Council documents upheld the Church’s traditional teaching about the family and inspired further theological development on the Domestic Church.

Lumen Gentium [Dogmatic Constitution on the Church]

Lumen Gentium is the only document of Vatican II to use the expression “Domestic Church” explicitly, and this is the first time it has appeared in an official church document. Analogously using this expression, *Lumen Gentium* makes a foundational statement that refers to the family being *like* or *as* a Domestic Church: “The

⁶⁸ Martin H. Work, “Nature of Lay Apostolate to Be Discussed in Council,” in *Council Daybook*, ed. Floyd Anderson, vol. 1, Vatican II: Sessions 1 and 2 (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1965), 56.

family is, so to speak, *the domestic church* [emphasis added].”⁶⁹ This reference becomes the basis for an ongoing evolution in the understanding of family in the context of the Church.

Lumen Gentium describes the fruitful love of a sacramentally married couple, which results in a Christian family. The couple may become parents with the responsibility of fulfilling their duties from an ecclesiological standpoint “by their word and example, [as] first preachers of the faith to their children.” The Christian family becomes a Domestic Church and strengthens the larger Church to the extent that Christ is present in each of its members:

Christian spouses, in virtue of the sacrament of Matrimony, whereby they signify and partake of the mystery of that unity and fruitful love which exists between Christ and His Church, help each other to attain to holiness in their married life and in the rearing and education of their children. By reason of their state and rank in life they have their own special gift among the people of God. From the wedlock of Christians there comes the family, in which new citizens of human society are born, who by the grace of the Holy Spirit received in baptism are made children of God, thus perpetuating the people of God through the centuries. The family is, so to speak, the domestic church. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children; they should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each of them, fostering with special care vocation to a sacred state.⁷⁰

While it does not provide much theological grounding,⁷¹ Section 11 of *Lumen Gentium* does underscore the importance of the sacraments in the life of all the faithful, as well as the gifted state and rank of Christian families among the people of God. The sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist initiate believers into the Body of Christ, the Church. Moreover, the title of *ecclesia domestica* given to the Christian

⁶⁹ *Lumen Gentium*, sec. 11.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Atkinson, “Family as Domestic Church,” 592, 601.

family recognizes the ecclesial status that is bestowed upon the conjugal union of the spouses by the Sacrament of Matrimony.

Gaudium et Spes [Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World]

Gaudium et Spes contains a much longer section on marriage and family that echoes the conciliar discussions, which were centered on Genesis. It declares that “this many faceted-love” between the spouses is structured on the “model of [Christ’s] union with His Church.”⁷² Furthermore, by the Sacrament of Matrimony, Christian spouses are “[g]raced with the dignity and office of fatherhood and motherhood” and “receive a kind of consecration in the duties and dignity of their state.”⁷³ A summary of the Council’s teaching on the Christian family is found in the document’s final paragraph of section 48:

Thus the Christian family, which springs from marriage as a reflection of the loving covenant uniting Christ with the Church, and as a participation in that covenant, will manifest to all men Christ's living presence in the world, and the genuine nature of the Church. This the family will do by the mutual love of the spouses, by their generous fruitfulness, their solidarity and faithfulness, and by the loving way in which all members of the family assist one another.⁷⁴

Apostolicam Actuositatem [Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity]

In *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, the Council fathers once again analogously characterize the family *as* a Domestic Church:

This mission – to be the first and vital cell of society – the family has received from God. It will fulfill this mission if it appears *as the domestic sanctuary of the Church* [emphasis added] by reason of the mutual affection of its members and the prayer that they offer to God in common.⁷⁵

⁷² *Gaudium et Spes*, sec. 48.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Second Vatican Council, *Apostolicam Actuositatem [Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity]*, Vatican Website, November 18, 1965, sec. 11, accessed October 3, 2018, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html.

Vatican II affirmed that the mission of the family is from God Himself and will only be accomplished if the household is a holy place, referred to *as the domestic sanctuary of the Church*, where members pray together and experience the love of God.⁷⁶ *Apostolicam Actuositatem* also described some duties and practical activities necessary for the family to fulfill its God-given mission:

It has always been the duty of Christian married partners but today it is the greatest part of their apostolate to manifest and prove by their own way of life the indissolubility and sacredness of the marriage bond, strenuously to affirm the right and duty of parents and guardians to educate children in a Christian manner, and to defend the dignity and lawful autonomy of the family. [The Christian family] will fulfill [its] mission . . . if the whole family makes itself a part of the liturgical worship of the Church, and if it provides active hospitality and promotes justice and other good works for the service of all the brethren in need.⁷⁷

Gravissimum Educationis [Declaration on Christian Education]

The main objective of *Gravissimum Educationis* is to establish a foundation for the fundamental principles of Christian education, especially in schools, which would be further developed by a post-conciliar commission. However, it makes clear that the parents “have the primary and inalienable right and duty to educate their children.”⁷⁸

After addressing the universal right to an education and recalling the pastoral obligation to ensure Christian formation for all the baptized, this document stresses the vital role of education in the family. The relevant section is titled “The Authors of Education”:

[T]he family is the first school of the social virtues that every society needs. It is particularly in the Christian family, enriched by the grace and

⁷⁶ Michael A. Fahey, “The Christian Family as Domestic Church at Vatican II,” in *The Family*, ed. Lisa Sowle Cahill and Dietmar Mieth, Concilium 4 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 90.

⁷⁷ *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, sec. 11.

⁷⁸ Second Vatican Council, *Gravissimum Educationis [Declaration on Christian Education]*, Vatican Website, October 28, 1965, sec. 6, accessed July 30, 2019, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_gravissimum-educationis_en.html.

office of the sacrament of matrimony, that children should be taught from their early years to have a knowledge of God according to the faith received in Baptism, to worship Him, and to love their neighbor. Here, too, they find their first experience of a wholesome human society and of the Church. Finally, it is through the family that they are gradually led to a companionship with their fellowmen and with the people of God. Let parents, then, recognize the inestimable importance a truly Christian family has for the life and progress of God's own people.⁷⁹

Gravissimum Educationis asserts that, as a place of grace, the Christian family provides a child's earliest fellowship with others and with God. It is the "first school" where children learn their faith and are encouraged to develop their baptismal identity as sons or daughters of God.

2.3 *Subsequent Papal Ecclesiological Development*

Although the documents of the Second Vatican Council offer practically no developed theological grounding for the Domestic Church,⁸⁰ there has been a growing body of theological and spiritual literature on the Domestic Church in the five decades since the Second Vatican Council ended. In the years since Vatican II, popes, bishops, and theologians have built upon the foundation laid at the Council to develop an ecclesiology of the Domestic Church. Below are brief selections from the five popes since Vatican II, highlighting their ongoing teaching on the concept of the Domestic Church. (Subsequent development of the ecclesiology of the Domestic Church by bishops and theologians will be treated in *Chapter Three*.)

This section of *Chapter Two* will focus on the transformation of the Vatican II description of the family analogously or metaphorically as *like* a Domestic Church to the current understanding of the family as *being* a Domestic Church. The *Catechism of the*

⁷⁹ Ibid., sec. 3.

⁸⁰ Atkinson, "Family as Domestic Church," 592, 601.

Catholic Church affirms that the “Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason, it can and should be called a *domestic church*.”⁸¹

Pope Saint Paul VI (1963 – 1978)

In his 1964 address at Nazareth on the feast of the Holy Family, Paul VI encouraged all to reflect on the Holy Family as a school for learning to imitate Christ. Through the Holy Family, according to Paul VI, we learn about family life: “a community of love and sharing, beautiful for the problems it poses and the rewards it brings.”⁸² He says there is no substitute for the family, which is the ideal environment for raising and nurturing children.

In 1974 (within ten years of the closing of the Second Vatican Council), the shift to perceiving family literally *to be* a Domestic Church could already be seen in the teachings of Paul VI:

The Second Vatican Council has pointed out how the family, the primary and vital cell of society, “shows itself *to be* [emphasis added] the domestic sanctuary of the Church through the mutual affection of its members and the common prayer they offer to God.” The Christian family is thus seen *to be* [emphasis added] a domestic Church.⁸³

One year later, Paul VI declared that “the family has well deserved the beautiful name of ‘domestic Church’”⁸⁴ and listed its roles and tasks: “promote justice, practice

⁸¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 2000), 532, sec. 2204.

⁸² Paul VI, “Nazareth, a Model,” in *Liturgy of the Hours*, ed. Catholic Church, vol. 1, January 5, 1964 (New York: Catholic Book, 1975), 427.

⁸³ Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus* [Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary], Vatican Website, February 2, 1974, para. 52, accessed June 6, 2019, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19740202_marialis-cultus.html.

⁸⁴ Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* [Evangelization in the Modern World], Vatican Website, December 8, 1975, sec. 71, accessed October 19, 2018, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html.

works of mercy, devote themselves to helping their brethren, take part in the apostolate of the wider local community and play their part in its liturgical worship.”⁸⁵ He also emphasized communal prayer in family life as being essential for the character of the Domestic Church.

Pope Venerable John Paul I (1978)

In his address to a group of bishops from the United States on September 21, 1978, John Paul I pointed out that the Second Vatican Council called the Christian family a Domestic Church. This address was just seven days before his untimely death, which ended his brief reign as pope. He expressed the significance of the Christian family and elaborated on the sanctifying power that is found in their community of love, their teaching authority, and their witness of faith:

The Christian family is so important, and its role is so basic in transforming the world and in building up the Kingdom of God, that the Council called it a “domestic Church” (*Lumen Gentium*, 11). . . . What a wonderful thing it is when families realize the power they have for the sanctification of husband and wife and the reciprocal influence between parents and children. And then, by the loving witness of their lives, families can bring Christ's Gospel to others. A vivid realization of the sharing of the laity – and especially the family – in the salvific mission of the Church is one of the greatest legacies of the Second Vatican Council. We can never thank God enough for this gift. It is up to us to keep this realization strong, by supporting and defending the family.⁸⁶

John Paul I affirms the vital mission of Christian families, as Domestic Church, to participate in building up God’s Kingdom and names this realization “one of the greatest legacies of the Second Vatican Council.”⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus*, para. 52.

⁸⁶ John Paul I, “Address to a Group of American Bishops on Their «ad Limina» Visit,” Vatican Website, September 21, 1978, 1, accessed July 11, 2019, https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-i/en/speeches/documents/hf_jp-i_spe_21091978_us-bishops.html.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Pope Saint John Paul II (1978 – 2005)

John Paul II is credited with securing a permanent place for the concept of the Domestic Church in the Church's Magisterium. He initiated the first systematic analysis of this concept and ensured that it is the “dominant hermeneutic” by which family will be interpreted.⁸⁸

John Paul II's 1981 Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio* – a post-synodal document of the 5th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on “The Christian Family,” gives a consequential statement of the ecclesial character of the family. John Paul II examines “the many profound bonds linking the Church and the Christian family and establishing the family as a ‘Church in miniature’ (*ecclesia domestica*).”⁸⁹ He describes the Christian family as an essential component of the Church and speaks of the family as “a living image and historical representation of the mystery of the Church,” affirming the family's identity to be a Domestic Church, “in its own way.”⁹⁰ The family serves humanity and builds the Kingdom of God by fulfilling its “ecclesial task . . . [and] by participating in the life and mission of the Church”⁹¹ – the mission to become “a community of life and love . . . a living reflection of and a real sharing in God's love for humanity and the love of Christ the Lord for the Church His bride.”⁹² Seven years later, he gave solid reasoning for why the Christian family should be called the Domestic Church in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles Laici* – a

⁸⁸ Atkinson, “Family as Domestic Church,” 598.

⁸⁹ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* [*the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World*], Vatican Website, November 22, 1981, sec. 49, accessed September 25, 2018, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., sec. 17.

document of the 7th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on “The Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World”:

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.” The more that Christian spouses and parents grow in the awareness that their “domestic church” participates in the life and mission of the universal Church, so much the more will their sons and daughters be able to be formed in a “sense of the Church” and will perceive all the beauty of dedicating their energies to the service of the Kingdom of God.⁹³

That same year, John Paul II gave a homily in which he emphasized that the “family is the domestic church . . . the Church in miniature.”⁹⁴ He likens the Domestic Church to the universal Church, saying both are communities of “life and love” with the role of leading “its members to their full human maturity” and serving “the good of all along the road of life.”⁹⁵ He closed this homily by reminding families that their vocation and their happiness was “to put on the Lord Jesus Christ and to walk in his light.”⁹⁶

Pope Benedict XVI (2005 – 2013)

Within a few weeks of becoming pope on April 19, 2005, Benedict XVI wrote a letter to the president of the Pontifical Council for the Family, confirming the convocation of the *Fifth World Meeting of Families*, which John Paul II had convoked earlier that year. In that letter, he maintained that “the Church cannot cease to proclaim that in accordance with God’s plans (cf. Mt 19:3-9), marriage and the family are

⁹³ John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici [the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World]*, Vatican Website, December 30, 1988, sec. 62, accessed November 21, 2018, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici.html.

⁹⁴ John Paul II, “Homily in Perth (Australia): The Family in God’s Plan for Humanity and for the Church,” Vatican Website, November 30, 1986, sec. 3, accessed July 30, 2019, https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1986/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19861130_perth-australia.html.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

irreplaceable and permit no other alternatives.”⁹⁷ Furthermore, he affirmed the critical mission of the Christian family, which he said was to transmit the faith and become part of the ecclesial community.

In 2011, for the thirtieth anniversary of the Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*, Benedict XVI addressed the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family, which had also been established by Pope Saint John Paul II thirty years earlier. Benedict XVI explained that the new evangelization relied heavily on the Domestic Church. In his general audience a few weeks later, he reflected on how the Holy Family of Nazareth – by the example of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus – is an icon of the Domestic Church and the importance of family prayer:

[T]he Holy Family is the icon of the domestic Church, called to pray together. The family is the domestic Church and must be the first school of prayer. It is in the family that children, from the tenderest age, can learn to perceive the meaning of God, also thanks to the teaching and example of their parents: to live in an atmosphere marked by God’s presence. An authentically Christian education cannot dispense with the experience of prayer. If one does not learn how to pray in the family it will later be difficult to bridge this gap. And so I would like to address to you the invitation to pray together as a family at the school of the Holy Family of Nazareth and thereby really to become of one heart and soul, a true family.⁹⁸

At the closing Mass for the *Seventh World Meeting of Families* in 2012, Benedict XVI proclaimed the plan God has for the Domestic Church. He affirmed that Christ has raised marriage to the level of a sacrament and that this “special gift of the Holy Spirit” bestows upon the family a share in the spousal love of Christ for the Church,

⁹⁷ Benedict XVI, “Letter to the Participants in the Fifth World Meeting of Families,” Vatican Website (Valencia, Spain, May 17, 2005), para. 5, accessed July 11, 2019, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20050517_famiglia-valencia.html.

⁹⁸ Benedict XVI, “Prayer and the Holy Family of Nazareth,” Vatican Website, December 28, 2011, accessed July 30, 2019, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2011/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20111228.html.

strengthening it to “grow in God’s love according to the model of the Holy Family of Nazareth.”⁹⁹

Pope Francis (2013 – present)

Pope Francis has been a champion of families. On December 17, 2014, he launched a nine-month series of thirty-three general audiences on the subject of *The Family* one week after the Extraordinary Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops dedicated to the family. This series highlights the mystery of family as a Domestic Church and the challenges faced by contemporary families. His September 9, 2015, General Audience on Family focused on “*the connection between the family and the Christian community*,” saying that this connection is natural “because the Church is a spiritual family and the family is the domestic Church.”¹⁰⁰ Francis also calls attention to the importance of family as the place where life and faith begin and acknowledges the need for families and parishes to collaborate in the transformation of society.

The Christian community is the home of those who believe in Jesus. . . . The great events of worldly powers are written in history books, and there they will remain. But the history of human feelings is written directly in the heart of God; and that is the history that will endure for eternity. This is where life and faith are located. The family is the place of our irreplaceable and indelible initiation into this history... into this history of life in its fullness, which will culminate in heaven with the contemplation of God for all eternity, but which begins in the family! And that is why the family is so important. . . . The family and the parish must work the miracle of a more communal life for the whole of society.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Benedict XVI, “Homily at Closing Eucharistic Celebration for 7th World Meeting of Families,” Vatican Website (Bresso Park, Milan, June 3, 2012), para. 4, accessed July 11, 2019, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20120603_milano.pdf.

¹⁰⁰ Francis, “General Audience Of 9 September 2015: The Family - 26 Community,” Vatican Website, September 9, 2015, accessed August 1, 2019, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150909_udienza-generale.html.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia [on Love in the Family]* – a document of the 14th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on *The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and the Contemporary World*, Francis emphasizes that the family is a Domestic Church eleven times.¹⁰² He explains that members of the Domestic Church must “enter upon an ecclesial experience of communion among persons, which reflects, through grace, the mystery of the Holy Trinity.”¹⁰³ He also notes that the Church encourages and thanks faithful Christian families for the witness of their lives.

Francis declares in his 2014 address to participants in the *37th National Convocation of the Renewal in the Holy Spirit* that the Domestic Church is formed through Christ growing within the spousal love of Christian couples and within the lives of their children. Later that year, he wrote a letter for the 8th World Meeting of Families maintaining that the constant mission of the Christian family, by the power of the Sacrament of Matrimony, is to proclaim the love of God to the world.¹⁰⁴

The 10th World Meeting of Families, scheduled to be held June 2021 in Rome, has chosen the theme: “Family love: vocation and path to holiness.”¹⁰⁵ This event will take place on the fifth anniversary of *Amoris Laetitia* and three years after *Gaudete et*

¹⁰² Tom Weinandy, “The Christian Family as the Domestic Church,” *Gloria.Tv*, Magisterial Teaching on the Family as a Domestic Church, last modified August 22, 2018, accessed July 5, 2019, <https://gloria.tv/article/423MQWm6ChRz1zbDncR9mFU6C>.

¹⁰³ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia [on Love in the Family]*, Vatican Website, March 19, 2016, 86, accessed October 4, 2018, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia.html.

¹⁰⁴ Francis, “Letter for the 8th World Meeting of Families,” Vatican Website, December 9, 2014, accessed July 30, 2019, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20141210_lettera-incontro-mondiale-famiglie.html.

¹⁰⁵ “Family Love: Vocation and Path to Holiness,” *Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life*, last modified May 17, 2019, accessed August 1, 2019, http://www.laityfamilylife.va/content/laityfamilylife/en/news/2019/_1_amore-familiare--vocazione-e-via-di-santita.html.

Exsultate. The announcement for this meeting proposed a rereading of “*Amoris Laetitia* in the light of the call to holiness of *Gaudete et Exsultate*.”¹⁰⁶

This chapter, which treated the emergence of the Christian family as Domestic Church during and following the Second Vatican Council, focused on papal and Church documents. The next chapter will refer primarily to the development of new ecclesiological directions for the Domestic Church after Vatican II by bishops and theologians.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Chapter 3: New Ecclesiological Directions for the Domestic Church

Ecclesiological developments, which had a significant impact on the family as Domestic Church, were set in motion during the Second Vatican Council and continue to be developed. The resulting implications for the Domestic Church will also continue to unfold for years to come. This chapter will highlight these developments and will mention important implications based on works published in the past twenty-five years (since 1994) regarding:

- 3.1 the status of the expression “Domestic Church,”
- 3.2 the sacramentality of the Domestic Church, and
- 3.3 implications for parish and family ministry.

It features teachings by bishops and works by theologians prominent in the theology of family and marriage, such as Joseph C. Atkinson, Florence Caffrey Bourg, Lisa Sowle Cahill, Michael A. Fahey, Fr. Robert J. Hater, Cardinal Marc Ouellet, Julie Rubio, and Fr. Thomas Weinandy.

3.1 Status of the Domestic Church

It is noteworthy that the early 1980s appear to be a turning point in the number of bishops and theologians who gave more than a cursory treatment to the concept of Domestic Church. A pivotal event took place that gained their attention and moved the Domestic Church to the center of their thinking: the 5th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on “The Christian Family” in 1980 and the release of its 1981 Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*, which developed the ecclesial significance of family communities (see Section 2.3).

Several additional events in the early 1990s triggered a further increase in the number of theologians who began to treat the Domestic Church as a significant theological category. In 1993, the United States bishops requested an extensive theological study of the Domestic Church by the *Catholic Theological Society of America* and released a pastoral message addressed primarily to Christian families titled *Follow the Way of Love*, “on the Occasion of the United Nations 1994 International Year of the Family.” At the direction of Saint John Paul II and under the guidance of the Pontifical Council for the Family, the Church also celebrated this 1994 “Year of the Family” by holding the first *World Meeting of Families* in Rome. This event has continued to be held every three years since then in different parts of the world. Also in 1994, the Synod of Bishops for Africa chose the ecclesiological model, “Church as family of God,” to guide their discussion, and the Australian Bishops Conference issued its statement on family life titled *Families: Our Hidden Treasure*.¹⁰⁷

Although the expression “Domestic Church” has been widely received, there have been inconsistencies with the authentic reception of the ecclesiology of the Domestic Church. Just as there were many contrasting perspectives regarding family life in the earliest centuries of the Church, diverse views have emerged since Vatican II about how the love of God lived within a Christian family transforms it into a Domestic Church.

One of the most influential theologians on the Domestic Church, Florence Caffrey Bourg, emphasizes that the authors on this topic are far from being unified regarding the significance and implications of the expression. There is a concern that the teaching has been developed in a doctrinal void, neglecting to address critical issues that need to be

¹⁰⁷ Florence Caffrey Bourg, “Domestic Church: A Survey of the Literature,” *Marriage, Families & Spirituality* 7, no. 2 (2001): 190.

treated in dialogue with experts in the fields of sociology, psychology, demography, theology, and other areas of study.

Joanne Heaney-Hunter echoes this concern, saying that when the current state of society and the Church are taken into consideration, “it is easy to see that the guiding beliefs of domestic church might not be universally accepted.”¹⁰⁸ She stresses the importance of examining how the Church can best utilize the concept of the Domestic Church, in a world where so many people lack the experience of a healthy family life and when countless families are broken and wounded.

Another theologian, Joseph C. Atkinson, claims that there has been insufficient effort to ground the concept of the Domestic Church theologically.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, the contemporary world exposes it to a threat of misappropriation – possibly even “restructuring the very identity of the family (with implication for the salvific reality).”¹¹⁰ Faulty appropriation is especially likely when misguided compassion results in redefining the family based on subjective criteria for the purpose of being inclusive, and the Domestic Church runs the risk of being turned into an empty label for whatever end one is pursuing.

This compassion-driven misappropriation of the expression “Domestic Church” can be seen in the teaching of Catholic theological ethicist and feminist, Lisa Sowle Cahill. She presents a non-traditional view that places the common good of society and gender equality at the center of the Domestic Church’s mission, proposing that it be focused on women and the economically disadvantaged. She claims that the “so-called

¹⁰⁸ Joanne Heaney-Hunter, “Domestic Church: Guiding Beliefs and Daily Practices,” in *Christian Marriage and Family : Contemporary Theological and Pastoral Perspectives*, ed. Michael G Lawler and William P. Roberts (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 60.

¹⁰⁹ Atkinson, “Family as Domestic Church,” 601.

¹¹⁰ Atkinson, *Biblical and Theological Foundations of the Family*, 322–323.

Christian family” has been “co-opted by existing social structures . . . that reproduce economic and gender inequities” and presents the traditional Church teaching on the family as promoting gender inequity by “calling for the subordination of women to men in a scheme that placed the family as a civil institution within an equally hierarchical model of society.”¹¹¹ She advocates for revolutionary change within society to transform the family and places this priority above that of familial love and unity or caring for and educating children.

Another theologian who specializes in applying Catholic social teaching to the family is Julie Hanlon Rubio, who gives an alternative perspective. For Rubio, the family is a Domestic Church with a dual vocation that calls for parents to live their Christian identity both at home and in the world. She argues that it is “important to think of family itself not simply as a private haven, but as a community with a mission that goes beyond itself, a part of the public vocation of Christian parents.”¹¹² She explains that the teaching on the family as a community of life and love by John Paul II “is primary not because it is most important, but because it serves as the foundation for the rest of what the family does.”¹¹³ Based on the Gospel, she prioritizes the family’s spiritual and public duties higher than its private responsibilities. For Rubio, the Domestic Church is a community that passes on the Christian faith, serves humanity, cares for those in need, and transforms society by using the home as a sanctuary to witness to the world.

¹¹¹ Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Family: A Christian Social Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 83–84.

¹¹² Julie Hanlon Rubio, *A Christian Theology of Marriage and Family* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2003), 105.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 106.

Some may argue that the developing theology of family as Domestic Church needs an increased emphasis on the “sacramental image of God’s trinitarian life, as the locus of socialization and evangelization, and as the primary educator of children.”¹¹⁴ However, few would disagree that its ecclesial task of building up God’s Kingdom by participating in the life and mission of the Church is a core task for the Christian. The Church and the Christian family share the common goal of imparting God’s love and Good News to the world. Just as “the Church is not limited to the evangelization of its own members,” the Domestic Church is a “place from which the gospel radiates so that the family becomes an evangelizer to others.”¹¹⁵

A 2009 pastoral letter of the United States bishops affirmed that the Sacrament of Matrimony configures a Christian couple “to Christ’s love for the Church,” and the resulting “communion of persons” which is formed by them and their family “is a kind of microcosm of the Church.”¹¹⁶ The bishops also reiterated the Vatican II teaching that called the Christian family a Domestic Church because it is sustained by the life of the entire Body of Christ, while at the same time reflecting within itself the life of that same universal Church.

In 2011, the Canadian bishops released a document titled “Elements of a National Pastoral Initiative for Life and the Family.” It laid out a vision that the Domestic Church should be like the universal Church: living by the Gospel and sharing this Good News with the broader community. The bishops also upheld the magisterial teaching that called

¹¹⁴ Donald A. Miller, *Concepts of Family Life in Modern Catholic Theology: From Vatican II through “Christifideles Laici”* (San Francisco: Catholic Scholars Press, 1996), xiii.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹¹⁶ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life, and Youth, *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*, 7–092 (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2009), 39.

the Christian family both to be sanctified and to sanctify each of its members and the whole world.

The 14th Ordinary General Assembly of Bishops released its final report in October 2015 on “The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World.” This report once again affirmed the Christian family to be a Domestic Church – a sacred sign of love and life that is grounded in Christ:

Based on what she has received from Christ, the Church has developed over the centuries a rich teaching on marriage and family. . . . [T]he grounding of the couple in Christ is emphasized: Christ the Lord “comes into the lives of married Christians through the Sacrament of Matrimony” (GS, 48) and remains with them (*sacramentum permanens*). He assumes human love, purifies it, brings it to fulfillment and gives the married couple, with his Spirit, the ability to live it by permeating every aspect of their life of faith, hope and charity. In this way, the couple . . . builds up the Body of Christ and is a domestic Church. . . ¹¹⁷

The expression “Domestic Church” is now commonly applied to the Christian family to accentuate that it is the smallest community or manifestation of church. There are numerous references to the Domestic Church as “the basic, foundational, or fundamental church, the smallest individual church, the smallest unit of church, the smallest of local churches, or a living cell in communion with other cells.”¹¹⁸ Theologians generally acknowledge that the Domestic Church has within itself all the essential elements of the Church because it “takes its place within this ecclesial ‘architecture’ of sacramental theology” and “is based on the role of marriage and the

¹¹⁷ Synod of Bishops, “Relazione Finale XIV Assemblea [Final Report of XIV Ordinary General Assembly],” Vatican Website, October 24, 2015, sec. 42, accessed July 11, 2019, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20151026_relazione-finale-xiv-assemblea_en.html.

¹¹⁸ Florence Caffrey Bourg, *Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Christian Families as Domestic Churches* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 31.

family in the sacramentality of the Church.”¹¹⁹ The expression concurrently suggests the familial quality of the Church and the ecclesial quality of the Christian family.

3.2 *Sacramentality of the Domestic Church*

This section will highlight the central role of the laity’s response to God in the sacraments, which are foundational for initiating the laity into the Mystical Body of Christ. The sacraments bestow the necessary grace to carry out Christ’s mission to build the Kingdom of God and to establish the Domestic Church as a people of God (see “The Church as Community – the People of God” in section 2.1).

The Second Vatican Council (*Lumen Gentium*, V) issued a universal call to holiness, and all Christians must take up their vocation with due consideration to this call. Many respond to their call from within the vocation of marriage and family life. Once Christian families come to recognize that they are truly Domestic Churches, they will be able to participate more fully and engage each other – within their families and beyond – as members of the mystical body of Christ.

Sacrament of Baptism

Through the Sacrament of Baptism, believers are initiated into the Mystical Body of Christ – the Church – and become members of the People of God. Baptism is “the gateway to life in the Spirit,”¹²⁰ and through it, Christian life begins. Configuration to Christ “is based on the reality of the sacramental character [an indelible mark] received in baptism.”¹²¹ The gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit at baptism bring about union with

¹¹⁹ Marc Ouellet, “Marriage and the Family within the Sacramentality of the Church: Challenges and Perspectives,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 41, no. 2 (2014): 243.

¹²⁰ CCC, 312, sec. 1213.

¹²¹ Paul Haffner, *The Sacramental Mystery* (Leominster, Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2016), 51.

Christ and give access to the other sacraments, including the Sacrament of Matrimony.¹²² These gifts also enable the Christian to participate in Christ's threefold nature of priest, prophet, and king.

Priestly role: As a priest, Jesus sanctifies His Church, the body of Christ. Through the everyday circumstances of married and family life, the Christian family, in unity with the Church, is called to exercise their priestly role – “to be sanctified and to sanctify the ecclesial community and the world.”¹²³ The functions of this priestly ministry include, but are not limited to: participation in the liturgy, sacrifice and sanctification of everyday life, and acceptance and offering of suffering, sickness, and death.

Because of their common priesthood, all the baptized are responsible for continuing Christ's saving mission. Furthermore, Christian spouses are uniquely sanctified and empowered by the Sacrament of Matrimony to fulfill their priestly responsibilities in their families. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* calls the Christian family a Domestic Church where all members of the household “exercise the *priesthood of the baptized* in a privileged way ‘by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life, and self-denial and active charity.’”¹²⁴ The family, as a Domestic Church, is a faithful community whose witness is vital for the conversion of the world and the transformation of the culture.

Praying together and worshipping together as a family, especially at the Sunday Mass, is essential for exercising their royal priesthood. At the center of the Domestic Church's ministry is group prayer: spouses praying with and for each other and parents

¹²² CCC, 323, secs. 1213, 1267, 1269.

¹²³ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, sec. 55.

¹²⁴ CCC, 413, sec. 1657.

praying with and for their children. Through this community of prayer, family members are empowered to make priestly sacrifices for the greater good of all from a pure and selfless love for each other.

Prophetic role: As a prophet, Jesus is the supreme teacher. By their baptism, all lay members of the Church share in this prophetic role and are expected to cooperate with bishops and priests in the spreading of the Gospel by their words and their example of Christian living. Married couples have particular importance in this prophetic, or teaching, role because they are “the first preachers [or teachers] of the faith to their children.”¹²⁵ John Paul II expresses the obligation for the Domestic Church to maintain a focus on this responsibility:

[T]he Christian family fulfills its prophetic role by welcoming and announcing the word of God. . . . 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. Thus the little domestic Church, like the greater Church, needs to be constantly and intensely evangelized: hence its duty regarding permanent education in the faith.¹²⁶

Christian parents have the irreplaceable duty to joyfully and confidently pass on their faith, especially to their children. Christian husbands and wives will “find their proper vocation in being witnesses of the faith and love of Christ to one another and to their children.”¹²⁷ It is in the Church of the home – the Domestic Church – that children learn their first lessons about love and community, as well as about God and the Church. As “the first community,” the Christian family is called to announce the Gospel and provide an integral formation to its members both through a living witness of faith and

¹²⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, sec. 11.

¹²⁶ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, sec. 51.

¹²⁷ *Lumen Gentium*, sec. 35.

through ongoing human, intellectual, spiritual, and apostolic formation. With this stable foundation, children are able to discover their valuable role as sons and daughters of God and as members of the broader Christian community – the universal Church.

The United States bishops detailed four specific tasks given by the 1980 Synod "for the good of the Church and society"¹²⁸ and expanded by John Paul II under the prophetic role of the Domestic Church. These tasks are discussed in Section 3.3.

Kingly role: As a king, Jesus shepherds the faithful – He rules and governs His Church. Jesus Christ, however, does not rule in an authoritarian or regal role, but as a servant leader. A Christian family participates in the kingship of Christ by becoming a community at the service of humanity because to reign as Christ means to serve. The Canadian bishops argue that the Christian family will impact not only its own members but also the culture and society by exercising its kingly responsibilities:

As families, we serve society best when we work to “become what we are”: communities of life and love, when we are open to life and when we allow our love to radiate out into society, enhancing the personal dignity of all. By training their children to embrace roles of kingly and queenly service, Christian families contribute immeasurably to the future good of society. When the Christian family seeks its own well-being, then, it does so only because it knows and knows too well, that it is only in a climate of love that the spirit of generosity and self-donation, on which the future of humanity depends, can be cultivated.¹²⁹

In imitation of Christ, who exercises His royal power by serving, married couples and parents exercise their kingly role by their ministry of loving service. “Parents are to govern their families so as to ensure that the gospel is lived out among all of its

¹²⁸ *A Family Perspective in Church and Society*, 8.

¹²⁹ “Elements of a National Pastoral Initiative for Life and Family,” *Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops*, 10–11, last modified October 2011, accessed August 24, 2019, <http://www.cccb.ca/site/eng/church-in-canada-and-world/catholic-church-in-canada/life-and-family>.

members.”¹³⁰ This ministry involves the ordering of family life according to the Christian standard of love and making rules that exemplify the principles of the Ten Commandments.

By participating in Christ’s threefold nature of priest, prophet, and king received at Baptism, the members of a Christian family can make their home a “living” Domestic Church. In its priestly role, the Domestic Church is a believing and evangelizing community; in its prophetic role, they are a community in dialogue with God; and in its kingly role, the family is a community at the service of humankind.

Sacrament of the Eucharist

As the Church “draws her life from the word and the Body of Christ and so herself becomes Christ's Body,”¹³¹ so does the Christian family, as Domestic Church, draw the strength it needs to fulfill the duties and roles of its state in life. Christ unites the Christian family most fully with His Priesthood through the Sacrament of the Eucharist. The Catechism of the Catholic Church points out that Christian initiation is perfected in the Sacrament of the Eucharist:

The holy Eucharist completes Christian initiation. Those who have been raised to the dignity of the royal priesthood by Baptism and configured more deeply to Christ by Confirmation participate with the whole community in the Lord's own sacrifice by means of the Eucharist.¹³²

“The Second Vatican Council rightly proclaimed that the Eucharistic sacrifice is ‘the source and summit of the Christian life.’”¹³³ Nourished and strengthened by the

¹³⁰ Weinandy, “The Christian Family as the Domestic Church,” *Kingly Ministry within the Domestic Church*.

¹³¹ CCC, 198, sec. 752.

¹³² Ibid., 334, sec. 1322.

¹³³ John Paul II, “Ecclesia de Eucharistia [on the Eucharist in Its Relationship to the Church],” Vatican Website, April 17, 2003, sec. 1, accessed September 17, 2019, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/special_features/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_20030417_ecclesia_eucharistia_en.html.

Eucharistic Body of Christ, the Christian family, like all the faithful, can demonstrate the unity of the Church most tangibly. Our Lord calls every person, regardless of his or her state in life, and every family, regardless of its circumstances, to follow Him and His pathway of love (see also 1 Jn 4:9-11, Eph 5:2). During the Sacrament of the Eucharist, in the words of the Consecration, Christ demonstrates His immense love by giving His entire person to the faithful. John Paul II affirms that Christ is present whenever family members lovingly gather to break bread, but that He is closest when they gather for Holy Communion:

The Eucharist is truly a wondrous sacrament. . . . It is for you, dear husbands and wives, parents and families! Did Jesus not institute the Eucharist in a family-like setting during the Last Supper? When you meet for meals and are together in harmony, Christ is close to you. And he is Emmanuel, God with us, in an even greater way whenever you approach the table of the Eucharist.¹³⁴

According to the United States bishops, because the presence of Christ within the Christian family is what makes it truly a Domestic Church, its regular participation in the Eucharist liturgy, especially on Sundays, is especially important. In receiving Holy Communion, family members “are most fully united to the living and glorious Christ and so to one another and to their brothers and sisters throughout the world . . . and nurture most fully the love of the Father and the bond of the Spirit.”¹³⁵

There is “an inseparable link between communion in Christ’s eucharistic Body and communion in his ecclesial Body.”¹³⁶ In an ecclesial sense that was “very strong at the origins,” the Eucharist makes present the mystery of the Covenant: “the total gift that

¹³⁴ John Paul II, “Gratissimam Sane [Letter to Families],” Vatican Website, February 2, 1994, 18, accessed September 25, 2018, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii LET_02021994_families.html.

¹³⁵ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life, and Youth, *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*, 41–42.

¹³⁶ Ouellet, “Marriage and the Family within the Sacramentality of the Church,” 239.

Christ makes of His body to the Church His Bride, to sanctify and nourish her (Eph 5:27) and to associate her to His own fruitfulness, for the salvation of the world (cf. LG 7).”¹³⁷ Initiated into Christ by Baptism and strengthened in the Eucharist by the Body of Christ, Christian spouses share in the mystery of the unity and fruitful love that exists between Christ and His Church through the Sacrament of Matrimony.

Sacrament of Matrimony

The relationship between the Sacraments of Baptism and Matrimony is a basis for the ecclesial status of the family. The mutual self-gift of one baptized man and one baptized woman to each other in the Sacrament of Matrimony occurs within an act of faith, which also confirms their belonging to Christ through their Baptism. God desires that each sacramental marriage is a lasting and fruitful union, a means of sanctification for the couple, and a blessing for the entire People of God. In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis offers an excellent description of sacramental marriage:

Christian marriage, as a reflection of the union between Christ and his Church, is fully realized in the union between a man and a woman who give themselves to each other in a free, faithful and exclusive love, who belong to each other until death, are open to the transmission of life, and are consecrated by the sacrament, which grants them the grace to become a domestic church and a haven of new life for society.¹³⁸

Christian marriage between a baptized man and woman “receives its meaning and existence from God who created humans male and female, and from Jesus who restored its original intent.”¹³⁹ God is the author of marriage, and Jesus returned it to God’s original purpose when He sanctioned this union as a permanent bond by commanding: “what God has joined together, no human being must separate. (Matt 19:6)”

¹³⁷ Ouellet, “Ecclesiology of Communion,” I.A.2.

¹³⁸ Francis, *Amoris Laetitia [on Love in the Family]*, para. 292.

¹³⁹ Miller, *Concepts of Family Life in Modern Catholic Theology*, 91.

The *Catechism* teaches that the marriage is “a true sacrament of the New Covenant” because “it signifies and communicates grace.”¹⁴⁰ The love of the spouses is an image of Christ’s love for His Church. Moreover, Christ promises to dwell with the couple, giving them a share in His divine love. As a result, sacramental marriage is much more than a social structure originating from human nature or a legal contract.

Since the love of the spouses and their commitment to each other signifies Jesus’ everlasting communion between Himself and His Church, it is not surprising that the words of the liturgical rite of the Sacrament of Matrimony resemble those of the Eucharistic Consecration. In the sacred rite of matrimony, the bride and groom mutually give and take each other out of love and consecrate themselves to each other for the rest of their lives, becoming a single body. The Domestic Church, like the universal Church, is one body in Christ with missionary and apostolic vitality.

Through the Sacrament of Matrimony, the spouses receive a new identity and mission that drastically changes their personal and ecclesial status and produces rights and duties for the spouses toward each other, their children, and the broader community. As Cardinal Marc Ouellet, the prefect to the Congregation of Bishops, explains:

[T]he wholeness of their love [is] now complemented by an ecclesial mission: that of loving one another “in the Lord” (1 Cor 7:39), giving to the world a living witness of Christ’s Love in the daily life of their family, the domestic church.¹⁴¹

This new ecclesial identity of the couple leads to relationships that “follow highly logical patterns based on theological/anthropological premises all expressing the loving plan of God.”¹⁴² In addition, the universal appeal for unity in the Church, as described in

¹⁴⁰ CCC, 404, sec. 1617.

¹⁴¹ Ouellet, “Marriage and the Family within the Sacramentality of the Church,” 233.

¹⁴² Miller, *Concepts of Family Life in Modern Catholic Theology*, 102–103.

Eph 4:1-16, can be extended to family life: living in a manner worthy of being called a Domestic Church requires humility, gentleness, patience, bearing one another with love, striving through peace to maintain unity, and using one's gifts to make the family community more Christlike. Total self-giving, faithfulness, and openness to new life are also essential characteristics of the Christian marital relationship.

The vocation to married life is made possible for baptized spouses in the Sacrament of Matrimony by the essential source of strength supplied by the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Empowered and nourished by these two sacraments and the loving support of the surrounding community of faith, the marital union of the couple is strengthened and transformed. Thus transformed, the couple is ready to undertake the ongoing task of establishing their Domestic Church and working together with the parish to fulfill the mission of bringing Christ into the world and building the Kingdom of God.

3.3 Implications for Parish and Family Ministry

The implications resulting from the new ecclesiological directions set in motion at Vatican II are only beginning to be appreciated and will continue to be developed for years to come. This section addresses the implications of a “new ecclesial paradigm”¹⁴³ for family life in the Church, as discussed by John Paul II and subsequent popes, bishops, and theologians.

The implications of this new ecclesial paradigm are demonstrated in *Familiaris Consortio* through four specific tasks drawn from the 5th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Christian family. In 1998, the United States bishops

¹⁴³ Michael A. Fahey, “Fine-Tuning the Notion of ‘Domestic Church,’” in *The Household of God and Local Households. Revisiting the Domestic Church*, ed. Thomas Knieps-Port Le Roi, Gerard Mannion, and Peter De Mey, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium Series (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 98.

elaborated on these tasks in *A Family Perspective in Church and Society*, a pastoral strategy addressing the unique opportunities and pressures on the Christian family:¹⁴⁴

1. To form an intimate community of persons.
2. To serve life in its transmission, both physically by bringing children into the world and spiritually by handing on values and traditions as well as developing the potential of each member at every age.
3. To participate in the development of society by becoming a community of social training and hospitality, as well as a community of political involvement and activity.
4. To share in the life and mission of the Church by becoming a believing and evangelizing community, a community in dialogue with God, and a community at the service of humanity.

John Paul II, in *Familiaris Consortio*, indicates that plans for the Domestic Church should always bear in mind the ecclesial and pastoral care of the family. In Part Three of this work, he calls for the family to be transformed into the Domestic Church. He says: “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.”¹⁴⁵ This statement is an appeal to the family to claim and act upon their ecclesial identity. However, they cannot do this on their own:

[The] family is not a chapel, a cenacle. This is why you must take care to work closely with your bishops and the ministers of the Church, beginning with your parish priests.¹⁴⁶

An important implication for the Christian family is to understand and accept that it does not exist for its own sake, but like the universal Church, it exists for fulfillment in God. A faith-filled family becomes a Domestic Church when they learn to welcome and listen to God's Word and whole-heartedly engage in their call and the Church's mission to

¹⁴⁴ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Committee on Marriage and Family, *A Family Perspective in Church and Society*, 4–6, 8, 59.

¹⁴⁵ John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, sec. 17.

¹⁴⁶ John Paul II, “Foyers Des Equipes Notre-Dame,” Vatican Website, September 23, 1982, sec. 5, accessed July 10, 2019, https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1982/september/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19820923_foyers-equipes-notre-dame.html.

proclaim the Gospel to all. The Domestic Church is to build the Kingdom of God in the world by preparing, nourishing, and sustaining the members of both the Church and civil society. It undertakes and accomplishes its mission while always guarding, revealing, and communicating the love of God.

Parishes can help the family to answer this call and accomplish its mission by addressing each Domestic Church as a body in communion with other families, who together form a parish and diocesan Church. For either the parish or the family to be a genuine form of Christian community, they need each other and must work collaboratively. Therefore, the Church has identified the essential role of priests in collaboratively forming the members of Domestic Churches in their parish:

It devolves on priests duly trained about family matters to nurture the vocation of spouses by a variety of pastoral means, by preaching God's word, by liturgical worship, and by other spiritual aids to conjugal and family life; to sustain them sympathetically and patiently in difficulties, and to make them courageous through love, so that families which are truly illustrious can be formed.¹⁴⁷

Three steps were identified by the bishops for a pastoral strategy to collaborate in the formation of Christian families and to deliver on the promise of a new ecclesial paradigm. First, the Church, especially at the parish level, must reflect on and recommit itself to family life, recognizing the “value, the dignity, and the mission of the domestic church.”¹⁴⁸ The second step is to welcome all families and to consider family diversity when developing policies, programs, ministries, and services. Thirdly, recognizing the vital importance of family life, the Church must take action to address issues that undermine families and look for new ways to provide ongoing assistance and support.

¹⁴⁷ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, sec. 52.

¹⁴⁸ *A Family Perspective in Church and Society*, 5–6.

This final step includes examining how its structures and processes actually assist or impede the family life of its members.

Cardinal Ouellet affirms this renewed pastoral approach to marriage and the family that more fully reveals the vision from Vatican II. He urges the Church to “begin anew from Christ, the ‘Light of Nations,’” and to reconceive the Church’s pastoral care of the family with a broader outlook and from the perspective of the Domestic Church.¹⁴⁹ According to Ouellet, there is a critical need for a focus on authentic and timely formation for the Domestic Church in this age when the family is being threatened by a culture that does not respect the dignity and beauty of life and the marital union:

At a time when we are witnessing an unprecedented anthropological crisis, characterized by the loss of a sense of marriage and the family, the Church can and must count on the resource of the family founded on sacramental marriage in order to confront the challenges of secularized societies. The evangelizing potential of such a sacramental reality still remains to be discovered and promoted, so that the Church’s endeavor for the new evangelization can become a reality.¹⁵⁰

A more comprehensive catechesis is needed to help parents to understand their own ecclesial leadership responsibilities better as well as to appreciate the impact on their children and parish community of fully living their three-fold ecclesial roles of priest, prophet, and king. A suggested approach focuses on family members who are ready to begin preparation for a particular sacrament as being the ideal time for parishes to offer an expanded formation that systematically includes the topic of the Christian family being an ecclesial reality. Pastors, for example, are urged to help engaged couples during marriage preparation to be intentional in setting priorities for the formation of their own faith and that of their children:

¹⁴⁹ Ouellet, “Marriage and the Family within the Sacramentality of the Church,” 228.

¹⁵⁰ Ouellet, “Ecclesiology of Communion,” 1.B.1.

This preparation process challenges a parish to recognize that more is required pastorally than preparing for a nice celebration of four separate events: marriage, baptism, reconciliation and first Communion. This “more” requires a pastor and staff to consider where the parents are on their faith journey, the attitude they have toward their children’s faith, and how to encourage parents to be more intentional about their journey.¹⁵¹

Many of the principles for realizing the essential ecclesial and sacramental nature of the Christian family, as contained in the bishop’s plan outlined above, have been put into action, such as the implementation of family-related initiatives dealing with marriage preparation, marital crisis, parenting, and youth. However, this is only a beginning, and more effort is required by parishes and families to achieve the goal of putting the Domestic Church at the center of the Church’s work and worship.

To become more faithful disciples of Christ, all members of the universal Church need to remain close to God in prayer and be deeply evangelized and continuously formed. The bishops appropriately stated in their pastoral strategy: “No domestic church does all this perfectly. But neither does any parish or diocesan church.”¹⁵² Therefore, as a renewed pastoral approach to marriage and the family is put into effect, it is important to keep in mind the maxim of “progress, not perfection.”

The bishops recap the implications for the new ecclesial paradigm described in this section in their manual for pastoral leaders:

The state of the family has been verified; the need is clear; the direction has been set; immediate action is possible. . . . [It is hoped] that, in the years to come, many more persons will come to understand, accept, and act upon what a family perspective means for society, for the Church, and for families themselves, upon whom the future of the human family rests.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Robert J. Hater, “The Pastoral Opportunities of First Communion: Explaining the Importance of the Eucharist Starts at Home,” *The Priest Magazine* 75, no. 5 (May 2019): 42.

¹⁵² “Follow the Way of Love,” *You Are the Church in Your Home*.

¹⁵³ *A Family Perspective in Church and Society*, v, 60.

Conclusion

This thesis establishes that the Second Vatican Council set in motion new directions that enabled subsequent ecclesiology to regard the family as a Domestic Church – an authentic ecclesial manifestation of God's presence within a familial community and actualizing what the Church is as a whole. To accomplish this purpose, a wide range of teachings have been treated, including: the scriptural roots of the Domestic Church that were upheld and developed by the Council from the early Church regarding house churches and the family, the patristic and magisterial teachings about marriage and family through the ages, and new ecclesiological directions that were initiated at Vatican II and were subsequently developed.

Vatican II modeled the theological framework for understanding the Christian family as a Domestic Church upon the everlasting bond of love between Christ and His Church (ecclesiology) and upon the gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit at Baptism that enable the Christian to participate in Christ's threefold nature of priest, prophet, and king (Christology). The roles of the Christian family as Domestic Church are the same as those that define the universal Church: evangelizing and teaching, sanctifying and growing in holiness, governing and serving humankind.

Conciliar documents (See *Lumen Gentium*, section 11, and *Gaudium et Spes*, section 48) considered the Christian family to be analogously and metaphorically *like* a Domestic Church – the smallest cell of the universal Church. Within ten years of Vatican II, Paul VI portrayed the Christian family literally *to be* the Domestic Church. Subsequent popes, bishops, and theologians prominent in the theology of family and marriage have continued to build upon this shift and to reinforce the ecclesial relationship

between the Christian family and the broader Church, which the Second Vatican Council established. The expression “Domestic Church” is now commonly applied to the Christian family to accentuate its vital role in the ecclesial community – a community of life and love.

Christian families and parishes are encouraged to work together to realize the high value of the teaching on the Domestic Church and to build up the Mystical Body of Christ. The United States bishops point out that this teaching unites the family and the Church in a shared mission:

As Christian families, you not only belong to the Church, but your daily life is a true expression of the Church. Your domestic church is not complete by itself, of course. It should be united with and supported by parishes and other communities within the larger Church. Christ has called you and joined you to himself in and through the sacraments. Therefore, you share in one and the same mission that he gives to the whole Church.¹⁵⁴

This challenge from the bishops invites all Christians to acknowledge and advance God’s plan for marriage and the family. In this Divine plan, the Christian family finds the full truth of its being as a Domestic Church, with a particular salvific and ecclesial identity that cannot be altered because it is a gift from God.

¹⁵⁴ “Follow the Way of Love,” You Are the Church in Your Home.

Appendix A – List of Select Prominent Authors

Selected theologians prominent in the theology of family and marriage since 1995 are listed here with a brief description of their credentials and most notable works:

JOSEPH C. ATKINSON, Ph.D., is a primary authority on the concept of the Domestic Church, which explores the ecclesial structure and meaning of the family. His work has included foundational research in developing the Biblical and theological foundation of the family. He teaches at the Pontifical John Paul II Institute on the Biblical structure and meaning of marriage and the family, on the Jewish background of the family, on the nature and role of covenant, and on hermeneutics and the role of symbol. He has produced a 13-part series with EWTN on the Domestic Church and has authored numerous works on Scriptural exegesis and the biblical vision of the family, including “Family as Domestic Church: Developmental Trajectory, Legitimacy and Problems of Appropriation” (Theological Studies) and his book *The Biblical and Theological Foundations of the Family: The Domestic Church* (CUA Press, 2014). He is founder of the *Theology of the Family Project*, which promotes the recovery of the Biblical vision of marriage and family.
From <https://www.johnpaulii.edu/academics/faculty/joseph-atkinson>

FLORENCE CAFFREY BOURG, Ph.D., is the author of several significant works about the Domestic Church, most notably *Where Two or Three Are Gathered: Christian Families as Domestic Churches* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2004). Her dissertation on the Domestic Church was completed in the Department of Theology at Boston College. She has served as convener of the Marriage and Family interest group for the College Theology Society, where her projects on the formation of virtue have been presented. She was the religious department chair at the Academy of the Sacred Heart School in New Orleans and has taught systematic theology and ethics at the College of Mount Saint Joseph in Cincinnati. She is currently instructor and curriculum designer for a required online ministry course at Loyola University in New Orleans as well as grant writer for Jesuit USA Central and Southern Province.
From <https://www.linkedin.com/in/florence-caffrey-bourg-ph-d-361773147/> and <https://www.loyno.edu/academics/faculty-and-staff-directory/florence-caffrey-bourg>

LISA SOWLE CAHILL is J. Donald Monan Professor of Christian Ethics at Boston College. She is the author of several books on Christian social ethics and the Christian family, including *Global Justice, Christology and Christian Ethics* (2013) and *Family: A Christian Social Perspective* (2000). Cahill has been president of both the *Society for Christian Ethics* and the *Catholic Theological Society of America*. She was one of four principal speakers at the 1996 “Mile Hi Conversations” in Denver, which drew criticism from Denver archdiocesan officials, and the speakers were labeled “false teachers” in the archdiocese’s newspaper.
From March 3, 1996, *National Catholic Reporter* Vol. 32 Issue 19 Page 10 and back cover of *Family: A Christian Social Perspective*.

MICHAEL A. FAHEY is professor of theology at Boston College. He studied philosophy in Leuven in the 1950s and in the late 1960s did doctoral studies in theology at the University of Tübingen under Professors Hans Küng and Joseph Ratzinger. Most of his academic work has taken place in Montreal and Toronto, and his focus has been ecumenism. In 2005, he received an honorary doctorate from St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto. In 2006, fifteen of his colleagues and former students dedicated a Festschrift to him entitled: *In God's Hands: Essays on the Church and Ecumenism in Honour of Michael Fahey*. He has served as president of the *Catholic Theological Society of America* as well as the *American Theological Society*. Fahey's well-known work, "The Christian Family as Domestic Church at Vatican II" (1995), is often cited by other theologians. Fahey has published twenty-nine works in ninety-one publications in three languages. From <https://www.bloomsbury.com/author/michael-a-fahey>

REV. ROBERT J. HATER, PH.D., a priest of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, resides at St. Clare Parish in Cincinnati. He is professor of pastoral and systematic theology at the Athenaeum of Ohio and Professor Emeritus at the University of Dayton. Hater is a storyteller and internationally known writer and lecturer in the fields of catechesis, ministry, evangelization, spirituality, and theology of the family. He has written over thirty books and numerous journal articles. His latest books include: *Finding God Anew Everyday, Vol 1* (2017), *Your [Imperfect] Holy Family* (2015), and *Catholics Come Alive! Lessons from Evangelicals* (2014). His 2007 book, *When a Catholic Marries a Non-Catholic*, won a Catholic Press Association Award. From: <http://www.twentythirdpublications.com/meetfrbobhater.html> and <https://www.biola.edu/talbot/ce20/database/robert-hater>

THOMAS KNIEPS-PORT LE ROI is since 2005 holder of the *INTAMS* Chair for the Study of Marriage & Spirituality at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, KU Leuven. He teaches courses in theological ethics with a particular focus on sexual, conjugal and family ethics. He is also a member of the Research Unit Theological and Comparative Ethics. Since 1995, Knieps is editor of the international journal *Marriage, Families & Spirituality* (formerly *INTAMS Review*). His main field of research is the theology, ethics, and spirituality of marriage and the family. He has recently edited the following books: *A Point of No Return? Amoris Laetitia on Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage* (ed., 2017) *Authentic Voices, Discerning Hearts. New Resources for the Church on Marriage and the Family* (co-ed. with A. Brenninkmeijer-Werhahn, 2016); *The Household of God and Local Households. Revisiting the Domestic Church* (co-ed. with Mannion & P. De Mey, 2013). From <https://theo.kuleuven.be/en/research/researchers/00050346/>

CARDINAL MARC OUELLET has served as Prefect of the Congregation for Bishops and President of the Pontifical Commission for Latin America since June 30, 2010. Formerly, he was Archbishop of Québec and Primate of Canada, and in 2013, he was elevated to a Cardinal. He held the chair of dogmatic theology at the *Pontifical John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family* in Rome from 1996 to 2002 and previously taught theology in both North and South America. In 2018, he was appointed Cardinal-Bishop of Santa Maria in Traspontina. Ouellet is also the author of seventy-two works in 136 publications in five languages, including in English: *Divine Likeness: Toward a Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family* (2006), “Marriage and the Family within the Sacramentality of the Church: Challenges and Perspectives” (2014), and *Mystery and Sacrament of Love: A Theology of Marriage and the Family for the New Evangelization* (2015). From <https://www.logos.com/product/156308/mystery-and-sacrament-of-love-a-theology-of-marriage-and-the-family-for-the-new-evangelization>

JULIE HANLON RUBIO, PH.D., is currently on the faculty at Jesuit School of Theology after nineteen years in the Department of Theological Studies at Saint Louis University. She has written several works on family and the Domestic Church and is frequently cited in the work of other theologians. She has published four books and one edited volume, including *Reading, Praying, Living Pope Francis’s The Joy of Love* (2017) and *Family Ethics: Practices for Christians* (2010). Her many essays have appeared in *Theological Studies*, *Horizons*, the *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*, and the *Journal of Political Theology*. She is a board member of the *Catholic Theological Society of America*, *Horizons*, the *Journal of Catholic Social Thought*, and *National Catholic Reporter*. Rubio also speaks in a wide variety of public forums and specializes in applying Catholic social teaching to the family.

From: <https://www.scu.edu/jst/about/people-of-jst/faculty/julie-rubio-phd/>

REV. THOMAS WEINANDY, OFM., CAP., is a highly regarded and accomplished American theologian who is former chief of staff for the U.S. Bishops’ Committee on Doctrine and a current member of the Vatican’s International Theological Commission. He is the current President of the Academy of Catholic Theology, and a member of the Catholic Theological Society of America, the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars, the Catholic Theological Society of Great Britain, the North American Patristics Society, and the Association Internationale D’Etudes Patristiques. He received from Pope Francis the Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice medal in recognition of service to the Church in 2013. Weinandy is the author of several books and numerous articles for both academic and popular publications, including *Jesus Becoming Jesus: A Theological Interpretation of the Synoptic Gospels* (2018) and “The Christian Family as the Domestic Church” (2018). From <https://www.catholicworldreport.com/author/weinandy-thomas/> and <https://catholiccitizens.org/press/87479/fr-thomas-g-weinandy-o-f-m-cap-to-speak-at-our-july-12-2019-forum-luncheon/>

Appendix B – Chronological List of Select Documents

This appendix provides a list of the significant events and documents impacting the ecclesiology of the Domestic Church since the Second Vatican Council:

1964 ADDRESS, “NAZARETH, A MODEL.” At Nazareth on the Feast of the Holy Family, Pope Paul VI encourages all to reflect on the Holy Family as a “school” for learning to imitate Christ.

Liturgy of the Hours, ed. Catholic Church, vol. 1, January 5, 1964 (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1975), 426–427

1974 APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION, *MARIALIS CULTUS*. By Pope Paul VI, on the “Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the shift to perceiving the Christian family literally *to be* a Domestic Church is evident.

http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19740202_marialis-cultus.html

1978 PASTORAL STATEMENT, A VISION AND STRATEGY: THE PLAN OF PASTORAL ACTION FOR FAMILY MINISTRY. By the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

USCC Office of Publishing and Promotion Services, (Washington, D.C., 1978)

1981 APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION, *FAMILIARIS CONSORTIO*. By Pope Saint John Paul II, a document of the 5th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on “The Christian Family,” gives a substantial account of the ecclesial character of the family.

http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio.html

1983 CODE OF CANON LAW. The official compilation of ecclesiastical law for Roman Catholics, contains Canons 1055 – 1165 about Marriage.

http://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic_lib4-cann998-1165_en.html#TITLE_VII

1988 APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION, *CHRISTIFIDELES LAICI*. By Pope Saint John Paul II, a document of the 7th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on “The Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World,” gives solid reasoning for why Christian family should be called Domestic Church.

http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici.html

1988 PASTORAL STATEMENT, *A FAMILY PERSPECTIVE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY: A Manual for All Pastoral Leaders*, followed by the **1998 TENTH ANNIVERSARY EDITION.** The National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Committee on Marriage and Family, proposes a strategy to infuse a *family perspective* as the guiding vision for planning, implementing, and evaluating all programs, ministries, and policies of the parish.

USCC Office of Publishing and Promotion Services, (Washington, D.C., 1988 and 1998)

1992 CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. Originally promulgated in 1992 by Pope Saint John Paul II with a second edition published in English in 2000, conveys Catholic faith and morals, the Sacrament of Matrimony is sections 1601 – 1666, and the Sixth Commandment is sections 2331 – 2400.

http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P51.HTM and [/___P84.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/___P84.HTM)

1993 PASTORAL LETTER, “FOLLOW THE WAY OF LOVE.” By the National Conference of Bishops, addressed primarily to Christian families on the Occasion of the United Nations 1994 International *Year of the Family*, shares a vision of the family's "great calling" and pledges the support of the Church.

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage/follow-the-way-of-love.cfm>

1994 LETTER, “GRATISSIMAM SANE.” To Families by Pope Saint John Paul II, for the *Year of the Family*, emphasizes the importance of family prayer: "prayer by the family, prayer for the family, and prayer with the family."

http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_02021994_families.html

2005 LETTER “FIFTH WORLD MEETING OF FAMILIES.” By Pope Benedict XVI to participants, reflects on how the Holy Family of Nazareth – by the example of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus – is an icon of the Domestic Church.

http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/letters/2005/documents/hf_ben-xvi_let_20050517_famiglia-valencia.html.

2009 PASTORAL LETTER, *MARRIAGE: LOVE AND LIFE IN THE DIVINE PLAN*. By the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life, and Youth; reiterates the Vatican II teaching that called the Christian family a Domestic Church.

USCC Office of Publishing and Promotion Services, (Washington, D.C., 2009)

2011 ADDRESS, “PLENARY ASSEMBLY OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY.” By Pope Benedict XVI to participants, states that the “new evangelization depends largely on the Domestic Church” and affirms that family is the “first school of prayer,” theme of the assembly was “The Family: Work and Rest.”

http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2011/december/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20111201_pc-family.html

2011 PASTORAL STATEMENT, “ELEMENTS OF A NATIONAL PASTORAL INITIATIVE FOR LIFE AND FAMILY.” The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops proposes a plan for parishes and families to collaborate in creating a new generation of families who are actively engaged in building a culture of life and family in Canada.

<http://www.cccb.ca/site/eng/church-in-canada-and-world/catholic-church-in-canada/life-and-family>

2012 HOMILY, “CLOSING EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATION FOR 7TH WORLD MEETING OF FAMILIES.” Pope Benedict XVI proclaims God’s plan for the human couple.

http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/homilies/2012/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20120603_milano.pdf

2014 REPORT, “LINEAMENTA.” A document of the 3rd Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on “The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World” includes the Relatio Synodi on the “Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization.”

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20141209_lineamenta-xiv-assembly_en.html

2014 LETTER, 8TH WORLD MEETING OF FAMILIES. Pope Francis maintains that the constant mission of the Christian family, by the power of the Sacrament of Matrimony, is to proclaim the love of God to the world.

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20141210_lettera-incontro-mondiale-famiglie.html

2015 REPORT, “RELAZIONE FINALE XIV ASSEMBLEA.” The final report of the 14th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishop, discusses “The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World.”

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20151026_relazione-finale-xiv-assemblea_en.html

2018 APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION, AMORIS LAETITIA. By Pope Francis, a document of the 14th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and the Contemporary World, “stresses that the family is a domestic church” and explains that its members “enter upon an ecclesial experience of communion among persons.”

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia.html

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