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M. Danielle Peters
University of Notre Dame

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MARY AND THE DOMESTIC CHURCH

M. Danielle Peters, STD

Lumen Gentium (LG) 11 acknowledges: “The family is, so to speak, the domestic Church.” The Instrumentum Laboris (IL) of the Synod of Bishops, dealing with “The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization,” refers five times to the family as domestic Church. The concluding prayer of the IL asks the Holy Family of Nazareth to “grant that our families, too, may be places of communion and prayer, authentic schools of the Gospel and small domestic Churches.” This paper seeks:

- *To explore the notion of the family as domestic church or Church in miniature;*
- *To make a contribution to a theology/ecclesiology of the domestic church and Mary’s role therein;*
- *To introduce the ‘Home Shrine’ of the Schoenstatt Movement as a place of prayer and spiritual encounter for the domestic church with a specific focus on Mary’s efficacy as Educatrix of the Family;*
- *To show that the domestic church under the protection of Our Lady can be a prime promoter of evangelization.*

Introduction

Lumen Gentium (LG) 11 acknowledges that the “family is, so to speak, the domestic church.” The Instrumentum Laboris of the 2014 Synod of Bishops, dealing with “The Pastoral

Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization,” refers five times to the family as domestic church.¹ Its concluding prayer asks the Holy Family of Nazareth to “grant that our families, too, may be places of communion and prayer, authentic schools of the Gospel, and small domestic Churches.” This paper seeks:

1. To explore the notion of the family as domestic church;
2. To make a contribution to a theology of the domestic church and Mary’s role therein;
3. To introduce the Schoenstatt ‘Home Shrine’ as a concrete realization of the domestic church.

Although traditional families are for the first time in history in the minority, a serious issue which will need to be taken up by the coming 2015 synod, my paper focuses on the Christian understanding of family—a baptized man and a baptized woman united in the sacrament of marriage and open to the gift of life.

PART 1: THE NOTION OF A DOMESTIC CHURCH

The notion of the Christian family as the Church of the home with its own unique ministry has been recovered and renewed during Vatican II. With LG 11, the council fathers presented a seed text connoting the ecclesial dimension of the Christian family as “domestic Church.”

A. Bishop Pietro Fiordelli’s Intervention at Vatican II

It may not come as a surprise that this concept was not included in the original 1962 Schema “On the Church.”

¹ III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, “The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization,” *Instrumentum Laboris* (Vatican City, 2014).

However, four days into the discussion, the Italian Bishop Pietro Fiordelli called attention to the need of situating the role of the Christian family within Roman Catholic ecclesiology. Bishop Fiordelli's intervention was abruptly interrupted by the session's Presider, Cardinal Alfrink, who apparently failed to see the connection to the "ecclesial" identity and role of Christian spouses and their families. However, Bishop Fiordelli, a long-standing pioneer in family ministry, was not prepared to give up. He concluded saying: "This, which I propose for the schema, is not a mere formality, but, as it seems to me, a great [very important] thing."² Fiordelli postulated that a substantial section on the sacrament of marriage and the family was needed, to establish "the ontological foundation for relations between the Church and the family, family and state, to protect the rights of the family, for example, in the order of education of children."³ This treatise of the family would be a recognition by the ecumenical Council of the "more fervent Christian spouses, who often are truly admirable, and sometimes heroic," and "for less fervent spouses ... it will be a maternal invitation and incentive."⁴

In his written agenda, Bishop Fiordelli reminded the council fathers that Christian families should be conceived of as *miniscalae ecclesiae* as already suggested by St. Augustine and

² The entire intervention can be found in: *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, 1.4 (Vatican City: Typis polyglottis Vaticanis, 1970), 41; 46; 309-311. Eng. trans. in the dissertation by Ennio Pasquale Mastroianni, "Christian Family as Church? Inquiry, Analysis, and Pastoral Implications" (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University, 1999), 25.

³ Mastroianni, "Christian Family as Church," 25.

⁴ *Ibid.*

St. John Chrysostom.⁵ Moreover, he argued that just as Secular Institutes, whose members belong to the laity, are specifically mentioned in chapter five of the schema, couples, though lay as well, should receive recognition as “laity constituted in an altogether special state in the Mystical Body of Christ, and indeed, by divine right, for Christ himself instituted the state of matrimony.”⁶ According to the Bishop of Prato, Italy, “the Christian family truly is the greatest help against the perils of indifferentism, worldliness, and sometimes the practice of materialism.”⁷ In areas of persecution, “the Christian family is as it were the last and especially precious stronghold for guarding the Christian religion.”⁸ And, “for the venerable bishops who are in mission territories, I think that Christian families are solemnly constituted as the sweetest hope for nourishing and spreading the Christian religion.”⁹ Bishop Fiordelli stressed three points in particular:

1. The divine vocation and mission of the married couple and their place in the Church was assigned by Christ (Eph. 5);
2. The married couple safeguards the natural and supernatural fecundity of the Church; parents are

⁵ *Acta Synodalia*, 2.1, 264-65. Cf. Augustine, *De bono viduitatis* (PL 40. 450).
Idem, *Epistula* 188.3 (PL 33. 849). Chrysostom, *In Genesis* 6, 2 (PG 54, 607).

⁶ Mastroianni, “Christian Family as Church,” 25.

⁷ *Acta Synodalia*, 1.4, 309.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 310.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 311.

consecrated for their role and live their priesthood within the domestic church;

3. The Christian family, being a holy cell or little Church, is the smallest unit of the Church and not only the parish.¹⁰

Thankfully, Bishop Fiordelli's message was heard. It is the first time that this term—*Ecclesia domestica*—is incorporated in a conciliar document. Article 11 of LG emphasizes that “the family is, *so to speak—velut*, the domestic church.”¹¹ With this modifier, Bishop Fiordelli's argument was not fully heeded, since the family is not merely *like* the Church, but *is* truly Church.¹² After much discussion the council fathers agreed to link the domestic church to the sacrament of marriage, while a previous draft associated it with the sacrament of baptism in the

¹⁰ See Mastroianni, “Christian Family as Church,” 24-28.

¹¹ LG 11: “In hac velut Ecclesia domestica parentes verbo et exemplo sint pro filiis suis primi fidei praecones, et vocationem unicuique propriam, sacram vero peculiari cura, foveant oportet.” *Constitutio Dogmatica De Ecclesia*, chap. 2, art. 11, par. 2, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 57 (1965): 15-16. In addition to LG 11, “domestic Church” can be found as *domesticum sanctuarium Ecclesiae* in the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, art. 11. In the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, art. 48, the passage does not contain the explicit term, domestic Church, but it does describe the reality of a domestic Church by speaking of Christian marriage and Christian family as a manifestation “. . . to all men [of] the Savior's living presence in the world, and the genuine nature of the Church.”

¹² Cf. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1989, c1978), 421. “The Church becomes present in marriage: marriage is really the smallest community of the redeemed and the sanctified . . . hence, it is truly the smallest individual church.” Cited in: USCCB, “A Family Perspective in Church and Society: A Manual for All Pastoral Leaders,” 10th Anniv. Ed., (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1998), 20.

section on “the universal priesthood, the *sensus fidei* and the charism of the faithful.”¹³ Fiordelli’s suggestion of perceiving the domestic church as the nucleus of the parish, however, was not considered in the final draft.¹⁴

B. Development after Lumen Gentium 11

The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* (GS), dedicates chapter 1 of Part II to “Fostering the Nobility of Marriage and the Family.” It emphasizes the iconic value of the marital state whose covenant of conjugal love, bond of unity and indissolubility represents Christ’s love for the Church. Christ, who “abides with them thereafter,” strengthens spouses in their love for each other and aids them “in their sublime office of being a father or a mother.”

¹³ Cf. Mastroianni, “Christian Family as Church?” 8: “This does not mean, of course, that the Christian community does not recognize various family structures, especially the extended family (spouses, children, relatives) and the household (spouses, children, others). From early Christianity to the twentieth century the prevailing experience of family has been the extended family and/or household. The presumption, however, is that marriage is understood to be the foundation of the family. In other words, marriage creates a new family unit in the sense that it differentiates and enlarges the extended family. Furthermore, Catholic Tradition comes to understand that the sacrament of marriage commences a new Christian family that differentiates and enlarges the Church. The understanding of the council at Vatican II is that by the power of the sacrament of matrimony a new Christian family is derived by which the Church grows qualitatively and quantitatively. Thus, the Christian family is called a “domestic Church” and is understood to be a foundational cell of the Church.”

¹⁴ Bishop Fiordelli wanted “a special chapter which concerns ... the sacramental marriage” but although the term was included in LG, “the intrinsic relationship between church and family was not grasped” yet. See Joseph Atkinson, “Family as Domestic Church: Developmental Trajectory, Legitimacy, and Problems of Appropriation,” *Theological Studies*, 66, no. 3 (2005): 592-604, esp. 594.

Article 47 of GS links the well-being of a person to the family, and GS 52 speaks of the family as a school of a deeper humanity. Though the term domestic church is not mentioned *verbatim*, we find nevertheless a description of it in GS 48: “parents, by their word and example, are the primary teachers of their children and indeed everyone gathered around the family hearth on the path to human maturity, salvation and holiness. Parents are charged particularly with helping the children to discern their vocation, fostering with special care any religious vocation; children, in turn, contribute in their own way by being their parents’ means to holiness.”

Bl. Paul VI refers to the domestic Church in *Marialis Cultus*, 52-53. “The domestic sanctuary of the Church,” he writes, is characterized “through the mutual affection of its members and the common prayer they offer to God.”¹⁵ The latter is indispensable since it constitutes the essential profile of the domestic Church from which flows the promotion of justice, the works of mercy, and aid given to the wider local community. In addition, Paul VI’s statements on the domestic Church in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, albeit brief, offer a development of LG 11. The Apostolic Constitution emphasizes that (1) “There should be found in every Christian family the various aspects of the entire Church”; (2) in the domestic Church “all members evangelize and are evangelized” within and outside the home;

¹⁵ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus: For the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary* (February 2, 1974). Art. 53 specifies that the family, as a domestic sanctuary of the Church, is the ideal community “in which the Divine Office can suitably be celebrated.”

(3) two baptized Christians in a mixed marriage “have the difficult task of becoming builders of unity.”¹⁶

St. John Paul II presents his “summa of the Church’s teaching on the family” in *Familiaris Consortio* (FC).¹⁷ In his treatment of the domestic church in article 43, he stresses several compelling aspects concerning Christian families as an ecclesial community of persons in an inhuman and dehumanizing world. Based upon the teaching of Vatican II and his predecessors, John Paul II regards the Christian family as “a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion” and a “living image and historical representation of the Church” (FC 49).¹⁸ The family as a Church in miniature, writes John Paul II, makes “specific the sanctifying grace of baptism” (FC 56) and revolves around two axes: Christ and the Church (FC 17).¹⁹ The Christological nature (FC 50) is apparent in the family as believing and evangelizing community (prophetic office); as community in dialogue with God (priestly office); and as community at the service of

¹⁶ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (December 8, 1975), 71. Cf. Florence Caffrey Bourg, “Domestic Church: A New Frontier in Ecclesiology,” *Horizons* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 56.

¹⁷ John Paul II, the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio: On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World* (Nov 22, 1981). See his address to the Roman Curia on December 22, 1981, 7: “La recentissima esortazione apostolica *Familiaris Consortio*, resa pubblica una settimana fa, che vuol essere una “summa” dell’insegnamento della Chiesa sulla vita, i compiti, le responsabilità, la missione del matrimonio e della famiglia nel mondo d’oggi.”

¹⁸ Though John Paul II does not explicitly link the idea of domestic church to the diocese, parish, or local church, he retrieves the sense of domestic church which Fiordelli seemed to have in mind but which LG 11 did not establish.

¹⁹ Cf. William E. May, *Marriage: The Rock on Which the Family Is Built* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009²), chap. 5.

humanity (kingly office). The ecclesiological nature of the domestic church is realized in the family as a communion of persons in formation, serving life, participating in the development of the society, and sharing in the life and mission of the Church (FC 50).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) allots four articles for the domestic church. Article 1655 recalls the Holy Family and Christian households of the nascent Church who resembled “islands of Christian life in an unbelieving world.” This holds true even today, when families, as *ecclesia domestica*, live “in a world often alien and even hostile to faith” (CCC 1656). Parents of the house Church are the prime educators of their children’s faith and their first vocation directors. All members of the family, whereby the father’s position is highlighted, albeit ambiguously, are called to give full expression of the “priesthood of the baptized” through “the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life, and self-denial and active charity.” In this way, the domestic church becomes the “first school of Christian life and a school for human enrichment” (CCC 1657). Finally, the *Catechism* draws attention to the fact that although “no one is without a family in this world,” many find themselves often unintentionally without loved ones. To those, the doors of the domestic churches should be opened with special affection and hospitality (CCC 1658).

The U.S. Bishops’ *Follow the Way of Love*, published in the same year as the *Catechism*, primarily grounds the domestic

church in the sacrament of baptism.²⁰ “In fact, marriage is not mentioned at all in the pivotal introductory pages (8-10).”²¹ Instead, the bishops define Church as “two or three gathered in my name” and family as “the most basic way in which the Lord gathers us, forms us, and acts in the world.”²² The document introduces marriage after having clarified that Christ’s promise to be faithful is the “firm foundation” on which “every” Christian family, “like the whole Church,” rests. As a consequence of this approach the bishops assure God’s gracious presence among members of families that may not arise from sacramental marriage—single parent, blended, and inter-religious families (as well as childless families).²³ They conclude, “the church of the home can live and grow in every family.”²⁴ Since then, very little has been done as to the specific theological locus of the ‘church in miniature,’ ‘church of the home,’ or ‘little church.’²⁵ The concept remains ambiguous even in our time, when a contemporary parlance of its concept would be especially helpful to Christian families.²⁶

²⁰ National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Follow the Way of Love: A Pastoral Message of the U.S. Catholic Bishops to Families on the Occasion of the United Nations 1994 International Year of the Family* (Washington, DC: USCC, 1993), available at: <http://www.usccb.org>.

²¹ Cf. Bourg, “Domestic Church : A New Frontier,” 56

²² *Ibid.*, citing *Follow the Way of Love*, 8.

²³ *Follow the Way of Love*, 9-10.

²⁴ Cf. Bourg, “Domestic Church: A New Fronier,” 57.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁶ Cf. Maurice Eminyan, *Theology of the Family* (Malta: Jesuit Publications, 1994), 8-9.

C. The Synod on the Family, 2014

Fast forward to the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 2014. The document refers five times to the domestic church and grounds it in the consecrated love of the bride and groom.²⁷ In fact, the synod fathers admit that it is the mystery of marriage and Christian family which helps the Church to “fully understand her mystery.”²⁸ The relationship of the spouses is based on faithful love and equality; their roles as father and mother, as well as “family-togetherness,” are nourished in the domestic church through a “familial culture of prayer”—including Marian devotion—and ritual practices in the home.”²⁹ The synod fathers maintain, however, that “the domestic church of the family can never be a substitute for the parish community nor underestimate the importance of the participation as a family in the parish’s sacramental life, the Sunday Eucharist and the Sacraments of Christian Initiation.”³⁰ While parents remain the first educators in the faith of their children, the parish assists in providing formation, particularly

²⁷ *Instrumentum Laboris*, 4, 42 (twice), 133, 159.

²⁸ *Instrumentum Laboris*, 4.

²⁹ Cf. *Instrumentum Laboris*, 41-42. The document notes: “In fact, a genuine knowledge of Jesus Christ is fostered through personal prayer and, particularly, family prayer, according to the specific forms of prayer and ritual practices in the home, which are considered an effective way to teach the faith to children. Great emphasis is also placed on reading Scripture in common and other forms of prayer, such as the blessing before and after meals and the family recitation of the rosary.” Cf. Edward M. Hays, *Prayers for the Domestic Church: A Handbook for Worship in the Home* (Easton, KS: Shantivanam House of Prayer, 1979).

³⁰ *Instrumentum Laboris*, 42.

for the sacraments of initiation.³¹ The working paper attributes much effectiveness to those ecclesial movements with a mission for the family including formation for the couple.³²

In sum, we can observe three stages of the development of the domestic church: (1) LG 11 understood the relationship of the domestic church to the Church in an analogous manner. (2) After the council the domestic church was treated within the fundamental categories of Vatican II's Christ-centeredness, personalism, and universal call to holiness. (3) The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* moved the domestic church "from an *analogous* position to an *ontological* relationship with the Church."³³ Accordingly, Vatican II's claim that Christian families "manifest Christ's presence and the genuine nature of the Church," as well as Paul VI's assertion that "there should be found in every Christian family the various aspects of the entire Church," and John Paul II's designation of domestic churches as "living images" and "historical manifestations" of the Church are not ideals far removed from reality. Rather, the holiness and growth of the Church [and in extension of society] depends to a large degree on the natural and supernatural health of the domestic church.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 132.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Atkinson, "Family as Domestic Church," 593. Cf. Stanley L Saxton, Patricia Voydanoff, Angela Ann Zukowski, *The Changing Family: Views from Theology and the Social Sciences in the Light of the Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1984).

PART II: MARY AND THE DOMESTIC CHURCH

There exists a commonality between the domestic church and the Blessed Virgin Mary: just as there was a dispute whether Christian families should be recognized as the smallest cell of the Church in LG, so, too, there was a debate whether or not the teaching about the person and mission of the Blessed Virgin Mary should be included in the schema on the Church. It is appealing that Bishop Pietro Fiordelli's passion for the family was backed by his "greatest trust in God and in the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church ..."³⁴

As is well known, LG's chapter eight offers a careful treatment of Mary's place in the "mystery of the Incarnate Word and the Mystical Body" and discusses the practical realization of devotion to her in the Christian community (LG 54). *Mutatis mutandis*, these teachings shed light on Mary's role and position in the domestic church.

The third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops entrusted the domestic church to the Holy Family of Nazareth. Yet, with very few exceptions, the episodes in the life of the Holy Family describing the domestic church are left to our imagination. What we do know is that Jesus spent ten elevenths—30 years—of his earthly existence with his parents at home!

A. The Domestic Church of the Holy Family

St. John Paul II's apostolic exhortation on St. Joseph, the Guardian of the Redeemer, highlights in its third part the spousal

³⁴ *Acta Synodalia*, 1.4, 310.

relationship of Joseph to Mary.³⁵ Since their marriage was marked by extraordinary events, it also demanded extraordinary action.³⁶ The pontiff identifies St. Joseph's way of acting as "one of the most important testimonies concerning man and his vocation."³⁷ Joseph, who was informed about "the divine truth concerning his wife's indescribable vocation," simultaneously at his "annunciation by night," becomes aware of "the truth about his own vocation."³⁸ He "loved the Virgin of Nazareth and was bound to her by a husband's love."³⁹ The late Stratford Caldecott, who looked on St. Joseph as a role model for his vocation as husband and father, reflects that "this model for all human fathers, this living icon of the divine Father, is not even the biological father of his own child." He observed, "a man becomes what a father should be *the more he allows God to act through him in marriage.*"⁴⁰ Caldecott insightfully maintains,

If we take Joseph as our guide, we will say that true masculinity is ordered to (primarily spiritual) fatherhood, and its recovery takes place in "response" to (primarily spiritual) femininity. Mary comes first. It is *her* humility, *her* feminine receptivity to God and to the life that God inspires, which Joseph must imitate and follow. In this way he is called to nourish, protect and serve with his own life the One who is entrusted

³⁵ Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptoris Custos: On the Person and Mission of Saint Joseph in the Life of Christ and of the Church* (August 15, 1989).

³⁶ Cf. *Redemptoris Custos*, 17.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Redemptoris Custos*, 19.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Stratford Caldecott, "The Family at the Heart of a Culture of Life," *Communio* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 89-100), esp. 92; Caldecott's emphasis.

to him. Joseph and Mary are therefore one flesh, one mind, and one attitude before God: they cannot be separated. He receives grace from her; she receives it from Christ.⁴¹

Joseph's obedience to the angel's message reveals "the clear characteristics of a husband" who respects and honors the "mystery of his wife."⁴² Like Mary, Joseph speaks his *fiat* in an obedience of faith to his role as husband and father of the Holy Family. The upright man must have felt humbled by the charge given to him: authority for an immaculate wife and a divine child, to whom he is to give a name and be a father according to Jewish law. Mary's part on the other hand consisted in "her gift of self: a form which God himself expected of the Virgin Mary, who was 'betrothed' to Joseph."⁴³

It is in the domestic church that Joseph and Mary lived the covenant of their marriage commitment. The mystery entrusted to them is for the sake of the child whom they cherish in the truest sense as their God, the source and happiness of their life. As spouses and parents, they provide emotional stability to each other and their child, thereby setting the atmosphere and educational activity for him to grow "in age, wisdom and grace" and thus to be fully committed to the Father's business.

B. The Second Dimension of the Holy Family

While Mary accompanies her Son from the womb to the cross and beyond, Joseph is—according to tradition—mostly

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 92-93.

⁴² *Redemptoris Custos*, 18.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

entrusted with the hidden and private life of Jesus.⁴⁴ Does this mean that their domestic church was dissolved once Jesus left home? Sacred Scripture informs us that, at the beginning of his public life, Jesus and his mother witnessed the foundation of a new domestic church at the wedding at Cana. Yet, we know virtually nothing about the continuation of his own childhood home in Nazareth. John 19:26 indicates that the beloved disciple took Mary into his own home from where, as St. John Paul II suggested, “she could ... carry out her role in the newborn Church both at Pentecost and in the subsequent years.”⁴⁵ Could we perhaps liken Jesus’ entrustment of John to Mary as a “third annunciation” concerning the Holy Family? Caldecot compares Mary’s and Joseph’s “annunciations,” which initiated the domestic church of the Holy Family, to Jesus’ annunciation to the beloved disciple, which led John to enter this mother’s womb, so to speak, in order to be born of her and thus to become the first of many new members of this new dimension of the Holy Family. Caldecott argues,

All ecclesiology, all theology of the Church,—and we include here the domestic church—is therefore rooted in the living historical reality of the Holy Family. The departure through the death of Jesus is necessary to create the mystical womb of Mary where the saints may come to birth, filling the place he occupied. ... The physical womb of Mary which bore the Christ Child and the mystical womb that bears the saints are one but

⁴⁴ Cf. *Redemptoris Custos*, 8

⁴⁵ John Paul II, *Jesus, Son and Savior: A Catechesis on the Creed* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1996), 469. Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Mater: On the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Life of the Pilgrim Church* (March 25, 1987), 45. Also see John Paul II, “Inviting Mary to visit Family Homes,” Angelus Message on August 15, 1980, *L’Osservatore Romano* (Eng. ed., August 25, 1980), 19.

not identical, united but distinct, in a relationship comparable to that between the physical body of our Lord and his mystical body.⁴⁶

To be sure, the first and most exalted member whom the Holy Spirit breathes forth from the womb of the cross, is Mary herself, the New Eve, pre-redeemed and fully redeemed through the sacrifice of her Son and Redeemer, the New Adam. “As the Mother of life, Mother of grace incarnate, ... her mission is the mission of the Church in the world and also of every Christian family: to give Christ to the universe.”⁴⁷ This summons “to give Christ to the universe” was the primary mission of the domestic church that was the Holy Family. It continues through Jesus’ testament addressed to the beloved disciple. The Mother’s hour has come beneath the Cross, coinciding with Jesus’ true hour (cf. Jn 2:4; 13:1) when a new holy family is born.⁴⁸

As a result, there exists a vital link between the Holy Family and each domestic church. Just as the Holy Spirit knitted the body of the Christ child in the womb of Mary during the first Advent, Mary’s spiritual maternity suggests her cooperation with the Holy Spirit in the birth of all who receive supernatural life at baptism (cf. Jn 3:7)—at least in the objective plan of redemption.⁴⁹ In baptism, every domestic church has been conceived immaculately by water and the Holy Spirit. The *Lineamenta* of the Bishop’s Synod on the Family notes: “In the Christian life, the reception of Baptism brings the believer into

⁴⁶ Cf. Caldecott, “The Family at the Heart of a Culture of Life,” 94.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 94-95.

⁴⁸ Cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* (December 25, 2005), 41.

⁴⁹ In support of this position, see LG 61f.

the Church through the *domestic church*, namely, the family; thus beginning ‘a dynamic process [which] develops, one which advances gradually with the progressive integration of the gifts of God’ (FC 9), in an ongoing conversion to a love that saves us from sin and gives us fullness of life.”⁵⁰ Continuing in this vein, Notre Dame Lutheran theologian Maxwell Johnson argues that “if mariology is best understood in relationship to ecclesiology, then there is indeed a close parallel between what is asserted of Mary’s Immaculate Conception in service of her ultimate role as *Theotokos* in the Incarnation and the ultimate role of the (domestic) church, the community of the baptized, as the God-bearers of the incarnate Christ in the world as well. For baptism makes us all *Theotokoi*.”⁵¹ The profound reality of the sacrament of baptism, with its ontological and transforming impact on the spouses and children due to Christ’s indwelling, is the hitherto not yet sufficiently explored reality of the domestic church.⁵² It is safe to argue, however, that the sacraments of baptism and marriage provide the mother soil, so to speak, for the fruitfulness of Mary’s activity in the domestic church.⁵³ As the great

⁵⁰ XIV Ordinary General Assembly, *The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World, Lineamenta* (Vatican City, 2014), 12.

⁵¹ Cf. Maxwell E. Johnson, *Images of Baptism*, Forum Essays, No. 6. (Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 2001), 128f.

⁵² Cf. Joseph C. Atkinson, *Biblical & Theological Foundations of the Family: The Domestic Church* (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2014), 600. See also Dwight Campbell, “The Heavenly Messages of ‘Our Lady of America’: A Call for Sanctification of the Family through Purity and the Divine Indwelling in Souls,” *Marian Studies* 63 (2012): 86-123.

⁵³ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium Vitae: On the Value and Inviolability of Human Life* (March 25, 1995), 102-103; see also his Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae: On the Most Holy Rosary* (October 16, 2002), 15.

Theotokos, her primary task is to preserve unstained the white baptismal garment indicative of the dignity of her likenesses.⁵⁴

C. Mary's Activity in the Domestic Church

By inviting Mary into their own homes and hearts, families, like the beloved disciple, ask her to become part of their communion of life and love. John Paul II writes in *Familiaris Consortio*:

Authentic devotion to Mary, which finds expression in sincere love and generous imitation of the Blessed Virgin's interior spiritual attitude, constitutes a special instrument for nourishing loving communion in the family and for developing conjugal and family spirituality. For she, who is the Mother of Christ and of the Church, is in a special way the Mother of Christian families, of domestic Churches.⁵⁵

The enthronement of Our Lady's icon in the domestic church is an excellent way to make her maternal presence felt. Icons or statues of Mary are more than artistic renditions of exterior beauty; rather, "a suitable icon ... opens up a scenario on which to focus our attention." St. John Paul II emphasized that "In the Church's traditional spirituality, the veneration of icons ... make use of visual and imaginative elements (the *compositio loci*),

⁵⁴ Cf. *Rite of Baptism for Children: The Roman Ritual* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 42, 65, 84, 100; my emphasis. See also *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1988), 144, 199. For further reading, see Teresa Tsui, "'Baptized into His Death' (Rom 6:3) and 'Clothed with Christ' (Gal 3:27): The Soteriological Meaning of Baptism in Light of Pauline Apocalyptic," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 88, no. 4 (2012): 395–417, esp. 407–410: "Christ as Eschatological Garment."

⁵⁵ *Familiaris Consortio*, 61.

judged to be of great help in concentrating the mind.”⁵⁶ In other words, suitable Marian icons should speak to the whole person and inspire to invocation and imitation.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 29.

⁵⁷ Cf. *Redemptoris Mater*, 36, where John Paul II recommended to “have a place of honor in churches and houses [for images of the Virgin].” Cf. John Paul II, *Theotókos: Woman, Mother, Disciple: A Catechesis on Mary, Mother of God* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2000), 252. “Images, icons and statues of Our Lady, present in houses, public places and countless churches and chapels, help the faithful to invoke her constant presence and her merciful patronage in the various circumstances of life. By making the Blessed Virgin’s motherly tenderness concrete and almost visible, they invite us to turn to her trustfully and to imitate her in generously accepting the divine will. ... Therefore, the practice of exposing images of Mary in places of worship and in other buildings should be encouraged, in order to be aware of her help in moments of difficulty and as a reminder to lead a life that is ever more holy and faithful to God.”

The Blessed Mother's maternal presence imprints a "Marian dimension,"⁵⁸ or "mother culture,"⁵⁹ on the domestic church which has its beginning in Christ and is also directed towards him.⁶⁰ Analogously to her role in the Holy Family, Mary's task for the domestic church is to cooperate in the birth of each of the *theotokoi* as well as to nurture the spiritual life in the spouses and children "until Christ is 'fully formed' in them (cf. Gal

⁵⁸ *Redemptoris Mater*, 45. For a discussion on this "Marian dimension," see **The Pontifical International Marian Academy, *The Mother of the Lord: Memory, Presence, Hope***, trans. **Thomas A. Thompson** (Staten Island, NY: St. Paul, 2007), 70-71. "John Paul II ... indicated that this 'Marian dimension' is a personal bond, derived from the maternal-filial bond, which is established between the Mother of Jesus and each of his disciples and constitutes 'a unique and unrepeatable relationship' (RM 45). He outlined the fundamental meaning of 'the words spoken by Jesus to his Mother at the hour of the Cross: *Woman behold your son* and to the disciple *Behold your mother* (Jn 19:26-27). They are words which determine Mary's place in the life of Christ's disciples' (RM 44) and give 'the reason for the Marian dimension' (RM 45) of Christian life and spirituality. The relation between Mary and every disciple of Christ has a gratuitous character—a pure gift: 'The Redeemer entrusts his mother to the disciple, and at the same time he gives her to him as his mother. Mary's motherhood which becomes man's inheritance is a gift: a gift which Christ himself makes personally to every individual' (RM 45)." Cf. Leo Scheffczyk, "Die 'Marienweihe' in Leben und Lehre Johannes Pauls II unter systematischem Aspekt," in *Totus Tuus. Maria in Leben und Lehre Johannes Pauls II*, ed Anton Ziegenaus, Mariologische Studien 17 (Regensburg: Pustet, 2004), 109-124, here 123-24. The author relates that in the thought of John Paul II each Christian life is equipped with a "Marian dimension" which signals the deepest meaning of the reason for our dedication to Mary. In distinction to our consecration to Christ at baptism, our consecration to Mary is a freely chosen expression of a special spirituality which is indispensable for the Church.

⁵⁹ Francis I, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium: On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World* (November 24, 2013), 139.

⁶⁰ Cf. *Redemptoris Mater*, 46.

4:19).”⁶¹ In particular she is concerned that each member knows to be accepted and loved in this “church of the home” both on the natural and supernatural level. Spouses are to become increasingly aware of the gift they are for each other mindful of the “annunciation” that sealed their love forever. This gift—mutually offered, received and accepted—in a communion of conjugal love is the foundation of their sanctuary of love and life. Fatherhood and motherhood are likewise recognized and valued as gift. The respect and love of the parents for each other and for their family is the paramount seedbed for children to grow and unfold their gifts. Several authors compare the daily routine of the domestic church to the discipline of religious communities “which train the mind, emotions, will, and body for receptivity to God’s Spirit. In both sorts of community, work and prayer are interwoven, and hospitality to those who show up at one’s door unexpectedly is grounded upon a prior practice of stability—a committed, lifelong acceptance of a particular community, for better or worse.”⁶² Celebrations, customs, rituals, and the daily interactions are to safeguard “that which unites”⁶³ the family. The couple’s pledge of faithful love to one another is the guarantee for stability in the domestic church even if families, not unlike the Holy Family, have to move frequently.

Besides her solicitude for an atmosphere of belonging, Mary’s task in the domestic church is also to help each family member to grow into another Christ. If that which attracts to a

⁶¹ *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 15. Cf. LG 60.

⁶² Bourg, “Domestic Church: A New Frontier,” 51, fn. 34.

⁶³ Karol Wojtyła (John Paul II), *Person and Community: Catholic Thought from Lublin—Selected Essays*, trans. Theresa Sandock, OSM (New York: P. Lang, 1993), 246.

domestic church can be summarized with “See how they love one another,” then it is precisely the ability to love, and to stay faithfully committed to love, that needs to be tended. Pope Francis reminds us of the profound and alarming inability to build community and to love in the family and beyond. In a time when “marriage ... tends to be viewed as a form of mere emotional satisfaction,” the resulting “lifestyle ... weakens the development and stability of personal relationships and distorts family bonds.”⁶⁴ The domestic church thus must become a school of love whose education imprints on the soul certain virtues relative to the dignity of the human person. Mary is experienced not only as someone who loosens knots, but also as one who ties a net of knots that sustain relationships.

Fostering a sense for purity, truth, or respect, for example, awakens reverence for God, self and others. On the other hand, when lacking courage it is hardly possible to remain in love. In this pedagogical process under the auspices of the Mother of Fair Love, “thoughts and affections, mentality and conduct are slowly purified and transformed” [through love, and thus] “becomes a new criterion of understanding and action that changes the whole of life” (cf. Rom. 12:2; Col. 3:9-10; Eph. 4:20-29; 2 Cor. 5:17).⁶⁵ Thus family life is sacred, not because it could be considered perfect, but on account of God’s presence and Mary’s maternal education. By fostering this awareness, the family develops its unique “liturgy.” Celebrating the liturgical seasons of Advent and Lent, providing space for acknowledging

⁶⁴ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 66-67.

⁶⁵ Cf. Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter “*Motu Proprio Data*” *Porta Fidei*, for the Indiction of the Year of Faith (October 11, 2011), 6. See also: Benedict VI, General Audience (November 7, 2012).

wrongdoing and extending forgiveness, making an effort to go to confession as a family are but a few ways in which parents, trusting in Our Lady's intercession, exercise their priestly function to advance the spiritual and moral transformation of family members.

Vatican II compared the domestic church to an ongoing "apprenticeship for the apostolate."⁶⁶ Bl. Paul VI emphasized that "all the members of the family are evangelizers and are themselves evangelized."⁶⁷ It lies in the nature of the "little domestic church," adds St. John Paul II, to be "constantly and intensely evangelized."⁶⁸ Families thus exercise their apostolate in being and action. Pope emeritus Benedict XVI, when speaking to married couples, underlined that their daily renewed yes "is the only force that can truly transform the cosmos, the world."⁶⁹ He emphasized this investment as their primary way of evangelizing. This was Mary's way of evangelizing, as well. "From crib to cross" she remained faithful to her Yes (*fiat*), and, as mother of the domestic church, families are nourished and encouraged by her steadfast example. At the same time, families are drawn into Mary's mission as well. She sends them to hurry to the homes "in the hill country" (cf. Lk 1:39) in our time in order to "to give Christ to the universe!" This was and continues to be the mission of the Holy Family and remains the most authentic and attractive evangelization, "when, through our

⁶⁶ Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem: Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* (November 18, 1965), 30.

⁶⁷ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 71.

⁶⁸ *Familiaris Consortio*, 51.

⁶⁹ Benedict XVI, Homily at the Occasion of the 7th World Meeting of Families in the Archdiocese of Milan (June 3, 2012).

actions, words and way of being, *Another* makes himself present.”⁷⁰

Is this too high an ideal, conceivable only for exceptionally spiritual families but not realistic for young married couples and families in the third millennium? Not so, if we consider that this is the ideal of the sacrament of baptism and marriage and of the vocation to live as domestic church. The question we may need to ask instead is where young people are to receive guidance and example to be capable of such a high calling and lifelong commitment? Who can best lead engaged couples in an understanding that their future family is a home beckoning to grace and to mission, a vocation to be transformed into Christ by self-surrender in love and community?⁷¹ I cannot think of a better answer than those families—domestic churches—who aspire to these ideals and strive to take seriously Christ’s legacy by entrusting themselves to Mary, the Queen of the Family and Domestic Church. In the last part of my talk I wish to introduce the Schoenstatt Home Shrine as a concrete way of living as domestic church.

PART III: THE SCHOENSTATT HOME SHRINE

Although its founding (1914) and international expansion predate Vatican Council II by roughly fifty years, Schoenstatt is regularly counted among the largest of modern ecclesial movements described by Pope John Paul II as “one of the most significant fruits of that springtime in the Church which was

⁷⁰ Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (22 February 2007), 85.

⁷¹ Frederick Parella, “Towards a Spirituality of the Family,” *Communio* 9, no. 2 (Summer 1982): 127-141, esp. 130.

foretold by the Second Vatican Council.”⁷² In view of the first aim of Schoenstatt’s mission—the formation of the new person in the new community—the renewal of Catholic couples and families was for its founder, Father Joseph Kentenich (1885-1965), a matter of highest urgency. Already in the early 1930s, he conducted retreats on Christian marriage. With Dr. Fritz Kühr, a fellow prisoner in Dachau and family man, he clandestinely founded the family branch of the Schoenstatt Movement on July 16, 1942.⁷³ Father Kentenich’s foremost concern after his release from the concentration camp was to build it up as the foundation and crown of the Schoenstatt Work. In 1948 he wrote to Schoenstatt couples in Brazil, where Dr. Kühr’s family had emigrated: “Take the picture of the MTA [Mother Thrice Admirable] with you and enthrone it in your homes. Then your homes will become little shrines where the venerable picture will prove to be a source of grace, will create a holy family atmosphere, and form holy family members.”⁷⁴ In

⁷² John Paul II, “Message to the World Congress of Ecclesial Movements, 1998,” *Laity Today* (1999): 222.

⁷³ Father Kentenich’s esteem of the sacrament of Christian marriage foresaw the possibility of a Secular Institute for married couples, which thus far does not fit the rubrics of the *Codex Iuris Canonici* (Code of Canon Law: CIC; see CIC can. 599, can 721). In his vision, those belonging to the Schoenstatt Family Institute “strive ... to live faithfully the evangelical counsels ... [which] is different from that of celibates. But the goal is the same” (cf. The Schoenstatt Institute of Families, *Our Vocation Is to Love*. Promotion material, 2007). More important than the approbation as Secular Institute by the Church is the challenge to these families to show that a Christian couple can reach holiness, not in spite of being married but because the sacrament of matrimony enables them to magnanimously live their vocation with the help of grace and Schoenstatt’s spirituality.

⁷⁴ See Jonathan Niehaus, *The Birth of the Home Shrine* (Waukesha, WI: Schoenstatt Fathers, 1994, 1989), 7.

the mid-1950s—while in Milwaukee, Wisconsin—Father Kentenich began meetings with married couples who, although engaged in their parishes and other apostolates, were concerned about their spiritual formation as couples and that of their children. In their weekly gatherings on Monday evenings,⁷⁵ he told them in 1961: “We have to break with this attitude” that “we as married people are second-class people in Christianity.”⁷⁶ To their surprise, he acknowledged that “nowhere else does life demand so many sacrifices than in the family.”⁷⁷ No priest before had ever acknowledged this to them. Now at last, they were taken seriously in their vocation and thus became receptive to his message: “We want to become holy not in spite of our being married ... but because we are married. That is, we must use everything which is permitted in marriage as a *sursum corda*.”⁷⁸ Father Kentenich introduced the couples to the ideal of the Nazareth Family and insisted that their first apostolate was inside the home, a concept which was much appreciated by the

⁷⁵ See the homonymous volumes *On Monday Evenings: Speaking to Families* (talks given by Fr. Kentenich to couples in Milwaukee WI, 1955-1964) (Waukesha, WI: Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary, 1995 -).

⁷⁶ *On Monday Evenings*, 20:43.

⁷⁷ Joseph Kentenich, *Uns gesagt: Vorträge und Ansprachen für Schönstattmütter und die Schönstattfamilie*, 3 vols. (Schoenstatt: Sekretariat der Schönstatt Mütterliga, nd), 3:70. Cf. *On Monday Evenings*, 20:100-101: “I must repeat time and again, if you see the ideal of married couples like this, then you must agree, it is a first-class school of holiness. And when do you get the highest grades in this university? When the partner does not go along. ... Look, in such a situation to strive towards the ideal ... means to live the life of a martyr. ... As married couples we need not look for special means of penance. ... We have enormously many opportunities to make sacrifices for one another from morning till night.”

⁷⁸ *On Monday Evenings*, 20:9.

young wives, mothers of large families.⁷⁹ He advised them: “It is so important for you to retire from other activities and devote your time to your family because what goes into your children’s minds now is more important than what anybody can tell them later on. ... As parents we must understand and accept the responsibility that the focal point of our child’s education is not in the school, and not even in the church, but in the family.”⁸⁰

In the course of their weekly meetings the couples could ask their many questions and were introduced to Schoenstatt’s spirituality, its Marian consecration—the covenant of love, and the Schoenstatt Shrine. After a time of preparation, they sealed this covenant of love with the Mother Thrice Admirable of Schoenstatt as a means, protection and expression of their baptismal and marriage covenants. Like the biblical covenants, this covenant of love includes promises and requests: Our Lady promises to dwell in the Schoenstatt Shrine and to be effective as educator of the spiritual life. In return she asks her spiritual children to prove their love for her through a life of ardent prayer, faithful fulfillment of their duties, and striving to the highest degree. These means of self-sanctification provide the capital of grace so to speak for Our Lady’s activity from the Schoenstatt Shrine. To link a consecration to Mary to a particular place, as Father Kentenich did, is unique in the history of the Church.

Father Kentenich also led the couples to a better grasp of their priestly function as parents by being the bearers of what he

⁷⁹ Cf. Joseph Kentenich, *The Family at the Service of Life* (Bangalore: St. Pauls, 2001), 110.

⁸⁰ Schoenstatt Movement Milwaukee, *Home Shrine Congress Presentations* (Waukesha, WI: Schoenstatt Movement, 2013), 50-51.

called a “great atmosphere” in the home and their married life. This great atmosphere is founded above all in the sacramental commitment to their conjugal love and nourished by at least one weekly “rendezvous” without children or other distractions. During the so-called Schoenstatt Hour, couples should review the ups and downs of the past week, look ahead to the coming days, and turn above to their heavenly covenant partners for direction. Father Kentenich recommended they begin this encounter with prayer and conclude it by taking turns in providing some natural joy for each other. The focus of this exchange should not be the children in the first place, but their relationship as couple. Their love and unity as a reflection of that of the Triune God will in turn contribute to a deep and warm relationship among all family members, what Father Kentenich called the atmosphere of “constant living contact.”⁸¹

In the years 1962-63, when Bishop Fiordelli was arguing for the domestic church at the Council, Father Kentenich told these couples that, at their request, their homes could indeed become shrines. Fr. Kentenich took great interest in this new form of activity of the Blessed Mother among these families; he encouraged them to reserve a fitting place and discern a name for their home shrine that would resemble God’s vocation and mission for their domestic church and thus a daily incentive to live by. These couples and the thousands that followed carefully chose the appropriate title for their home shrine; they selected either a biblical place (e.g., “Nazareth Today!”) or an incentive from the Bible (e.g., “Thy will be done”). Some families searched among the titles from the Litany of Loreto; “Queen of Peace” became the absolute favorite, followed by “Queen of

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

Families.” Others found a name connected uniquely to their identity: (e.g., “Guiding Light,” as the name of a family of an electrician); to walk “*Contra Torrentem*” spoke to a family with several chronically sick children.

Father Kentenich made an effort to officiate at each family’s home shrine blessing and even summarized in a prayer addressed to the Blessed Mother the spiritual and educational needs of each particular domestic church in view of its ideal and mission. Henceforth, the home shrine became the center of their domestic church: here the couple would begin its weekly Schoenstatt Hour; here the family would pray together, decisions would be made, resolutions would be formulated and renewed. Moreover, here dwelt a Mother who is always available; she awaits her children and is ready to listen, console, counsel and show the way. Sue and Paul V., who joined Schoenstatt in the 1980s, shared their experience: “Words cannot express the intimate relationship we have with the Mother of God in our home shrine, ... It is a frightening task to try to raise our (five) children to be saints in a pagan world and always remain faithful ourselves; so we gave the Blessed Mother the title *Fountain of Holiness* in our home shrine. ... Her presence and the flow of graces will always inspire a Marian and supernatural atmosphere in our home and in our family.”⁸²

There are many customs connected with the home shrine and each family is free to develop their own. To name a few: common prayer times, which include the renewal of the covenant of love; the renewal of baptismal and marriage promises on their respective anniversaries; the celebration of the liturgical seasons, including ways of celebrating Sundays as the

⁸² *Home Shrine Congress Presentations*, 44.

Lord's Day. Sacramentals, like Holy Water, candles, or rosaries, are found in nearly all home shrines and daily rituals are connected to them. In many home shrines there stands a jar reminiscent of the wedding at Cana. Every family at one time or another experiences a lack or at least a shortage of wine in the form of virtue, health, or material need. All known or unknown lacks, along with the petition to be transformed into love's choicest wine, are written on slips of paper and added to the jar. They are included in the daily family prayer, always mindful of Mary's directive, "Do whatever He tells you!"

Life in the home shrine thus becomes an *admirable* pedagogical tool, aiming at the religious and moral integrity of each member as well as at building strong bonds among them. One testimony stands for countless others:

In each stage of life we feel the closeness of Mary's presence in our home as she educates and defends our family. Sheltered beneath our Lady's mantle we seek protection and direction as we complete our daily tasks. Before her enshrined image we have often comforted a colicky baby or a feverish child. It is within our home shrine that we grieved the loss of our son. Under Mary's watchful eye we admonish and correct misbehavior. And many hours have been spent there praying for teenagers, or asking for direction as they choose a spouse. We also gather here to celebrate and commemorate sacramental milestones: Baptism, Reconciliation, First Eucharist, Confirmation, Matrimony. Our Lady is intricately bound to our family's rhythm of life. Through her motherly care and protection we have found direction, strength, healing and comfort.⁸³

In a talk given at the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the first home shrines, the Allegría family emphasized the home

⁸³ <http://schoenstattofohio.org/2011/09/23/winner-family-home-shrine-degraff-ohio>.

shrine “as our cradle of sanctity,” “a haven in the midst of our profaned world, and oasis for our children and family. It is a place where husbands and wives imitate the self-sacrificing love of Christ for the Church.”⁸⁴ Spouses in a unique way entrust their salvation to each other and together exercise “their task of strengthening the gift of divine grace in their children’s souls.”⁸⁵ In this setting children organically come to appreciate a certain continuation of the priest’s function in the parish church, through the priestly ministry of their parents in the church at home.

A distinctive component of the Schoenstatt home shrines is their extension into Living Shrines. Each family member chooses a symbol from the Schoenstatt Shrine with the intention to be formed by it in order to embody it. In my experience, when working with Schoenstatt families, husbands and fathers often choose St. Joseph to exemplify that saint’s strong protection of the Holy Family, his hard work, gentleness, and integrity. Mothers tend to select a feature of Our Lady: her hands or her sacrificial love, for example. One unique choice of a mother sticks out in my memory; she wanted to be the mortar that keeps her family united! Children may pick a symbol related to their patron saint; boys like also the lance of St. Paul or of St. Michael to fight the ungodly forces; girls are keen on flowers, candles, or Mary’s crown, indicating their resolve to live a pure and noble life. As testimonies given during the International Home Shrine Congress (held June 27-30, 2013, in Waukesha, WI) amply demonstrate, the Living Shrine has proven to be an effective means of, and a safeguard for, the individual’s growth in

⁸⁴ *Home Shrine Congress Presentations*, 24.

⁸⁵ *Familiaris Consortio*, 49.

holiness within a communal framework, affecting the atmosphere within the environment of the home itself as a place of education and a source of grace for everyday sanctity. Mike, oldest son of one of the couples who were formed by Father Kentenich and married to Marge whose parents belonged as well, reflects on the impact this striving had on his birth family:

Most of the living shrine symbols in our family centered on the holy mass. ... With a large family [of twelve children] we had quite a few symbols ... [among them] the tabernacle, the candle, the altar, the paten, the chalice, the host, the bell and the wine. Many years later my mother remarked that every day at mass, no matter where her children are, she can see them physically before her. ... My father chose the chalice and my mother the wine, both a central part for holy mass. ... These two symbols are intimately united in the most holy reality, Christ really among us, literally giving himself as food. Both my father and mother intimately united as the chalice and wine in this mystery as they are in their marriage sacrament. I can only imagine what this must have meant to them over the years.⁸⁶

Marge adds:

The idea that each person chose a symbol came very naturally to our family. It wasn't something that was only for the children, but for the parents as well, and as Father [Kentenich] prayed a simple prayer for each person and their symbol, he spent more time with Mom and Dad than on the children. ... We, the children, saw ... this being lived in our parent's souls. ... [It] was the very air we breathed, the "great atmosphere" we lived in and [which] still has a deep influence on our lives."⁸⁷

⁸⁶ *Home Shrine Congress Presentations*, 29.

⁸⁷ *Home Shrine Congress Presentations*, 33.

And elsewhere she recounts:

Our Mother's presence and education truly became a reality in our home. The 1960s were difficult years for families. A time of rebellion of the youth against all authority ... , and the beginning of the sexual revolution affected many hearts. In the aftermath of Vatican II many young people left the Church as a measure of confusion reigned. ... Through Father Kentenich's guidance as he led our family into the heart of our Mother, placing all needs and cares into her loving hands in the home shrine, we were able to navigate those stormy seas.⁸⁸

The domestic church as a living shrine is a strong evangelizing force. Father Kentenich expressed it this way: "We need certain places where we can inhale the supernatural atmosphere, otherwise we might be in the danger of losing ground under our feet. ... When we constantly inhale the atmosphere of the shrine, our hearts become a sanctuary, too. Then we can go out to our work places, immune to the spirit of our time and be creatively active as well. The divine, supernatural atmosphere will flow through our being into our surroundings. We ourselves become moving, acting little sanctuaries."⁸⁹ Hence, he rejoiced in the fact that Mary's way of "life lives so strongly in us that it accompanies us wherever we go: on the streets, in the workshops, in our places of recreation, to churches and chapels, in basements and living rooms, on

⁸⁸ *Home Shrine Congress Presentations*, 32.

⁸⁹ Cited in *Home Shrine Congress Presentations*, 78.

airplanes and boats, and especially through the dark portals of death.”⁹⁰

Since the 1960s, when the first home shrines came about in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, the practice has been taken up by a growing number of Schoenstatt families worldwide. Their experiences, methods, and creative provisions have an impact on other families. Bishops and parish priests are increasingly turning to Schoenstatt Families who can teach youth, as well as engaged and married couples about the domestic church. Home Shrine congresses, Family Parish Missions, and the Schoenstatt Family Academy are other examples of how Schoenstatt Families are involved in evangelizing the smallest cell of the Church.⁹¹

Conclusion

In *Evangelii Gaudium*, 224, Pope Francis wonders,

... if there are people in today’s world who are really concerned about generating processes of people-building, as opposed to obtaining immediate results which yield easy, quick short-term political gains, but do not enhance human fullness. History will perhaps judge the latter with the criterion set forth by Romano Guardini: “The only measure for properly evaluating an age is to ask to what extent it fosters the development and attainment of a full and authentically meaningful

⁹⁰ Joseph Kentenich, *Mary, Our Mother and Educator: An Applied Mariology. Lenten Sermons, 1954* (Waukesha, WI: Lithoprint, 1987), 57, slightly altered translation.

⁹¹ Cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 69 and 72.

human existence, in accordance with the peculiar character and the capacities of that age.”⁹²

I argue that the family is among those social groups, if not the only community, whose primary aim is human fullness. In this paper we have shed light on the Christian concept of the family as domestic church, aiming at human fullness (i.e., holiness for all its members)! The theological development of the concept of the domestic church shows that it shifted from an analogical to an ontological understanding of the Christian family as domestic church. This notion, however, tends to be little considered or even ignored within ecclesiology and perhaps as a consequence “has had almost no impact on the life of the average Catholic, families and parishes.”⁹³

Jesus spent most of his earthly life in a family in this way giving perennially valid recognition to the fundamental cell of society.⁹⁴ The family, as a reflection of Trinitarian communion, finds its model in the family of Nazareth, where the human history of the Redeemer and his parents unfolded. This Holy Family received a new dimension when Jesus entrusted John to his mother from the womb of the Cross. Mary’s position in this Holy Family is to form and serve Christ in all members who through the sacrament of baptism have become *theotokoi*.

Finally, we have been introduced to the unique application of the domestic church by Schoenstatt families. The home shrine

⁹² Citing Romano Guardini, *Das Ende der Neuzeit* (Würzburg: Werkbund 1965), 30-31.

⁹³ Mitch and Kathy Finley, *Christian Families in the Real World: Reflections on a Spirituality for the Domestic Church* (Chicago, IL: Thomas More Press, 1984), 11.

⁹⁴ Cf. John Paul II, Angelus Address (December 31, 2000).

as an extension of the Schoenstatt Shrine becomes fruitful through the covenant of love of the couple with the Mother Thrice Admirable of Schoenstatt, whose educational task is to form each family member into a Living Shrine.

In conclusion: Pope Francis tells us that “Mary was able to turn a stable into a home for Jesus, with poor swaddling clothes and an abundance of love.”⁹⁵ She is able to do likewise for the domestic church. She takes care that “each Christian family really becomes a ‘little Church’ in which the mystery of the Church of Christ is mirrored and given new life.”⁹⁶

The Feast of the Holy Family, the first domestic church, is celebrated on the Sunday after Christmas. In the Jubilee Year 2000, this commemoration coincided with the last day of the year and in this way connected two Christian millennia. For St. John Paul II it was “providential that the Year 2000, the year that seals a millennium, should end *in the sign of the family*” and accompany us into the future.⁹⁷ May the Synod on the Family and the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia “sound the bell of Holy Freedom”⁹⁸ so that “the example of the Holy Family ... guide all families ... to be homes of communion and prayer and to always seek [God’s] truth and live in [God’s] love.”⁹⁹

⁹⁵ *Evangelii Gaudium*, 286.

⁹⁶ *Familiaris Consortio*, 86.

⁹⁷ John Paul II, Angelus Address (December 31, 2000).

⁹⁸ World Meeting of Families Hymn. Available at: <http://www.worldmeeting2015.org/about-the-event/hymn>.

⁹⁹ World Meeting of Families Prayer. Available at: <http://www.worldmeeting2015.org/about-the-event/prayer>.

Author Biography

Danielle M. Peters is a member of the Secular Institute of the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary and [at the time of this presentation] a research fellow at the Institute for Church Life at the University of Notre Dame, to explore the possibilities for a Marian initiative. She earned her STD from the International Marian Research Institute (IMRI) in Dayton, Ohio. Her former assignments include professor and coordinator of academic programs at the Pontifical International Marian Research Institute (IMRI) in Dayton, Ohio; instructor at the Athenaeum in Cincinnati, Ohio; and employee at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in the Vatican.

She is the author of *Ecce educatrix tua: The Role of the Blessed Virgin Mary for a Pedagogy of Holiness in the Thought of John Paul II and Father Joseph Kentenich* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, c2010) and several articles; she is a regular contributor to the Oblation: Liturgy and Life Blog of the Institute for Church Life. She currently serves as the vice president of the Mariological Society of America (2014-16).