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THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY AS FULFILMENT OF SACRAMENTAL MARRIAGE

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I. Three Views of the Relationship between Marriage and Children

Though Augustine defended the goodness of marriage, he regarded it as only instrumentally good: 'Surely we must see that God gives us some goods which are to be sought for their own sake, such as wisdom, health, friendship; others, which are necessary for something else, such as learning, food, drink, sleep, marriage, sexual intercourse.'¹ For Augustine, marriage is good because it both builds up the human community by procreation and makes marital fidelity possible; for Christians, marriage is also good, he held, because of the 'sacrament' — that is, the sacredness of the spouses' commitments which renders their union indissoluble.²

Drawing on both Augustine and Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas distinguished between primary and secondary ends of marriage. Thomas said its principal end is the good of offspring and its secondary ends are the help the spouses give each other in domestic life and, after original sin, the healing of concupiscence.³ Thomas needed the distinction between primary and secondary ends especially to account for Old Testament polygamy: though it interfered with the secondary end, he explained, it could be permitted because it did not violate the primary end.⁴ By thus using the distinction and hierarchy of ends, Thomas confirmed Augustine's view that marriage is only instrumentally good.

¹ St Augustine, *De bono coniugali* 9.9 (*Saint Augustine: Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects*, trans. Charles T. Wilcox, M.M., et al. [New York: Fathers of the Church, 1955], 21–22).

² *Ibid.*, 24:32, pp. 47–48.

³ Thomas Aquinas, *In Sent.*, 4, d. 26, q. 1, a. 1 (*S.t.*, sup., q. 41, a. 1), cf. *In Sent.*, 4, d. 33, q. 1, aa. 1–2 (*S.t.*, sup., q. 65, aa. 1–2). The curbing of concupiscence is an essential, secondary end of marriage: *In Sent.*, 4, d. 40, q. 1, a. 3 (*S.t.*, sup., q. 54, a. 3).

⁴ *In Sent.*, 4, d. 33, q. 1, aa. 1–2 (*S.t.*, sup., q. 65, aa. 1–2).

This view influenced much subsequent Christian theology and was officially endorsed by the Catholic Church. The 1917 *Code of Canon Law* stated marriage's purposes: 'The primary end of matrimony is the procreation and raising of offspring; the secondary, mutual help and the remedy for concupiscence.'⁵ And in 1944, with Pius XII's confirmation, the Holy Office declared inadmissible the view of those who 'either deny that the primary end of marriage is the generation and education of children, or teach that the secondary ends are not essentially subordinate to the primary end, but are equally principal and independent.'⁶

That declaration responded to some theologians who had said that the spouses' mutual fulfillment is the — or, at least, a — primary purpose of marriage.⁷ Whatever they meant, those theologians failed to distinguish what they had in mind from a view, first proposed by various nonbelievers in the nineteenth century, that has been taken for granted by many affluent people in this century. According to it, marriage, rather than a means to children, is an arrangement in which two individuals can seek self-fulfillment by working together for a number of things many men and women want: a comfortable home, regular sexual satisfaction, good meals, perhaps a child or two, a diverting social life, pleasant holidays, and so on. More recently, this gender-inclusive secularist view spawned two cynical variants: marriage is either the ball and chain (a form of servitude into which women entice men) or the most widespread and accepted form of prostitution (a patriarchal institution for oppressing women).

By contrast with the preceding views, which regard marriage as instrumentally good, an alternative Christian view regards it as intrinsically good. Due to my ignorance of other Christian traditions, I can summarize the development of this alternative only from a Roman Catholic perspective. But even from that perspective, the development begins from something all Christians can accept: the two biblical accounts of humankind's creation.

According to one, God first creates a man, observes that it is not good for him to be alone, and so creates a woman; when God presents the woman to the man, he at once recognizes her as his counterpart (see Gen. 2:18–23). 'Therefore,' the sacred writer concludes, 'a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh' (Gen. 2:24).⁸ Here, the contrast between the man's

⁵ *Codex iuris canonici* (1917), c. 1013, §1 (translation supplied).

⁶ DS 3838 / 2295; for an English translation of the decree and bibliography regarding it, see John C. Ford, S.J., and Gerald Kelly, S.J., *Contemporary Moral Theology*, vol. 2, *Marriage Questions* (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1964), 27–30.

⁷ The most influential work along these lines was Herbert Doms, *The Meaning of Marriage*, trans. George Sayer (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1939).

⁸ While St Paul understands 'they become one flesh' as referring to sexual intercourse (see 1 Cor. 6:15–16), it refers, not to that alone, but to the total communion of the married

initial loneliness and his fulfillment in marriage implies that marital communion is in itself good.

According to the other account, man and woman were created together in God's image and blessed: 'So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it"' (Gen. 1:27–28). Here, the fact that man and woman are created together in God's image suggests that their communion pertains to their essential dignity as human persons. And here, the fact that fruitfulness is an original blessing suggests that neither marital communion nor parenthood is a merely instrumental good.

Despite their inconsistency with the instrumentalist view, these scriptural accounts of humankind's creation and certain facts about human and Christian life affected the thinking of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, and the Catholic Church's teaching.

Near the beginning of the very work in which Augustine stated the instrumentalist view, he himself said of marriage: "This does not seem to me to be a good solely because of the procreation of children, but also because of the natural companionship [*societas*] between the two sexes. Otherwise, we could not speak of marriage in the case of old people, especially if they had either lost their children or had begotten none at all."⁹

And according to Thomas, the precepts of natural law are principles of practical reasoning that correspond to goods to which human beings are naturally inclined. These goods are the ends to which all human action is directed, and in describing them Thomas includes as one genus 'the mating [*coniunctio*] of male and female, the raising of children, and the like'.¹⁰ Now, if both marriage and parenthood are objects of natural inclination whose goodness is presupposed by all practical reasoning about means, neither can be a merely instrumental good.

In 1566, the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, in explaining 'Why a man and a woman should be joined in marriage', presents the three ends as reasons (*causae*) that couples should have in view when consenting to marriage: 'The first reason is this very society [*societas*] of the two sexes, sought by an instinct of nature, entered into with the hope of mutual help...'¹¹ Not only has a secondary end become the

couple by which they are, as it were, one person; see Maurice Gilbert, S.J., "'Une seule chair" (*Gn. 2, 24*),' *Nouvelle revue théologique* 100 (1978): 66–89.

⁹ St Augustine, *op. cit.*, 3.3, p. 12.

¹⁰ *S.t.*, 2–2, q. 94, a. 2. Some editions, instead of the Leonine's *coniunctio*, have *commixtio*, which suggests that the good to which nature inclines is intercourse rather than marriage. But the soundness of the Leonine and the meaning of *coniunctio* in this context is clear from *In Sent.*, 4, d. 26, q. 1, a. 1 (*S.t.*, *sup.*, q. 41, a. 1), where Thomas quotes as a *sed contra* the classic formulation from the *Digest*: "Ius naturale est maris et feminae coniunctio, quam nos matrimonium appellamus."

¹¹ *Catechismus ex decreto Ss. Concilii Tridentini ad parochos* (*The Catechism by Decree of the Holy Council of Trent*), Latin text with trans. by J. Donovan, 2 vols. (Rome: 1839), 2.18.13–14 (1:648, 650; translation supplied).

first reason to marry, but this reason is, not mutual help (though that is hoped for), but 'this very society of the two sexes, sought by an instinct of nature'. Thus, the first reason to marry is marital communion itself — Augustine's 'natural companionship [*societas*] between the two sexes' and Thomas's 'the mating [*coniunctio*] of male and female' to which nature inclines — which implies that marriage is a good that can be sought for its own sake.

In his 1930 encyclical on marriage, *Casti connubii*, Pius XI organizes the treatment by Augustine's three goods rather than by the three ends, and when he speaks of ends, he lists the *fostering* of conjugal love among the secondary ends of both marriage and the marital act.¹² Then, distinguishing authentic conjugal love from lust, sentiment, and empty talk, Pius explains that true love is expressed by action, which must go beyond mutual help and have as its primary purpose that the spouses help each other grow in virtue and holiness.¹³ And Pius adds: 'This mutual moulding of husband and wife, this determined effort to perfect each other, can in a very real sense, as the Roman Catechism [the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*] teaches, be said to be the chief reason and purpose [*causa et ratio*] of matrimony, provided matrimony be looked at not in the restricted sense as instituted for the proper conception and education of the child, but more widely as a communion, companionship, and association [*societas*] of life as a whole.'¹⁴ Thus, Pius presents Christian marriage as a vocation and way of holiness.

In 1965, the Second Vatican Council entitles its main treatment of marriage (*Gaudium et spes*, part two, chapter one): 'Fostering [*fovenda*: Cherishing, Supporting] the Dignity of Marriage and the Family,' thus indicating their dignity — that is, *inherent* worth.¹⁵ Avoiding any suggestion that marriage is instrumental to ends extrinsic to it, the Council never speaks of marriage's primary and secondary ends. The chapter's central article (GS 49) presents conjugal love as the vivifying source of marriage and family life. Thus, though never identified as an *end* or *good* of marriage, conjugal love becomes the chapter's integrating principle. In this way, Vatican II presents marriage as a unified reality, continuous with the family, good and holy in itself, and bearing within itself its various goods and ends, which also result in additional goods: 'God himself is the author of matrimony, endowed with various goods and ends, all of which are of the greatest importance for the continuation of the human race, for the personal development and

¹² See Pius XI, *Casti connubii*, AAS 22 (1930) 561, *The Papal Encyclicals*, ed. Claudia Carlen, I.H.M. (1981; reprint Ann Arbor, Mich.: Pierian Press, 1990), encyclical 208, §59.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 548; P.E. §23.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 548–49, P.E., §24 (translation amended).

¹⁵ A valuable commentary on this chapter of *Gaudium et spes*: Marcellinus Zalba, S.J., 'De dignitate matrimonii et familiae fovenda (ad cap. I partis II Const. de Ecclesia in mundo commentarium,' *Periodica de re morali, canonica, liturgica* 55 (1966): 381–429.

eternal destiny of the individual members of the family, and for the dignity, stability, peace, and prosperity of the family itself and of human society as a whole' (GS 48).

Never suggesting that marriage and conjugal love are means to offspring, Vatican II instead suggests that having and bringing up children normally fulfill marriage and conjugal love from within: 'By their own natural character, the institution of marriage and conjugal love are directed to the procreation and raising of children and find their culmination in this' (GS 48).¹⁶ The Council goes on at once to treat mutual help, too, not merely as the division of labor appropriate in the household insofar as it is an economic unit, but as the proper unfolding and perfecting of the conjugal covenant itself: 'Thus the man and the woman, who by their conjugal covenant "are no longer two, but one flesh" (Mt. 19:6), by the intimate conjoining of their persons and their actions provide each other with mutual help and service, experience a sense of their oneness, and achieve it more fully day by day' (GS 48).

Finally, developing the teaching of Vatican II, John Paul II explicitly characterizes children as a gift continuous with the gift of conjugal love:

In its most profound reality, love is essentially a gift; and conjugal love, while leading the spouses to the reciprocal 'knowledge' which makes them 'one flesh' (cf. Gen. 2:24), does not end with the couple, because it makes them capable of the greatest possible gift, the gift by which they become cooperators with God for giving life to a new human person. Thus the couple, while giving themselves to one another, give not just themselves but also the reality of children, who are a living reflection of their love, a permanent sign of conjugal unity and a living and inseparable synthesis of their being a father and a mother.¹⁷

On this view, marriage is good in itself, and parenthood is part of its complex goodness.

¹⁶ It is often said that Vatican II deliberately set aside the traditional hierarchy of the primary and secondary ends of marriage. But it is more accurate to say that the Council avoided the terminology of primary and secondary ends, which suggested that marriage is only instrumentally good, and developed traditional teaching by relating conjugal love to the various ends, while regarding these as intrinsic elements of marriage-family considered as a single, complex good; see John Paul II, General Audience (10 Oct. 1984), 3, *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1984) 7.2:846, *L'Osservatore Romano* (English) 15 Oct. 1984, 8. While conjugal love is the source (efficient cause) of all the ends, they specify it and in that sense are its ground: see Guy de Broglie, S.J., 'Le fondement de l'amour conjugal,' *Doctor communis* 23 (1970): 192–216.

¹⁷ John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, 14, AAS 74 (1982) 96, *L'Osservatore Romano* (English), 21–28 Dec. 1981, 3.

II. Some Reflections on the Inherent Goodness of Marriage

For many couples, the wedding or intercourse or both, as imagined (or perceived) states of affairs, seem good in themselves inasmuch as either or both are emotionally desired (or enjoyed). In that sense, marriage is not good in itself. It cannot be imagined or perceived; its goodness is intelligible and serves as a reason for acting. Marriage is good in itself in this sense: it can be a reason, that needs no other reason, for doing various things, including getting married.

In this respect, marriage is like other things good in themselves, such as health and friendship. One can imagine feeling well and desire it, or experience feeling well and enjoy it; one can imagine doing something with a friend and want to do it, or experience being with a friend and enjoy his or her company. But health and friendship are not objects of emotion. One understands them and acts for them: health is a reason to watch one's diet and get some exercise, friendship a reason to do many things, including some things one does not feel like doing and would not otherwise do, even for oneself.

Though things intelligibly good in themselves are not concrete objects that one can possess or definitively achieve, they are not platonic ideas or mere ideals. They are aspects of what human beings can be and are, elements of their well-being or fulfillment as individuals and as persons in communion with one another. My health, my friendships with these persons, my wife's and my marriage — these are parts of my and our reality that I and we understand, cherish, and act to promote and protect. Of course, these and similar goods also often contribute to other goods. But even if they did not, the anticipation of beginning or continuing to share in them could be a reason for choosing to do what seemed likely to promote or protect that sharing.

Compared with health and friendship, the good of marriage is complex. It fulfills both biological and moral capacities by making two bodily and free persons into one, new, integral, physical and moral person, without in the least compromising their individuality.

The joining of male and female to which nature inclines human beings is generically like that to which it inclines other animals that reproduce sexually. In sexual intercourse, the mated pair engages in one reproductive act. Though a male and a female are complete individuals with respect to other functions — nutrition, sensation, locomotion — with respect to reproduction they are only potential parts of a mated pair, which is the complete organism capable of reproducing sexually. Even if the mated pair is sterile, intercourse, provided it is the reproductive behavior characteristic of the species, makes the copulating male and female one organism. If intercourse is fruitful, the unity of the pair is prolonged, because offspring fully emerge and become independent only through a more or less lengthy process.

Of course, humans are specifically different from other animals and are subjects not only of bodily functions but of spiritual acts, such as linguistic understanding.¹⁸ So, a human couple's sexual intercourse shares in their dignity both in itself and insofar as it is apt for procreating new persons. Still, just as with a male and a female of other species, a mated man's and woman's reproductive behavior makes them one organism. 'Two in one flesh' is no mere metaphor.

At the same time, like authentic, faithful friendship and unlike the mating of animals or nonmarital coupling, marriage is a communion of persons constituted by their mutual, free self-gift. However, the parties' subjective preferences determine the structure and responsibilities of marriage far less than of friendship. Though marriage and family life vary culturally, anthropologists studying a culture do not ask whether its members marry but what special characteristics marriage has in that society. In doing so, they refer to something recognizable in any society by its constant characteristics: it is the more or less stable heterosexual relationship recognized by society as the community in which it is appropriate for a man and a woman to engage regularly in sexual intercourse, and to beget and raise children.¹⁹ So, unlike friendship, which can develop without any definite undertaking by the parties, marriage is constituted by marital consent: mutual commitment to undertake the well-defined responsibilities of husband and wife, and, if the marriage is fruitful, father and mother. Consequently, in marrying, the bride and the groom undertake to constitute an intimate and comprehensive union — as it were one, new person — suited to be a unified parental principle from which new persons can proceed and develop into mature persons and autonomous members of society.

In sum, having and raising children are included within the good of marriage. So, the requirements of parenthood specify marriage, and its realization fulfills marital communion. For the same reason, children, insofar as they come to be and are nurtured by their parents' marriage, participate in the good of marriage.²⁰

¹⁸ See David Braine, *The Human Person: Animal and Spirit* (London: Duckworth, 1993), 345–479.

¹⁹ G. Robina Quale, *A History of Marriage Systems* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 305, summarizes: 'Marriage is an alliance before it is anything else. It is an alliance between the two who are marrying. It is an alliance between families who become more closely linked... Marriage is the means by which the larger social system recognizes not only the mother, but also the father of the children whom the mother bears. Marriage acknowledges each as the other's partner in bringing children into the world and raising them. Marriage is also the means by which the larger social system seeks to control the expression of the powerful instincts of sexual attraction.'

²⁰ This explanation clarifies the statement of Paul VI, *Humanae vitae*, 12, AAS 60 (1968) 488, *The Papal Encyclicals*, encyclical 277, §12, that marital intercourse has two meanings — unitive and procreative — which may not be separated. The reason why it is wrong to try to separate the two meanings is that they cannot be separated: they are not units

Yet marriage and the marital act are not merely instrumental goods. Marriage is an intrinsically good communion of the spouses, constituted by their mutual self-gift, and each marriage has this character from the moment the couple marry and begin to live together. Though particular couples may know, or come to learn, that they never will have children, their marriages are real and good, insofar as they partially fulfill the spouses' biological and moral capacities as sexually complementary persons. Still, though infertile couples can exercise and fulfill their capacity for parenthood by adopting children and in other ways, their marriages lack the natural fulfillment of parenthood — a lack many spouses experience as a frustrating privation.

Since intelligible goods are aspects of persons' well-being and fulfillment, to love these goods is to love persons. And, since love of neighbor and self fulfills every moral requirement, these goods, including marriage, are moral principles,²¹ whose implications can be drawn out by considering what sorts of willing are compatible with loving all the goods of all persons — that is, with willing the integral fulfillment of the entire human community.²² Therefore, the willing involved in actions bearing on marriages and families can be evaluated by its harmony with willing the integral fulfillment of the entire human community, including the fulfillment of spouses and children in the good of marriage and family life. Moreover, just as people cannot comprehend their duties to friends if they think friendship is only instrumentally good, or their responsibilities regarding their own and others' health if they mistakenly think that feeling well suffices for health, so people cannot comprehend the morality of marriage and family life unless they accurately understand this good and appreciate its dignity.²³

Because intelligible goods, including marriage and family, are not concrete objects that can be possessed or definitively achieved, and are not states of affairs that can be imagined or perceived, their moral implications *cannot* be drawn out by comparing the benefits and harms that probably would result if a certain option were carried out or not, or if this or that option were carried out.²⁴ So, actions (including

complete in themselves and linked only by something outside themselves. Rather, intercourse can be unitive only if it is suited to be procreative. Thus, the procreative meaning of marital intercourse is part of its unitive meaning.

²¹ See my *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, vol. 1, *Christian Moral Principles* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), 97–140; vol. 2, *Living a Christian Life* (Quincy, Ill.: Franciscan Press, 1993), 555–69.

²² See *Christian Moral Principles*, 173–228.

²³ For my attempt to articulate systematically the moral norms for marriage, sex, and family life see my *Living a Christian Life*, 553–752 (ch. 9). In that chapter, interested readers will find a fuller treatment of most of the matters touched on in this paper.

²⁴ See my *Christian Moral Principles*, 141–71.

actions making laws and policies) affecting particular marriages and families, and marriage and family life in the community as a whole cannot be morally evaluated adequately by weighing and balancing their wanted and unwanted prospective results. Therefore, all the consequentialist arguments proposed to justify adultery and polygamy, and to support legislation and social arrangements to facilitate divorce, are unsound.

III. Sacramental Marriage and the Christian Family

Since the family fulfills marriage, a sacramental marriage is fulfilled by a Christian family. But what is the sacramentality of Christian marriage, and how do children share in and fulfill that sacramentality? To these questions, I shall say several things very briefly, hoping my sketch will serve as starting point for discussion and reflection.²⁵

One's free choices are self-determining; unless one changes one's mind, that determination remains even when one is not carrying them out, much as intellectual knowledge remains even when one is not employing it. Accepting the invitation to give this paper shaped into the one act of preparing it occasional behavior, and several other choices, over many months. Consenting to marriage shaped into one, vast, cooperative act much of what my wife and I have been doing since 9 June 1951.

In celebrating the Last Supper with his disciples, Jesus freely accepts death; that covenant-forming self-offering is once for all, as the writer of the Letter to Hebrews explains (see Heb. 9:11–10:18). In celebrating, Jesus directs his disciples: 'Do this in remembrance of me' (Lk. 22:19). So, by doing it, Christians of all times and places cooperate with Jesus' unending self-offering and are joined in covenantal communion with him, with the hope of sharing in his risen glory.

This is the Eucharist, the central sacrament; the others, in diverse ways, enable and extend the same cooperation. They are salvific because the human action they involve, including Jesus' human action, is cooperation with God's saving work; the sacraments contain and give grace because the Holy Spirit works in them. Baptism is admission to the covenant community; it joins to Jesus those who accept his gospel, and empowers them to share in the Eucharist. Baptism is to the Eucharist as marital consent is to marital intercourse.

Before a Christian man and woman marry, they already are united with Christ by baptism and, by the Eucharist, are not only his members but members of each other (see Rom. 12:5, 1 Cor. 10:17). By marital consent and intercourse, the two 'become one flesh' (Gen. 2:24)—

²⁵ For a longer attempt at what I sketch here, see my *Christian Moral Principles*, 527–55, 725–806; *Living a Christian Life*, 596–613. See also Peter J. Elliott, *What God Has Joined: The Sacramentality of Marriage* (New York: Alba House, 1990).

one, new, integral, physical and moral person. Do they not also become a new member of Christ, a new Christian, sharing in a new sacrament, even without any additional, specifically Christian ceremony?

The question is not answered by a single Scripture passage: “... the two will become one flesh.” This is a great mystery [Greek: *mysterion*; Latin: *Sacramentum*]’ (Eph. 5:31–32).²⁶ This text must be considered with other data: marriage in Genesis’ two creation accounts and in the prophets’ clarification of God’s intimate, covenantal relationship with Israel (see Is. 54:5–8, Jer. 2–3, Ezk. 16 and 23, Mal. 2:14–16); Jesus’ participation in the wedding feast at Cana, his teaching about marriage in the beginning, and his development of the marriage analogy to clarify his new covenant; the real efficacy of God’s redemptive work in Jesus’ death and resurrection; and the availability of that work’s fruits through baptism and in the Eucharist. Considered together, these data indicate that marriage is a sacrament, not only by signifying the bodily communion of Christ with his Church — the communion that is realized in the Eucharist — but by extending that central sacrament’s cooperation with Jesus’ sacrifice to marital consent and, through it, to the whole of married life that faithfully carries out that consent.

If cooperation with Jesus’ sacrifice extends to the whole of married life, he is permanently present in the communion of the sacramentally married, as Vatican II teaches:

Christ the Lord abundantly blessed this many-faceted [conjugal] love, welling up as it does from the fountain of divine love and structured as it is on the model of his union with the Church. For as God of old made himself present (cf. Hos. 2; Jer. 3:6–13; Ezk. 16 and 23; Is. 54) to his people through a covenant of love and fidelity, so now the savior of men and the spouse (cf. Mt. 9:15, Mk. 2:19–20, Lk. 5:34–35, Jn. 3:29; cf. also 2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:27; Rv. 19:7–8; 21, 2, 9) of the Church comes into the lives of married Christians through the sacrament of matrimony. He abides with them thereafter so that, just as he loved the Church and handed himself over on her behalf (cf. Eph. 5:25), the spouses may love each other with perpetual fidelity through mutual self-bestowal. (GS 48)

Because a Christian marriage as a sacrament is a lasting cooperation with Jesus’ sacrifice, the spouses are bound by their covenant not only to each other but to him. Now, ‘if we are faithless, he remains faithful — for he cannot deny himself’ (2 Tim. 2:13). Jesus’ presence in each Christian marriage, however, not only requires absolute fidelity but lends fallen men and women the Holy Spirit’s power to meet this requirement.

Since parenthood fulfills marriage, the sacrament of marriage must affect not only the spouses’ actions toward each other but their

²⁶ Though the Councils of Florence (See DS 1327/702) and Trent (see DS 1797– 99/969) use this text in their teaching on marriage, neither uses it as a proof text for sacramentality.

procreative and parental actions. The prophets already regarded marriage as a divine vocation and sacred ministry. Children are born for God and belong to him (see Ezk. 16:20–21). Forming them, God makes them for his own glory (see Is. 43:6–7). So, from marriage, God desires, not simply offspring, but ‘Godly offspring’ (Mal. 2:15). In the new covenant, offspring, once born, are to be baptized — reborn as children of God — and nurtured as members of Christ. In this straightforward way, the Christian family fulfills sacramental marriage.

Moreover, since children participate in their parents’ marriage insofar as they come to be and are nurtured by it, Christian children participate in the sacrament of marriage insofar as their parents bring them up as members of Christ. Hearing the gospel from their parents’ lips, experiencing the witness of their lives, and believing, Christian children share in the Church’s faith by sharing in their parents’ faith. Joining in their parents’ prayer and learning to pray, Christian children share in their family’s worship. The three or more family members are gathered in Jesus’ name, and he lives in their midst (see Mt. 18:20). Thus, the family is a community called together by God, an *ekklesia*, a church.²⁷ Again, in a simple and obvious way, the Christian family fulfills sacramental marriage.

Finally, I venture to suggest that the Christian family also fulfills sacramental marriage in a less obvious way. Marriage signifies the union of Christ with his Church. Like marriage, that union is not only spiritual but bodily, effected by the Eucharist (see Rom. 12:5, 1 Cor. 10:17) so that those who believe in Jesus will share in his resurrection life (see Jn. 6:25–59). Marriage, however, is very limited, since it joins only two persons on the basis of each one’s natural incompleteness with respect to the single organic function of reproduction. By contrast, the bodily communion built up by the Eucharist joins in Jesus all who share in the one bread with respect to the entire, glorious life which they hope to live in him forever. Moreover, ‘in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels’ (Mt. 22:30; cf. Mk. 12:25, Lk. 20:34–36), and death dissolves a marriage, so that widows and widowers are free to remarry (see 1 Cor. 7:7–9). By contrast, the parent-child and sibling relationships, which fulfill the one-flesh unity of marriage, are unending. So, it seems to me, though the couple’s one-flesh union aptly signifies the union of Christ with his Church considered as a whole, the Christian family completes the sacrament by more aptly signifying the union of Christ with his Church considered as a gathering of many members — God’s ‘large family’, in which Jesus, the Father’s natural Son, is ‘the firstborn’ (Rom. 8:29).

²⁷ A notion proposed by some Church Fathers, including St John Chrysostom, *In Gen. serm.*, 7, 1; PG 54:607: ‘When yesterday I said, “Each one of you must see to it that your home becomes a church,” you responded in loud voices and were pleased at what like words had produced in you.’