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What You Are

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In 1981, Pope John Paul II published his encyclical *Familiaris Consortio* on the role of the Christian family in the modern world. In that encyclical he issued an exhortation: “Family, become what you are” (n. 17). Before you can become what you are raises the question of what you are and what you are to become, and the Pope offers an answer to that question. Central to that answer is his definition of family as “domestic church” (n. 21), a term he takes from *Lumen Gentium*, the Second Vatican Council’s document on the church (n. 11).

The Pope explains that “the Christian family constitutes a specific revelation of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called the domestic church.” The internal communion that characterizes the family is a revelation of the communion that should characterize both the church of Christ and the civil community in which the family lives. The family is also, John Paul insists, a “school of deeper humanity. This happens where there is care and love for the little ones, the sick, the aged, where there is mutual service every day, where there is sharing of goods, of joys, and of sorrows” (n. 21). These actions establish Christian families in a “‘preferential option’ for the poor and disadvantaged” (n. 47), an inestimable human and religious value to both church and society.

The Christian family that John Paul *describes* in *Familiaris Consortio* is quite different from that presented by his papal predecessors, in the sense that in the domestic church husband and wife are equal, or at least relatively equal. Basing himself on Paul’s instruction to the Ephesians, “wives be subject to your husbands as to the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is head of the church” (Eph 5:22), Pope Leo XIII wrote in his 1880 encyclical on Christian marriage, *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae*, that “the husband is the chief of the family and head of the wife. The woman...must be subject to her husband and obey him” (n. 11). Fifty years later, in his encyclical on Christian marriage, *Casti Connubii*, his response to the Anglican church’s approval of the

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morality of artificial contraception, Pope Pius XI repeated that teaching, proposing that the order of love in the family grants the husband authority over his wife and that the wife is to be subject to and obedient to her husband (n. 26). Pope John XXIII, who called the Second Vatican Council and moved the Catholic Church into the modern world in the 1960s, also repeated it. In his first encyclical in 1959, *Ad Petri Cathedram*, he taught that in the family, the father stands in God's place. He must lead and guide the rest by his authority and the example of his good life.

Pope John Paul, at least in principle, will have none of this traditional patriarchy. The order of love in the domestic church, he teaches, is an order of *equality* between wife and husband. Nowhere in his extensive writings does he advocate women's submission to men or wives' submission to their husbands. Women and men are so equal that he teaches, again contrary to the traditional Catholic position, that "there is no doubt that the equal dignity and responsibility of men and women fully justifies women's access to public functions" (n. 23). Women, that is, can work outside the home, but he has a caveat here. John XXIII taught that God endowed women with special natural attributes and assigned them certain tasks. John Paul II has no doubt what the dominant natural attribute of women is: it is *motherhood*. Women are created as mothers. Women can work outside the home, but there must be "a clear recognition given to their *maternal* and family role, by comparison with all public roles and all other professions." Their maternal and work roles must be "harmoniously combined" (n. 23), but for them to be harmoniously combined demands a change in the attitudes of husbands.

DOMESTIC REALITIES

We stated above that John Paul II teaches *in principle* the equality of wives and husbands in marriage and family. We now explain how far that principle of spousal equality is from *actual* family practice. Government studies in the United States show that the working week for married women averages 72-76 hours compared to their husbands' average 42 hours. Those 72-76 working hours, of course, are not all put in at their job outside the home. Trade unions would never permit such an imbalance. No, the 72-76 hours combine their first shift on the job outside their home and their second shift when they come home to their housework and to care of their husbands and children. The data show that husbands assist with the second shift on average 2 hours a week. This datum describes the lives of working mothers not only in the United States but across the globe. It also demonstrates how husbands worldwide are in serious need of education on what it means to be

a husband and to love their wives in the domestic church. It also demonstrates how *far from* equality are modern working wives and husbands.

John Paul, it would appear, was unaware of this data when he lauded the equality of wives and husbands in the domestic church, but how could he not have known by listening to the lived experiences of married couples? The divergence in the working hours of wives and husbands in modern marriages is very difficult to reconcile with talk of their marital equality. Speaking to working mothers in 1960, Pope John XXIII explained that work is tiring, and when a man comes home he is looking for a refuge from the dullness of his work, a source to restore his energies. A woman's task in general is to provide that refuge even if she herself has been tired and dulled by work outside or inside the home. He acknowledges women's physical weakness and concludes reasonably that they, therefore, are to make a greater effort to make their homes a refuge for their families and their tired husbands. He does *not* conclude, however, that men should contribute more than two hours a week to make their homes restorative refuges for their working wives. This demonstrates again anything but equality and the truth of theologian Margaret Farley's claim that most families in the world today are still hierarchical and patriarchal. This structure, both she and we argue, must change for the family that is a domestic church. The Catholic Church cannot be a prophetic voice urging that change until its own structure models coequal discipleship between women and men. In its document on the church universal and domestic, the Second Vatican Council taught that "the holy people of God [comprised of women and men] shares also in Christ's prophetic office" (n. 12). The experiential evidence continues to show that teaching still remains theoretical principle far removed from Church experience and practice.

John Paul II's exhortation continues to resound in the world: "Family, become what you are." Become a domestic church, an order of *mutual* love in which wives and husbands are equal; in which wives and husbands are equally prophetic voices to one another, to the society in which they live, and in the Church in which they belong; in which wives and husbands conceive and raise children to be followers of the Christ who invited all women and men "to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and will all your minds, and with all your strength" and to "love your neighbor as your yourself" (Mark 12:30-31).

The word *love* can be a source of confusion, for it is general and needs to be specified to be effective. The Greeks had four words for love: *agape*, translated as love or charity, *philia*, translated as friendship, *storge* translated as affection, and *eros*, translated as

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sexual love, but only *agape* and *philia* concern us here. *Agape* is the universal, non-preferential, not necessarily reciprocated love of all others; *philia* is the particular, preferential, reciprocated love of a friend over all others. *Agape* is a love that never ends. It is the love demanded in Jesus' exhortation to love your neighbor as yourself. *Philia* is a love that can end, as every forgotten friendship verifies, though we would argue that a friendship that ends was never a true friendship in the first place. The great Roman, Cicero, taught that friendship is to be preferred to all human possessions and that it is secured by honesty. Dishonesty destroys all truth without which there can be no friendship except only in name.

MARRIAGE

The majority of women and men today continue to celebrate their mutual love and to establish their family via marriage which, the Second Vatican Council taught in *Gaudium et Spes*, is an "intimate partnership of life and love" (n. 48). That intimate partnership establishes the mutual spousal responsibility to maintain and grow it in the mutual love that established it in the first place. Spousal love, however, cannot be only non-reciprocal *agape*, it must also be reciprocal *philia*. It must also be the other two realities name by the Greek words *storge* (affection) and *eros* (sexual love), but to maintain focus we do not deal with those realities in this essay. The communion between spouses in marriage has no obvious models in our world. Marriage is not a democracy, which is about equal but separate individuals; nor is it a monarchy, which is about unequal individuals. It is an intimate partnership of friendship-love in which one free person gives herself/himself to another free person so completely that they become one person or, in the Hebrew language of the scripture, "one body" (Gen 2:24). In this one person the two share their thoughts, their feelings, their experiences, their joys, their sorrows, their love, their life. The social scientific evidence suggests that this one-body of friendship-love is the best and lasting foundation of a good marriage and a happy family. The Catholic Church so values such a marriage that it names it a sacrament, a symbol in the world of the friendship and self-sacrificing love of God for God's people and of Christ for his people the church.

We raise here a question that has often been posed to us by our students: why would a free woman and a free man choose to give up their individual freedoms and rights and become one loving body-person for life? The short answer is because they wish to become best friends for life. A longer answer was developed in the Catholic tradition from a consideration of the ends or purposes of marriage. Those ends were traditionally judged to be two: the mutual love

and support of the spouses and the generation or procreation of children. For centuries, marriage was judged to be primarily for the procreation of children, and so procreation was judged to be the primary end of marriage and the mutual love and support of the spouses was judged a secondary end. In the twentieth century, however, when marriage came to be viewed as a loving union between the spouses before there was any procreation of children, the Second Vatican Council adjusted that hierarchical arrangement and established the two ends as equal ends. We conclude this essay by considering these two ends of marriage, along with a frequently forgotten third end, a life of friendship love of those near to the family and of unconditional love of all.

THE ENDS OF MARRIAGE

The bedrock of every marriage is loving generativity, the capacity to generate and nurture life beyond one's own. The *first* life generated in a marriage is not that of a child. The first life generated in a marriage, and the life on which all other lives in the marriage and family depend for their viability, is the life of the spouses together, the life of the one biblical body-person. By virtue of their consent to a life of intimate and loving partnership, the spouses are no longer two persons but one body-person, and they are called to grow the life of that one person by day-to-day love and fidelity. The one-body friendship love of the spouses is an important end of their marriage, indeed the very end for which they married in the first place. It is the primary end of their marriage because all other ends depend on it for their procreation and growth.

A friend who is also a spouse daily reflects to the other spouse an honest appraisal, a kind of mirror image of himself/herself. He/she offers support against the constant temptation to loss of interest in and commitment to the loving one-body communion that marriage is. As the other who is to be responded to in friendship love, he/she calls the spouse to constant moral behavior in and out of marriage. All of that and more is generated by mutual spousal love and by mutual spousal commitment to the ongoing consent to be a communion of best friends forever. Because, however, the commitment to be best friends forever in marriage is founded on preferences which can ebb and flow and be fragile, marriage too is fragile. That is where *agape* comes in, as universal support for perhaps fading preferences. The communion between the spouses in marriage is, therefore, both *philia* and *agape* communion, and that communion fashions and sustains the broader communion that is the family that develops from the marriage.

Most parents will agree with *Gaudium et Spes*' teaching that "children really are the supreme gift of marriage and contribute

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substantially to the welfare of their parents” (n. 50), and so we need not spend time establishing the procreation of children as an important *second* end of marriage. Given the socially demonstrated physical and emotional fate of many children in contemporary world families, however, we do need to spend some time reflecting on the fact that the generativity and fruitfulness of marriage are not achieved by the mere biological generation of children. To be parentally generative requires not only the transitory moment of sexual intercourse but also the long-term nurture of children resulting from that intercourse into functioning adults. Maternity and paternity generate children, but only the long-term nurture of mothers and fathers generates functioning adults. The generation of functioning adults has always been the desired Catholic end of the act of procreation, and functioning adults are seriously required today in both society and church, perhaps more required than at any time in history.

There is a *third* end in a specifically *Christian* marriage that spouses often forget. Christian marriage requires spouses to live their marital and family lives in imitation of Jesus, whom they confess to be God’s Christ. Jesus instructs them to call upon God as *Abba*, Father (Mark 14:36) and, therefore, to look upon all God’s children as sisters and brothers and friends. To be generative as Christian spouses, spouses must nurture love, care, compassion, justice, and peace, both within and without their families, with special concern for the poor and vulnerable at the margins of every society. In this way, they will love all within their reach and those nearest to them most of all. In this way too they will make, in *Familiaris Consortio*’s words, their “first and fundamental contribution to society” (n. 43).

CONCLUSION

So, in conclusion, what is a Christian family to become? It is to become a domestic church: which is an order of mutual love and fidelity in which wives and husbands are equal and contribute equally to loving and nurturing one another and their children; in which wives and husbands are equally prophetic voices to one another and to the society and church in which they live; in which wives and husbands, when possible and chosen, conceive and raise children to be followers of the Christ who invited all women and men to “follow me” (Matt 4:19); it is to become a preferential option for the love, the compassion, and the care for the poor and vulnerable in their world. It is to become, in short, a sacrament-symbol in the world of the loving presence of God and God’s Christ.