

The Family in Christian Social and Political Thought

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Late Liberalism and Contemporary Christian Thought

According to many late liberal theorists, the family is a social institution in dire need of radical reform and political regulation. Rawls, for instance, can muster no normative rationale for the family in a well-ordered society. Its only value is its potential for promoting the self-esteem of children, a task he readily admits could be undertaken more effectively by other institutions. Okin builds upon this premise, insisting that the state should enact legislation and regulations which ensure the just and egalitarian ordering of households. The values inherent in the family are inimical to liberal democratic society, and their influence must be expunged or severely restricted. This attack on the family has been chronicled and criticized by such writers as the Bergers and Lasch. Contrary to the claim that families are pathological breeding grounds of anti-democratic values, the Bergers contend that the nuclear family embodies the foundational bourgeois morality of liberal democracy. Defending the family is synonymous with protecting freedom and liberty. Lasch is more ambivalent about the relationship between the family and democracy, but he is alarmed by the untoward social and political consequences of the family's deteriorating moral authority. He is also less sanguine about mounting a successful defence of the family, for he sees the attack as part of a religious, rather than social and political, struggle, and he refuses, or is unable, to offer any advice for how this culture war should be conducted.

One need not accept Lasch's speculative prognosis to recognize that contemporary Christian thinking on the family must take into account that it has become the object of heated moral debate. The purpose of this chapter is to survey a representative range of Christian positions that

purportedly attempt to engage this volatile social and political context in an overtly theological manner. The first two approaches may be characterized, respectively, as *reformulation* and *resistance*. The former believes that a Christian understanding of the family must be radically reformulated in light of rapid social change; what is at stake is the adaptability and continuing relevancy of Christian faith. In contrast, the latter contends that the traditional family must be strengthened as a bulwark to resist late modernity's moral and social chaos; the issue at hand is the preservation of and fidelity to historic Christian doctrine. A third stance is that of *critical adaptation*. This approach selectively reinterprets *and* defends traditional doctrinal teaching on the family in response to late liberal social and political thought, as exemplified in three proposals that may be characterized, respectively, as *critical familism*, *church as first family*, and *household management*.

REFORMULATION

One possible theological response to late liberal social and political thought is to reformulate a Christian understanding of family in the light of dominant liberal values and presuppositions. Such revision is needed if the church is to make significant contributions to the social and political ordering of the family, and failing to do so would result in its curt dismissal as an antiquated and irrelevant institution. A promising route for reformulating a pertinent model of the family is to link core late liberal principles with appropriate theological convictions. The principle of individual autonomy, for example, is seemingly compatible with Christian notions of love and freedom. Humans, for instance, have an inherent capacity to love God and neighbour. A relationship with the neighbour, however, must be formed freely and willingly if it is to be a genuinely loving one. These relationships are formed by individuals who, in the freedom of their love, regard each other as equals who contribute to each other's welfare. Neighbour love is thereby characterized by mutuality and reciprocity. Consequently, late liberalism's commitment to autonomy and equality offers a fitting social setting in which loving relationships may be formed, and something akin to Rawls's portrayal

of 'justice as fairness' secures a complementary political framework in which the core theological convictions of love and freedom are enacted.

More importantly, if loving relationships with neighbours are to be genuinely mutual and reciprocal, then adequate attention must be directed towards an individual's self-regard. This emphasis does not represent a transparent attempt to rationalize hedonism or narcissism with theological rhetoric, but is based on the assumption that self-love is not incompatible with or unrelated to neighbour love.¹ A love of neighbour is not inherently sacrificial, but should promote mutual self-fulfilment. Indeed, individuals cannot be said to be truly participating in a mutual and reciprocal relationship if they have not sufficiently developed certain qualities which can be offered freely to others. Appropriate self-love is therefore a prerequisite for neighbour love. In this respect, sin may be understood as psycho-social conditions that prevent individuals from pursuing self-fulfilment, and being liberated from these conditions may be said to be redemptive. We cannot love our neighbours freely until we love ourselves fully. Rawls's contention that self-esteem plays a pivotal role in a well-ordered society is again compatible with this theological conviction.

These emphases on self-fulfilment, mutuality, and reciprocity have received considerable attention in the spate of contemporary theological treatises praising the human body in general, and sexuality in particular.² It is as embodied creatures that we love ourselves and our neighbours. Moreover, being embodied means that we are also sexual beings. It is as women and men that we relate to each other, so there is a sexual component to every human relationship. An individual's self-fulfilment is dependent upon a series of both other-sex and same-sex relationships. Denying an individual the opportunity to develop the full range of these relationships is tantamount to prohibiting the possibility of maximizing her self-fulfilment. More importantly, these relationships are embedded in moral and

¹ See Gene Outka, *Agape* (1976), 55–74.

² See e.g. Christine E. Gudorf, *Body, Sex, and Pleasure* (1994). It should also be noted that not all theological discourse on embodiment supports these divisions, as exemplified in the encyclicals of John Paul II.

social traditions that are expressed through gender roles. These roles, however, are social constructs, rather than normative categories, and should not receive any political support or privilege. Indeed, traditional gender roles often impede the psycho-social development of individuals. Since these roles are malleable constructs, political ordering should permit a wide range of experimentation in order to deconstruct and reconstruct the sexual relationships that enable individuals to construct their respective identities as sexual beings. Consequently, social mores and legal codes which discriminate against homosexual, bisexual, and promiscuous lifestyles, for example, are unjust, because they are based on artificial distinctions that favour a so-called normative heterosexuality. In this respect, Okin's goal of establishing a genderless society is compatible with a theological emphasis on embodiment.

There are two implications that can be drawn from this theological emphasis on embodiment that are particularly germane to this inquiry. First, sexual behaviour is separated from procreation. This is not a novel development since same-sex relationships have always precluded the possibility of procreation, and birth control has a long history.³ What has changed is that sexual experimentation, largely liberated from the prospect of unwanted offspring, is becoming an object of social approbation rather than stigma, and, co-laterally, being granted the status of a political right. Marriage, then, is a matter of personal taste, and should not be either a socially or politically privileged institution for ordering sexual behaviour or procreation. It follows that, secondly, marriage is effectively separated from family. Although some, if not many, individuals may choose to have children within the context of a marital relationship, there is no compelling reason why this pattern should be favoured over other alternatives. Since marriage enjoys no inherently superior moral status, other childrearing alternatives, such as single-parent, same-sex, or communal arrangements, should not be prohibited, unless harm, especially in the case of children, can be clearly demonstrated. Indeed, a highly diverse range of families should be encouraged to promote the self-development and fulfilment of parents and children.

³ See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (1985) and John T. Noonan, *Contraception* (1986).

From a theological perspective, these two divisions should not be mourned, but celebrated, for they facilitate the redemptive liberation of humans from oppressive gender roles and repressed sexual expression. The work of James B. Nelson may serve as a leading representative of this celebrative stance. His central contention is that the church must overcome two pervasive dualisms that warp its moral teaching.⁴ On the one hand, a spiritualistic dualism separates an inferior body from the superior soul, while on the other hand, a patriarchal dualism subordinates inferior women to superior men. These dualisms incorporate the worse features of early Christian theology, Platonic philosophy, and Hebrew custom which were, in turn, perpetuated and reinforced by Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and the Reformers. The principal consequence of this theological tradition is the creation of social and political orders comprised of individuals alienated from their bodies and feelings. This sad legacy must be expunged if the church is to help late modern societies escape the debilitating dichotomies that stem from this alienation. Nelson is not reticent in reducing the source of this alienation to human sexuality, for no social or political issue can be understood and solved in absence from this underlying sexual component.

The strategy for overcoming this alienation is to affirm embodiment as *the* defining characteristic of human beings, a trait that is sexual in nature. Nelson uses the 'notion of sexuality as something far more inclusive than specifically genital sex acts and their erotic accompaniments'.⁵ Rather, sexuality is 'our self-understanding and way of being in the world', expressing 'God's intention that we find our authentic humanness in relationship'.⁶ All human relationships are thereby sexual by definition, including the relationship with God. Consequently, the church is a 'sexual community'⁷ seeking its 'sexual salvation'.⁸ Salvation consists of healing and overcoming alienation. Humans are saved as sexual beings, and their hope therefore resides in the 'resurrection of the sexual body'.⁹ The resurrection of the body is a powerful symbol of self-discovery as sexual beings, a process of self-acceptance prevented by the church's spiritual and patriarchal

⁴ See James B. Nelson, *Embodiment* (1978), 37–69.

⁵ *Ibid.* 17.

⁶ *Ibid.* 17–18.

⁷ *Ibid.* 14–16.

⁸ *Ibid.* 70–4.

⁹ *Ibid.* 70.

dualisms. Coextensively, the incarnation affirms human sexuality, since Jesus was a sexual being. Together, incarnation and resurrection invite humans to embrace the flesh that God affirms, promoting in turn the values of self-acceptance, sensuousness, and freedom that lead inevitably to androgyny. According to Nelson, every person is by nature androgynous. This claim reflects the 'fact' that homosexual and heterosexual dimensions are present in each individual.¹⁰ A fully developed psychological bisexuality is salvific and sacramental, because it inspires an empathy among females and males that liberates them from the bondage of their dualistic alienation. A growing acceptance of androgyny promotes greater unity with other persons and with God. Consequently, androgyny provides a natural and moral base for more egalitarian forms of social and political ordering.¹¹

The more striking implications of such ordering are seen most vividly in Nelson's discussions of marital fidelity and same-sex unions. According to Nelson, adultery and infidelity are not synonymous terms. Adultery is sexual intercourse with a person who is not one's spouse, whereas infidelity marks the 'rupture of the bonds of faithfulness, honesty, trust, and commitment'.¹² Fidelity is commitment to a marital relationship over time, yet congruent with 'marital fidelity and supportive of it can be certain secondary relationships of some emotional and sensual depth, possibly including genital intercourse'.¹³ Although the Bible and the teaching of Jesus seemingly forbid adultery, 'it is unrealistic and unfair to expect that one person can always meet the partner's companionate needs—needs which are legitimate and not merely individualistic, hedonistic, or egocentric'.¹⁴ Interpersonal intimacy with others does not necessarily exclude the possibility of sexual intimacy as well, for friendship among sexual beings must *always* be open to the possibility of sexual interaction. Spouses, after all, are not hermits who happen to be living together. In addition, secondary relationships can strengthen a marriage. Only immature persons will not be open to the possibility of sexual intimacy with another person other than one's spouse, because each partner is concerned about the growth and fulfilment of the other. Extra-marital affairs are therefore justified if the 'sexual sharing realistically

¹⁰ Ibid. 78–9.

¹¹ For specific implications and proposals, *ibid.* 261–71.

¹² Ibid. 143.

¹³ Ibid. 144.

¹⁴ Ibid. 146.

promises to enhance and not damage the capacity for interpersonal fidelity and personal wholeness.¹⁵ This is compatible with a Christian understanding of marriage, because Jesus condemned an adultery of the heart, not the genitals. Nelson admits that his proposal challenges so-called traditional Christian moral teaching on marriage and the family, but he insists there is nothing inherently normative about monogamy or the nuclear family, and that the church should embrace a wide range of committed relationships and childrearing arrangements.

It is within the context of this expansive acceptance that Nelson addresses the issue of homosexuality in general, and same-sex union in particular. He contends that there is no sweeping condemnation of homosexuality in the Bible, and biblical passages which appear to be condemnatory can be dismissed because they are culturally conditioned and historically relative. Since biblical teaching offers no clear moral guidance—other than Jesus' invitation to seek 'wholeness and communion'¹⁶—the church is also free to discard or correct its traditional theological opinions in light of new scientific evidence and social circumstances. Natural law arguments that condemn homosexual acts, for example, because there is no reproductive potential, fail to recognize that human nature is a social construct rather than a given norm, and overpopulation has rendered the Bible's procreative mandate irrelevant. In addition, the assertion that only heterosexual relationships embody the *imago dei* is too narrow, and fails to recognize that every person has both heterosexual and homosexual dimensions. God's image and likeness is borne by androgynous individuals, and not by males and females joined in a one-flesh heterosexual union. It is only in the complete acceptance of same-sex relationships that God's 'humanizing intentions' are fulfilled, because such acceptance liberates everyone from oppressive sexual stereotypes.¹⁷ Since gays and lesbians require relationships like everyone else, and since all relationships have an underlying sexual component, they should not be denied the freedom of sexual expression. Consequently, the church should simultaneously permit same-sex union for those desiring a lifelong relationship, and support the

¹⁵ For specific implications and proposals, see Nelson, *Embodiment*, 151.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 181–2. ¹⁷ *Ibid.* 197–8.

civil rights of homosexuals. 'When and if the church moves toward liturgical support of gay union, it should also press toward civil recognition.'¹⁸

Although Adrian Thatcher shares Nelson's presuppositions that all human relationships have a strong sexual component that unfortunately suffers the alienating effects of Christianity's dualistic traditions, he believes that late modernity offers an opportunity for a critical reaffirmation of Christian teaching on marriage and family rather than a curt dismissal. The quest for sexual fulfilment that Nelson commends as liberating can prove to be as equally enslaving in the absence of institutional structures that marriage and family provide, albeit in revised configurations. Consequently, his principal goal is to reclaim and affirm these institutions in the light of alarming increases in divorce, cohabitation, and child neglect, but to reclaim and to affirm in a manner that is palatable to a postmodern audience.

The foundation of Thatcher's reclamation project is a series of 'loyal', but critical, enquiries. As a theologian, he endeavours to be loyal to Christ, the Bible, tradition, and the church. But he must also be loyal to the experience of people who have been harmed by marriage, and the contemporary culture in which the church is presently located.¹⁹ These loyalties inspire simultaneous 'internal' and 'external' dialogues.²⁰ The internal dialogue results in a particular Christian understanding of marriage as covenant and sacrament. As covenant, marriage is a public '*agreement between two people*' that is '*ratified by Jesus Christ*'. As sacrament, the partners of a marital covenant are '*equal recipients*' of Christ's love, and participate equally '*in the divine-human covenant between Christ and the Church*'.²¹ The biblical notion of one-flesh union is an important symbol to reclaim, for its emphasis on marriage as a lifelong covenant of mutual fidelity and an openness to children. This symbol is important, because any theological account of marriage that takes embodiment seriously cannot casually sever the links between sexuality, covenant, and procreation. Consequently, unlike Nelson, Thatcher insists that adultery and infidelity are not two unrelated categories, but integrally related. Sexual intimacy with a person who is not one's spouse

¹⁸ Ibid. 209.

¹⁹ See Adrian Thatcher, *Marriage after Modernity* (1999), 12–25.

²⁰ Ibid. 31–66.

²¹ Ibid. 87–95 (emphasis original).

violates the one-flesh character of the marital covenant. Moreover, the natural link between sexual intercourse and procreation should not be ignored. Although Thatcher is not opposed to contraception,²² and admits that not all couples should become parents, he nonetheless insists that marriage is oriented towards procreation and childrearing. Again in contrast to Nelson, who rarely makes any mention of children, Thatcher contends that Christian discourse on marriage should begin with children.²³ Although marriage is in itself a complete institution, it nonetheless loses its moral intelligibility when separated from a larger familial context.

In the external dialogue, the church presents its reclaimed tradition of marriage, but it is a reclamation shorn of all sexist and patriarchal distortions, making it more acceptable to postmodern sensibilities. This dialogue partner remains highly sceptical of marriage, however, as witnessed by the growing popularity of cohabitation, and its exclusion of gays and lesbians. In response to cohabitation, Thatcher proposes that betrothal should be recovered and reinstated as a vital component of marriage. He draws on the role it played in the Christian tradition until the eighteenth century, and wishes to recover and reinstitute it as a way of granting ecclesial and civil recognition of a couple's intent or promise to marry.²⁴ Thatcher argues that betrothal is morally superior to either cohabitation or trial marriage. Cohabitation is merely a private arrangement which is not subject to any public recognition or affirmation,²⁵ and trial marriages do not necessarily entail any explicit consent to a lifelong commitment.²⁶ As well as providing a preferable option to cohabitation or trial marriage, betrothal offers a couple a sanctioned time and institutional setting to determine whether they are being joined in the eyes of God,²⁷ and to protect the legal status of children born or conceived during the betrothed period.²⁸ In short, betrothal is needed to

²² See Thatcher, *Marriage after Modernity*, 171–208.

²³ *Ibid.* 132–70.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 108–31.

²⁵ In this respect, Thatcher is critical of the Church of England permitting cohabitation in their report, *Something to Celebrate*; see *ibid.* 129–31.

²⁶ Thatcher takes Spong to task in this regard; *ibid.* 124–7. It should also be noted that the promise to marry which betrothal institutionalizes is not irrevocable; *ibid.* 127–8.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 267–8.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 171–2.

support marriage properly as an evolving process rather than the aftermath of a wedding.

In response to the exclusion of gays and lesbians, Thatcher proposes that the marital covenant should be extended to same-sex couples. He admits that, unlike betrothal, his proposal represents a radical reform rather than retrieval of the Christian tradition. This proposal appears to be incongruent with his insistence on maintaining the link between sexuality and procreation. Thatcher contends, however, that friendship is the foundation of all relational commitments, and is the principal force preserving marriage over time. There is, therefore, no compelling reason why this 'special kind of friendship'²⁹ cannot be extended to same-sex couples. Thatcher admits that, given its close association with procreation and childrearing, marriage can be regarded as a 'heterosexual institution'.³⁰ This restriction, however, is no longer definitive. As Christian history demonstrates, marriage is an adaptable institution, and can be altered in response to changing cultural circumstances. Children, for instance, can now be obtained through a variety of methods that do not require sexual intercourse, and as adoption and reproductive technology make clear, biology is not *the* defining characteristic of parenthood. Consequently, same-sex couples do not necessarily sever the link between the marital covenant and procreation, thereby enabling the church and civil society to extend the institution of marriage to gays and lesbians. Moreover, the friendship of same-sex unions provides a good model of egalitarian and post-patriarchal relationships that should be emulated by heterosexual couples. Since the friendship emanating from a covenanted same-sex couple is identical to the sacramental quality experienced by an equally committed heterosexual couple, there is no reason why the former should not be recognized and blessed as a marriage.

RESISTANCE

In contrast to accommodating Christian teaching and practice to late liberal tenets of moral, social, and political ordering in respect of

²⁹ Ibid. 217–22.

³⁰ Ibid. 297–9.

marriage and family, an alternative approach is to resist all such attempts by reasserting traditional dogma. Some of the principal features of this resistance can be captured by examining selected aspects of contemporary Catholic social teaching.

The promulgation of *Humanae Vitae* dashed expectations that Catholic prohibitions on contraception would be relaxed. Given the development of more reliable techniques, population concerns, and the reforms of Vatican II, many assumed that Paul VI would position the church's moral teaching in response to the growing need to regulate procreation. The encyclical, however, forbade all methods of artificial birth control, in many respects reinforcing strictures imposed by *Casti Connubii*. According to *Humanae Vitae*, humankind has reached a crucial historical moment with its ability to control its own propagation. This prospect raises the issue of 'whether, because people are more conscious today of their responsibilities, the time has come when the transmission of life should be regulated by their intelligence and will rather than through the specific rhythms of their own bodies'.³¹ The moral response to this prospect must be based on natural law and divine revelation, for in following their precepts 'married people collaborate freely and responsibly with God the Creator'.³²

Although the encyclical's brief reference to contraception captured the attention of both theologians and the media, it was largely focused on a theological explication of marriage and family. Unlike attempts to reformulate Christian doctrine in the light of changing cultural mores and values, the issue at stake is not sexual expression, but an ordering of sexual conduct in line with the integral goals of fidelity and procreation. Marriage is foundational to the encyclical's argument, because it provides the normative setting governing both sexual intimacy and the transmission of life. Especially in respect of the latter, the sacred union of a woman and a man provides the natural social environment for the birth and education of children. It is within marriage that moral issues regarding procreation should

³¹ *Humanae Vitae* 5. 3, p. 224. All the encyclicals cited in what follows (apart from *Donum Vitae*) can be found in *The Papal Encyclicals*, ed. Claudia Carlen (1981), ii–v.

³² *Ibid.* 5. 1, p. 223.

be addressed, for in it women and men perfect each other while 'cooperating with God in the generation and rearing of new lives'.³³

Marriage satisfies many physical and emotional needs, but it is not an institution grounded exclusively in nature. A person has the ability to transcend natural needs, giving marriage a deeper character than mutual gratification. A wife and husband become one-flesh, which promotes each other's fulfilment. Moreover, conjugal love does not turn in upon itself, but prompts a couple to extend their marital fellowship to include children. Appealing to the Second Vatican Council, *Humane Vitae* stipulates: 'Marriage and conjugal love are by their nature ordained toward the procreation and education of children. Children are really the supreme gift of marriage and contribute in the highest degree to their parents' welfare.'³⁴

The encyclical enjoins spouses to exhibit self-control, assessing relevant physical, economic, and psychological factors in determining the size of their families. In exercising this responsibility, they are not free to use any means available, but may only employ methods corresponding to God's will by following a natural course of spacing the interval between pregnancies. No act of sexual intercourse should be separated from its potential for transmitting life, because marriage is oriented toward fecundity. Marriage, then, is constituted by both its unitive and procreative significance, and violating either aspect impairs the couple's collaboration with God. The encyclical declares that the 'direct interruption of the generative process', once initiated, is 'absolutely excluded as a lawful means of regulating the number of children'.³⁵ In short, contraception perverts marriage, for 'it is a serious error to think that a whole married life of otherwise normal relations can justify sexual intercourse which is deliberately contraceptive and so intrinsically wrong'.³⁶

Since it is wrong to use contraception to control fertility, it is also wrong to use artificial means to overcome infertility, a principle that was ensconced by the publication of *Donum Vitae* to provide instruction on 'biomedical techniques which make it possible to intervene in the initial phase of the life of a human being and in the very processes of procreation and their conformity with the principles

³³ Ibid. 5. 8, p. 225.

³⁵ Ibid. 5. 14, p. 226.

³⁴ Ibid. 5. 9, p. 225.

³⁶ Ibid. 227.

of Catholic morality'.³⁷ The Vatican's concern was not an aversion to reproductive medicine *per se*, but to ensure that its use respected the 'inalienable rights' of persons 'according to the design and will of God'.³⁸ Procreation should be pursued in ways acknowledging the spiritual and physical totality of embodied persons, honouring their fundamental right to life and inherent dignity. Specifically, reproductive technology should be evaluated by the moral standard of the 'life of the human being called into existence and the special nature of the transmission of human life in marriage'.³⁹

Given these principles, *Donum Vitae* prohibits virtually all forms of assisted reproduction. The first set of prohibitions focus on the dignity of embryos,⁴⁰ while a second set concentrates on marriage as the normative foundation of procreation.⁴¹ Since personhood begins at conception, proper respect must be shown embryos in their creation and subsequent development. Embryos, like all persons, have a right to life, and should not be destroyed if they are not needed or carry deleterious traits. Moreover, a new life should only be brought into being through means that respect a person's inherent dignity. Embryos should not be created for the purpose of improving the chances for a pregnancy, nor should disembodied techniques of conception be employed. On these grounds, *in vitro* fertilization (IVF), for instance, is wrong because it often involves the destruction of unneeded embryos, as well as employing a non-coital method of conception.

All methods of achieving conception, other than sexual intercourse between a wife and husband, are illicit since they violate the one-flesh unity of marriage. It is only within marriage that procreation should be pursued, for it upholds the dignity of both parents and offspring. Heterologous techniques are wrong, because they divest children of a biological relationship with their parents, as well as rupturing the social dimensions of parenthood. Homologous methods are also wrong for, although no donated gametes or surrogate wombs are used, the techniques employed disrupt the unitive meaning

³⁷ *Donum Vitae*, 'Foreword'. Available at: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19870222_respect-for-human-life_en.html

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 'Introduction/2'.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 'Introduction/4'.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 2.

of marriage. Thus, artificial insemination, IVF, and surrogacy are proscribed. In addition, *Donum Vitae* admits that, although the desire for children is natural, marriage does not entitle an individual to become a parent, and infertile couples are urged to satisfy their desire through adoption or charitable work with disadvantaged children.

Donum Vitae builds upon *Humanae Vitae* in two respects. At one level, the former extends the argument of the latter regarding the natural ends and means of procreation: the natural process of transmitting life is sacrosanct, and its embodied structure should not be violated. At another level, *Donum Vitae* contends that assisted reproduction is wrong, because it disrupts the relation between the unitive and procreative aspects of marriage, thereby diminishing the dignity of spouses and offspring. This is especially the case with children who have the right to be born within marriage, and reared by parents to whom they are biologically related.⁴² With this emphasis, *Donum Vitae* shifts the issue away from the purpose of sexual intercourse, and towards the normative relation between parents and children.

Taken together *Humanae Vitae* and *Donum Vitae* argue that the ordering of human fertility and infertility encompass issues of social and political ordering. Marriage is the normative institution in which this ordering is initiated and grounded. Yet marriage alone is an insufficient bridge to accomplish the necessary social and political tasks; it is the family, built upon the moral foundation of marriage, that must bear the weight. More importantly, in the absence of strong families these tasks cannot be accomplished in a proper manner. *Humanae Vitae*, for instance, exhorts public authorities to protect the family's integrity since it is the 'primary unit of the state', and they should 'not tolerate any legislation which would introduce into the family those practices which are opposed to the natural law of God'.⁴³ The state has a duty to promote the common good that is best achieved through upholding marriage and family, and since contraception harms these institutions it should be prohibited, or at least proscribed.

More expansively, *Donum Vitae* asserts that the 'good of the children and of parents contribute to the good of civil society',

⁴² Ibid. 2A.

⁴³ *Humanae Vitae*, 5. 23, p. 229.

for the 'vitality and stability of society require that children come into the world within a family and that the family be firmly based on marriage'.⁴⁴ The 'inviolable right to life' is given its strongest protection in marriage and family, thereby constituting the basic 'elements of civil society and its order'. Consequently, reproductive medicine must be restricted and regulated, because conscience alone is insufficient for 'ensuring respect for personal right and public order'. Moreover, public policies must embody a rational relationship between civil and moral law, in recognition that civil rights are not granted by the state but 'pertain to human nature and are inherent in the person by virtue of the creative act from which the person took his or her origin'. Since civil society is built upon the family the state must uphold it by protecting the rights of children to be conceived, born, and reared within marriage.⁴⁵

In making these claims about the foundational status of marriage and family, *Humanae Vitae* and *Donum Vitae* also draw upon the tradition of modern encyclical social teaching. Leo XIII, for example, asserted that 'family life itself . . . is the cornerstone of all society and government', and is crucial 'to the right ordering and preservation of every State and kingdom'.⁴⁶ Pius XI built upon this teaching, insisting that the family is the 'germ of all social life', and warning that failing to protect it will 'result in poisoning and drying up the very sources of domestic and social life'.⁴⁷ Stable families engender political stability, because 'what families and individuals are, so also is the State, for a body is determined by its parts'.⁴⁸ Pius XII further delineated the state's role in upholding marriage and family, claiming it should 'control, aid and direct the private and individual activities of national life that they converge harmoniously towards the common good'.⁴⁹ Although the family is the 'essential cell of society', it is 'by nature anterior to the State',⁵⁰ and God has assigned these respective spheres distinct, yet complementary, roles in pursuing the common good. Political leaders are thereby urged to resist ideologies leading to the 'gradual abolition of rights peculiar to the family'.⁵¹ John XXIII

⁴⁴ See *Donum Vitae*, 2A.1. ⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 3.

⁴⁶ *Quod Apostolici Muneris*, 2. 8, p. 14. ⁴⁷ *Ubi Arcano Dei Consilio*, 3. 29, p. 231.

⁴⁸ *Casti Connubii*, 3. 37, p. 397. ⁴⁹ *Summi Pontificatus*, 4. 59, p. 13.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 4. 61, p. 13. ⁵¹ *Ibid.* 4. 63, p. 13.

commended the family as the microcosmic foundation to civil society, for there can be no genuine tranquillity in the absence of stable families. Moreover, there are dire consequences if the family is weakened: 'The Christian family is a sacred institution. If it totters, if the norms which the divine Redeemer laid down for it are rejected or ignored, then the very foundation of the state tremble; civil society stands betrayed and in peril.'⁵² Paul VI further highlighted the social sources of human identity, contending that man 'is not really himself... except within the framework of society and the family plays the basic and most important role.'⁵³ The 'natural family, stable and monogamous—as fashioned by God and sanctified by Christianity—in which different generations live together, helping each other to acquire greater wisdom and to harmonize personal rights with social needs, is the basis of society.'⁵⁴

In his apostolic exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul II systematically ties together the various emphases of the documents surveyed above, while also portraying the family as an evangelical witness complementing the witness of celibacy. The primary role of the family is to be a 'living reflection of and a real sharing in God's love for humanity and the love of Christ the Lord for the Church his bride.'⁵⁵ This role is now performed against a social and political background in which marriage and family are weakened by 'an autonomous power of self-affirmation... for one's own selfish well-being.'⁵⁶ Consequently, the family is called to witness to the power of sacrificial love, and is empowered by God to bear this witness by manifesting a divine love that is the source of every vocation. The marital vocation expresses not only God's love for humankind, but more poignantly Christ's love for the church. In their one-flesh unity a married couple becomes a salvific witness of mutual self-giving. Their one-flesh unity serves also as the foundation of the parental vocation, for marriage is oriented towards procreation and child-rearing. In their reciprocal and exclusive act of transmitting life, a couple cooperates with God in receiving the gift of children. Marital and parental love reflect God's love while also exhibiting a love for God, together providing the basis for familial love.

⁵² *Ad Petri Cathedram*, 5. 51, p. 10.

⁵³ *Populorum Progressio*, 5. 36, p. 189.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 5. 36, p. 190.

⁵⁵ *Familiaris Consortio*, 3. 17, p. 33.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 1. 6, p. 13; see also 1. 4–10, pp. 8–18.

Marriage and family alone, however, cannot bear the weight of their witness, and require the complementary witness of vocational singleness. 'Virginity or celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of God not only does not contradict the dignity of marriage but presupposes it and confirms it. Marriage and virginity or celibacy are two ways of expressing and living the one mystery of the covenant of God with his people.'⁵⁷ Singleness is a witness to the eschatological union of Christ with his church in anticipation of the new creation. In embodying this witness, singleness protects marriage from any disparagement, reminding the church that it is an institution ordained by God as part of a created order awaiting its consummation in Christ. Celibacy remains a superior vocation, however, because this rare *charism* enables a single-minded devotion to God's kingdom, but this work in turn assists the family in becoming what God intends it to be.

God intends the family to be an 'authentic community of persons' whose members are bound together by an 'unceasing inner dynamism' of love which is displayed initially in marriage that matures into the 'foundation and soul' of the family.⁵⁸ Conjugal communion is grounded in a natural relationship between woman and man, that is sanctified by God as a 'vocation and commandment' of mutual fidelity.⁵⁹ It is upon this sanctified foundation that the familial community is built. The natural bonds of 'flesh and blood' are nurtured by love into the 'deeper and richer bonds of the spirit', animating the structure of familial roles and relationships.⁶⁰ These roles and relationships instil the values of mutual respect and reciprocity, and are perfected through sacrificial love. The virtues of patience, forgiveness, reconciliation, and fidelity are practised most intensely in the family, and authentic familial fellowship cannot exist in their absence. Most importantly, the proper ordering of familial roles and relationships promotes the 'dignity and vocation' of all persons, thereby protecting the inherent rights of women, men, children, and the elderly.⁶¹

As a community, the family is called by God to perform the tasks of serving life, participating in the development of society, and sharing in the life and mission of the church. Spouses serve life

⁵⁷ *Familiarus Consortio*, 2. 16, pp. 28–9.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 3. 18, pp. 34–5.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 3. 20, pp. 37–9.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 3. 21, pp. 39–40.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 3. 22–7, pp. 42–52.

by cooperating with God 'in transmitting the gift of human life'. The essential task of the family is 'to actualize in history the original blessing of the Creator', namely, that through procreation the *imago dei* is passed on from generation to generation. Fecundity is the 'living testimony' of mutual self-giving.⁶² The church assists the family in being this living testimony in two ways: first, the church 'stands for life' against the 'anti-life mentality' of the present age. The church steadfastly opposes contraception, abortion, and any reproductive technique that violates the family's conjugal core, preserving the 'full sense of mutual self-giving and human procreation in the context of true love'.⁶³ Second, the church is the teacher and mother of married couples. As teacher, the church proclaims the 'moral norm' guiding the 'responsible transmission of life'. In doing so, it draws upon a knowledge of human biology and natural birth regulation in providing an 'education in self-control', protecting the conjugal relationship 'from the perils of selfishness and aggressiveness'. A couple must be assisted in seeing their marriage 'as a sign of the unitive and fruitful love of Christ for his Church'. As mother, the church provides pastoral care for married couples who find this teaching difficult to follow, 'instilling conviction and offering practical help to those who wish to live out their parenthood in a truly responsible way'.⁶⁴

In serving life, parents have the vocational right and duty to educate their children. Since the family is the primary school of personal and civic virtues, parents must impart to their offspring the 'values of kindness, constancy, goodness, service, disinterestedness, and self-sacrifice'.⁶⁵ Since the family is a school of 'social living', familial relationships should exemplify sacrificial mutuality and solicitude as opposed to individualistic, selfish, and materialistic attitudes. Through their mutual service, family members discover their personhood not through self-love, but in accepting the 'gift of self in love'.⁶⁶ Since the sacramentality of marriage bestows on parenthood its essential dignity, the education of children is a ministry of the church performed by parents on its behalf.

⁶² Ibid. 3. 28, pp. 53–4.

⁶³ Ibid. 3. 30–2, pp. 55–62.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 3. 33–5, pp. 62–70.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 3. 36, pp. 70–1.

⁶⁶ Ibid. 3. 37, pp. 72–4.

The family participates in developing society by providing its social foundation. In serving life, the family 'is by nature and vocation open to other families and to society, and undertakes its social role'.⁶⁷ It fulfils this role, on the one hand, by reinforcing a sense of personal dignity, inculcating social values, and providing a bulwark against the depersonalizing trends of contemporary life. On the other hand, the family accomplishes its role by participating in social service projects, offering hospitality to those in need, and advocating appropriate legislation.⁶⁸ Since the family is the moral foundation of civil society, the state must order other social spheres in ways that support the family, and assist it in upholding the values of 'truth, freedom, justice, and love'.⁶⁹

By participating in the life and mission of the church, the family is a community of love and fidelity, contributing to Christ's prophetic, priestly, and kingly ministries. This participation is marked by the family as a 'believing and evangelizing community', a 'community in dialogue with God', and a 'community at the service of man'.⁷⁰ The prophetic ministry is fulfilled by receiving and communicating the gospel. Parents proclaim the gospel to their children, and together evangelize other families. As the seedbed of vocational life, the family serves needy neighbours and supports missionary activities. Family members are sanctified in their dialogue with God, which in turn assists the sanctification of the church and world. Familial spirituality follows a pattern of creation, covenant, crucifixion, and resurrection, for it is within the family that life's joys and sorrows, as well as the realities of sin and grace, are experienced most intensely and woven into the fabric of daily living. Alongside the sacraments of marriage and baptism, the Eucharist enables the performance of the priestly role. In sharing the bread, family members 'become one body', disclosing the 'wider unity of the Church'.⁷¹ In response to God's gift and commandment of love, the family is a community of service. The 'inner communion' of familial love is expanded to embrace every

⁶⁷ *Familiarus Consortio*, 3.42, p. 82.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 3. 43–4, pp. 82–5.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 3. 45–8, pp. 85–91. A charter of family rights codifying this principle of subsidiarity is included in 3. 46.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 3. 50, p. 94.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 3. 55–62, pp. 102–14.

‘brother and sister’, especially the poor, weak, and disposed, whom Christ calls his followers to serve in his kingly ministry.⁷² In helping the family fulfil these ministries, the church provides pastoral care and practical assistance, particularly in the areas of marriage preparation, education, and political advocacy.⁷³

In his theological account of marriage and family, Germain Grisez defends and builds upon the Catholic social teaching summarized above.⁷⁴ A detailed summary of his work would prove redundant, but there are two emphases worth mentioning given their particular relevancy to this inquiry.

First, Grisez emphasizes marriage as an open-ended community. Marriage by ‘its very nature is part of a larger whole’, anticipating the emergence of a family. ‘Because parenthood fulfills marriage, it shapes the spouses’ interpersonal communion; and the way children come to be sets requirements for marriage as a whole, among them that it be an open-ended community.’⁷⁵ Humans are biologically complete individuals, except for the purpose of reproducing. In fulfilling this function, they complete each other, becoming a single organic unit. In this respect, children perfect marriage, forming a cooperative community in pursuit of its intrinsic common good.⁷⁶ This pursuit determines the community’s structure and forms of cooperation, for although marriage cannot be reduced to parenthood, its orientation towards offspring shapes its inherent virtues and practices. Childrearing is not a task undertaken by parents, but a foundational element of the family as an open-ended community in which children are simultaneously derived from but also differentiated from their parents; there is both familiarity *and* difference. In this respect, the family mirrors larger cultural processes of development in which social differentiation is derived from shared or common characteristics.

Second, although marriage is oriented towards familial communion, a marriage is nonetheless an intrinsically good and complete relationship in the absence of children. This absence, however, does not alter marital virtues and practices which remain oriented towards its

⁷² Ibid. 3. 63–4, pp. 114–18.

⁷³ Ibid. 4. 119–62.

⁷⁴ See Germain Grisez, *The Way of the Lord Jesus* (1993), ii. 553–752.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 569.

⁷⁶ Grisez specifies the elements of this common good, *ibid.* 555–69.

familial *telos*, and Grisez compares a childless couple to a crypt for a great church that was never built but retains its integrity as a place of worship.⁷⁷ Although it is natural for an infertile couple to desire offspring, they may not resort to assisted reproduction because it would violate the normative structure of marriage. Rather, he urges infertile couples to pursue this good desire through either adoption or charitable work with disadvantaged children.⁷⁸

CRITICAL ADAPTATION

The literature surveyed in this section represent theological portrayals of marriage and family that are simultaneously cognizant of changing social mores and values, while at the same time maintaining the efficacy of traditional Christian moral teaching on marriage and family. This is not to suggest that these positions are merely proposals offering a compromise between the ‘extreme’ options summarized above. Rather, they are attempts to appropriate and expound selected traditional emphases in the light of contemporary social and political circumstances. In this respect, they may be characterized as interpretations that are critical of both the traditions they represent, and the late liberal context in which they are enacted.

Critical familism

Don Browning and his co-authors in *From Culture Wars to Common Ground* contend that the time is ripe to move beyond the acrimonious family values debate.⁷⁹ The plight of the late modern family is no longer an exclusively conservative issue, but has moved to the centre of the political landscape. Given substantial evidence of the detrimental effects of divorce and household instability on children,

⁷⁷ Grisez specifies the elements of this common good, 569. ⁷⁸ Ibid. 689–90.

⁷⁹ The following section is adapted from a book review of Browning *et al.*, *From Culture Wars to Common Ground* which appeared in *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 13/1 (2000).

there is a consensus on both the left and right that families are in crisis and need to be supported through various political initiatives. The way is now open to find a common ground.⁸⁰

The authors' central claim is that religious traditions, and especially Christianity, have much to offer in building this consensus. The family they propound is egalitarian, requiring 'new religious and communal supports, and a new theory of authority'. Such a family is characterized by a married or committed couple, whose relationship is based on equal regard and mutual respect, and both having equal privileges and responsibilities in the public and private domains. Although they endorse an intact mother–father family as an ideal, families failing to embody it should nonetheless be supported. In lifting up this model, they advocate a 'new *critical familism* and a new *critical culture of marriage*', promoting the 'democratization' of the family.⁸¹

The principal factors contributing to the family crisis include rampant individualism, changing economic circumstances, dysfunctional behavioural patterns, and lingering patriarchy. To redress these issues, marriage and family should be based on a new understanding of the relationship between intimacy, work, value formation, and parenting which enables, rather than restricts, personal fulfilment. This dominant, and essentially positive, cultural emphasis on personal fulfilment is forcing a democratization of the family, founded upon the authority of mutuality and ethic of equal regard. In making their case, the authors explicate the basic lineaments of this authority and ethic 'surrounded by the Christian story'.⁸²

Early Christians, for instance, challenged the patriarchy of the Graeco-Roman household with their belief in radical equality in Christ. Marital and familial love are particular expressions of a more general love of God and neighbour, indicating that Jesus' criticism of the family was aimed at tribal loyalties instead of its 'conjugal core'. Although the household codes of the New Testament reflect a conservative reaction against Jesus' and Paul's emphases on equality, the seeds of equal regard were nonetheless sown in a Christian understanding of the family.⁸³ The harvest is seen in Thomistic teaching, in tandem with evolutionary psychology, to

⁸⁰ See Browning *et al.*, *From Culture Wars to Common Ground*, 29–72.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 1–25 (emphasis original).

⁸² *Ibid.* 51.

⁸³ *Ibid.* 129–54.

remedy what is described as the 'male problematic'. Men are always uncertain about their biological connection to offspring. Monogamy eases this anxiety, promoting greater male investment in childrearing. This Thomistic principle accords well with contemporary findings that parental care is largely motivated by a genetic relationship with children. These natural bonds alone, however, provide an insufficient foundation for the family, because they do not address the subjective needs of its individual members. Although Christian teaching on the one-flesh unity of marriage implies mutuality and equality, what is missing is a concept of 'inter-subjectivity' around which an egalitarian family may be structured.⁸⁴ To address this deficiency, the authors turn to a variety of contemporary feminist, therapeutic, activist, and economic 'voices'.

Feminists are correct to criticize patriarchal structures that prevent women from achieving their full potential. The family is often a barrier in attaining sexual equality, because family roles can institutionalize a fundamental inequality between women and men. This is particularly the case when women are expected to sacrifice their careers or creative interests for the sake of other family members. Echoing Okin, familial roles and relationships must be radically restructured, for women can only be liberated in a 'genderless society and gender-free family'.⁸⁵ This emphasis on self-regard over self-sacrifice, however, is often achieved at the expense of any constructive account of the family. Religious feminists, such as Lisa Sowle Cahill and Mary Stewart van Leeuwen, offer more nuanced alternatives by drawing 'critical connections between love, sexual pleasure, and bearing children that are grounded in a common humanity and common human experience'.⁸⁶ 'Womanist' critiques in particular are lifted up as illuminating how genuine self-love provides a basis for mutuality, in which family relationships are empowered by images of discipleship as opposed to sacrificial service.⁸⁷

Therapeutic approaches play a limited, yet crucial, role in promoting critical familism. Critics of a so-called therapeutic culture, such as Lasch, go too far in dismissing the positive contributions of therapeutic techniques. Cultivating interpersonal communication and negotiating

⁸⁴ See Browning *et al.*, *From Culture Wars to Common Ground*, 101–28.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 162–8.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 181–5.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 185–8.

skills, for example, is not incompatible with an ethic of mutual regard, or promoting egalitarian relationships. Self-improvement need not be selfish when pursued within a social context based on mutuality and reciprocity. Emphasizing ‘intersubjective dialogue’ assists marriage and family to realize such ‘pre-moral’ goods as ‘procreation, parental certainty, sexual exchange, and mutual helpfulness.’⁸⁸ Consequently, therapeutic techniques help individuals to develop the necessary skills for performing their roles within a ‘critical marriage culture and critical familism.’⁸⁹

Activist ‘profamily’ voices are commended for focusing on the problem of absent fathers rather than single mothers. The African-American community, with its stress on sexual equality, strong relationship with the church, and extended kinship networks, and the Catholic principle of subsidiarity are extolled as illuminating examples for drawing connections between selfhood, social ordering, and the moral significance of biological bonds. These movements are criticized, however, because they ‘lack understanding of love as equal regard’, lapsing ‘easily into “soft” patriarchy’, and the ‘Christian right’ is denounced for its slavish devotion to patriarchal structures based on a misreading of biblical texts.⁹⁰ To correct these tendencies, the authors assert that the Reformed doctrine of the orders of creation overlaps significantly with the principle of subsidiarity, providing a theological model for ‘dialogue between Catholics and evangelicals’ on a pattern of ‘natural regularities’ governing the social ordering of marriage and family.⁹¹

In assessing the economic voices, it is assumed that families are inevitably threatened with the decline of a robust civil society. Economic accounts, which often presume ‘kin altruism’ as the foundation of rational acts, can bolster the stability of families by addressing the male problematic: economic policies are needed that reinforce, rather than discount, a father’s genetic investment in offspring. These economic theories, however, are often too reductionistic to provide an adequate foundation for the family as a social sphere. Given the late liberal commitment to atomistic individualism, children are often reduced to commodities, and it is citizenship, instead of familial bonds,

⁸⁸ Ibid. 197–202.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 202–18.

⁹⁰ Ibid. 222–42.

⁹¹ Ibid. 242–3.

which provides the dominant category of human association. Consequently, economic theories must be overlaid with a thicker account of affiliation based on equal regard and mutuality.⁹²

In their 'practical theology' of the family, the authors contend that Christian confessions are not 'arguable in public discourse'.⁹³ In response, they propose a framework informed by Thomistic thought, the principle of subsidiarity, and the orders of creation to translate confessional rhetoric into public discourse. The one-flesh unity of marriage, for instance, becomes a 'covenant of intersubjective dialogue', and monogamy, contrary to Nelson, is a superior expression of equal regard.⁹⁴ Mutuality between spouses is achieved by empathizing with each other's 'narrative identity', for marriage consists of acknowledging the 'ultimate worth' of these personal stories. It is upon the intersubjective dialogue between these identities that a familial covenant is built, for self-regard is a prerequisite of equal regard. It is in this context that sacrificial love is explicable, for it enables or restores mutual love, but is *never* an end in itself. Moreover, this relation between mutual and sacrificial love is revealed in both the triune God and *imago dei* which are, in turn, manifested in the family and the life of the church, especially as the latter embodies the example of Christ's suffering and grace.

The parameters of this practical theology are further explicated by examining how family members participate in an ethic of equal regard and mutuality through different stages in their respective life cycles. Although a 'process of biological, psychological, historical, and religiocultural negotiation' enables personal fulfilment, it is tempered by a family's intersubjective and covenantal relationship, as pursued in the dialogue among unique and changing identities.⁹⁵ Furthermore, families are important in their own right, but they are subordinate to the common good and reign of God. Unlike Aristotle, who saw citizenship as an extension of familial affection, Christians insist that such affection is drawn out towards the church. Similar to Maurice, kinship is the base from which larger spheres of affection are extended. Humans cannot learn to love their neighbours if they cannot learn to love their kin. Marriage is thereby the first step in forging larger familial and social covenants.

⁹² See Browning *et al.*, *From Culture Wars to Common Ground*, 247–68.

⁹³ *Ibid.* 271–2.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* 275–9.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 287–301.

This practical theology concludes with a recommendation on how the church and civil society should cooperate in supporting critical familism. The most pressing problem, at least for Protestants, is to model the family as a non-hierarchical ‘domestic church’, requiring a dialogical relationship with the church as ‘first family’. The authors assert:

Our model grounds parental authority in a *dialogue* between parents’ own covenant with God and the church’s covenant. This assumes that God has a covenant with both church and family. Parental authority, therefore, should evolve from a dialogue with a church that itself is dedicated to an appreciative yet critical inquiry into its traditions.⁹⁶

Armed with this recognition of parental authority, the church should seek ecumenical cooperation and form strategic alliances with other segments of civil society in promoting a culture of critical familism.

The authors’ principal goal is to establish a new basis of authority for promoting a culture of critical familism. To what extent they have succeeded, as well as the consequences of their relative success or failure, is examined in subsequent chapters. What is most pertinent to note at this juncture is that their concept of the family as ‘domestic church’ in dialogical relation to the church as ‘first family’ is portrayed as a *means* of implementing their practical theology rather than its *foundational* principle. In this respect, it incorporates many late liberal presuppositions in which the rationale for this relation is ultimately to promote the self-fulfilment of family members. I now turn attention to an account of marriage and family that is more critical of these presuppositions as reflected in its understanding of the relation between family and church in foundational, rather than instrumental, terms.

Church as first family

Rodney Clapp is an American evangelical attempting to recover a biblically inspired understanding of the family. His book, *Families at the Crossroads*, is a reaction against both a conservative espousal of

⁹⁶ Ibid. 308–9 (emphasis original).

so-called family values, and what he characterizes as unacceptable postmodern options. Similar to Thatcher, Clapp contends that a contemporary Christian exposition of the family must take into account the pervasive influence of the postmodern world. With its emphasis on expressive individualism, a rampant consumerism is well-suited for fulfilling the desires of autonomous persons. Choice is the dominant value, because an 'ideal world is one with as many choices as possible, about everything possible'. The supermarket is an apt symbol of this postmodern culture.⁹⁷ This imagery distorts the family by placing a 'premium on novelty rather than fidelity'.⁹⁸ Marriage is little more than a precarious contract, enduring so long as it serves the interests of its parties, and children are either avoided as constraints against pursuing one's interests, or seen as commodities enabling one's self-fulfilment. Consequently, the family is a haven that autonomous persons use in pursuing their private interests, effectively stripping the family of any substantive social or political meaning.

Clapp, however, rejects tradition and nature as the primary sources from which the social and political significance of the family can be recovered. Appeals to a nostalgic 'traditional family' hearken back to the nineteenth-century bourgeois family, of the kind championed by the Bergers, based on romantic love, heightened concern for children, and sentimentality. This model portrays the family as a 'private refuge', reflecting a cultural construct of a particular era.⁹⁹ Since such a model is not found in the Bible, it cannot provide an authoritative guide for theological deliberation. Nor can the family be understood as an institution grounded in nature. It is instead an 'unnatural' social construct serving the 'natural' needs to 'sanction and regulate sexual mating', assist the 'reproduction, survival and socialization of children', and 'apportion roles, labor and goods between the sexes'.¹⁰⁰ As the Bible, cultural anthropology, and the postmodern world attest, familial structures accommodating these needs vary among historical epochs and contemporary societies.

If Christians are to recover any normative content for the family, they must look to the church for their model. The centrepiece of

⁹⁷ See Rodney Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads* (1993), 60–2.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 62–4.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 30–4.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 39–45.

Clapp's argument is that, contrary to Bushnell, it is not the family but the church that is 'God's most important institution on earth. The church is the social agent that most significantly shapes and forms the character of Christians. And the church is the primary vehicle of God's grace and salvation for a waiting, desperate world.'¹⁰¹ Accordingly, the family embodies covenantal rather than biological relationships. In the Old Testament, the covenant between God and the people was admittedly expressed through Abraham's lineage. This did not imply, however, that salvation was the result of biological descent, but that procreation was an obedient response to God's salvific promise. In fulfilling the old age and inaugurating the new, Jesus displaces lineage as the means of keeping the covenant. It is not kinship, but doing God's will that give witness to this new age. Familial relationships and loyalties are tempered and transformed within the community bearing Christ's name. The importance of Mary, for example, is not that she is Jesus' mother but his disciple.¹⁰² It is by being 'born again' into the church that 'families and individuals gain a distinctive Christian identity', empowering them to resist the corrosive influences of a postmodern world. Within the church the natural fate of 'family ties' is replaced with the 'gift' of God's destiny. Clapp insists that reconfiguring familial bonds does not weaken the family; to the contrary, it is 'enriched when it is decentered, relativized, recognized as less than absolute'.¹⁰³ The veracity of this claim is demonstrated by examining how singleness is related to the family.

Evangelical Protestants, according to Clapp, are plagued by a 'flawed vision of the Christian family' that 'denigrates and dishonors singleness'. Single persons denote the abnormal status of not being married instead of a way of life that may be better for some to follow. What is needed is a recovery of singleness as a vocation, because '*it uniquely witnesses to true Christian freedom*'.¹⁰⁴ This denigration is rooted in the 'wrong turn' taken by Augustine. Although Augustine affirmed marriage, he nonetheless insisted that sexual intercourse

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 67–8.

¹⁰² Ibid. 80–1; cf. Michael Banner, *Christian Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems* (1999), 225–51.

¹⁰³ See Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads*, 84–8.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 89–92 (emphasis original).

was always 'attended by the sin of lust'. Consequently, virginity is a more holy calling.¹⁰⁵

The significance of singleness, however, is not sexual renunciation, but where one's hope is placed. This is seen more clearly against the Old Testament background in which hope was lodged in lineage. For Christians, hope is transferred to Christ. This transfer is behind Paul's counsel that, in this 'awkward' time of transition between the old and new ages, singleness may prove to be a superior calling, for the 'married person is likely to sink more deeply into the affairs of passing world'. A conjugal relationship is not 'inherently corrupting', but may prevent some persons from devoting themselves to Christ. As a vocation, singleness is an ultimate act of trust that places one's hope exclusively in Christ.¹⁰⁶ 'Christian singles are thus radical witnesses to the resurrection. They forfeit heirs—the only other possibility of their survival beyond the grave—in the hope that one day all creation will be renewed.'¹⁰⁷ This radical witness enables singles to exercise a greater range of freedom; they are, for instance, liberated from marital and parental duties. Moreover, singles are also *free*, rather than compelled, to marry, for if 'we are not truly free to be single, we are not truly free to be married'.¹⁰⁸ There are a variety of spiritual gifts empowering Christians to serve God through the vocations of singleness *and* marriage. Instead of seeing either as superior, singleness and marriage provide 'complementary missionary advantages': the former mobility and the latter hospitality.

For Clapp, marriage is a life of fidelity bearing witness to the story of God's fidelity to Israel and the church. Such fidelity entails bodily acts. Contrary to the postmodern dualism between the will and the body, the one-flesh unity of marriage and lifelong monogamy are ideals upheld by Christians, because they express not only what we think about fidelity, but that they are also something 'we do with our bodies'.¹⁰⁹ Elaborating on this notion of fidelity, Clapp contrasts contractual and covenantal models of marriage. A contractual model portrays marriage as an economic transaction between two autonomous persons; it strives for a 'union of interests rather than a union of selves'. The arrangement presumes that marriage is defined

¹⁰⁵ See Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads*, 92–5. ¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 98–101.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* 101.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* 107.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* 123–5.

and structured in accordance with the 'wants and needs' of the parties who are not accountable to any larger 'tradition, community, or institution'. A covenantal model joins two persons together who are 'unconditionally' committed to each other. More importantly, their covenant is made before God and witnesses, making them accountable to the church.¹¹⁰

These models of marriage produce two contrasting interpretations of fidelity. First, they situate spouses within differing contexts of accountability and possibility. Since contractual fidelity is restricted to the contracting parties, marriage is 'limited to the possibilities of two people rather than the potential of an entire community'. Covenantal fidelity enfolds a couple into a 'quest or venture' that is larger than their marriage, because they are accountable to the church.¹¹¹ Second, the two models produce divergent types of histories. Since contractual fidelity attempts to satisfy the changing desires of two autonomous persons, there is no agreement where a marriage has been or where it is headed. By being grounded in the church, covenantal fidelity gains its bearing from a more expansive story, inspiring the emergence of a 'unique history' of a couple's 'life together'.¹¹² Third, the two models create differing conceptions of relationships. Contractual fidelity is premised on the power of techniques that individuals employ to improve their marriage, whereas covenantal fidelity is based on 'complex commitment' of enduring and mutual trust.¹¹³ Fourth, the two fidelities shape contrasting expressions of love. In the contractual model sex is a means of self-fulfilment, and thereby not necessarily related to procreation. Offspring may present obstacles in pursuing one's romantic or occupational interests, so 'children fit awkwardly at best into a contractual scheme of fidelity'. In a covenantal model, spouses are bound together within a larger community of service. Conjugal love is a 'celebration of communion with another and the means of "creating" others who will live on' as fellow stewards of creation. A love for children 'flows naturally' out of covenanted fidelity.¹¹⁴

Children are the first step in establishing a family as a mission base for extending hospitality to strangers. Covenantal fidelity embodies

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 125–8.

¹¹¹ Ibid. 128–9.

¹¹² Ibid. 130.

¹¹³ Ibid. 130–1.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 129–30.

an expansive love, embracing larger spheres of affection and service. Taking its cue from Israel and the church—both of which are enjoined to welcome strangers in their midst—the family is called to ‘put hospitality at the center of its life’.¹¹⁵ As a mission base, the family is not a private haven but a public witness to God the Lord of creation, and a saviour who ‘reaches out to those who are forgotten or oppressed’.¹¹⁶ Consequently, it is only the church that can provide the normative content, as well as the social and political significance, of the family by calling it to embrace a mission greater than itself. ‘Christian families commit themselves to the church; the church commits itself to the kingdom. When affection wanes, spouses are still committed to witnessing God’s fidelity, to rearing children who can serve the world in Christ, to providing a place hurt people can come for healing.’¹¹⁷

Although Clapp explicates in detail the formation of families in relation to strangers and singleness as mediated through the church, it is unclear what kind of social and political ordering is needed to sustain families in their mission of hospitality. Particular households draw upon the church in embracing their mission, but it is performed largely ‘outside’ rather than ‘within’ the ‘first family’. In Clapp’s account, the distance between formation and performance is largely uncharted territory. It is mapping this terrain that the next proposal undertakes.

Household management

According to David Matzko McCarthy, marriage cannot be sustained by romance. The late modern emphasis on romance and interpersonal intimacy has corrupted love as the proper moral foundation of marriage and family, making both institutions captives of a pervasive ‘consumer capitalism and nation-state individualism’.¹¹⁸ In response to this situation, McCarthy proposes that the more expansive concept of *household* should replace the nuclear family as the proper social

¹¹⁵ See Clapp, *Families at the Crossroads*, 137–40.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* 155–7; see also pp. 161–2. ¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* 163–4.

¹¹⁸ David Matzko McCarthy, *Sex and Love in the Home* (2001), 3.

setting for ordering marriage, procreation, and childrearing. The principal task, then, is to articulate a theological account of the household that is grounded in vocations that sustain the family. Specifically, this requires an ordering of marriage and family within household and neighbourhood economies, as opposed to capitalistic markets, thereby enabling a more virtuous pursuit of the foundational vocations.

This shift in economic context is crucial, for capitalistic markets promote values that are antithetical to establishing and sustaining households. These markets, for instance, instantiate the assumption that sexual expression is *the* central feature in developing individual personalities. For many individuals, marriage is a primary instrument of this expression, but its fulfilment is often in tension with the more mundane tasks of maintaining a home and raising children. The household is thereby an impediment to the sexual expression of spouses, and they turn increasingly to outside agencies and experts to help them manage these conflicting interests. As McCarthy notes, it is ironic that couples must often flee their homes for romantic trysts in order to keep their love alive. Although McCarthy agrees with Nelson that sexuality is a 'basic expression of the true self, and sexual experiences and fulfilment are goods of life for which we struggle and strive',¹¹⁹ these goods are distorted when sundered from the formative environments of marriage, families, and households. It is the economy of the household, as opposed to the market, that nourishes the necessary commitments and virtues to sustain the pursuit of these goods over time, for they ground marriage in particular times and places.

McCarthy is highly critical of late liberal theorists, especially Rawls,¹²⁰ who have turned the family into an abstraction, stripping the household of any social and political significance by relegating it to a unit of economic consumption. A family is reduced to a voluntary arrangement in which dependent individuals are allied with productive ones. Yet the latter, as Lasch notes, must spend increasing amounts of time outside the home to maintain this relationship. The net effect is to isolate the family from larger social or kinship networks that might challenge the dominant demands of

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 34.

¹²⁰ Ibid. 78–9.

‘political and economic life’ which are based on autonomous self-interests and anonymous exchange.¹²¹ For late liberals, households are little more than convenient staging areas where individuals refresh themselves for the important tasks of production and consumption. This expedient quality is required by the public life of a liberal, contractual society which is predicated on isolated selves pursuing their respective self-interests. Making households increasingly dependent on external institutions and expertise is therefore a form of political control, for ‘[c]ontractual politics reduces the home to a private place, and in doing so, undermines the possibility of alternative social forms.’¹²² Late liberal families are by definition ‘closed families’.¹²³

In opposition to the closed family, McCarthy proposes a restoration of ‘household networks’ designed to sustain the open households that are structured in various configurations.¹²⁴ ‘Open families have loose and porous boundaries, whether they are thought to be nuclear, extended, traditional, or untraditional.’¹²⁵ These open families are sustained by a series of ‘three distinct, but sometimes overlapping, kinds of networks’ comprised of kin, friends, and neighbours,¹²⁶ forming together what may be described as a neighbourhood economy and social setting. Gift-giving is the medium of exchange in this economy which provides the foundation of the ‘wider social network’.¹²⁷ These exchanges offer an alternative social reality to that proffered by capitalist markets, for they presuppose a common life of neighbours rather than contractual relationships among autonomous individuals. One person, for example, mows a neighbour’s lawn in exchange for repairing a roof rather than both contracting the respective services of a gardener and roofer.¹²⁸ McCarthy grounds his account of the neighbourhood economy in contemporary Catholic social teaching in which marriage and family play crucial roles in promoting a culture of love. Following John Paul II, marriage is the basis of a genuinely civilized life, because it reflects the Trinitarian nature of the creator. Similar to Nelson, McCarthy insists that a spouse cannot be the sole source of fulfilling a person’s identity. Marriage is supported and enriched by

¹²¹ McCarthy, *Sex and Love* (2001), 67–72.

¹²² *Ibid.* 96. ¹²³ *Ibid.* 95–7. ¹²⁴ *Ibid.* 97–101.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.* 97. ¹²⁶ *Ibid.* 101. ¹²⁷ *Ibid.* 103–4.

¹²⁸ These exchanges are derived from a spectrum of informal to formal agreements.

friends, but unlike in Nelson these friendships are not open to the possibility of sexual intimacy since their purpose is to strengthen the exclusive bond of marriage. In turn, the family is a form of human association based on mutual love that underlies all other social relationships. In taking its proper 'place in the order of love', however, the family must not 'have a direct relation to the world'.¹²⁹ Rather, it is through the church as a social body that families are related to the world, because the church precedes and transforms all other social bonds.

Explicating the *instrumental* role of open households in the order of love receives the bulk of McCarthy's attention. His essential premise is that 'love in its basic and highest form is cultivated in ordinary friendships and duties of neighborhood and home'. Yet 'love of the household and neighborhood is not complete, but moves beyond itself through its grounding and its end in the love of God'.¹³⁰ The principal characteristics of these friendships are reciprocity and mutuality. Reciprocal relationships assume a high degree of familiarity and affinity in 'stark contrast to disinterested and unilateral conceptions of neighbor love'.¹³¹ These relational qualities are required in an economy based on gift exchange rather than contractual performance, for both givers and recipients are transformed in their exchange.¹³² Consequently, reciprocity brings together mutual benefit *and* self-regard in instantiating the order of love within the social network of the neighbourhood. The reciprocal exchanges of the household promote a mutuality to counter altruistic and incomplete expressions of love. Altruism is inadequate, because it reinforces the fragmented and detached character of contemporary life. The poor, for example, cannot be truly loved through disinterested acts of generosity, but only by sharing their lives through a mutual breaking of bread within the church. Again agreeing with Browning and his co-authors, altruism or self-sacrifice is appropriate only under extraordinary circumstances. The family thereby points to the reciprocal and mutual nature of love, as mediated through the

¹²⁹ See McCarthy, *Sex and Love*, 124.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* 128. ¹³¹ *Ibid.* 133.

¹³² Cf. Stephen H. Webb, *The Gifting God* (1996).

church, for love's 'basic habitat is the household economy, not necessarily the biological family, but primarily the household of God'.¹³³

It is within love's proper habitat that the neighbourhood economy orders sexual and parental practices within particular households that promote a larger process of social reproduction. These practices are needed to counter the corrosive influences of late liberalism which reduce sexual intercourse and parenting to contractual relationships that are unable to promote genuine reciprocity and mutuality. According to McCarthy, this corrosive influence is exemplified in the increasing use of reproductive technologies in which infertility has created a market in scarce children. In contrast, there is a plenitude of children in the neighbourhood economy, for 'all adults have children' through an informal system of patronage.¹³⁴ Since all adults have a parenting role, parenthood itself is adoptive, rather than biological, in character, and is a chief feature of the neighbourhood's common life. Moreover it is this shared and adoptive emphasis on parenthood that links together the normative ordering of sexual and parental practices, for married couples and their households are embedded within a nexus of lineage, kinship, and friendship. In these households, the relationships between spouses, children, and neighbours cannot be easily demarcated or disentangled. Consequently, in agreement with contemporary Catholic social teaching, McCarthy contends that marriage is properly oriented towards procreation, but for the purpose of social, not biological, reproduction. The family alone, then, cannot bear the heavy burdens of procreation and childrearing, because it is properly a 'dependent social institution that requires a fit within broader systems of reciprocity, patronage, and gift-exchange'.¹³⁵ While McCarthy's proposal challenges conservative appeals to 'family values' and their close affiliation with market capitalism, he also rejects 'personalist' emphases which ground marriage in a vacuous romantic love. In this respect, marriage is not the foundation of the family, much less civil society, but enjoys a privileged position at the centre of a household that participates in a larger neighbourhood economy.

¹³³ McCarthy, *Sex and Love*, 141.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* 206.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.* 213.