

Constructing Parenthood: Catholic Teaching 1880 to the Present

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Jacob Kohlhaas

Loras College, Dubuque, IA, USA

Abstract

This article reviews Catholic theological conceptions of parenthood within magisterial documents since the late nineteenth century and contends that presumptions about parenthood tend to arise as reactions to Western cultural developments related to sex and gender. This reactionary trend creates instability in conceptions of parenthood and inhibits the ability of the institutional church to respond constructively to real challenges that face parents in the present. Pastoral concern for lived realities, as well as the responsibilities of Christian parents to socialize and evangelize children, tend to disrupt this trend, but more adequate theological attention to parenthood qua parenthood is still required.

Keywords

Amoris Laetitia, *Casti Connubii*, *Familiaris Consortio*, gender, John Paul II, parenthood, Pius XII, Pope Francis, sexual ethics, theological anthropology

While teaching on marriage and family is a common theme in contemporary Catholic magisterial documents, they offer a thin and shifting account of parenthood itself. Since the late nineteenth century, Catholic social encyclicals have attended to the spiritual and educational needs of children, the dignity of domestic labor, and just family wages, among other concerns. Likewise, moral teachings have addressed topics including sexual ethics, the indissolubility of marriage,

Corresponding author:

Jacob Kohlhaas, Loras College, 1450 Alta Vista, Dubuque, Iowa, 52001-4327, USA.

Email: jacob.kohlhaas@loras.edu

reproductive responsibilities, and defense of the unborn. John Paul II offered insight into the operative assumptions about parenthood by insisting on the need for sexual complementarity between parental partners, yet little systematic attention has generally been paid to the theological-anthropological question of what a parent is. This question is important as it underlies theological and ethical responses to changing social realities concerning the family. This article aims to provide a historically informed analysis of how implicit understandings of what a parent is have developed since the late nineteenth century within significant magisterial writings. These documents range from Leo XIII's 1880 encyclical on marriage, *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae*, through the legacy of John Paul II, to Pope Francis' recent apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*. Throughout this analysis, I argue that the presumptions that define parenthood in magisterial thought have often changed in reaction to cultural developments on related issues, particularly gender and sexuality. While a consistent concern for education and evangelization is present throughout, this reactionary posturing of what are taken to be the fundamentals of Christian parenthood significantly inhibits the institutional Catholic Church's ability to respond constructively to the contemporary challenges many parents face. In contrast to the circumscribed gendered roles which are frequently endorsed by way of appeals to complementarian and hierarchal frameworks, the firmest traditional foundation for Christian parenthood in magisterial teaching rests in the task of raising and educating children in the faith. Yet this functional and evangelical dimension is frequently obfuscated in particular documents by an overriding concern to confront social developments which are perceived to threaten established teaching.¹

Although this article is concerned with the trajectory of magisterial teachings, academic theological discourse is similarly limited in direct reflection on parenthood, which I can only sketch briefly. Revisionist Catholic theologians,² who have generally followed personalist methodologies with greater concern for historical consciousness and experience as a source of moral knowledge, are often critical of magisterial documents on issues of sexuality, gender, marriage, and family.³ Yet relatively few scholars

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1. For a listing of some church documents cited in this article, and abbreviations used to cite them, see the Appendix.
 2. For explanations of the divide between "revisionist" academic theologians, and the views of the magisterium, see James F. Keenan, *A History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century: From Confessing Sins to Liberating Consciences* (London: Continuum, 2010); Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler, *The Sexual Person; Towards a Renewed Catholic Anthropology* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008), chaps. 2 and 3; and Charles Curran, *The Development of Moral Theology: Five Strands* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), chap. 3.
 3. Among others see Margaret A. Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2010); Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Salzman and Lawler, *The Sexual Person*; and Christine E. Gudorf, *Body, Sex, and Pleasure; Reconstructing Christian Sexual Ethics* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 1994).

have given explicit attention to parenthood itself.⁴ Present scholarly literature in marriage and family is instead dominated by sacramental theology and sexual ethics. The word “fatherhood” does not even appear in all indices of books on marriage and family from Catholic scholars. When academics do engage parenthood, *spirituality of parenthood* is the preferred approach.⁵ As such, the prevailing discourse of revisionist theologians tends to replicate the prevailing pattern of magisterial documents. When dealing with parenthood directly, both are particularly prone to extract principles of parenthood from sexual ethics and theories of gender rather than robust theological anthropological reflection. Consequently, the present analysis of magisterial teaching intends to indicate, rather than dismiss, the need for rethinking frameworks for parenthood throughout Catholic theological discourse broadly considered.

1880–1958: Modern Assumptions, Antimodern Church

Pope Leo XIII’s *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae* marked the first encyclical devoted entirely to the subject of marriage and family. His work was followed by Pius XI’s encyclicals on Christian education, *Divini Illius Magistri* of 1929, and Christian marriage, *Casti Connubii* of 1930. From 1939 to 1958 Pius XII contributed many addresses, often to newlyweds.⁶ Throughout these documents, the social and domestic roles of men and women are clearly differentiated, clarified, and defended. The

4. Among others see Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Family: A Christian Social Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000); and Julie Hanlon Rubio, *Family Ethics: Practices for Christians* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010). On adoption specifically, see Darlene Fozard Weaver, “Water Is Thicker than Blood: Adoptive Families and Catholic Tradition,” in “Families,” ed. Susan A. Ross, Lisa S. Cahill, Erik Borgman, and Sarojini Nadar, *Concilium* (2016): 98–110; Weaver, “Adoption, Social Justice, and Catholic Tradition,” *Journal of Catholic Social Thought* 13 (2016): 197–213, <https://doi.org/10.5840/jcathsoc20161324>.

5. The works consulted are as follows: Michael G. Lawler and William P. Roberts, eds., *Christian Marriage and Family: Contemporary Theological and Pastoral Perspectives* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1996); Kieran Scott and Michael Warren, *Perspectives on Marriage: A Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Richard R. Gaillardetz, *A Daring Promise: A Spirituality of Christian Marriage* (New York: Crossroad, 2002), Michael G. Lawler, *Marriage and the Catholic Church: Disputed Questions* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2002); Julie Hanlon Rubio, *A Christian Theology of Marriage and Family* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2003); Todd Salzman, Thomas M. Kelly, and John J. O’Keefe, *Marriage in the Catholic Tradition* (New York: Crossroad, 2004); Daniel Hauser, *Marriage and Christian Life: A Theology of Christian Marriage* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005); Charles Curran and Julie Hanlon Rubio, eds., *Marriage* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2009); and Natalie Kertes Weaver, *Marriage and Family: A Christian Theological Foundation* (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2009).

6. Early developments in magisterial teaching on marriage and family parallel that of Catholic Social Teaching with significant documents appearing in similar intervals under the same papacies.

resulting distinctions have obvious implications for parenthood, with women presumed to be domestic caregivers and men economic providers. Such gendered conceptions of parenthood rested implicitly on an essentialist theory of gender which presumed distinct and inherent male and female capabilities.⁷ This perspective was virtually unchallenged at the time, in part because it informed teachings that portrayed a world neatly divided and hierarchically ordered through complementing male and female spheres.⁸

The historical timing of *Arcanum* is significant as it accepts as timeless and universal a number of presumptions that are, in fact, peculiarly late-modern. These presumptions demonstrate the extent of the Victorian era's influence in Christian thought as upper-class trends and Christian ideals meshed to shape popular imagination of domestic life around a specific family structure with attendant parental functions.⁹ These ideals were reified by acceptance of changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution which physically distanced economic production from the home. The home became a haven from the world while ultimate responsibility for childrearing switched from fathers to mothers. Women's places as wives and mothers in control of the domestic sphere were cemented within the social ideals of the majority by the mid-nineteenth century. For men, craftsmanship was replaced by factory work, while increasing standards of professionalization forced women out of many careers. Romanticism provided the cultural framework for neatly repackaging the newly privatized domestic sphere as the epicenter for women's expression of true feminine virtue. Interestingly, the resulting evolution in Catholic conceptions of gender, family, and parenthood, supported by social ideals, took place alongside the

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7. Gender essentialism rests on commitment to a clear distinction between the genders closely tied to human sexual difference. Romanticism was key in constructing the particular essentialist assumptions that shaped late modern understandings of gendered capabilities. See Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe, 1890–1970* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
 8. Here I follow Charles Taylor's use of "hierarchal complementarity" which, he argues, structured the collective Western understanding of the entire social order into the late modern era. For various reasons, the Catholic Church was particularly motivated to continue conceiving of the social order, from church to state to family, as hierarchically ordered but such that each component part complemented the others to create an ordered whole. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007), 127, 164.
 9. Rosemary Radford Reuther, *Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family* (Boston: Beacon, 2000), 10. Cf. Frances Goldscheider, "Rescuing the Family from the Homophobes and Antifeminists: Analyzing the Recently Developed and Already Eroding 'Traditional' Notions of Family and Gender," *Case Western Reserve Law Review* 64 (2014): 1029–44, <https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/caselrev/vol64/iss3/11/>. Bernard Cooke explains, "With few exceptions, the patriarchal structures and presuppositions of society in general and of the church in particular remained unrecognized and unchallenged." Bernard Cooke, "*Casti Connubii* to *Gaudium et Spes*," in Salzman, Kelly, and O'Keefe, *Marriage in the Catholic Tradition*, 109–114 at 110.

rise of Antimodernism.¹⁰ As a result, the documents of this era are characterized by implicit acceptance and explicit rejection of various uniquely modern ideals.

Documents of this era consistently dismiss women's social equality and participation in the public sphere as unnatural and opposed to women's essential character and label the secular forces pushing for equality as driven by false ideologies. Concern centers on articulating the proper place of women within public and private spheres and the dangers posed to women themselves if they upset what Pius XI described as the established will of God.¹¹ The popes affirm distinctly feminine virtues including delicacy, modesty, and nurture, and employ these to justify differentiated treatment from men. *Divini Illius Magistri*, for example, endorses limited and separate education of girls as preparation for their circumscribed and gendered roles as well as to ward off indecorous association among the sexes: a threat to proper female modesty. The document contends, "there is not in nature itself . . . in temperament, in abilities, anything to suggest that there can be or ought to be promiscuity, and much less equality, in the training of the two sexes."¹² Revealing the asymmetry wrought by presumed male normativity, men rarely emerge as a topic of special concern requiring explanation. The closest parallel to the attention paid to women comes in the strong and consistent support of family wages for employed fathers.¹³

The era likewise supports hierarchal ordering of domestic life around male authority and defends this as divinely established.¹⁴ This gendered hierarchy is sanctioned by repeated reminders that the bond between spouses is analogous to the bond between

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10. The "two spheres" ideology is exemplary in this regard. As industrialization increased, wage labor moved outside the home, and families increasingly relied on purchasing power. In this new economy, the unique virtues of each gender and the complementing male-public and female-private spheres became a powerful ideology that clearly influences modern magisterial teaching. See Barbara Laslett and Johanna Brenner, "Gender and Social Reproduction: Historical Perspectives," *Annual Review of Sociology* 15 (1989): 381–404 at 386ff., <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.15.1.381>. Rosemary Radford Ruether contests the extent to which this two-spheres division was ever actually manifest history. See Ruether, *Christianity and the Making of the Modern Family*, 5, 10, 101.
 11. Pius XI, *Casti Connubii* (December 31, 1930), 74–77, https://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19301231_casti-connubii.html (hereafter cited as *CC*).
 12. Pius XI, *Divini Illius Magistri* (December 31, 1939), 68, http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_31121929_divini-illius-magistri.html (hereafter cited as *DI*).
 13. Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* (May 15, 1891), 5, http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html (hereafter cited as *RN*). Cf. *CC* 117.
 14. *Arcanum* does not view female subordination as a result of the fall but as part of the divine plan. Leo XIII, *Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae* (February 10, 1880), 1–2, 11–15, and 18–34, http://w2.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_10021880_arcanum.html (hereafter cited as *AD*). Cf. Pius XII, "Allocution to Fathers of Families," in *Matrimony*, trans. Michael J. Byrnes (Boston: Saint Paul, 1963), 397–404.

Christ and the church, such that husbands image the headship of Christ and wives the submission of the church (*CC* 9, 26; cf. Eph. 5:21–33). However, certain moral parameters are also established as no wife is compelled to comply with spousal demands that do not accord with reason or her own dignity (*CC* 27). Moreover, *Casti Connubii* of 1930 also affirms a woman’s right to head the family if her husband is lax or absent (*CC* 28). Thus, even as fathers assume a natural and divinely ordered headship in the household, this position may be abrogated by their actions.¹⁵

The functional requirements of parenthood are likewise generally subject to gendered hierarchical ordering. For example, Pius XII praised parenthood, calling it a “ministry of Christ” and speaking of parents as “priests” of their households.¹⁶ Yet he also asserted that the entire health and well-being of the family, not only physically, but intellectually and spiritually, rested upon the virtue and hard work of the father.¹⁷ He likened fatherhood to God’s original act of creation and added that fatherhood communicates “the superior life of intelligence and love.”¹⁸ Additionally, he suggested that fathers not only fulfill the “priestly” role of parenting, but also an “episcopal” role within the home.¹⁹

Like social gender roles and the domestic hierarchy, marriage is presented as a divinely established institution with a fixed, immutable order (*CC* 6). Within marriage, sexual expression is constrained by a characteristic suspicion of sexual pleasure which makes procreation the single justifying factor for use of the sexual faculties. At times this pushes towards reducing the institution of marriage to a means of containment for sexual expression.²⁰ *Casti Connubii*, for example, spiritualizes its descriptions of sexual intercourse and warns spouses against loving “as adulterers love” (*CC* 23). But while the moral norms for both marriage and sexuality are guided by the primacy of procreation, this is not absolute. Pius XI surmised that procreation is the primary end of marriage only from a certain restricted perspective while from another, the relationship of husband and wife may be taken as primary (*CC* 24).²¹

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15. Although the term “complementarity” was not explicitly used, the underlying concept was employed to both support and soften the domestic hierarchy. For example, Pius XI offers a complementarian interpretation of domestic primacies. “For if the man is the head,” he writes, “the woman is the heart, and as he occupies the chief place in ruling, so she may and ought to claim for herself the chief place in love” (*CC* 27). The presumption that men occupy the place of headship de facto in virtue of their maleness, while women are encouraged to “claim” the leading place of love reveals deeper inequality in this complementarian logic.
 16. Pius XII, “Allocution to Newlyweds,” in Byrnes, *Matrimony*, 316–18 at 318.
 17. Pius XII, “Allocution to Fathers of Families,” 398.
 18. Pius XII, “Allocution to Newlyweds,” 325.
 19. Pius XII, *Summi Pontificatus* (October 20, 1939), 89, http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_20101939_summi-pontificatus.html.
 20. The Pauline model of marriage as a compromise with passion (1 Cor. 7:9), later cast as a concession to concupiscence, has a long history in Western Christian thought but is traditionally ordered as a secondary good beneath procreation (cf. *CC* 59).
 21. Procreation and education of children remains the primary *end* of marriage but the mutual aid of spouses may still be considered the “chief reason and purpose of matrimony” (*CC* 24). This reflects Leo XIII’s thought in *Arcanum*: “Not only, in strict truth,

As a consequence of defining sex by marriage, and both sex and marriage by procreation, marriage is presented primarily as an institution for childrearing, but with a particular reference to children's need for love and stability (*CC* 16, 37). Spouses may be defined by parenthood, but for Pius XII, "parenthood" extends even to couples without children. "Now, the truth is that matrimony," he writes, "has not as a primary and intimate end the personal perfection of the married couple but the procreation and upbringing of a new life ... This is true of every marriage, even if no offspring result."²² Furthermore, Pius XII extends family and parenthood beyond biological kinship and frequently reminds spouses of the evangelical foundations of parenthood. Speaking to newlyweds he states,

Above all, remember that when you call your children heirs of your blood, you must refer to something which is much greater than corporal generation only. You are, and your children ought to be, the source of a race of saints ... men sanctified and raised up to participate in the divine nature by means of supernatural grace ... As a consequence, in baptized people, when one speaks of transmitting inherited blood to descendants ... there is no need to limit the sense of those words to a purely biological and material element, but it may be extended to that which is, as it were, the nutritive liquid of the intellectual and spiritual life: the patrimony of faith, virtue, and honor transmitted by parents to their posterity is a thousand times more precious than the blood—be it ever so rich—infused into their veins.²³

Pius XII's shift away from strictly biological reproduction is especially significant given that a generation earlier, *Divini Illius Magistri* had upheld Aquinas' view that a father's rights over his children, including the duty to educate, are natural extensions of biological paternity (*DI* 33).²⁴ *Casti Connubii* clarified that God "would have failed to make sufficient provision for children that had been born ... if He had not given to those to whom He had entrusted the power and right to beget them, the power also and the right to educate them" (*CC* 16). Through an appeal to divine providence, the capacity for biological reproduction becomes the foundation for both the right and capacity

was marriage instituted for the propagation of the human race, but also that the lives of husbands and wives might be made better and happier" (*AD* 26). This non-hierarchical perspective follows from Aquinas who argues love is the *form* of marriage while procreation is marriage's *end*. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 3, q. 29, a. 2.

22. Pius XII, "Allocution to Midwives," in Byrnes, *Matrimony*, 424.

23. Pius XII, "Allocution to Newlyweds," 312–13.

24. *Divini Illius Magistri* quotes from Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* 2-2, q. 102, a. 1, which reads in part, "Now just as a carnal father partakes of the character of principle in a particular way, which character is found in God in a universal way, so too a person who, in some way, exercises providence in one respect, partakes of the character of father in a particular way, since a father is the principle of generation, of education, of learning and of whatever pertains to the perfection of human life: while a person who is in a position of dignity is as a principle of government with regard to certain things: for instance, the governor of a state in civil matters, the commander of an army in matters of warfare, a professor in matters of learning, and so forth." Trans. Fathers of the Dominican English Province (New York: Benzinger, 1947).

of parents to educate their children. Pius XII's later statements do not directly reject this notion, yet his shift in emphasis and vocal support for adoption²⁵ undermine the argument for parental capabilities through divine providence in any absolute sense.

Pius XII's words are also significant for revealing the extent to which procreation *and* education are understood as inseparable throughout this period. "Procreation" is occasionally used alone as shorthand but education occasionally moves towards the place of primacy. Education, understood broadly as an ongoing intentional development of the intellectual, social, and spiritual faculties of a child, is fundamental to being a parent and spouse.²⁶ By fulfilling the educational tasks of parenthood, spouses can become parents to nonbiological children or, by failing in this task, a father can annul his right to status within the familial order.

The era's unique anxieties over transitioning social patterns is indicated in the selectivity of its concerns. The documents argue forcefully for containing women's roles within the domestic sphere and clearly reject contraception and divorce. Throughout, the two-parent biological nuclear family with attendant gender roles is taken as normative despite the existence of exceptions. Lower-class, minority, and immigrant families rarely felt the privilege of such neatly divided spheres as women's economic labor was simply necessary for survival.²⁷ Within the social encyclicals, there is greater attention to these challenges. But the documents directly concerning marriage and family rarely substantively engage these pluralities in family experiences. Instead, they expound upon an upper-class ideal as if it represented common experience. Threats to this ideal get identified as major challenges to the family: that is, women's participation in the workforce and public life, contraception, and divorce. This one-sidedness colors the conceptions of parenthood that arise.

Throughout this era, parenting is presented at least partially as an act of caretaking (*DI* 32), supervision (*CC* 15), and educating (*DI* 34). Of these, education is of greatest concern, while caretaking and supervision tend to be associated with motherhood. Biological reproduction is assumed as the normative foundation for parenthood and used to support the capabilities necessary for parental tasks, but it is not presented as essential to parenthood. The documents define marriage and sexuality in relation to childrearing and specify procreation and education of children as the primary ends of each. Consequently, the identities of spouse and parent largely merge. These factors also give rise to a biological nuclear ideal of the family supported by modernist

25. Pius XII, "Allocution to the Members of the Seventh Congress on Hematology," in Byrnes, *Matrimony*, 513–25 at 520.

26. The Code of Canon Law gives a broad articulation of the realms of the education: "Parents have the most grave duty and the primary right to take care as best they can for the physical, social, cultural, moral and religious education of their offspring." *Code of Canon Law, Latin-English Edition* (Washington, DC: CLSA, 1983), canon 1136, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_INDEX.HTM.

27. Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Racial Ethnic Women's Labor: The Intersection of Race, Gender and Class Oppression," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 17 (1985): 86–108 at 91ff., <https://doi.org/10.1177/048661348501700306>.

conceptions of feminine virtues which are used to support a gendered hierarchy in the domestic order.

1958–1978: Reforming the Irreformable

Following the long papacy of Pius XII, the Catholic Church entered an era of reform beginning with the election of John XXIII and culminating in the implementation of Vatican II. On the surface, teaching on the family during and after Vatican II remained largely continuous with the previous era, even as perspectives on marriage and gender roles underwent significant development. In the wake of Paul VI's 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, conceptions of parenthood became more firmly linked to biological procreation and reproductive decisions.

In a 1960 address to the Roman Rota, John XXIII described procreation as cooperation with God in which humans give life "to new beings in whom the life-giving Spirit infuses the powerful principle of immortal life" but followed by clarifying the priority of education over procreation. Educating children, he explained, is the "more noble office" which "perfects" parent's act of procreation. It is because of the greater nobility of the task of education, John XXIII asserted, that marriage requires stability.²⁸ Likewise, Vatican II's 1965 pastoral constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*, links biological procreation to generosity and praises spouses who raise large families "suitably."²⁹ The inclusion of the modifier is significant as it suggests that generosity, and by implication the quality of spousal fecundity, cannot be directly correlated to their number of biological offspring. Both views echo Pius XII but were not shared among all bishops before or during the council.³⁰

Pope John XXIII and Vatican II diverged more clearly from previous decades by considering the extent and range of women's social rights. Remarkably, even as previous papacies had seemingly rejected outright such notions because they contradicted both God's designs and women's proper nature (*RN* 42; cf. *CC* 75), John XXIII wrote favorably of women's increasing claims to social rights and abandonment of contentment with a "purely passive role."³¹ The 1963 encyclical *Pacem in Terris* stands in

28. John XXIII, "Importance of the Institution of the Family," in *Matrimony*, 530–36 at 535.

29. John XXIII, "Importance of the Institution," in 535. Cf. Pius XII, "Allocution to the Associations of the Large Families," in *Matrimony*, 434–42 at 440. Ramón García de Haro makes the connection between procreation and generosity explicit. "[*Gaudium et Spes*] does not encourage selfishness on the part of the parents; thus *having a large family is the way of exercising responsible parenthood most praised by the Council*: generosity is always a condition of human and Christian responsibility." Ramón García de Haro, *Marriage and the Family in the Documents of the Magisterium: A Course in the Theology of Marriage*, trans. William E. May (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 273.

30. John T. Noonan, *The Church and Contraception: The Issues at Stake* (New York: Paulist, 1967), 12, 18, 31.

31. John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris* (April 11, 1963), 41, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jxxiii_enc_11041963_pacem_en.html (hereafter cited as *PT*).

clear contrast to the work of John XXIII's predecessors, who had argued for social limitations in order to preserve women's dignity. Conversely, John XXIII judged that the human dignity of women themselves had led to expanded social rights and public involvement (*PT* 41). To be sure, John XXIII still conceived of women primarily as wives and mothers and did not envision their participation in all types or fields of public employment (*PT* 19).³² However, he helped reform teachings in light of social developments by reevaluating the implications of women's dignity and in so doing challenged hierarchal complementarity as a means of equitably ordering public and private gender relations. This transition was assisted by a newfound confidence that modern social change was not necessarily a departure from divinely established ideals but capable of suggesting legitimate reforms.

The documents of Vatican II evidence the tension of the magisterial attempt to both accept a more progressive social stance while at the same time preserving a traditional posture towards domestic life. On the one hand, the equal human dignity of the genders was now interpreted as requiring equitable treatment across more subjects than ever before. On the other, traditional teaching on family life continued to rest on differentiated treatment defined by hierarchical complementarity. This tension surfaces in documents such as *Gaudium et Spes*, which affirms women's right to more active roles in cultural life but cautions that this be implemented "in accordance with their own nature."³³ The 1965 declaration on Christian education, *Gravissimum Educationis*, likewise asserts a universal right to education but allows it to be conditioned by gender.³⁴ Still, the conciliar documents are considerably more reserved in asserting hierarchy than earlier teachings. In reference to Ephesians, for example, *Gaudium et Spes* conspicuously avoids identifying husbands with Christ and wives with the church (*GS* 9; cf. *AD* 11–17 and *CC* 74–77) and affirms spousal equality (*GS* 21). Despite such shifts, more diverse conceptions of female rights and potentials offered during this time did not yield significant rethinking of male roles within the family. Sharing the sentiments of Pius XII, *Gaudium et Spes* encourages fathers to be active in their children's lives, while insisting that children, especially young children, "need the care of their mother at home." This "domestic role" of motherhood is given special

32. Here the encyclical cites *Rerum Novarum*, despite the fact that the earlier document can hardly imagine a place for women in the workforce and argues for women's natural fitness for life in the home (*RN* 42).

33. *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965), 60, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html (hereafter cited as *GS*). This approval of women's social progress is utilized in *Apostolicum Actuositatem* to assert that women's expanded social spheres of influence create obligations for more diverse female roles in the apostolate of the laity. *Apostolicum Actuositatem* (November 18, 1965), 9, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651118_apostolicam-actuositatem_en.html (hereafter cited as *AA*).

34. *Gravissimum Educationis* (October 28, 1965), 1, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_gravissimum-educationis_en.html (hereafter cited as *GE*).

consideration as it must be “safely preserved, though the legitimate social progress of women should not be underrated on that account” (*GS* 52).

Following the council, Paul VI’s 1971 apostolic letter, *Octogesima Adveniens*, approved of growing social recognition of women’s “rights to participate in cultural, economic, social and political life,” but warned against “false equality which would deny the distinction with woman’s proper role, which is of such capital importance, at the heart of the family as well as within society.”³⁵ In 1975, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) document *Persona Humana* emphasized the importance of sexual difference and made explicit some of the tensions that underlie the era’s guarded attempts to embrace gender equity. Here, gender is said to condition an individual’s development in numerous ways. Justice is served when men and women are treated with equal dignity but with respect to their essential differences.³⁶

The Vatican II era introduced significant rethinking of women’s social equality guided by an essentialist understanding of gender and influenced by unexamined presumptions of male normativity. The product of this assessment was a negotiated assertion of women’s rights without a concerted reconsideration of domestic life and parental roles for either women or men. As in the earlier era, attention is much more focused on articulating proper parameters for women in public and domestic spheres than on considerations of male involvement in either. Although women’s entry into the labor force and access to positions of public leadership are accepted, these are balanced against domestic and maternal obligations which remained relatively unchanged. And while emphasis on male headship and authority wanes, scant attention is given to men’s obligations within the household. Consequently, fatherhood is conceived only as a supporting role to motherhood in regard to the care and nurture of children even as headship of the family becomes a shared task among spousal partners.

As it moved away from conceiving of the family as an ordered hierarchy,³⁷ Vatican II also coined and recovered various terms to describe the family. Replacing the earlier “imperfect society” (Cf. *AD* 11–15, *DI* 12, *CC* 26) the council describes the family as a “school of deeper humanity” (*GS* 52), “the primary mother and nurse of [cultural] education” (*GS* 62), “the first school of the social virtues that every society needs” (*GE* 2), the “foundation of all society” (*GS* 52), an “apprenticeship for the apostolate” (*AA* 30),³⁸

35. Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens* (May 14, 1971), 13, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-vi_apl_19710514_octogesima-adveniens_en.html (hereafter cited as *OA*).

36. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Persona Humana* (December 29, 1975), 1 and 5, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19751229_persona-humana_en.html (hereafter cited as *PH*), citing *GE* and *GS*.

37. “Imperfect society” was the prevailing model of family prior to Vatican II. “Imperfect” refers to the family’s dependence on larger orders of society.

38. Also “training for the apostolate” and in *Lumen Gentium*, “school of the lay apostolate.” *Lumen Gentium* (November 21, 1964), 35, www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html (hereafter cited as *LG*).

the “domestic church” (LG 11), an “initial seminary”³⁹ and a proclaimer of “both the present virtues of the Kingdom of God and the hope of a blessed life to come” (LG 35). The decree on the lay apostolate, *Apostolicum Actuositatem*, describes parents as the primary evangelizers and role models for their children who help children discern their vocation (AA 11). Parents “have the task of training their children from childhood on to recognize God’s love for all [people]” (AA 30). The family is described as both a source of spiritual growth as well as a means for exercising the apostolate (AA 4; cf. LG 31). The family fulfills its God-given purpose when, through love and prayer, it acts as a domestic church, participates in liturgical worship, promotes hospitality and justice, and undertakes works of service (AA 11).

These descriptions create possibilities for rethinking parenthood in terms of the purposes and goals of the family, distinct from family order and structure. Nonetheless, little attention was given to families beyond the biological nuclear norm. *Gaudium et Spes* asserts that Christians must be willing to assist children who have been born outside of marriage and suffer for other’s sins (GS 28). It also entrusts society with the care of children “who unhappily lack the blessing of a family” and who require legal protections necessary to assure their well-being (GS 52).⁴⁰ These statements amount to little more than a reminder of Pius XII’s statements a generation earlier while parenthood remains defined by marriage and biological reproduction. *Apostolicum Actuositatem* is notable in listing “the adoption of abandoned infants” first among activities for the family apostolate, a rare example of adoption presented apart from considerations of infertility (AA 11).

Pope Paul VI’s early documents had little to say about marriage and family. The landmark social encyclical of 1967, *Populorum Progressio*, for example, is silent on the role of the family even where explicit references might be expected. Its concern centers on the individual who is the “chief architect of his own success or failure” who may be “helped, and sometimes hindered, by his teachers and those around him.”⁴¹ In fact, *Populorum Progressio* employs the terms “father,” “mother,” and “family” metaphorically (for God, Mary, and the church or the human community) more often than literally. A single paragraph titled, “The Role of the Family,” simply repeats a litany of traditional concerns (PP 36).

Paul VI’s 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, which offered judgment on the moral permissibility of contraception, is the prominent exception. In 1951, Pius XII had confirmed the moral legitimacy of the “rhythm” method. In 1965, *Gaudium et Spes* had confirmed the right of spouses to responsibly plan childbirths in light of familial, social, and ecclesial considerations (GS 50).⁴² Both statements placed such decisions

39. *Optatam Totius* (October 28, 1965), 2, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_optatam-totius_en.html.

40. *GS* notably uses “parents or guardians” which suggests a recognition of a distinction between biological and social parenthood (52).

41. Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* (May 26, 1967), 15, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html (hereafter cited as *PP*).

42. Here there is an implicit rejection of the intervention of priests or other authorities, secular or religious, in this decision. The assumption of priestly guidance in such decisions was

within certain parameters and required serious moral deliberation (*GS* 47).⁴³ *Humanae Vitae* was tasked with clarifying explicitly what constituted permissible practices regarding contraception but went beyond this task to offer a broad vision of marital morality informed by concerns of personalist moral methodology, such as spousal love and the dignity of the human person.⁴⁴ The encyclical asserts the central conviction that just as intercourse without consideration of a partner's will violates the unitive end of marriage, so too does contraceptive intercourse violate the will of God.⁴⁵

Even as Paul VI described "responsible parenthood" broadly as a matter of right relation to God, self, family, and society, his use of the term within the encyclical conceptually linked responsible parenthood to reproductive decisions (*HV* 10). As such, *Humanae Vitae* effectively marks a watershed moment in which reproductive choices and conformity to magisterial moral authority became central planks in Catholic conceptions of parenthood. Under Pius XII and John XXIII, the duty to educate was presented as both a more complex and more important obligation than biological procreation. *Humanae Vitae* complicated matters by shifting conceptions of parenthood towards biological procreation and submission to church authority. At the same time, *Humanae Vitae* distinguished the roles of spouse and parent more clearly than in the previous era.

1978–2005: A Romantic Reprise

Only a year after becoming pope, John Paul II began a series of addresses outlining the foundations of his "theology of the body." This five-year phenomenological exegetical reflection on human embodiment and sexuality culminated with an indication of Christ's response to contemporary questions concerning marriage and sexuality, including a defense of *Humanae Vitae*.⁴⁶ Although John Paul II was somewhat reserved

common prior to Vatican II. Cf. Noonan, *The Church and Contraception*, 34; Pius XII, "Allocution to Newlyweds," 318.

43. Paul VI interjected a *modi* condemning "contraceptive arts" during the drafting process of *GS* which was generalized in its incorporation into the document. Cf. Peter Hebblethwaite, *Paul VI: The First Modern Pope* (New York: Paulist, 1993), 299; García de Haro, *Marriage and the Family*, 262; and Noonan, *The Church and Contraception*, 25.

44. The question is often regarded as concerning the use of artificial methods of contraception by married Catholics. Some contend it concerned only if the pill could be regarded as "artificial means." This approach carries the assumption that the prohibition of contraception has been historically established as irreformable which is difficult to sustain against the refusal of the council fathers to incorporate a general condemnation of contraception into *GS*.

45. "The Church, nevertheless, in urging men to the observance of the precepts of the natural law, which it interprets by its constant doctrine, teaches that each and every marital act must of necessity retain its intrinsic relationship to the procreation of human life." Paul VI, *Humanae Vitae* (July 25, 1968), 12, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae_en.html (hereafter cited as *HV*). Notably, *HV* extends the prohibition to include acts intended to impede procreation "either before, at the moment of, or after sexual intercourse." Including "before" clearly categorizes the pill as illicit despite it not directly altering the act of intercourse.

46. John Paul II, *Original Unity of Man and Woman* (Boston: Saint Paul, 1981), 171ff.

in incorporating his personal reflections into his authoritative writings, his term “complementarity” became a key concept in magisterial writings of this era. The underlying concept had long functioned in papal writings but was historically bound within a hierarchal framework. As the egalitarian model of marriage and social relations expounded by Vatican II now held sway, John Paul II attempted to revive the concept stripped of its explicitly hierarchal use. This recapitulated complementarity proved useful in buttressing magisterial teachings on sexual ethics and provided a rationale for objectively linking all heterosexual marriages, through the bodies of the spouses themselves, to the good of procreation, even if they were factually childless or infertile.⁴⁷ However, this emphasis on the body exacerbated the trend set by *Humanae Vitae* in further centering parenthood in biological procreation while deemphasizing both the good of education and non-biological kinship.

In 1981, John Paul II wrote the apostolic exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio* which he described as “a *summa* of the teaching of the church on the life, the tasks, the responsibilities, and the mission of marriage and of the family in the world today.”⁴⁸ In the concluding remarks, he wrote simply, “*The future of humanity passes by way of the family.*”⁴⁹ Later, he taught that the family is both the source of a person’s individuality and every individual’s “existential horizon.”⁵⁰ John Paul II never tired of emphasizing the importance of the family. Despite occasional pessimism, John Paul II consistently presented challenges facing the family as a mix of positive and negative developments requiring careful discernment. Positive developments included greater appreciation for individual freedom, attentiveness to interpersonal relationships, support for women’s dignity, responsible procreation and education of children as well as attention to “the development of interfamily relationships, for reciprocal spiritual and material assistance, the rediscovery of the ecclesial mission proper to the family and

47. Christine Gudorf observes that John Paul II avoided worn and unconvincing social stereotypes which lead to lack of content in the categories themselves. Questioning why largely empty categories would be retained, she offers, “together with the principle that every sexual act must be open to procreation, it constitutes the moral bulwark against homosexuality.” Christine Gudorf, “A New Moral Discourse on Sexuality,” in *Human Sexuality in the Catholic Tradition*, ed. Kieran Scott and Harold Daly Horell (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 51–69 at 54. Patricia Beattie Jung similarly concludes that magisterial account of complementarity offered is simply too weak in light of present knowledge about sexual diversity. Patricia Beattie Jung, “God Sets the Lonely in Families,” in *More than a Monologue: Sexual Diversity in the Roman Catholic Church*, vol. 2, *Inquiry, Thought, and Expression*, ed. J. Patrick Hornbeck II and Michael A. Norko (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 115–33 at 120–22.

48. Quoted in García de Haro, *Marriage and the Family*, 333.

49. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio* (November 22, 1981), 86, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio_en.html (hereafter cited as *FC*). Emphasis original/

50. John Paul II, *Gratissimam Sane* (February 2, 1994), 2, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_02021994_families_en.html (hereafter cited in text as *GrS*).

its responsibility for the building of a more just society” (FC 6). Negative developments included erroneous conceptions of spousal independence, “the relationship of authority between parents and children” (FC 6), difficulty in transmitting values, divorce, abortion, sterilization, and the “contraceptive mentality.”

Like his predecessors, the changing roles of women elicited special concern from John Paul II. In the 1960s, John XXIII and Vatican II moved Catholic teaching from rejection to cautious acceptance of women’s place in the paid workforce and public life. Half a generation later, John Paul II attempted to articulate how and why sexual differentiation still mattered in a world where the fluidity and cultural construction of gender roles had become widely accepted. His response drew heavily upon the Romantic ideals that had influenced his predecessors’ essentialist understanding of gender.⁵¹ Although he embraced a larger vision of women’s social and economic participation, women remained characterized by their femininity, defined by passive receptivity and motherhood.⁵² For John Paul II, the vocation of motherhood is every woman’s “main” and “irreplaceable role” which corresponds to “the very essence of her womanhood.”⁵³ The “fundamental contribution” of women to society, he wrote, is conditioned by their experience of motherhood in which they accept and love life for its own sake.⁵⁴ Women have a legitimate place in the labor force, but this must give due regard for women’s roles as wives and mothers if social advancement is to be “truly and fully human” (FC 23). John Paul II repudiated social structures that compel married women to enter the workforce and viewed occupations that can be undertaken from the home as particularly appropriate for women’s employment (FC 24).⁵⁵

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51. Although hierarchical language was largely avoided at Vatican II, John Paul II once again identifies men as the “head” of the household in *Laborem Exercens*. John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens* (September 14, 1981), 19, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens_en.html. See also FC 25 where language of headship is avoided and equality is emphasized; and *Mulieris Dignitatem*, where the dignity of women is contrasted with domination by husbands. John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem* (August 15, 1988), 10, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19880815_mulieris-dignitatem.html.
52. Earlier he had suggested that gendered attributes extend into the sexual act where women, by “the very nature of the act,” are the “comparatively passive partner, whose function is to accept and to experience ... it is enough for her to be passive and unresisting.” Karol Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 271.
53. John Paul II, “Woman, Spouse and Mother, in the Family and in Society,” in *Enchiridion on the Family: A Compendium of Church Teaching on Family and Life Issues from Vatican II to the Present*, ed. Pontifical Council for the Family (Boston: Pauline, 2004), 853–56 at 854.
54. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* (March 25, 1995), 99, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae_en.html (hereafter cited as *EV*).
55. This is a revision to his earlier thought, in which the opportunity for employment outside the home itself was considered problematic. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 238.

Conceptually, John Paul II leveraged his gendered anthropology in order to expound upon universal and fundamental human attributes that characterize the essentially exclusive, yet complementary, concepts of “masculinity” and “femininity.” The genders constitute “two ways of ‘being a body’” that speak to and complete each other.⁵⁶ Each gender “finds itself” in the other.⁵⁷ Accordingly, the human body has a “nuptial meaning” which is realized in marriage where sexual intercourse may speak to the fullness of the human person as both subject and gift. John Paul II describes procreation as the “greatest possible gift” and laments that conception is often needlessly thwarted in the contemporary world (*FC* 14).⁵⁸ For John Paul II, procreation is conceptually bound to education because the true expression of conjugal love entails not only openness to procreation, but preparedness to accept new life and ensure a child’s full physical and spiritual development.⁵⁹

Consistent with earlier eras, John Paul II linked biological procreation to generosity and praised large families (*EV* 59).⁶⁰ Especially in wealthy countries, he lamented married couples who lack “the generosity and courage needed for raising up new

56. John Paul II, *Original Unity*, 62.

57. John Paul II, *Original Unity*, 62. John Paul II emphasizes the theological significance of bodily existence which manifests itself in distinctly male and female forms. These reflections do not directly consider social gender roles, although a view of women’s fundamental vocation as motherhood may be inferred.

58. It may be asked whether life or faith is the greatest gift. Traditionally the value of life is held very high, but relativized in light of faith. This is most dramatically evidenced by traditional reverence for martyrs and more subtly through balancing procreation and education. On the other hand, life is the condition for faith and in a sense holds a natural, but not ultimate primacy.

59. “It is here that the full productive power of love between two persons, man and woman, is concentrated, in the work of rearing new persons.” Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 56.

60. Cf. Pontifical Council for the Family, “Charter of the Rights of the Family” (October 22, 1983) 3.c (hereafter cited in text as CRF), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/family/documents/rc_pc_family_doc_19831022_family-rights_en.html. Praise for large families also took the form of criticizing small families for both John Paul II and Benedict XVI. In *Love and Responsibility*, Wojtyła doubted if parents and a single child or two children could truly constitute a family, because the family must arise “within the framework of a community of children, a collective of siblings.” Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 242. John Paul II argued that parents ought to remind themselves that it is “certainly less serious to deny their children certain comforts or material advantages than to deprive them of the presence of brothers and sisters, who could help them to grow in humanity to realize the beauty of life and all its ages and all its variety.” Quoted in García de Haro, *Marriage and the Family*, 395. Benedict XVI questioned if small families could be beneficial for society. Such families, he wrote, “run the risk of impoverishing social relations, and failing to ensure effective forms of solidarity.” Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (June 29, 2009) 44, http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate_en.html.

human life: thus life is often perceived not as a blessing, but as a danger from which to defend oneself" (*FC* 6).⁶¹

Gender, sexuality, marriage, and family are cleanly packaged in John Paul II's thought, but this ideal integration further calls the legitimacy of non-nuclear and non-biological families into question. By idealizing complementarity and procreation, John Paul II encourages a primacy of biological kinship even while reprimanding couples who desire to use medical technologies to assist in creating a child "of their own." Furthermore, adoption arises in John Paul II's thought most frequently as an alternative to reproductive technologies.⁶² This tendency creates the impression that avoiding the moral misuse of medical technology is a greater driving concern than the good of adoption itself. His logic around adoption is further circumscribed by the assertion that parental rights are "unrenounceable," a position that undercuts the moral permissibility of placing a child for adoption (*FC* 25) while non-biological kinship is set at odds with an increasingly significant biological norm.

Still, John Paul II contends that, because all people are children of God, the bonds of the family rightfully extend to universal concern for children in need. Families may serve life by their willingness to "adopt and foster children who have lost their parents or have been abandoned by them." This benefits children, who rediscover the "warmth and affection of a family," as well as the family, via its expansion (*FC* 41; cf. *EV* 63). Elsewhere, he writes, "True parental love is ready to go beyond the bounds of flesh and blood in order to accept children from other families, offering them whatever is necessary for their well-being and full development" (*EV* 93).⁶³ Thus even as the family unit is centered in parental complementarity and biological procreation, the biological nuclear norm is subject to exceptions in light of human need and the demands of the gospel.

Still, biological kinship is idealized and assumed in his writing. While John Paul II acknowledges the fundamental superiority of spiritual bonds, within the family these

61. Under John Paul II and Benedict XVI the magisterium began to rebut fears about human overpopulation and linked population concern to destructive social ideologies. Although the potential dangers of overpopulation had been treated seriously in earlier decades (cf. *GS* 5, 47, 87 and *HV* 2), the 1998 document, "On the Decrease of Fertility in the World," makes the alternative argument that falling fertility rates are a cause of global concern. Pontifical Council for the Family, "On the Decrease of Fertility in the World," in *Enchiridion on the Family*, 1037–1045.

62. The concern is with ARTs, variously called "Artificial" or "Assisted" Reproductive Technologies, which are interpreted as either unjustifiable "artificial" interference with the natural order, as John Paul II would have it, or "assistance" with natural processes, as some moralists have argued. See Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction for Respect of Human Life in Its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation; Replies to Certain Questions of the Day* (February 22, 1987), sec. 2, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19870222_respect-for-human-life_en.html.

63. Families with economic advantages are encouraged to "adopt" whole families through economic support. This removes the separation from biological parents which, John Paul II reminds, is often caused by poverty, not parental desires.

deepen and enrich “the natural bonds of flesh and blood” (*FC* 21). For John Paul II the family is generally conceived as a community founded upon the bond of spouses, rooted in their natural complementarity, and expressed in the procreation of new life (*FC* 19). Against those who would argue that family forms are products of social and historical forces, the pope holds that the private, biological nuclear family is the necessary outcome of adequate reflection on the meaning of the family and nature of persons themselves.⁶⁴ John Paul II did express concern for the care and inclusion of grandparents and presented extended kin relations favorably, especially as aids to the nuclear family. However, in each case the inclusion is partial as individuals beyond the nuclear family are directed to respect its privacy and autonomy (*FC* 27; cf. *CRF* 6.C).

In the daily activities of parenthood, John Paul II presumes differentiated experiences based on gender. Prior to his papacy, Cardinal Wojtyła had discerned a basic asymmetry in male and female experiences of parenthood. Women are powerfully and instinctually driven towards desiring children, he argued, while men have to cultivate paternal feelings as they tend to lack a similar drive and do not share the physical experience of pregnancy.⁶⁵ As pope, John Paul II argued for the importance of women’s role in nurturing children, and gave little indication that a father might also fulfill this task (*FC* 66). The duties of fatherhood include economic contributions, love for wife and children, and involvement in the life of the family (*GrS* 16). Fathers are more than income earners, and tend to be associated with education, but appear to play a secondary role in nurturing children.

John Paul II posits much more common ground between male and female experiences of parenthood when considering the evangelical tasks of parenthood.⁶⁶ *Familiaris Consortio* describes parents as “heralds of the Gospel” for their children who fulfill their vocation as both physical and spiritual progenitors (*FC* 39). Love conditions this obligation and perfects parents’ “service to life.” Parental love is “the animating principle and therefore the norm inspiring and guiding all concrete educational activity, enriching it with the values of kindness, constancy, goodness, service, disinterestedness and self-sacrifice that are the most precious fruit of love” (*FC* 36).

Throughout the era there is increasing concern for cohabitation, civil unions, and same-sex partnerships—each being “false alternatives” to the “irreplaceable value of the family based on marriage.”⁶⁷ Such non-marital partnerships are considered harmful

64. Wojtyła’s ideal vision of the family is explicit in *Love and Responsibility*’s lament that the family’s “old traditional form—the large family relying on the father as the breadwinner, and sustained internally by the mother, the heart of the family—has reached a state of crisis.” Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 238. “Private” here is intended primarily to denote the autonomy of the family and household; in terms of ethical responsibilities his depiction is quite social. See Rubio, *A Christian Theology of Marriage and Family*, 107.

65. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 259.

66. John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae* (October 16, 1979), 42, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae.html. Cf. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, 260ff.

67. John Paul II, address to the Members of the Pontifical Council on the Family (June 4, 1999), 2, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1999/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_04061999_family.html.

in themselves as well as undermining to the true meaning of marriage. Of these, same-sex relationships receive particular attention.

John Paul II's concern for parental complementarity was partially driven by increased attention to homosexuality during his papacy. In 1986 the CDF's "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons" responded to laxist pastoral interpretations of its 1975 directive *Persona Humana*.⁶⁸ Its most significant claim was that, although the homosexual inclination itself is not a sin, "it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder" (*LTB* 64). In the document, the statement is supported by the assertion that creation displays a clear, God-given complementarity. In subsequent years, as acceptance of homosexuality in Western societies expanded, magisterial concerns progressed from homosexuality, to same-sex relationships, to same-sex parenthood. In 2003 the CDF argued that, because they cannot procreate biologically, same-sex couples cannot properly contribute to the survival of the human race. Moreover, because same-sex partnerships lack gender complementarity, adoption cannot be allowed as this absence would cause developmental problems for children.⁶⁹ As such, "Not even in a remote analogous sense do homosexual unions fulfil the purpose for which marriage and family deserve specific categorical recognition" (*CRP* 8). The Pontifical Council for the Family had earlier presented the similar arguments against same-sex partnerships being likened to marriage. First, they are not procreative. Second, they cannot express interpersonal complementarity. And third, they are "a deplorable distortion of what should be a communion of love and life between a man and a woman in a reciprocal gift open to life."⁷⁰

When same-sex couples seek legal protection or the right to adopt children they evoke alarm. A Vatican document on children's rights protests,

It is in no way acceptable for children to be subjected, forced and basically obliged to undergo the discrimination of being entrusted to [same-sex] unions made up of their very lives. Impeding them from being part of a family—in the proper and original sense—involves serious, negative and even irreparable consequences for [these children].⁷¹

68. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons* (October 1, 1986), 2, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19861001_homosexual-persons_en.html (hereafter cited as *LTB*).

69. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Considerations regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognitions to Unions between Homosexual Persons* (June 3, 2003), 7, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20030731_homosexual-unions_en.html (hereafter cited as *CRP*).

70. Pontifical Council for the Family, *Family, Marriage and "De Facto" Unions* (November 9, 2000), 23, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/family/documents/rc_pc_family_doc_20001109_de-facto-unions_en.html.

71. International Symposium on Adoption, "The Rights of Children," in Pontifical Council for the Family, *Enchiridion on the Family*, 932–37 at 935.

John Paul II further safeguarded the link between parenthood and gender complementarity by introducing sacramental marriage as a source for parental capacities. Through the grace of sacramental marriage, he contended, couples become participants in and witnesses to salvation which equips them for the task of spiritual education (*FC* 5). Although the basic capability to educate children remains rooted in biological procreation, recalling Aquinas, the duty to educate is described as being fortified by matrimony in which it becomes a “ministry” (*FC* 38). That the sacrament of marriage provides graces fitting for married life had been previously affirmed (*CC* 105), but tying parental capabilities to this sacramental grace effectively strips authentic Christian parenthood from non-sacramentally married or single parents. This restriction comes on top of a tradition that already asserts biological parenthood as the source of parental capabilities, thus further cementing the biological nuclear norm rooted in spousal complementarity.

Under the influence of John Paul II, conceptions of parenthood within magisterial documents had become linked to complementarity by the early 2000s. Similar to *Humanae Vitae*'s shift of concern from education to procreation, John Paul II's papacy shifts concern from procreation to its own antecedent, complementarity. Consequently, the functional tasks of parenthood were displaced further as sexuality and gender became increasingly important. As such, it was no longer parental roles, but parenthood itself, which becomes defined by gender and sexual complementarity. In other words, “parenthood” transitions to a collective concept embracing the two fundamentally distinct realities of motherhood and fatherhood which are rooted in biological gender difference. Previously parenthood had primarily indicated a function of caregiving performed by men and women differently in accord with the naturally established social and domestic hierarchies. Once again, this conceptual shift was not driven by deep reflection on the actual practices of parents themselves, but arose as a byproduct of reactions to changing social realities which threatened established magisterial teachings.

2016: Pastoral but Persistent

The product of two unusually public synods, Pope Francis' 2016 apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*, demonstrates Francis' desire to shift magisterial teaching in a more pastoral direction. Like the documents of Vatican II, *Amoris Laetitia* is a project in consensus which attempts to hold together competing concerns. Consequently, it demonstrates well the present incarnations of the tensions traced above.

In keeping with earlier documents, *Amoris Laetitia* presumes the ideal of a private, biological, and nuclear family while acknowledging certain exceptions.⁷²

72. *Amoris Laetitia* asserts there is “no stereo-type of the ideal family, but rather a challenging mosaic made up of many different realities, with all their joys, hopes and problems.” The statement is likely directed at diversities beyond structure which can be found in the function, experiences, and contexts even among private, biological, nuclear families. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* (March 19, 2016), 57, https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf (hereafter cited as *AL*).

Against excessive privacy, families are called to contribute to society by reaching out in solidarity (AL 181). This social contribution is linked to raising children well and the family's place as the primary unit of society.⁷³ The nuclear family is presented as embedded within a larger family network with obligations to interact with and assist these relatives. The link to the social obligations of the family is clear as even neighbors are considered a form of extended kinship (AL 48, 187). As in earlier teaching, the legitimate autonomy of the nuclear family and proper ordering of its relationship to the wider family is also clarified (AL 190). Likewise, the possibility of adoption is noted and praised but presented primarily as a response to infertility (AL 82, 179).

With respect to parenthood, Francis continues John Paul II's insistence on complementarity and confirms existing teaching on the centrality of marriage for family and society (AL 52). *Amoris Laetitia* recognizes that procreation has often taken priority over interpersonal union in Catholic presentations of marriage (AL 36). In response, and reminiscent of *Casti Connubii*, love is presented as the essence of the spousal relationship. While insisting on the centrality of complementarity for marriage (AL 172), *Amoris Laetitia* also encourages reciprocity between spouses (AL 55) and urges men to assume greater responsibilities within the home (AL 286). Despite acknowledging some malleability in the categories of "masculine" and "feminine," the dichotomy remains influential (AL 175). For example, while both mothers and fathers are called upon to be involved in the life of the family, only women's role in motherhood is presented as essential to society (AL 173). Men are to love their wife and are encouraged to assume "some aspects" of childrearing if required for the good of the family (AL 286). Even as the document pushes towards greater parental mutuality and attempts to disrupt rigid gendered categories, it nonetheless replicates earlier patterns.

Amoris Laetitia's fundamental struggle is with a tension that has grown increasingly problematic in recent decades: namely, how to unite the essential functions of the family with an essential structure in a world where alternatives are obvious. Like Vatican II, *Amoris Laetitia* prioritizes the ultimate function of the family unit, that is, socializing and evangelizing its members while serving the good of society. At the same time, it insists that a particular family structure is essential for these tasks, that is, a complementary union of married man and woman. For popes of the early twentieth century the link was hardly called into question. Their concern was with gendered responsibilities within the family, particularly the place of women. By the end of the century, chosen diversities in family forms could hardly be ignored. For John Paul II, insistence on complementarity held structure and function together. True marital love, expressed as mutual self-gift, was only possible through a married union of man and woman. The consequence, however, was frequent accusations that John Paul II's idealized presentation of marriage and family drifted into the ephemeral, quite divorced

73. Julie Hanlon Rubio likewise identifies the family as a point of convergence between private and social spheres and has called for greater attention to the social responsibilities of the family. In so doing she anticipates Francis' thought. See Rubio, *Family Ethics*.

from lived realities.⁷⁴ In contrast, Francis insists on engaging the lived realities of families and responding pastorally to present situations. This is precisely where the supposedly essential link between structure and function appears weakest.

Amoris Laetitia demonstrates this weakness in two ways. First, as a consequence of its concern for pastoral care, *Amoris Laetitia* is uniquely willing to admit exceptions and alternatives to the familial ideal. This compromise with reality undermines the purported essentialness of the married nuclear family structure. For example, if a spouse dies, *Amoris Laetitia* counsels single parents to find other adults who can model mature adult sexuality for their children. Although driven by a concern for complementarity, the advice itself undermines the absolute necessity of parental complementarity within the household (*AL* 197). If a single parent can supply role models for children in non-parent adults, what would inhibit a same-sex couple from doing the same? Second, while its descriptions of masculinity and femininity still rest largely in romantic stereotypes, *Amoris Laetitia* cannot sustain these. It rebuffs an extreme presentation of gender theory in which gender is entirely constructed by personal choice but acknowledges some legitimate fluidity in gender roles (*AL* 56). Tellingly, the closer the document gets to the lived needs and challenges of families, the less gender appears to matter. The only time gender is meaningfully considered in *Amoris Laetitia*'s entire chapter on the parental task of education is to explain how gender roles are negotiable (*AL* 286).

When *Amoris Laetitia* considers the functions of the Christian family, adaptable human capabilities clearly take priority over gendered differences. Like John Paul II, Francis attempts to shore up this disparity through emphasis on the grace of sacramental marriage. He struggles to convince. It seems entirely fitting that sacramental marriage might serve as a sort of formal ordination for the ministry of parenthood, but this does not necessitate a restriction of this ministry to the married. In fact, doing so negates the priority of the Christian's fundamental identity given in baptism, which *Amoris Laetitia* itself recognizes as the foundation of the self-giving love required in matrimony (*AL* 85). Yet, decoupling the capacity to parent from sacramental marriage would weaken the bulwark of teaching on gender and sexuality that the magisterium has so diligently defended against the perceived hostilities of modern society. Despite its protests to the contrary and clear emphasis on the task of education, *Amoris Laetitia* falls in line with the established historical trajectory by conceiving of parenthood primarily as an extension of sexual ethics wherein procreation and complementarity hold the decisive upper hand.

Beyond Biology

This article has traced historical developments in magisterial teaching on marriage and family in order to show that the underlying theological conceptions of what makes a

74. Julie Hanlon Rubio often writes in close dialogue with the writing of John Paul II, whom she presents as a moderate, yet criticizes his portrayal of the family, which "never steps out of the ideal realm to touch the reality of individual families." Rubio, *A Christian Theology of Marriage and Family*, 21. Cf. Rubio, *Family Ethics*, 84; and Cahill, *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics*, 203.

parent a parent have developed over time. These developments were neither accidental nor intentional products of reflection upon the tasks of parenting itself. Rather, developments have tended to arise as consequences of reactions to social changes which impinged upon magisterial teaching related to gender, sexuality, and reproduction. In particular, the intimate links between gender, sexual ethics, and teaching on marriage and family have produced a growing tendency to center parenthood on biological kinship. Magisterial teachings retain the conviction that spiritual education marks Christian parenthood in its fullest, yet weakens this conviction through narrow emphasis on gender, sex, and reproduction. The consequences emerge as a general inability of the institutional church to write clearly about parenthood *qua* parenthood, even as magisterial teachings themselves attest to alternative ways of thinking about parenthood which depart from the overarching trend and are firmly rooted in the distinctive evangelical dimensions of Christian identity.

As noted above, proposals offered by revisionist theologians have provided relatively little corrective to the tendencies here identified. Rather, I suggest, a more meaningful contemporary theological account of parenthood requires a conceptual shift in the underlying framework of Catholic theological discourse. This shift will require a willingness to move considerations of parenthood beyond the decisive influences of sexual ethics and theories of gender. Such disentanglement would create new opportunities for robust theological anthropological reflection in which we may come to see parenthood as a moral, social, and evangelical commitment grounded in the natural human capacity to care for others. Consequently, decisive moral concerns may be reoriented towards the conditions necessary for parental capabilities to manifest themselves in stable long-term relational commitments. In theological language, we will seek to discover the functions, capabilities, and conditions which give rise to the domestic church.

Author Biography

Jacob Kohlhaas (PhD, Duquesne) is Assistant Professor of Moral Theology at Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa. His research focuses on contemporary Catholic theological accounts of parenthood and kinship. Recent writings include "Christian Sexual Ethics: The Ongoing Conversation(s)" (*Religious Studies Review*, June 2017).

Appendix: List of Abbreviations of Magisterial Documents

<i>AD</i>	<i>Arcanum Divinae Sapientiae</i> , Leo XIII, 1880
<i>RN</i>	<i>Rerum Novarum</i> , Leo XIII, 1891
<i>CC</i>	<i>Casti Connubii</i> , Pius XI, 1930
<i>DI</i>	<i>Divini Illius Magistri</i> , Pius XI, 1939
<i>PT</i>	<i>Pacem in Terris</i> , John XXIII, 1963
<i>LG</i>	<i>Lumen Gentium</i> , Second Vatican Council, 1964
<i>GS</i>	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i> , Second Vatican Council, 1965
<i>AA</i>	<i>Apostolicum Actuositatem</i> , Second Vatican Council, 1965

- GE* *Gravissimum Educationis*, Second Vatican Council, 1965
PP *Populorum Progressio*, Paul VI, 1967
HV *Humanae Vitae*, Paul VI, 1968
OA *Octogesima Adveniens*, Paul VI, 1971
PH *Persona Humana*, Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1975
FC *Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul II, 1981
CRF “Charter of the Rights of the Family,” Pontifical Council for the Family, 1983
LB “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons,” Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1986
GrS *Gratissimam Sane*, John Paul II, 1994
EV *Evangelium Vitae*, John Paul II, 1995
CRP “Considerations regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognitions to Unions between Homosexual Persons,” Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 2003
AL *Amoris Laetitia*, Francis, 2016