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The Sacrament of Marriage as Vocation

SAKRAMENT MAŁŻEŃSTWA JAKO POWOŁANIE

Sięgając do przyjętego przez Episkopat Polski programu duszpasterskiego na ubiegły rok pod hasłem *Kościół, jest naszym domem* należy zwrócić szczególną uwagę na rolę katolickich małżonków w dziele budowania tego Kościoła. Kościół jest ich domem ponieważ on, jak i ów Kościół domowy zrodzony w rodzinie są wzajemnie na siebie zdane, a także ponieważ *Pismo Święte* mówi o małżeństwie jako symbolu złączenia Chrystusa z Jego Kościołem, więzi, która leży u podstaw Kościoła.

Jeśli zadaniem katolickich małżonków jest budowanie Kościoła jako swego domu, muszą oni przywołać szereg podstawowych prawd. Małżeństwo jest sakramentem, a każdy sakrament istnieje w Kościele i dla niego. Dlatego małżonkowie mają szczególne powołanie do budowania Kościoła takiego, który zarazem wyrasta z sakramentu, jak i rzeczywistości, której ich sakrament jest uprzywilejowanym symbolem. Małżonkowie muszą także pamiętać, że sakrament małżeństwa nie jest rzeczywistością statyczną, która załatwia coś raz na zawsze i spełniając ostatecznie swe zadanie. Małżeństwo jest raczej sakramentem na co dzień obdarzającym łaską, uzdalniającym małżonków zarówno w domowym Kościele, jak i w Kościele powszechnym, określanym jako *ecclesia*, do budowania Kościoła pośród wszelakich zadań codziennego życia. Ponieważ wieczność zbudowana jest na wyborach i decyzjach dnia powszedniego przenikniętego miłością (lub jej brakiem) małżeństwo także ma swój eschatologiczny wymiar. Fakt, że małżeństwo kończy się wraz ze śmiercią jednego z małżonków nie przyćmiewa naszej świadomości o trwałym i eschatologicznym jego znaczeniu.

Chrześcijańscy małżonkowie budują Kościół w szczególny sposób, ponieważ symbolizują oni złączenie Chrystusa z Kościołem, które stanowi źródło kościelnej tożsamości i mocy. Współczesny człowiek posiada zubożone pojęcie symbolizmu, co stanowi przeszkodę w uświadomieniu sobie, że małżeństwo, jako symbol złączenia Chrystusa z Jego Kościołem, jest czymś więcej aniżeli tylko ciekawą, literacką przenośnią, stanowi ono bowiem rzeczywistą realizacją tej unii (i jej istotnych cech) w ich własnym życiu małżeńskim. Złączenie Chrystusa z Kościołem znaczone jest jednością, pełnią, nierozzerwalnością i owocnością.

Cechy te jako istotne właściwości małżeństwa są dziś przedmiotem ataków. Nowoczesny człowiek nie rozumie, że cechy te są czymś więcej niżeli tylko jakaś spuścizna kulturowa, względnie wynikają z dyscypliny kościelnej, są one bowiem wewnętrznymi i bezdyskusyjnymi elementami tego, co stanowi małżeństwo. Artykuł niniejszy rozważa owocność jako cechę małżeństwa. Złączenie Chrystusa z Kościołem jest zawsze życiodajne (jest to istotne znacznie nauki o *ex opere operato*), tak jak małżeństwo winno być otwarte na życie. Podobnie też, tak jak przeciwdziałanie sakramentom dającym życie jest świętokradztwem, tak i negacja owocodajności małżeńskiej jest świętokradczym rozumieniem samego małżeństwa.

W czasie trwania roku duszpasterskiego Kościół powinien skupić się na dopomożeniu małżeństwom katolickim w zrozumieniu, że te istotne cechy wyrażające złączenie Chrystusa z Kościołem – jedność, pełnia, nierozzerwalność i owocność – są podobne do istotnych cech, jakie posiada sakramentalne małżeństwo. W stopniu, w jakim małżonkowie urzeczywistniają te znamiona w swych małżeństwach, budują oni także Kościół, ponieważ naśladują oni i urzeczywistniają te same cechy, które wiążą Chrystusa z Kościołem. Małżeństwo zatem jest czymś więcej aniżeli dyscypliną kościelną lub tradycją kulturową: złączenie mężczyzny i kobiety w małżeństwie jest istotnym symbolem, odzwierciedleniem związku Chrystusa z Jego Kościołem. W takim stopniu, w jakim małżonkowie rozumieją, przeżywają i urzeczywistniają te właściwości w ich małżeństwie, uczestniczą oni w budowaniu Kościoła. W takim stopniu, w jakim rozumieją oni, że te właściwości są dla Kościoła istotne, potrafią oni także lepiej pojąć kościelną doniosłość małżeństwa jako sakramentu dokonującego się w Kościele, poprzez Kościół i dla Kościoła.

Słowa kluczowe: małżeństwo, Kościół domowy

THE SACRAMENT OF MARRIAGE AS VOCATION

Taking into account the Episcopate of Poland's pastoral programme with its motto: "The Church is our home" we should consider the role of Catholic

married couples in the building of the Church. It is their home because both the Church and the 'home church' originated in the family are left to each other, because in the Scripture marriage is a symbol of the communion between Christ and His Church and this unity is a foundation of the Church.

Key words: marriage, home Church

To Build the Church as “Our Home”

The theme of this year's pastoral program of the Polish Episcopate, “The Church Is Our Home” (*Kościół naszym domem*) naturally should turn our attention to marriage and the family. Contemporary theology of the sacraments identifies two—marriage and Holy Orders—as “sacraments of vocation.”¹ If the sacraments of initiation are more oriented towards giving a person his own “individual” vocation within the Church, the two sacraments of vocation give that person a special social vocation vis-à-vis the Church as a community.

There has been a certain tendency to think of “vocation” primarily in connection to preparation for the priesthood. The Second Vatican Council, however, sought to reorient Catholics' attention to the fundamental vocation which all Christians share through Baptism. The Council did teach that priesthood of the faithful conferred by Baptism and the ministerial priesthood conferred by Holy Orders “differ from one another in essence and not only in degree.”² Without depreciating the importance of the ordained priesthood—an unfortunate tendency in some post-Vatican II theology in the West—one should also not forget the Copernican revolution represented by *Lumen gentium* in beginning its ecclesiology from the Church as the People of God.³

¹ Applying the term “sacrament of vocation” to marriage and Holy Orders can, however, also be somewhat misleading, because the first sacrament of vocation for every Christian is Baptism.

² Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 10.

³ See Aloys Grillmeier, “The People of God,” in Herbert Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, volume I (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), pp. 153-68. Note that “People of God” does not only mean the laity, “the mass of the faithful in contrast to the hierarchy, but the Church as a whole, with every group of its members” (p. 153). It is nevertheless instructive that the Council Fathers decided (p. 119) to begin their discussion of the Church from the viewpoint of what binds all its members together, before discussing the ordained priesthood. See also Kevin McNamara, *Vatican II: The Constitution on the Church—A Theological and Pastoral Commentary* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1968), p. 103. It is important, especially in light of the theme “The

The theme of “The Church Is Our Home” ought to move us from a clerical vision of the Church to a vision that emphasizes each Christian’s responsibility for building up the Christian community. For most Catholics, that responsibility will occur through the sacrament of marriage. It is therefore important to draw out the full implications of the vocation of marriage to build up the Church in a way that truly makes it “our home.”

1. Marriage as a Sacramental Vocation

Why has the optimistic and positive theology of the Second Vatican Council, especially with relationship to marriage, not borne as much fruit as that of which it seems potentially capable? One reason could be certain intellectual baggage that still impedes us from seeing the full implications of the opportunities at hand in the present theological moment. As noted above, the tendency to associate “vocation” with priesthood sometimes hinders us from truly grasping⁴ the rich “vocation” that married people should play in building up the Church.

What other intellectual baggage might impede us from understanding more fully the implications of marriage as a vocation within and for the Church? Let me suggest two points: (1) a static notion of the sacrament of marriage in terms of its effect and its grace; and (2) a depreciation of the eschatological significance of the sacrament.

Church Is Our Home,” to move from a clerical vision of the Church to one that emphasizes each Christian’s responsibility for the Church. The present author would even suggest that until the Church begins to put more emphasis on helping Catholics to see their marriages as vocations, we will continue having problems with fewer priestly vocations. Priestly vocations do not arise *ex nihilo*. They normally arise within Christian families that see their everyday married lives as part of what God called them to do. Young people are more apt to be receptive to leading their lives as vocations from God if they see others doing the same. Here, as in many other areas, parents are “the first teachers of their child in the ways of faith. May they also be the best of teachers, bearing witness to the faith by what they say and do” and live: see “Blessing” in Rite of Baptism for One Child. [*Rite of Baptism for Children* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1970), p. 62]. See also H. Caffarel, ed., *Marriage Is Holy*, trans. Bernard Murchland (Chicago: Fides, 1957), p. 32.

⁴ We can “know” something intellectually without truly grasping the full meaning and implications of that “knowledge.” This author suggests that something like this occurs when we “know” that Vatican II laid emphasis upon a “vocation” to the Christian life” but we then continue using that word in the narrower sense of identifying potential *ordinandi*. Bl. John Henry Newman identified this distinction when he spoke about “notional assent” versus “real assent.” See his *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (London: Burns, Oates, and Co., 1874), especially chapters I-IV, (pp. 2-97).

Recovering a sense of marriage as sacramental vocation requires cultivation of two frequently neglected aspects of that sacrament: its ongoing dynamism and its sacramental grace. Too many Catholics still have a static concept of marriage: the sacrament “did” something at some previous moment in time; it established the “state” of being married, the marriage bond. Such an approach tends, however, to underestimate the significance of marriage *qua* sacrament in the ongoing, everyday life of a couple. The sacrament of marriage not only did something for the couple at some previous, discrete moment in time; it can continue to do something every day that this couple is married, until “death do us part.”⁵

Sacramental marriage as continuing to do something in the everyday life of the couple means, however, that marriage also has an eschatological significance. It is the eschatological significance of marriage as an aspect of marriage as vocation that requires better explanation (and catechesis). Catholic marital theology still labors under the burden of a “too temporal” view of marriage. It is true that marriage as a sacrament exists only until the death of one partner. It is true that the New Testament, especially St. Paul, tended to relativise marriage in light of expectations of an imminent Parousia.⁶ Without denying the truth behind those teachings, however, a certain correction of perspective seems in order. The foundations of eternity are laid in this life. Eternity is not so much a break, a rupture, from this “vale of tears” as a making permanent of the basic trajectory for one’s identity and being that one has established in this life. Such a perspective of continuity leads us, then, rather to see this temporal world not as some draft paper upon

⁵ “The first priority is to believe in the sacrament. . . . Believing in the sacrament means believing that the gracious Bridegroom of the Church continues to uphold married Christians with the strength of this sacrament, not only in the moments of consent but in the years which follow.” Peter J. Elliott, *What God Has Joined: The Sacramentality of Marriage* (New York: Alba House, 1990), p. 181. See also Bernard J. Cooke, *Christian Sacraments and Christian Personality* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1965), pp. 101-03, where he anticipates Vatican II’s teaching about how Christians share in the priestly office of Christ, when he speaks about married couples sharing in the “exercise of priesthood.”

⁶ See, e.g., I Corinthians 7, esp. vv. 1-7, 32-40; Matthew 22: 23-33. Edward Schillebeeckx correctly summarizes the New Testament when he observes: “The kingdom of God makes sovereign claims which take precedence over everything else” including marriage [*Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), p. 123].

which we make an initial sketch for eternity as much as the canvas we paint that God in eternity touches up, perfects, and eventually frames.⁷

Marriage, therefore, as a vocation of the Christian in and for the Church has an eschatological significance. What married people do in terms of their love for each other leads each other to salvation. That love, as a participation in God's own work of creation, brings new persons into the world who, by being raised within a family joined in Christian marriage, build up the Church through new generations. The foundation for the kind of person that a child becomes are often laid in childhood and, while they can later be changed or even rejected, such changes are often difficult. What marriage does, therefore, has an eternal, eschatological significance.⁸

What does marriage do? Catholic sacramental theology teaches that every sacrament confers both sanctifying grace and a specific sacramental grace,⁹ the latter enabling the recipient of that sacrament to live out its implications. Because the sacraments exist to build up the Christian community, sacramental grace also serves to enable the recipient of that sacrament to play a particular role within the Church.¹⁰

⁷ More than one hundred years ago, a Polish bishop made the case for the positive appreciation of temporal goods as a preparation for eternity in a still too-neglected text: see "Dr. Teodor Rzymiski," (pseudo. Teodora Kubiny), *Wartość dóbr doczesnych w świetle religii chrześcijańskiej. Szkic apologetyczno-społeczny* (Poznań 1906). Mark Fischer observes "[d]eath is not the end because we have already experienced immortality before death. It is the immortality of a commitment to the good. It is the immortality of a hope that God's grace and promise are real." *The Foundations of Karl Rahner: A Paraphrase of Foundations of Christian Faith with Introduction and Indices* (New York: Crossroad, 2005), p. 161. See also Karl Rahner, "Eternity from Time," in his *Theological Investigations*, vol. 14 (New York: Crossroad, 1983), pp. 169-77, especially pp. 170-73. I add the caveat that some of Rahner's reflections rest, in my judgment, on faulty philosophical premises.

⁸ This point deserves mention because traditional explanations have usually focused on celibacy or consecrated virginity as being "for the sake of the Kingdom," while ignoring that Christian marriage and family life are also lived in some sense "for the sake of the Kingdom." Likewise, while we often speak of marriage as ending with the death of one of the partners, Vatican II in fact also taught that all the sacraments are temporary: the Council specifically speaks of the pilgrim Church[s] . . . sacraments and institutions, *which pertain to this present time* . . . (Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, # 48, emphasis added).

⁹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, 62; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1129.

¹⁰ Married couples need to understand that the sacramental grace of marriage is, like the other sacraments, something positive, i.e., something that makes it possible for them to live up to what Christian marriage demands. This principle

Baptism, for example, is not just the discrete moment in infancy that “made”¹¹ someone a Christian. It is the constitutive event that continues to be the foundation of the Christian’s identity throughout his life and which assures the Christian that a faithful God will provide that person with what is necessary to achieve that sacrament’s goal, i.e., salvation. Likewise, marriage is that constitutive event that establishes the foundation of the Christian’s identity as a married person, an identity that perdures until death, and in which God pledges His faithfulness to provide the help a married Christian needs to be a married Christian. What “help” does God provide? The sacramental grace of marriage “... is intended to perfect the couple’s love and to strengthen their indissoluble unity.”¹² God is not a “judge” who establishes the “goals” of marriage and then later judges married people on how successfully they attained those goals. He is partner of the marriage, who does his part by always providing what the husband and wife need to fulfill the vocation they have freely chosen. Every marriage, therefore, is a “triangle,” because every marriage involves the man, the woman, and God.¹³

2. Marriage as Symbol of Christ’s Union to His Church

Marriage assumes an even greater role in building up the Church as “our home” precisely because Sacred Scripture itself speaks of marriage in ecclesiological terms. Marriage itself becomes the symbol of God’s union to His People. In the Old Testament, God presents His relationship to Israel as one of a faithful husband joined to a prostitute wife. His love, however, is so intense that, instead of availing himself of the option of divorce, he redoubles his efforts to win her back to their first love, “you

deserves emphasis in light of the debate among medieval theologians as to whether marriage conferred any positive grace as opposed to a grace that was negative or prophylactic, e.g., protecting the married person against concupiscence. See Schillebeeckx, pp. 327-38, esp. 337; Elliott, pp. 87-99, 180-90; Michael G. Lawler, *Secular Marriage, Christian Sacrament* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1985), pp. 36-37. Although Elliott specifically challenges the secularizing theology that underlies Schillebeeckx’s work, the same critique applies to Lawler.

¹¹ See *Made, Not Born: New Perspectives on Christian Initiation and the Catechumenate*, Notre Dame, 1976.

¹² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1641.

¹³ Every Christian marriage “triangle” therefore also bears a certain witness to the Love of the Trinity, a theme relevant to discussing the vocation of married persons within the Church but which the limits of space here exclude from discussion.

will call me ‘my husband’ and not ‘my Baal.’”¹⁴ This negative Old Testament symbolism—God as spouse of unfaithful Israel—is completely reversed in the New Testament. There, Christ’s Union to His Church is symbolized in the love of a husband for a pure and faithful bride.¹⁵

A genuine understanding of the profound significance of this text requires two things. First, we need to remind ourselves that Scripture is not just painting literary images. Contemporary man suffers from an impoverished notion of symbolism, one that fails to see the very real and actual link between a symbol and what it symbolizes. A symbol is more than just a picture; it is an actual and real participation in the reality it symbolizes.¹⁶ When St. Paul speaks of married Christians as a symbol of Christ’s union with His Church, the connection he draws is far deeper and more profound than just a literary allusion. Second, if Christ’s Union with His Church is symbolized in the man-woman relationship of marriage then, in a very real way, the Church begins in the home, and Christian spouses are also most at home in the Church.

If the union of husband and wife in marriage is a symbol of the union of Christ to His Church, then it also follows that the characteristics of one relationship are relevant to the other, and vice versa. Christ’s union to His Church is one, total, indissoluble, and fruitful. The first “note” of the Church is its unity. Christ’s Love for His Church is total and unreserved, given that the Church is made worthy of her Bridegroom precisely through His sacrifice.¹⁷ By virtue of that sacrifice, Christ’s covenant is eternal, and He remains with His Church “always, until the end of the world.”¹⁸ What Christ did for His Church makes her fruitful, makes her the new Eve who, through her sacraments, truly “became the mother of all the living.”¹⁹

So often today the essential characteristics of marriage—unity, totality, indissolubility, and fruitfulness—are viewed not as intrinsic elements of the institution, but as merely formal rules imposed by external authorities like the State or Church. From such a viewpoint, the Church is often accused of being “unrealistic” or “inhumane” because

¹⁴ Hosea 2:18, see also 2:16-22. One should also remember that these texts represented a major change in Israel’s understanding of God: instead of a towering transcendence, God is presented as being so intimately and immanently bound to Israel as a husband.

¹⁵ Ephesians 5:22-33.

¹⁶ See Jean Danielou, “The Problem of Symbolism,” *Thought*, 25 (1950): 423-40.

¹⁷ Ephesians 5:25-26.

¹⁸ Matthew 28:20.

¹⁹ Genesis 3:20.

it remains faithful to Christ in defending the indissolubility of marriage or the immorality of contraception. The state abets this tendency to regard the inherent characteristics of marriage as just so many social customs or conventions when some jurisdictions legislate wholly new definitions of “marriage” that ignore or deny those characteristics in positive civil law, e.g., when they declare that sexual differentiation is irrelevant to entering into marriage.

For the Christian, however, an awareness that the very nature of marriage is a symbol of Christ’s Union to His Church changes the entire picture. The Christian husband or wife should understand that his marriage participates in a reality larger than himself, so that the criteria of what marriage is have their foundation independent of the self-will of the partners. Coming to an awareness of that truth will itself represent a fundamental counter-cultural insight for Christians living in the contemporary world, because so much of modern social policy is rooted in self-willed individualism.²⁰ It will also, conversely, enable Christian married couples better to understand their Church, because if unity, totality, indissolubility and fruitfulness are essential aspects of their marital love, then those characteristics must also be elements of a Church founded upon the Love of Christ.

Let us consider fruitfulness for an example. Various reasons can be adduced for why fruitfulness is an essential dimension of acts of conjugal love. Marriage, which should be a total self-giving of love, is obviously not total if giving the possibility of maternity or paternity is excluded. It is obviously not a total receiving of the other if the offer of potential paternity or maternity is rejected. It is not totally human if one’s potential parenthood is treated not as a dimension of the other but merely as some subpersonal, “biological rhythm” to be manipulated. All the preceding arguments can be made on the basis of reason alone, without invoking revelation (although, obviously, considering them from the viewpoint of Christ’s total, life-giving love for His bride should make them more meaningful).

Fruitfulness, considered as the participation by Christian marriage in the life-giving generativity of the Church, adds a whole new spiritual dimension to the picture. Christ’s Union to His Church is life-giving: the sacraments, through which the Christian most immediately comes into contact with Christ’s total love for His Church, are also always

²⁰ The United States Supreme Court, for example, reaffirmed its decision that abortion is a Constitutionally protected right, claiming that “At the heart of liberty is the right to define one’s own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life” *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833 (1992) at 851.

life-giving. That is the essential import of what is meant by the teaching that the sacraments work *ex opere operato*. *Ex opere operato* does not mean that the sacraments are magic, producing effects once the “magic words” are said. It means that Christ is always faithful to His Love: provided the recipient of the sacrament does not himself oppose them (*non poentibus obicem*²¹), the sacraments will always give the life they promise.

If, then, Christ’s Love for His Church is always life-giving, then marital love—which is a symbol of Christ’s Love for His Church—should also be life-giving if it is to be true to itself. Marital “love” which rejects life is not merely contrary to what it should be, rationally understood. Contraceptive intercourse is, in fact, sacrilegious in the same sense that a sacrament received unworthily is a kind of spiritual contraception: in both cases, the natural life-giving orientation of the act is mutilated.²²

Likewise, the giving of life outside of the marital embrace through artificial reproduction, is not just a technical substitute for intercourse. Rather, just as the Eternal Son of the Father, whose Love is the image and measure for marital love, was “begotten, not made,” so neither should the fruit of marital love be the manufactured product of the test tube.²³

Numerous other examples can be adduced: why marriage is indissoluble; why monogamy is essential to marriage; how total love should be; the relationship of the Cross and marriage; marriage, its relationship to baptism, and its proper participation in the *triplex munere Christi*, etc. During this year dedicated to the theme of “The Church Is Our Home,” we should encourage an awareness among married

²¹ “Si quis dixerit, sacramenta novae Legis non continere gratiam, quam significant, aut gratiam ipsam non ponentibus obicem non conferre ... anathema sit.” Council of Trent, canon 6 on the “Sacraments in General,” *Symboles et définitions de la foi catholique*, ed. Peter Hünermann et Joseph Hoffmann (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2005), p. 434 (Denz. 1606); also in *The Church Teaches: Documents of the Church in English Translation* (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1955), p. 263. See also Karl Rahner, *The Church and the Sacraments* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), p. 32; Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ, the Sacrament of Encounter with God* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), pp. 68-73.

²² John F. Kippley, *Sex and the Marriage Covenant: A Basis for Morality* (Cincinnati: Couple to Couple League, 1991), pp. 81-86.

²³ William E. May, “‘Begotten, Not Made:’ Reflections on Laboratory Production of Human Life,” in *Pope John Paul II Lecture Series in Bioethics*, vol. 1, (Cromwell, CT: Holy Apostles College, 1983), pp. 53-55; see also Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, “Instruction on Respect for Human Life in Its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation: Replies to Certain Questions of the Day” [*Donum vitae*] issued February 22, 1987, esp. II.A.7.

couples of the deep relationship between what marriage is and what the Church is. Their relationship should model Christ's relationship to His Church, not because the Church says so or even because that image sounds poetic, romantic, or even pious. Their relationship should model Christ's relationship to His Church because the marriage relationship participates in and draws its sense from Christ's relationship with His Church. There is a particularly acute need today for Christian spouses to understand that truth, because the contemporary world (as well as not a few Christians) seem to think that the essential characteristics of marriage—unity, sexual differentiation, indissolubility, openness to life—are not inherent and inalienable aspects of marriage itself but only so much cultural baggage that can be changed by individual choice, majority decision, or governmental fiat. All these aspects of Christian marriage can appropriately be developed and catechized during a year dedicated to understanding "The Church [as] Our Home."

3. Some Concluding Thoughts

In *Familiaris consortio*, Pope John Paul II stressed the importance of "... understand[ing] . . . the many profound bonds linking the Church and the Christian family and establishing the family as a "Church in miniature."²⁴ If we take seriously the maxim *gratia supponit naturam*, then in fact those bonds are mutually illuminating: nature makes a rational case for what love should be, and grace illumines love's possibilities beyond the human's wildest imagination. Doctrinally, morally, and spiritually, Christian marriage comes to an ever deeper understanding of its own mystery by coming to an ever deeper understanding of the mystery of the Church. Because Christian marriage is the symbol *par excellence* of Christ's union with His Church, married Christians have unique opportunities to understand the nature of the Church and to contribute to the building up of that Church. That is because, for the married Christian, the Church truly is and should be "our home."

²⁴ Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, 49.