

Domestic Church A Survey of the Literature

It has been almost six years since I encountered the term “domestic church” in John Paul II’s *Familiaris consortio*¹, and three years since I completed a dissertation on the subject². In this short span of time there has been steady growth in the quantity and quality of scholarship devoted to a theology of family, and to domestic church specifically.

The greatest challenge in writing a survey of literature on domestic church comes in the initial step: locating authors and texts that treat the concept. I remember the first day I searched for the phrase “domestic church” among the library holdings of nine member schools of the Boston Theological Institute consortium and in theological research databases, indexes of dissertation abstracts, and theological dictionaries. Altogether there were about six items that cited domestic church in their title or in their narrative summary – quite discouraging! Eventually I uncovered many theologians, bishops, and pastoral specialists who have discussed domestic church in their writings. However, few authors place domestic church at the center of their thought, and this explains the scarcity of index references.³

To find literature on domestic church, one must sift through countless books and articles on marriage and family, many of which devote only a few pages or paragraphs to the concept.⁴ By doing this, I have assembled a bibliography of well over 100 articles and books from five continents which treat Christian families as domestic churches (alternate titles are “house church”, “little church”, “church in miniature”, or “church of the home”). The authors are Catholic, Orthodox,

and Protestant; they represent conservative, progressive, and moderate voices on the ideological spectrum.

My wish is that someday “domestic church” might be part of our common theological vocabulary and piety, as familiar to the average believer as “sacrament”, “minister”, “salvation”, “conscience”, or the “Golden Rule”. (As a corollary, I would be thrilled if every theological dictionary, book index, and library database included domestic church among its subject headings.) Because the term “domestic church” has appeared in a variety of writings, both pastoral and academic, and because it helps articulate a very basic arena of religious engagement, I am hopeful that the idea will take hold among average believers, pastors, and scholars alike. This would mean that Vatican II’s goal of overcoming the perceived dichotomy between “sacred” and “secular” life⁵ would be addressed at its root. Perhaps in a generation or two it will be second-nature for Christians to consider their families and households as a “base of operations” for their faith and witness.⁶

Writing in 1972, before the notion of domestic church was rediscovered by most contemporary Catholic theologians and pastoral authors, Rosemary Haughton offered one of the earliest and most detailed visions of what the Church might look like if, from the grassroots level to the top of the hierarchy, Catholics understood families as house-churches in the Pauline sense.⁷ The most fundamental point she makes is this: in the past, individuals physically and/or emotionally separated themselves from their families in order to live a truly spiritual life and serve the

Lord without distraction; in the future, we will assume that our God is encountered and served most readily in ordinary life and among members of one's family. Haughton includes suggestions concerning worship at home and in the parish, religious education, overcoming the clergy shortage, intercommunion, and interaction of home communities with each other and with communities of religious nuns, brothers, and priests. Whether or not one accepts all her practical suggestions, Haughton deserves credit for her attempt to flesh out, in concrete detail, what domestic churches might look like in contemporary times.

I. *The Origins of the Concept*

Where did the idea of domestic church or "church of the home" originate? When and how was it revived in Catholic theology? Most authors trace scriptural roots to the Pauline epistles (Rom 16,3-5,23; 1 Cor 16,15-20; Phil 4,21-22; Col 4,15; 2 Tim 4,19; Philem 1-2),⁸ and by extension to the Jewish tradition of family-based religious education and worship. Contemporary commentators are fond of pointing to patristic precedent among figures such as John Chrysostom, Augustine, Clement of Alexandria, and Gregory of Nazianus.⁹

¹ See JOHN PAUL II: *Familiaris consortio*, 21, 38, 48-54, 59, 61, 65, 86.

² See F. CAFFREY BOURG: "Christian Families as Domestic Churches: Insights from Theologies of Sacramentality, Virtue, and the Consistent Ethic of Life", Ph.D. diss., Boston College, 1998.

³ Even books that include discussion of domestic church sometimes neglect to include the term in their indexes. A recent example is M.G. LAWLER: *Family: American and Christian*, Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1998. In many other texts, such as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, domestic church is indexed as a sub-heading under some other topic (in this case, under another sub-heading "Church: structure, states, and constitution"), making relevant material more difficult to locate.

⁴ Despite the fact that the term "domestic church" made its modern debut in Roman Catholicism via Vatican II's *Lumen gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), II, it has received very little attention within the field of ecclesiology. There appears to be a need for better con-

versation among specialists in different branches of the-ology. Ecclesiological perspective is seen in works by Foley, Boelen, Aubert, Doohan, Haughton, Peelman, Potvin, Provencher, Rahner, and Guroian, to be discussed later in this article.

⁵ *Gaudium et spes*, 43.

⁶ See H.-J. KLAUCK: "Die Hausgemeinde als Lebensform im Urchristentum", in: *Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift* 32 (1981), 1-15, (along with various scripture scholars – see note 8, below), who explains that in the nascent era of Christianity the "house-church" was the cornerstone of the local church, the base of operations for mission, a place to assemble for prayer, catechesis, and eucharist, and the center of Christian fellowship. He adds that this ancient model might be adapted to the modern era, especially where the church finds itself a small community in a hostile world. L.S. CAHILL: *Family: A Christian Social Perspective*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000, likewise shows that such a model of the Christian household can be perceived in scripture and in the patristic period. She provides a captivating description drawn from the thought of John Chrysostom and from the example of his friend Olympias, a wealthy Christian widow who used her influence to advise bishops and to fund church projects. See chapters 2 and 3.

⁷ See R. HAUGHTON: "Experience of Family", in: R. HAUGHTON: *The Knife Edge of Experience*, London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1972, 115-120. Surprisingly, Haughton does not employ the term "domestic church" *per se*, and makes no reference to *Lumen gentium*, II.

⁸ See H.-J. KLAUCK: "Die Hausgemeinde"; L.S. CAHILL: *Family: A Christian Social Perspective*; V. BRANICK: *The House Church in the Writings of Paul*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1989; R. BANKS: *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in their Historical Setting*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980; J.H. ELLIOTT: "Philemon and House-Churches", in: *Bible Today* 22 (1984), 145-150; H. HENDRICKX, "The 'House Church' in Paul's Letters", in: *Theology Annual* 12 (1990-91); N. PROVENCHER: "Vers une théologie de la famille: L'Eglise domestique", in: *Eglise et Théologie* 12 (1981), 9-34, esp. 15ff.; C. OSIEK/D. BALCH: *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997.

⁹ For patristic sources, see PROVENCHER, "Vers une théologie de la famille", 19ff.; M. LAWLER: *Family: American and Christian*, 97; J. HEANEY-HUNTER: "Domestic Church: Guiding Beliefs and Daily Practices", in: M. LAWLER/R. ROBERTS (Eds.): *Christian Marriage and Family*, 59-78, esp. 62ff.; V. GUROIAN: "Family and Christian Virtue: Reflections on the Ecclesial Vision of John Chrysostom", in: V. GUROIAN: *Ethics After Christendom: Toward an Ecclesial Ethic*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994, 133-154; P. EVDOKIMOV: *The Sacrament of Love: The Nuptial Mystery in the Light of the Orthodox Tradition*, Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985, 121-123.

For instance, in his *Homily 20* on Ephesians, John Chrysostom states, “If we regulate our households [properly]...we will also be fit to oversee the Church, for indeed the household is a little Church. Therefore, it is possible for us to surpass all others in virtue by becoming good husbands and wives.”¹⁰ In a homily on the book of Acts, Chrysostom writes, “Let the house be a Church, consisting of men and women... ‘For where the two,’ He saith, ‘are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them.’”¹¹ Augustine describes Christian heads of households as having an episcopal function similar to his own: “Take my place in your families. Everyone who is head of a house must exercise the episcopal office and see to the faith of his people... Take care with all watchfulness for the salvation of the members of the household entrusted to you.”¹² Though we must strive for a positive theology of domestic church that matures beyond mere “proof-texting”, we must gratefully acknowledge that the existence of such patristic proof texts has allowed the idea of domestic church to gain a hearing among some audiences who otherwise might have dismissed the concept.¹³

2. *Orthodox and Protestant Perspectives*

Domestic church is a prominent theme in Orthodox marriage liturgy and theology; here it is typical to invoke the ecclesial symbolism attached to marriage in Eph 5,21-32.¹⁴ As one of the highlights of an Orthodox wedding the bride and groom are adorned with crowns. There are several symbolic meanings attached to these crowns; one is to remind the spouses of their role as rulers or leaders of their own domestic church. In another ancient ritual, the “churching” of new mothers (forty days after childbirth), we see not only a vestige of ritual purification, but also a ceremonial acknowledgment of the fact that a Christian mother has brought her child, even before his or her baptism, into the liturgical assembly of the Church.¹⁵ Alexander Schmemmann com-

ments, “The Christian family *belongs* to the Church, finds in the Church the source, the content, and the transcendent goal of its existence as a family. Therefore the child who belongs to the family, and in a most concrete biological sense to the mother, *thereby* belongs to the Church, is truly *her* child, already offered, already committed to God in the rite of churching.”¹⁶

The title “little church”, or even “seminary of the church”, has enjoyed favor among some Protestants. Lisa Sowle Cahill’s newly released book, *Family: A Christian Social Perspective*, is recommended reading for those seeking analysis of reformation-era references to domestic church, not simply as proof-texts, but set in their broader theological and cultural context.¹⁷ A few of the examples Cahill uncovers are these: In his commentary on one of St. Paul’s “house church” texts (1 Cor 16,19), John Calvin remarks enthusiastically, “What a wonderful thing to put on record, that the name ‘church’ is applied to a single family, and yet it is fitting that all the families of believers should be organized in such a way as to be so many little churches.”¹⁸

Thomas Taylor, a 17th century English Puritan, advises, “Let every master of his family see to what is called, namely, to make his house a little church, to instruct every one of his family in the fear of God, to contain every one of them under his holy discipline, to pray with them and for them”.¹⁹ Thomas Martin describes the Old Order Amish as an example of a denomination that organizes itself via house churches. For them, the basic unit of church organization is the Church district, which is defined by “the number of people who can meet for the preaching service in one dwelling house”²⁰.

Both Cahill and Martin clarify that these examples of domestic church were not as socially-minded as current Catholic magisterial teaching encourages Christian families to be. For instance, the Amish maintain themselves as pure communities by shunning the world, as well as family members who fall into sin after adult baptism.²¹ The English Puritans made the father responsible for teaching the faith to his own family, but

chastised him for reaching out to a more public audience.²²

By comparison, Cahill says, the African-American churches – both Protestant and Catholic – seem to have maintained a more consistent pattern of family-centered social outreach.²³ *In Roots of a Black Future: Family and Church*, J. Deotis Roberts concurs: “Traditionally the black church has been an extended family and the family has been a ‘domestic church’. At the center of this affirmation is the Biblical image of the church as the family of God ... Throughout the African-American tradition the family system has been central to understanding the church – its purpose and mission. At the same time religion has been the core of fulfilled family life. Because of severe racist oppression, there have been times when the church has been a family for the homeless and times when the family altar has been a domestic church.”²⁴

3. Roman Catholic Perspectives

Compared to their Orthodox and Protestant fellows, Catholics (theologians particularly) never recovered the concept of domestic church lost after the patristic period.²⁵ Of course, devotional

¹⁰ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM: *Homily 20*, cited in V. GUROIAN: “Family and Christian Virtue”, 134.

¹¹ JOHN CHRYSOSTOM: *Homily 26*, cited in V. GUROIAN: “Family and Christian Virtue”, 139.

¹² AUGUSTINE: *Sermo 94*, cited in B. HÄRING: “The Christian Family as a Community for Salvation”, in: J. ALFARO (Ed.): *Man Before God: Toward A Theology of Man*, New York: P.J. Kennedy & Sons, 1966, 154.

¹³ The proceedings of Vatican II, recorded in *Acta Synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, reveal this dynamic. See the analysis by M. FAHEY: “The Christian Family as Domestic Church at Vatican II”, in: *Concilium* 4 (1995), 85-92.

¹⁴ A valuable introduction is found in the video *Holy Matrimony*, Brooklyn: Greek Orthodox Telecommunications, 1993. See also V. GUROIAN: “Family and Christian Virtue” and P. EVDOKIMOV: *The Sacrament of Love*; P. EVDOKIMOV: “Ecclesia Domestica”, in: *L’Agneau d’or* 107 (1962), 353-362; P. EVDOKIMOV: “The Theology of Marriage”, in: P. EVDOKIMOV/G. CRESPIY/C. DUQUOC (Eds.): *Marriage and Christian Tradition*, Techny: Divine

Word Publications, 1968, 85-87; V. GUROIAN: “An Ethic of Marriage and Family”, in: W. BOULTON/T. KENNEDY/A. VERHEY (Eds.): *From Christ to the World: Introductory Readings in Christian Ethics*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994, 322-330, originally published in V. GUROIAN: *Incarnate Love: Essays in Orthodox Ethics*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987.

¹⁵ See V. GUROIAN: “Family and Christian Virtue”, 143.

¹⁶ A. SCHMEMANN: *Of Water and the Spirit*, Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974, 145.

¹⁷ See L.S. CAHILL: *Family: A Christian Social Perspective*, chapter 3. For Protestant references to “little church” and similar metaphors see also T. MARTIN: “The Family as Domestic Church: Why There is a Family Perspective on Social Issues”, in: P. VOYDANOFF/T.M. MARTIN (Eds.): *Using a Family Perspective in Catholic Social Justice and Family Ministries*, Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1995 (Roman Catholic Studies; 6), 19-38; M. STACKHOUSE: *Covenant and Commitments: Faith, Family, and Economic Life*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997; J. WITTE: *From Sacrament to Contract: Marriage, Religion, and Law in the Western Tradition*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997; and W.J. EVERETT: *Blessed Be the Bond: Christian Perspectives on Marriage and Family*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985.

¹⁸ J. CALVIN: *Commentary on 1 Corinthians*, cited in L.S. CAHILL: *Family: A Christian Social Perspective*, 71.

¹⁹ T. TAYLOR: *Works*, cited in L.S. CAHILL: *Family: A Christian Social Perspective*, 71.

²⁰ T. MARTIN: “The Family as Domestic Church”, 32.

²¹ See *ibid.* 33-34.

²² See *ibid.* 31, where the author recounts: “John Etherington, for example, ‘was fined and imprisoned by the High Commission on a charge of expounding the Scripture to others besides his own family’ in 1626. As early as 1583 the Puritans had prohibited ‘all preaching, reading, catechism, and other such-like exercises in private places and families whereunto others do resort, being not of the same family.’”

²³ L.S. CAHILL: *Family: A Christian Social Perspective*, chapter 5.

²⁴ J.D. ROBERTS: *Roots of a Black Future: Family and Church*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1980, 80, 86.

²⁵ There are noteworthy exceptions: B. HÄRING: “Die christliche Familie als Heilsgemeinschaft, grundsätzliche Schau”, in: B. HÄRING: *Ehe in dieser Zeit*, Salzburg: Otto Müller, 1960, 164-176, translated as “The Christian Family as a Community for Salvation”, in: *Marriage in the Modern World*, Westminster: Newman Press, 1965, and in J. ALFARO (Ed.): *Man Before God*; as well as K. RAHNER: *The Church and the Sacraments*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1963, 111-112. Both Häring and Rahner comment, albeit briefly, on the profound sacramental significance of Christian marriage as a “church in miniature”, and as an instrument of encounter with

practices in the home remained common among Catholics; parents did their best to share their faith with their children and to ensure that their children received the necessary sacraments. The idea that everyday life had religious significance was not lost upon these believers; for instance, elders tried to shelter impressionable youth from a myriad of daily temptations that might lead to sin, and advised them that daily struggles should be “offered up” and united with Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross.

Nevertheless, a comprehensive web of theory, popular catechism, and custom engendered among many lay Catholics a sense that marriage and family life were “secular” or “worldly”, that they were not vocations (or, they were second-class vocations), and that “the Church” was a shorthand way of referring to clergy, consecrated buildings, the pope, etc. – that is, institutions and persons holier than themselves. Clergy and vowed religious were also schooled this worldview, whether deliberately or inadvertently.²⁶ Through my college teaching, I have found that this “tradition” remains alive even among the generation born after Vatican II, often awkwardly juxtaposed with contemporary-sounding beliefs. Thus, today’s Catholic pastors and teachers must coax their audiences to “unlearn” their habits of religious thinking in order to comprehend the idea of domestic church as recent magisterial documents portray it.²⁷

Thanks to a persistent advocate, Bishop Pietro Fiordelli of Prato, Italy, the idea of *ecclesia domestica* was included in the documents of the Second Vatican Council (*Lumen gentium*, 11, and parallels in *Apostolicam actuositatem*, 11, and *Gaudium et spes*, 48).²⁸ Michael Fahey’s 1995 essay on “The Christian Family as Domestic Church at Vatican II” is essential reading for anyone interested in the debate that led to inclusion of domestic church in *Lumen gentium*, 11.²⁹ Bishop Fiordelli’s experience reveals the challenge of provoking people toward new habits of thinking about Christian families as ecclesial communities. Fahey recounts that when Fiordelli first proposed a section on Christian marriage and family in *Lumen gentium*,

he was interrupted by the presiding Cardinal Alfrink of Utrecht, who said that the topic “did not seem germane to the discussion at hand”³⁰. Bishop Fiordelli eventually yielded the floor, but campaigned for the idea of *minuscula ecclesia* through a written statement and a second oral intervention.

Fiordelli apparently intended for the Council’s treatment of the Christian family as *minusculae ecclesiae* to be associated with the discussion of local or particular churches, but instead the phrase *ecclesia domestica* was used. It was incorporated in a rather ordinary-sounding reminder for parents to teach the faith to their children and cultivate religious vocations among them. Perhaps because the way *ecclesia domestica* was placed in *Lumen gentium* did not signal much that was innovative, most theologians and pastoral authors in the wake of the Council busied themselves with other concerns.³¹ However, section 71 of Paul VI’s *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1971) expands upon the treatment of domestic church in *Lumen gentium* and, indeed, seems to have better captured the ecclesial significance Fiordelli had in mind.

Notable in the pope’s brief remarks were these points: (1) “There should be found in every Christian family the various aspects of the entire Church” – suggesting a comprehensive mission extending beyond raising up faith and vocations among one’s own children. (2) In a family conscious of its mission as domestic church “all members evangelize and are evangelized” – suggesting that the activity of a domestic church is not simply derivative of a couple’s marital relationship. (3) A domestic church should be “an evangelizer of other families and of the neighborhood of which it forms a part”; like the Church Universal, it should not seclude itself from “the world” or be exclusively preoccupied with its own salvation. (4) Domestic churches are not necessarily built upon the marriage of two Catholics: in a “mixed marriage” of two baptized Christians, this mission remains the same because it is the “consequence of a common baptism”. Such families have “the difficult task of becoming builders of unity”,

– put differently, they are at the “cutting edge” of the ecumenical movement.

In 1980-81 the world witnessed a Synod of Bishops devoted to the theme of family,³² followed by the release of John Paul II's *Familiaris consortio*.³³ Domestic church had been a regular

Christ. Rahner goes so far as to call Christian marriage “the smallest of local churches”, specifically clarifying that in the local church “the whole Church in a true sense is manifested as a totality”. In a similar vein Häring cites Augustine's instruction for heads of household to “exercise the episcopal office” in their families and take responsibility for salvation of family members. Subsequent Rahnerian references to the “house church” are K. RAHNER: “Marriage as a Sacrament”, in: *Theological Investigations*, vol. 10, New York: Seabury Press, 1977, 199-221, esp. 212, 221; K. RAHNER: “The Sacramental Basis for the Role of the Layman in the Church”, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 8, New York: Seabury Press, 1977, 51-74, esp. 70; and K. RAHNER: *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, New York: Seabury Press, 1978, 420-421. Also remarkable for this time period is M. PERKINS: *Beginning at Home: The Challenge of Christian Parenthood*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1955. Perkins, writing a book designed to be inspirational reading for parents, urges readers to consider their homes “little churches” (65) and promotes a sacramental, ecclesial interpretation of the Christian family comparable in essence to that asserted by Rahner and Häring.

²⁶ In *Familiaris consortio*, 16, John Paul II reiterates the tradition that consecrated celibacy is a higher calling than either single life or Christian marriage.

²⁷ See B. BOELEN: “Church Renewal and the Christian Family”, in: *Studies in Formative Spirituality*, 2 (1981), 359-369. In this insightful essay, Boelen elaborates: “The shift from the preconciliar understanding of the Christian family in terms of ‘functions’ and ‘subjects’ to the renewed understanding in terms of the ‘domestic church’ is so profound, so overwhelming and far-reaching, that its full realization will be long in coming...It goes without saying that the Christian family encounters many obstacles to its attempt to renew itself. To elaborate on just one example, the habit of looking upon itself as ‘laity’ in the preconciliar sense is hard to break...many lay persons and their families still want ‘to be told’ what to do; they hold the hierarchy responsible for all decisions in the Church, and feel guilty or even sinful when they themselves take initiative or accept responsibility...The habit on the part of some Church officials of looking upon themselves as ‘hierarchy’ in the preconciliar sense is understandably hard to break too...When these Church ‘officials’ fail to listen to what the Holy Spirit is revealing to the domestic church, they fail to listen to the Church itself...The Church cannot become

an integral part of the Christian family's self-understanding unless this domestic church becomes and integral part of the Church's self-understanding” (367, 369). For helpful commentary on Vatican II developments in the theology of family/domestic church, sympathetic to Boelen's theme of unlearning old habits of thinking about family, church, laity, etc., see J. HEANEY-HUNTER: “Domestic Church: Guiding Beliefs and Daily Practices”; R. HAUGHTON: *Problems of Christian Marriage*, New York: Paulist Press, 1968, 39ff.; and D. THOMAS: “Family Comes of Age in the Catholic Church”, in: *Journal of Family Ministry* 12/2 (1998), 38-51.

²⁹ See note 13, above.

³⁰ M. FAHEY: “The Christian Family as Domestic Church at Vatican II”, 86.

³¹ For reasons I cannot discern, there were proportionately fewer American authors engaged with the idea of domestic church during this period. Besides Paul VI's brief reference in *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 71, John Paul II's citation in *Catechesi tradendae*, 68, and works by Rahner, Boelen, Haughton, Evdokimov, Provencher, and Klaucek cited previously, these pieces are found from the period between Vatican II and the release of Pope John Paul II's *Familiaris consortio* in 1981: P. AHR: “The Internal Dynamics of the Sacrament of Marriage”, in: J. McHUGH (Ed.): *Working Papers on the Theology of Marriage*, Washington, DC: USCC Family Life Bureau, 1967, 12-19; C. CARRETTO: *Famiglia, piccola chiesa*, Rome: Editrice A.V.E., 1971; A. PEELMAN: “La famille comme réalité ecclésiale”, in: *Eglise et théologie* 12 (1981), 95-114; T. POTVIN: “La famille – Eglise domestique”, in: *Prêtre et pasteur* 83 (1980), 311-322; M.R. RUIZ: “La familia como iglesia domestica”, in: *Studium* 18 (1978), 321-332; E. HAYS: *Prayers for the Domestic Church: A Handbook for Worship in the Home*, Easton: Forest of Peace Books, 1979; M. & B. HILL: “The Family as a Center of Ministry”, in: G. DURKA/J. SMITH (Eds.): *Family Ministry*, Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1980, 202-226, esp. 204ff.

³² See J. GROOTERS/J. SELLING (Eds.): *The 1980 Synod of Bishops “On the Role of the Family”*, Leuven: Peeters, 1983 (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium; 64).

³³ A thorough examination of magisterial statements on family life from Vatican II through John Paul II, with significant attention to domestic church, has been written by D. MILLER: *Concepts of Family Life in Modern Catholic Theology from Vatican II through “Christifideles Laici”*, San Francisco: Catholic Scholars Press, 1996. Similar information covering the period from 1945-1990 is found in C.F. HINZE: “Catholic: Family Unity and Diversity within the Body of Christ”, in: P. AIRHART/M.L. BENDROTH (Eds.): *Faith Traditions and the Family*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996, 53-72. J. MARTOS: “The Evolving Ideal of the Family in the Catholic Tradition”, in: R. CARTER/S. ISENBERG (Eds.): *The Ideal in the World's Religions: Essays on the Person,*

feature of the pope's speeches, but it now became a more deliberate theme in his writings.³⁴ Here the ecclesial significance of family communities is developed in more depth, and we find several provocative statements, particularly in section 49: the Christian family is said to be "a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion" and "a living image and historical representation of the church". Domestic churches "not only receive the love of Christ and become a saved community, but they are also called upon to communicate Christ's love to brethren, thus becoming a saving community."

At this point, more theologians took notice of the theme of domestic church, and took the appearance of *Familiaris consortio* as an occasion to reflect upon our topic in connection with established theological concepts such as sacrament, trinity, worship, evangelization, and communion.³⁵ A few authors followed the pope's lead in *Evangelium vitae*, 92 (1995) and examined domestic church in connection with the notion of the sacredness of human life.³⁶ Also in the 1980's, several widely-read American authors in the "family spirituality" genre voiced enthusiasm for the concept of domestic church.³⁷

4. Recent Writings

Soon the United States bishops' conference took up the domestic church theme. In *A Family Perspective in Church and Society* (1988) they urged pastoral leaders to develop a family-centered approach to ministry and to evaluate all parish and diocesan programs to see if they enabled families to become active agents, rather than passive recipients, of church ministry.³⁸ Their 1994 document *Follow the Way of Love* is directed to families themselves, especially heads of households. Here the US bishops seem to self-consciously respond to those who are skeptical of rigid definitions of "the" family, and of conservative "family values" rhetoric. They assure their audiences that a family does not need to be perfect, nor a two-parent nuclear family, nor a family of two Catholics, in

order to function as a church of the home. In fact, at the end of a two-page description of activities befitting domestic churches, the bishops clarify, "No domestic church does all this perfectly. But neither does any parish or diocesan church. All members of the Church struggle daily to become more faithful disciples of Christ."³⁹

At about the same time that the US bishops were drafting these documents, the American theological community was also being drawn into broader – and often heated – cultural debates about "family values". Michael Lawler and Lisa Sowle Cahill have suggested that, in this context, audiences who rejected conservative "family values" rhetoric (because of perceived gender stereotypes, hostility toward "non-traditional" families, and inadequate commitment to supporting poor/minority families) initially showed little enthusiasm for the Catholic magisterium's promotion of families as domestic churches.⁴⁰ In response to this cultural debate, the Lilly Endowment provided funding for a wide-ranging ecumenical and social-scientific research initiative, the "Family, Religion, and Culture Project", housed at the University of Chicago under the direction of Don Browning. The project produced a series of eleven volumes published by Westminster/John Knox Press between 1996 and 1998, and a second phase will be published by William B. Eerdmans beginning in 2000.

In 1993, the Catholic Theological Society of America, then under the leadership of Lisa Sowle Cahill, received a request from the US bishops' Committee on Marriage and Family, chaired by Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, for serious theological investigation of theology of family, and of domestic church in particular. The result was a task force which hosted panel presentations at the 1994 and 1995 CTSA conventions and which prepared a final report to the US bishops in October 1997 and to CTSA members in May 1998.⁴¹ Parallel initiatives include a 1995 volume in the *Concilium* series devoted to the family⁴², a 1998 issue of the journal *Interpretation* on the same theme,⁴³ and research sponsored by the Center for Marriage and Family at Creighton University in

Omaha, Nebraska (USA), under the direction of Michael Lawler.⁴⁴ These resources are not focused solely on the domestic/house church theme, but together they include biblical, historical, theological, and pastoral perspectives on our topic.

Meanwhile, halfway around the world, the idea of “Church as family of God” was chosen by the 1994 Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Africa (meeting in Rome) as their guiding ecclesiological model, particularly for efforts at evangelization through small Christian communities. This event prompted a number of thoughtful essays from the African continent which examine pastoral and ecclesiological implications of the idea of domestic church.⁴⁵ Also in

Family, Society, and Environment, St. Paul: Paragon House, 1997, 233-251 examines 20th century magisterial thought on the family. See also N. METTE: “The Family in the Teaching of the Magisterium”, in: *Concilium* 4 (1995), 74-84; M. FARLEY: “Family”, in: J. DWYER (Ed.): *New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1994, 371-381; and R. GARCIA DE HARO: *Marriage and the Family in the Documents of the Magisterium: A Course in the Theology of Marriage*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993.

³⁴ Besides *Familiaris consortio* citations (see note 1, above), see *Catechesi tradendae*, 68; *Christifideles laici*, 62; *Letter to Families*, 3, 5, 13, 15, 16, 19; *Evangelium vitae*, 92. John Paul II’s weekly general audiences on sexuality, marriage, and celibacy are collected by the Daughters of St. Paul in a volume entitled *Theology of the Body: Human Love in the Divine Plan* (Boston: St. Paul Books and Media, 1997). References to family in other contexts dating from John Paul II’s election in October 1978 through December 1982, apart from these general audiences and *Familiaris consortio*, can be found in S. O’BYRNE (Ed.): *The Family: Domestic Church*, Athone: St. Paul Publications, 1984. Another collection of John Paul II’s statements on the family through 1988 is A. SARMIENTO/J. ESCRIVA (Eds.): *Enchiridion familiae*, Madrid: Ediciones Rialp, 1992.

³⁵ For instance, W. ROBERTS: “The Family as Domestic Church: Contemporary Implications”, in: M. LAWLER/R. ROBERTS (Eds.): *Christian Marriage and Family*, 79-90; G. KONERMAN: “The Family as Domestic Church”, in: J. MORGAN (Ed.): *Church Divinity*, Bristol: Wyndham Hall Press, 1990-91, 58-67; D. THOMAS: “Home Fires: Theological Reflections on the Christian Family”, in: S. SAXTON (Ed.): *The Changing Family*, Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1984, 15-21; M. GALLAGHER: “Family as Sacrament”, in: S. SAXTON (Ed.): *The Changing Family*, 5-13; W. MAY: “The Christian Family:

A Domestic Church”, in: W. MAY: *Marriage: The Rock on Which the Family is Built*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995, 101-119; J. POLLARD: “Leaders in the Domestic Church”, in: *Momentum* 20/2 (1989), 19-21; L. ALESSIO/H. MUÑOZ: *Marriage and Family: The Domestic Church*, New York: Alba House, 1982; G. MARTINEZ: “Marriage as Worship: Theological Analogy”, *Worship* 62 (1988), 350; J.-M. AUBERT: “La famille cellule d’Eglise”, in: *Divinitas* 26 (1982), 305-314; A. LOPEZ TRUJILLO: “The Family at the Center of New Evangelization”, in: A. MASTROENI (Ed.): *The Church at the Service of the Family: Proceedings of the 16th Convention of the Fellowship of Catholic Scholars, Orange, California, 1993*, Steubenville, OH: Franciscan University Press, 1993, 3-21; P. & W. MAY: “The Family as a Saved and Saving Community: A Specific and Original Ecclesial Role”, in: A. MASTROENI (Ed.): *The Church at the Service of the Family*, 179-209 (includes a response by Timothy and Catherine O’Donnell).

³⁶ See J. HEANEY-HUNTER: “The Domestic Church Proclaims the Gospel of Life”, in: *Living Light* (Fall 1995), 27-38; S. CALDECOTT: “The Family at the Heart of a Culture of Life”, in: *Communio* 23 (1996), 89-100.

³⁷ See M. & K. FINLEY: *Christian Families in the Real World: Reflections on a Spirituality for the Domestic Church*, Chicago: Thomas More, 1984; D. LECKEY: *The Ordinary Way: A Family Spirituality*, New York: Crossroad, 1982, 5; W. WRIGHT: *Sacred Dwelling: A Spirituality of Family Life*, New York: Crossroad, 1989, 24-26; M. THOMPSON: *Family: The Forming Center*, Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1989, 23-28 and chapter 8; also E. HAYS: *Prayers for the Domestic Church*.

³⁸ For commentary on this document, see J. TROKAN: “The Challenge of Ministry with a Family Perspective: An Ecological View”, in: *New Theology Review* 5/2 (1992), 20-32.

³⁹ Washington, DC: USCC, 1994, 10.

⁴⁰ See M.G. LAWLER: *Family: American and Christian*, 105; L.S. CAHILL: *Family: A Christian Social Perspective*, 93ff.; L.S. CAHILL: *Sex, Gender, and Christian Ethics*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 207-211.

⁴¹ The final report and accompanying papers from task force members (Christine Firer Hinze, Susan Secker, William Roberts, Jeannette Holguin-Rodriguez, Richard Gaillardetz, Joann Heaney-Hunter, and Sidney Callahan) have not yet been published for general readership.

⁴² *Concilium* 4 (1995).

⁴³ *Interpretation* 52/2 (1998).

⁴⁴ Lawler’s work has been published in his book *Family: American and Christian*; in a collaborative essay with G. REICH: “Covenant Generativity: Toward a Theology of Christian Family”, *Horizons* 26 (1999), 7-30; and in a book edited in partnership with W. ROBERTS: *Christian Marriage and Family: Contemporary Theological and Pastoral Perspectives*, Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996.

⁴⁵ See F.K. LUMBALA: “The Church as Family in Africa”, in: *Concilium* 4 (1995), 93ff.; E. OROBATOR: “Leadership

1994, the Australian Catholic bishops' conference published *Families, Our Hidden Treasure*⁴⁶.

5. Areas for Further Research

What about domestic churches remains to be explored? There are several areas that appear to be "cutting edge" topics. First, when will domestic church assume its proper place in ecclesiology? Some authors who specialize in theology of the laity have raised this question⁴⁷, and rightly so – domestic church has been curiously absent as a theological category in the thought of prominent ecclesiologists.⁴⁸ Second, assuming domestic church does find its proper place in ecclesiology, will so-called "interchurch" Christian families be appreciated for their ecumenical significance?⁴⁹ Already a provocative pool of literature has begun to develop around this topic. For instance, Ernest Falardeau and Ladislav Örsy advocate an interpretation of Roman Catholic canon law that will allow for the possibility of more frequent shared communion among interchurch families.⁵⁰ An international support group founded in England, the Association of Interchurch Families, maintains a website with many articles and testimonials that invoke the concept of domestic church.⁵¹

A third area of welcome development comes from authors who emphasize the untapped potential of domestic churches as prophetic witnesses and agents of the church's social mission. As an alternative to narrow, insular "family values" rhetoric, authors such as Lisa Sowle Cahill, James and Kathleen McGinnis, and Julie Hanlon Rubio, among others, call for domestic churches to "transform society". Christian families might do this by becoming role models of non-violence, voluntary simplicity, gender equality, and hospitality, by educating themselves about the needs of their brothers and sisters around the world, by works of charity, and by using their political influence to address root causes of injustice.⁵²

Finally, there exists the need to examine why the notion of domestic church remains relatively unknown among average believers.⁵³ Surely there

are untapped opportunities for cultivating a sense of domestic church among believers of all ages. Marriage preparation is one such opportunity, but catechesis confined to a weekend retreat for engaged couples will be "too little, too late".⁵⁴ If the idea of domestic church is to become "second nature", it must be an integral component of preparation of parents for their children's sacraments, bereavement ministries, Sunday worship, parish decision-making structures, and so on.

and Ministry in the Church-as-Family: An Essay on Alternative Models", in: *Hekima Review* 17 (1997), 7-18; P. LWAMINDA: "The African Synod and the Family", in: *African Christian Studies* 11/2 (1995), 46-53; K. OWAN: "African Marriage and Family Patterns: Towards Inculturative Evangelization", in: *African Christian Studies* 11/3 (1995); and P. WAGUA, "Pastoral Care for Incomplete Families: A Forgotten Ministry in Africa", *African Ecclesiastical Review* 38 (1996), 114-124. African-American thought invoking the domestic church theme is covered in L.S. CAHILL: *Family: A Christian Social Perspective*, chapter 5. Sources cited by Cahill include J.D. ROBERTS: *Roots of a Black Future*; T. EUGENE: "African American Family Life: An Agenda for Ministry within the Catholic Church", in: *New Theology Review* 5/2 (1992), 33-47; T. EUGENE: "'Lifting as We Climb': Womanist Theorizing about Religion and the Family", in: A. CARR/M.S. VAN LEEUWEN (Eds.): *Religion, Feminism, and the Family*, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1996, 330-343; T. BOWMAN (Ed.): *Families: Black and Catholic, Catholic and Black*, Washington, DC: USCC, 1985.

⁴⁶ Melbourne: Aurora Books, 1994. Other Australian authors writing about domestic church include D. EDWARDS: "The Open Table: Theological Reflections on the Family", in: *The Australasian Catholic Record* 72 (1995), 327-339 and F. O'LOUGHLIN: "Theology of Family", in: *Compass: A Review of Topical Theology* 29 (1995), 33-40.

⁴⁷ See L. DOOHAN: *Laité's Mission in the Local Church: Setting a New Direction*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986, 72ff.; L. DOOHAN: "The Church as Family", in: *The Lay-Centered Church: Theology and Spirituality*, Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1984; P. BRENNAN: "The Domestic Church and a Family Perspective", in: *Re-imagining the Parish: Base Communities, Adulthood, and Family Consciousness*, New York: Crossroad, 1990, 115-120; G. FOLEY: *Family-Centered Church: A New Parish Model*, Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1995; M.A. FOLEY: "Towards an Ecclesiology of the Domestic Church", in: *Eglise et théologie* 27 (1996), 351-373; M. FINLEY: "A Family Ecclesiology", in: *America* 149 (30 July 1983), 50; M. & K. FINLEY: *Christian Families in the Real World*, II; A. PEELMAN: "La famille comme réalité ecclésiale", 102.

- ⁴⁸ Evidence of such neglect is seen in the recent book A. DULLES/P. GRANFIELD (Eds.): *The Theology of Church: A Bibliography*, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1999. The book is 198 pages of bibliography, organized under 53 subject headings – without any heading for domestic church.
- ⁴⁹ Among ministers who work with such families, the term “interdenominational” is now favored over the term “mixed marriage”. “Interchurch” is a term applied to those interdenominational marriages where spouses from two different Christian denominations (and their children) remain active in the home churches of *both* spouses.
- ⁵⁰ See G. KILCOURSE: *Double-Belonging: Interchurch Families and Christian Unity*, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1992; G. KILCOURSE: “Interchurch Families: Living Ecumenically”, in: *Church* 8/3 (1992), 20-23; T. LINCOLN: “Ecclesiology, Marriage, and Historical Consciousness: The Domestic Church as an Ecumenical Opportunity”, in: *New Theology Review* 8/1 (1995), 58-68; L. ÖRSY: “Interchurch Families and the Eucharist”, in: *Doctrine & Life* 47/1 (1997), 10-13; L. ÖRSY: “Interchurch Families and Reception of the Eucharist”, in: *America* 175 (12 October 1996), 18-19; E. FALARDEAU: “The Church, the Eucharist, and the Family”, in: *One in Christ* 33/1 (1997), 20-30; E. FALARDEAU: “The Eucharist and the Domestic Church”, in: *Emmanuel* 102 (1996), 538-541; E. FALARDEAU: “Eucharist and the Family: Essential to Communion”, in: *Church* 11/4 (1995), 19-22; E. FALARDEAU: “The Family as Communion”, in: *Emmanuel* 102 (1996), 489-492; E. FALARDEAU: “Mutual Recognition of Baptism and the Pastoral Care of Interchurch Marriages”, in: *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 28 (1991), 63-73.
- ⁵¹ The Association of Interchurch Families website is www.aifw.org.
- ⁵² See T. MARTIN: “The Family as Domestic Church”; L.S. CAHILL: *Family: A Christian Social Perspective*; L.S. CAHILL: “Families Offer Way to Transform Society”, in: *National Catholic Reporter*, 8 March 1996; J. & K. MCGINNIS: “Family as Domestic Church”, in: J. COLEMAN (Ed.): *One Hundred Years of Catholic Social Thought*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991, 120-134; J. HANLON RUBIO: “Does Family Conflict With Community?”, in: *Theological Studies* 58 (1997), 597-617; J. CARR: “Natural Allies: Partnership Between Social Justice and Family Ministries”, in: P. VOYDANOFF/T.M. MARTIN (Eds.): *Using a Family Perspective in Catholic Social Justice and Family Ministries*, 99-111; T. LANGAN: “Bolstering the Domestic Church”, in: *Communio* 9 (1982), 100-109. See S.V. BRAKMAN: “Responsibilities Within the Family”, in: J. DWYER (Ed.): *Vision and Values: Ethical Viewpoints in the Catholic Tradition*, Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1999, 129-147, for a discussion of domestic church in connection with themes of “distributive justice” and “filial obligations” among different generations of one’s family. Conflicts involving this issue might arise when care for elder members imposes burdens on younger members and their own children, or when a member who has distanced her/himself from the family returns.
- ⁵³ See my own essay, “Accessing the Knowledge of Domestic Churches: Sociological Challenge and Theological Imperative”, forthcoming in: M. BARNES (Ed.): *Theology and the Social Sciences*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 2001 (The Annual Publication of the College Theology Society; 46).
- ⁵⁴ For an alternate approach which fully appreciates initiation into leadership of the domestic church, see J. HEANEY-HUNTER: “The RCIA: A Model for Marriage Preparation?” in: *Living Light* (Spring 1991), 209-217, and her RCIA-based marriage preparation program, *UNITAS*, New York: Crossroad, 1998.

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• Résumé

Cet article établit une compilation de textes bibliques, historiques, théologiques, pastoraux, spirituels et magistraux traitant de la question des familles chrétiennes comme Eglise domestique. Sont rassemblés dans cette compilation des auteurs catholiques, protestants et orthodoxes des cinq continents et la plupart des sources citées datent de 1990/92. L'article reprend l'enchaînement des événements entourant la réapparition de l'idée d'*ecclesia domestica* à Vatican II, ainsi que des notions parallèles, voire des précurseurs de ce concept que l'on peut rencontrer dans les Ecritures, la patristique et dans les écrits de la Réforme. Le terme «Eglise domestique» trouve son origine dans les Epîtres de Paul. On retrouve encore cette idée dans quelques textes de la patristique grecque et chez Saint Augustin. C'est une idée qui est traitée dans la liturgie du mariage et la théologie de l'Eglise orthodoxe.

• Kurzfassung

Dieser Artikel stellt biblische, historische, theologische, pastorale, spirituelle und lehramtliche Literatur zusammen, in der die christliche Familie als Hauskirche behandelt wird. Katholische, orthodoxe und protestantische Autoren aus fünf Kontinenten werden vorgestellt; die meisten der behandelten Quellen stammen aus den neunziger Jahren. Die Folgen der Neubelebung des Gedankens der *ecclesia domestica* durch das II. Vatikanum werden im Einzelnen aufgeführt sowie Parallelen und Vorgänger des Begriffs aus der Schrift, aus der Patristik und aus

L'Église domestique: Un survol de la littérature sur ce sujet

Des auteurs protestants de l'époque de la Réforme, dont Jean Calvin et Thomas Taylor nomment la famille une «petite Eglise». Les catholiques ont repris cette idée à Vatican II (comme en témoigne son inclusion dans le document *Lumen gentium*). L'élaboration de cette conception a été poursuivie par le pape Paul VI dans son *Evangelii nuntiandi* qui reconnaît que la famille contient en soi les caractéristiques de l'Eglise universelle. Depuis la publication par le pape Jean-Paul II de *Familiaris consortio*, on accorde un renouveau d'attention au terme «Eglise domestique» comme décrivant la famille chrétienne; on parle aussi d'«Eglise-foyer», de «petite Eglise», d'«Eglise miniature» et d'«Eglise dans la maison». Au cours des dernières années, on a assisté à une augmentation régulière de la qualité et de la quantité des bourses d'étude réservées par différentes Eglises à la théologie de la famille.

Hauskirche: Eine Literaturübersicht

der Reformationszeit erwähnt. Der Begriff »Hauskirche« hat seinen Ursprung in den Paulusbriefen. Der Gedanke wird in einigen Schriften der griechischen Kirchenväter sowie bei Augustinus erwähnt. Außerdem wird er in der Eheliturgie und -theologie der orthodoxen Kirche behandelt. Protestantische Autoren der Reformationszeit, unter ihnen Johannes Calvin und Thomas Taylor, nennen die Familie eine »kleine Kirche«. Die Katholiken haben den Begriff beim II. Vatikanum wiederbelebt (wie seine Aufnahme in das Dokument *Lumen gentium*

Un nombre croissant d'auteurs, notamment ceux qui sont formés à la théologie du mariage, publient des écrits spécifiquement consacrés à l'Eglise domestique. Ce concept n'a pourtant pas encore obtenu une reconnaissance semblable en tant que catégorie théologique parmi les ecclésiologues, ni même comme catégorie de recherche dans les bases de données des bibliothèques. Bourg relève que la littérature sur l'Eglise domestique se situe au carrefour de nombreux sujets d'intérêt théologique ou pastoral. Elle met en exergue quatre domaines qui nécessitent davantage de recherche: l'inclusion de l'Eglise domestique dans l'ecclésiologie, l'exploration des besoins pastoraux et des ouvertures œcuméniques des familles interconfessionnelles, le rôle des familles dans la justice sociale et enfin le développement de l'idée de l'église domestique chez le croyant moyen.

bezeugt). Er wurde von Paul VI. in *Evangelii nuntiandi* erweitert, der anerkennt, dass die Familie in sich selbst Züge der Universalkirche trägt. Seit der Veröffentlichung des Schreibens *Familiaris consortio* von Johannes Paul II. im Jahr 1981 ist dem Begriff "Hauskirche" als Darstellung der christlichen Familie neue Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt worden (alternative Begriffe sind »kleine Kirche« und »Kirche im Kleinen«). Innerhalb der letzten Jahre hat die wissenschaftliche Beschäftigung mit der Familientheologie der verschiedenen Kirchen sowohl in ihrer Qualität als

auch in ihrer Quantität zugenommen. Eine wachsende Zahl von Autoren, besonders derjenigen, die in der Ehetheologie ausgebildet sind, verfasst Arbeiten, die sich ganz besonders mit der Hauskirche beschäftigen. Der Begriff hat jedoch noch keine entsprechende Anerkennung als theologische Kategorie bei den Ekkle-

siologen sowie in den Suchmaschinen für Bücher-Datenbanken erhalten. Die Autorin deckt auf, dass die Literatur über die Hauskirche viele Bereiche anschnidet, die von theologischem oder pastoralem Interesse sind. Sie weist auf vier Bereiche hin, in denen intensivere Forschungsarbeit wünschenswert wäre: die Einbeziehung

der Hauskirche in die Ekklesiologie, die Erforschung der pastoralen Situation und der ökumenischen Bedeutung konfessionsverschiedener Ehen und Familien, die Rolle der Familie im Streben nach sozialer Gerechtigkeit sowie die Förderung des Gedankens der Hauskirche bei den Gläubigen.

• Sommario

Questo saggio raccoglie testi della letteratura biblica, storica, teologica, pastorale, spirituale e dottrinale, in cui la famiglia cristiana viene considerata chiesa domestica. Sono presenti autori cattolici, ortodossi e protestanti in rappresentanza dei cinque continenti; la maggior parte delle fonti sono degli anni Novanta. Vengono prese attentamente in esame le conseguenze della ripresa dell'idea di *ecclesia domestica* avvenuta nel Concilio Vaticano II e vengono anche citati quali parallelismi e quali precedenti di questo concetto sono rintracciabili nelle Scritture, nella Patristica e nel periodo della Riforma. Il concetto di «chiesa domestica» ha la sua origine nelle Lettere di San Paolo. L'idea viene menzionata in alcuni scritti della patristica e greca e in Sant'Agostino. Viene inoltre trattata nella liturgia e nella teologia del matrimonio della chiesa ortodossa. Autori protestanti dell'epoca della

Chiesa domestica: Una panoramica letteraria

Riforma, tra cui Calvino e Thomas Taylor, parlano della famiglia come di una «piccola chiesa». I cattolici hanno ripreso il concetto nel Concilio Vaticano II (come testimonia il documento *Lumen gentium*). Venne esteso da Paolo VI in *Evangelii nuntiandi*, dove si riconosce che la famiglia possiede in sé i tratti della chiesa universale. A partire dalla pubblicazione dello scritto di Giovanni Paolo II, *Familiaris consortio*, avvenuta nel 1981, al concetto di «chiesa domestica», considerato come rappresentativo della famiglia cristiana, viene prestata nuova attenzione (concetti alternativi sono «piccola chiesa», «chiesa in piccolo» o «chiesa di casa»). Nel corso degli ultimi anni l'interesse scientifico verso la teologia della famiglia delle diverse chiese è aumentato sia in quantità che in qualità. Un crescente numero di autori, in particolare quelli che provengono dalla teo-

logia della matrimonio, producono lavori che si occupano in modo specifico della chiesa domestica. Il concetto tuttavia non ha ancora ricevuto un corrispondente riconoscimento come categoria teologica presso gli ecclesiologi o nei motori di ricerca dei database dedicati ai libri. L'autrice fa vedere come la letteratura dedicata alla chiesa domestica tocchi molti ambiti di interesse teologico o pastorale. Richiama l'attenzione su quattro settori, in cui sarebbe desiderabile un lavoro di ricerca più intenso: l'inclusione della chiesa domestica nell'ecclesiologia, lo studio della situazione pastorale e del significato ecumenico dei matrimoni e delle famiglie interconfessionali, il ruolo della famiglia nell'aspirazione alla giustizia sociale e la promozione dell'idea di chiesa domestica presso i credenti.