Consecrated Families in Western Christian History: Their Presence in and Significance for Christian Spirituality

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This paper is a brick, a response, a hunch, and a prelude. As a brick, it is one more part of a growing building, my collection of historical studies in consecrated life.[1] I am now in the modern period and only have a few studies of key movements/themes left to explore before I begin work more formally on an ecumenical theology of consecrated life. This paper is also a response to a request. About three years ago my friend Charles Moore requested that I do some work on families. He expressed a desire that Christians distance ourselves from an unhelpful dualism (crassly worded: celibate = special life; family = ordinary life) that does not help us reimagine church, families, and singleness afresh. Charles wondered if a historical study might contribute to this reimagination. As a hunch, I kind-of agree with Charles. Perhaps a historical survey might be valuable. As you will see, I observe instances throughout Christian history of families and family movements that lived what then might have been perceived as—and today we would call—radical Christian lifestyles. With Charles, I think that noticing these instances is of relevance today as we rethink "church" and consecrated life both academically and practically. Finally, this paper is a prelude. I have been invited to publish a piece for *Plough* magazine tentatively titled, "The Home, a Monastery? Reexamining the Potential of Family Life." The piece for the magazine must be both short and practical and I will only be able to document a few select instances. As I have not seen a more complete list published elsewhere, it seemed best to present fuller documentation here, in an unpolished and open-source format, available to all.

1 See https://spiritualityshoppe.org/resources-for-christian-living/old-monastic-wisdom-for-new-monastic-people/ and especially those essays listed under "Reflections on the History of Devout Forms of Life." One upon a time I spoke of "monasticism" (and I still do when appropriate). Then I began to speak of "religious life." More recently I am shifting to speak of "consecrated life." I will discuss all this in future work.

Introduction

Historical surveys of "the family" or "laity" in the field of Christian spirituality tend to present a schema whereby family spirituality is marginalized early in Christian history by dominant priestly/monastic religiosities, only to regain a bit of recognition in the 12th century, more fully recovered after the Protestant reformation.[2] These surveys generally do not mention the numerous examples of consecrated families in history. Perhaps this lacuna is associated with a more general perception of the "religious life" as the preserve of those vowed to chastity.[3] I wonder. Just as we are seeking to recognize ministerial religious women today, aware now that there were a number of women through history who saw themselves as ministerial religious though not formally acknowledged,[4] Perhaps it might also be appropriate to acknowledge the gift of consecrated families today, especially in light of their own often-unrecognized historical precedent.[5] Thus my aim in this paper is simply to bring to light this often-unrecognized precedent of consecrated family life: Christian families throughout history who sought *as families* to lead exemplary lives—lives that both in their day and currently we might think of as "religious." My aim is not to prove any kind of historical "dependence"

2 See for example, Yves M. J. Congar, "Laïc et laïcat" in the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité Ascétique et Mystique. Doctrine et Histoire. Marcel Viller* et al. eds. vol 9 (Paris: Beauchesne, 1976), 79–108. Kees Waaijman, *Spirituality: Forms, Foundations, Methods*. Translated by John Vriend (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2002), 19–23; Wendy Wright, "Marriage, Family, and Spirituality," in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 419–21; Wendy Wright, "Family Life, Spirituality of" in Glen G. Scorgie, ed. *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 441–42. Edward C. Sellner, "Lay Spirituality" in Michael Downey, ed. *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality* (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier/The Liturgical Press, 1993), 589–96. See also more generally Yves M. J. Congar, *Lay People in the Church: A Study for a Theology of Laity.* trans. Donald Attwater. Revised edition (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1965). Articles on "laity" do not always offer significant treatment of families. There is no article on family in *The Study of Spirituality, The Blackwell Companion in Christian Spirituality*, or the three volume *Christian Spirituality* series.

3 This perception is defended in Sandra Schneiders three-volume *Religious Life in a New Millennium* (NewYork: Paulist Press, 2000, 2001, 2013).

4 Schneiders herself acknowledges this (along with other forms of non-canonical "consecration") in *Finding the Treasure: Locating Catholic Religious Life in a New Ecclesial and Cultural Context*. Religious Life in a New Millennium 1 (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), xxiv, 66, 216–18, 232, 261, 292; *Selling All: Commitment, Consecrated Celibacy, and Community in Catholic Religious Life*. Religious Life in a New Millennium 2 (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 8, 149. I see Schneiders desiring to acknowledge now openly what was implicit earlier (particularly in the face of the present interest and experience of ministerial women today).

5 As you will see, I am more interested in the practice than the language, whether we talk about "religious" families or "consecrated" or "semi-monastic" or whatever.

of one expression on another. I simply want to list and describe what I have observed in my reading.[6] Then I will close with a few reflective comments on the whole.

0 – @ 500 CE

Students of Christian spirituality have often summarized the early history of Christian devotion by highlighting the birth and then development of "monasticism" in the fourth century and beyond. This monasticism is associated with ascetical practices, significant of which is the renunciation of family and sexual impulse through a commitment to celibacy. Thus William Harmless summarizes what he calls the "classic Christian map of holiness": "one begins the journey through conversion and renunciation (family, marriage, wealth)."[7] Family is that from which the holy person withdraws.[8] Family was considered of lesser spiritual rank, as expressed in the sermon of Caesarius of Arles (@468–542) comparing the Biblical three soils/fruits (Matthew 13:1–9) to states of life: "there are three professions in the holy Catholic Church: There are virgins, widows, and the married. Virgins produce the hundred-fold, widows the sixty-fold, and the married the thirty-fold."[9]

What is less often mentioned are the roots of Christian monasticism in consecrated virginity (which was often practiced in a familial context) and consecrated families *as families*. Here I will not

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6 This paper is also not a "historical" study in the technical sense. Much of the material would require greater focus and depth for a truly historical analysis (I am especially nervous about my summary of the Reformation period). I am trying simply to review and re-express our ways of speaking about the survey of history generally as a prelude to re-framing our approach to consecrated life. My process is to read a wide sample of the original sources and to have examined respected secondary sources regarding each aspect I consider.

7 William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 286.

8 For a few examples of this theme see Armand Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia: Volume Two – Pachomian Chronicles and Rules.* Cistercian Studies Series, No. 46 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981), 116; John Cassian, *The Conferences,* trans. Boniface Ramsey. Ancient Christian Writers, No. 57 (New York: Newman Press, 1997), #XXIV; (825–52) and the summaries in James E. Goehring, *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 21; John H. Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 14.

9 Caesarius of Arles, *The Rule for Nuns of St. Caesarius of Arles: A Translation with a Critical Introduction*. Translated by Maria Caritas McCarthy (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1960), 59.

treat early domestic asceticism, spiritual marriage, or the development of women's communities with a family-like arrangement, as I want to limit my attention to consecrated families.[10]

Laura Swan writes, in her compendium of "forgotten desert mothers" of one fourth-century Poplia.[11] Poplia was married with children and after the death of her husband she was ordained a deacon. "Her home became a monastery" Swan writes, mentioning that other deaconesses were part of this community. What about the children?

Peter Brown introduced the early Syrian practice of conjugal celibacy, a practice that did not end up forming separate "monasteries" but rather developed into an integral part of the Syrian church. Brown writes, "Husbands and wives could withdraw from the marriage bed after baptism; by so doing, they regained a state of "holiness"—the term became virtually coextensive with "continence" in the Syrian church, when referring to continent married couples."[12]

While continence is often mentioned in the literature, it must also be recognized that the desert tradition was careful not to identify celibacy with holiness. Indeed, one classic story of an "Abba Macarius" recounts how a divine voice sent him to discover a pair of women who were holier than he. Upon his initial inquiry into their life, they replied, "Believe us, Father," they told him, "we have not been absent from our husband's beds to this very day; what sort of work do you expect of us?" Ultimately they reveal how they have not quarreled or spoken ill of others.[13] While this story does not

10 See, for example, Elizabeth A. Clark, *Ascetic Piety and Women's Faith: Essays on Late Ancient Christianity*. Studies in Women and Religion 20 (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1986); Elizabeth A. Castelli, "Virginity and its Meaning for Women's Sexuality in Early Christianity." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 2, no. 1 (1986): 61–88; Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Susanna Elm. *'Virgins of God': The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity.* Oxford Classical Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); and more currently see Eliana Magnani, La vie consacrée des femmes et l'ascétisme domestique : normes, liturgies, pratiques (fin IVe-début XIIe siècle) in *Revue Mabillon, revue internationale d'histoire et de littérature religieuses*, Abbaye Saint-Martin ; A. Picard et fils ; Brepols, (2018): 5–25.

11 Laura Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers : Sayings, Lives, and Stories of Early Christian Women* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001), 123.

12 Brown, *The Body and Society*, 96. See also 101. On this expression see also Robert Murray, "The Features of the Earliest Christian Asceticism." In Peter Brooks, ed. *Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honour of Gordon Rupp* (London: SCM Press, 1975), 63-78. and Robert Murray. "The Exhortation to Candidates for Ascetical Vows at Baptism in the Ancient Syrian Church," *New Testament Studies* 21 (1974–75): 59–80.

13 See John Wortley, ed. and trans. *The Anonymous Sayings of the Desert Fathers: A Select Edition and Complete English Translation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 327.

give evidence of fully consecrated families *as families* (the husbands did not show the same commitment to a devout life), it does show the insignificance of chastity in light of the weightier matters of kindness and humility.

Another interesting case is that of the fourth-century Melanias: the Elder and the Younger. It is not easy to gain a clear picture from the various accounts, but perhaps the ambiguity itself is worthy of notice.[14] Melania the Elder's evangelistic efforts, benevolence, and travels involve her "family," "son(s)," "cousin," "granddaughter" (Melania the Younger) and spouses, leading them from Rome to Jerusalem, where she "built a monastery." Melania the Younger despises marriage and both her sons die. The couple decide to live chastely: we hear of the husband living with thirty monks while she lives with her mother in Sicily and Campania, ultimately gathering a group of followers. To me the story of the Melanias illustrates the complications of categorizing early "monasticism." The boundaries between family, consecrated virginity, and monastery are not always easy to draw.[15]

Perhaps the most celebrated example of consecrated family life in this period is that of Macrina the Younger and her family/circle, which included Basil the Great.[16] In summary, Macrina led and gathered her brothers, mother, household circle, and others into an intentional devout Christian lifestyle centered around their home in Annisa (in Cappadocia), devoting themselves to a rhythm of prayer, work, hospitality, and practical ministry to the needy. Elizabeth Castilli describes their household as a "home monastic community."[17] They re-conceived traditional household roles even as they lived as

14 See, for example, Palladius, *The Lausiac History*. Ancient Christian Writers 34 (New York: Paulist Press, 1964), #46, 54; pp. 123–25; 134–36, 141–44. See also Palladius' discussion of Verus and Bosporia (p. 66) and the discussion in Silvas, *Ascetikon*, 78.

15 In the Pseudo-Athanasius Canons, canon 97-98 mentions: "In every house of Christians it is needful that there be a virgin, for the salvation of the whole house is this one virgin." The canon then describes how a girl's parents were responsible to teach her the ascetic life while she is still young. If she was obedient to them and showed love to this life, she shall be appointed as virgin. If she was not to the age of thirty, she shall marry. See W. Riedel, W. E. Crum, eds. And trans., *The Canons of Athanasius of Alexandria, The Arabic and Coptic Versions* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1904), 62-3. thanks to Christine Fawzy George for this reference and translation.

16 See especially discussion in Elm, *Virgins*, Anna M. Silvas, *The Ascetikon of St. Basil the Great* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Anna M. Silvas, *Macrina the Younger: Philosopher of God*. Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts (Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2008).

17 Castelli, "Virginity and its Meaning," 82.

family. Anna Silvas summarizes what she calls the "domestic ascetic movement" as, "not so much individuals, typically women, living an ascetic life within their natural family, but the commitment of the entire family to pursuing a life of Christian piety."[18] She cites Elena Giannerelli proclaiming that, "We have here one of the most interesting phenomena of IV century Christianity in east and west: entire families, above all aristocratic families, giving themselves over to ascesis inside their own households, in which the female element has a leading function."[19] Silvas summarizes the development of Macrina's household—and the domestic ascetic movement—as follows:

> As can be seen from the above account, women were the leading force in the domestic ascetic movement, in all stages of its manifestation. It is also clear that the type of ascetic community which issued from the transformation of a family household, was not something entirely different or alien to what preceded it, but the outcome of a progressive enactment of the radical, ascetic understanding of the Gospel and baptism in its domestic setting. All that we have seen in this section on the domestic ascetic movement suggests that between the households of devout and committed Christian spouses—especially but not exclusively when electing celibacy—and of ascetic 'brothers' and 'sisters' in community, too sharp a distinction is not to be drawn.[20]

@500 – @1500 CE

While the institutionalization of monasticism served to clarify for many the distinctions between "religious" and "lay" (or between those who pray, those who fight, and those who labor), for those of us who look back at the record, the complications of understanding devout "homes" and familial-organized "monasteries" persist as we explore the medieval period. Yet, we shall see that by

18 Silvas, *Asceticon*, 76; *Macrina the Younger*, 3.
19 Sivas, *Ascetikon*, 76–77; *Macrina the Younger*, 4.
20 Silvas, *Asceticon*, 80–81; *Macrina the Younger*, 8–9. See also Elm's summary of the three types of Cappadocian ascetic practice (especially the second) in her *Virgins*, 206.

the thirteenth century, some expressions clearly tried to embody forms of consecrated family life, in conscious dialogue with the religious movements surrounding them.

Once again, it is difficult to categorize the lifestyle of early Celtic "monasticism." Debates have been waged over the meaning of *paruchia* (sphere of influence), *monasterium* (monastic space), *manaig* (monk?), and more.[21] Patrick speaks in his *Confessio* of "monks and virgins" of Christ. Westley Follett writes of this: "While it is doubtful that we should understand these as cenobitic monks and nuns in a Pachomian or Benedictine sense, there is no question from Patrick's remarks in the *Confessio* and his *Epistola ad milites Corotici* that the promotion of the religious life, and particularly its commitment to celibacy, was a central feature of his ministry to the Irish. It seems likely that Patrick's virgins remained at home with their unbelieving families rather than forming a separate Christian community."[22] An interesting example of home-based monasticism, but here in the context of an unbelieving family.

As I read the literature regarding Celtic Christianity, I imagine not formal "monasteries" in the continental sense, but rather settlements gathered around influential figures and groups. Perhaps some families dwelling around the circle of influence were mere tenants, but I suspect that many families—inspired by the leadership of the saint/founder—lived some form of devout life. Philip Sheldrake summarizes this best:

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21 See especially, Richard Sharpe, "Some Problems Concerning the Organization of the Church in Early Medieval Ireland" *Peritia* Vol 3 (1984), 230-70; Sheldrake, Philip. *Living Between Worlds: Place and Journey in Celtic Spirituality.* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1995 – the edition I am using is that published by Cowley Publications, n.d.); Colmán Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland A. D. 650-1000* (Maynooth: Laigin Publications, 1999); Ian Bradley, *Colonies of Heaven: Celtic Models for Today's Church.* (London: Darton, Longman, Todd, 2000); Catherine Thom, *Early Irish Monasticism: An Understanding of Its Cultural Roots.* Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2008. For England, see Sarah Foot, *Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England c. 600–900*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

22 Westley Follett, *Celi De in Ireland: Monastic Writing and Identity in the Early Middle Ages.* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2006), 28. See also Donatus of Besançon, *The Rule of Donatus of Besançon*. In Jo Ann McNamara, *The Ordeal of Community: The Rule of Donatus of Besançon* (Toronto, Ontario: Peregrina, 1990). 8 and Augustine Thompson, *Cities of God: The Religion of the Italian Communes 1125–1325* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005) regarding the continued and shifting place of women's religious life within their homes.

> "A 'monastic' enclosure, therefore, was a settlement dedicated to religious purposes but within which comparatively few lived a strictly ascetical life. in this sense, the large 'monastic' settlements were really the local Church, a microcosm of the Church Universal. In terms of sacred space, *manaig* lived fully within the enclosure, had the right to attend certain rituals within the church but also had to undertake some degree of ascetical behaviour that was not expected of other Christians who lived outside the enclosure."[23]

Many married people who responded to the eleventh-century Hirsau reform in southwestern Germany "decided to live continent lives in a lay religious community headed by a monk or priest. These communities modeled themselves on the early Church communities and had their life-style approved by Pope Urban II in 1091."[24] Similarly, Constance Berman recounts spontaneous developments following a twelfth-century wave of conversions: "Some of these adult converts would retire with their entire families to newly created religious centers whose cores were syneisactic (literally communities of men and women living together under the same roof)."[25] Another similar example was the San Desiderio community active from 1187–1236. They were a rural, voluntary community supported by agriculture. Augustine Thompson writes of them that they, "practiced an asceticism based on that of canonical public penance (save for celibacy). . . . Their religious identity was paramount. They vowed conversion of life, wore a kind of habit (*saio*), recited the traditional hours, if literate, or the Pater Noster if not. They met for periodic Masses, sermons, and chapters of faults. The group held common property, but they were not monks, nor were they attached to a monastery."[26] We can see in these examples the development of a conscious identification, by married

23 Sheldrake, *Living Between Worlds*, 42.

24 Robert M. Stewart, "De Illis Qui Faciunt Penitentiam" *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order: Origins, Development, Interpretation* (Roma: Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, 1991), 111.

25 Constance H. Berman, *The Cistercian Evolution: The Invention of a Religious Order in Twelfth-Century Europe.* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 101–02.

26 Thompson, *Cities of God*, 74–75.

laity, of the monastic ideals. Robert Stewart summarizes these developments, particularly regarding the idea of *penitence*: "The idea spread and took root that the laity could live fully religious lives as lay people. Both marriage and involvement in the developing economic system, which had been viewed as obstacles to the spiritual life, slowly began to be integrated into the framework of the spiritual life. . . . Marriage was understood as a remedy for concupiscence, a concession to human weakness. But toward the end of the twelfth century continence was no longer obligatory for married penitents."[27]

All of this development reaches a peak with the emergence and eventual approval of the Humiliati in 1201. What is important to notice about the Humiliati is their structure as a religious order. Three distinct forms of life were approved within a single framework of authority: groups of clergy living in common, male or female religious living in communities, and more significantly for this paper, less formal associations of men and women living a religious life while living in their own homes. A letter, *Incumbit nobis* [in what are we obligated], employed as evidence in the 1201 hearings, gives us the best sense of the life of the "Third Order" Humiliati.[28] They are to pursue a life of virtue, and particularly the virtue of humility. Profits and produce collected beyond the just needs of the communities were to be given to the poor, for they are not to lay up treasures on earth, but rather lay them up in heaven. They are to fast on the fourth and sixth day of each week, except during feast seasons. Two frugal meals each day are to be eaten otherwise. They are to observe the canonical hours, reciting the full seven-fold divine office. Their clothing is to be neither too grand nor too abject. They are to come together each Sunday for a time of instruction and mutual support. While the priests and formal religious take formal vows, members of Third Orders can only make a solemn promise .

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27 Stewart, "De Illis," 119. More generally see André Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages: Religious Beliefs and Devotional Practices*. Edited by Daniel E. Bornstein and translated by Margery J. Schneider (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993); Frances Gies and Joseph Gies, *Marriage and Family in the Middle Ages.* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1989). I think that the practice of penitential expressions, along with reflections on the *vita apostolica* and the maturing of medieval religious confraternities, contributed to new steps in consecrated family sensibilities. I cannot develop this here.

28 See Frances Andrews, *The Early Humiliati.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 100–111. The division of "first," "second" and "third" orders probably had its origins with the Humiliati.

Thus what we see in the early Humiliati is an informal (but recognized) society of marrieds and singles living in their own homes—yet with sufficient geographic proximity to gather on Sundays—making serious commitments to a religious life as individuals and as a community. They do not abandon all their possessions in the process of joining a monastery. They do not renounce their marriages, but maintain chastity within the context of married life. They have no formal abbess or abbot, but submit themselves willingly to the leadership of local bishops, maintaining patience in adversity and expressing the willingness to turn the other cheek when offended by another. Where do we draw the lines between consecrated families and religious life?

Which brings us to the Franciscan Third Orders.[29] The classic origin passage is from Thomas of Celano's "First Life" (Book I, chapter 15 (par. 37)):

> Many people, well-born and lowly, cleric and lay, driven by divine inspiration, began to come to Saint Francis, for they desired to serve under his constant training and leadership. All of these the holy one of God, like a fertile stream of heavenly grace, watered with showers of gifts and he adorned the field of their hearts with the flowers of perfection. He is without question an *outstanding craftsman*, for through his spreading message, the Church of Christ is being renewed in both sexes according to his form, rule and teaching, and there is victory for the triple army of those being saved. Furthermore, to all he gave a norm of life and to those of every rank he sincerely pointed out the way of salvation."

Robert Stewart—and the *Early Documents* introduction to the text—date Francis's "Earlier Exhortation" to the Faithful prior to 1221, perhaps between 1209–1215. The "Later Admonition" is dated around 1220. The 1228 version of the *Memoriale propositi* was considered the Rule of the penitents at least between 1228–1289. The Exhortations urge devotion, confession, communion, and

29 The sources of the early Franciscan intellectual tradition, including the multi-volume *Francis and Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, are available at https://digitalcollections.franciscantradition.org/ . A key study of the Secular Franciscan Order is Stewart, "*De Illis*." Other orders, such as the Dominicans, established third orders, but here I will restrict myself to describing the Franciscan expressions.

good works. Followers are instructed to "fast and abstain from vices and sins and from any excess of food and drink," to visit churches, and to exhibit humility and mercy to others.[30] The *Memoriale propositi* presents the life of penance in a more legal framework and language, treating of dress, monthly meetings, admission, election of officers, and other matters typical of an institution of religious life.

Franciscan histories tell of a rich merchant and his wife who joined the Third Order and went about distributing gifts to the poor. John Moorman closes the chapter of his comprehensive history of the Franciscan order on the "Origins of the Third Order" by stating that, "though we know few of the early Tertiaries by name, there must have been many of them, of all classes and ages, who found inspiration in the teaching of S. Francis and whose lives became sweeter and nobler through contact with him."[31] Through the Third Orders, many families were inspired and enabled to live recognized consecrated lives, giving themselves to God's service beyond the expectations of ordinary domestic existence.

@1500 – 1900

It is very difficult to summarize this period. During these centuries, the Western Christian church formed diverse branches, each with their own emphases. Some branches were larger while others were quite small, yet each with unique perspectives of devotion and family life. Things were changing in a pro-family direction in Europe more generally even prior to the sixteenth century.[32] The Council of Trent re-affirmed traditional divisions between lay and religious life, even while "Protestants" were dismantling them. Third Orders became increasingly clerical and avenues for the

30 Stewart, "De Illis," 144–55. In a second portion of the Exhortations (155–61), Francis speaks to those "who do not do penance," warning them of the consequences.

31 John. Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order: From Its Origins to the Year 1517.* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1988 (1968 Oxford UP).

32 See, in addition to the summaries in the dictionaries mentioned above, Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

support of devout families within Roman Catholic circles dwindled until the development of the French School in the seventeenth century. Even after that, energy around lay spirituality supported *devout* families, though not necessarily what I want to call *consecrated* families. The magisterial reformation (Lutheran, Reformed, Church of England), similarly nurtured pious families, though not necessarily providing vehicles for consecrated families. And then there were the varieties of the "radical reformation": Anabaptists, spiritualists, and more. As will be shown, I suggest that the Anabaptist movement (to simplify matters) served to nourish what appears like consecrated communities of families and individuals, but that the impulse was less strong toward a consecration of the family *as family*. What follows is my brief and provisional explanation, limiting my attention to early magisterial and Anabaptist expressions.

As I mentioned above, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and the Church of England all dissolved the monastic structures that had been in place for many centuries. It was not simply a matter of re-purposing land and buildings but also a decisive elimination of the institutes of religious life more generally—along with their procedures of formation, organization, and so on. Not only were there no "places" to join, but as a result of the dissolution there were no Protestant frameworks (at least for a long time) for even exploring the possibility of a recognized association of consecrated people, whether familial or celibate. The details of the situation are complicated and there were a few exceptions, but it is fair to say that the sixteenth-century magisterial reformers put, for the most part, the structures of religious life behind them.[33]

True, in one sense the Protestants "eliminated" monasticism. But it also can (and I think *must*) be said that they repurposed monasticism. As Eric Saak summarizes in an article on "Martin Luther and the Monastic World of the Later Middle Ages": "In the course of twenty years, Luther domesticated

33 I treat this more thoroughly in the section on the Reformation(s) of my "What Does God Expect? From Whom? And Why? Commands, Counsels, Community, and the Theology of Religious Life." Completed January of 2021 and available at Spirituality Shoppe, https://spiritualityshoppe.org/what-does-god-expect-from-whom-and-why-commands-counsels-community-and-the-theology-of-religious-life/).

monasticism, transforming the school of Christ into Church, school, and family, the three institutions that were to form and shape the morals and faith of the new religion."[34] First, Luther simplified the monastic office to make it more accessible. He writes to the pastors who received his Large Catechism, "Now that they are free from the useless, bothersome babbling of the Seven Hours, it would be fine if every morning, noon, and evening they would read, instead, at least a page or two from the Catechism, the Prayer Book, the New Testament, or something else from the Bible and would pray the Lord's Prayer for themselves and their parishioners."[35] He encourages pastors and preachers, in his preface to the Small Catechism, to "take pains to urge governing authorities and parents to rule wisely and educate their children. They must be shown that they are obliged to do so, and that they are guilty of damnable sin if they do not do so, for by such neglect they undermine and lay waste both the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world and are the worst enemies of God and man."[36] More specifically, in the shorter preface to the Larger Catechism, Luther declares that "it is the duty of every head of a household to examine his children and servants at least once a week and ascertain what they have learned of it, and if they do not know it, to keep them faithfully at it."[37] The German headings which divide the Small Catechism are sub-titled "In the Plain Form in Which the Head of the Family Shall Teach Them to His Household." The Latin subtitles read: "How, in a very Plain Form, Schoolmasters Should Teach the Ten Commandments to their Pupils." As we can see by Luther's Catechisms, he was deeply concerned with the ignorance of the faith by the laity and sought to marshal fathers, pastors, and schoolmasters to the task of propagating the fundamentals of the faith.[38]

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34 Eric Leland Saak, "Martin Luther and the Monastic World of the Later Middle Ages" in *The Oxford Research Enclopedia of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). Accessed online on October 16, 2020 from https://oxfordre.com/religion/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-370. With Calvin we must add to church, school, and family, the institutions of the civic order.

35 T. G. Tappert, ed. (1959). *The Book of Concord: the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1959), "Large Catechism," "Martin Luther's preface," par. 3, p. 358.

36 Tappert, ed. *The Book of Concord*, "Small Catechism" "Preface," par. 19, p. 340.

37 Tappert, ed. *The Book of Concord*, "Large Catechism," "Preface" par. 4, p. 362.

38 See also Tappert, ed. *The Book of Concord*, "Small Catechism" "Preface," par. 3, p. 337; Jane E. Strohl, "Luther on Marriage, Sexuality, and the Family," in Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L'ubomír Batka, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014; online edn, Oxford Academic, 2 June 2014).

So also for John Calvin. As Barbara Pitkin notes, “Calvin clearly ascribed responsibility for caring for children to both the domestic and the public spheres, as one can see when one considers his views on the place of children in the family and on parental obligations toward children.”[39] Calvin explicitly designates that, “it is the duty of parents to apply themselves diligently to the work of communicating what they have learned from the Lord to their children.”[40] Likewise, Steven Ozment describes the tenor of what he calls “Reformation Europe” with regard to parents: “they have a duty to prepare their children for both temporal and spiritual well-being.”[41]

The sense of responsibility or duty was taken even more seriously by families of the seventeenth century, particularly among those following the line of John Calvin. Indeed, the “Puritan Family” has become a stereotype of an ordered—and perhaps rigid—religious household.[42] But could we call the Puritan family a *consecrated* family? Hard to say. Edmund Morgan declares of Puritan culture generally, “The Puritans have gained from their modern descendants a reputation for asceticism that is not easily dispelled.”[43] Their sense of frugality has stimulated much discussion of “The Protestant Ethic.” While having no respect for the idea of celibacy, the Puritans insisted upon faithfulness in within the institution of marriage. Puritans have a deep sense of the importance of submission.[44] A Puritan form of poverty, chastity, obedience? The Puritan household was grounded in a carefully considered theology of grace, covenant, sanctification, and mutual relations. The God who ordered the world placed us within a set of relationships within which Christians work out the salvation

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https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199604708.013.046.

39 Barbara Pitkin, “The Heritage of the Lord”: Children in the Theology of John Calvin.” In *The Child in Christian Thought,* edited by Marcia J. Bunge, 160–93 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 169–70.

40 John Calvin, J., & King, J., *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, Vol. 1. (Logos Bible Software, 2010), 481. For more examples, see Pitkin, “The Heritage of the Lord,” 170–72.

41 Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled*, loc. 1836.

42 For a worthy study, see Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England,* New Edition (New York: Harper and Row, 1966 (original 1944)).

43 Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 62.

44 “The essence of the [Puritan] social order lay in the superiority of husband over wife, parents over children, and master over servants in the family, ministers and elders over congregation in the church, rulers over subjects in the state.” Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 19.

granted us by the grace of God. Puritans in the New World were able to regularize the laws regarding marriage and family in ways that were not possible in England, and the civil courts were employed to enforce the domestic laws. Parents were to provide for their children and to see to it that the children were instructed in a trade from which they could maintain themselves upon growth into adulthood. But more important was the parent's responsibility to prepare them for conversion, "by teaching them the doctrines and moral precepts of Christianity."[45] As with the Lutheran encouragement, it was the norm for each father to catechize his children weekly, often after the church service.[46] In some families it became a daily practice to say prayers and read Scripture at the morning or evening meal. Is this an Family "Office" of sorts? Perhaps not a fully consecrated family, and yet . . .

Making sense of Anabaptist families is even more complicated. Even use of the term "Anabaptist" is itself not without problems as segments of sixteenth-century non-Catholic Christianity varied widely from one group to another.[47] I will limit my discussion here to the Hutterian, Amish, Mennonite affiliated communities often identified as Anabaptist. Furthermore, sources on family life—and particularly religious practice in family life—of Anabaptist communities are scarce indeed.[48] Consequently my comments here are offered more as personal impressions than a historically verified 'state of affairs."

The first thing to note is that many Anabaptist communities bear distinct similarities with—and have often been compared to—medieval monasticism.[49] More than the Puritans, the Anabaptist have a

45 Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 90.
46 See Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 95–103.
47 See George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation.* Third Edition. Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies, Vol. XV (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2000); Peter C. Erb, "Anabaptist Spirituality." In *Protestant Spiritual Traditions*, edited by Frank C. Senn, 80–124 (New York: Paulist Press, 1986).
48 See Williams's chapter on "Marriage, Family Life, and Divorce" in *The Radical Reformation*, 755–98 and Cornelius Krahn and J. Howard Kauffman. "Family. *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online.* 1989. Web edition. Accessed 7 Mar 2024. https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Family&ildid=161244.
49 I treat the "Radical Reformation" and their relationship to monasticism more generally in the section regarding Anabaptists in my "What Does God Expect?". See bibliography listed there.

strong sense of distance from the world, and among some even a commitment to a shared economy. Like the Puritans—but with some important differences—the Anabaptists also have a strong sense of authority and obedience, even to the point of honoring the practice of excommunication (known as "the ban"). The combination of persecution, geography, belief, and ultimately a degree of freedom in exile, facilitated the ability of Anabaptist groups to explore new forms of intentional Christian community, demonstrating the Gospel message through village-sized collections of devout families and singles. As J. Howard Kauffman stated, "Hardships experienced in isolation not only tied the members of one family closer together, but also united groups of families."[50] While perhaps not being centered (as much) around a particular leader as a Celtic "monastic" settlement, the similarities between Celtic and Anabaptist settlements are worthy of note. Indeed, I suspect the standards of membership in some Anabaptist villages were as severe as those in certain levels of association with Celtic settlements.

Early Anabaptists, however, understood their asceticism as explicitly an asceticism of *families*. Williams writes, "Anabaptists and other similarly minded restitutionists rediscovered those passages in Scripture that had originally contributed to the evolution of the ascetic ideal in early Christianity and transmuted them for conjugal life in, as it were, conjugal coenobitism."[51] Anabaptists—more so than the magisterial reformers—affirmed the values of traditional monasticism, and yet—like the magisterial reformers—they explicitly rejected the framework of celibacy upon which traditional religious life was built. Furthermore, over time—and in the context of predominantly agricultural economies—life together served to strengthen the bond of family and kin even further.

In spite of this importance of family life—a valued shared between Anabaptists and Puritans—I see significant differences in the ways Puritans and Anabaptists navigate the relationship between family and community. Williams's phrase "conjugal *coenobitism*" is apt, and this affects how we understand the type of "consecration" made by Anabaptists. As I see it, Anabaptist commitment is of an

50 Krahn and Kauffman. "Family."
51 Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 757.

individual to following Christ through the church within a family; in that order. “Radicals, more intensely than the magisterial reformers,” declares Williams, “spoke their new marriage vows in the face of a gathered congregation and were continuously subject to its self-disciplining order in ways comparable to the taking of vows among monks, friars, and nuns in the older Catholic orders . . .”[52] and later “ . . . just as the magisterial reformers incorporated the reformed family into the body politic, so the radicals in many cases incorporated the family into the covenantal community, the renewed church, and in a sense placed their separatist household codes in the context of the Church rather than of the public order.”[53] It is interesting to note that the Calvinist tradition affirms infant baptism, placing the child within the covenant of the family under God. Anabaptists, however see baptism as an independent decision of adults in the context of the community. As Anabaptist communities developed under the conditions of hardships, agricultural isolation and the like, as Steven Nolt writes of the Amish, “the relationship between church and family was not always clear.”[54]

Still, Anabaptist communities fostered a *conjugal* coenobitism. The general sense of family structure and the duties of the parents resemble those of pious families through the early modern Christian West. Presentations of family life in Anabaptist communities seem comparable with descriptions of Christians of other traditions. Krahn and Kauffman specifically mention that “many homes had some type of family worship.”[55] A mutual image developed among Anabaptists. “We understand the Mennonite family in terms of *Gemeinde* [community], just as we envision the church in terms of the family.”[56] The early Anabaptist communities saw themselves not as collectives of uniquely consecrated celibates, but neither did they see themselves as mere “believers.” Rather early Anabaptists

52 Williams, *The Radical Reformation,* 761. It is worthy to note how in times of change among the Amish, for example, changes in clothing (habit) served as a point of tension and identification of divisions.
53 Williams, *The Radical Reformation,* 765.
54 Steven M. Nolt, *A History of the Amish* Third edition (New York: Good Books, 2015),134.
55 Krahn and Kauffman. “Family.”
56 Victor Doerksen, “Still in the Image? The Anabaptist-Mennonite Imagination of the Family.” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 20 (2002): 69.

saw themselves as *consecrated,* as a concrete expression of Christ's church as a community of families given over to following Christ in their ordinary domestic lives.

I must briefly mention two other developments before moving on to the twentieth century. First, is the experiment known as “Little Gidding.”[57] “In 1625,” Greg Peters writes, “Mary Ferrar purchased a dilapidated house with an abandoned chapel in the small Huntingdonshire parish of Little Gidding.”[58] Various members of the family moved together onto the property (most significantly, Mary’s son, Nicholas Ferrar, a member of Parliment and ordained deacon) and chose to live a life of prayer, labor, and the care for poor local children. They recited the divine office on a regular basis. They took no formal vows, and yet Nicholas left a life of politics to dedicate himself—and the family—to the formation of this community. Priest and author George Herbert, a friend and fellow Parliment member, moved nearby and helped the Ferrars bebuild the chapel, though ultimately transferring to Bemerton, where he became a country parson, inviting others into his own devotional life. Robert Van de Weyer, ancestor of Herbert’s patrons and founder of a 1980s community on the Little Gidding location writes of the similar aims of the pair: “While Nicholas Ferrar created a residential group, like a monastery, George Herbert lived a similar life within a normal parish.” The community lasted about thirty years, and then dissolved. What strikes me as I review the story of this community is how much it resembles the foundation of Macrina’s (and Basil the Great’s) family “monastery” at Annisa in the fourth century. A woman at the front gathering the family together, the life of prayer and care for others, the sensitivity to the needs of children. While Nicholas Ferrar wished to avoid the language of *consecration* (and, reading their history, for good reasons), but intentionally and functionally the expression was that of a

57 See Greg Peters, *Reforming the Monastery: Protestant Theologies of Religious Life*. New Monastic Library: Resources for Radical Discipleship 12 (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2014), 54–55; A. L. Maycock, *Nicholas Ferrar of Little Gidding* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960). Robert Van de Weyer’s *The Little Gidding Way: Christian Community for Ordinary People* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1988) is more of a treatment of the refounding of the community in the 1980s, but it hearkens back to the earlier vision.

58 Peters, *Reforming the Monastery*, 54.

family (and those that joined them), leaving the life of "the world" and dedicating themselves to this alternative lifestyle that many—both then and now—would identify as "monastic."

Second is the nineteenth-century wave, particularly in the United States, of what are often called "utopian communities" or communes.[59] The Shakers arrived in the New World led by Mother Ann Lee in the late eighteenth century, flourishing particularly in the early nineteenth century. Secular visionary Robert Owen came to North America in 1824 to initiate a New Moral World, a model of the perfect society. This model became known as the New Harmony community, in part due to their association with German spiritual leader George Rapp. The New Harmony community combined communist economic views with careful organization to foster what was an exceptionally diverse and, for a season, apparently successful model of a thriving society. The Oneida community, originating in the 1840s on the grounds of John Humphrey Noyes's farm, housed three hundred 'Perfectionists' living an intimate, intellectual existence. I could go on to discuss the Fourierists, Icarians, the Amana Society and many more.

My interest in mentioning these communities is to consider whether (or not) they were examples of some form of "consecrated families." On the one hand, many of these communities were highly structured, perhaps even somewhat monastic in appearance. Clothing, daily rhythms, economic structures (again, at times sharing finances in common) were normal in these communities. Many of these communities were established in properties "away" from the mass of society in the effort to "withdraw" from what was perceived as an inadequate society and to become models for something better. Rosabeth Moss Kanter, presenting the salient characteristics of these communities, highlights their "spirit of experimentation."[60] Many—though not all—were founded and organized in the context

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59 I can here only present the briefest portraits of a select few of the many expressions. On these see especially, Rosabeth M. Kanter, *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972); Robert Fogarty, *All Things New: American Communes and Utopian Movements 1865–1914*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Chris Jennings, *Paradise Now: The Story of American Utopianism* (New York: Random House, 2016).

60 Kanter, *Commitment and Community*, 51.

of distinct religious interests. In all these ways utopian communities could resemble semi-monastic expressions.

And yet the utopian community movement was anything but a rediscovery of the consecrated family. Rather it was a profound questioning of family. Chris Jennings summarizes: "With bearings fixed toward a meridian of joy and perfection, everything old and familiar—monogamy, property, heirarchy, family—went overboard."[61] The Shakers explored celibacy, the Oneida community practiced "complex marriage" [free love], and communal child-rearing.[62] Family loyalties often complicated the path toward cohesion and communities explored other ways of organizing community and family life.[63] Benjamin Zablocki, writing about contemporary communities, identifies a category of communities called "alternative family communes," a category that has some roots in the utopian communities of the previous century.[64] While I see the utopian community movement—from the nineteenth century to the present—as an important movement for understanding the development of expressions of semi-monastic living especially in the later twentieth century, I do not see them as particularly significant as explorations of consecrated family life.

@1900 – Present

Within the past century or so, and in particular within the past sixty years, we have seen a exponential growth of consecrated family expressions. Administrative bodies have scrambled to find ways of recognizing and supporting these expressions, but we are making progress. In December of 2020, for example, The Holy See recognized the Community of the Beatitudes as an Ecclesial Family of Consecrated Life of diocesan right by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life

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61 Jennings, *Paradise Now*, 21.
62 Kanter, *Commitment and Community*, 9.
63 See Kanter, *Commitment and Community*, 89–91.
64 Benjamin Zablocki, B., *Alienation and Charisma: A Study of Contemporary American Communes* (New York: The Free Press, 1980), 227–34.

(CIVCSVA), the first community of consecrated life to be erected under this title. As I cannot even begin to document the hundreds of different expressions that have arisen in the past century, I will reserve myself to summarizing the life of five distinct *networks* of communities which welcome consecrated families.[65]

The Bruderhof is an Anabaptist-rooted network of communities founded in the 1930s and currently consisting of around three thousand people living in twenty-nine settlements on five continents.[66] They see themselves as following Jesus and inspired by the example of the early church. A large majority of Bruderhof members are married, and they consider family to be an important value of their network. The Bruderhof describes their membership vows in their *Foundation of Faith and Life* (similar to a Rule of Life) as follows:

> Vows of membership are made in the spirit of the traditional monastic vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience:
>
> *Poverty:* We pledge to give up all property and to live simply, in complete freedom from possessions.
>
> *Chastity:* We pledge to uphold sexual purity and, if married, to stay faithful in the bond of marriage between one man and one woman for life.
>
> *Obedience:* We pledge to yield ourselves up in obedience to Christ and our brothers and sisters, promising to serve the church community wherever and however we are asked.[67]

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65 Of course, it is a bit complicated. At times networks are associated with other networks (the Bruderhof is associated with the Nurturing Communities Network). At times the networks have grown more distant but still share a kindred spirit (such as the New Friars teams). Some networks are consciously ecumenical and consequently official recognition varies for Catholic and non-Catholic families. For a larger list of communities (of singles or families) see Evan B. Howard, *Deep and Wide: Reflections on Socio-Political Engagement, Monasticsm(s) and the Christian Life* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Press, 2023), 256–76 and https://spiritualityshoppe.org/resources-for-christian-living/links/.

66 See for example, Benjamin Zablocki, *The Joyful Community: An Account of the Bruderhof, A Communal Movement Now in its Third Generation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971 (Phoenix Edition, 1980); J. Heinrich Arnold, *Discipleship,* compiled and edited by the Hutterian Brethren (Farmington, PA: Plough Publishing House, 1994); The Bruderhof, *Foundations of Our Faith and Calling*. Rifton, NY: The Plough Publishing House, 2012. Their website is https://www.bruderhof.com/.

67 Bruderhof, *Foundations*, #39, p. 35.

The Nurturing Communities Network (including some of the communities known in the early 2000s as "new monastic") is an informal network of Christ-centered intentional—predominantly residential—communities.[68] As an informal group of independent communities, one cannot identify any particular "rules" regarding the common life of them all. Nonetheless, many of them are informed by the values of simplicity, sexual purity, and mutual submission.[69] Some of these communities practice a "full common purse" while others make various arrangements for mutual economic care. Virtually every one of the communities represented has some form of regular common devotions. All of them welcome both families and singles.

A number of communities of families and individuals emerged out of the charismatic renewal in the 1960s.[70] Whereas the Pentecostal wave in the early twentieth century sparked the founding of new denominations, the "charismatic" movement in the 1960s—70s gave birth less to denominations, and more to intentional communities. Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, ecumencial, nondenominational: it seemed that every form of Christian that was touched by the Spirit started a community (a "Christian commune"). This was not only an American phenomenon. A number of charismatic communities were founded, for example, in France.[71] While there is a wide range of styles of life in these communities, a

68 Their website is https://www.nurturingcommunities.org/. To get a sense of these communities see, for example, Dave Jackson, *Coming Together: All Those Communities and What They're Up To* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany Fellowship, 1978); Dave Jackson and Neta Jackson, *Living Together in a World Falling Apart: The Classic "Handbook on Christian Community" with Updated Reflections* (Evanston, Illinois: Castle Rock Creative, Inc, 2009); David Janzen, *Fire, Salt, and Peace: Intentional Christian Communities Alive in North America* (Evanston, Illinois: Shalom Mission Communities, 1996); Rutba House, eds. *School(s) for Conversion: 12 Marks of a New Monasticism* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Press, 2005); David Janzen, *The Intentional Christian Community Handbook: For Idealists, Hypocrites, and Wannabe Disciples of Jesus* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2013).

69 See, for example, "Marks" 2,5, and 8 in Rutba House, *12 Marks*.

70 I have treated these more thoroughly in my "Pentecostal Monasticism: Communities of the Spirit both Past and Potential" available at https://spiritualityshoppe.org/pentecostal-monasticism-communities-of-the-spirit-both-past-and-potential/. See also P.D. Hocken, "Charismatic Communities," in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements,* revised and expanded version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 473–76. The website for the North American Network of Charismatic Covenant Communities is https://nanccc.org/.

71 See Monique Hébrard, *Les Nouveaux Disciples: Voyage à travers les communautés charismatiques. (*Paris: Éditions du Centurion, 1979). The website for the Community of the Beatitudes is https://beatitudes.or/en/. The Chemin Neuf

number either have been or are currently exploring their life in conscious dialogue with historic religious life. The ecumenical Alleluia Community in Georgia speaks openly and simultaneously of a Rule of Life and the importance of family.[72] Monique Hébrard writes of the French Theophanie community: “Cells of the church and people of God, Theophanie is collecting together in itself all states of life: couples, singles [celibates?], hermits, and monks,” a mix she mentions in her discussions of other communities.[73] The Communityof the Beatitudes welcomes priests and lay, singles and families all into the same community life. This blend of the monastic and the charismatic in contemporary communities of families and individuals is, to me, significant.

The organizations that have identified with the phrase “new friars” used to be more closely tied together, with leaders meeting on a regular basis. Nevertheless, the organizations are all still active and a number of mission-minded groups of families and individuals are associated with these organizations.[74] The phrase “new *friars*” is employed, of course, in conscious association with the mendicant movements of Francis, Dominic and others. Whereas some institutes of consecrated life are more oriented to contemplative practice (the cave) and others toward the communal life itself (the refectory), the new friars consecrate their life and lifestyle with a sense of mission (the road).[75] New friars are a mix of singles and families, frequently choosing to relocate to areas of extreme need. Yet, unlike a previous model of mission where it was all about “the work,” new friars see themselves as also —or perhaps most importantly—about a lifestyle. Groups explicitly make known their values for and

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Community can be found at https://www.chemin-neuf.fr/ or https://us.chemin-neuf.org/.

72 See Don Swenson, *Alleluia: The Return of the Prototype. (*New Life Publishing, 2018). Kindle edition; Almeter, Dan, *Unity: On Earth as in Heaven.* (Alleluia Christian Service Center, 2017). Kindle edition.

73 Hébrard, *Les Nouveaux Disciples*, 24. translation mine.

74 For an introduction to the new friars organization and character see for example, Scott Bessenecker, *The New Friars: The Emerging Movement Serving the World’s Poor* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006); and Scott Bessenecker, ed. *Living Mission: The Vision and Voices of New Friars* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010).

75 Adams, Ian. “Cave, Refectory, Road: The Monastic Life Shaping Community and Mission.” In *New Monasticism as Fresh Expression,* edited by Graham Cray et al. (London: Canterbury, 2010), Kindle edition loc 789–1009 of 2923. See also his popularization of the framework in Ian Adams, *Cave, Refectory, Road: Monastic Rhythms for Contemporary Living* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2010).

commitments to contemplation, simplicity, community and other values retrieved consciously from the Christian monastic tradition. These are families with a deep sense of consecration.

The 24-7 Prayer communities associated with the Order of the Mustard Seed (once known as "Boiler Room" communities) grew out of the culture of the charismatic influences in the UK which flowered in Holy Trinity Brompton church, in the Alpha course, and in the Soul Survivor festivals. Rooms where people devoted hours to prayer (creating 24-7 prayer watches) morphed into communities shaped by commitments to prayer, mission, justice, creativity and more. Their self-description, particularly in the influential book *Punk Monk: New Monasticism and the Ancient Art of Breathing*, clearly demonstrates the interpenetration of the charismatic, the monastic, and the communitarian streams.[76] The manual of the Order of the Mustard Seed speaks of the importance of spiritual direction and draws from monastic resources frequently. The movement has stimulated the founding of a number of communities world-wide, some of which are either residential or gathered communities.[77] And, of course, there are devoted families seeking to embody these values in every one of the communities.

Conclusions:

So there it is. A list of expressions that seem to me to be trying to make room for what I am calling *consecrated families*, families who choose to live lives of simplicity, rhythm, sexual purity,

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76 Andy Freeman and Pete Greig, *Punk Monk: New Monasticism and the Ancient Art of Breathing* (Ventura, California: Regal Books, 2007). For a sociological analysis of a boiler room community as a case study of the relationship of new monasticism and evangelicalism, see Wes Markofski, *New Monasticism and the Transformation of American Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). 24-7 Communities can be explored further at https://www.24-7prayer.com/247communities, accessed September 16, 2019. For the Order of the Mustard Seed see www.orderofthemustardseed.com and Order of the Mustard Seed, *The OMS Guide for New and Prospective Members*. Fourth edition (Belfast, UK: Order of the Mustard Seed, 2022). For use of a similar charismatic prayer community in a sociological study see Mark Killian's analysis of the "Philadelphia" community in his *Religious Vitality in Christian Intentional Communities: A Comparative Ethnographic Study* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2017).

77 See, for example, those associated with the New Monastic Roundtable – (https://www.newmonasticroundtable.com/).

humility and more. Families who seek to live as family in a way that is alternative to the models of their surrounding world and who do so building from a foundation of faith. Families whose vows of marriage blend with their vows to a “religious”life. This is not a vast list, but it is a list of expressions that tends to be overlooked, even in treatments of “family” in dictionaries of Christian spirituality.

The parallels between old and new are significant, I think. Macrina and Basil in Anissa and Mary and Nicholas Ferrar in Little Gidding. The neighborhood and family-based community of the Humiliati and the neighborhood and family-based communities of the Nurturing Communities Network. Celtic settlements and Anabaptist/Bruderhof/Alleluia settlements. Not merely pious families, but families seeking to be fully consecrated, just as Third Order Franciscan families perceived themselves as consecrated in the thirteenth century. To me, these are not just random exceptions, blips on the screen of Church history. They are a voice. A small and perhaps often quiet voice, but a vloice nonetheless. They are a voice crying out that what my friend Charles called the “unhelpful dualism” of celibate=special and married=ordinary must be reviewed more carefully as we reimagine church, families, and singleness afresh.

I think that the voice has grown recently to the point where the Roman Catholic hierarchy has been pressed to respond, with the result that frameworks for recognizing forms of consecrated family are finally being constructed. Nevertheless, there is much work to be done in order to develop similar frameworks in other traditions, in particular as we consider what an “ecumenical” theology of religious life might look like.[78]

78 For example, I have not addressed the important questions of the unique character of celibacy, the place of “virtuosi,” and “sodality and modality.” These and other issues are to be explored in the years to come. For a more personal and practical take on this, see the upcoming *Plough* article.