This volume draws from the work of the international conference on ‘The Household of God and Local Households: Revisiting the Domestic Church’, which took place from 10–13 March 2010 at the Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium. This conference was the result of collaboration between the International Academy for Marital Spirituality (INTAMS), the Ecclesiological Investigations International Research Network and the Louvain Centre for Ecumenical Research; and it sought fresh insights into both the ecclesiology of the family, and the role of the family in the Church (p. vii). The book provides a significant contribution to our understanding of the ‘domestic church’. One of the Editors, Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi, places the volume at the intersection of family studies and ecclesiology, with an insightful introduction to the concept of domestic church. This includes a helpful overview and critical analysis of contemporary literature’s exploration of the role of the family in the local church. Instead of following Prof. Knieps’ fine summary of each paper, I would like briefly to highlight and reflect on some of the book’s rich discourse.

The editors divide the remainder of the 24 chapters into five parts, followed by a conclusion by Gerard Mannion. The first part, ‘Ecclesiological Perspectives on the Domestic’, examines ecclesiological perspectives on the family. Part two, ‘Family Perspectives on the Church and Ecclesial Community’, aims to examine the Church from the perspective of family life. The third part, ‘What Families for what Church?’, attempts ‘to transcend the perspectives of ecclesiology and of the family by describing the common ground on which the ecclesial and the domestic may come together’ (p. 18). Part four, ‘Contexts and Practices of Households’, examines the domestic church in a variety of contexts, such as Judaism, early second century CE (with a study on the Shepherd of Hermas), Hindu-Christian conflict in India, the Igbo culture of Nigeria, and the Taiwanese Catholics. ‘Ecumenical Households’ are discussed in part five. I wondered what determined the placing of the essays (e.g. Father Francis Appiah-Kubi’s African reflection in part four), or why some common themes (e.g. rituals discourse) are scattered throughout the volume. In the final chapter, Mannion provides some general reflections on common themes and identifies four areas for future discussion: (1) the multidisciplinary methodological approach; (2) the ecclesiological appropriation of domestic church; (3) learning from diverse cultural, familial and ecclesial contexts; and (4) the discourse on family,
domestic church and the household of God, which may promote ‘profound ecclesiological, soteriological and social implications alike – all of which come together in the sacramentality that such theological reflections seek to explicate and communicate’ (p. 376). Mannion’s aim is to place the discussion in the broader context of ethical and ecclesiological concerns, but his chapter left me wanting a more focused recommendation for future dialogue about the ‘domestic church’. However, the breadth and depths of the different scholars gathered for this conference are reflected clearly in this volume, so that it successfully examines the concepts of the domestic church from a wide variety of traditions, contexts and methodological perspectives.

Richard R. Gaillardetz argues that baptism is the sacramental foundation of the domestic church (p. 121). The sacramental basis (baptism or marriage) seems to be the common qualifier of the ecclesiality of the domestic church for the editors and many of the contributors. Although this approach may encourage a dialogue within their own traditions on the nature of the domestic church, in light of the ecumenical nature of the volume, I would personally have preferred a discussion on the ‘ecclesial vitality’ of the family that may have been a more fruitful basis for an analysis of the domestic church, as Gaillardetz has argued elsewhere.¹ The last part of the volume is dedicated to the reality that in some countries almost half the Christian couples are living in interchurch relationships. Ray Temmerman’s research found that these couples develop an ‘interchurch identity’ over time which gives many impulses for enriching the influence of the ‘domestic church’ on our ecclesial communities and resources, and on the wider ecumenical movement. A more multi-disciplinary approach could incorporate more empirical data about the different ways domestic church is being lived out in diverse contexts (cf. Marco Lazzarotti’s essay), so as to create a useful tension with the more theoretical (ideal) emphasized discussion of the topic (as Michael A. Fahey’s essay argues). And in our contemporary culture, it might be more fruitful to move beyond the nuclear family and address some other forms of family in relation to the domestic church (Jana M. Bennett raises the question, ‘What kind of family is needed for domestic church?’ [p. 172]). To find this balance is of course very difficult in a conference-based volume.

Bernd Jochen Hilberath’s chapter examines the relationships needed to promote legitimate diversity and encourage mutual enrichment within the domestic church. Hilberath provides a sceptical response to the model of the domestic church as he believes that familial and friendship-based relationships should not be taken as a basis for ecclesial communities. Even though each

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