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Buffy the Vampire Slayer and the Domestic Church: Revisioning Family and the Common Good

[1] "Does family conflict with community?" This is the question posed by Julie Hanlon Rubio in a 1997 *Theological Studies* article.[1] Drawing on a range of popular and academic writers, Rubio suggests that the typical answer is "yes." She writes:

> Because family is viewed as a private association, social values are assumed to be an intrusion. Love and self-sacrifice are primary family values; justice and solidarity are not, because family is supposed to be primarily about relationships, and at most a place to prepare good citizens for the public sphere. The family, it is assumed, must first take care of its own, and this necessitates a certain withdrawal from the community.[2]

Arguably, much popular film and television perpetuates such a division between family and community as independent, all-consuming, and largely incompatible ideals. On the one hand, we have numerous family-centered dramas that give little or no attention to obligations outside the extended household; on the other, we have the action-adventure hero, who either by chance or by choice leaves behind family to struggle for the common good. From the smoking ruins of Luke Skywalker's homestead on Tatooine to the family bonds that alone provide transcendent value in films like *Terms of Endearment* and *Steel Magnolias*, one can discern a common thread that depicts the claims of family and of the common good as at least independent of one another if not downright contradictory.

[2] Although one typical response to the question of family and community--both in scholarly and popular writings *about* family and depictions *of* it in the media--may support a necessary conflict between them, this answer has not gone unchallenged. Rubio highlights Catholic social teaching on the family, and recent teaching on the "domestic church" in particular, as a quite different response, one that refuses to disconnect the two ideals.[3] Another, no less significant refusal comes from what may be an unexpected source: the television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, which, now having completed its sixth season, possesses unquestionable cult status among a broad range of viewers, including teens, adults and, based on my informal inquiries, even a disproportionately large number of theologians. On its face, the show is straightforward action-adventure, with an attractive heroine in the title role, easily identifiable bad guys in the form of vampires and demons, and an ensemble of friends and allies--the "Scooby Gang"--that add heart and humor to the narrative. At a deeper level, however, the writers and producers of the show have also used it as a venue to develop an alternative vision of the North American family, a vision that clearly refuses to sever family from the common good and, in so doing, interestingly overlaps with a theology of the domestic church.

[3] In this essay, I offer an interpretation of the television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in dialogue with Catholic teaching on the family as a "domestic church." In a first section, I trace the "family" motif across the fifth season of the show, uncovering how its vision challenges traditional ideals by placing them in a mythic context. Second, I offer a brief summary of the theology of the domestic church and illustrate how it provides a vocabulary to interpret the themes and values represented in the show. Finally, I turn to points of tension and possibilities for mutual growth created by this juxtaposition. Overall, I hope to demonstrate that both *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the domestic church represent quite different, yet comparable and mutually informative attempts to re-imagine the family in a larger social and supernatural context that transcends a common sense conflict between family and the common good.

I. The Family Motif in Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Season Five

[4] "It's an eensy more complicated than that. Family always is, isn't it?."[4]

[5] So states the hell-god Glory (in "Blood Ties," 5013), and in so doing the arch-villain of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s fifth season puts her demonic finger on what is arguably the defining theme of the season. From the show's premiere in 1997, of course, it has consistently taken aim at traditional notions of family, society, and especially social authority.[5] In the "Buffyverse," in which every shadow conceals a supernatural threat, each new year contains the seed of a fresh apocalypse, and even ordinary rites of passage can literally unleash hell on earth, conventional roles and rules quite naturally fall by the wayside . . . including conventional family roles. Not infrequently, the show contrasts the relative impotence of such parental figures as Buffy's absent father, her naive mother Joyce, and even her official "watcher" Rupert Giles with the mutual support provided by her friends and fighting allies--particularly her very closest friends, Xander and Willow.[6] As in many other teen series, the narrative of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* illustrates "that friends are family, because the traditional family unit has fragmented."[7] Unlike other such shows, *BtVS* employs a mythic storyline to construct a cohesive alternative to the traditional structure, an alternative which Susan A. Owen calls a "collectivized, matrilineal social order" embodied by Buffy and her allies in the never-ending struggle against evil.[8]

[6] This general pattern--the Scooby Gang as an alternative to the conventional family--is a characteristic of *BtVS* as a whole. In the fifth season, however, it becomes clear that this new social order can be seen, not as an abrogation of traditional family ideals, but as a profound transformation and fulfillment of them. Early in the season, we get brief hints of this, such as when Buffy enlists members of the Scooby Gang to baby-sit for her younger sister Dawn ("Real Me," 5002; cf. "I Was Made to Love You," 5015), or when she says off-handedly to her best friend Willow, "You still wear the smarty-pants in the family" ("Out of My Mind," 5004). In the fifth, sixth and seventh episodes of the season, the family motif moves to center stage. In episode five, entitled "No Place Like Home," Buffy discovers that Dawn is not originally her blood kin, but is in fact a mystical power given human form and inserted into her family in order to keep it out of enemy hands. In episode seven ("Fool for Love"), on the other hand, we catch a glimpse of a family unit constituted entirely by blood: the vampires Darla, Angelus, Drusilla, and Spike,[9] who even in a few short flashbacks reveal a bond of self-interest, competition, and patriarchal control--in one scene, Angelus refers to the group as "me and my women."

[7] It is between these two fractured visions of family--the one broken by Buffy's discovery that Dawn is not really her sister, the other by the very dysfunction on which it was built--that episode six, itself entitled "Family," offers a concrete alternative. The episode focuses on the relationship of Willow's lover and fellow witch Tara Maclay to the rest of the Scooby Gang. Tara feels alienated from the group for two main reasons. First, she questions whether she really helps them in their fight against evil.[10] Second, she fears rejection should they discover her true identity. She is part demon--or, at least, this is what she has been led to believe. Tara's anxiety is dramatically heightened when her father arrives to take her back home before she "changes." And he deliberately exploits her fear to encourage her obedience: "Your family loves you, Tara, no matter what. How do you think your friends are going to feel when they see your true face?" Or, as stated by Tara's cousin Beth, "I can't wait until your little friends find out the truth about you. And they will, you know. No matter how innocent you act, they'll see." Family is about unconditional acceptance and love, things that mere friendship simply cannot provide.

[8] Pushed to the edge by her fear of discovery, Tara casts a spell to hide her "true" identity, with near-fatal consequences for Buffy and the others. At the end of the episode, her plan in ruins and her secret exposed, Tara still wants to stay, but her shame and fear of condemnation also impel her to flee. The subsequent exchange is worth quoting at length:

> **Mr. Maclay:** You're going to do what is right, Tara. Now I'm taking you out of here before someone *does* get killed. The girl belongs with her family. I hope that's clear to the rest of you.
>
> **Buffy:** It is. You want her, Mr. Maclay? You can go ahead and take her . . . You just gotta go through me.
>
> **Mr. Maclay:** What?
>
> **Buffy:** You heard me. You wanna take Tara out of here against her will? You gotta come through me.

The scene continues, with one after another of the Scooby Gang adding their support. Finally, Tara's father ups the ante:

> **Mr. Maclay:** This is insane. You people have no right to interfere with Tara's affairs. We . . . are her blood kin! Who the hell are you?
>
> **Buffy:** We're family.

This distinction between blood and true family is further accentuated when it comes to light that Tara isn't part demon at all, that the story is, in Spike's words, "just a bit of spin to keep the ladies in line."[11] Mr. Maclay's earlier statement--"Your family loves you, no matter what"--rings true, but in the end it applies more accurately to the Scooby Gang than to Tara's own "blood kin."

[9] Now it's important to note that membership in the Scooby Gang does not simply negate all other family bonds. Later in the season, Willow speaks about visiting her mother ("Forever," 5017), and Buffy even refuses Giles' help when Dawn discovers her true origin: "This is a family thing; we [i.e. her natural family] should deal with this" ("Blood Ties," 5013).[12] Yet the Scooby Gang does become member characters' *primary* family unit, particularly in later episodes, after Buffy's mother Joyce dies from a brain aneurysm. And this family--unlike others--has a definite purpose and orientation. In "the Body" (5016), Xander offers a succinct mission statement: "We'll go, we'll deal, we'll help. That's what we do. We help Buffy." As illustrated in subsequent episodes, such "help" functions on at least two distinct levels. On one level, it consists in ordinary familial expressions of love and mutual care. Members of the Scooby Gang offer support at the hospital, help make funeral arrangements, share meals and parenting responsibilities, and make an intervention when they believe

Buffy has entered an unhealthy relationship (in "Intervention," 5018). On another level, they continue to struggle against evil together with her. As the conflict with the hell-god Glory comes to a head, members of the group pile into an old RV (itself a idiosyncratic family symbol)[13] to keep "the key" out of her hands ("Spiral," 5020) and, when this fails, pool their talents to avert disaster ("The Gift," 5022). Intimate love and acceptance, parenting, saving the world from destruction--these are all elements of the ideal family in the mythic world of *BtVS*.

[10] No single symbol fuses ordinary family obligations and the welfare of a broader community more clearly than that of Dawn, the younger sister who is also the supernatural key to Glory's plan of destruction. On the one hand, simply by caring for Dawn the family acts on behalf of the whole world. In a conversation with Buffy in "Listening to Fear" (5009), Joyce draws a direct analogy between the two: ". . . [Dawn is] important. To the world. Precious. As precious as you are to me . . . I have to know that you'll take care of her, that you'll keep her safe. That you'll love her like I love you." On the other hand, as demonstrated especially in "Blood Ties" (5013), Dawn is a fully accepted member of both her natural family and the Scooby Gang . . . and, hence, she shares their mission, at least to some extent. Even when these two aspects of Dawn's identity seem to conflict in the season finale ("The Gift," 5022)--when it seems that the only way to stop Glory would be to destroy "the key"--the group eventually decides to honor its commitment to both. That is, they resolve to protect the youngest member of their family *and* save the world. Buffy refuses to sacrifice one ideal for the other, even though this ultimately requires that she give up her own life. Buffy's self-sacrifice is, as the title of the episode indicates, her "Gift." But it is also a dramatic embodiment of a family ideal that does not neglect the common good, an ideal of a family founded, not primarily on blood, self-interest or patriarchal control, but instead on love, mutual responsibility and a mission to serve and save others in need.

II. Family as "Domestic Church" in Catholic Theology

[11] In many respects, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* challenges conventional family ideals. But it does so more by reforming these ideals than by dismissing them.[14] It maps the notion of family onto a mythic struggle between good and evil and thereby upholds traditional family values even as it opens them to a broader sphere of concern. To be family, our analysis suggests, is to be in a saving relation to the world--a relation realized both in the internal life of the family itself and in its concrete engagement against the forces of darkness. If this interpretation is correct, then we can see in the show a definite parallel to the Catholic theology of the domestic church.

[12] But in what does such a theology consist? Theologian Florence Caffrey Bourg suggests that it consists in new ways of imagining both family and church:

> Christian families are nothing new, of course; what is new is the way the term ["domestic church"] has come to be used to stress that the *Christian family is the smallest community or manifestation of church.* The expression simultaneously evokes the ecclesial character of the Christian family and the familial character of the church . . . The idea of domestic church also presupposes that religious activity is not confined to a sanctuary or a particular day of the week; rather, it incorporates the Pauline principle that "Whatever you eat or drink--whatever you do--you should do all for the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31).[15]

This vision of family as a fundamental realization of ecclesial community has deep roots in the New Testament and the early church, but it only recently resurfaced in Catholic circles through the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and post-conciliar Magisterium.[16] In the United States, it has perhaps received its most thorough articulation by--in addition to theologians such as Bourg, Rubio, and others--two documents of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops: *A Family Perspective in Church and Society* (1988; revised and re-issued in 1998) and *Follow the Way of Love* (1993).[17] Each of these participants in the conversation reflect on a teaching that the U.S. bishops call "simple, yet profound": "As Christian families, you not only belong to the church, but your daily life is a true expression of the church."[18]

[13] If the family is seen as a true expression of the church, then this means that family--like church--exists in and for a purpose beyond its own narrow boundaries. As the bishops state in no uncertain terms:

> What you do in your family to create a community of love, to help each other to grow and to serve those in need is critical not only for your own sanctification, but for the strength of society and our church. It is a participation in the work of the Lord, a sharing in the mission of the church. It is holy.[19]

As an instance of domestic church, the Christian family ideally participates in the prophetic and evangelical mission of the church on at least two levels.[20] First, in its ordinary activities of caring for family members, raising and educating children, and, above all, fostering an authentic community of mutuality and acceptance, the family offers a witness to the reality of self-giving love and a challenge to

"exaggerated individualism."[21] Second, it enlists this same love to serve the neighbor and the stranger through its concrete involvement--as a family--in moral formation, hospitality and social activism.[22] By locating ordinary familial bonds in the context of God's love in Christ for all humankind, the U.S. bishops and other Catholic voices try to show how Christian families *already* serve the world through their own internal life and how they *can also* become "front line agents of the church's social mission."[23]

[14] Both of these aspects of the domestic church might aptly be gathered under the idea of the church as a "sacrament of integral salvation."[24] That is, the Christian family approaches its ideal insofar as it becomes sign and instrument of a saving reality that *includes* the concrete activities of daily life *even as* it places them into a broader, supernatural context. If so, then the theology of the domestic church provides a vocabulary that might also be applied to the primary family unit of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s fifth season. As a family, the Scooby Gang concretely embodies a higher moral order in the chaotic and threatening world that surrounds it. Just as the mutual love and acceptance exhibited by the Scoobies dramatically reverse the patriarchal control and ruthless self-interest of Spike's vampire "anti-family" or even the Maclays, so also the Scoobies *as a unit* enlist this bond of love again and again to resist the forces of evil. In a real if limited sense, this extended family might be fruitfully interpreted as something like a "domestic church," a "sacrament of integral salvation" for family members, society at large, and indeed the whole world.

[15] At precisely this point, of course, we should sound a note of caution. First, we should recognize the limits of our comparison: just as the theology of the domestic church does not exhaust everything that might be said about the family in Catholic social thought, so also the fifth season does not exhaust everything that might be said about family in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*--particularly if one extended the inquiry to include Season Six. Second, we should be very clear about the deliberately constructive nature of the comparison. By associating the Scooby Gang with the theology of the domestic church, I do not intend to suggest that a Christian agenda has motivated the writers and producers of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. In the whole, the show's depiction of Christianity is no less--and in some cases considerably more--harsh than its depiction of any other social institution. What I do want to suggest is that the show is *susceptible* to an interpretation in terms of Christian faith and the domestic church. Critics of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* have amply shown how the supernatural creatures and situations of the show often serve as metaphors for the dilemmas of growing up, of psychological development, and of ordinary life.[25] However, by appealing to the supernatural to develop these themes, the show can also provide a model or metaphor for the transformation of ordinary social realities--like the family--in the light of the transcendent. Hence, it can be constructively re-visioned as an intriguing and possibly influential conversation partner for the U.S. bishops and other North American Catholics who wish speak about the family as domestic church.

III. Points of Tension and Dialogue: Re-Visioning the Family Ideal

[16] If the analogy we have constructed holds any merit--that is, if the Scooby Gang of *BtVS* can be accepted as something like a domestic church--then what kind of conversation could ensue? As I have hopefully demonstrated, both the writers of the show and Catholic voices like those of the U.S. bishops share a fundamental and largely counter-cultural orientation, re-imagining the North American family in a larger social and supernatural context that transcends a common sense conflict between family and the common good. Within this broad and general structure of agreement, important points of tension also emerge, points that could become opportunities for dialogue and growth. I will confine my attention to just three of these points.

[17] First of all, it should be obvious that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* considerably stretches what many Catholics might understand as an authentic family. In the words of the U.S. bishops, "family" is defined as:

> an intimate community of persons bound together by blood, marriage, or adoption, for the whole of life. In our Catholic tradition, the family proceeds from marriage--an intimate, exclusive, permanent, and faithful partnership of husband and wife. This definition is normative and recognizes that the Church's normative approach is not shared by all.[26]

Now the bishops have a very nuanced understanding of the relation between this norm and the actual diversity of family arrangements,[27] and they define their vision in contrast to other competing ideals--the family as constituted principally on authority or heredity, for example, or the family as a "temporary community of individual self-interest"[28]--which would also appear to conflict with the vision of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Yet the bishops' definition still stands in considerable tension with the ideal depicted by the show. In the episode entitled "Family" (5006), the Scooby Gang consists of only one blood or adoptive relationship: Buffy and her sister Dawn. The remainder of the group comprises a single adult (Giles), a pair of same-sex partners (Willow and Tara), a "cohabiting couple" (Xander and Anya),[29] and a marginally reformed agent of darkness (Spike). Family *is* as family *does*, the show suggests, and thus it sharply relativizes abstract norms of kinship or marriage as secondary or peripheral concerns.

[18] What's particularly intriguing about this point of tension is that it is not entirely clear which of the two dialogue partners more accurately represents the earliest traditions of the church. Household codes such as Ephesians 5 testify to the importance that New Testament authors placed on marriage as both the foundation of family life and a powerful symbol of the church. At the same time, as highlighted by biblical scholar Carolyn Osiek, the New Testament world possessed a diversity of family models that rivals even that of contemporary American culture.[30] And the gospel narratives themselves sharply relativize kinship and marriage in favor of one's relationship to Christ and his mission:

> . . . family relationship, the basis of intimacy and privileged access, in the community of Jesus no longer depends on blood or other socially established ties . . . This new family loyalty must even take priority over traditional ones, for those who give them up will receive them a hundredfold (Mt 19:27-29; Mk 10:28-30; Lk 18:28-30).[31]

Hence some writers suggest baptism or simply a broader notion of family itself might serve as a better foundation than marriage for a theology of domestic church.[32] In so doing, they edge away from the bishops and toward the early gospel writers . . along with, somewhat ironically, the writers and producers of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

[19] Our second point of tension and dialogue also points to an area in which *BtVS* might push Catholics toward a deeper appreciation of the Christian gospel. For, as we have already briefly noted, the narrative of the show clearly reveals how the refusal to divorce family from the common good necessarily requires profound sacrifice. In *A Family Perspective in Church and Society*, the U.S. bishops do refer to an "asceticism" at "the very heart of Christian marriage and family life."[33] Yet, as Rubio notes:

> The absence of reflection on appropriate levels of sacrifice weakens those parts of the social teaching that speak to families. Because what is expected of families in the social realm is so vague, this part of Catholic social teaching is rendered virtually meaningless in the lives of Catholic families.[34]

The kinds of decisions that Rubio specifically highlights in her article--such as choosing one's livelihood on ethical grounds rather than those of pure economics or self-fulfillment, relinquishing some control over child care and education, or even sharing one's home with another family--should be seen in the context of self-sacrifice and Christian realism. Buffy's sacrifice of her own life in the finale of Season Five, a sacrifice motivated by concern for family *and* the common good, is anything but vague and meaningless. It might serve as a useful metaphor for the gospel call to die to self as an authentic follower of Christ--a call directed not just to individuals, but also to families themselves.

[20] Still, at the end of the day, it is Buffy alone who makes this sacrifice, and she does so in order to defeat what is an exclusively supernatural threat. This leads to our third and final point. For what the family ideal of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* exemplifies in specificity and emotional appeal, it simultaneously lacks in holism and mutuality. Xander's mission statement for the Scooby Gang--"We help Buffy"--seems defective from the point of view of the domestic church, precisely because it defines the transcendent identity and mission of the family in terms of just one member.[35] One can question whether the patriarchal family ideal has really been reformed all that much if an older male head of household has merely been replaced by a younger female one. Similarly, little attempt is made to connect the group's work on behalf of the common good to a broad range of social concerns. When the show deals with economic issues at all, for example, it does so exclusively in terms of characters' attainment of sufficient income levels to support their consumerist, middle American lives.[36] A family in the Buffyverse whose concern for the world extends only to supernatural forces of darkness is logically equivalent to a Christian family that confines its effort on behalf of the common good to intercessory prayer. On a purely symbolic level, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* offers a compelling and counter-cultural family ideal, yet it is not at all clear that this symbol is developed with sufficient depth to challenge concrete family assumptions or dynamics in the real world.

[21] This third point, of course, leads us to question the 'transgressive' character of the series as a whole. We may note Susan Owen's critique of the show's "uncritical embrace of American capital culture." She writes:

> . . . in spite of Buffy's narrative agency and physical potency, her body project remains consistent with the re-scripted body signs of American commodity advertising. In other words, political potency is both imagined and reduced to matters of consumer style . . . The series plays at transgression; as such, it is quintessential television. But it remains to be seen whether transgressive play can challenge institutional relations of power.[37]

So too, as we have seen, the show "plays at transgression" in areas of family life, deliberately challenging its traditional bases as well as enlarging its field of concern. Yet it falls short of presenting a comprehensive and consistent alternative. Does this mean that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is not genuinely transgressive or counter-cultural? Not necessarily. But it does suggest that an application to

"institutional relations of power" does not follow directly from the show's narrative--nor, perhaps, should it do so. For this further step toward application, a theology of the domestic church or some other comparable heuristic tool may be not only helpful, but positively required.

IV. Conclusion

[22] Early in the final episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer's* fifth season, the Scooby Gang is faced with a difficult choice. One side, represented by Giles, believes that the common good trumps the good of family, that it would be worth losing a family member to save the world. The other, represented by Buffy, upholds family above any other value. In the face of this conflict, a third family member--Anya--insists that it is time to "think outside the box" ("The Gift," 5022). In an entirely different context, theologian Florence Caffrey Bourg reckons the theology of the domestic church as an opportunity "to exercise our imaginations, to take a periodic respite from telescopic vision in order to reflect upon church at the micro level."[38] Each implies in her own way that if we posit a necessary conflict between family and community we have not fully appreciated the family's unique identity and function, have not placed it into a sufficiently rich social and supernatural context, have not seen its tremendous potential as a witness and agent for the common good. Such occluded vision stems less from a failure in ethics than a failure in imagination. The family ideals of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the domestic church can be seen as mutually clarifying attempts to address this failure, to re-vision the North American family by placing it into a much broader imaginative view of the world.

[23] Does family conflict with community? Not necessarily . . . but to see this clearly we must, as Anya recommends, be willing to "think outside the box."

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[1]Julie Hanlon Rubio, "Does Family Conflict with Community?" *Theological Studies* 58 (1997), 597-617.

[2]Ibid., 599.

[3]See ibid., esp. 600-602, 616-17.

[4]Direct quotations from the show Buffy the Vampire Slayer have been checked against the scripts provided on "Psyche: Buffy Transcripts" <http://studiesinwords.de/buffy.html>.

[5]See Daniel A. Clark and P. Andrew Miller, "Buffy, the Scooby Gang, and Monstrous Authority: BtVS and the Subversion," *Slayage: the Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 3 <http://www.middleenglish.org/slayage/essays/slayage3/clarkmiller.htm>.

[6]See Susan A. Owen, "Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Vampires, Postmodernity, and Postfeminism," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 27/2 (1999), esp. 25-27; and Cynthia Bowers, "Generation Lapse: The Problematic Parenting of Joyce Summers and Rupert Giles," *Slayage: the Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 2 <http://www.middleenglish.org/slayage/essays/slayage2/bowers.htm>.

[7]Owen, 25.

[8]Ibid., 29.

[9]Cf. Drusilla's comment to Spike in "Crush" (5014): "I want us to be family again, my William." On Spike's transition from this anti-family to a comic and intrusive member of the Scooby Gang, see Michele Boyette, "The Comic Anti-hero in Buffy the Vampire Slayer, or Silly Villain: Spike is for Kicks," *Slayage: the Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 4 <http://www.middleenglish.org/slayage/essays/slayage4/boyette.htm>.

[10]"I'm . . . well, I just like to be useful. You know, to the gang? I just . . . never . . . feel useful" ("Family," 5006, teaser). This echoes concerns she has already voiced in "Real Me" (5002).

[11]Cf. the words of cousin Beth, who accuses Tara earlier in the episode of being a "selfish bitch" for refusing to return home: "You don't care the slightest bitty bit about your family, do you? Your dad's been worried sick about you every day since you've been gone. There's a, a house that needs taking care of . . . Donny and your dad having to do for themselves while you are living God knows what kind of lifestyle."

[12]And Giles returns the favor in "Tough Love" (5019), when Buffy wants help disciplining Dawn: "You're her family, her only real family now. She needs you to do this."

[13]Cf. Spike's comment, "Buckle up, kids, Daddy's puttin' the hammer down."

[14]On this issue, compare the claim by Martin Buiniki and Anthony Enns that "the show's representations of institutional power are also less transgressive than they seem . . . these apparent subversions of institutional power merely signal a resistance to the excessive use of power, to outdated institutional models rather than to institutional power in general." See their article "Buffy the Vampire Disciplinarian: Institutional Excess and the New Economy of Power," *Slayage: the Online International Journal of Buffy Studies* 4 <http://www.middleenglish.org/slayage/essays/slayage4/buinickienns.htm>, and the further discussion in paragraph 21, below.

[15]Florence Caffrey Bourg, "Domestic Church: A New Frontier in Ecclesiology," *Horizons* 29 (2002), 42-43.

[16]See Ibid., 3-5; Joann Heaney-Hunter, "Domestic Church: Guiding Beliefs and Daily Practices," in *Christian Marriage and Family: Contemporary Theological and Pastoral Perspectives*, ed. Michael G. Lawler and William P. Roberts (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996), esp. 62-66; and Michael A. Fahey, "The Christian Family as Domestic Church at Vatican II," in *The Family*, ed. Lisa Sowle Cahill and Dietmar Mieth, *Concilium 1995/4* (London and Maryknoll: SCM Press/Orbis Books, 1995), 85-92.

[17]National Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee on Marriage and Family, *A Family Perspective in Church and Society: Tenth Anniversary Edition* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1998); U.S. Bishops, "Follow the Way of Love," Origins 23 (1993), 433-43. For a more complete survey of contributions to the discussion around the domestic church, see Florence Caffrey Bourg, "Domestic Church: A Survey of Literature," forthcoming in *INTAMS Review* 7 (Fall 2001).

[18]U.S. Bishops, "Follow the Way of Love," 436.

[19]Ibid.; cf. NCCB, A Family Perspective, esp. 19-21.

[20]For what follows, cf. U.S. Bishops, "Follow the Way of Love," 436-37, William P. Roberts, "The Family as Domestic Church: Contemporary Implications," in Lawler and Roberts, *Christian Marriage and Family,* 79-90; and Thomas M. Martin, "The Family as Domestic Church: Why There is a Family Perspective on Social Issues," in *Using a Family Perspective in Catholic Social Justice and Family Ministries*, ed. Patricia Voydanoff and Thomas M. Martin, Roman Catholic Studies 6 (Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 1994), 19-38.

[21]NCCB, *A Family Perspective,* 18; cf. Bourg, "Domestic Church," 50-51; and Martin, "Family as Domestic Church," esp. 26-28.

[22]NCCB, A Family Perspective, 18-19; cf. Rubio, esp. 604-608, 615-17; Florence Caffrey Bourg, "Family as a 'Missing Link' in Bernadin's Consistent Life Ethic," *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 8/2 (Summer/Fall 2001), 3-26; and John L. Carr, "Natural Allies: Partnership between Social Justice and Family Ministries," in Voydanoff and Martin, *Using a Family Perspective*, 99-111.

[23]Bourg, "Domestic Church," 10. Of course, writers on the domestic church are not naive about the fact that this entails a transformation of Catholic ideas, not only about family, but also about church itself. See especially Heaney-Hunter, 70-72.

[24]For the sources and development of this theme in Catholic ecclesiology, see Francis A. Sullivan, S.J., *The Church We Believe In: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1988), 132-51. Cf. Bourg, "Domestic Church," 60-63, and Roberts, 83-84.

[25]See especially Rhonda V. Wilcox, "There Will Never Be a 'Very Special' Buffy: *Buffy* and the Monsters of Teen Life," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 27/2 (Summer 1999), 16-23; and Beth Braun, "*The X-Files* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*: The Ambiguity of Evil in Supernatural Representations," *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 28/2 (Summer 2000), 88-94.

[26]NCCB, *A Family Perspective*, 17.

[27]See ibid., 31-40; cf. U.S. Bishops, "Follow the Way of Love," 437. Cf. Steven Preister, "Changing Families in a Changing Society: The Need for a Family Perspective," in Voydanoff and Martin, *Using a Family Perspective*, 47-67.

[28]NCCB, *A Family Perspective*, 17.

[29]See National Conference of Catholic Bishops Committee for Pastoral Research and Practices, *Faithful to Each Other Forever: Catholic Handbook of Pastoral Help for Marriage Preparation* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1989), 71-74.

[30]See Carolyn Osiek, "The New Testament and the Family," in Cahill and Mieth, *The Family*, 1-9.

[31]Ibid., 7.

[32]See especially Bourg, "Domestic Church," 56-57, and Heaney-Hunter, 60-61.

[33]NCCB, *A Family Perspective*, 21.

[34]Rubio, 601.

[35]In the fifth season the group's only direct connection to the "Powers That Be" takes the form of a spirit guide in "Intervention" (5018), with whom Buffy meets alone.

[36]Interestingly, the spin-off series *Angel* does a considerably better job on both scores. The staff of Angel Investigations reveals a high level of reciprocal dependence in their mutual relations, particularly as these reflect their shared mission. Community members--including the character of Cordelia, who was easily the most materialistic character in the first three seasons of *BtVS*--consistently opt to live relatively simple lives so as to preserve their value for persons above either economic advancement or an abstract notion of "professional achievement" in the struggle against the forces of darkness. The supernatural enemies of this show are also more likely to serve as metaphors for systemic social issues.

[37]Owen, 30-31.

[38]Bourg, "Domestic Church," 60.