

UNIVERSITY OF WINNIPEG

INTERCHURCH FAMILIES AS DOMESTIC CHURCH:  
FAMILIAL EXPERIENCES AND ECCLESIAL OPPORTUNITIES

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Theology in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Masters of Sacred Theology

Faculty of Theology

by  
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Winnipeg, Manitoba  
March 2011

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Note: This thesis is published online at the Association of Interchurch Families website,  
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## Table of Contents

<b>Abbreviations</b>		iii
<b>By Way of an Introduction</b>		vi
Background		
Potential Conflict of Interest		
The task		
<b>Chapter One:</b>	Thesis	1
Arguments		
The Terms		
Review of Literature		
Previous Studies		
Research Methodology		
<b>Chapter Two:</b>	One	15
The Exploration Begins		
Marriage as Covenant		
The Apostolic Fathers		
The Present Day		
Movement Toward Unity		
The Experience		
<b>Chapter Three:</b>	Holy	42
The Source		
Realization of Holiness		
<i>Koinōnia</i> in Faith		
<i>Koinōnia</i> in the Gospel		
<i>Koinōnia</i> in the collections		
<i>Koinōnia</i> in the Spirit		
<i>Koinōnia</i> in the Eucharist		
<i>Koinōnia</i> in the sufferings and glory		
Concrete Experience		
<b>Chapter Four:</b>	Catholic	70
<i>Ekklesia Kath olos</i>		
Protestant Perspectives		
A New Era		
Concrete Experience		
<b>Chapter Five:</b>	Apostolic	96
Scriptural Evidence		
Understanding Grows		
Apostolicity and the Churches		
The Present Day		
Apostolicity as Praxis		

<b>Chapter Six:</b>	Conclusion	127
	A Question of Representation	
	Simple Steps	
	Promises to Keep	
	Baptism	
	Eucharist	
	Funerals	
<b>Afterward</b>		159
<b>Bibliography</b>		160

**Abbreviations used in the footnotes, in alphabetical order:**

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Bibliographic Reference</b>
Bard	Bard, Mary. <i>Whom God Hath Joined</i> . Great Wakering, Essex, UK: McCrimmon Publishing, 1987.
Barrett	Barrett, C.K. <i>The Signs of an Apostle</i> . London: Epworth Press, 1970.
BEM	<i>Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry</i> . Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982.
Bettenson	Bettenson, Henry S, Ed. and Trans. <i>The Early Christian Fathers: A selection from the writings of the Fathers from St. Clement of Rome to St. Athanasius</i> . Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956.
Bornkamm	Bornkamm, Günther. <i>The Authority to “Bind” and “Loose” in the Church in Matthew’s Gospel: The problem of Sources in Matthew’s Gospel</i> , in <i>The Interpretation of Matthew</i> , edited by Graham N Stanton, 101-114. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995.
Bourg	Bourg, Florence Caffrey. <i>Where Two or Three are Gathered: Christian Families as Domestic Church</i> . Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004.
Brueggemann	Brueggemann, Walter. <i>The Bible Makes Sense</i> . Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1983.
Burns	Burns, J Patout Jr. <i>Cyprian the Bishop</i> . London & New York: Routledge, 2002.
Bush & Cooney	Bush, John C. and Cooney, Patrick R. <i>Interchurch Families: Resources for Ecumenical Hope</i> . Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.
Cahill	Cahill, Lisa Sowle. <i>Family: A Christian Perspective</i> . Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000.
CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i> . Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994
Churches Together	Churches Together in England & Wales. <i>Churches Together in Marriage: Pastoral Care of Interchurch Families</i> . London: Churches Together in England & Churches Together in Wales, 1994.
Clement	Graham, Holt M. & Grant, Robert M., Trans. “1 Clement” in <i>The Apostolic Fathers</i> , Edited by Jack N. Sparks. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1978.
Code	<i>Code of Canon Law</i> . Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983.
DAPNE	<i>Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism</i> , Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993.
Davies	Davies, Emlyn. <i>Our Mutual Fellowship in the Gospel in The Unity We Seek</i> , edited by William S. Morris, 66-72. Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1962.
DV	<i>Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation / Dei Verbum</i> . Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965.
FC	<i>Familiaris Consortio</i> . Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1981.
Greinacher	Greinacher, Norbert. “Catholic Identity in the Third Epoch of Church History” <i>Concilium</i> (1994/5): 3-14.
GS	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i> . Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965.

Hay	Hay, David W. <i>Church Reformation and the World Church in The Unity We Seek</i> , edited by William S. Morris, 98-112. Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1962.
Hedlund	Hedlund, Roger E. <i>The Mission of the Church in the World</i> . Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985.
Heideman	Heideman, Eugene P. <i>Reformed Bishops and Catholic Elders</i> . Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1970.
Jefford, <i>Apostolic</i>	Jefford, Clayton N. <i>The Apostolic Fathers: An Essential Guide</i> . Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005.
Jefford, <i>Reading</i>	Jefford, Clayton N., with Harder, Kenneth J and Amezaga, Louis D. Jr. <i>Reading the Apostolic Fathers: An Introduction</i> . Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 1996.
Lawler, <i>Ministry</i>	Lawler, Michael G. et al. <i>Ministry to Interchurch Marriage: A National Study</i> . Omaha, NE: Center for Marriage and Family, Creighton University, 1999.
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i> . Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1964.
Lindbeck	Lindbeck, George A. <i>The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age</i> . Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984.
Link	Link, Hans-Georg, Ed. <i>Apostolic Faith Today: A Handbook for Study, Faith and Order Paper No. 124</i> . Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1985.
McGrath	McGrath, Alister E. <i>Christian Theology: An Introduction</i> . Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1994.
MM	<i>Matrimonia Mixta</i> . Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1970.
Ouellet	Ouellet, Marc Cardinal. <i>Divine Likeness: Toward a Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family</i> . Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006.
Panikulam	Panikulam, George. <i>Koinōnia in the New Testament: A Dynamic Expression of Christian Life in Analecta Biblica 85</i> . Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1979.
Pannenberg	Pannenberg, Wolfhart. <i>The Church</i> . Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1983.
Ratzinger	Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal. <i>Introduction to Christianity</i> . San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004.
Reflection	<i>Reflection And Orientations On Interreligious Dialogue And The Proclamation Of The Gospel Of Jesus Christ</i> . Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1991.
Russell	Russell, Norman. <i>Cyril of Alexandria</i> . London & New York: Routledge, 2000.
Schütz	Schütz, John Howard. <i>Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority</i> . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.
Sharing	Reardon, Ruth & Finch, Melanie, Eds. <i>Sharing Communion: An appeal to the Churches by interchurch families</i> . London: William Collins Sons, 1983.

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Stam	Stam, John E. <i>Episcopacy in the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus</i> . Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt Kommissionsverlag, 1969.
Sullivan	Sullivan, Francis A, SJ. <i>The Church We Believe In: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic</i> . New York / Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 1988.
Tugwell	Simon Tugwell, O.P. <i>The Apostolic Fathers</i> . London: Continuum, 1989.
Yeago	Yeago, David S. "The Office of the Keys: On the Disappearance of Discipline in Protestant Modernity," in <i>Marks of the Body of Christ</i> , edited by Carl E Braaten and Robert W Jenson, 95-122. Grand Rapids MI / Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 1999.

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## By Way of an Introduction<sup>1</sup>

### Background

The genesis of this thesis lies in two concrete experiences. The first, and foundational, is my marriage as a Roman Catholic to a woman of the Anglican tradition. What began as a journey of love developed into a life-long ecumenical journey, joining the growing subset of such marriages in which both spouses retain their respective church membership, worship together and raise their children in both churches to the extent they are able. We began living in our marriage the *already* of Christian unity within the *not yet* of unity between our churches. Such families are known variously as interchurch families (Anglophone countries), *foyers mixtes* (France), *Konfessionsverbindende Paare und Familien* (Germany), *Coppie interconfessionali* (Italy).

The second is more prosaic. I participated in a meeting in Rome, Italy, in 2005, between representatives of the Interchurch Families International Network and some members of the staff of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity<sup>2</sup> where we were invited to begin exploring the reality of the term “domestic church.”

### Potential Conflict of Interest

While sincerely desiring to discover and express the reality of interchurch families as domestic church, and the opportunities that experience may give for growth in unity between their churches, I am not a wholly objective observer.

My wife and I worship together and participate actively in the life of both our churches. We have participated in international Anglophone conferences in the USA (1996),

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<sup>1</sup> This way of entitling an introduction was used by James H.L. Friesen in his M.A. thesis, *Paul J. Griffiths and the Interreligious Encounter: A Christian Response to Religious Plurality*, Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 2000. Friesen in turn cites its use in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Devils*, as translated by David Maraschack.

<sup>2</sup> <http://interchurchfamilies.org/ifir/2006/ifir04-200604Romevisit.pdf> (accessed 22 March 2008).

Canada (2001, where we were principal coordinators), and Australia (2005). We have also participated in world gatherings in Geneva (1998) and Rome (2003). I administer the web site for interchurch families ([interchurchfamilies.org](http://interchurchfamilies.org)) which constitutes the largest single resource for interchurch families in the world. I also administer the listserv, [aifw@mylist.net](mailto:aifw@mylist.net), where some 180 members from around the world share the hopes and the difficulties of the path to Christian unity as lived out in their marriages. As such, the findings are of immediate relevance to our life of faith.

### **The task**

Rev'd Dr. Jamie Hawkey, a rapporteur<sup>3</sup> for the 2008 Lambeth Conference, suggests churches need to “forge new and imaginative methods of appreciating and evaluating each other’s – and our own – ecclesiality.” He suggests that

one way of doing this might be to refocus our attention on the four classic “Marks” or “Notes” of the Church which embody the nature of the Church, and on how different Christian communities might appreciate each other through these four essential prisms.<sup>4</sup>

This research project is a contribution in that vein, seeking to determine whether or not the “marks” (one, holy, catholic and apostolic) of the Church can be seen to apply to interchurch families: couples united in a common baptism, with that union enhanced by marriage. If so, then their existence as couples united across denominational lines must bring unique values, as well as unique opportunities, to the churches of which they are members.

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<sup>3</sup> A ‘rapporteur’ is one who has been appointed by a deliberative body to investigate and issue or a situation; one who is responsible for compiling reports and presenting them, as to a governing body, in this case for and to the Lambeth Conference.

<sup>4</sup> Jamie Hawkey, *Renewing the Marks: Called to be One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic in One in Christ*, Vol 43, No. 2, (Winter 2009): 184.



The research project encompassed interchurch couples in the United States and the United Kingdom, whose participation formed an invaluable component of my work, giving concrete, particular, personal witness to the reality of the domestic church.

## CHAPTER ONE:

### Thesis

The research project from which this thesis emerges began as a hypothesis, namely that there would be within the lives of interchurch families signs of the unity, sanctity, catholicity and apostolicity that are the “marks” of the Church. These “marks” have been recognized for centuries, indeed since the early days of the Church. Their status was formally recognized in the Niceo-Constantinopolitan creed of the 4th century, where the church universal professes faith “in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.”<sup>5</sup>

### Arguments

Having surveyed interchurch couples in the United States and the United Kingdom, I now argue that there are clear indicators of these “marks,” so much so that interchurch families are, as with same-church couples, legitimately to be recognized as “domestic church.”<sup>6</sup> I further argue that such interchurch couples are not a threat but a gift to the Church, through the churches and ecclesial communities of which they are part, on the journey to full Christian unity. I do so in hope that the theological and ecclesiological status of their experience may become a gift of unity, forged through a common baptism and enhanced by marriage, to be brought by interchurch families to their churches, there to be unwrapped, recognized, and celebrated. Finally, I argue that there are clear opportunities, several of which I outline, whereby the churches may incorporate and nurture the gift of interchurch families in their midst.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf the International Consultation on English Texts (ICET), as published at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English\\_versions\\_of\\_the\\_Nicene\\_Creed\\_in\\_current\\_use](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_versions_of_the_Nicene_Creed_in_current_use). Accessed 19 March 2011.

<sup>6</sup> As we will see, this term came into modern use during the Second Council of the Vatican (Vatican II).

Several realities call for this thesis to be written from a predominantly, though not exclusively, Catholic perspective. One is that the phrase *domestic church* has gained prominence primarily within the Catholic Church. Also, while clearly a significant number of couples marry across Protestant denominational lines,<sup>7</sup> in each and every response to this survey, one of the spouses was a Roman Catholic. Finally, I am a Catholic writer, and am particularly concerned to address the unique and often challenging barriers to ecclesial unity that exist within my own tradition.

### The Terms

The term *interchurch family* is used as understood by interchurch families themselves. This understanding is evident in a document produced by participants of the Second World Gathering of Interchurch Families, held at the Mondo Migliore Centre near Rome, 24-28 July 2003, where the following definition is given:

An interchurch family includes a husband and wife who come from two different church traditions (often a Roman Catholic married to a Christian of another communion). Both of them retain their original church membership, but so far as they are able they are committed to live, worship and participate in their spouse's church also. If they have children, as parents they exercise a joint responsibility under God for their religious and spiritual upbringing, and they teach them by word and example to appreciate both their Christian traditions.<sup>8</sup>

The term *domestic church* was used in the “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church” (*Lumen Gentium*) issued in 1964, a fruit of the Second Council of the Vatican:

From the wedlock of Christians there comes the family, in which new citizens of human society are born, who by the grace of the Holy Spirit received in baptism are made children of God, thus perpetuating the people of God through the centuries. **The family is, so to speak, the domestic church.** In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children; they should encourage

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<sup>7</sup> cf Michael G. Lawler, Gail S. Risch and Lisa A. Riley, *Church Experience of Interchurch and Same-Church Couples in Family Ministry: Empowering Through Faith* Vol 13, No 4. (Winter 1999), 36, drawing on the research of Andrew Greeley, Norval D. Glenn, Dean R. Hoge & Kathleen Ferry, and others.

<sup>8</sup> Association of Interchurch Families, *Interchurch Families and Christian Unity: Rome 2003* (London, UK: 2003), 1.

them in the vocation which is proper to each of them, fostering with special care vocation to a sacred state.<sup>9</sup>

The term's historical and theological foundations and import are generally studied within an understanding of same-church families. Referring to the work of Dan Browning and colleagues,<sup>10</sup> Lisa Sowle Cahill suggests "the key difference that these authors see between Catholic and Protestant understandings of Domestic Church is that the former is *sacramental*, while the latter is *covenantal*."<sup>11</sup> What happens when these two understandings meet, as happens within interchurch marriages? Does the validity of the term hold, even though different linguistic constructs are used to describe the reality? This research project and thesis is a contribution to that study and exploration.

Drawing from research conducted in 2008 and published elsewhere<sup>12</sup> I will compare the narratives of interchurch families vis-à-vis the narrative of scripture and church teachings on the ancient creedal "marks" of the Church, then draw out potential opportunities for interchurch families and their churches.

## **Review of Literature**

While accepting the work already done on the theological merits of the term *domestic church*, it is helpful to familiarize ourselves with the term, so we can more readily determine to what extent it applies to the life of interchurch families. It is also necessary to review literature written on and within the world of interchurch families to see what contributions they may make in understanding and applying the term within the interchurch family framework.

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<sup>9</sup> *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church / Lumen Gentium*, in *The Documents of Vatican II*, Edited by Walter M. Abbott (New York: American Press, 1966), #11. Emphasis mine.

<sup>10</sup> Don S. Browning et al, *From Culture Wars to Common Ground: Religion and the American Family Debate* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> Lisa Sowle Cahill, *Family: A Christian Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 132.

<sup>12</sup> *Interchurch Families as Domestic Church: Familial Experiences* <http://interchurchfamilies.org/STM/> (accessed 4 Feb 2011).

We begin our journey in the writings of St Paul. Paul speaks of the relationship of marriage, with particular reference to Gen. 2:24: “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cling to his wife, and the two shall be made into one.” Paul then goes on to say “This is a great foreshadowing; I mean that it refers to Christ and the Church.” (Eph. 5:32) In Paul’s thinking, then, if we want to know what the Church’s spousal relationship with Christ is like, we should look to sound marriages for our reference point. As Professor Florence Caffrey Bourg states in her seminal work *Where Two or Three are Gathered: Christian Families as Domestic Church*, “Domestic church is a concept that directs our attention to the ecclesial character of Christian families and, conversely, the familial character of the Church.”<sup>13</sup>

When we move to the writings of the early Church, we see that there is not a great deal written about the family as church, even though, as Lisa Sowle Cahill indicates, “the household was important as a locus of conversion in the early church.”<sup>14</sup> That locus of conversion will be seen as we look at the marks of the Church. Cahill continues, “Indeed, patristic writers of the first four centuries gave relatively little attention to the family, in comparison with the number and length of their treatises on virginity and continence.”<sup>15</sup> Still, both Cahill and Bourg point to several patristic statements which at the very least provide precedent for the later development in understanding the family as domestic church. For example, Bourg quotes John Chrysostom’s “Homily 20 on Ephesians,” stating, “If we regulate our household [properly],...we will also be fit to oversee the Church, for the

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<sup>13</sup> Florence Caffrey Bourg, *Where Two or Three are Gathered: Christian Families as Domestic Church*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 8.

<sup>14</sup> Cahill, 48.

<sup>15</sup> Cahill, 49.

household is a little Church.”<sup>16</sup> Similarly, she quotes Chrysostom (Homily 26 on Acts 12:1-2) where he says “Let the house be a Church consisting of men and women...”<sup>17</sup> As Cahill indicates, however, Chrysostom “extols the miracle of sexual union and of parenthood in uniting the couple”<sup>18</sup> in a way which most writers did not. Indeed, in what must be good news for childless couples, he sees value in sexual union even when a child is not produced. “No, their intercourse effects the joining of their bodies, and they are made one, just as when perfume is mixed with ointment.”<sup>19</sup>

While Bourg, drawing from the work of Horace Bushnell, Lisa Sowle Cahill and Thomas Martin,<sup>20</sup> provides several minor examples of Protestant and Reformation-era reference to the household as domestic church, the concept has been little used within those traditions. Even within the Roman Catholic Church, there was little understanding of the term until recent years. As Bourg indicates, “Following the patristic period, domestic church was all but forgotten in Roman Catholic theology.”<sup>21</sup> We must therefore turn to more recent developments.

It was at the Second Council of the Vatican, 1960-64, that the theme of *domestic church* was resurrected after some 1500 years of silence, thanks to the interventions of Bishop Fiordelli.<sup>22</sup> This theme was expanded on by Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Bourg, 10.

<sup>17</sup> Bourg, 10.

<sup>18</sup> Cahill, 57.

<sup>19</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homily 12 on Colossians 4:18*, in *St John Chrysostom*, edited by Roth and Anderson, cited in Cahill, 57.

<sup>20</sup> cf Bourg, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Bourg, 11.

<sup>22</sup> For those wishing an overview of those interventions beyond the scope of this paper, Michael Fahey analyzes them in *The Christian Family as Domestic Church at Vatican II* in *The Family*, ed. Lisa Sowle Cahill and Dietmar Mieth, Concilium Series, vol. 4 (London: SCM Press; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995) 85-92, while Joseph Atkinson outlines their history, and the philosophical and ecclesiological discussion and development which followed, in “*Family as Domestic Church: Developmental Trajectory, Legitimacy, and Problems of Appropriation*” in *Theological Studies* 66, no 3 (2005), 592-604.

<sup>23</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1975) Art 71.

and later by Pope John Paul II. Opening the 1980 Synod of Bishops, John Paul II said the family is meant to “constitute the church in its fundamental dimension.”<sup>24</sup> That it became a strong part of the life of the Church is evident in John Paul II’s *Familiaris Consortio*.

Having stated the fundamental call of the Gospel, namely conversion to Christ, John Paul II continues:

The Church once again feels the pressing need to proclaim the Gospel... to all those who are called to marriage . . . The Church is deeply convinced that only by the acceptance of the Gospel are the hopes that man legitimately places in marriage and in the family capable of being fulfilled.<sup>25</sup>

He goes on to say, “The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason too it can and should be called ‘the domestic Church.’” (FC #21) Finally, he says

Thus the Christian family, which springs from marriage as a reflection of the loving covenant uniting Christ with the Church, and as a participation in that covenant, will manifest to all people the Saviour’s living presence in the world, and the genuine nature of the Church. (FC #50)

Expressed here is a clear link between the spousal relationship that is marriage, and the Church’s spousal relationship with Christ.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, in their 1994 Pastoral Message *Follow the Way of Love*, states simply, “You are the Church in your home.” Therefore, “The point of the teaching is simple, yet profound. As Christian families, you not only belong to the Church, but your daily life is a true expression of the Church.”<sup>26</sup>

We must not leave out the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Speaking of the family, it quotes *Familiaris Consortio*, saying “the Christian family constitutes a specific revelation

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<sup>24</sup> Mitch & Kathy Finley, *Building Christian Families* (Allen TX: Thomas More, 1984), 15.

<sup>25</sup> John Paul II, *The Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World / Familiaris Consortio* (Boston: St Paul Books and Media, 1991), paragraph 3.

<sup>26</sup> *Follow the Way of Love* (Washington: USCCB, 1994) <http://www.nccbuscc.org/laity/follow.shtml>, accessed 8 Feb 2011

and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called a domestic church.”<sup>27</sup> The *Catechism* adds a brief but helpful section (Articles 811-870) on each of the four “marks” of the Church. We will explore these in more detail later.

These writings are sufficient to point to the validity of the term *domestic church*. What we need do now is review and connect any material specifically concerning interchurch families as potential domestic churches.

The first real change in official church understanding came with Pope Paul VI’s *Motu Proprio Matrimonia Mixta*. It recognizes a large growth in numbers of “mixed marriages”<sup>28</sup> and that “a great influence in this regard has been exercised by the growth and spread of civilization and industry, urbanization and consequent rural depopulation, migrations in great numbers and the increase in numbers of exiles of every kind.”<sup>29</sup>

An understanding of a subset of “mixed marriages,” known (at least in the English language) as “interchurch families” had barely begun to develop, and only through groups and associations of such married couples beginning to gather in various countries. That development was to come to some extent in the 1993 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms of Ecumenism* (DAPNE),<sup>30</sup> which in turn has given rise to additional Directories<sup>31</sup> promulgated by various Episcopal Conferences and Dioceses around the world. Each of these has as its primary function the work of applying the principles in the DAPNE.

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<sup>27</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994), #2204, quoting *Familiaris Consortio*, 21.

<sup>28</sup> A mixed marriage is a “marriage between two baptized persons, one of whom is either baptized as a Catholic, or has been received into full communion after baptism” Code of Canon Law, #1124

<sup>29</sup> Paul VI, *Matrimonia Mixta* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1970)

<sup>30</sup> *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms of Ecumenism* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993)

<sup>31</sup> Several can be found via the interchurchfamilies.org web site at <http://interchurchfamilies.org/sitemap.htm#Episcopal>. One of the most recent and most promising is that of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon, found at [http://www.ecumenism.net/archive/stoon\\_sacramental\\_sharing\\_directives\\_feb\\_13\\_2007.pdf](http://www.ecumenism.net/archive/stoon_sacramental_sharing_directives_feb_13_2007.pdf)



In addition to these formal statements by individual churches, several ecumenical dialogues have produced statements on the subject of interchurch families. The Roman Catholic and Anglican bishops of Canada, for example, produced *Pastoral Guidelines for Interchurch Marriages Between Anglicans and Roman Catholics in Canada*, in which they say “though Anglicans and Roman Catholics who marry have been baptized in different Churches, their union is a true sacrament and gives rise to a ‘domestic church’.”<sup>32</sup> It helpfully provides understandings and statements from both the Anglican and Catholic churches. Another such statement is *Interchurch Families: Resources for Ecumenical Hope*, a fruit of the Catholic / Reformed dialogue in the USA.<sup>33</sup> The entire document is predicated on the very significant opening statement,

Interchurch families are a gift both for our churches and for the whole Church of Jesus Christ. The creativity and longing for a unity that can be visibly manifest, often expressed by members of such families, can serve as a witness to the whole Church.<sup>34</sup>

In the United Kingdom, *Churches Together in England*, working in conjunction with *CYTUN (Churches Together in Wales)*, produced a valuable document entitled *Churches Together in Marriage*. While not speaking directly to the term *domestic church*, this document says that “interchurch couples should be seen as presenting a **promise** and not a **threat**”<sup>35</sup> (emphasis in the original). It then goes on to speak of the need “to support interchurch families and to interact with them so that the growth of love and understanding in the home affects the life of church and society.”<sup>36</sup> We will explore this connection more fully

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<sup>32</sup> *Pastoral Guidelines for Interchurch Marriages Between Anglicans and Roman Catholics in Canada* (Ottawa, ON: CCCB Publications Service, 1987), 7.

<sup>33</sup> John C. Bush and Patrick R. Cooney, *Interchurch Families: Resources for Ecumenical Hope* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002)

<sup>34</sup> Bush & Cooney, 1.

<sup>35</sup> *Churches Together in Marriage: Pastoral Care of Interchurch Families* (London: Churches Together in England & Churches Together in Wales, 1994), 2.

<sup>36</sup> Churches Together, 3.

as we look at the “marks” of the Church. Finally, it observes that the term “interchurch families”

is intended to reflect the coming together of two church traditions within a marriage, but also – and of particular importance – two local church communities being drawn together through such a marriage and in the process witnessing to the reconciling love of Christ in human relationships.<sup>37</sup>

We see here echoes of unity, sanctity, catholicity and apostolicity.

George Kilcourse, a priest of the diocese of Louisville, KY, has walked with interchurch families for many years, exploring and helping develop the theology of their experience. His intimate knowledge of their experience, combined with his careful attention to ecumenical and sacramental theology, have made his book, *Double Belonging: Interchurch Families and Christian Unity*<sup>38</sup> valuable for any research into the value interchurch families bring to their churches, and the implications for their churches of their presence.

The “double belonging” term he proposes, however, has difficulties even as it expresses very well the experience of interchurch families. While couples experience belonging to the Church through two different concrete ecclesial entities, there can be only one Body of Christ to which each belongs. The French use the term *double insertion*<sup>39</sup> to express the same reality, suggesting one is “inserted” into the one Body through two vehicles. This term expresses the intent more clearly than does Kilcourse’s term, but it does not have the same resonance in English that it has in French. And so the search continues for language which will adequately express this human and ecclesial reality.

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<sup>37</sup> Churches Together, 4.

<sup>38</sup> George A. Kilcourse, *Double Belonging: Interchurch Families and Christian Unity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992)

<sup>39</sup> The words are identical in English, though they are pronounced differently.

Other Catholic clergy have similarly been supportive in their own countries, e.g. René Beaupère, founder of *the Centre œcuménique Saint-Irénée* in Lyons, France, and John Coventry, S.J., of England. Beaupère's *Mariages mixtes entre chrétiens* is summarized thus: "we can now see that these 'little domestic churches' that are interchurch families, far from forming the 'third church' against which religious leaders occasionally warn them, constitute 'islands of reconciliation' within the confessional communities in which they live, and between these communities."<sup>40</sup> Coventry, providing the conclusion in *Sharing Communion*, edited by Ruth Reardon and Melanie Finch, a book otherwise focused on the neuralgic issue of Eucharistic sharing, says "The global and domestic theologies of the church are both valid, and pastoral practice needs to accommodate both."<sup>41</sup> As early as the mid-1960s, Beaupère and Coventry recognized the pastoral needs and gifts of interchurch families, and walked with them in forming interchurch family associations. Kilcourse, Beaupère and Coventry are ardent supporters of interchurch families, as well as serious theologians in their own right, bringing their theological expertise to bear on a variety of issues confronting interchurch families and their churches.

Finally, there are the practitioners themselves, interchurch families who have lived their ecumenical journey of unity. Key among these must be Dr. Ruth Reardon and her late husband Canon Martin Reardon, who together with John Coventry began the Association of Interchurch Families (AIF) in England almost forty years ago. Their work, as well as a number of their articles in the Association's *Journal*<sup>42</sup> which Ruth edited, is invaluable.

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<sup>40</sup> René Beaupère, *Mariages mixtes entre chrétiens* in *Intams review*. Vol 6 (Autumn 2000): 230.

<sup>41</sup> Ruth Reardon & Melanie Finch, Eds, *Sharing Communion: An appeal to the Churches by interchurch families* (London: William Collins Sons, 1983), 101.

<sup>42</sup> Association of Interchurch Families, *Journal* (London, 1993-2004), [http://interchurchfamilies.org/journal/journal\\_index.shtml](http://interchurchfamilies.org/journal/journal_index.shtml)

Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi of the Catholic University of Leuven has published *Marriage and the Church: Reflections on an Underrated Relationship*<sup>43</sup> and *Interchurch Marriage: Conjugal and Ecclesial Communion in the Domestic Church*.<sup>44</sup>

Several interchurch family members, too, have published their own experiences and theological reflections, through publications such as *Ecumenism (Canada)*, *INTAMS review (Belgium)*, the Association of Interchurch Families *Journal (UK)*, and *Living Light (USA)*. Space does not allow a full expose of all the articles one will find in these publications. A specific journal well worth reading, however, is the *INTAMS review*, Vol. 6 #2, Autumn 2000,<sup>45</sup> containing a focus on interchurch marriages, with nine articles on the topic, including summaries of the status of interchurch marriages within the churches by Cardinal Edward Cassidy, President Emeritus of the Roman Catholic Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Rome, and Konrad Reiser, former General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Geneva.

Having set the stage, as it were, with the above literature, we will turn ourselves to that most important task of listening to the voices of interchurch families as expressed in written responses to a series of questions exploring their concrete, particular, personal experiences of being domestic church. If they are indeed, as Pope Benedict XVI indicated, a “practical laboratory of unity,”<sup>46</sup> then what has happened and is happening in that laboratory must be carefully observed, not with preconceived notions as to what *must* happen, but to see what *does* happen, and to draw conclusions and implications for the wider world of faith.

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas Knieps-Port-le-Roi, *Marriage and the Church*, *Celebrating Christian Marriage*, ed. Adrian Thatcher, 105-118 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001)

<sup>44</sup> Thomas Knieps-Port-le-Roi, *Interchurch Marriage : Conjugal and Ecclesial Communion in the Domestic Church*, Presented at the Societas Oecumenica, Prague, 2006

<sup>45</sup> *INTAMS Review* Vol 6 #2 (Autumn 2000).

<sup>46</sup> Benedict XVI, *Ecumenical Encounter*, presented on the occasion of his pastoral visit to Poland, 25 May 2006. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2006/may/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20060525\\_incontro-ecumenico\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060525_incontro-ecumenico_en.html).

## Previous Studies

It must be recognized that this survey is not the first through which interchurch families have been able to give voice to their joys and difficulties, their hopes and dreams. A questionnaire, responded to by thirty-three couples, provided input into a 1972 document entitled simply *Two-Church Families*.<sup>47</sup> Published by the Association of Interchurch Families of the United Kingdom, it provides observations and helpful comments on topics such as preparation for marriage, joint prayer and worship, and bringing up children.

Similarly, *Sharing Communion* already referred to is a product of a survey of eighty interchurch couples in the United Kingdom in 1982. While focusing on the Eucharist, it makes clear that the voices of interchurch families come from

couples who are committed and practicing members of their churches, couples who have tried in their lives to give full weight *both* to the fact that the family is a unity *and* to their two-church situation.<sup>48</sup>

A 1986 survey of 316 members of the Association of Interchurch Families in the United Kingdom, begun with “the objective of examining to what extent interchurch couples feel they ‘belong’ in two churches,”<sup>49</sup> formed the basis for *Whom God Hath Joined* by Mary Bard, a Catholic married to an Anglican. In it, John Coventry S.J., speaking of the term *domestic church* of the Second Council of the Vatican, says:

This has obvious repercussions for the two-church family. It is thereby designated the home and growth-point for Christian unity between churches, and the churches in turn are invited and challenged to foster the unity of such families by every Christian means (and the Eucharist in particular was given to the church to deepen and develop existing unity).<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Two-Church Families* (London: Association of Interchurch Families, 1972, reprinted 1983, 1990, 1992).

<sup>48</sup> *Sharing*, 24.

<sup>49</sup> Mary Bard, *Whom God Hath Joined* (Great Wakering, Essex, UK: McCrimmon Publishing, 1987), 17.

<sup>50</sup> Bard, 112.

The Center for Marriage and Family at Creighton University, in Omaha, Nebraska produced a national study on interchurch marriages.<sup>51</sup> Of 1512 respondents, 16.7% were in interchurch marriages at the time of the study. The study and summary article *Church Experience of Interchurch and Same-Church Couples*<sup>52</sup> provide a sociological understanding of the reality of interchurch families in comparison to that of same-church families.

### **Research Methodology**

The methodology for the research component of this thesis, as well as the resulting data, have been published at <http://www.interchurchfamilies.org/STM/>.

The research was carried out as a qualitative process, giving participants free range to response to a variety of questions posed to them. The survey questions were on topics familiar to the couples, quite possibly the subject of discussion around their dining tables and in their congregations. In other words, the topics focused on their lived reality. Included were questions concerning the “marks” of the church, elements of *koinonia*, and funeral preparations.

The people surveyed were identified as interchurch couples, registered either for the American Association of Interchurch Families biennial conference (Louisville, KY, 2008), or the 2008 British Association of Interchurch Families annual conference, Swanwick, England. The Canadian couples to whom surveys were sent were all personally known to me.

Of fifty-three survey questionnaires distributed to interchurch couples in Canada, the USA and the United Kingdom, a total of twenty-four (45%) were returned: five (21%) from the American Association, nineteen (79%) from participants at the United Kingdom

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<sup>51</sup> Center for Marriage and Family, *Ministry to Interchurch Marriages: A National Study* (Omaha NE: Creighton University, 1999).

<sup>52</sup> Michael Lawler, Gail S. Risch, and Lisa A. Riley, *Church Experience of Interchurch and Same-Church Couples in Family Ministry* 13 (1999), 36-46.

Association's conference at Swanwick, and none from Canadians (0%). Of the responding couples, twenty had a total of 51 children, while three had no children. One respondent was an adult child of an interchurch couple, who offered to fill in the survey as well. While this was not part of the original survey methodology, I accepted the offer as a way of comparing the parents' perception of what their children received and lived with the child's perception of the same reality.

Their responses, interspersed throughout the chapters of this thesis, can be understood according to the following format, e.g. (Q3, R1078, H:C/W:A, Y:3, C:Y), where

'Q' refers to the question number in the survey.

'R' refers to the number assigned to the respondent.

'H' and 'W' refer to the Husband or Wife. Within that, the following apply:

A=Anglican/Episcopalian, B=Baptist, C=Catholic, D=Disciples of Christ,  
F=Free Church, M=Methodist, P=Presbyterian, R=Reformed

'Y' refers to the cohort of years married, with 1 being newly married to 10 years, 2 being 11-20, 3 being 21-30, and 4 indicating having been married for more than 30 years.

'C' indicates whether or not the couple had children, i.e. 'Y'es or 'N'o.

We turn, then, to the study of the issue at hand, namely whether interchurch couples can be claimed to be domestic church, and if so, how their gift to the churches can be fostered.

## CHAPTER TWO

### One

Our exploration of interchurch families as reflective of the *oneness* of the Church calls for two different but related approaches. We will first explore what Scripture has to say about unity, then discover something of the Church's self-understanding, both in the early life of the Church and today. That will provide us with the parameters against which to measure the experience of the spouses and their family's unity. Does their experience show the two spouses to be truly *one* within themselves? Does that unity extend to their immediate family? Is there a unity present which is more than that of two or more people living under the same roof? Does that unity which is the family relate in a unitive manner with those around, the congregations and Churches or ecclesial communities of which they are part? With these questions in mind, let us look first at the grounds against which we are to measure the unity of interchurch families.

#### **The Exploration Begins**

We may begin with the priestly prayer of Jesus. Having prayed for his disciples, he turns now to all who will come to believe in him.

I do not pray for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their word, that all may be one as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; I pray that they may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. I have given them the glory you gave me that they may be one, as we are on – I living in them, you living in me – that their unity may be complete. (Jn. 17:20-23)

This earnest and powerful prayer for unity of human beings with each other, and humanity with God, is both preceded and followed by numerous scripture passages which speak of the unity of man and woman, the covenanted unity of God and Israel, and the unity of the Church.



Scripture makes clear that it is God who brings two people together in what we call marriage, God who makes us *one*. This reality is referred to in the very beginning of scripture, in reference to the beginning of the world. We see man/humanity being created in the image of the Trinitarian God: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion...” (Gn. 1:26) This immediately alerts us to the fact human beings are not meant to be solitary. This depth of communion with other humans is played out again in Gn. 2:7, where, in a play on the words *adam* (person) and *adama* (ground), God creates the man as an earth-person, the first of many beings. We see that while all of the other beings are good, none are adequate to the need for a true partner. God eventually creates the woman, so intimately related to the man that, whereas the other animals and birds are created separately from the man and placed before him, she is made from his rib. She is literally “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” (Gn. 2:23) It is here, too, that we are given another sign of the reality of that intimacy: “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body.” (Gn. 2:24) That this sense of the unity of man and woman as gift and work of God is consistent over centuries, and very much at the heart of God, is evident when Jesus himself picks up the theme, saying:

At the beginning of creation God made them male and female; for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and the two shall become as one. They are no longer two but one flesh. (Mk 10:8)

This is picked up again in Ephesians 5:31, immediately after Paul has laid out a pattern of mutual love and respect (Eph 5:22-30), a pattern which is, in the context of the day, quite surprising. A woman may indeed have been a “worthy wife” whose “value is far beyond pearls” (Prov. 31:10), yet she was first bartered over, effectively sold to the highest bidder, and could be disposed of in divorce at her husband’s whim. In these passages, Paul is

laying out a new pattern of relationship, one in which the respect of a wife for her husband is situated in the context of a love for her in which he is willing to nourish her, care for her, to the point of his own death.

We cannot avoid the fact Paul appears to take a misogynist view of women in 1 Cor. 11:1-10. We must remember that in these passages he is attempting to establish propriety in worship within the cultural norms of a specific community. In light of this passage, our task today is not to establish the same cultural norms to which Paul refers, but to establish propriety within our worship within the cultural norms of our own communities. Having established the principle of propriety, however, Paul immediately goes on to speak of the intimate and completely irreducible relationship of unity between men, women and God, saying “Yet, in the Lord, woman is not independent of man nor man independent of woman. In the same way that woman was made from man, so man is born of woman; and all is from God.” (1 Cor. 11:11-12)

### **Marriage as Covenant**

We would be remiss if we did not look at another significant scriptural theme which relates to the unity of marriage - that of covenant. As Marc Cardinal Ouellet says, “God’s covenant with Israel and humanity is the story of a wedding.”<sup>53</sup> Several Old Testament passages provide evidence of this. Hosea, for example, speaking in the second half of the eighth century B.C., portraying God’s relationship with Israel, says, “I will make a covenant for them on that day...,” (Hos. 2:20) and “I will espouse you to me forever; I will espouse you in right and justice, in love and in mercy; I will espouse you in fidelity, and you shall know the Lord.” (Hos. 2:21-22) Jeremiah (circa 580 B.C.) again gives voice to God: “With

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<sup>53</sup> Marc Cardinal Ouellet, *Divine Likeness: Toward a Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006), 80.

age-old love I have loved you; so I have kept my mercy toward you.” (Jer. 31:3) Despite the fact Israel breaks covenant with God, God never changes his mind, never tosses Israel away. Instead, when Israel has repented, he enters into a new covenant, saying “this is the new covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days. I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God and they shall be my people.” (Is. 31:33) God wills it. Israel *shall* be his renewed people, about whom God says

I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts. I will put my spirit within you and make you live by my statutes, careful to observe my decrees. You shall live in the land I gave your fathers: you shall be my people and I will be your God. (Ez. 36:26-28)

Other scriptures reflect the same reality of committed, exclusive love, but none does so better than the Song of Songs. In speaking of the Song, Ouellet cites Hans Urs von Balthasar.

According to von Balthasar, the song celebrates “but one thing: the beautiful, resplendent, and awesome glory of the *eros* between man and woman.” “*Eros* hovers freely about its own house, without any other purpose than loving and being loved: nowhere is there talk of marriage, or indeed of children”; “*eros* is self-sufficient” in its dreamed-of and desired existence. Detached from the historical circumstances of sin and guilt; “this is a supralapsarian *eros*, as it were.”<sup>54</sup>

Balthasar’s words are important to note, not only in the context of the “marital” love of God for his people, but because it points also to this sense of family unity and *domestic church* even when no children are involved, as is the case with several respondents in the survey.

Finally, we come to Christ himself. We have seen the promises of God to his people. Paul says “Whatever promises God has made have been fulfilled in him.” (2 Cor. 1:20) It is in Christ’s death that God proves his love for us, giving himself so we might be reclaimed

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<sup>54</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. VI: *Theology of the Old Covenant*, trans. Brian McNeil, C.R.V., and Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1991), 131-133, as cited in Marc Cardinal Ouellet, *Divine Likeness: Toward a Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 83.

and made one with him. (cf Rom. 5:6-11) “God is the one who firmly establishes us along with you in Christ; it is he who has anointed us and sealed us, thereby depositing the first payment, the Spirit, in our hearts.” (2 Cor. 1:21-22)

Whether in the first covenant between God and his people, or in the second covenant of forgiveness and reconciliation, justification and salvation of Jesus Christ, it is God who wills, God who acts. We are the bride, called to be loved and to love, into full and complete unity with the lover.

We can look at marriage through either a katalogical or an analogical lens. Let us take a moment to understand the difference in approach. Ouellet describes the analogical method, saying it “proceeds from the bottom up, beginning with creatures and rising toward God.” He goes on to speak of the katalogical method, employing the understanding of the term as developed by Hans Urs von Balthasar:

This method reverses the perspective and starts from on high to enlighten created realities. What this means, for example, is that instead of proceeding exclusively from the family to the Trinity (analogy), one can proceed also from the Trinity to the family (katalogy).<sup>55</sup>

Analogically, we can look at Jesus of Nazareth, and come to faith in the second person of a monotheistic Trinitarian God. Katalogically, we can look at the mystery of “the eternal life that was present to the Father and became visible to us” (1 Jn. 1:2), then discover the consequences of that mystery in the way we read scripture and live our lives. Katalogically, too, we can look at the love of Christ for his Church, and see what marriage is intended to be. Analogically, however, we can look at good, holy marriages, and see what is the relationship between Christ and his Church. Quite simply, marriage has something very important to say to the Church, on how Christ loves it, and how it is to love and respond to Christ.

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<sup>55</sup> See Ouellet, p. 14-15, for a discussion of the approach of Hans Urs von Balthasar.

According to M.G. Lawler and T.A. Salzman,

That is an exalted, some would say an exaggerated, claim to make for marriage, but it is the claim that two believing Christians make when they claim that they are entering into not only a legal marriage but also a sacrament of marriage. ... It is a claim that is extraordinarily difficult to live, for it is extraordinarily difficult for two individuals to become one coupled person.<sup>56</sup>

This term, “one coupled person” catches very well that sense of a God-created unity between a man and a woman which we call marriage. There remain two physical beings, yet in a very real way, they become *one*, a “coupled person.”

“There is one body and one spirit,” Paul wrote, “just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all” (Eph. 4:4-5). This is reflected in Paul’s statement about Eucharistic unity: “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of one bread.” (1 Cor. 10:17) Jesus had promised at the outset that “there would be one flock, one shepherd.” (Jn. 10:16)

It is worth noting that Paul offers both katalogical and analogical perspectives. Katalogically, the relationship between Christ and the church shows husbands and wives how to love and submit to each other. Analogically, however, he says the relationship of marriage is “a great foreshadowing”; “it refers to Christ and the church.” (1 Eph. 5:32) Marriage as a communion relationship of intimate love and commitment between a man and a woman existed long before the Church was established, and serves as a foreshadowing, a sign of the relationship between Christ and the church. Nonetheless, we would do well to look at the trajectory of reflection in the later Church on the matter of unity and marriage, for that reflection draws from scripture as we have done, and lights the way for what we understand of unity and marriage today.

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<sup>56</sup> M.G. Lawler & T.A. Salzman, “A Pastoral Letter of the United States Catholic Bishops on Marriage: A Commentary” in *INTAMS review* Vol 15, n2, (Fall 2009): 219.

## The Apostolic Fathers

Cyprian was elected Bishop of Carthage in 248 B.C. Faced with the fact that “[t]he division of the Christians in Africa into three competing communions, each with its own college of bishops, involved conflict over the efficacy of the rituals performed in other churches,”<sup>57</sup> he produced a treatise on the unity of the Catholic Church. Burns argues that for Cyprian, “The foundational text for the unity of the Church was the commissioning of Peter in Mt. 16:18-19.”<sup>58</sup> This commissioning “which was the foundation of the unity of the local church in its bishop, was in practice also the foundation of the unity of the church as a whole.”<sup>59</sup> So strong was Cyprian’s focus on church unity in the context of the divisions of the day that in his treatise *On Unity*, he insisted that “the sacred flesh of Christ cannot be eaten outside the one church.”<sup>60</sup> We can see from texts such as these how various churches can even today insist not only that their members are not to receive Communion in any church other than their own, but that no one other than members may be allowed to “take and eat” within their church. The unity of the church, on both the local and Episcopal level, was considered essential for reception of the Eucharist.

This sense of unity shows up again in the celebration of the Eucharist. As Peter Hinchliff, working from the writings of that same Cyprian of Carthage, argues,

Having taken the bread and wine, the bishop then mixed a little water with the wine in the cup. Here certainly the action represented, for Cyprian, something much vaster than would appear on the surface. It symbolized in microcosm what the whole rite achieved: the union of the people of God with the Lord Christ.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> J Patout Burns Jr., *Cyprian the Bishop* (London & New York: Routledge 2002), 100.

<sup>58</sup> Burns, 163.

<sup>59</sup> Burns, 163.

<sup>60</sup> Burns, 161.

<sup>61</sup> Peter Hinchliff, *Cyprian of Carthage and the Unity of the Christian Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman Publishers, 1974), 44.

If the Eucharist achieves such a union so earnestly desired by Christ and his followers, should we be surprised when interchurch families, needing to nourish and sustain the unity given them by God, earnestly desire to receive as that “coupled person”, that *one*?

Earlier we looked at the priestly prayer of Jesus. Cyril of Alexandria (378-444), in his commentary on John, says of this prayer,

He wishes them to enjoy a unity which is inseparable and indestructible, which may not be enticed away into a dissimilarity of wills by anything at all that exists in the world or any pursuit of pleasure, but rather preserves the power of love in the unity of devotion and holiness.<sup>62</sup>

He goes on “This is also what Paul himself meant when he said ‘one body and one spirit’ (Eph. 4:4), ‘we who are many are one body in Christ, for we all partake of the one bread’ (1 Cor. 10:17; cf Rom. 2:5).”<sup>63</sup> Once again in the life of the Church, we see how central is this sense of and need for unity. Once again, too, it should come as no surprise when we hear repeatedly from interchurch families this need to “partake of the one bread”. A need to actively take and eat of the one bread, take and drink of the one cup, goes hand in hand with the unity of the Church and the unity of the “one coupled person” made so by God in marriage.

### **The Present Day**

Let us move forward to the present day. What do we find? Georges Florovsky is Professor of Eastern Church History at Harvard. “The Orthodox Church,” he says, “is not a confession or denomination, one of many, one among the many. For the Orthodox, the Orthodox Church is just *the* Church.”<sup>64</sup> Speaking from that perspective, he argues

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<sup>62</sup> Norman Russell, *Cyril of Alexandria* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 128.

<sup>63</sup> Russell, 128.

<sup>64</sup> Georges Florovsky, *Primitive Tradition and the Traditions in The Unity We Seek*, Edited by William S. Morris. (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1962), 29.

The church is one. There is but one church of Christ. For the church is his body, and Christ is never divided. Unity is not one note of the church among the others. It denotes rather the very nature of the church: one Head and one body.<sup>65</sup>

Emlyn Davies, a Baptist minister who served for a time as President of the Baptist Federation of Canada, speaks of the issue of unity this way:

When we speak of the unity of the church we must give to the word “unity” its unique Christian connotation. The unity of the church is *sui generis*. It is the unity given by God. Our task... is to realize the unity which already exists, to be obedient to the God-given unity which He has entrusted to the church of His glory.<sup>66</sup>

In this context, Davies takes strong exception to Hans Küng’s reference to ecumenism as a work between denominations. “The ecumenical movement within the church”, he says, “owes its meaning and existence to the foundation fact of unity.”<sup>67</sup> In this, I would agree with both. The ecumenical movement does indeed owe its meaning and existence to the foundation fact of unity. Though expressed through a variety of cultural traditions, it is still one Body, that of Christ. The presence of what are known as denominations, however, provides an indicator of something more than a variety of cultural traditions, that indeed the foundational unity has been divided. In this sense, then, Küng is right: the ecumenical movement is a work between denominations, seeking to move from division to a variety of cultural traditions within a singular unity. In this, we must face a question. Are we truly divided, such that any move to unity must begin “from scratch”? Or does there remain, of that foundational fact of unity, some connection, however tenuous, in which we may find common ground, and take nourishment together?

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<sup>65</sup> Georges Florovsky, *Togetherness in Christ in The Unity We Seek*, Edited by William S. Morris. (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1962), 22.

<sup>66</sup> Emlyn Davies, *Our Mutual Fellowship in the Gospel in The Unity We Seek*, Edited by William S. Morris. (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1962), 67.

<sup>67</sup> Davies, 67.



There may yet be a glimmer of hope. It has to do with the term *subsists in* as given in the documents of Vatican II. This is often seen as a limitation, a suggestion that, while the Church of Christ may not be equated directly with the Catholic Church, yet the reality which is Church is to be found truly only there, with all others enjoying more or less only elements of that reality. George Tavard, one of the drafters of *Unitatis Redintegratio*, has this to say on this term:

First, the Latin term used to designate other Christians with whom Catholics ought to be in ecumenical dialogue was not *fratres separati*, but *fratres sejuncti*. This was done deliberately at the request of Cardinal Baggio, well known for his mastery of the Latin language: *separati*, he argued, would imply that there are and can be no relationships between the two sides; *sejuncti*, on the contrary, would assert that something has been cut between them, yet that separation is not complete and need not be definitive. The nuance does not come through easily in translation, but I would suggest ‘estranged brothers,’ rather than ‘separated.’<sup>68</sup>

We have then a different way of seeing the connectivity between our various churches and ecclesial communities. Let me take an accident involving an arm as an example. Had *separati* been the term used, then the arm has been severed, completely cut off from the torso. They are now two separate identities, an arm and a torso. The torso sees itself as alive (though injured) while the arm is seen, from the perspective of the torso, as dying or dead. (The analogy is somewhat limited, of course, as in the physical world an arm severed from the torso would not see itself as alive, while the analogical arm used here sees itself as alive and well and proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ.)

Given that the term *sejuncti* was used, however, we have exciting possibilities. There is severe damage, to be sure. But the arm is still attached, and together with the torso forms one body. Blood still flows back and forth between the extremity and the torso, nutrients continue to be distributed to the arm, and neurological signals continue to be sent, perhaps

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<sup>68</sup> G.H. Tavard, “Reassessing the Reformation,” in *One in Christ*, vol. 19 (1983): 360-61.

responded to, even if the flow in all three cases is imperfect. *The arm is still part of the body*, and the focus of care and concern is on healing and restoring the damage, so that *the entire and still united body can once again be whole*. Until that healing is completed, the body is not completely whole.

If this is the case, then we can reasonably say that the Church includes even those parts of the body which are partially severed from each other, not fully and completely attached, but attached nevertheless. The Church of Christ may subsist in the Catholic Church, as the documents of the Catholic Church state, but that Catholic Church *includes* all parts of the Church of Christ, even those not at the moment fully and healthily connected, yet connected nonetheless.

I would argue that the dialogues presently under way constitute, not an attempt to bring two separated body parts together, but to find ways to restore wholeness between the torso and arm which are still, no matter how tenuously, attached and *one*. There are no easy answers, no magical solutions, in this search for restoration. At the same time, signs of connectivity outside those formal dialogues should be able to be viewed, not as problems for the torso to deal with and restrain, but as opportunities for blood, nutrients, and neurological signals to flow ever more fully, until wholeness and unity has been fully restored. We are called to look at each other within the Church of Christ, and to joyously proclaim, not as a new creation but in recognition of an existing reality, that we indeed see “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!” (Gn. 2:23).

It must be recognized that not only would some within the Catholic Church not take kindly to seeing other churches and ecclesial communities as truly Catholic, even if imperfectly so, but some others also would not take kindly to this understanding of

themselves, preferring to see themselves as wholly separate from the Catholic Church. These different understandings clearly need to be considered, respected, and explored in ecumenical dialogues. I would add, speaking as a Catholic, that such an understanding needs also to be nurtured and developed within the Catholic Church itself, too many members of which continue to see our brothers and sisters of other Christian traditions as *separati* rather than *sejuncti*.

This sense of the unity of the whole in Christ is referred to in a most illuminating manner from a member of the Presbyterian church. This church has traditionally celebrated Communion no more than a few weeks of the year, “at ‘the Communion season,’ which has always been esteemed as the high point of the church’s worship.”<sup>69</sup> David W. Hay, Presbyterian theologian and Moderator of the 1975 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, looking at this result of incorporating what he suggests is Zwingli’s “altogether novel idea that the church could worship Sunday after Sunday without celebrating the Eucharist,”<sup>70</sup> argues that in so doing

[t]hey treated the Son’s gift of himself to the Father as a private matter within the Trinity, *not represented in the sacrament*, [emphasis in the original] and they therefore robbed it of its active aspect from the human side in which *the whole body, Head and members in one* [emphasis added], is presented to God on earth and in heaven.<sup>71</sup>

Hay then proceeds to argue for a liturgical renewal in the Presbyterian church:

Liturgy is not a matter merely of occasional ceremonies or forms of prayer. It is the eschatological action of the church, under the divine action, in which the mighty acts of God take place in the living present.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> David W. Hay, *Church Reformation and the World Church in The Unity We Seek*, Edited by William S. Morris. (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1962), 125.

<sup>70</sup> Hay, 124.

<sup>71</sup> Hay, 126.

<sup>72</sup> Hay, 127.

In all these examples, there clearly remains a sense of unity, and that the responsibility of working toward, indeed living, that unity which is at once present and not yet fully realized is as imperative here and now as it was there and then.

Within the Catholic Church, too, many documents point to the significance and unitive value of the family. It must be pointed out, however, that many of these are of relatively recent origin. Indeed, Norbert Mette, writing in *Concilium*, refers to J. Lange's *Ehe- und Familienpastoral heute*, to indicate that much of the Church's concern on the issue "is a result of the introduction of the feast of the Holy Family into the liturgical calendar in 1921."<sup>73</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has perhaps the most concise form of the teaching of the Catholic Church at the moment. For example,

A man and a woman united in marriage, together with their children, form a family. (CCC, 2202). The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called a *domestic church*. (CCC, 2204) The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. (CCC, 2205) The family is the *original cell of social life*. It is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life. Authority, stability, and a life of relationships within the family constitute the foundations for freedom, security, and fraternity within society. The family is the community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honor God, and make good use of freedom. Family life is an initiation into life in society. (CCC, 2207)<sup>74</sup>

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, says, "Christian spouses, in virtue of the sacrament of Matrimony, whereby they signify and partake of the mystery of that unity and fruitful love which exists between Christ and His Church, help each other to attain to holiness in their married life and in the rearing and education of their children. By reason of their state and rank in life they have their own special gift among the people of

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<sup>73</sup> Norbert Mette, "The Family in the Teaching of the Magisterium," *Concilium* n. 4 (1995): 75.

<sup>74</sup> There remains the question of committed and faithful same-sex relationships as marriage, a discussion and debate which is outside the bounds of this thesis.

God.”<sup>75</sup> *Familiaris Consortio* says: “the love that animates the interpersonal relationships of the different members of the family constitutes the interior strength that shapes and animates the family communion and community.”<sup>76</sup> The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, says, “the family, in which the various generations come together and help one another grow wiser and harmonize personal rights with the other requirements of social life, is the foundation of society.”<sup>77</sup> Finally, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

The Church is one: she acknowledges one Lord, confesses one faith, is born of one Baptism, forms only one Body, is given life by one Spirit, for the sake of one hope, at whose fulfillment all divisions will be overcome.<sup>78</sup>

### **Movement Toward Unity**

It should be noted that the *Catechism* recognizes the eschatological nature of unity. It is only in the final fulfillment that all divisions will be overcome. Despite all statements and protestations of unity, the Church, like marriage itself, will be perfectly *one* only in the eschaton.

The words of Scripture, the teachings of our churches, as well as our own experience, all tell us that in our marriages, we are made *one*, however imperfect that unity may as yet be. As with any sacrament, the ‘how’ of that unity remains a mystery, yet through centuries we have come to know that unity of which Scripture speaks.

That experience of unity is not limited to those of the same Christian tradition. It encompasses all whose faith is in Christ. Alister E McGrath, in his book *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, points out that “The World Council of Churches, one of the more important

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<sup>75</sup> *Lumen Gentium* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1964), 11 § 2.

<sup>76</sup> *Familiaris Consortio* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1981), 21.

<sup>77</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965), 52 § 3.

<sup>78</sup> CCC, 866.

agencies in the modern period to be concerned with Christian unity, defines itself as ‘a fellowship of churches, which confess our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior.’ Yet that very definition concedes the existence of a plurality of churches – Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Orthodox, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, and so on.”<sup>79</sup> Walter Cardinal Kasper speaks of this as “the inherent contradiction between the fact that we are *one* body in Jesus Christ yet live in separate churches.”<sup>80</sup> Faced with such obvious divisions, McGrath insists “ ‘Unity’ must not be understood *sociologically* or *organizationally*, but *theologically*.”<sup>81</sup> In support, he quotes Hans Küng who, in his book *The Church*, writes,

The unity of the church is a spiritual entity.... It is one and the same God who gathers the scattered from all places and all ages and makes them into one people of God. It is one and the same Christ who through his word and Spirit unites all together in the same bond of fellowship of the same body of Christ... The Church *is* one, and therefore *should* be one.<sup>82</sup>

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger argues the Church “is not defined as a matter of offices and organizations but on the basis of her worship of God: as a community at one table around the risen Christ, who gathers and unites them everywhere.”<sup>83</sup> If interchurch families are indeed domestic churches, then they, too, must be recognized in a similar manner. Worship of God is key, with that worship most predominantly around the Eucharistic table. Ratzinger again: “The Church began to be seen, not just as the unity of the Eucharistic table, but also as the community of those who through this table are united among themselves.”<sup>84</sup> This is important. Those who gather around the Eucharistic table are united among themselves *through* the Eucharistic table. The Eucharist must be sign of unity, yes, but if it is to be truly

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<sup>79</sup> Alister E McGrath. *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 418.

<sup>80</sup> Walter Cardinal Kasper. *Sacrament of Unity: The Eucharist and the Church*. (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2004), 61.

<sup>81</sup> McGrath, 420.

<sup>82</sup> Hans Küng, *The Church* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday-Image Books, 1967) cited in McGrath, 420.

<sup>83</sup> Ratzinger, Joseph Cardinal. *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 334.

<sup>84</sup> Ratzinger, 334.

*sacrament*, it must also be allowed to *effect* the unity. This is echoed in a recent conversation with a woman in an interchurch union, who said, “I know the Eucharist is a sacrament of unity. When we receive together, it effects the unity of our marriage.”<sup>85</sup>

This coming to unity, this being Church, is something which people participate in, of course. More importantly, however, it “is understood in terms of the Holy Spirit... the gift of God that turns man around toward a new beginning that he cannot give to himself, to a communion he can only receive as gift.”<sup>86</sup>

Let us now begin to look at the concrete experiences of interchurch couples themselves. As indicated in the beginning of this chapter, if interchurch families are truly *domestic church*, we should find within them indications of true unity, with that unity effecting a unitive function on other households and the congregations of which they are members.

### **The Experience**

The first issue to explore is that of expectations in marrying someone of another Christian tradition. (Q3) The range of response varies, from a couple who said, “It mattered little at the time. We were not active in our denominations” (Q3, R1072, H:C/W:A, Y4, C:Y), through “We realized we had issues and differences to discuss and work through” (Q3, R1069, H:C/W:F, Y1, C:Y), to a fairly broad spectrum reflecting mutuality and commonality of faith. This latter is reflected in comments such as, “Not a lot of thought was made concerning religious tradition. I was so comfortable and confident of our sound relationship that there was no need to consider this part of our lives” (Q3, R1061, H:C, Y4, C:N); “...that we would share faith stories and experiences together and that we would make joint decisions

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<sup>85</sup> Private conversation, Washington DC, 14 May 2010.

<sup>86</sup> Ratzinger, 335-6.

about any children” (Q3, R1066, W:C, Y3, C:Y); “We had a shared faith and certainly shared an understanding of the Christian nature of marriage...” (Q3, R1067, H:A, Y3, C:Y); “...that we were entering into a lifelong commitment where both of us believed we were doing the same thing and would have the support of each other and of God to fulfill our vows.” (Q3, R1067, W:C, Y3, C:Y)

One thing is crucial to note: again and again, in response to this and other questions, even those couples who experienced significant unity within their marriages found themselves negatively impacted by the scandalous division of the churches. For example, one couple, despite “a common outlook on life, a spiritual dimension to our marriage,” says they “knew there could be trouble ahead when in-laws were not originally intending coming to our wedding as I was CE<sup>87</sup> and it was being performed by an Anglican vicar!” (Q3, R1065, H:C/W:A, Y3, C:Y) This is echoed by others: “our university chaplain... warned us that life would not be so easy on the ‘outside’ “ (Q3, R1083, H:C/W:A, Y3, C:Y); in speaking of planning the Nuptial Mass, “In spite of external forces seeming to pull them (sic) apart, at a personal level we felt that our attitudes and beliefs were very similar.” (Q3, R1086, W:C, Y3, C:Y) It comes up especially as couples look at their lives now, sometimes after years of marriage. They speak of “lack of understanding support from some pastors” (Q10, R1056, H:D/W:C, Y4, C:Y) and “the discouragement, close-mindedness, dogmatism, authoritarianism and seeming inability to be Christian that is sometimes experienced across denominational lines at some times and situations, especially from the Catholic hierarchy” (Q10, R1061, H:C, Y4, C:N). Lest it be thought this is someone who is simply angry with his church, this same husband says of what makes interchurch life joyful: “The appreciation, love, acceptance, interest, support, encouragement and Christian joy encountered when either

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<sup>87</sup> Note: “CE” is Church of England, otherwise known as the Anglican Church in England



of us participates in the other's denomination or participates in an ecumenical situation in our own denomination. When experienced from clergy, this is especially exciting and motivating." (Q10, R1061, H:C, Y4, C:N) Or again, "some clergy and parishioners on the way have been less affirming than others." Q10, RC1067, W:C, Y3, C:Y) This is a couple who seeks to be actively involved in both churches, saying at the same time that another difficulty is "not always being as involved as we might like in either of our church communities, due to time constraints." The opposition is not just from the Catholic community. One couple experienced "opposition and misunderstanding from family and friends (mainly against the Catholic Church)" (Q10, R1069, H:C/W:F, Y1, C:Y) Finally, we will close this discussion with three short statements which capture the essence of forces outside the couple themselves: "the sense that I was not socially a 'member of the club'" (Q10, R1070, W:M, Y4, C:Y); "when one of us is made to feel left out or made to feel second class at worship" (Q10, R1086, H:A/W:C, Y3, C:Y), and finally "the churches" (Q10, R1078, H:A, Y4, C:Y) were named as the biggest obstacle to unity.

Whether there was considerable unity at the beginning, or very little, there are also signs of growing unity over the years. Let us look at several examples.

In one couple, it seems a unity in faith was not very present at the beginning, but grew through the couple's marriage. In fact, at first the wife "deferred on marriage" as her future husband "seemed to have no particular commitment to church." (Q3, R1058, W:B, Y4, C:Y) The husband says of the situation, "...she impelled me to study the basis of my own belief, and I came back to the Catholic Church out of deep conviction", so much so "that I excluded other Christian beliefs and practices from the household." This restricted any possible discussion prior to marriage: "We agreed that the children would be raised

Catholics. I allowed no possibility of anything else.” (Q4, R1058, H:C, Y4, C:Y) More than 25 years later, this same couple can say “We are glad to have people of different traditions gather with us.” (Q8C, R1058, H:C, Y4, C:Y) Also, “Being involved in ecumenism has been a tremendous eye-opener and opportunity for spiritual growth.” (Q7, R1058, H:C, Y4, C:Y) Clearly, there has been growth in unity in the intervening years, with a far greater openness to the faith tradition of the “other”! Evidence can be seen in the way they approached the education of their children. “In [one state] our children attended a Baptist elementary school because it clearly had the best educational program. In [another state] they went to Catholic schools.” (Q5, R1058, W:B, Y4, C:Y)

Both now worshipping in both churches, with the husband having become Chair of the Ecumenical Committee of their Catholic parish, he says, “We have become an interchurch couple. ... There has been a kind of evolution toward this. We are still discovering what it means, and still exploring how to build Christian unity, both within our household and in the broader church community.” (Narrative, R1058, H:C, Y4, C:Y)

Respondents 1061, already referred to, had no children. They experienced their unity growing over their years of marriage. The husband says, “For a few years, we both attended the local Catholic church on Sundays. Later, I would accompany [my wife] to her Baptist church on occasion. Then, more and more frequently, I would go to Sunday worship with her (as well as to my own church) as well as other services and events.” (Q5, R1061, H:C, Y4, C:N) How has their interchurch marriage impacted on their faith life? Listen to the husband: “My original unthinking espousal of Catholic teaching has been reshaped by our joint religious experience into a thinking appreciation and support of the truth that is behind Catholic thought.” (Q12, R1061, H:C, Y4, C:N) The wife says, “Over the course of our

marriage, I have asked many questions, and have learned much, not just about Catholicism specifically, but about the larger issues of Christianity.” (Q12, R1061, W:B, Y4, C:N)

We turn now to a couple married 31+ years. Speaking of their time of marriage preparation, the husband says, “I was aware of the difficulties that would lie ahead but somewhat simplistically assumed that, because [my wife] had agreed to sign the promise at that time required that she would be able to accommodate herself to the requirements that the Catholic Church imposed on her, ... ‘things would work out!’” (Q3, R1070, H:C, Y4, C:Y) His wife says of that time: “I was fearful as I knew it would be difficult, although I do not think I realized how difficult it would be in those early years. I was very unhappy about some issues, [for example] having to sign a promise that the children would be brought up as Catholics; [my husband’s] not being allowed to come to my church with me; our being debarred from taking communion in each other’s churches, etc.” (Q3, R1070, W:M, Y4, C:Y) Such were the lengths to which people had to stretch so their love might bear fruit.

It is also educative to compare the discussions that took place prior to marriage on such subjects as where to worship, eucharist, baptism of children, etc., with what actually happened when the couples were presented with the reality. Their responses must be read in light of the fact that a number of people responded to the question not with information from prior to their marriage, but from the early years of their marriage.

In one case, the couple said that “neither would expect the other to forsake their faith tradition and make changes to suit the other. We agreed to support each other.” (Q4, R1056, H:D/W:C, Y4, C:Y) This same couple are now able to say, “There were no problems. We just supported and participated in each other’s traditions, agreed to baptize and confirm our children in the RC tradition, since [the husband] was less active in his tradition at the time.

Beyond that, all of us, including the children, participated in both traditions.” (Q5, R1056, H:D/W:C, Y4, C:Y)

In the case of the couple earlier noted, where the wife had impelled her husband to look once again at his faith, we see a situation in which the wife, who “did not want him to stop practicing his faith again,” “made it easy for him to be active in his church, including choir practice.” She hoped he would attend church with her also, “but he felt contaminated in my church and refused.” (Q4, R1058, W:B, Y4, C:Y) As it turned out, while they educated the children in both Baptist and Catholic schools, the wife “took the children to CCS<sup>88</sup> and they met the milestones of baptism, communion, and confirmation.” Indeed, she went so far in support of her husband’s faith tradition that she became “active in [her] spouse’s church and even served on the church council.” As adults, their children “chose not to be married in the Catholic Church.” (Q5, R1058, W:B, Y4, C:Y) It’s worthy of note, however, that the husband, seeing the life they have lived, and having also become involved in church work and volunteer activities, now says, looking back, “We did not become an interchurch family until after our children were grown and had left home. Looking back, I think a truly interchurch approach while they were growing up might have been a lot healthier. As it is, only one of the three goes to church and that is a Methodist church.” (Q6A, R1058, H:C, Y4, C:Y) Indeed, he now says “being involved in ecumenism has been a tremendous eye-opener and opportunity for spiritual growth.” (Q7C, R1058, H:C, Y4, C:Y) It is impossible to know what might have happened had the family been more truly interchurch from the start of their marriage. The couple themselves suggesting it as a better option, however, indicates they have real questions about the path they chose.

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<sup>88</sup> Now known as the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD), this is the religious teaching program of the Catholic Church. These classes are taught to school age children to learn the basic doctrines of their faith.

Another husband says about their discussions prior to marriage, “I don’t recall a lot of discussion about where to worship. We were clear that we shared an understanding of the Eucharist. Discussion was mainly about the uncertainties around things like how straightforward it would be to receive a blessing at communion without prior discussion with the priest.” (Q4, R1067, H:A, Y3, C:Y) He then goes on to say that after marriage, “... we soon came to the view that how we dealt with baptism, etc., would depend on the circumstances at the time, i.e., the attitude of clergy and congregations in our parishes, with a lot of prayer and guidance.” (Q5, R1067, H:A, Y3, C:Y) Once again, this is an example of the division between the churches, and the attitudes of clergy and congregations, can have a far more divisive impact on couples than the couples experience within themselves.

Another couple indicated that “[t]here was not much discussion as such. It was more a case of becoming familiar with the dictates of the Catholic Church.” (Q4, R1070, W:M, Y4, C:Y) The husband says, “As I was not allowed to worship in a Protestant church, [my wife] normally did not accompany me to a Catholic church and so the question of the Eucharist scarcely arose.” (Q4, R1070, H:C, Y4, C:Y) The wife says of that time, “During the first year we worshipped separately after which I always worshipped, ... for the sake of family unity, with [my husband] and the children in [his] church. Very soon in our marriage we felt an overwhelming need to worship in both churches...” (Q5, R1070, W:M, Y4, C:Y) Then a pivotal event took place. The Catholic husband tells the story: “In December 1962, a Catholic priest thought it would be all right if I attended [my wife’s] church on Christmas day, ‘provided’ that I ‘did not take part in the service’. So I accompanied [my wife] as a spectator (a compliment she returned by accompanying me to mass), but the thought that we would not be together for another year was so distressful that we repeated the practice at

Easter, and then again and again as we felt the need to be together.” (Q5, R1070, H:C, Y4, C:Y) The wife says of the event “Waiting for the next Christmas was too painful so, as I was going to mass with [my husband], he gradually came with me more and more and this brought us great relief and set us on the road to even greater unity although the thorny issue of the eucharist was to cause us a lot of pain.” (Q5, R1070, W:M, Y4, C:Y) In this, we have an example of love finding a way, despite significant obstacles, to move toward unity.

One couple had a quite different path for their marriage. Now being in the cohort married 11-20 years, they began married life as a same-church “charismatic evangelical” couple. It was not until 10 years into their marriage that the husband became Catholic and they entered the world of interchurch life. So, they speak of both a “before” and an “after” time. “Before, we chose a place to worship together seeking to follow God’s calling. After, we consider each of us is responsible for choosing the church of their tradition for the entire family.” When it came to the baptism of their children, “we made a conscious decision not to baptise our children so that they could make their own profession of faith. They were dedicated. We ourselves had both been rebaptised after infant baptism and did not feel happy about it on reflection. Our children were baptised at an intermediate age – due to their own request and enthusiasm – probably a little early for [the wife’s] preference and late for [the husband’s]. The ceremonies were ... with full immersion presided over by our RC priest and for the first two an evangelical minister and for the third our Anglican vicar.” They go on to speak of religious education, saying “before, we did not have any strong feelings about this other than that we wanted our children to attend a Christian primary school. After, we feel that the place for religious education is in our domestic church, and we actively do so at home in our interchurch way. We feel unified in this aspect. We are supported by both

churches.” (Q5, R1073, H:C/W:A, Y2, C:Y) We have here a situation in which a unity in one form, calling for little thought on the matter, became a unity in another, calling for considerable intentionality.

For some couples, what appeared one way prior to marriage worked out quite differently along the way. Their thoughts prior to marriage were that “we knew it was important to worship together in both churches,” but that “eucharistic sharing did not seem possible” and “bringing up children together did not seem feasible.” (Q4, R1079, W:C, Y4, C:Y) In their marriage they “worshipped together from the beginning, going to (both) Mass and Holy Communion each weekend,” but “gradually came to feel we were doing the same thing twice over.” (Q5, R1079, W:C, Y4, C:Y) They began to share the Eucharist whenever possible in 1968 (it’s worth noting that the wife “thought it important to practice reciprocity as soon as that happened”), a practice which gradually increased until not sharing the eucharist was the exception. They went on to shared celebrations of baptism, then “the children received their First Communion together in the Catholic Church, and soon after in the Church of England.” (Q5, R1069, W:C, Y4, C:Y) This couple has developed over time a way to live their interchurch reality which may not fall within the canonical guidelines of their churches, but which enables them to live the unity to which they feel themselves called.

Another couple discussed many of the issues that affected them at the time, “in particular, where to worship, and receiving of the eucharist together.” They would “opt to go to RC churches where we were not known so that [the wife] could receive without having to address the issue with anyone other than ourselves.” (Q4, R1083, H:C/W:A, Y3, C:Y) This worked, but “when we set up a permanent home we had to ‘own up’ to who we were.” Initially they thought of alternating baptisms of their children (i.e. one Catholic, the next

Church of England, etc), and in fact had their first child baptised in the RC church, but “when we mentioned to [husband’s] very traditional RC parents that No 2 would be baptised in the C of E, a major problem ensued.” All subsequent children were baptised in the RC church, then welcomed and received into the Anglican parish church. Happily, “at the baptism of our fourth child we went to see the RC bishop who gave permission for [my wife] to receive during the Mass”. Since then, all children have made their First Communion in the Catholic Church followed by reception in their Anglican parish church, while “two have declined to be confirmed because they did not wish to choose; and two chose to be confirmed – both in the Anglican Church.” (Q5, R1083, H:C/W:A, Y3, C:Y) Here we have a couple whose chosen practice, with which they were comfortable, was impacted by forces outside themselves. They adjusted accordingly, but developed ways in which they could nurture the lived unity of their family within churches and families divided.

The issue of “the promise,”<sup>89</sup> made initially by the non-Catholic spouse, then later by only the Catholic spouse, regarding raising children in the Catholic faith, has often had significant impact, with couples needing to develop ways of responding which are appropriate in their concrete and particular cases. “[The wife’s] initial reaction was to be extremely anxious because of “the promise” and my fear that I would not be able to take my children to church with me. However we worked things out for ourselves as the need arose, which was very hard as we felt we were alone, and [the husband’s] family were rather suspicious.” (Q3, R1068, H:C/W:A, Y4, C:Y) In one family, while the wife was unhappy about having to sign the promise, she remained faithful to it, going so far as to start a ‘Sunday school’ program in the Catholic parish, with the full support of the parish priest, so

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<sup>89</sup> Cf Apostolic Letter of Pope Paul VI on Mixed Marriages *Matrimonia Mixta* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1970), 4



the children would benefit from the riches she had experienced in her Presbyterian childhood. (Cf Q3, R1070, W:M, Y4, C:Y) She says of their struggles to maintain and develop their unity in the face of the strict requirements of the Catholic Church, “It was only the knowledge that God loved us very much and did not want us to be separated and divided that kept me going.” (Q5, R1070, W:M, Y4, C:Y) This couple has since moved on to receiving together in both their churches.

In case after case, couples have had to work out ways of fidelity to their promises within the context of their particular situations, including significant pressures from blood and church families.

Much more on unity could be gleaned from the responses of the various couples. We will focus on only one more key area, that of planning for the death of a spouse. A funeral is a key time in which all the emphasis falls on the deceased spouse’s faith tradition, without that spouse being present to help navigate the currents of family or parochial pressures. I therefore chose to include a question on it in the survey.

The responses are far-ranging. “We haven’t thought about it yet!” (Q11, R1069, H:C/W:F, Y1, C:Y) “Just plant me in the ground. I won’t be here anyway.” (Q11, R1041, W:P, Y2, C:N) “The way each of us has planned. Both traditions will participate in each service.” (Q11, R1056, H:D/W:C, Y4, C:Y) One husband stated he wants “clergy, choirs, congregations, liturgy, music, and lay ministers..., a wake at one church and funeral at the other. How better to wind up my life in which ecumenism and interchurch marriage have meant so much?” (Q11, R1061, H:C, Y4, C:N) One spouse stated she wanted her pastor and a cemetery plot with her spouse, but went on to note that “His friends would be welcomed in my church. His church is awkward for visitors.” (Q11, R1058, W:B, Y4, C:Y) Most spoke

of the desire to have both churches involved in some way, though many specifically referred to the funeral service as being for the benefit of the spouse left behind, and so should be carried out in whatever way the remaining spouse was most comfortable. (cf Question 11 in general) I suggest this expresses a love between the spouses, and a unity with each other, such that the wellbeing of the other is paramount. This is both a foreshadowing and reflection of the relationship between Christ and his Church.

It begins to be clear that, as through the Spirit we interchurch families live our call and vocation, we find our unity strengthened, divisions being overcome. Our traditions, their richness recognized and celebrated by both, remain distinct, to be sure. But our faith, and we as married couples, remain and grow ever more *one*, that “one coupled-person” who reflects and builds the *oneness* of the Church. Unity, however imperfect, is nonetheless possible in a very real way across what are perceived as denominational lines.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Holy

In this chapter, we will review several issues: the origin of holiness, its realization in the world, and to what extent interchurch families reflect and express that holiness.

“*Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh* – Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God of Hosts” (Is 6:3, Rev 4:8). Similarly we read, “Be Holy, for I the Lord your God am Holy” (Lv 19:2). These words inform us of the ground of all holiness. It is God, and God alone, who is holy. All other holiness flows from God. We see this theme repeated again and again, e.g., “For I, the Lord, am your God; and you shall make and keep yourselves holy, because I am holy” (Lv. 11:44), and “Therefore be holy, because I am holy” (Lv. 11:45). Again we read, “And today the Lord is making this agreement with you: you are to be a people peculiarly his own, as he promised you; and provided you keep all his commandments, he will then raise you high in praise and renown and glory above all other nations he has made, and you will be a people sacred to the Lord your God, as he promised” (Dt. 26:18-19), as well as “There is no holy one like the Lord; there is no Rock like our God” (1 Sam. 2:2). We are not the subjects of our own holiness, nor is there anything we can do to persuade or coerce God into granting us holiness. God is the one who makes us holy, as a free gift from him according to his promise.

We are “consecrated in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor. 1:2), “consecrated by the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 15:16). We are “servants of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:1), and “God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved” (Col. 3:12). Holiness is the work of God, in Christ Jesus and by the Holy Spirit, and not the work of any one of us. Nowhere do we see any sign that we can be the subjects of, or create, our own holiness. Admittedly, in Lv. 20:7 we see the directive to

“Sanctify yourselves, then, and be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy,” but this is not an instruction for the people to do something of their own strength. Rather, “it portrays God as the reason and cause of holiness.”<sup>90</sup> The passage speaks of the response appropriate to God’s call. We can accept God’s work in us, and through that work be sanctified, made holy. Because we have the promise of God, we can also, according to Paul, “purify ourselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit, and in the fear of God strive to fulfil our consecration perfectly” (2 Cor. 7:1). But we have no capacity to make ourselves holy, short of the grace of God. The same can be said of the Church.

Clement of Rome, generally recognized as one of the first popes (dying circa 100 CE), takes up this sense of holiness in his first Epistle to the Corinthians. He argues for holiness on the basis of our intimate connection with God, saying, “Since we are the portion of the Holy one let us practice what belongs to holiness.”<sup>91</sup>

Reflecting the words of Eph 5:25-27, The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* states:

The Church ... is held, as a matter of faith, to be unfailingly holy. This is because Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit is hailed as “alone holy”, loved the Church as his Bride, giving himself up for her so as to sanctify her; he joined her to himself as his body and endowed her with the gift of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God.<sup>92</sup>

It is vitally important that we remember this. The Church is holy, yes. But it is holy *because* of the loving and salvific work of Christ, *not* of anything it possesses or is in itself.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) says, “To believe that the Church is ‘holy’ and ‘catholic’ ... is inseparable from belief in God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy

<sup>90</sup> Roland J Faley, T.O.R., *Leviticus*, in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Vol I Edited by Raymond E Brown, S.J., Joseph Fitzmyer, S.J., and Roland E Murphy, O.Carm. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall), 80.

<sup>91</sup> Henry Bettenson, Ed. *The Early Christian Fathers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 30.

<sup>92</sup> LG, #39.

Spirit.”<sup>93</sup> Again, there is no such thing as holiness, in the Church or anywhere else, apart from God. It is important to note, however, that our faith is not “in” the Church, nor even in its holiness. Our faith is in God, the triune uncreated, who makes the Church, and makes it holy. Francis Sullivan argues regarding the creed we recite:

This [English] translation does not bring out the difference between “believing in” God and “believing in” the church: a difference which the official Latin version of the creed expresses by using the term “believe in” only with reference to the Divine Persons. The Latin text does not say, as the English does, “We believe *in* the church”.<sup>94</sup>

This is echoed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, where we read:

In the Apostles’ Creed we profess “one Holy Church”, and not to believe *in* the Church, so as not to confuse God with his works and to attribute clearly to God’s goodness *all* the gifts he has bestowed on his Church.<sup>95</sup>

The Holy Spirit is known as, among other things, “God’s gift to history in the community of those who believe in Christ.”<sup>96</sup> According to Sullivan, this connection is made explicit in the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus, written about the year 215. “By the end of the second century, the third question asked of the one being baptized in the church of Rome was: ‘Do you believe in the Holy Spirit in the holy church?’”<sup>97</sup> For Martin Luther, that holy Church is a public assembly, but rather than a common gathering, it is “*sancta Catholica Christiana*, that is, a Christian holy people.”<sup>98</sup>

As we will later see, this looking to God for holiness is vital where the domestic church is concerned. If the domestic church is to be truly a church in miniature, it too must

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<sup>93</sup> CCC, 750.

<sup>94</sup> Francis A. Sullivan, S.J. *The Church We Believe In: One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic*. (New York / Mahwah NJ: Paulist Press, 1988), 5

<sup>95</sup> CCC, 750

<sup>96</sup> Ratzinger, 331

<sup>97</sup> Sullivan, 7

<sup>98</sup> Martin Luther as translated in *Luther’s Works* (Concordia and Fortress, 1955), cited in David S. Yeago, *The Office of the Keys: On the Disappearance of Discipline in Protestant Modernity*. Published in *Marks of the Body of Christ*, Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, Eds. (Grand Rapids / Cambridge: Wm B Eerdmans, 1999), 98.

receive its holiness from God. The global Church is a mediating sign, a sacrament of that holiness, and it is holy, but it is not itself that holiness. Rather, “the holiness of the Church consists in that power of sanctification which God exerts in her in spite of human sinfulness.”<sup>99</sup> It is equally important to keep that in mind as we look at the concrete lived realities of interchurch families. We will be looking, not for signs that they are holy in themselves, but that God is sanctifying them in spite of, and in the midst of, the human sinfulness of the spouses and their families.

Lest we be lulled into believing that holiness is all about beauty and light, let us not forget that there is a hard side to it. This can be found in the Matthean account of the granting of the keys to Peter (Mt 16:19). Peter is told by Jesus that whatever he binds or looses on earth will be similarly bound or loosed in heaven. A concrete expression of this is found in the passage on fraternal correction, Mt 18:15-18, where steps are outlined for dealing with a sinning member of the community. A move from a one-on-one discussion to bring about reconciliation, through to a full banishing from the community if all else fails, is *not* the stuff of gentle persuasion. David Yeago, in an article on *The Office of the Keys*, quotes Martin Luther, writing about the power of public and private discipline:

For Christ left the Keys as a legacy, to be a public sign and holy thing through which the Holy Spirit (acquired by Christ’s death) might sanctify fallen sinners anew, and through which Christians might confess that they are a holy people subject to Christ in the world.<sup>100</sup>

As Yeago points out, Luther wrote a page earlier that

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<sup>99</sup> Ratzinger, 341.

<sup>100</sup> David S Yeago. “The Office of the Keys: On the Disappearance of Discipline in Protestant Modernity” in *Marks of the Body of Christ*, Edited by Carl E Braaten and Robert W Jenson. (Grand Rapids MI / Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 96.

the Church or people of God does not suffer public sinners in its midst, but disciplines them and makes them holy as well, or else, if they will not agree, it casts them out of the holy place through the ban, and regards them as Gentiles.<sup>101</sup>

It is significant to note that this last passage was written a page earlier than the previous one, at the conclusion of Luther's discussion on the Eucharist. There is an expectation that only those who have been reconciled with Christ and the Church are to be admitted to the Eucharist, with the rest being banned. There is a further expectation that this banning is not a final end in itself, but will lead to the person(s) repenting, being reconciled, and coming once more into "the holy place." Ratzinger expresses something similar, when he says

...forgiveness leads us into fellowship with those who live from forgiveness; forgiveness establishes communion; and communion with the Lord in the Eucharist leads necessarily to the communion of the converted, who all eat one and the same bread, to become in it "one body" (1 Cor. 10:17) and, indeed, "one single new man" (cf Eph. 2:15).<sup>102</sup>

The question must be asked whether the churches have at times applied this banning, consciously or not, to people whose "sin" is to have fallen in love. Has the guilt of falling short of the holiness and unity God gave to, and expects of, his Church, caused the churches to project their guilt upon interchurch couples in their midst who do not perfectly fit their church's paradigm, effectively banning them from the Eucharist, perhaps even from general participation in the life of the church? This sounds like a harsh question. It should be. Banning a person from our midst in order to bring them to repentance and reconciliation must be a last resort and for real sin, not a first reaction to the gift of love. This is especially true if the banishment prevents them from taking and eating, taking and drinking the One without whom we can have no life in us (Jn. 6:53). We will explore this more as we visit the survey responses.

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<sup>101</sup> Yeago, 96.

<sup>102</sup> Ratzinger, 336.

The question of sinfulness, too, bears further exploration. Does sinfulness mean the absence of holiness? Let's listen to Martin Luther again:

Where you see that sin is being forgiven or disciplined... publicly or privately, there you know that the people of God is present, for where the people of God is absent the Keys are also absent, and where the Keys are absent, the people of God is also absent.<sup>103</sup>

It is not, here, the presence of sinfulness which indicates a lack of holiness. Rather, it is the absence of forgiveness and discipline which is the indicator. There can be no doubt that sinfulness stands as a barrier to holiness. Where there is sinfulness in one's life (and all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God), there is indeed an obstacle to full holiness. But does that obstacle indicate a complete barrier to holiness? We can give thanks that this is not so. We see in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*,

The Church is holy: the Most Holy God is her author; Christ, her bridegroom, gave himself up to make her holy; the Spirit of holiness gives her life. Since she still includes sinners, she is "the sinless one made up of sinners." Her holiness shines in the saints; in Mary she is already all-holy.<sup>104</sup>

This holy Church, made so by the self-gift of Christ and the Holy Spirit, is made up of both saints and sinners. It cannot be separated into parts, i.e. a holy part where all holy people and all holiness reside, and another, sinful part, where all sinners and sinfulness reside. Rather, both saints and sinners are real members of the Church. As Hans Küng argues,

The Church composed of human beings is also, through his grace, the Church of God; it is a fellowship which, for all its sinfulness, is at the same time holy and, for all its holiness, is at the same time sinful. This is the ecclesiological *simul justus et peccator*: a *communio peccatorum* which through the forgiving grace of God is really and truly a *communio sanctorum*.<sup>105</sup>

The Church lives a true tension, being at the same time holy (as a consequence of Christ's absolute victory over sin, that victory to be realized in the eschaton), yet imperfect in its

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<sup>103</sup> Yeago, 96.

<sup>104</sup> CCC, 867.

<sup>105</sup> Küng, 422.



holiness (i.e. sinful) as a consequence of being a pilgrim church, struggling to make its way, here, today, to its true home. In the words of *Lumen Gentium*,

While Christ, “holy, innocent, undefiled (Heb. 7:26) knew nothing of sin (2 Cor. 5:21), but came to expiate only the sins of the people (cf Heb. 2:17), the church, embracing sinners in her bosom, is at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, and incessantly pursues the path of penance and renewal.<sup>106</sup>

One of the most recent statements on the reality of a sinful Church comes from the present Pope, Benedict XVI. On his way aboard the papal plane for his visit to Portugal in May 2010, he said

Today the greatest persecution of the church does not come from outside, but from the sin inside the church itself. The church thus has a deep need to relearn penance, to accept purification, to learn on the one hand forgiveness but also the necessity of justice.<sup>107</sup>

There can be no doubt that the Church, indeed the church at any level, contains within itself both the holiness which it and its members receive from God, and the sinfulness of those same members, who are part and parcel of the reality of Church.

Having looked at the reality of sinfulness in the midst of holiness, we briefly turn to the Eucharist. Sullivan again:

The fact that the same people can be both holy and sinners at the same time is manifested when we celebrate the Eucharist. The celebration begins with the penitential rite, in which all confess themselves to be sinners and ask God’s mercy. But at Communion time, the same sinners judge themselves holy enough to receive the Eucharist. The kind of sins they have confessed are not such as to deprive them of the holiness required for reception of the Eucharist.<sup>108</sup>

While I agree with Sullivan that the sins confessed are deemed not to deprive the people sufficiently that they cannot receive the Eucharist, I disagree that receiving is a consequence

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<sup>106</sup> LG, 8.

<sup>107</sup> Peter Popham, “Made in his own image: The Catholic Church faces another scandal,” *The Independent*, 28 June 2010. <http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/faith/made-in-his-own-image-the-catholic-church-faces-another-scandal-2012093.html> (accessed 28 June 2010).

<sup>108</sup> Sullivan, 81.

of deeming oneself “holy enough to receive”. I suggest there is a more appropriate understanding. The Eucharist is, as proclaimed in Eastern liturgies, *Sancta sanctis!* - “God’s holy gifts for God’s holy people.” None of us can claim holiness, for “God alone is holy.” It is on the basis of that holiness, which is in God alone, that we push forward, confident not in our own assessment of our holiness but in God’s mercy and love so that, by the grace of that same God, “The faithful (*sancti*) are fed by Christ’s holy body and blood (*sancta*) to grow in the communion of the Holy Spirit (*koinōnia*) and to communicate it to the world.”<sup>109</sup> Later in this chapter we will look for signs of how spouses in interchurch families approach the Eucharist, whether they receive as a consequence of self-assessment, or as a sign of their trust in God’s mercy and love.

### **Realization of Holiness**

We turn now to the question of the realization of holiness. If the Church, whether in its global, local, or domestic expressions, is holy by the grace of God, how is that holiness to be manifest? It is insufficient to claim holiness, even if given by God, and let the matter lie there. Taking our cue from the Epistle of James (James 2:14-26), we can say that if the holiness is real, we must be doing our “works,” i.e. “the obedient implementation of God’s revealed will in every aspect of life.”<sup>110</sup> Today instead of “works” we speak of “outcome measures,” something which demonstrates the presence of the immeasurable, the unquantifiable, which holiness clearly is. What are those ‘works’? I will refer here to the work of George Panikulam, in which he presents a schema against which we can measure the lived reality of interchurch families.

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<sup>109</sup> CCC, 948.

<sup>110</sup> Thomas W Leahy, “The Epistle of James” in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Vol II Edited by Raymond E Brown, S.J., Joseph Fitzmyer, S.J., and Roland E Murphy, O.Carm. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall), 373.

Panikulam argues that the New Testament (NT) has one word which encapsulates the whole of Christian life. That word is *koinōnia*, usually translated as “fellowship”.<sup>111</sup> First John 1:3 lays out this fellowship in crystal clear language: “What we have seen and heard we proclaim in turn to you so that you may share life with us. This fellowship of ours is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” This fellowship is with Christ, through him with the Father and, through Christ, together with one another.

This term is particular to the NT. In the Old Testament (OT), a similar Hebrew word *hābēr* describes the bond between worshippers of God. There are, however, according to Panikulam, only three such uses, as compared to the 18 instances of *koinonia* found in the NT. A significant difference, however, is that where the OT term is used to speak of the relationship between people, the NT term is used to describe a relationship with God. This is reflective of Jesus’ call to enter into a relationship with our *Abba*, our Father, a relationship we recall and nurture every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer.

*Koinōnia* is a term used primarily by Paul, accounting for 13 of the 18 NT usages. According to Panikulam, the target of Christian vocation is, for Paul, *koinōnia* with the Son (1 Cor. 1:9). This is understood as both present and future; it begins and lives here and now, yet will never be complete until the Parousia. Paul goes on to speak of six other occurrences of *koinōnia*, being *koinōnia* in faith (Philm. 6), *koinōnia* in the gospel (Phil. 1:5), *koinōnia* in the collections (2 Cor. 8:4, 9:13; Rom. 12:13, 15:26), *koinōnia* in the Spirit (2 Cor. 13:13, Phil 2:1), *koinōnia* in the Eucharist (1 Cor. 10:16), and *koinōnia* in the sufferings (Phil. 3:10), each of which would serve as concrete modes of responding to this call to *koinōnia* with the

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<sup>111</sup> P. Hennebusch, *Christian Fellowship in the Epistle to the Philippians*, *The Bible Today* 12 (1964) as cited in George Panikulam, *Koinonia in the New Testament: A Dynamic Expression of Christian Life*, *Analecta Biblica* 85 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1979), 1.

Son.<sup>112</sup> We will briefly look at each of these in turn, and then examine how they relate to interchurch marriage.

“God is faithful, and it is he who called you to fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:9). This faithful God, who has called us to fellowship, is the same God upon whose mercy we throw ourselves in confidence as we approach the Eucharist. This fellowship to which we are called is, in concrete terms, the *ekklesia* or assembly of faithful of the NT which Paul saw as replacing the *qahal* or organizational structure of the OT. We are called to be now in fellowship, even as we grow into deeper fellowship, to be completed in the glory of the *kyrios*, the Lord, at the parousia. This call of God awaits a response on our part.

### ***Koinōnia* in Faith**

And my prayer is that your sharing of the faith with others may enable you to know all the good which is ours in Christ. (Philemon 6)

Panikulam argues that “in this text, Paul presents a theme crucial to his doctrine of *koinōnia*: fellowship in faith. This fellowship which results from the acceptance of the gospel remains the first moment of a fellowship with the Son.”<sup>113</sup> Though there is no indication of a final completion at some future time, yet there is a sense of active faith development. There is joy in the present, both for the person whose life has been touched by faith and brought into fellowship, and for those who see the active response of the person so touched. It is important to note, too, that Paul establishes, through the welcome to be extended to Onesimus (Philemon 8-16), an equality among the members of the fellowship. Ignatius of Antioch (c. 115), writing to Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna and his people, advises

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<sup>112</sup> George Panikulam, “Koinonia in the New Testament: A Dynamic Expression of Christian Life” in *Analecta Biblica* 85 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1979), 5.

<sup>113</sup> Panikulam, 87.

them to “Toil together, wrestle together, run together, suffer together, rest together, rise together, since you are stewards in God’s house, members of His household, and His servants.”<sup>114</sup> In a *koinōnia* of faith, then, we should see joyful thanksgiving and equality in an active working out of the response to, and sharing of, the good news.

### ***Koinōnia* in the Gospel**

I give thanks to my God every time I think of you – which is constantly, in every prayer I utter – rejoining, as I plead on your behalf, at the way you have all continually helped promote the gospel from the very first day. (Phil 1:3-5)

With this statement, Paul outlines the joy which comes from a proclamation of the good news of the Son of God, the *huios tou Theou* who has become man (cf Rom. 8:3), the same one who died, was buried, and who rose again (1 Cor. 15:1f). The object of thanksgiving is the active response of the community to the gospel preached to them.<sup>115</sup> While we are called to actively respond, the response is not of our own doing, nor is it by itself effective. According to Origen (c 185-255), in *De Principiis*, “Our perfection does not come about by our remaining inactive, yet it is not accomplished by our own activity; God plays the greater part in effecting it.”<sup>116</sup> According to Panikulam, who quotes other sources, the way *koinōnia* is used here indicates a dynamic activity in progress.<sup>117</sup> It is not limited to material help (which the Philippians provided, cf Phil 4:16). Rather, the Philippians have responded in every way to the gospel they have received from him, have been strengthened in the gospel, and have worked to propagate it. Their response will not be in vain. It is exercised in the present, yes, but it will find its accomplishment at the Parousia.<sup>118</sup> We are

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<sup>114</sup> Johannes Quasten and Joseph C Plumpe, Ed. *Ancient Christian Writers: The Epistles of St Clement of Rome and St Ignatius of Antioch* (London, the Newman Press, 1961), 98.

<sup>115</sup> Panikulam, 81.

<sup>116</sup> Henry S Bettenson, Ed, *The Early Christian Fathers: A selection from the writings of the Fathers from St. Clement of Rome to St. Athanasius*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 208.

<sup>117</sup> Panikulam, 82.

<sup>118</sup> Panikulam, 85.

called to a similar full response to the good news, sharing that good news with others in both material and spiritual ways, and being strengthened ourselves. We are likewise called to do so even when we may not see the fruits of our labours, trusting instead that all will be fulfilled at the coming of the Lord.

### ***Koinōnia* in the collections**

The fellowship with the others of the *ekklesia* was also expressed through the collection, referred to in 1 Cor. 16:1-4 and Rom. 15:22-30, on behalf of the impoverished. This is not an idea of Paul's alone. Indeed, as is clear from Gal. 2:9-10, this is something "the acknowledged pillars, James, Cephas and John" gave Barnabas and him to carry out. Not only was it "to provide urgently needed assistance to the Jerusalem poor," it was "to establish a bond of solidarity between the Jewish and gentile Christians."<sup>119</sup> Paul uses several words, e.g. *charis* (1 Cor. 16), *diakonia* (Rom. 15:31), *leitourgia* (Phil. 2:30), and *eulogia* (2 Cor. 9:5) to speak about the collection. While those words are used in several other contexts, sometimes as nouns and sometimes as verbs, we get the sense from these uses that the collection is an act of charity, an act of service, an occasion for the givers to glorify God, and as a blessing. We see from this the emphasis Paul places on what could as easily be seen as a mundane task. Justin (martyred 165 CE) connects the Eucharist with the collection. In his *Apologia I*, *lxv-lxvi*, Justin speaks about the distribution of the Eucharistic gifts, then says "The well-to-do who wish to give, give of their own free choice and each decides the amount of his contribution."<sup>120</sup> If true *koinōnia* is present, there should be generous self-giving for the well-being of others, recognizing and giving thanks to God for the abundance enjoyed.

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<sup>119</sup> Panikulam, 35.

<sup>120</sup> Bettenson, 62.

### ***Koinōnia* in the Spirit**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all! (2 Cor. 13:13)

In Rom 5:5, we read that the hope which comes from tested virtue, itself finding its grounding in endurance born of affliction, “will not leave us disappointed, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” We come together in Christ through the Spirit, who then abides in each of us as God’s temple (cf 1 Cor. 3:16-17). Yet the work of the Spirit does not end there; we are together to become the living stones of a spiritual house (cf 1 Pet. 2:5). This ever-present Spirit binds us in both the vertical dimension with Christ, and the horizontal dimension with each other, each of us given gifts by the Spirit to be exercised for the common good (cf 1 Cor. 12:17). This binding together in effective love for the common good is beautifully called for in Phil. 2:1-4:

In the name of the encouragement you owe me in Christ, in the name of the solace that love can give, of fellowship in spirit, compassion, and pity, I beg you: make my joy complete by your unanimity, possessing the one love, united in spirit and ideals. Never act out of rivalry or conceit; rather, let all parties think humbly of others as superior to themselves, each of you looking to others’ interests rather than to his own.

Irenaeus (320 CE) says of the faith given to us that it is “causing the renewal of the vessel in which it is stored.”<sup>121</sup> More, it is through the Church that “has been bestowed on us our means of communion with Christ, namely the Holy Spirit, the pledge of immortality, the strengthening of our faith, the ladder by which we ascend to God.”<sup>122</sup> Panikulam argues “the Spirit becomes the dynamic force behind the whole *koinōnia* process, [becoming] the activating and dynamic principle making the concept of *koinōnia* itself a dynamic reality.”<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Bettenson, 83.

<sup>122</sup> Bettenson, 83.

<sup>123</sup> Panikulam, 78.

### ***Koinōnia* in the Eucharist**

Is not the cup of blessing we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, many though we are, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf. (1 Cor. 10:16-17)

Paul is indicating to the Corinthians, and hence to us, what the Eucharist signifies.

Jesus set the Eucharist in the context of a meal, a guarantee of peace, trust, and brotherhood.

Where such table fellowship included sinners, it was a sign of forgiveness (which, as we have already seen argued in Luther's writings, is a sign of the presence of the fellowship with Christ). When we partake of the cup of blessing and the bread, we not only partake of fellowship with Christ, we are made one, and enter into fellowship, with each other. The *Didache* (1st or 2nd century) says "As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains and was gathered together and became one, so let the Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into thy Kingdom."<sup>124</sup> In short we, together as one, become the *ekklesia*. Hence we can say that the Eucharist builds the Church. As we respond in a vertical manner to God's call, receiving the body and blood of Christ, we are brought by God into a horizontal dimension, fellowship with the community. Where there is *koinōnia*, there should be an awareness of the importance of celebrating and receiving the Eucharist.

### ***Koinōnia* in the sufferings and glory**

I wish to know Christ and the power flowing from his resurrection; likewise to know how to share in his sufferings by being formed into the pattern of his death. Thus do I hope that I may arrive at resurrection from the dead (Phil 3:10-11).

One would think the natural order of events would be to speak of suffering, then death, then resurrection. Here, however, Paul speaks first of the resurrection of Christ, and only then of the opportunity to share in his sufferings. And even that flows out of the pattern

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<sup>124</sup> Bettenson, 50.



of Christ's death. Panikulam, citing J Blank's *Paulus und Jesus*, points out that "Paul sees the fellowship in the sufferings from two different angles: he sets first the motivation for suffering, and then the result."<sup>125</sup> To know Christ is to know God's relationship with man, and to recognize and fulfill God's will, which will undoubtedly include suffering as we deal with the realities of life. It is a knowledge which calls for a whole change of life, an re-interpretation of all that has gone before as being loss (Phil 3:7-9). This knowledge is a present reality, not simply words given us as children which we can recite by rote. It is alive, dynamic, giving us reason and strength to suffer the difficulties that beset us as they beset Christ (Rom 6:4, 8, 11; 1 Thess. 4:14), and even to see those sufferings in a new light, that of the resurrection. Thus *koinōnia* in suffering and glory is to enter into full fellowship with Christ, excluding nothing, be it the joys of that life, or the suffering, death and resurrection that were Christ's and, through him, are ours. As Irenaeus writes (*Adversus Haereses III. xviii. 6-7*):

In what way could we share in the adoption of the sons of God unless through the Son we had received the fellowship with the Father, unless the Word of God made flesh had entered into communion with us? Therefore he passed through every stage of life, restoring to each age fellowship with God.<sup>126</sup>

Having looked at the dimension of *koinōnia* in Panikulam's schema, we can take his words to heart:

True Christian faith is living and fruitful. It works through love and brings forth its fruits. It has a transforming effect not only upon him who possesses it but also upon the community. It creates mutual respect and equality among the members. In such a community what counts is not whether one is a slave or a free man or whether one is circumcised or not, but faith which operates in love.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Panikulam, 97.

<sup>126</sup> Bettenson, 78.

<sup>127</sup> Panikulam, 89

We might add as well that it gives joy in entering into the sufferings of Christ, strengthened by the grace of his resurrection, until we come (together, for none of us arrives there on our own) to that day when “God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:29).

### ***Koinōnia* in interchurch families**

If interchurch families are truly “domestic church”, truly reflect the holiness of God within their households, we should see signs, imperfect and as yet incomplete they may be, of these dimensions of *koinōnia*. Before we look to their concrete experience, however, we would do well to listen to the words of Pope Benedict XVI, clearly and unequivocally stated in his first encyclical:

Marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa. God’s way of loving becomes the measure of human love.<sup>128</sup>

The mutual self-giving love of one spouse for the other engenders and nurtures holiness in the other. Though they remain sinners, their mutual love causes them to move ever more to holiness, both individually and in the unity of their marriage, and to be an ever more accurate icon of the God who created them. As children of God, entering into the mystery of marriage, recognizing our weakness, trusting in God, opening our doors to and feeding the stranger, we become and reveal the holy.

### **Concrete Experience**

In attempting to establish a sense of the holiness of interchurch families, question 7, in its various components, asked “What kinds of things have you done to create an atmosphere in which God is central?” These things point to the realization of the God-given holiness which should be found within the domestic church.

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<sup>128</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2005), #11

It is worth noting that, on the subsequent question asking for a level of importance associated with this making God central, all but one respondent gave a score of 6 or 7 out of 7, with that one (Q7A, R1085, H:C/W:U, Y4, C:Y) giving no response at all. It's further worth noting that this nil response is not due to disinterest, but because the couple is clearly grappling with how to answer the question: " We go to church, we belong to a housegroup. I am not sure that I would say that God is central because that assumes a 'direction'." Indeed, the couple clearly desires this centrality, even if they are unable to give voice to the 'how' of it, as the husband says " Again this is not something I can isolate because I cannot imagine it differently" (Q7C, R1085, H:C, Y4, C:Y), while the wife says, simply but unequivocally, "Should be more!!!" (Q7C, R1085, W:U, Y4, C:Y).

Of 27 individual responses to the question (with responses by both individual spouses within a marriage being considered 2 responses), fully 15 specify prayer together, while others refer to it obliquely as an important part of life. The response of one who does not explicitly state that prayer is an important part of life is, however, profoundly clear on what is involved:

I find this a strange question. Either God IS central or he isn't. Where he is then your life begins to change in every aspect and begins to shape itself around this centrality. The atmosphere grows proportionately to the role that God plays in your life. That role, of course, is circumscribed by the barriers that I have erected around me by sin. God, however, is – and how blessed we are that he is so – infinitely patient. (Q7A, R1070, H:C, Y4 C:Y)

One would be hard-pressed to find a more succinct expression of the fact that fellowship with God changes everything (cf Phil 3:7-9), is ongoing and dynamic, and involves a God who acts in the lives of people and a domestic church which is, like the global Church, at once holy and sinful.

There is a sense that fellowship is rooted in God, yet leads immediately to fellowship with each other. One respondent says, “I feel that the unity in a Trinitarian God calls each one of his children into unity with each other.” (Q6C, R1077) The indicating convention is notably different in this case, because this response is written not by an interchurch couple, but by the child of interchurch parents. While this is the only response from an interchurch child (none were asked; this was gratuitously submitted), it represents, I suggest, a clear sign that the faith of interchurch parents is being handed on to their children, who incorporate it as their own. But let us continue, with interchurch couples themselves: “A common faith in God is the key to unity” (Q6C, R1080, H:C/W:A, Y3, C:Y); “We share two traditions and thereby many others.” (Q6A, R1078, W:C, Y4, C:Y) Against that, it must be said that this unity in fellowship with others is not always experienced, e.g. the Anglican husband of the previous Catholic wife says “The unity is between ourselves, and the churches come in second best. Our unity has always been in our family - often against the rest.” (Q6A, R1078, H:A, Y4, C:Y)

Again and again we read that the whole of life is impacted by faith, and calls for a response in all areas of life. Consider some examples: “Faith impacts on so many areas of life, we need a holistic approach” (Q7C, R1066, H:A, Y3, C:Y); “[God] is both the source and the end of my life – the **all** of it” (Q7C, R1070, H:C, Y4, C:Y); “Life doesn’t make sense otherwise” (Q7C, R1072, H:C/W:A, Y4, C:Y); “It was our life” (Q7C, R1079, W:C, Y4, C:Y); and “Because we are convinced that our life is hold (sic) by God” (Q7C, R1082, H:C/W:L, Y4, C:Y). There is a clear awareness that faith is not limited to community worship times, but courses through and enlivens every aspect of life. Indeed, reaching beyond the question focusing on holiness, we see comments such as “This shared belief and

practice is one of the most important aspects of our married life.” (Q6C, R1067, H:A, Y3, C:Y)

The question of proclamation of the good news of Christ must be asked. Is there evidence that this is part and parcel of interchurch family life? The answer is obvious, expressed in various statements: “We are supposed to proclaim Christ and live His life in front of others, that they might want to come to Him for salvation and friendship with God” (Q9C, R1041, H:C/W:P, Y2, C:N); “Our marriage is Christian and we wanted to share this with those around us” (Q9C, R1066, W:C, Y3, C:Y); “It’s Christ’s mission to his disciples” (Q9C, R1067, W:C, Y3, C:Y); “If something is very important to you, and of value, of course you want to hand it on to your children.” (Q9C, R1070, W:M, Y4, C:Y) If such responses are truly a *koinōnia* in faith and the gospel, they must be experienced and seen not only as a sharing of spiritual goods, but as a sharing of material goods also. We will visit that more fully as we look to a *koinōnia* in the collections.

If all this is real, however, there must be joy in the experience. For this, we need only turn to the responses to question 10 and its components, on what causes interchurch life to be joyous. (The difficulties given in that same set of questions will be dealt with more fully as *koinōnia* in the sufferings.) What are sources and expressions of joy? Responses include “worshiping together” (Q10, R1056, H:D/W:C, Y4, C:Y); “unconditional love” (Q10, R1066, H:A, Y3, C:Y); “the joy of sharing the riches of our traditions and of others, and of feeling that we might be making a difference in our churches.” (Q10, R1068, H:C/W:A, Y4, C:Y) This last comment speaks also to the future orientation, i.e., this couple feels they are making a difference. The change is not yet complete, but is happening gradually. Another comment is indicative of the joy of togetherness in sharing the gospel: “Witnessing together

in each other's church.” (Q10, R1083, H:C/W:A, Y3, C:Y) This is important. If marriage makes us truly *one*, then there must be a way in which that *one* can live its life of fellowship with Christ and with others.

Let us turn to questions of *koinōnia* in the collections. Not limited to financial collections, this takes in all concrete service to others. While it was never formally part of any survey question, several interchurch couples referred to such work specifically, e.g.: “serving others” (Q7A, R1056, H:D/W:C, Y4, C:Y); “service to others” (Q7A, R1058, W:B, Y4, C:Y); and “volunteer work in church and community organizations” (Q7A, R1058, H:C, Y4, C:Y). This same person says “Getting involved in church work and other volunteer activities is preaching the gospel in action.” This is not always a well-thought-out action, as one couple, speaking of the importance of making others welcome in the home, says: “I don't know, we just do it.” (Q8C, R1085, H:C/W:U, Y4, C:Y) This is echoed in another statement: “ I don't think we have consciously set out to do this. We are a practising Christian couple, and this is well known to our families and neighbours.” (Q7A, R1068, H:C/W:A, Y4, C:Y) While approaching self-service to others with a sense of awareness is good, the sense of “we just do it” can be a healthy sign of spiritual maturity, where actions have become so integrally part of one's life that no prior thinking about it is required. At the same time, conversations and discussions about these matters are important, bringing about an ongoing re-interpretation of life. We see evidence of this occasionally, e.g. “ conversations with each other on matters of faith, morals, social justice” (Q7A, R1067, W:C, Y3, C:Y)

While looking to collections and service as a sign of *koinōnia* does not directly offer us a great deal, we must recall that, as previously stated, these were “to establish a bond of solidarity between the Jewish and gentile Christians.” We should, therefore, look also for

such bonds of solidarity between families and churches. Here we discover far more evidence, as the following examples attest: “participation in the worship life and social life of our two churches” (Q7A, R1058, W:B, Y4, C:Y); “celebrating the Lord’s Baptism with a group of churches in [our city]” (Q7A, R1059, H:/, W:C, Y3, C:Y); “we could appreciate the faith of other Christian denominations (and also the faith of other non-Christian religions). This opened the doors to ecumenism and to interreligious appreciation” (Q7A, R1061, H:C, Y4, C:N); “working on behalf of both our churches (and particularly AIF) is a very important part of our lives” (Q7A, R1083, H:C/W:A, Y3, C:Y); and “we have regularly hosted and led ecumenical Lent discussion groups in our home, and [my wife] is heavily involved in the local and regional Churches Together organisation.” (Q8A, R1083, H:C/W:A, Y3, C:Y) Again and again, whether in direct service or in relations with other Christians and their churches, we see concrete signs of the bond of solidarity.

Is there a *koinōnia* in the Spirit? To be sure, there is a spiritual dimension referred to several times, be it expecting “a common outlook on life, a spiritual dimension to our marriage” (Q3, R1065, H:C/W:A, Y3, C:Y); or having experience of a “spiritual relationship” (Q6C, R1061, H:C, Y4, C:N); and of “rich cultural, spiritual, theological and psychological relationships” (Q7A, R1061, H:C, Y4, C:N); of “a spirit that inspires your life” (Q7C, R1078, W:C, Y4, C:Y); of “the spirit of Christianity” (Q8C, R1078, W:C, Y4, C:Y); or “a great sharing and stimulation of our spiritual lives” (Q10, R1065, H:C/W:A, Y3, C:Y). But there’s more to it than that. We have already spoken of a bonding together on the horizontal dimension. The same exists in the vertical dimension: “Our unity in Baptism and Marriage has deepened our love for each other and for God, and nourished our marriage and family life for a very long time.” (Q6C, R1067, W:C, Y3, C:Y) This reflects the ongoing

nature of God's presence, and the sense of continued dynamic growth that is called for in true *koinōnia*. Again we hear that "the whole meaning of the Incarnation is the restoration of unity – between ourselves and God on the one hand and between one another on the other." (Q6C, R1070, H:C, Y4, C:Y) We have already referred to several other indicators, but one in particular, representative of many, bears repeating: "God is the centre of who we are." (Q7C, R1080, H:C/W:A, Y3, C:Y) There can be no doubt that none of this could be happening without the vivifying presence of the Spirit, willing and doing in our lives (Phil 2:3-4).

We turn now to the last two indicators of *koinōnia*, the Eucharist and the sufferings. We will treat them in a somewhat interrelated fashion, for the experience of suffering is not exclusively but often most deeply known among interchurch families in their desire to receive the Eucharist as *one*.

The Eucharist is clearly experienced as a sharing in the body and blood of Christ, with its reception making us *one*, both within our marriages and with our churches. This shows up as early as the time of marriage preparation, where one couple asked "How would we come not being able to receive Eucharist together?" (Q4, R1066, H:A, Y3, C:Y), and another speaks of discussing "some about where to worship and Eucharist" (Q4, R1067, W:C, Y3, C:Y), though in the husband's mind they were "clear that we shared an understanding of the Eucharist." (Q4, R1067, H:A, Y3, C:Y) Some simply accepted that "at that time eucharistic sharing did not seem possible – at best a very remote possibility." (Q4, R1079, W:C, Y4, C:Y)

Indeed, of 28 responses to question 4 on discussions prior to marriage, 8 mention the Eucharist specifically, and others obliquely. It was clearly a matter of importance to a



significant number of these couples, even at that time. While each couple worked out in their own circumstances what they would actually do in concrete terms, there is no question that the importance of sharing the Eucharist grew over time. One Catholic husband speaks of their journey, from his initially not receiving in his wife's church to a point where, a number of years into their marriage, "by Easter 1971 I had worked out a theological position that allowed me to take communion together with [my wife] and her mother – a moment of great joy for all of us." (Q5, R1070, H:C, Y4, C:Y) This was equally clearly an occasion not just of entering into fellowship with his wife, but with his extended family as well. His wife speaks of the pain of that situation, saying "Waiting for the next Christmas was too painful." The husband "gradually came with me more and more and this brought us great relief and set us on the road to even greater unity although the thorny issue of the Eucharist was to cause us a lot of pain." (Q5, R1070, W:M, Y4, C:Y) They remained faithful through their suffering, however, and have at least occasionally been able to enjoy the great benefit that comes from receiving together. How is that benefit experienced? That same couple again: "I cannot emphasise enough what an enormous difference this has made to our life together as a couple and as a family and to our journey of unity." (Q5, R1070, W:M, Y4, C:Y) That the value is experienced not just by the non-Catholic spouse is indicated by the Catholic husband, who says "In 2007, at a retreat given for the Sacred Hearts Lay Associates, the bishop leading the retreat openly invited [my wife] to join us at communion – the first time ever to be invited as against being permitted to receive communion at mass." (Q10, R1070, H:C, Y4, C:Y)

Some couples have chosen not to receive together, or even to ask for permission. The Anglican spouse in one couple says, "I know that if I asked our priest for the Eucharist he would say yes. I have chosen not to ask, however, for a number of reasons. I find the whole

process of asking humiliating. I do not want to take the Eucharist in the RC church with [my husband] without him taking it in the Anglican Church to which I now attend.” (Q5, R1073, W:A, Y2, C:Y) Taken in the context of how seriously this couple take their respective views of the Eucharist, it becomes clear that such a position is taken out of deep respect, and the awareness that “it also reminds the priests that I am not a catholic and we have different needs to the rest of the congregation – in a positive sense – perhaps a prophetic sense. We take communion together at AIF occasions when an RC priest is celebrating.” (Q5, R1073, W:A, Y2, C:Y) The husband, too, speaks of the situation and the respect involved: “I enjoy those rare occasions when we can receive together. I am generously and warmly invited to receive in the CofE and they respect my refusal.” (Q5, R1073, H:C, Y2, C:Y)

Where the question of the Eucharist and of suffering comes to the fore, however, is in response to question 10, “What issues have made living your interchurch life joyful? Difficult?” Joys are given as “Worshipping together” (Q10, R1056, H:D/W:C, Y4, C:Y); “our membership of AIF which has brought us into a community of like-minded Christians who will understand and support us non-judgmentally in what we do ... Sharing Eucharist together, and also in each other’s church life” (Q10, R1067, W:C, Y3, C:Y); “getting the best of 2 traditions / fellowships, gaining good friends in 2 fellowships” (Q10, R1069, H:C/W:F, Y1, C:Y); “My receiving communion with [my wife] in the Presbyterian Church (1971). [My wife’s] joining me on a week-long *Better World Retreat* (1975) where, in addition to the warm welcome she was given, for the first time we were able to receive communion together at mass.” (Q10, R1070, H:C, Y4, C:Y) Another speaks of “Those occasions when we have received communion together.” (Q10, R1072, H:C/W:A, Y3, C:Y) Yet another speaks of joyous occasions as follows: “getting married, baptism, sharing communion ... joyful when

we were understood.” (Q10, R1079, W:C, Y4, C:Y) There are more, but these will suffice to show that the Eucharist and all it entails is seen as critically important in building up the *ekklesia*, be it the *ekklesia domestica*, the local parish, or a broader expression of church. Unfortunately, as we will see, anything outside the couple themselves which serves to prevent celebrating Eucharist together brings sorrows.

We have already read of the pain of several couples at not being able to receive together, and in some cases how they eventually resolved that issue. Others present their own situations. The first example of pain we look at says simply “my family, receiving / not receiving Eucharist.” (Q10, R1059, H:L, W:C, Y3, C:Y) This same couple, asked what they have learned about their own Christian tradition, says “That Eucharist should be shared more within an interchurch marriage situation.” (Q13, R1059, H:L/W:C, Y3, C:Y) These responses indicate both a growth in understanding of the importance of the Eucharist, and a sense of difficulty when such Eucharistic sharing is denied. (In another chapter, we will look at what purpose the denial of Eucharist serves. Is it to bring about repentance and change? Is some other purpose at stake?) This is echoed again and again, e.g., “Difficulties inevitably concentrate around issues of authority in the RC church and problems for the non RC partner in areas like the Eucharist” (Q10, R1065, H:C/W:A, Y3, C:Y); “The difficulties have been through not being able to receive communion” (Q10, R1066, W:C, Y3, C:Y); and “the exclusion of [my wife] from unity with us all at communion” (Q10, R1070, H:C, Y4, C:Y). Again, this last comment is made not by the wife who could not receive at the Catholic Eucharist, but by the Catholic husband, who felt deeply the pain of having his wife excluded. In this case, too, the wife is aware of a sense of suffering by the children as a result of her exclusion, though what form that suffering took is not indicated: “they did suffer from my

being excluded when they were children.” (Q10, R1070, W:M, Y4, C:Y). One Anglican wife spoke of “not feeling fully part of either church, being excluded from receiving communion at [my husband’s] church.” (Q10, R1071, W:A, Y2, C:Y) In this case, the sense of exclusion goes wider than the Eucharist, to include the whole of fellowship, and in both churches. One couple is quite direct: “That we are from different Christian traditions does not detract from the joyfulness of our marriage. It is the attitude of the RC church to Holy Communion that I find hard.” (Q10, R1089, H:C/W:A, Y3, C:N)

It is worth noting that one Catholic husband indicates far more is at stake than only the Eucharist; in fact that an entire religious culture and theological paradigm is involved: “The difficulties within and between the churches and, therefore in a respectful and loving way within our marriage, go way beyond communion and into the different cultural as well as theological aspects of the various churches.” (Q10, R1071, H:C, Y2, C:Y) This would indicate that simply allowing Eucharistic sharing, important and valuable though that would be, will not resolve all issues of disunity. Much more needs to be done, though we will not look at possibilities on the way to full unity until our final chapter. Meanwhile, the problem of “the churches’ differing Eucharistic hospitality ‘rules’ “ (Q10, R1072, H:C/W:A, Y4, C:Y) remain a clear and present cause of suffering. There are more such examples, but it is time to move on to another sorrowful issue, namely that of “the promise”.

Roman Catholicism requires that the Catholic party in a mixed marriage promises “... sincerely to do all in his/her power to see that the children of the marriage be baptized and educated in the Catholic Church.”<sup>129</sup> This promise does not stand alone. In fact, it comes with the explicit recognition that “At the same time, it should be recognized that the non-

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<sup>129</sup> *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), #150.

Catholic partner may feel a like obligation because of his/her own Christian commitment.”<sup>130</sup> Indeed, it is recognized that “In carrying out this duty of transmitting the Catholic faith to the children, the Catholic parent will do so with respect for the religious freedom and conscience of the other parent and with due regard for the unity and permanence of the marriage and for the maintenance of the communion of the family.”<sup>131</sup> This clearly indicates that the situation of the entire family, especially that of the spouse, and not only the words of that directive, is to be considered when applying the directive. Both husband and wife have a say in how that promise is lived out! Unfortunately, “the promise” is all too often expressed in terms of the demand of the first part, without recognition of the mitigating circumstances of the rest of that directive and that which follows. This is evident in the responses of several of the spouses: “[My wife’s] initial reaction was to be extremely anxious because of ‘The Promise’ and my fear that I would not be able to take my children to church with me” (Q3, R1068, H:C/W:A, Y4, C:Y); “I was very unhappy about some issues e.g. having to sign a promise that the children would be brought up as Catholics.” (Q3, R1070, W:M, Y4, C:Y) Others phrased it differently, but the sense is the same: “I agreed to have the children educated in the ‘full teaching of the Catholic Church’ and did not think that meant excluding my beliefs. He felt differently and strongly objected to the children being in a protestant nursery when I attended church and did not accommodate my desire to be active in a protestant church.” (Q4, R1058, W:B, Y4, C:Y) This same couple later goes on to say “Being involved in ecumenism has been a tremendous eye-opener and opportunity for spiritual growth,” indicating a clear growth in understanding. Another husband expresses the pain thus: “religious education was ‘covered’ by [my wife’s] painful acceptance that [our children]

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<sup>130</sup> DAPNE, #150.

<sup>131</sup> DAPNE, #151.

would be ‘brought up as Catholics’.” (Q4, R1070, H:C, Y4, C:Y) Clearly, the approach to ‘the promise’ has engendered considerable suffering.

In most cases, couples worked out ways of applying “the promise” in a way which was respectful of both their religious sensitivities. In some cases, the result was heroic, e.g. one Methodist wife started and ran a Sunday School at their Catholic parish so her and other children could have the benefit of the rich experience she herself had received as a child, and then trained two other Catholic mothers to take over so she could be with her own children at Mass. (cf Q5, R1070, W:M, Y4, C:Y) Such is the lengths to which spouses and families go to ensure that their children experience and benefit from the liturgies and life of their churches.

In many cases, a more understanding approach, taking into consideration the needs of both spouses, would have done much to alleviate the suffering caused by “the promise”. Be that as it may, the suffering undergone as a result of “the promise” did not prevent couples and their families from entering fully into a life of committed and joyous faith in the Christ who lived, died and rose again.

We have looked at the origin of the holiness which abides in the Church, be that at the global, local, or domestic level. We have seen the ways that holiness has been lived out, realized in a true *koinōnia*, a fellowship with God and with each other. We have compared the lived experience of interchurch families with that *koinōnia*. I believe it is safe to say that the evidence they provide is a strong indicator that interchurch families, too, are domestic churches in their own right. It is time now to turn to the next mark of the Church.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Catholic

In looking at the mark of catholicity, we are faced with several questions. What is it and how is it understood in different church traditions? What are the measures of catholicity? Does the concrete experience of interchurch families indicate they meet those measures?

#### **Ekklesia Kath olos**

“Here comes everybody!” These words, used by James Joyce as the title sketch for what would become the 1939 book *Finnegan’s Wake*, are often cited as an example of the *church throughout all* Judea, “ἐκκλησια καθ’ ὅλης”—pronounced “Ekklesia Kath olos” of Acts 9:31. This *Kath olos* is the same phrase used by Ignatius of Antioch (died circa 110) in his Letter to the Smyrneans, chapter 8, “Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude [of the people] also be; even as, wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church.”<sup>132</sup> Simon Tugwell states “Ignatius is the first writer to have used the phrase ‘the catholic church’, and his sense of the universality of the church is shown by his desire that all the churches should join with the church of Antioch in celebrating its return to peace, and by his conviction that there is an immense significance in the Bishop of Smyrna being martyred in Rome.”<sup>133</sup> At the same time, Tugwell argues that “it remains a disputed question whether Ignatius accords any kind of primacy to the church of Rome, within the universal church.”<sup>134</sup> We are less concerned, here, with the question of primacy as we are with when a sense of catholicity became part of the church’s self understanding, a question which Ignatius helps answer.

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<sup>132</sup> St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Ad Smyrn.* 8,2: *Apostolic Fathers*, II/2,311 as cited in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, #830; also Kung, 384, Tugwell, 110.

<sup>133</sup> Simon Tugwell, O.P. *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Continuum, 1989), 111.

<sup>134</sup> Tugwell, 127.

What, then, do we mean by the term “catholic”? Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger argued that while the shades of meaning acquired by this word during the course of time are numerous, a double meaning has been decisive from the start. According to Ratzinger, the term

refers, first, to local unity – only the community united with the bishop is the “Catholic Church”, not the sectional groups that have broken away from her, and second, the term describes the unity formed by the combination of the many local Churches, which are not entitled to encapsulate themselves in isolation; they can only remain the Church by being open to one another, by forming one Church in their common testimony to the Word and in *the communion of the eucharistic table, which is open to everyone everywhere* [emphasis added].<sup>135</sup>

Ratzinger contrasts this with “those ‘Churches’ that only exist ‘from time to time in their provinces’ and thereby contradict the true nature of Church.”<sup>136</sup>

For Ratzinger, then, the term *catholic* has to do with an episcopal structure of governance, including the unity between all those bishops with each other. Ratzinger stresses that this does not mean uniformity, but rather unity in plurality, a unity which is visible despite the Church’s variety. Despite the many failures in unity and catholicity, says Ratzinger, we “should face the challenge of the present and try in it not only to profess catholicity in the Creed but to make it a reality in the life of our torn world.”<sup>137</sup> This is, indeed, a huge challenge!

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “the word ‘catholic’ means ‘universal,’ in the sense of ‘according to the totality’ or ‘in keeping with the whole.’”<sup>138</sup> There is ground for confusion on this issue, however. On the one hand, that same article states, “the Church is catholic because Christ is present in her. Where there is Christ Jesus,

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<sup>135</sup> Ratzinger, 345.

<sup>136</sup> Ratzinger, 345.

<sup>137</sup> Ratzinger, 347.

<sup>138</sup> CCC, # 830.



there is the Catholic Church.” If so, that would indicate that wherever Christ is, be it in the Catholic Church or in any other Church or ecclesial community, catholicity also exists. On the other hand, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* states

*The Holy Catholic Church, which is the Mystical Body of Christ [emphasis added], is made up of the faithful who are organically united in the Holy Spirit by the same faith, the same sacraments and the same government and who, combining together into various groups which are held together by a hierarchy, form separate Churches or Rites.*<sup>139</sup>

Here, the Catholic Church appears to be identifying itself exclusively with the Mystical Body of Christ, allowing for no other Churches or ecclesial communions to be included.

While the statement is speaking of the Eastern Churches, seen by Rome to be in communion, there can be no question that today we have a variety of forms of governance and hierarchies, a multiplicity of understandings as to what constitutes authentic sacraments, and indeed at times the question as to whether these various bodies enjoy the same faith.

With Ratzinger, we must confess that the catholicity of the Church is in question:

The catholicity of the Church seems just as questionable as her holiness. The one garment of the Lord is torn between the disputing parties, the one Church is divided up into many Churches, every one of which claims more or less insistently to be alone in the right.<sup>140</sup>

For Ratzinger, this is a manifestation of “the human struggle for power, the petty spectacle of those who, with their claim to administer official Christianity, seem to stand most in the way of the true spirit of Christianity.”<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Decree on the Catholic Churches of the Eastern Rite: *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1964), # 2.

<sup>140</sup> Ratzinger, 340.

<sup>141</sup> Ratzinger, 340. One must be careful, however, in interpretation of such a statement. Made by Ratzinger in 1968 in reference to Church governance, the same statement is being made today in reference to the sexual abuse which is being revealed in country after country. Unfortunately, it applies as accurately in the present situation as it did then to wholly different situations, though it is extremely unlikely Ratzinger had such a possibility in mind when he originally made the statement.

While the catholicity of the Church can rightly be called into question, this does not mean it is not real. As we saw in relation to holiness, catholicity is not created by the Church, nor does it possess it of itself. Rather, it is a call and gift from God, of the essence of the Church by the grace of God, which we are called to live out and realize, day by day, in the concrete and particular circumstances of our world.

There are other senses in which the term *catholic* is understood, as can be seen in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. For example, it can be used as a description of the Church as a whole, as distinguished from local Christian churches or communities. It can be used in application to the doctrine of the Church as a whole, as distinguished from unorthodox teachings. It may be used of the Church before the split between Eastern and Western Christianity in 1054. It may also be used by the Anglican Church, Old Catholics and others who claim to possess a historical and continuous tradition of faith and doctrine. Finally, it may be used by individual Christians, insofar as they belong to the Catholic Church and are orthodox in their belief.

Today, according to that same publication, “it applies to the Church membership, the creeds, churches, institutions, clergy and hierarchy who follow the same teachings of Christ as given to the Apostles.”<sup>142</sup> Except for the grudging admission that the Anglican Church, the Old Catholics, and several others “claim” themselves also as *catholic*, however, the term *catholic* is still seen as applying exclusively to the Catholic Church.

Hans Küng also makes a contribution. “The word ‘catholic,’ rendered in Latin by the loan-word ‘*catholicus*’ or ‘*universalis*’ means: referring to or directed towards the whole, general.”<sup>143</sup> Speaking of Ignatius’ letter to the Smyrneans already referred to, he says

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<sup>142</sup> *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Edited by Peter M.J. Stravinskias. (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1991), 184.

<sup>143</sup> Küng, 383, referring to the work of a range of theologians and historians.

‘Catholic Church’ in this context means quite straightforwardly the whole Church, the complete Church, in contrast to the local episcopal Churches. This is confirmed by the second oldest reference we have, half a century later, in which we learn that shortly after the death of their bishop Polycarp in 156, ‘the Church of Smyrna’ sent a report about his martyrdom to ‘the Church of God at Philomelion and to all communities, wherever they may be, of the holy and catholic Church’.<sup>144</sup>

This understanding from the early life of the Church shifted significantly from the third century onward,

an inevitable polemical consequence of disputations with various heretical groups and movement: that Church and those Christians are called ‘Catholic’ who are united in the whole Church, and not, like the heretics, separated from it. The word ‘Catholic’ in fact takes on the sense of ‘orthodox’: instead of the reality of catholicity there develops the claim to catholicity.<sup>145</sup>

This came in particular with the reign of Constantine. Every Roman had to be a Christian, a “catholic” Christian. “Paganism and heresy became political crimes, ‘catholicity’ became orthodoxy, defended by law.”<sup>146</sup> With Augustine, there came yet another development. In addition to the idea of catholicity in the original idea of an all-embracing church, and the secondary idea of an orthodox church, there now developed the idea of a church encompassing the whole earth, a geographic catholicity, and of a church much larger in numbers than any other, a numerical catholicity.<sup>147</sup> As Küng later points out, the last two are not truly expressive of catholicity. Simply having a church more widespread, or having greater numbers, than any other is no claim to catholicity if that church is unfaithful to its own nature.<sup>148</sup> For a church within the Church to be truly catholic, it must be world-wide in its thinking, reaching out to preach the Gospel to the whole creation (Mk 16:15), to all

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<sup>144</sup> Küng, 384.

<sup>145</sup> Küng, 385.

<sup>146</sup> Küng, 385.

<sup>147</sup> cf Küng, 386.

<sup>148</sup> cf Küng, 388-9.

nations (Mt 28:19), as witnesses (Acts 1:8) until the end of the world (Mt 28:20). It must also, as a local church, be in communion with all other local churches.

Norbert Greinacher provides some further expansion on Catholic identity, especially as developed after the Second Vatican Council. “To be Catholic,” he argues, “means to confess the Christian faith in loyalty to the statements of the Old and New Testament, the proclamation of the Magisterium, and the historical experiences of Christians.”<sup>149</sup> It means being part of God’s elect and beloved people. Greinacher continues, “But this does not mean exclusiveness. The believers of other churches are also part of this people.”<sup>150</sup> While Greinacher also argues that “our Jewish brothers and sisters have always been there ... and in the end, all people of all religions and world-views belong to it,”<sup>151</sup> that remains outside the scope of this thesis on interchurch, as distinct from interfaith, marriages.

Speaking from a Catholic canonical perspective, professor of canon law James Provost points out three specific implications in the 1983 Code of Canon Law. According to Provost, “Catholic identity is based on full communion with the visible society of the Catholic Church. Full communion is verified by the external bonds of profession of faith, sacraments, and ecclesiastical governance,” yet that same identity admits of diversity in these bonds. It is possible for that visible communion to be lost, in part or in whole. Finally, “Catholic Church law recognizes that all Christians in virtue of baptism pertain to the People of God, participate in the three-fold office of Christ, and participate in some way in the mission Christ entrusted to the Church.” This is “because Christ’s Church in whose mission they share subsists in the Catholic Church.”<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Norbert Greinacher, “Catholic Identity in the Third Epoch of Church History,” *Concilium* 1994/5 (1994): 11.

<sup>150</sup> Greinacher, 11-12.

<sup>151</sup> Greinacher, 12.

<sup>152</sup> cf James H. Provost, “Approaches to Catholic Identity in Church Law,” *Concilium* (1994/5): 20-21.

## Protestant Perspectives

We have seen a Catholic perspective of the term *catholic*. We will turn now to others. As we do so, however, we must remember that the Reformation happened in a time when the notion of religion and empire were still highly intertwined. To be other than Catholic was to be not only theologically beyond the pale, but politically and hence legally as well, perhaps with death as a consequence. While this is a notion which we in the western world, familiar as we are with freedom of worship and the separation of church and state, find difficult to understand today, the Reformers saw themselves as Catholic. They began to formulate that catholicity in somewhat different terms, an orthodoxy of belief, by everyone and everywhere, *in accordance with the scriptures*.<sup>153</sup>

Wolfhart Pannenberg, a Lutheran and Professor of Theology at the University of Munich, makes a valuable contribution. He argues that catholicity includes not only all presently existing Christian groups but also those of its past, back to the origins of Christianity, as well as those of the future, to the end of the world. “Only in the glory of the eschatological consummation will the church be fully and completely catholic, since that consummation is not merely the final stage of world history but also the consummation of and judgment on all earlier epochs.” Importantly, “only in the eschatological glory will [the church] attain to full reality, which will include, among other things, the elimination of the contrast between church and secular society.”<sup>154</sup> The full catholicity of the Church is at once always being realized in the concrete present, and always in search of full completion in the eschaton.

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<sup>153</sup> cf Küng, 386.

<sup>154</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *The Church* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1983), 63.

Alan P. F. Sell, in his book “A Reformed, Evangelical, Catholic Theology” expands on the term as seen through the eyes of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) over the years 1875-1982. He presents a theology which is “catholic both in the sense that it is in line with the apostolic faith of the ages and also in the sense that its objectives are not sectarian.”<sup>155</sup>

Sell is clear that there exists within the WARC family no sense of a universal *magisterium*.

The emphasis has ever been upon the catholicity of the *local* church; and although “local” means here the local congregation and there the presbytery, on all sides there has been an ecclesiological inspired disinclination to think in terms of church structures being “from the top down,” so to speak.<sup>156</sup>

According to Sell, catholicity in the Alliance understanding is reflected most clearly “in the atoning cross of Christ [where] the world was redeemed by holy God once for all.” Indeed, “all turns on the cross being the power creative of the church, and on the church’s relation and witness to this source and secret of its life.”<sup>157</sup> The catholic church is “a communion of all believers ... who are ... sanctified by his Spirit.”<sup>158</sup> As such, it goes beyond the visible church on earth. “The real Church of God can never be equated merely with the faithful members of the visible Church. We are but part, and the lesser part, of a greater Church which transcends the limits of the earth.”<sup>159</sup> This is very reflective of the Catholic understanding of the “communion of saints”, a gathering of all believers in Christ, whether living or dead. The sense of universality remains constant.

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<sup>155</sup> Allan P.F. Sell, *A Reformed, Evangelical, Catholic, Theology: The Contribution of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, 1875-1982* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), 1.

<sup>156</sup> Sell, 20.

<sup>157</sup> *Proceedings of the International Congregational Council*, 1908, 45, 52, quoted in Sell, 34-35.

<sup>158</sup> *Proceedings of the Councils of the Presbyterian Alliance*, 1877, 46, quoted in Sell, 46.

<sup>159</sup> *Proceedings of the Councils of the Presbyterian Alliance*, 1937, 52, quoted in Sell, 85.

This sense of universality is evident in the title of the first issue of the Presbyterian Alliance's journal, *The Catholic Presbyterian*, published January 1879. Its editor, William Blaikie, affirmed that "Catholic Presbyterianism cannot be a very exclusive Presbyterianism ... we regard other evangelical communions as parts of the one Church catholic."<sup>160</sup> We will leave aside for the moment the limiting factor of "evangelical communions". There is at the very least a recognition of a universality extending well beyond Presbyterianism. This is made even clearer in a presentation by M.D. Hoge at the first Presbyterian Council, 1877, recognizing

the fact that, notwithstanding the differences existing among Christians of other denominations as to forms of government and modes of worship, a true Christian unity may exist even where there is little outward uniformity, and that this unity not only may, but does, and must exist among those whose lives are hid with Christ in God.<sup>161</sup>

This expresses very well the tension inherent in living the *already* of Christian unity that is present, yet somehow hidden, in the body of Christ, and the *not yet* which results from our need to grow into and *realize* that already existing unity. True catholicity is to take both into consideration; it "must be regulated by a supreme regard to the honor and glory of our Divine Saviour, as well as a tender concern for the members of his body."<sup>162</sup>

While the Reformed churches would agree, especially in this time of ecumenical activity, that catholicity of the church entails its visible unity, they do not see the need for as much uniformity in expression, liturgy, or practice as is commonly called for in the Catholic Church. Rather, they would view such pluriformity not as a sign of division, but as gifts of God to be accepted gladly. Still, because "the proclamation of God's reconciliation by a manifestly unreconciled church is inherently incongruous and detrimental to mission", their

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<sup>160</sup> *The Catholic Presbyterian*, Vol I, 1879, 6, quoted in *Sell*, 105.

<sup>161</sup> *Proceedings of the Councils of the Presbyterian Alliance*, 1877, 81, quoted in *Sell*, 106.

<sup>162</sup> *Proceedings of the Councils of the Presbyterian Alliance*, 1880, 346, quoted in *Sell*, 107.

goal is “the mutual recognition of ministries and membership and, above all, the removal of those barriers dividing Christians at the Lord’s table.”<sup>163</sup> In this, the unity of the church is tied directly to its catholicity, something echoed in the proceedings of the Presbyterian Council (1964), which declared in its report that

we were baptized into Christ and therefore made members of the Holy Catholic (Universal) Church but we received this baptism through the ministry of a particular, historical Church. ... Nevertheless the truth, recognized by the Reformers, that there is only one Church extended throughout the world, remains valid today and the present disunited state of the Church is sinful in that it obscures this truth and our reconciliation with one another in Christ.<sup>164</sup>

Where the Catholic Church places a strong emphasis on ordained hierarchical government, the Reformed churches recognize more fully (at least in practice) the priesthood of all believers, seeing it as “integral to the catholicity of the reconciled community that all believers are ‘to reveal God to their fellows by word and by life and to be the means of bringing them to God, and finally to serve one another in love’.”<sup>165</sup> This is, however, not the whole story. The Reformed churches recognize that “because of a diversity of gifts, it is necessary that church life be decently ordered.”<sup>166</sup> That ordination, however, is not seen as an imparting of spiritual gifts or special power; rather “it is simply the solemn form by which the Church recognizes Christ’s call to office, and gives the persons ordained public authority to minister in His name.”<sup>167</sup> The ordained are seen as having less to do with governance, and more to do with ministry. But while their importance is seen differently, it is not of less value.

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<sup>163</sup> Sell, 113.

<sup>164</sup> *Proceedings of the Councils of the Presbyterian Alliance*, 1964, pp 220-21, quoted in *Sell*, 120.

<sup>165</sup> Sell, 170.

<sup>166</sup> Sell, 170.

<sup>167</sup> *Proceedings of the Councils of the Presbyterian Alliance*, 1892, pp 287, quoted in *Sell*, 120.



Finally, we may reflect on what the World Council of Churches, meeting in Uppsala in 1968, had to say:

The purpose of Christ is to bring people of all times, of all races, of all places, of all conditions, into an organic and living unity in Christ by the Holy Spirit under the universal fatherhood of God. This unity is not solely external; it has a deeper, internal dimension, which is also expressed by the term “catholicity”. Catholicity reaches its completion when what God has already begun in history is finally disclosed and fulfilled.<sup>168</sup>

This catholicity is not something created by the members of the Church. Rather, as Uppsala stated, “God’s gift of catholicity is received in faith and obedience.”<sup>169</sup>

While “the Catholic tradition has usually emphasized that the ordained ministry, concentrated in the episcopate, is of the *esse* of the universal church,”<sup>170</sup> it must be said that the lack of such a clearly defined ordained episcopacy as the Catholic Church holds forth may not mean the lack of such *esse*. The Consultation on Church Union, as stated in the *Principles of Church Union* of 1968, has accepted that there should be in a united church a representative ministry which includes the offices of bishop, presbyter, and deacon. At the same time, it recognized that the record of the church of the New Testament offers several differing forms of church order.<sup>171</sup>

Similarly, the report of the United Presbyterian Church in the USA, entitled *The Church and Its Changing Ministry*, states that while ministry is essential and of the essence of the church, no particular structure of the church’s ministry is essential to the church, nor is any particular ordering so sacred that it is beyond criticism or even beyond abolition.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> *The Holy Spirit and the Catholicity of the Church: Report of Section I*, as published in *Apostolic Faith Today: A Handbook for Study, Faith and Order Paper No. 124*. Edited by Link, Hans-Georg. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1985), 117.

<sup>169</sup> *Apostolic Faith*, 116.

<sup>170</sup> Eugene P. Heideman, *Reformed Bishops and Catholic Elders*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1970), 37.

<sup>171</sup> Heideman, 37.

<sup>172</sup> Heideman, 39.

It is agreed, then, that there is need for order in Church governance. But what form must that order take? Heideman points out that the documents of Vatican II did not make clear distinctions with regard to the institution of the priesthood, leaving it difficult to draw clear lines between the bishop and the priest. For example, the priest can confirm members in the church, a role formally reserved to the bishop. It is known that a priest cannot ordain a bishop. Heideman goes on to state, however, that, according to a statement by Karl Rahner, “it is not even certain that under certain conditions the priest could not validly confer ordination to the priesthood.”<sup>173</sup> This juxtaposition of roles makes it clear that the canonical clarity seemingly assigned to church governance is not as clear as it may appear.

The problem becomes even more difficult when we look at other sacraments. A layperson, even a non-Christian, can administer the sacrament of baptism, provided that person intends what the Church intends by that action. While in the Orthodox tradition, the priest confers the sacrament of marriage on a couple, in the western Church it is the parties to the marriage themselves who confer the sacrament of marriage upon each other. Adrian Hastings, in his book *The Theology of a Protestant Catholic* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1990) points out that in the Middle Ages people often confessed their sins to the laity. He also indicates that the last Catholic bishop of Iceland indeed did so to his wife when on his way in 1550 to lay down his life for the faith at the hands of the Danish Protestants.<sup>174</sup>

Finally, we see that in the Presbyterian tradition, the presbyters from the earliest times of the Reformation had entrusted to them the power not only for the celebration of the sacraments, but also along with other ministers to ordain other men to the office of minister, elder, or deacon. This, then, gave them the same level of power and authority as bishops in

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<sup>173</sup> Heideman, 111.

<sup>174</sup> Adrian Hastings, *The Theology of a Protestant Catholic* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1990), 51.

the Anglican and Catholic traditions. This was in fact recognized in the Anglican church in the seventeenth century, which accepted the validity of Presbyterian orders, and at times even accepted persons with Presbyterian orders as fully ordained.<sup>175</sup>

To what end is all this discussion on governance and ministry? It is not to deny the authenticity and validity of any of the forms of governance which have held sway over the years. Rather, it is to show that, while governance is of the essence of catholicity, this or that form is not. Forms of governance and ministry can and do vary at different stages in the life of the Church, and in response to the needs of different places and cultures. As Hastings points out,

the church did not begin with a doctrine of ministry. It began with a very simple praxis of ministry which grew and grew and as it grew its branches had to be blessed and pruned. But it was and is of the very nature of Catholic ecclesiology and ministry that the development preceded the formal and ecumenical authorization.<sup>176</sup>

This has a direct relationship to the reality of interchurch marriages, insofar as the praxis of interchurch marriage is developing ahead of the churches' corresponding theology and ecumenical authorization.

### **A New Era**

Greinacher quotes Karl Rahner's statement that the Second Vatican Council represented no less than the beginning of a new era in church history – a periodization which must be seen in theological, not historical terms.<sup>177</sup> If Rahner is right that we are entering a new era, and Hastings is right that doctrine grows out of praxis developed over years, we are facing a time when we may see significant changes in forms of church governance, though not an end to governance *per se*. We must enter this era as a time of real dialogue. As

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<sup>175</sup> Heideman, 113.

<sup>176</sup> Hastings, 45.

<sup>177</sup> Greinacher, 3.

Geoffrey King, quoting the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference held in Taipei in 1974, says, "Real dialogue requires openness to change, to conversion. A church that really dialogues risks becoming transformed in the process."<sup>178</sup> According to the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue,

*Dialogue* can be understood in different ways. Firstly, at the purely human level, it means reciprocal communication, leading to a common goal or, at a deeper level, to interpersonal communion. Secondly, dialogue can be taken as an attitude of respect and friendship, which permeates or should permeate all those activities constituting the evangelizing mission of the Church. This can appropriately be called "the spirit of dialogue". Thirdly, in the context of religious plurality, dialogue means "all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment," in obedience to truth and respect for freedom. It includes both witness and the exploration of respective religious convictions.<sup>179</sup>

While the statement refers specifically to interreligious dialogue, the same attributes hold true for interchurch dialogue. Both are, in the document's words, a "*dialogue of life*, where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations."<sup>180</sup> This *dialogue of life* takes on a new meaning and impetus where interchurch families are concerned, in that their *dialogue* takes place not only in an open and neighbourly spirit, but in the context of a relationship of committed, faithful love.

Such a dialogue, whether open and neighbourly or in the context of deep and faithful love, does not mean that we should expect major changes in a short space of time. George A. Lindbeck, having observed that "a religion is first of all a comprehensive interpretive medium or categorial framework within which one has certain kinds of experiences and

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<sup>178</sup> Geoffrey King, "Identity, Law and Culture," *Concilium* (1994/5): 39.

<sup>179</sup> *Reflection And Orientations On Interreligious Dialogue And The Proclamation Of The Gospel Of Jesus Christ* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1991), # 9.

<sup>180</sup> Reflection, # 42.

makes certain kinds of affirmations,”<sup>181</sup> goes on to say that “in the case of Christianity, the framework is supplied by the biblical narratives interrelated in certain specified ways (e.g., by Christ as center).”<sup>182</sup> This framework acts as a constant guide to all future experiences, all future formulations of doctrine. It may well be that what was recognized as good and expressive of our faith may be found, today, no longer to be adequately expressive, and may need to change accordingly in order to fulfill its original purpose. Because “the cognitional and experiential dimension of a religion are variable in contrast to a doctrinally significant core,”<sup>183</sup> Lindbeck argues that “faithfulness to such doctrines does not necessarily mean repeating them; rather, it requires, in the making of any new formulations, adherence to the same directives that were involved in their first formulation.”<sup>184</sup> “The first-order truth claims of a religion change,” he argues, “insofar as these arise from the application of the interpretive scheme to the shifting worlds that human beings inhabit.”<sup>185</sup> Still, “it need not be the religion that is primarily reinterpreted as world views change, but rather the reverse: changing world views may be reinterpreted by one and the same religion.”<sup>186</sup> The fundamental and abiding framework of Christianity does not change. Rather, Lindbeck argues, “amid these shifts in Christological affirmations and in the corresponding experiences we have of Jesus Christ, the story of passion and resurrection and the basic rules for [that framework’s] use remain the same.”<sup>187</sup>

In that light, we can understand that the exploration and enrichment of religious convictions that result from dialogue should be expected to take time, not only in the

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<sup>181</sup> George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 80.

<sup>182</sup> Lindbeck, 80.

<sup>183</sup> Lindbeck, 82.

<sup>184</sup> Lindbeck, 81.

<sup>185</sup> Lindbeck, 82.

<sup>186</sup> Lindbeck, 82.

<sup>187</sup> Lindbeck, 83.

Catholic community but in Christian communities in general, and even in the domestic church. Potential enrichment and the fruits of exploration arising from dialogue need to be weighed, tested, and found to be consistent with essential values (Lindbeck's "doctrinally significant core"), even if they present and realize those values in a new and different way, before change can be accepted and incorporated. This is a long-term activity, not easily accepted by a society and culture used to instant gratification. Nevertheless, we must not refrain from dialogue just because its fruits are not immediately clear and present. The exploration, discovery, and enrichment must go on.

As we come, then, to look at the concrete data gleaned from interchurch couples, we need to look for several indicators. Is there a sense of dialogue, first between the spouses themselves and then with their respective churches, a dialogue which is at once respectful, friendly, positive and constructive, directed at mutual understanding and enrichment? Is there a sense of unity with the Church, the respective churches, and the church authorities? Is there a sense of openness, not only to the Christian tradition of the spouse and the spouse's church, but to the *oikumene*, the world as a whole? Is there a sense of revealing and living out the Good News of Jesus Christ, in ways appropriate to the family's situation and circumstances? Finally, is there a sense of order and governance within the family? This clearly need not be the monarchical form of governance absolutized in the Catholic Church at the First Vatican Council; but there must be a sense that the family enjoys a sense of order amidst the chaos that is a normal part of everyday family life. If these are evident in the lives of interchurch families, then we can reasonably say that they enjoy true catholicity.

### **Concrete Experience**

Question 4 in the survey asked, “What expectations did you have in being married to someone of another Christian tradition?” There was a variety of expectations as couples entered married life, some of them being supportive of a *dialogue for life* and others clearly not so. Some were able to say, “We had a shared faith and certainly shared an understanding of the nature of Christian marriage so that we would not have serious disagreements, but that there were uncertainties about our families’ understanding of our situation and many unanswered questions about bringing up children.” (Q3, R1067, H:A, Y:3, C:Y) Others went into marriage with no expectations of change of themselves, e.g. “[I] would still be free to share and practice my Catholic faith” (Q3, R1041, H:C, Y:2, C:N), while others went into marriage expecting no change of the other. “None-neither of us expected changes from the other.” (Q3, R1056, H:D/W:C, Y:4, C:Y) (The former could be interpreted as a refusal to consider other perspectives, the latter as an indifference to the other. Responses to other questions by these couples prove neither is the case.) Still others were able to answer “That we would share faith stories and experiences together and that we would make joint decisions about any children.” (Q3, R1066, W:C, Y:3, C:Y) One couple was perhaps overly optimistic in their expectation, saying “Our Expectation was to be accepted by our churches as a mixed couple.” (Q3, R1082, H:C/W:L, Y:4, C:Y) The evidence indicates such an expectation, while in many ways founded on reasonable grounds, is not often met in the reality of church life.

There were several responses, however, which indicate a clear lack of support for dialogue – though that lack of expectation stemmed less from the couple themselves than from their churches. One Catholic husband expressed the situation this way: “Because I had been accepted and not excluded from anything by [my wife’s] church, I was not going to

have problems with them. It was more what the Catholics were agitated about.” (Q3, R1085, H:C, Y:4, C:Y) Still another couple were blunt about their expectations: “Very little, because we were bound by the rules and demands of the Catholic Church at the time.” (Q3, R1087, H:A/W:C, Y:4, C:Y) This same couple, in response to what they discussed prior to marriage, said they had “many hours of anguished discussion, argument and soul-searching, but in the end we were again bound by the rules and demands of the Catholic Church.” (Q3, R1087, H:A/W:C, Y:4, C:Y) Simply put, it was the demands of the Church rather than their own relationship which were seen as limiting dialogue.

The variety of expectations is not reflected in their actual entry into the *dialogue for life*, something which began with most couples well before their wedding. Of 31 responses, 15 spoke of moderate to significant dialogue when asked what discussions they had had prior to marriage (Question 4). Given a list of suggested topics, they gave responses from where to worship (e.g. Q4, R1066, H:A, Y:3, C:Y) to “All of the above in great detail.” (Q4, R1041, H:C/W:P, Y:2, C:N) Where discussion of children was concerned, there was a variety of response, from decisions made in advance, e.g. “Baptism 1st. HOW to worship together was probably 2nd. Our decision was if 1st child was a girl, all kids would be raised Catholic, if 1st child was a boy, all kids would be raised Lutheran. First Communion & Confirmation 3rd” (Q4, R1059, H:L/W:C, Y:3, C:Y) through “Discussing details re children (other than we were both family people and wanted a family) seemed rather premature perhaps” (Q4, R1065, H:C/W:A, Y:3, C:Y) to “We did agree to put off any considerations about children until after our marriage developed.” (Q4, R1061, H:C, Y:3, C:N) The latter two do not indicate a lack of dialogue, but rather a joint decision regarding what was worth discussing at the time. Once again, however, outside forces impacted on the discussion, this



time as evidenced in the discussion topic of another couple: “Where to get married (traditionally, in England, it’s the bride’s church, in our case the Anglican one) (and the consequences of the RC parents’ declining to attend); general attitudes to ‘life.’ The topics listed weren’t relevant ... we married in (her) church without the RC parents being there. We re-married later in the RC church after realising that Church (capital “c”) did matter (mainly to the RC parents).” (Q4, R1072, H:C/W:A, Y:4, C:Y) There is here an issue of deep concern for not only couples but their churches as well. This pattern reveals itself several times not only from various respondents, but in various questions within each response. Couples manage to dialogue, grow in understanding, and come to a praxis which enables them to live their faith and family life faithfully and with stability within their marriage, yet find themselves buffeted not by what they themselves hold, but by the very churches which should be their first source of support and encouragement.

What has been considered in the idealism of pre-marital life can be found to be profoundly different when the reality of marriage takes over. How did the couples fare in their dialogue as their marriages progressed? One couple, who had discussed all things in great detail, did not have any children. A lot of the dialogue, therefore, proved irrelevant as to the details themselves, but the fact the couple is now in their second decade of marriage indicates the dialogue was valuable in itself, regardless of the details. Another couple, who had come to clear conclusions as to how things would happen with their children, seemed to have fairly closely adhered to their decisions: “Baptism: Our 1st child was a girl, so Baptism, First Communion, Confirmation were in Catholic Church. Where to worship depended upon us lecturing or girls in Sunday religious education.” (Q4, R1059, H:L/W:C, Y:3, C:Y) Yet another couple, who felt consideration of what to do regarding children was premature, came

to the following decision: “We have one daughter and had a shared baptism at our RC church with our Anglican vicar taking part-this followed a correspondence with both Bishops.

Decided that an RC school for her could be a divisive issue so sent her to a non denominational school and decided against First Communion. (It would have been v difficult for me to take communion then on that occasion-again, divisive.) She chose an Anglican confirmation at 14 but has also been to Lourdes with the RC HCPT group and fitted in fine.” (Q4, R1065, H:C/W:A, Y:3, C:Y) They go on to say that their daughter, now aged 22, is an occasional church attender who is “happy in either place.”

One could think the lack of consistent church attendance is due to their interchurch marriage not providing a clearly defined context for faith and worship, however one would be hard-pressed to show that children of same-church marriages are, today, more faithful in their attendance. One couple went on to form what appears to be a healthy relationship of faith within their marriages, despite the obstacles: “when we began to go to church again – four years after marrying – we attended both churches each week, then changed to alternate weeks, then to attending only our “own” church, with occasional attendances at each other’s. Eucharist; we generally observe the (RC) “rules”. Baptism – both were joint services, the older one in the RC church and the younger in the CofE one; both were confirmed in the CofE and attended a CofE secondary school (which was attended by children from many denominations).” (Q5, R1072, H:C/W:A, Y:4, C:Y) Other couples provide evidence of movement in their lives, as seen from the response given earlier by respondent couple 1079. (See page 37.) Clearly it is possible for at least some couples to find a way forward.

We have taken a brief look at the dialogue between the spouses themselves. We will now look at their relationships with their churches. Are these couples, in their interchurch

reality, isolated from their churches? Or do we find them in dialogue with their churches, a dialogue which enables them and their churches to learn from each other how to live the Good News of Jesus Christ in the concrete reality of day-to-day lives? We must bear in mind what we have already seen, that true catholicity also involves unity, a realization of the *already* while living the *not yet*.

“We tried to worship at our churches as a family whenever possible, attend ecumenical events.” So says couple 1059 (Q6A, R1059, H:L/W:C, Y:3, C:Y) when asked how they experience unity in their marriage and family. Another couple says they “pray together, read scripture together, attend each other’s church, minister in each other’s denomination as much as possible.” (Q6A, R1041, H:C/W:P, Y:2, C:N) Couple after couple speaks of being involved in both their churches, both individually and together. “We are both involved in the Baptist church, and (to a lesser extent) we are both involved in the Catholic church. We join in worship services, attendance at special events, Sunday school, administrative discussions, social occasions, occasional work activities, all at the respective churches (more frequently at the Baptist church).” (Q6A, R1061, H:C/W:B, Y:4, C:N) “Over the years, we have become truly two church-we both take an active part in both churches and feel that they are both our churches. i.e. as with many AIF folk, two churches are our “church” and that’s fine. We’re very lucky in [our parish] which has a very positive ecumenical atmosphere and all our priests (and bishops) so far have been very supportive.” (Q6A, R1065, H:C/W:A, Y:3, C:Y) The spouses in another couple highlight different aspects of their relationship with their churches. The husband points to that dialogue and relationship “In sharing as much as we are able to: our prayer life; our worship; our spiritual reading; our church friends; our church activities; our ecumenical work.” (Q6A, R1070, H:C,

Y:4, C:Y) Meanwhile the wife says “we have at different times been involved in other activities in each other’s churches e.g., [my husband] is a valued member of our House Group and I have been in groups in his church. We also go together to each others’ Retreats.” (Q6A, R1070, W:M, Y:4, C:Y) It’s worth noting that, of 29 individual comments by spouses, only 4 did not explicitly mention relationships with their churches, and as a positive aspect of their lives. Of the 4 who did not, we find no sense of disunity or isolation. Rather, we read comments like “We pray together and we pray and discuss before making major decisions. The praying together and worshipping together are helpful to us whether things are going well or not.” (Q6A, R1066, W:C, Y:3, C:Y) While there is no specific mention of church involvement in this woman’s response, the husband identifies “a joy when our unity is celebrated by our worshipping communities. Frustration with artificial barriers to unity.” (Q6A, R1066, W:C, Y:3, C:Y) Clearly there is warm and affectionate dialogue with their churches, even in the midst of occasional difficulties. Another couple, while in the specific question not saying what their involvement with their churches might be, says simply “We do things together. We do not put a ‘denomination’ tag on our family life – we have unity embedded, it is not an ‘add on’.” (Q6A, R1085, H:C/W:U, Y:4, C:Y) The reality becomes more clear, however, when we read their response to Question 7A on the centrality of God in their lives: “We go to church, we belong to a housegroup.” (Q7A, R1085, H:C/W:U, Y:4, C:Y)

The response of another couple to the question of openness to other traditions makes clear that the dialogue and respect is not only with their own churches, but goes much wider: “We are well known in the local church communities (i.e. all denominations, not just RC and CofE) for our interchurchedness and openness to other churches. E.g. we have regularly

hosted and led ecumenical Lent discussion groups in our home, and [my wife] is heavily involved in the local and regional Churches Together organisation.” (Q8A, R1083, H:C/W:A, Y:3, C:Y) When asked why they take steps to make sure God is central in their lives, we read responses such as “this is what the Christian life is supposed to be, the abundant life” (Q7C, R1041, W:P, Y:2, C:N) and “It is the mission of believers.” (Q7C, R1056, H:D/W:C, Y:4, C:Y) This latter statement clearly reflects a sense that the Christian life is not only about oneself, or even one’s community but about sharing that “abundant life”, of which the previous respondent spoke, with others who have not yet come to faith. That this *dialogue for life* goes on in a respectful and neighbourly manner beyond the Christian community is clearly reflected in the comment of one respondent: “I enjoy my relationships with people of other Christian traditions and also other faith traditions (i.e. Jewish). I treasure what I can often learn from them.” (Q8A, R1061, W:B, Y:4, C:N) Another respondent says “We have always offered hospitality to friends and people from both church communities. We have often involved agnostic and friends from other faiths in worship.” (Q8A, R1067, H:A, Y:3, C:Y) And yet another says “We love them as people without labels. We have friends in both traditions – and others of various denominations, faiths and none. They come to our house for meals, prayer time, discussions etc. We have had ecumenical house groups etc.” (Q8A, R1070, W:M, Y:4, C:Y) The people who are saying this are not people who have come to the interchurch journey only recently, to become jaded and insular as time goes on. These people have lived their interchurch reality for 30 years or more, and still take joy in sharing their journey with others from across various Christian and other faith traditions. Living a life open is part and parcel of their lives.

We come now to the question of governance and order. While that was never a specific question in the survey, there are statements spread here and there in the responses which give us an indication of the kind of governance which exists. For example, we read, “Our children and other relatives seem to feel welcome as do others.” (Q8A, R1058, H:C, Y:4, C:Y) Such a sense of welcome is not normally found in homes with no loving governance. The same can be said of a couple who responds, “One set of our daughter’s Godparents are Baptists-the others are RC. My brother and family are all Methodists (my original background) and they happily come to either of our churches when they are down staying. We have entertained most of our clergy from time to time.” (Q8A, R1065, H:C/W:A, Y:3, C:Y) Or, “We have lots of people coming through our house for meals and visits, and often have conversations on a variety of topics, religious or not.” (Q8A, R1067, W:C, Y:3, C:Y) Again, in each case, these are families with a significant number of years of marriage, i.e. 20 or more. The fact that people feel welcome, are happy to go to church with the couple when visiting, and that clergy are entertained, etc., indicates a sense of peace and order.

Speaking of handing on their faith to their children, one couple says they do this “In the first place by trying to be loving, caring and understanding. We have always made it plain to our children – in a non-didactic manner – that God is central to, the source of and destiny of human life and have tried to build our family life – and, importantly, our relationship to the world - around that fact. We have added to that by taking an active part in their formal religious education and formation.” (Q9A, R1070, H:C, Y:4, C:Y) At least one couple reflects the fact that much of the work of parenting and governance shows up well beyond the churches of which they are part: “By example and encouragement – Attendance

at both churches, church activities, voluntary work at local prison through chaplaincy, Scout movement, songs of praise in the streets of our estate and town centre, supporting friends and neighbours, pilgrimages.” (Q9A, R1080, H:c/W:A, Y:3, C:Y)

In response to the question on why couples would seek to demonstrate unity in their lives, one couple said, “Unity in marriage and family life is vital for any family in any situation. If we as Christians of any tradition are to proclaim the love of Christ in the world, then we should not be divided by our religious affiliation which would make a nonsense of the whole message.” (Q6C, R1070, W:M, Y:4, C:Y) Another couple, responding to the same question, says, “Because it is important to know that we do share the fundamentals of something as key to our life, principles & decision-making as is our faith. ... I do think we have to recognise that we are two separate individuals, maybe bound by the most significant life long bonds, & that as such we will differ & will change & have to be adaptable to that.” (Q6C, R1071, H:C/W:A, Y:2, C:Y) Clearly there is no reflection here of a monarchical governance. Rather, there is a sense of sharing in “life, principles, and decision-making,” while being open to change and adaptation. That is truly the stuff of the *dialogue for life!*

As we draw this chapter to a close, we can look back at what we have accomplished. We have looked at what constitutes catholicity, with its corollary of unity which we reviewed in Chapter One. We have seen how that catholicity is lived in various Christian traditions, and explored the ways we can measure its realization. We then looked at a variety of responses from interchurch families, seeing how their lives reflect a true catholicity of spirit, both between themselves, with their churches, and indeed with the wider world. And we have seen indicators of governance and order. As with the previous “marks”, I believe it is safe to say that the lived experience of interchurch families indicates strongly that their

domestic churches, too, are authentically catholic. We turn now to the final “mark” of the Church.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### Apostolic

It is he who gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers in roles of service for the faithful to build up the body of Christ, till we become one in faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, and form that perfect man who is Christ come to full stature. (Eph. 4:11-13)

The adjective "apostolic" does not appear in our scriptures. The term apostle, however, is clearly present – though with several different understandings and contexts. If we are going to delve into the term 'apostolic' as it may apply to the question of interchurch families as domestic church, then, it is important that we look at these understandings, and work forward from there. Let us begin with a simple question. Who were the apostles?

#### Scriptural Evidence

In Mark, the earliest gospel, we find them named: Simon, James, John, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James, Thaddaeus, Simon of the Zealot Party, and Judas Iscariot. (Mk. 3:13-19) The Matthew named here can be understood to be Levi the tax collector, named in Mk. 2:14. We see evidence of this in the Matthean parallel (10:2ff), where we find not only a slight variation in the order, but the fact Matthew is now the one referred to as 'the tax collector'. In both gospels they are referred to as 'the Twelve'. In both gospels, they are sent to proclaim the good news, and given authority over evil spirits. In Luke 6:14ff, the apostles are also named, as a subset of a larger group of disciples (cf Lk. 6:13), though we now have a second Judas, and Thaddeus disappears. John refers to the Twelve as a group several times (6:67, 70, 71, 20:24) but no lists are given. Indeed, some names are not even mentioned.

The names are clearly less important than the number twelve, the importance of which is seen in statements by Jesus (Mt. 19:28 and Lk. 22:28ff) where they are said to sit in

judgment of the twelve tribes of Israel. As C.K. Barrett points out in regards to the passage in Acts 1:15-26 where Matthias is elected (by the apostles, not by Christ, who has died and risen) to fill the place left vacant by the defection of Judas, “Nothing could underline more heavily the significance of the number twelve. It is not that twelve men, no less, are needed to do the work, for no attempt is made to fill the place of the martyred James.” (Acts 12:2)<sup>188</sup>

Why are the two situations seen differently, when in both cases the number left alive is reduced from twelve to eleven? Judas, committing suicide, clearly breached his mission. The twelve called to proclaim have been reduced to eleven, and so the apostles select a replacement, thereby ensuring the number sent remains at twelve. James, being martyred, clearly lived his mission, and so remains known as one of the twelve apostles sent, even though the number of apostles still alive is similarly reduced to eleven. The number twelve is important, and the mission of proclamation cannot be separated from that number.

This is further evidenced by the fact there were more than twelve people who were referred to as apostles. For example, in 1 Cor. 15:5ff, we see that Christ was seen by Cephas, then by the Twelve, then by five hundred brothers, then James, and finally all the apostles. If the Twelve were ‘the apostles’ in this sense, there would have been no need for recording a second appearance to them, unless there was something specific about that appearance, of which we are given nothing. In Rom. 16:7, Paul speaks of Andronicus and Junias as outstanding apostles, while in 1 Thess. 2:7, Paul appears to group Silvanus and Timothy with himself as apostles, yet clearly none are seen as members of the Twelve. (There were also “false apostles”, people who “practice deceit in their disguise as apostles of Christ” - 2 Cor. 11:13. Fortunately, they don’t figure largely in the epistles beyond Paul having to exercise his authority in bringing discipline to the church in Corinth.) It would appear, then, that the

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<sup>188</sup> C.K. Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles* (London: Epworth Press, 1970), 48.

term *apostle* is used of anyone who is sent, whether by a community or by a person. But those sent by a community or person not having lived with Christ in his earthly ministry clearly do not have the same level of authority as those sent by Christ himself, or selected specifically to replace one of their number by those he had sent. “The Twelve” are a specific group, with Jesus in his earthly ministry, who were sent with a specific mission, to proclaim the good news.

John takes a somewhat different approach to the question of being an apostle. For him, the things to be considered are given voice in several passages. “The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we have seen his glory.” (Jn. 1:14) “We are talking about what we know, we are testifying to what we have seen.” (Jn. 3:11) “When the Paraclete comes ... he will bear witness on my behalf. You must bear witness as well, for you have been with me from the beginning.” (Jn. 15:26-27) Having been with the Christ, one must also “hear” and “keep” what has been seen and heard: “If you live according to my teaching, you are truly my disciples” (Jn. 8:31), and “anyone who loves me will be true to my word...” (Jn. 14:23). This is not a matter solely of a person’s choice. Rather, “It was not you who chose me, it was I who chose you to go forth and bear fruit.” (Jn. 15:16) “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” (Jn. 20:21) For John, then, key components are that a person has been chosen by Christ, experienced the reality of Christ, “takes in” that reality and makes it his/her own, and witnesses to that reality.<sup>189</sup>

What, then, of Paul? Again and again, the opening lines of his letters make clear that he sees himself as a true apostle,<sup>190</sup> sent not by a community nor even by one of the Twelve,

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<sup>189</sup> cf Barrett, 64-65.

<sup>190</sup> Rom 1:1, Cr. 1:1, 2 Cor. 1:1, Gal. 1:1, etc.

but by Christ himself. How can he make that claim? And if he can make it, why cannot others, who came after him, do the same?

Paul had an experience of the risen Christ (Acts 9:1-19), and was told by Christ to go into Damascus and await directions (Acts 9:6). He was healed of his blindness, received the Holy Spirit, and was baptized (Acts 9:17-18). Though there is no indication that Paul was at this time given a mission to proclaim the good news of Christ crucified, it's clear Paul interpreted the whole event in that manner (cf Gal. 1:15ff), beginning his life's work from this point.

Though Paul is identified in Acts as an apostle (Acts 14:14, 15:25ff), this cannot be an indicator that he is seen by the Twelve as one of them. He had never accompanied Jesus in his earthly ministry. Yet there can be no question that Paul had an experience which he interpreted as his being chosen by Christ, that he experienced the reality of Christ, of which Christ's crucifixion was central, and that he was sent to "spread among the Gentiles the good tidings concerning him." (Gal. 1:16) This mission was so thoroughly lived out that he was martyred for his pains. In that sense, i.e. chosen by Christ as an emissary, having lived within himself the reality of the crucified and risen Christ, and having spent his life in proclamation of the good news, he can rightly be called an apostle, though not one of the Twelve. The same could be said of others throughout time. The canon of scripture having been fixed, however, we have taken to calling some of them teachers, doctors, and saints of the Church.

We cannot leave the scriptural question of being an apostle without looking at the role of women. Both the gospels of Matthew (28:10) and of John (20:17) have passages where Mary Magdalene is sent by Jesus to instruct the apostles on what they are to do. Being sent by the Lord, she can clearly be said to be an apostle. Otto Michel, however, argues that

“both Gospels recognize the women as witnesses of Easter, but both admit that the disciples were given a special commission and a new authority through the Easter event.”<sup>191</sup> The apostles were sent to the world, while Mary was sent to the apostles. In other words, while the importance of Mary Magdalene (and, in Matthew, the other Mary) as an apostle to the apostles cannot be overstated, the sending of Mary is of a different order than that of the apostles. The clarity of the situation is not helped, of course, by the fact the “disciples” referred to in both Mt. 28:16 and Jn. 20:19-25 are those known to us as the twelve apostles! Eduard Schweizer argues “Matthew is in no doubt that the special position, historically speaking, of the 12, particularly Peter, must be seen and preserved as the basis for the Church as such.”<sup>192</sup>

What is given to Peter in Mt. 16:19 is in 18:18 promised to all members of the community. Coupled with Matthew’s insistence (23:8-12) that no titles of honour are to be used, one might think the ministry of the apostles would have been taken over by the community as a whole, without any special ministry. Yet we know clearly from scripture and later writings that this was not the case. That there were people known as bishops, priests or deacons is clear from various scripture passages, e.g., “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the holy ones at Philippi, with their bishops and deacons in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:1). Similarly, “Whoever wants to be a bishop aspires to a noble task” (1 Tim. 3:1); “In the same way, deacons must be serious, straightforward and truthful” (1 Tim. 3:8); “The bishop as God’s steward must be blameless” (Tit. 1:7). Finally, “A presbyter must be irreproachable, married only once...” (Tit. 1:6) There appears to be a clear distinction

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<sup>191</sup> Otto Michel, *The Conclusion of Matthew’s Gospel: A Contribution to the History of the Easter Message*, in *The Interpretation of Matthew*, edited by Graham N Stanton. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 40.

<sup>192</sup> Eduard Schweizer, *Matthew’s Church*, in *The Interpretation of Matthew*, edited by Graham N Stanton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 160

between bishops and deacons, whereas at times, e.g., Titus 1, both terms are used for the same person. According to George A. Denzer,

The evidence in various passages indicates that these officials or bishop-presbyters were not bishops in the later sense. Proper episcopal functions were reserved to Paul himself, or to one of his legates, such as Timothy.<sup>193</sup>

### **Understanding Grows**

The understanding of what it meant to be apostolic grew in the church over time. There was in Paul's day no matrix by which he, for example, could be measured and accounted as an apostle. While he had experienced the risen Christ, he could not prove it. While he lived his life in proclamation of the good news, there were enough times that he was seen as a hindrance that his apostolic claim could be at the very least questioned if not outright rejected. He could look to the fruits of his work, yet at times those fruits were themselves questionable. We must therefore look beyond the time of the Twelve and of Paul, to the church in later stages of development.

Several documents from the Patristic era are worth reviewing. As Clayton N Jefford points out,

The modern practice by which scholars group our writings into a single collection of literature from the early church under the designation of the Apostolic Fathers indicates that these texts stood out from among the vast variety of competing writings that were known by Christians in the later first and second centuries.<sup>194</sup>

Key among these documents is *1 Clement*. This letter to the Church in Corinth, written from a purported Clement of Rome most likely between 81-110 AD,<sup>195</sup> seeks to re-establish order and peace in the Corinthian community.

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<sup>193</sup> George A. Denzer, *The Pastoral Letters* in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary, Vol II*, edited by Raymond E. Brown et al (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1969), 354.

<sup>194</sup> Clayton N. Jefford, *The Apostolic Fathers: An Essential Guide*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 127.

<sup>195</sup> cf Clayton N. Jefford, with Kenneth J Harder and Louis D. Amezaga, Jr. *Reading the Apostolic Fathers: An Introduction*. (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 1996), 104.

The letter presents several key themes very much in line with the teachings of the Apostles. Christ is associated with God, with Jesus seen as the Son of God. Christ is a teacher, and a model to be followed, bridging the gap between God and humanity. Christ, existing prior to creation of the world, has the power and authority of God (a power and authority he has given, through his Apostles, to the bishops of the Church), and can bring salvation to God's kingdom, the world. Christ is a sign of order, of a "right-functioning" in the world. Christ's death is for all people, as is his resurrection. From these statements, Clement develops a call to the Corinthians to listen to their presbyters, and submit to their leadership.<sup>196</sup> Jefford argues:

But most of all, there is a cry for love and repentance within the Corinthian church in the hope that, as the faith community would come to recognize the need for holiness in its midst, its membership would turn to respect divine authority and to set all things right and in order.<sup>197</sup>

Simon Tugwell, OP, reviewing that same letter, points out that "As was normal in the Pauline churches, the church in Corinth had a regime of *episkopoi* and deacons. It is clear from Clement that there is as yet no distinction between *episkopoi* and presbyters (44.4-5)."<sup>198</sup> For Tugwell, it is important to note that, while Clement is writing to the church in Corinth, he is writing *from* Rome, thereby indicating that the threefold hierarchical order we are familiar with today of bishop, priest and deacon was not yet established as normative, not just for Corinth, but for the Church as a whole. For Clement, "Christ is from God, and the apostles are from Christ; thus both came in proper order by the will of God."<sup>199</sup> Even more,

our apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife over the title of bishop. So for this reason, because they had been given full foreknowledge,

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<sup>196</sup> cf Jefford, *Reading*, 107-110.

<sup>197</sup> Jefford, *Apostolic*, 12.

<sup>198</sup> Tugwell, 91.

<sup>199</sup> *I Clement*, Holt M. Graham & Robert M. Grant, Trans., in *The Apostolic Fathers*, Edited by Jack N. Sparks (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1978), 41.

they appointed those mentioned above and afterward added the stipulation that if these should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry.<sup>200</sup>

Clearly, then, Clement saw in the scriptures and the life of the Church an apostolic succession of some kind. Tugwell further argues that “they in turn appointed *episkopoi* and deacons in the places they evangelized (42).”<sup>201</sup> Despite the lack of definition between *episkopoi* and presbyters, Tugwell concludes that “the hierarchy of the church, then, is validated by the authority of Scripture and the principle of apostolic succession, which itself derives its authority ultimately from God.”<sup>202</sup> I would argue that, while this can be true, this can be done only by reading back into the scriptures through the hermeneutics of later practice.

Let us look also at the *Didache*, “a rudimentary manual of church order, compiled in the first century AD” which its editor understood to be “apostolic tradition”.<sup>203</sup> Tugwell points to rules for itinerant Christians; how they are to be welcomed and for how long before being put to work, etc. Prophets and teachers, for example, were to be supported without having to do any other work –provided of course they were genuine, a matter which had to be discerned according to their doctrine. Apostles, on the other hand, were to conform to stricter rules, allowed to stay for only a day, or two if necessary. But these apostles appear not to have been identified with the Twelve, being instead successors of the itinerant preachers sent out by Christ. (cf Lk. 10:1-11)<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Clement, 42.

<sup>201</sup> Tugwell, 91

<sup>202</sup> Tugwell, 91.

<sup>203</sup> Tugwell, 1.

<sup>204</sup> cf Tugwell, 2-3.



Another of the Apostolic Fathers worth looking at for our purposes is Ignatius, bishop of Antioch in Syria, arrested by the Roman authorities early in the second century.<sup>205</sup> Ignatius was concerned for several issues developing at the turn of the century. First was that of false doctrines and teachings, especially Docetism, a denial of the humanity of Jesus. There was also a focus on the appropriate form of clerical structure. Ignatius calls, for example, for the people of Ephesus to “be made perfect in a single obedience to the bishop and the presbyter and be sanctified in every respect.”<sup>206</sup> That Ignatius believed this structure to be a threefold hierarchy of ecclesiastical offices, i.e., a single bishop with presbyters, and deacons, can be seen in his Letter to the Magnesians, “be eager to do everything in God’s harmony, with the bishop presiding in the place of God and the presbytery in the place of the council and the deacons, most sweet to me, entrusted with the service of Jesus Christ.”<sup>207</sup> It must be said that such an order is not universal in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. Both the *Didache* and *I Clement*, for example, speak only of bishops and deacons without presbyters.<sup>208</sup> The *Didache* also mentions apostles and prophets, “but there is no particular indication that their crucial spiritual and liturgical functions make them any more important than other Christians within the faith community.”<sup>209</sup> Nor had the church’s doctrinal position on the role of the Holy Spirit yet been finalized, and so the leadership of the Church was “naturally quite suspicious of a spiritual movement that could not be so easily controlled.”<sup>210</sup> Doctrinal positions had to develop over time, in response to ministerial praxis.

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<sup>205</sup> Jefford, *Apostolic*, 14.

<sup>206</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Ephesians*, Translated by Robert M. Grant, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, Edited by Jack N. Sparks (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1978), 78.

<sup>207</sup> Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Magnesians*, Translated by Robert M. Grant, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, Edited by Jack N. Sparks (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1978), 87.

<sup>208</sup> Jefford, *Apostolic*, 92.

<sup>209</sup> Jefford, *Apostolic*, 95.

<sup>210</sup> Jefford, *Apostolic*, 117.

Today, we face a similar situation, not of governance, but of the place of interchurch families within the Church. We see the Church being called to recognize Christian married couples as “domestic church”, while not yet fully understanding the ecclesiological implications of such a concept. In addition, we see couples falling in love and marrying across denominational lines, with the result being likewise not easily controlled by church authority. The Church finds itself, naturally enough, uneasy at the as yet unseen consequences. This calls for a leap of faith on behalf of the Church and the churches. Just as “the Apostolic Fathers witness to the important transition that the church made as it evolved beyond the roots of its fledgling New Testament beliefs into an institution of faith confessions, liturgical rituals, ecclesiastical regulations and ethical norms,”<sup>211</sup> so must the people of God today witness to the important transition the church must make as it evolves beyond its scandalous divisions into an original-and-yet-new unity, the realization of the “already-existing” unity which the Church lives, today, far too much as the “not yet”. Jeffords, summarizing *2 Clement*, argues that “the key to the entire process is to be found in the role that Christ fulfills as the savior of humanity.”<sup>212</sup> Jeffords continues “The presence of Christ within the lives of those who follow him should be evident to all who witness the church at work in the world.”<sup>213</sup>

It must be remembered that while these and other writings of the Apostolic Fathers were never accepted into the canon of sacred scripture, they were never rejected either. Instead, they became important writings in the life of the community as that community developed its self-understanding and its structures of leadership and authority, liturgy and

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<sup>211</sup> Jefford, *Apostolic*, 125.

<sup>212</sup> Jefford, *Apostolic*, 126.

<sup>213</sup> Jefford, *Apostolic*, 126.

life. For example, “(t)he Didachist teaches that there are correct ways to baptize, to fast, to pray, to observe Eucharist, to observe the Lord’s Day, and to select worthy leaders.”<sup>214</sup>

It must also be said that the writings of the Apostolic Fathers reflect a growth in understanding and expression of the development of the church. St Paul, for example, spoke of religious leadership functions such as apostle, teacher, and evangelist, but portrays no fundamental difference between their value and that of the laity. For Paul, all members have an important role, no matter what capacity they fill. By the time the Apostolic Fathers are writing, leaders within church communities have responsibilities that set them apart from the common role of other Christians.<sup>215</sup> Even when the Apostolic Fathers were mistaken (e.g., in believing the gospels of Mark and Matthew were originally written in Hebrew, when later evidence shows them to have been written in Greek), we see a crucial element, namely a development of understanding. First there is the practice, then a broad oral tradition complete with sorting and sifting, and finally a writing down of the texts which express the sorted and sifted result.<sup>216</sup>

### **Apostolicity and the Churches**

We turn now to the question of apostolicity as lived in our churches. For Wolfhart Pannenberg,

the designation of the church as “apostolic” is usually understood to mean that the church stands in a relationship to the apostles of Jesus Christ, a relationship that is the basis for its present existence as well as for its essence.<sup>217</sup>

Unfortunately, as he argues,

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<sup>214</sup> Jefford, *Apostolic*, 76.

<sup>215</sup> cf Jefford, *Apostolic*, 94.

<sup>216</sup> This three-stage process, beginning with the life and teachings of Jesus, is seen in the Roman Catholic principle for the development of the gospels. Cf CCC #126.

<sup>217</sup> Pannenberg, 44.

there are profound differences in the way the churches see the apostolic origin as a norm, and consequently in the answer given to the question of how the churches of the present day demonstrate that they are in harmony with their apostolic origin and thus make their apostolicity manifest.<sup>218</sup>

The problems are insoluble if the apostolic period as such is accepted as the norm for later church history. Instead, the writings of the apostolic fathers must be seen as doing three things: They point to the scriptures as the ground for the church; they shed light on those scriptures and help later readers to understand them; and they propose and defend forms of leadership, liturgy and life appropriate to the church in its contemporary stage of development, and with a future direction.

Pannenberg in turn argues that, when looking at the apostolic office, we must consider three aspects. First must be the resurrection of Christ, that event which was the “eschatological life from death which had now become reality in Jesus,” “the divine confirmation of the eschatological authority which Jesus had already claimed for himself before Easter”. This must lead to “a renewal of the mission for which he himself had given his life.”<sup>219</sup> As Roger Hedlund, coordinator of the McGavran Institute in Madras, India, says “Mission is from God. ... He acts, therefore his people are obligated to act.”<sup>220</sup> That this *missio Dei* is a profound work of God is evident in the fact “God sends his Word, his people, his servants and, ultimately, his Son.”<sup>221</sup> Indeed, “the privilege, full authority, commission, and obligation of the mission always flows from the activity of the triune God Himself.”<sup>222</sup> It is important to note that people are *sent*. One does not proclaim the good news of God in

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<sup>218</sup> Pannenberg, 44.

<sup>219</sup> Pannenberg, 50.

<sup>220</sup> Roger E. Hedlund, *The Mission of the Church in the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), 73.

<sup>221</sup> Hedlund, 74.

<sup>222</sup> G.F. Vicedom, *The mission of God: an introduction to a theology of mission* Translated by G.A. Thiele and D. Hilgendorf (Saint Louis: Concordia) cited in Hedlund, 73.

Jesus Christ because one is living out one's own idea, or because it pleases oneself, or even because it is a good thing to do (though any or all of those may in fact apply). One does so because one has been *sent*. Hedlund again:

The social praxis of the people of God derives from their faith. Their activity finds example in God who expresses his concern that [people] of all nations may know him and serve him obediently.<sup>223</sup>

The church, if it is to be apostolic, recognizes Christ, his authority and his eschatological promise, then “points toward the goal of accomplishing the content of the eschatological promise itself, and becomes itself the instrument of God’s activity, preparing the way for the coming of the kingdom.”<sup>224</sup> Indeed, “to be apostolic is to set forth the finality, that is, the truth, of that which occurred in the person of Jesus and was proclaimed by the apostles.”<sup>225</sup> This truth is “not already apparent in the incompleteness of the present world, but only through its being transformed into that salvation which has already dawned in the resurrection of Jesus.”<sup>226</sup>

How does this apply to interchurch families? To put it most simply, if the domestic church of interchurch families is truly apostolic, then we must be able to see in them a recognition of Christ as indicated, a pointing to an eschatological promise of life over death, of the unity of God and humanity in Christ,<sup>227</sup> for all nations. We must see them being sent to be, and becoming the instrument of that unity, bringing to realization in a divided world the unity already present in the resurrected Jesus, in a manner appropriate to our day. If these are evident in the lives of interchurch families, we will have yet another legitimate reason to recognize them as domestic church.

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<sup>223</sup> Hedlund, 74.

<sup>224</sup> Pannenberg, 51.

<sup>225</sup> Pannenberg, 53.

<sup>226</sup> Pannenberg, 54.

<sup>227</sup> Council of Chalcedon

The church has lived a one-sided concern to find in the apostolic age norms and legitimation for the present life of the church. The tensions and contrasts between the various New Testament writings and their disagreements have been ignored in favour of the pious opinion that there was unanimity among the apostles. As Pannenberg argues, “while the relationship of the apostle Paul to the Jerusalem church was marked by a concern for harmonious agreement, it was far from realizing such agreement.”<sup>228</sup> Pannenberg further argues, and with this I agree, that focusing on the past tends to work against being open to new and distinctive tasks and opportunities for our day, dealing instead with the present as something foreign. Pannenberg argues

The true *vita apostolica* is to be sought in the life of the church’s leaders and in the life of individual Christians who let themselves be permeated by the final, all-encompassing, liberating, and transforming truth of Jesus.<sup>229</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church presents a further criterion of apostolicity, in addition to the Scriptures and the profession of faith. It holds also the teaching and pastoral office of bishops and pope, with authority as successors of the apostles to interpret Scripture and the faith. This is in line with Pannenberg’s argument:

Those who by virtue of their office are responsible for the form and organization of church life ... are the ones responsible for the form of the churches and for the realization, in the churches, of the one Church of Christ.<sup>230</sup>

This is both problematic and acceptable. It is problematic in that an unbroken line of succession, from the Twelve to their successors today, is hard to defend on historic grounds. In the writings of the apostolic fathers, there is evidence of commentary *about* such succession. But there is no evidence that their commentary was based on historical evidence. Rather, we have an appropriate development of the life and work of the church, *following*

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<sup>228</sup> Pannenberg, 53.

<sup>229</sup> Pannenberg, 57.

<sup>230</sup> Pannenberg, 18.

which an unbroken line is demonstrated. It is also problematic in that there is no guarantee that a successor will be true to the task of those who preceded him. Pannenberg points out that Irenaeus referred to a charism of office. A charism, however, is an enabling function. It does not guarantee that what is enabled will in fact be exercised appropriately by the office holder. If a charism were sufficient, it would not be possible to point to concrete instances where such responsibilities were not appropriately carried out. Unfortunately, that is not the case, as can be seen by the fact that more than one bishop has been removed from office for precisely such failure.

On the other hand, it is acceptable if the teaching and pastoral office and authority is seen as relating to the entire community in the form of its various churches, and to the office of leadership, rather than to the specific person in that office. A judgment can then be made, by people who are not necessarily themselves office-bearers but who have a stake in the matter about which the office is concerned, as to whether the person holding that office is truly living the apostolic mission of the Church in a manner appropriate to the concrete, present situation of the Church. Questions can of course be raised as to what extent such a capacity for judgment is present in today's churches, and if not, how it might be implemented and exercised. Those questions, however, are not part of this discussion.

The unity of the church primarily involves concern for the fellowship of the already existing churches with one another. It is an internal issue, with reference to each other, to the origin and norm of the Christian community and of faith, and of the individuals within the church with each other. Irenaeus, in opposition to the "special" truth which the Gnostics held, appealed to the agreement of the apostles with one another, to the agreement among the various churches that could trace their origin to the apostles, and to the agreement with the

Roman Church, which he accorded special rank because of its size, age, respect, and the fact it had been founded and led by Peter and Paul.<sup>231</sup>

Catholicity, by contrast, goes beyond the limits of the existing churches insofar as their present life still reveals elements of particularities and narrowness when seen in terms of their universal responsibility for mankind. It includes the world not yet permeated by Christian faith. The apostolic mission of the church cannot be realized if it is not at the same time catholic, i.e. open to and embracing all peoples and at all times. This understanding was developed in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. Jefford is helpful in this regard, giving several examples. For instance, the *Epistle to Diognetus* speaks of the church as an active presence in the world, foreigners among their fellow countrymen as the active presence of Christ.<sup>232</sup> According to the author of *I Clement*, the blood of Jesus was poured out for the salvation of humanity and provided the grace of repentance to the whole world.<sup>233</sup> And in the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the covenant of salvation that God offered to Israel has been transferred to anyone who will accept that the crucifixion of the Lord was for the forgiveness of sins.<sup>234</sup> Each of these, while an appeal to Christians to live a life worthy of Christ, also opens that life in Christ to all people.

Apostolicity is the living out, the realization, of the mission of permeating that world with the news of salvation, and leading all to partake in it. Without catholicity, there is nowhere for the apostolicity to go. Without unity, apostolicity is a clanging symbol or a sounding brass, activity signifying nothing of value.

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<sup>231</sup> cf *Adv. Haer.* III. 5, as cited in Pannenberg, 61.

<sup>232</sup> cf Jefford, *Apostolic*, 78.

<sup>233</sup> cf Jefford, *Apostolic* 86.

<sup>234</sup> cf Jefford, *Apostolic*, 88.



There is also the purpose of apostolic activity. As John Howard Schütz points out, that purpose is “gospel”, the proclamation of the good news.<sup>235</sup> Paul calls himself “...a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart to proclaim the gospel of God...” (Rom. 1:1). Paul repeatedly makes a connection between the missionary nature of apostolic activity and proclamation of the good news (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:1, 2 Cor. 11:7, Gal. 1:11). It is worth noting, however, as Schütz says, “[Paul] does not talk of ‘preaching the gospel’ in general or abstract terms, but speaks of himself and his own work, or of a very specific situation in which he also has a deep interest.”<sup>236</sup> Like the authentic prophet who lives the reality of his/her own message, the apostle must embody the good news.

Schütz, after an extensive review of apostolic authority, provides several germane conclusions (p 281ff). First among these is that “the legitimacy of an apostle lies in the combination of his calling to preach the gospel and his being granted a resurrection vision.” He continues, pointing out that for Paul, “his authority has as its starting point the call to preach [the good news]. All authority is possible only on the grounds that it is an extension of this original commission.” In addition, “Such extension permits the apostle to continue his responsibility for the Christian community.” Schütz makes an important point, however, when he says that in addition to calling the world to faith, “apostolic responsibility for preaching is the instrument in this world by which the Church is called into being.” In other words, not only does the apostle proclaim the good news to the world and call the world to faith, but in doing so calls the Church to be, and to be itself. Indeed, an apostle may at times need to assert power “over against the churches when and where there is ... failure of Christians to reflect and embody the power originally made available to them,” such as Paul

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<sup>235</sup>John Howard Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 35ff.

<sup>236</sup>Schütz, 38.

did when calling the church in Corinth to rectify its ways. This will become yet another question where interchurch families are concerned: do they, by their life and proclamation, speak not just to the world but to their churches in the Church, not in anger, but lovingly calling into ever greater fullness of life?

Schütz speaks of the difference between force, power, and authority, arguing

Force applies power to motivate those who are less powerful and trades on a disequilibrium of power, while authority distributes power or opens up access to it in order to achieve the shared goals of those whose acceptance of authority is crucial.<sup>237</sup>

While force is an application of power which may at times be required in the face of those who fail to reflect the power of God made available to them, authority is its distributor, benefitting all. Authority, then, is an interpretation of power, not of force, while legitimacy is an interpretation of authority, an attempt to communicate it and make it accessible.<sup>238</sup>

The apostle may preach the gospel, thereby making its power available. Yet he does not provide that power, nor control it. The most he can do

is assess claims to power made on behalf of various appropriations of the “gospel”. This takes place within an eschatological dimension, i.e. even apostolic authority is not final in itself, but serves to “subject all, including the apostle, to the power which manifests itself in the gospel and will be manifest in the eschaton.”<sup>239</sup>

The “binding” and “loosing” spoken of in Mt. 16:19 and Mt. 18:18 is an example of where authority is to be exercised. According to Bornkamm, however, it is an indication not only of the authority of the apostles, but also of the congregation or community.<sup>240</sup> It should be noted that it is only here, in these two passages in the synoptic gospels, that we find the term *ekklesia*. Yet clearly these two instances have somewhat different meanings. We see in

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<sup>237</sup> Schütz, 14.

<sup>238</sup> cf Schütz, 15ff.

<sup>239</sup> Schütz, 286.

<sup>240</sup> cf Günther Bornkamm, *The Authority to “Bind” and “Loose” in the Church in Matthew’s Gospel: The problem of Sources in Matthew’s Gospel*, in *The Interpretation of Matthew*, edited by Graham N Stanton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 102.

Mt. 16:18 that the statement regarding building the *ekklesia* is made to Peter, in the form of an abstract ideal still to come. In Mt. 18:17, the term is used of the local gathering/congregation, and in a statement made not to the apostles, but to the disciples. This is supported by the fact that in Mt. 18:18, Jesus' next sentence refers to two or three gathering in his name, a situation clearly not limited to the apostles. Bornkamm also argues that the two phrases are used in different contexts; for example, that Mt. 18:18 speaks in terms of discipline, while Mt. 16:19 follows Peter's statement that Jesus is the Messiah, i.e. a proclamation of the good news. "From this," Bornkamm says, "we understand Peter's work to be fundamental for the existence of the Church and for her stability and continuance during the eschatological afflictions."<sup>241</sup> This would indicate that disciplining for the sake of reconciliation is a work of the whole community, while proclamation of the good news is a task, though not restricted to the apostles, at least specifically an apostolic responsibility. Bornkamm again: "The authority of Peter thus refers to the teaching of Jesus entrusted to him as being valid and obligatory for the whole Church on earth."<sup>242</sup> A church, even a domestic church, which does not proclaim the good news is not a custodian of what has been given by Christ, and therefore cannot claim to be apostolic.

Let us look briefly at the matter of apostolic succession, the question of how the authority of the apostles is carried down through the ages. Light is cast on this through the work of John E Stam. In his study *Episcopacy in the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*, he argues:

two emphatic clauses in the episcopal ordination prayer [of Hippolytus] suggest a directly apostolic basis for the authority of the bishop. God is besought to pour out upon the bishop-consecrand "that Power which is from Thee, of 'the princely Spirit', which Thou didst deliver to Thy Beloved Child Jesus Christ, which he bestowed on

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<sup>241</sup> Bornkamm, 109.

<sup>242</sup> Bornkamm, 110.

Thy Holy Apostles who established the Church which hallows Thee in every place.” (Apostolic Tradition 3.3) By this “high-priestly Spirit” the new bishop is to exercise “authority to forgive according to Thy command, to assign lots according to Thy bidding,” and “to loose every bond according to the authority Thou gavest to the Apostles.” (Apostolic Tradition 3.5)<sup>243</sup>

It is important to note, however, that in Hippolytus it is not the bishops doing the ordaining who are making the new bishop a successor to the twelve apostles. Rather, their prayer is that the Spirit may bestow the same gift on this person which was given to the apostles.

(This is in line with the understanding that a delegate is one selected, not by a delegate of a higher authority, but directly by the higher authority.)

This gift, however, is not one held solely by the bishop. According to Stam, “Irenaeus insisted stoutly, against the gnostic innovators, that the Holy Spirit and all His gifts have been granted to the Church Catholic under the guardianship of the episcopal-presbyteral succession.”<sup>244</sup> Indeed, Stam argues, “one element of genuine concept of Apostolic Succession is significantly missing from Apostolic Tradition 3.3 – namely the element of succession itself (diadoché).”<sup>245</sup> Rather, “the gift of the Spirit is associated in a vertical manner with the prayer of the congregation, presbyterate (Apostolic Tradition 2.4) and ordaining bishop (Apostolic Tradition 3.3) rather than with the horizontal continuity of a chain of layings on of hands.”<sup>246</sup> The ordinand becomes the successor to the previous bishop, and receives from God “the power of the princely Spirit” as a bishop within the apostolically-founded Catholic Church. The “Apostolic Spirit of [Apostolic Tradition] 3.3”, Stam argues, “was not the exclusive personal possession of the bishop.”<sup>247</sup> According to Stam, too, “Hippolytus seems

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<sup>243</sup> John E Stam, *Episcopacy in the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus*, (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt Kommissionsverlag, 1969), 101.

<sup>244</sup> Stam, 101.

<sup>245</sup> Stam, 102.

<sup>246</sup> Stam, 102.

<sup>247</sup> Stam, 103.

clearly to attribute greater importance to Apostolic Tradition than to Apostolic Succession.” He takes this from the fact that, “in contrast to the few passages where he suggests, usually indirectly, a doctrine of the latter, stand many passages which insist explicitly upon the life-and-death importance of the former.”<sup>248</sup>

### **The Present Day**

Having looked at the scriptures and the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, we must also look at where our understanding of apostolicity has come through the centuries. The Report of the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Uppsala in 1968, had this to say on the holy spirit and the catholicity of the church:

The apostolicity of the Church is derived from the Lord’s own sending of his apostles to preach the Gospel to all men, yet the Church which in the Christ-given authority of the apostles enters into their mission has not fully achieved her embassy of reconciliation on the world’s battle-fronts.<sup>249</sup>

Meanwhile, the Roman Catholic Church, meeting in the Second Council of the Vatican, produced the document *Dei Verbum* in which it claims: “In order that the full and living Gospel might always be preserved in the Church the apostles left bishops as their successors. They gave them ‘their own position of teaching authority’.”<sup>250</sup> More, “the apostolic preaching, which is expressed in a special way in the inspired books, was to be preserved in a continuous line of succession until the end of time.” The document goes on to say

What was handed down from the apostles comprises everything that serves to make the People of God live their lives in holiness and increase their faith. In this way the Church, in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Stam, 105.

<sup>249</sup> Hans-Georg Link, Ed. *Apostolic Faith Today: A Handbook for Study, Faith and Order Paper No. 124* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1985), 116.

<sup>250</sup> *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation / Dei Verbum* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965), #7.

<sup>251</sup> *Dei Verbum*, #8.

The Joint Working Group of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches said, in its 1980 Plan of Work, that “The essential elements of the Christian mystery are known to us through the witness of the apostolic community, transmitted in the Scriptures.”<sup>252</sup> As well,

The truth they transmit could be fully grasped only in the context of the life of that early community faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the fellowship of the brethren, to the breaking of bread and to prayer (cf. Acts 2:42). And so we can say that we exist as Christians through the apostolic tradition (the *paradosis* of the *kerygma*), attested in Scripture and transmitted in and through the Church by the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>253</sup>

The churches have a “new realization of a close relationship with the cultures in which they have taken root,” needing “to discover how to live the faith in such a way that it will meet the aspirations on which peoples and persons set their hopes today.”<sup>254</sup> The document goes on:

The question of apostolic faith must be answered in the same way as the question of the sufficiency of the Nicene Creed. It “does not lie in the comprehensiveness with which it treats either the biblical witness or contemporary questions, but in its consonance – claimed and recognized in the Church – with the testimony of the apostles to God’s revelation in Jesus Christ.”<sup>255</sup>

If interchurch families are to be recognized as domestic churches, then, their faith must also be in consonance with the testimony of the apostles to God’s revelation in Jesus Christ and lived in a way which meets the aspirations on which peoples and persons set their hopes today. Meanwhile, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, article 857, says:

The Church is apostolic because she is founded on the apostles, in three ways:  
 - she was and remains built on “the foundation of the Apostles,” the witnesses chosen and sent on mission by Christ himself;  
 - with the help of the Spirit dwelling in her, the Church keeps and hands on the teaching, the “good deposit,” the salutary words she has heard from the apostles;

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<sup>252</sup> Link, 182.

<sup>253</sup> Link, 182.

<sup>254</sup> Link, 184.

<sup>255</sup> Link, 219.

- she continues to be taught, sanctified, and guided by the apostles until Christ's return, through their successors in pastoral office: the college of bishops, "assisted by priests, in union with the successor of Peter, the Church's supreme pastor."

That same Catechism goes on to say "The whole Church is apostolic, in that she remains, through the successors of St. Peter and the other apostles, in communion of faith and life with her origin: and in that she is "sent out" into the whole world."<sup>256</sup> Finally, summarizing its position briefly, the Catechism says

"the Church is apostolic. She is built on a lasting foundation: "the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:14). She is indestructible (cf Mt 16:18). She is upheld infallibly in the truth: Christ governs her through Peter and the other apostles who are present in their successors, the Pope and the college of bishops."<sup>257</sup>

We have looked at the understanding of apostolicity, beginning from scripture and carrying through to our own day. We have seen that it is essential to the whole sense of being church. Without it, we cannot carry out the mission given to us by Christ, namely to proclaim the good news to all the earth. And yet, we face here a difficulty. Even though the apostolic faith is the ground for Church unity and contemporary witness, it finds its context in the divided state of the Church and the alienation of mankind. In this, Pannenberg is uncomfortably frank, and even more uncomfortably accurate:

In the light of that unity already given through Jesus Christ, the fact of Christian divisions can only be judged as an expression of failure, a straying from the path, which casts doubt on the identity of each individual Christian and refutes the claim of any of the separated churches to be the church of Christ.<sup>258</sup>

If we are to overcome our scandalous history of division, to realize the unity already existing as free gift from God through Christ by the Holy Spirit, it will be necessary for all of us to put aside our entrenched perspectives and become open to what the Spirit is doing in our midst. Just as the church needed to go beyond the theological foundation and ritual

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<sup>256</sup> CCC, 863.

<sup>257</sup> CCC, 869.

<sup>258</sup> Pannenberg, 24.

limitations of Judaism, so today, if it is to be faithful to its apostolic heritage, it needs to go beyond the hostile culture of competing Christian traditions, to seek out and realize the unity already existing.

Let us briefly recap what we have found regarding the apostolicity of the Church, to have an indicator against which to measure interchurch families. To be truly apostolic, its members, including those of its manifestation in the domestic church, must have a sense of being chosen by God, of having experienced the reality of Christ, and of being sent to witness to that reality, not for its or their own wellbeing, but that the world may believe. There must be an eschatological dimension, of life over death, of the unity of God and humanity in Christ, for all. The life and work of the interchurch family, because of its situation at the juncture of two Christian traditions, must lovingly call both its traditions into an ever greater fullness of life, life as *one*. Let us now see whether the concrete lived experience of interchurch families reflects that reality.

### **Apostolicity as Praxis**

The question of having been chosen by God can be difficult to assess. Cultures and languages can vary widely within the Christian community. The language of “call” and “choice” that is normal and comfortable in one tradition may be experienced as uncomfortably foreign in another, though the experience which the words express may be held in common. We need, therefore, to look beyond the words themselves, to the values those words express.

In the majority of cases, there is a clear sense of faith and religious participation, even if not yet directly a sense of being called by God. In one case, there is a specific reference to being called, by a couple who were both of the same tradition when they married, with the



husband becoming Catholic about ten years into their marriage. They say “we chose a place to worship together seeking to follow God’s calling (we were both charismatic evangelicals).” (Q5, R1073, H:C/W:A, Y2, C:Y) The response this particular couple gives raises the question expressed earlier regarding explicit mention of a sense of call. Was their mention of a call because they sensed it and others didn’t? Or was their mention of a call because that is the language of a particular subset of the Christian community, with other subsets using other language to speak of the same reality? The answer to that question will become more clear later as we look at the question of mission. For the moment, though, we can offer yet another expression of call, this time as a sense of being led by God, but in relation to churches. “We feel fortunate that God led us to churches where the people and the pastors are very open to interchurch couples.” (Q16, R1041, H:C/W:P, Y2, C:N)

What is important to note, however, is that the sense of God’s presence grows through marriage. Numerous statements give evidence of this. A Catholic husband says “When we married, we knew that we would not remain the same; when we grew and changed, we wanted to grow and change together so that we would continue to be interested in each other as well as ourselves. We believed that in doing so, we would not grow apart, but would grow closer together. And this is just what happened.” (Q6C, R1061, H:C, Y4, C:N) An Anglican husband says “This shared belief and practice is one of the most important aspects of our married life” (Q6C, R1067, H:A, Y3, C:Y), while his Catholic wife says “Our unity in Baptism and Marriage has deepened our love for each other and for God, and nourished our marriage and family life for a very long time.” (Q6C, R1067, W:C, Y3, C:Y) Another speaks of the growth toward unity in this way: “After much discussion and

trial and error, we realised that we had that unity, and the churches need only look to our example!!” (Q6C, R1078, H:A, Y4, C:Y)

In that same question, we have this response: “ I feel that the unity in a Trinitarian God calls each one of his children into unity with each other.” (Q6C, R1077). This same person says later “ God calls us into a relationship with him.” (Q7C, R1077) These two quotes are from the daughter of a Catholic and Anglican couple, who volunteered to send me a reply to the survey I sent to her parents, who also responded. This young woman has picked up a very clear indicator of apostolicity, that of being called by God. This sense of call was most likely passed on from her parents, who must therefore have had it themselves, though they never explicitly mentioned it in their response. Finally, in response to a question of growth in understanding of their churches (which would not necessarily equate with growth in a sense of God’s presence), a Catholic husband says “I have become ever more fully convinced of the truth of Christianity and of the claims of the Catholic Church.” He continues with a qualifier, “but I see great need to work out in practice how the Catholic Church can reach out to interchurch couples and other churches in respect and love.” He then makes clear, however, that this is not so he and his spouse can feel more comfortable, but “so as to show forth the gospel and build Christian unity, while seeking always the truth”, i.e. for the purpose of mission. (Q17, R1058, H:C, Y4, C:Y) This connection with the gospel can more directly be seen as a connection with God in Christ.

The issue of experiencing Christ in their lives must also be in evidence. This proves to be more directly demonstrable. As we have seen, one couple says they “Pray together, read scripture together, attend each other’s church, minister in each other’s denomination as much as possible.” (Q6A, R1041, H:C/W:P, Y2, C:N) Another says “we pray together and

we pray and discuss before making major decisions. The praying together and worshipping together are helpful to us whether things are going well or not.” (Q6A, R1066, W:C, Y3, C:Y) “Daily prayer together has always been important” says one Anglican husband. (Q6A, R1067, W:A, Y3, C:Y) This presence of prayer in daily life is explicitly stated in 7 of 29 respondents for question 6, and 13 of 29 for question 7A. Were there no experience of Christ in their lives, these Christian families would not be as dedicated to daily prayer as they are.

The experience goes well beyond prayer, however. One couple elaborates, “In our domestic church, we try to bring out the richness of both traditions and also of our shared charismatic heritage through music, the church calendar, ritual, films, family gatherings, meal time prayers and sad moments. In our marriage we attend each other’s churches.” This statement is made even more powerful given the fact this same couple continues on to say, “We still haven’t found a place of unity to express faith.” (Q6C, R1073, H:C/W:A, Y2, C:Y) One wonders what their life would be like if the churches were to be able to join in offering them a place of unity.

In response to other questions, we find couples speaking of a “relationship with Christ and each other” (Q6C, R1041, H:C, Y2, C:N) A Catholic says of his Baptist wife, “She is deeply committed to Jesus Christ” (Q12, R1058, H:C, Y4, C:Y) while an Anglican woman married to a Catholic says, “I feel that we give our children a Christian perspective that is neither RC or CofE or evangelical specifically. We talk about our walk with God, loving Jesus, living for him and they can express that in worship in whichever way they feel comfortable with.” (Q9A, R1073, W:A, Y2, C:Y) One person speaks of that relationship as an antidote to a significant problem, saying “It was only the knowledge that God loved us very much and did not want us to be separated and divided that kept me going.” (Q5, R1070,

W:M, Y4, C:Y) One husband says “We have scripture, the ongoing understanding of the Church, and Christ’s presence in one another to help us understand what it means to be Christian.” (Q17, R1061, H:C, Y4, C:N) This awareness of God’s presence in threefold form must surely be recognized as significant! Finally, one couple states bluntly, “Either God IS central or he isn’t. Where he is then your life begins to change in every aspect and begins to shape itself around this centrality. The atmosphere grows proportionately to the role that God plays in your life.” (Q7A, R1070, H:C, Y4, C:Y)

There must also be a sense of witness and mission for the good of the world. A number of responses can be seen in this regard, though it comes through most clearly and understandably where children are concerned. For example, “It is essential to preach the gospel in word and action to our children.” (Q9C, R1058, H:C, Y4, C:Y) This mission does not end when the children are grown up; that same couple indicates “We continue to do so in appropriate ways now that they are independent adults.” There is also a sense of participating in the work and life of Christ: “It’s Christ’s mission to his disciples.” (Q9C, R1067, W:C, Y3, C:Y) Other couples say, “We should share our faith with our children and others around us” (Q9C, R1069, H:C/W:F, Y1, C:Y), or “If we as Christians of any tradition are to proclaim the love of Christ in the world, then we should not be divided by our religious affiliation which would make a nonsense of the whole message.” (Q6C, R1070, W:M, Y4, C:Y) This last is as clear an indication of a sense of mission, not just to our children but to the entire world, and of the problem division imposes on that mission, as anyone could expect. The purpose, too, is made clear. “The whole meaning of the Incarnation is the restoration of unity – between ourselves and God on the one hand and between one another on the other.” (Q6C, R1070, H:C, Y4, C:Y) One statement in particular sums up the call to

witness, mission, and purpose thus: “We are supposed to proclaim Christ and live His life in front of others, that they might want to come to Him for salvation and friendship with God.”

(Q9C, R1041, H:C/W:P, Y2, C:N) These last two provide also an eschatological dimension, as does the statement, “We have always made it plain to our children – in a non-didactic manner – that God is central to, the source of and destiny of human life and have tried to build our family life – and, importantly, our relationship to the world - around that fact.” (Q9A, R1070, H:c, Y4, C:Y) The sense that God is the destiny of human life is clearly eschatological in nature.

Another comment bears being attentive to. “[My wife] was given to me by Divine Providence to play a key role in my salvation,” followed by, “My joy is in knowing that in Christ we shall discover, ultimately, the fullness of his desire and purpose.” What is particularly instructive is the context in which this understanding is held, namely, “I am a Catholic to the core of my being, just as she is Protestant, and the riches of her Protestantism have allowed my Catholicism to become more authentic and redemptive in the way, I am deeply convinced, Christ wants it to be.” (Q19, R1070, H:C, Y4, C:Y) This statement provides a sense of call, mission, and eschatological dimension, and opens the way to discussion of the particular role of interchurch families in the restoration of church unity.

As stated earlier, interchurch couples live at the juncture of two Christian traditions. In addition to the catholicity of mission to the entire world, then, they must lovingly call both their traditions into an ever greater fullness of life. This is expressed in a variety of comments. The first recognizes the potential benefit or burden involved: “As a mixed couple we are either a bridge and a positive incitement to ecclesial unity or we are a pastoral problem!” (Q6C, R1073, H:C/W:A, Y2, C:Y) Another comment by this couple, stating what

they find makes their interchurch marriage joyful, indicates they see themselves clearly as the former: “There is a sense that by slowly growing together we may help to undo the divisions that we both feel very keenly and resent.” (Q10, R1073, H:C/W:A, Y2, C:Y) Another states “We are both a SYMBOL of how unity can bridge past differences and a SIGN of how the joys and frustrations of that decision are lived out in daily life.” (Q19, R1066, H:A, Y3, C:Y) One couple, speaking of funeral arrangements, says “I would like both churches represented at my funeral because they are my ‘church’.” (Q11, R1065, H:C/W:A, Y3, C:Y)

Interestingly, interchurch couples are more often able to point to the impact their children make on their churches than to the impact they themselves make. We read comments such as this from a Catholic woman: “[Our daughter] certainly makes them think if they [people in the churches] are prepared to listen.” (Q15, R1066, W:C, Y3, C:Y) Her Anglican husband says of their children, “They challenge [the churches] to be more adaptable and open.” Another couple says “They [the children] have increased their [the churches] awareness of interchurch issues.” (Q15, R1068, H:C/W:A, Y4, C:Y) Yet another couple says, “Their baptisms were a real ecumenical sign to our churches – the joint services were commented on by many.” (Q15, R1083, H:C/W:A, Y3, C:Y) One couple makes this most illuminating remark: “Now that [our children] are grown, our experience with them influences us, and through us our churches.” (Q15, R1056, H:C, Y4, C:Y) Parents and children, through their relationships, become teachers of and learners from each other, with the result flowing over into other relationships.

Lest it be thought that these positive statements indicate the children of interchurch couples are invariably a positive impact on their churches, either during their formative years or later when they are on their own, it must be said that several of the parents of interchurch

families echo the same cry one hears from the parents of same-church children, namely that the adult children are now less active in their churches or not worshipping at all. Several questions could be asked in this regard. One is how a reduction in active participation by interchurch children compares with that which occurs with same-church families. Another is whether seeing, during the children's formative years, the difficulties and pressures their parents experienced in dealing with their divided churches has negatively affected the children, causing them to reject what they see as sources of difficulty and pain. A third is what the churches could be doing to more fully welcome and include interchurch families in their midst, thereby enabling those families to more fully live their life in Christ, and hopefully enabling them to pass on that life of faith to their children. The first two questions are beyond the scope of this study, but worth considering. The third question, however, is very much within the scope of this study.

I believe there is sufficient evidence to show that apostolicity is part and parcel of the life of interchurch families.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Conclusion

Bishop Klaus Küng of Sankt Pölten, Austria, in calling for an encyclical on the Church's teaching on sexuality, makes this important statement:

It has become clearer and clearer that married couples are not only the recipients of the Church's teaching but also in a sense important developers. We need young, mature people to show us how marriage can work and bring happiness.<sup>259</sup>

Having reviewed our historical understanding of the "marks" of unity, sanctity, catholicity and apostolicity of the Church, and found significant indicators of all "marks" within the concrete experience of interchurch families, we are able to identify them also as domestic churches in their own right. It is now time to move toward learning, from the domestic churches that are interchurch families, of the potential consequences and opportunities for the various churches of which these families are members.

#### A Question of Representation

Before we do so, however, it is necessary to deal with a criticism people may raise regarding this study. It is that the interchurch couples interviewed, who attend conferences such as the biennial conference of the American Association of Interchurch Families (AAIF), the annual conference of the Association of Interchurch Families of the United Kingdom, or those of similar groups and organizations around the world, are in fact far more involved in their respective churches than is the case with couples in general who have married across denominational lines, and therefore not representative of such couples.

This is an accurate assessment. Such families, in their active embrace of the richness of both Christian traditions, and their willingness and determination to raise their children

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<sup>259</sup> Christa Pongratz-Lippitt, 'Urgent Need' for sexual morality encyclical in *The Tablet*, 4 Dec 2010, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/article/15615>, accessed 3 Dec 2010.



within the combined riches of their respective traditions, sometimes at great cost to themselves, not just in financial terms but in terms of recognition and welcome within their own church communities, are in fact not the norm for such couples. Indeed the survey of marriages in the United States, conducted by the Center for Marriage and Family Studies of Creighton University, Omaha, NE, indicates that while 32.9% of couples were in interchurch relationships at time of engagement, about half (16.7%) remained in interchurch relationships when surveyed.<sup>260</sup> The evidence indicates that in the remainder of cases one of two things happened.

In 14.4% of the cases,<sup>261</sup> one or both of the couple embraced another tradition, either the tradition of the spouse, or together of a third tradition, and so become together ‘same-church’. It is important to note, however, that the findings in such cases indicate that while there is a change in religious affiliation, there was no indication of a significant change in belief structure. Instead, “the most important reasons given for changing religious affiliation were: finding a preferred denomination, believing the marriage or family would be stronger if the spouses belonged to the same denomination, and a desire to worship together.”<sup>262</sup> While members of the receiving church may experience joy or even a sense of triumph, and members of the church(es) from which the spouse(s) came may experience sorrow for the person, or deep hurt or even anger at the person’s action, such a change should be seen not as a change in belief, but *as a sign of significant commitment to the unity and stability of the marriage*, the need for which is arguably universally agreed upon. The third possibility

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<sup>260</sup> Michael G Lawler et al. *Ministry to Interchurch Marriage: A National Study* (Omaha, NE: Center for Marriage and Family, Creighton University, 1999), 7.

<sup>261</sup> Lawler, *Ministry*, 7.

<sup>262</sup> cf Lawler, *Ministry*, 7.

(experienced by 1.86% of couples<sup>263</sup>) is that one or both spouses cease worshipping, a situation no church can consider satisfactory.

All of this can only emphasize that continuing to worship, not just as an interdenominational marriage each in his/her own tradition, but together as a truly interchurch couple, cannot be considered to be normative practice. But is this a negative thing? It is not!

Interchurch couples and their churches have responsibilities each to the other. Such couples also offer prophetic gifts and opportunities for their churches to explore unity, to nurture it in their midst, and together to grow into that unity which is at the heart of God. If we, as churches, having allowed couples to marry across denominational lines, are going to encourage such marriages to be faith-filled and faithful, we must have two goals in mind. While remaining faithful to who we are before God, we must as much as possible move forward by removing the barriers to such growth in faith. While those barriers continue to exist, we must help couples build the resources to live with existing barriers in a positive manner. To help achieve these goals, we should look to the gift in our midst: interchurch couples who are experiencing joy in their faith and in their churches, and who are instruments of unity, sanctity, catholicity and apostolicity. We can look to them for two reasons. They can show us where the barriers are, and what might be done to remove them. They also show by their example how to wait in joyful hope while they work, along with the whole Church, for the removal of the barriers. In short, rather than looking at the difficulties and proclaiming those the norm, we must look for hopeful possibilities among those who are successfully living the interchurch reality. While not representative of mixed marriages, they

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<sup>263</sup> Lawler, *Ministry*, 78.

do offer a model for mixed marriages, and for their churches on the journey to Christian unity.

It is for this reason that we now turn to the experience of interchurch families insofar as barriers to unity are concerned. In the process, we will look at opportunities for removing those barriers, or ways in which interchurch families may, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church suggests, “live out their particular situation in the light of faith,”<sup>264</sup> while they wait for their efforts at barrier removal to bear fruit.

Walter Brueggemann is helpful in this regard. He outlines three ways in which God exercises power in our lives, namely as the freedom-giver, exile-ender or home-bringer, and life-bringer.<sup>265</sup> He points out that while the bible is a book of memories of the past, it is “a book about the future, about God’s promises coming to fulfillment.”<sup>266</sup> It is about a God who is different from all other Gods. “He hears. He sees. He comes down. He delivers. And history is transformed!”<sup>267</sup> In the midst of the trauma of living under a power which cannot recognize the people of Israel as people of God, God acts to bring freedom. In the process, he gives them a new way to see themselves, and their lives are transformed. “In our own time, the same perception is possible. It is about the new freedoms that come in marriages where relations are transformed.”<sup>268</sup> As interchurch families begin to live in their lives the unity of denominations, they begin to perceive themselves not as a pastoral problem to be solved, but as a gift of unity to be received. “In the exile, the Bible affirms that God does not will his people to be displaced and that he will act to bring them home.”<sup>269</sup> Be they displaced

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<sup>264</sup> CCC, Part Two, Section Two, Chapter Three, Article 7, Section 1636.

<sup>265</sup> cf Walter Brueggemann, *The Bible Makes Sense* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983), 80-87.

<sup>266</sup> Brueggemann, 80.

<sup>267</sup> Brueggemann, 81.

<sup>268</sup> Brueggemann, 82.

<sup>269</sup> Brueggemann, 83.

due to wars or famines, urban development, or the experience of marrying across denominational lines and finding themselves in a new and seemingly foreign environment, God promises to bring them home. In the case of interchurch families, that homecoming is to a new place as yet under construction, with that construction being done by the displaced people themselves as they offer their gift of unity to their churches! We see in the story of Israel that “God has the power and the will to turn chaos to creation and empty darkness to vibrant light, to deal with the forces of death, and to bring life.”<sup>270</sup> Even more, “the Good News to the poor is the change of those institutions which have denied them.”<sup>271</sup> In this, we see that God is compassionate, not only to the poor, but to the institutions themselves, transforming them so that they themselves become life-givers.

When barriers are erected which reduce or block God’s exercise of freedom-giving, exile-ending or home-bringing, and life-giving, the people for whom God’s power is being exercised suffer. As we explore the barriers and possible responses to them, we must remember that these areas are not always discrete, easily separated one from the other, but rather are closely interrelated, such that actions to reduce the impact or even completely remove one barrier will help reduce the impact or remove the others.

It is important to note that each and every response received to the surveys distributed had a Catholic as one of the spouses. I know of other interchurch couples, e.g. Orthodox and Baptist, etc., but either the difficulties of their experience are not such to bring them together in groups and organizations, or they simply chose not to respond. Because of this preponderance of Catholics in the survey data, I have chosen to focus primarily on situations

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<sup>270</sup> Brueggemann, 85.

<sup>271</sup> Brueggemann, 86.

involving the Catholic Church, in the hope of providing opportunities for the reduction or removal of the barriers to Christian unity which impact on such couples.

Perhaps the words of a husband are most illustrative: “I see great need to work out in practice how the Catholic Church can reach out to interchurch couples and other churches in respect and love, so as to show forth the gospel and build Christian unity, while seeking always the truth.” (C1058, Q17, H:C, Y, O:) How might this be done? While we will explore significant aspects further, I present first some proposals by way of exploration.

### **Simple Steps**

If we are ever to come to know the riches of each other’s traditions, we need to spend time with each other in our liturgies. This can be done by encouraging pulpit exchanges, so not only interchurch couples but the congregations of which they are members can begin experiencing the riches of other Christian traditions. Beyond that, we need to begin sharing space and resources. In so doing, we will learn to live, as married couples do, under one roof, where gifts can be discovered and magnified, the shadows of our deepest selves brought into the light. Though always challenging, this can help create and nurture respect for the “other”.

Rather than keep interchurch families relegated to the shadows, we need to discover and develop them in our midst. We can do this by inviting interchurch couples to gather for times of discussion, where pastors can listen to their voices, hear of their joys and difficulties, and together begin developing ways to respond pastorally within the parameters of their traditions.

Such simple steps would go far in making interchurch couples feel recognized, welcomed, and nourished within both their churches, thereby contributing greatly to making

a gift of their unity as a domestic church, leading in turn to the unity of the *ecclesia universalis*.

### **Promises to Keep**

The 1917 Code of Canon Law of the Catholic Church absolutely forbade the marriage of Catholics to Christians of other traditions. Such marriages still took place, of course, but by way of exception. The 1983 Code of Canon Law removed that edict, replacing it with a statement (Canon 1125) concerning the faith of the Catholic party and of the children which would issue from the marriage.

Can. 1125 The local ordinary can grant a permission of this kind if there is a just and reasonable cause. He is not to grant it unless the following conditions have been fulfilled:

- 1/ the Catholic party is to declare that he or she is prepared to remove dangers of defecting from the faith and is to make a sincere promise to do all in his or her power so that all offspring are baptized and brought up in the Catholic Church;
- 2/ the other party is to be informed at an appropriate time about the promises which the Catholic party is to make, in such a way that it is certain that he or she is truly aware of the promise and obligation of the Catholic party;
- 3/ both parties are to be instructed about the purposes and essential properties of marriage which neither of the contracting parties is to exclude.

As an indication of historical change, prior to the 1970 Motu Proprio *Matrimonia Mixta*, both spouses were required to make a binding promise that they would raise the children as Catholic. As a further sign of considerable movement in the Catholic Church, bear in mind that *Matrimonia Mixta* said in its opening lines "...mixed marriages, precisely because they admit differences of religion and are a consequence of the division among Christians, do not, except in some cases, help in re-establishing unity among Christians" while today we read

Marriages between Catholics and other baptized persons have their own particular nature, but they contain numerous elements that could well be made good use of and developed, both for their intrinsic value and for the contribution that they can make to the ecumenical movement. This is particularly true when both parties are faithful to their religious duties. Their common Baptism and the dynamism of grace provide the

spouses in these marriages with the basis and motivation for expressing their unity in the sphere of moral and spiritual values.<sup>272</sup>

Today too, the highest authority in the Catholic Church can describe interchurch marriages as “a laboratory of unity.”<sup>273</sup> The Catholic Church, like all others, is surely learning as it goes just what the Spirit is doing!

Given the movement in the Catholic Church over the years, I have no doubt that Canon 1125 is a well-intentioned statement, concerned for the wellbeing of the couple and their family. Difficulties remain, however. This can be seen in the statement of one couple who says, “As we moved house a few times during the early years we soon came to the view that how we dealt with baptism, etc., would depend on the circumstances at the time, i.e. the attitude of clergy and congregations in our parishes, with a lot of prayer for guidance.” (Q5, R1067, H:A, Y3, C:Y)

The comment in Article 1634 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church is prescient, and known by experience to apply not only to Catholics but to all in interchurch marriages. On the one hand it says, “Difference of confession between the spouses does not constitute an insurmountable obstacle for marriage, when they succeed in placing in common what they have received from their respective communities, and learn from each other the way in which each lives in fidelity to Christ.” In saying this, it lays out the need both to share in common, and (most importantly) to live in fidelity to Christ. At the same time, it realistically goes on to say, “But the difficulties of mixed marriages must not be underestimated. *They arise from the fact that the separation of Christians has not yet been overcome* (emphasis added).” This

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<sup>272</sup> FC, n. 78; Cf. Also CCC., §1633-1637.

<sup>273</sup>Pope Benedict XVI, *Ecumenical Encounter: Address of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI in Poland* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2006)  
[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2006/may/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20060525\\_incontro-ecumenico\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060525_incontro-ecumenico_en.html) (accessed 19 Nov 2010)

is important to note. It is not the love of the spouses or even the fact they are from different Christian traditions, which is the problem. The problem arises from the scandalous divisions within the body of Christ, whereby Christians are not fully joined to each other. The article continues: “The spouses risk experiencing the tragedy of Christian disunity even in the heart of their own home.” It is true that “Differences about faith and the very notion of marriage, but also different religious mentalities, can become sources of tension in marriage, especially as regards the education of children.” It is important to note that these differences do not necessarily reside within the couple. They may emanate from outside forces, not living the unity which is inherent in the couple’s marriage, yet which impose themselves, bringing enormous pressure for division on the couple. We have already heard couples speak of “artificial barriers / ignorance of current rules, particularly by vicars and priests,” (Q10, R1066, H:A, Y3, C:Y) an indicator the problem transcends denominations.

Nor is it limited to churches. Indeed, the issue is an indicator of just how much marriage has a societal dimension. Couples speak also of “family attitudes to what we are doing,” (Q10, R1068, H:C/W:A, Y4, C:Y) of “opposition and misunderstanding from family and friends.” (Q10, R1069, H:C/W:F, Y1, C:Y) One wife talks about her husband seeming “to want to expedite a marriage agreeable to his parents” (Q3, R1058, W:B, Y4, C:Y), then asks that people “not constantly question why I have not changed to be like [my husband].” (Q16, R1058, W:B, Y4, C:Y) Such situations are reflected in the statement, “Initially we thought of alternating – first was baptised in the RC church – when we mentioned to [my husband’s] very traditional RC parents that No. 2 would be baptised in the CofE a major problem ensued.” (Q5, R1983, H:C/W:A, Y3, C:Y) Finally, Article 1634 continues, “The temptation to religious indifference can then arise.” Such temptation may indeed arise, but



listen to what one couple says. On the one hand, “Our unity in Baptism and Marriage has deepened our love for each other and for God, and nourished our marriage and family life for a very long time.” On the other hand that same couple says, “Any feeling that one or other partner or the children were not welcome in both churches would have been difficult and might have well led to a loss of faith.” (Q6C, R1067, W:C, Y3, C:Y) It is not first and foremost the interchurch marriage that leads to a loss of faith, but the feeling of unwelcome, where the “exile-ending”, “home-bringing” activity of the Spirit is blocked. Similarly, “Difficulties are mainly ‘the rules’ and family attitudes to what we are doing.” (Q10, R1068, H:C/W:A, Y4, C:Y) Similarly too, “mainly the exclusion and non-acceptance, not just at mass but often in the early days, the sense that I was not socially a ‘member of the club’.” (Q10, R1070, W:M, Y4, C:Y) Once again, the sense of exile is as great an obstacle as are any “rules” of the churches.

Interestingly, a Catholic woman was able to rationalize her commitment in the following way: “I remember telling [my husband] that I had been able to sign the declaration because I would ‘do the best to bring any children up Christian’.” (Q3, R1066, W:C, Y3, C:Y) As another husband says, “This was in the days when [my wife] had to consent, or at least not object, to my bringing up the children as Catholic.” (Q4, R1075, W:C, Y4, C:Y) This promise has a significant impact on the way children were raised: “as promised the children were being brought up in the Catholic church.” (Q5, R1070, W:M, Y4, C:Y) Still, as one spouse said, “I agreed to have the children educated in the ‘full teaching of the Catholic Church’ and did not think that meant excluding my beliefs.” (Q4, R1058, W:B, Y4, C:Y) How can we make spouses of other traditions feel welcome if we see them as a threat

to faith? That is, in effect, what the requirement of the “promise”, to be made by the Catholic party in a mixed marriage, does.

We can approach Canon 1125 from two perspectives. The first is to argue for it to be applied differently. The second is to argue for its abolition. We will take each approach in turn.

Rather than simply expecting Canon Law to be obeyed in its literal sense, the Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism (DAPNE) provides guidance as to how the law is to be understood and applied. Published by the Vatican in 1993, this guidance is well worth visiting, as it expresses the mind of the lawmaker. According to Article 6 of the DAPNE, “While fully respecting the competence of authorities at different levels, the Directory gives orientations and norms of universal application to guide Catholic participation in ecumenical activity.”<sup>274</sup> For interchurch families, then, who live constantly the nexus between diverse Christian traditions, the DAPNE is an important document. It is well worth noting what it has to say about the “promise.” First, however, we must look at what it has to say about marriage itself, as that lays the foundation, the hermeneutics, through which to understand its comments on the “promise.” Article 144 states “In all marriages, the primary concern of the Church is to uphold the strength and stability of the indissoluble marital union and the family life that flows from it.” This is critical. The primary concern is *not* that the children be raised Catholic, though that is expected of any Catholic parent. Let us reiterate: “the primary concern of the Church is to uphold the strength and stability of the indissoluble marital union and the family life that flows from it.”

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<sup>274</sup> DAPNE, Art 6.

All interchurch couples, along with their families, their pastors, and their church communities, need to remember this as they consider what to do regarding the raising of their children. Seeing Catholic faith as a rich gift of God (which I would hope all other traditions would equally say about themselves), the Catholic Church longs for children to be raised in the fullness of that gift, so much so that it sees sharing that gift with children as an “obligation.” It recognizes the reality that such an obligation, or at the very least a longing, may be at the heart of Christians of other traditions as well, saying in Article 50 that “At the same time, it should be recognized that the non-Catholic partner may feel a like obligation because of his/her own Christian commitment.”

What should you do when you are a Catholic living with a spouse who takes his/her faith in Christ, and his/her tradition, as seriously and joyously as you do yours? Above all, rejoice! But then, recognize and live the rich directive of Article 151: “In carrying out this duty of transmitting the Catholic faith to the children, the Catholic parent will do so *with respect for the religious freedom and conscience of the other parent and with due regard for the unity and permanence of the marriage and for the maintenance of the communion of the family* (emphasis added).” And so we come full circle to the groundwork laid earlier, namely that “the primary concern of the Church is to uphold the strength and stability of the indissoluble marital union and the family life that flows from it.”

These articles must always be held firmly together, and presented as such. If they are not, they cannot fail to have negative implications. If they are firmly held together, they can have a positive catechetical value. But should “the promise” be called for at all? Here is where the argument for abolition must be heard.

The “promise” is asked of the Catholic spouse in interchurch couples only. It is a targeted approach, in effect exiling the couple from the mainstream of the Catholic community. This is especially so when, as we have already seen, the main desire of the Catholic Church, indeed of all churches, is the strength and stability of the marital union. This “promise” only adds to the stresses placed on the union.

The opposite approach could be taken, by having it asked of all Catholics. As we will see later, a recent Pew Research survey produced some sobering findings on what Catholics know about key elements of their faith, such that an argument could be made that we should take advantage of such opportunities, calling for the “promise” as a way of catechesis. Going yet a step further, it could reasonably be argued that all Christian traditions should be encouraged to ask it of their members, substituting their own tradition for “Catholic”, again as a catechetical tool. I do not accept these arguments.

Solid catechesis is indeed needed in preparation for living one’s faith in the context of marital union. But placing such catechesis on the level of law is using law to achieve what should be a pastoral goal, that of strength and stability of the marital union. All couples approaching marriage should be pastorally and sensitively educated on their obligation as Christians to raise their children in faith. Law should not be used as the means of education. To do so, I submit, stands in the way of the exile-ending, home-bringing work of the Spirit.

Instead, that *one* made so by God must be allowed to determine what is best for the strength and stability of the union, be it that the children be raised solely within the Catholic faith; solely within the other tradition; or within the richness of both traditions (in which case they also actively build the unity of the body of Christ as they live their interchurch lives).

At most, Article 3 of Canon 1125 could be retained, as it demands the pastor carry out an exercise of catechesis, but Articles 2 and 3 should be done away with.

## **Baptism**

Having looked at the promise made before marriage regarding raising children, we will now turn to the baptism of the children themselves. The first exercise of power, that of freedom-giving, is seen here, and from the earliest days of the church. Here is what Hans Küng has to say:

From the beginning the initiation rite of the new community is baptism, as prefigured by John: a bath of purification from the guilt of sin, witnessing to repentance and looking forward to the coming reign of God and administered now in the name of Jesus.<sup>275</sup>

This baptism is referred to by Paul when he says, “It was in one Spirit that all of us, whether Jew or Greek, slave or free, were baptized into one body. All of us have been given to drink of the one Spirit.” (1 Cor. 12:13) The community baptized, and now baptizes, not in the name of John, but in the name of Jesus who by his actions approved and accepted the actions of John, and who is now the risen Messiah and Lord. Through an act of faith and confession, a person offers oneself for baptism, a baptism which is an action of God and through which the person receives “the forgiveness of sins, the sealing with the name of Jesus as a sign of allegiance, the giving of the Spirit.”<sup>276</sup> This baptism is both a freedom from the guilt of sin, and a freedom for the work of the kingdom as made known in the *ekklesia*, the congregation, community, Church of God in Jesus Christ, and which has its effects not only in that *ekklesia*, but in the entire world created and held in being by God.

Baptism is, however, also an exile-ending or home-bringing event.

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<sup>275</sup> Küng, 116.

<sup>276</sup> Küng, 272.

Baptism is never just an individual act concerning only Christ and the man baptized. A man does not baptize himself, he is baptized in the presence of the community and for the community. By being baptized, he becomes a member of the community; by having his sins forgiven, he is included in the communion of saints; by being sealed with the name of Jesus as a sign of his allegiance, he becomes a member of the community which as a whole owes its allegiance to Jesus; by receiving the Spirit, he becomes a living stone in the spiritual house of the community; by sharing in Christ's death and resurrection, he becomes a part of the post-Easter fellowship of those who believe and love.<sup>277</sup>

As the document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) produced by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches states, baptism "is incorporation into Christ, who is the crucified and risen Lord; it is entry into the New Covenant between God and God's people."<sup>278</sup> Through baptism, one is paradoxically immersed in death, but a liberating and life-giving death, the death of Christ, and into his resurrection. Through that death, we are "brought into union with Christ, with each other and with the Church of every time and place."<sup>279</sup> Again, "our one baptism into Christ constitutes a call to the churches to overcome their divisions and visibly manifest their fellowship," and "anticipates the day when every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father."<sup>280</sup> We are thus "brought home" into the *ekklesia*, the community of believers, there to live out, in the *ekklesia* and, with it, in the world, the "good news" of Jesus Christ.

This wonderful gift from God can become also a time of anxiety for the couple. Incarnation into the Church becomes problematic when baptisms are not mutually recognized, the parents' intent not respected to raise their children in (as per the Catechism) a "flowering of what is common to them in faith and respect for what separates them."<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> Küng, 273.

<sup>278</sup> Faith and Order Commission, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), 2.

<sup>279</sup> BEM, 3.

<sup>280</sup> BEM, 3.

<sup>281</sup> CCC, Part Two, Section Two, Chapter Three, Article 7, Section 1636.

More, the approach to the sacrament can prove a source of significant pressure on the couple, and division in their lives. Blood family and church family can bring pressure to bear on couples, especially on the spouse of the “other” tradition, to put aside that spouse’s beliefs and persona. There is a real need to recognize that interchurch couples wish to celebrate the richness of both traditions, and to raise their children accordingly, allowing God to do with that what God will in order to bring about the unity for which Christ prayed. What stands in the way of this?

Not all churches or ecclesial communities have the same understanding of baptism, or the same way of baptizing. It is understandably difficult, then, for churches with a clearly defined theology and practice of baptism, whatever that may be, to recognize and accept baptisms by other churches having different understandings or different practices. It can be equally difficult for Christian parents of two such diverse traditions to come to a baptismal practice which will honour the deeply held convictions of both. “Cutting corners” and compromising deeply held theologies merely to achieve a common recognition is unacceptable, as it leads to a religious indifferentism in which no one knows anymore what anyone truly holds. That is not the way of the churches, nor the way of interchurch families, who deeply value their respective traditions and wish to share them in all their fullness, rather than cut and prune until nothing is left. There is, therefore a real need for theologians and church leaders to exercise their best efforts in sound theological dialogue in order to arrive at a clear common understanding of baptism which is held by all parties to the dialogue. Activities toward such an agreement, now bearing fruit between several churches in the United States of America after a number of years of hard work, are a good example, as are similar agreements already in place in other countries. Common certificates of baptism,

recognized by the parties to such agreements, are another positive step, reinforcing as they do the fact that while we may be incarnated into the body of Christ through different traditions, that incarnation is still into the one body. The Catholic Church states this very clearly:

While by baptism a person is incorporated into Christ and his Church, this is only done in practice in a given Church or ecclesial Community. Baptism, therefore, may not be conferred jointly by two ministers belonging to different Churches or ecclesial Communities. Moreover, according to Catholic liturgical and theological tradition, baptism is celebrated by just one celebrant.<sup>282</sup>

But even such agreements and common recognition, while important, are insufficient by themselves where interchurch families are concerned. We need also to have that recognition extended to the intent of the parents.

A child cannot be baptized twice, once into the father's tradition and once into the mother's. One is baptized into the body of Christ, the Church, once and for all time. But must such a baptism be seen as incarnating into only one tradition? At the moment, that appears to be the understanding. Indeed, some traditions are able to recognize incarnation into their tradition only if the pastor of that tradition has performed the baptism. For example, a Catholic priest present at and witnessing the baptism of one of the children of an interchurch couple in his parish cannot recognize that child as being incarnated into the Catholic Church unless the baptism was performed by him or another Catholic bishop, priest, or deacon. (Were no priest present, others may be deputed to conduct such a baptism.) Given the present state of theological understanding where interchurch families are concerned, it seem unlikely we will quickly see a change, such that interchurch couples may be allowed to have the baptism of their child recognized in both churches at once. We have not yet progressed that far in our theological and ecclesial understandings. It is the work of interchurch couples, then, to faithfully live, and introduce their children to, full participation

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<sup>282</sup> DAPNE, § 97.



in both churches, an orthopraxy of unity if you will, until such time as the orthodoxy of such an approach to the body of Christ can be determined.

How have interchurch families dealt with these realities? One couple chose not to deal with the question of baptism immediately, but to raise their children in faith until they could make a decision and professions of faith for themselves. “We made a conscious decision not to baptise our children so that they could make their own profession of faith. They were dedicated. Our children were baptised at an intermediate age – due to their own request and enthusiasm.” (Q5, R1073, H:C/W:A, Y4, C:Y) Their children were then baptized by the Roman Catholic priest with the pastor of their other tradition present. Another couple speaks of the discussions couples have before marriage: “The baptism of the children did arise and it was quite clear that the Catholic requirement was a great burden to [my wife] -- but we did not pursue it in sufficient depth to fully realise the implications.” (Q4, R1070, H:C, Y4, C:Y) Not pursuing in advance the question of what to do with children is fairly common, and understandable. Decisions about children, made in a theoretical milieu, may change when children arrive with all their concrete realities, and “the best laid schemes o’ mice an’ men gang aft agley.”<sup>283</sup> At the same time, the words “the Catholic requirement was a great burden to [my wife]” are important to note. A similar sentiment can be found in the statement of a Catholic husband who says he “assumed that because [his wife] had agreed to sign the promise at that time required that she would be able to accommodate herself to the requirements that the Catholic Church imposed upon her; and that thereafter ‘things would work out!’” (Q3, R1070, H:C, Y4, C:Y) His Methodist wife refers to the situation as “having to sign a promise that the children would be brought up as Catholics.” (Q3, R1070, W:M, Y4, C:Y) (As already noted, this was the case prior to the

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<sup>283</sup> Robert Burns: “To a Mouse, on Turning Her Up in Her Nest with the Plough”, 1785.

*Motu Proprio Matrimonia Mixta*<sup>284</sup> of 1970, which changed the requirements for mixed-marriage couples). That there are other possibilities and other practices is clear from the couple who, while having their children baptized in the Catholic Church, says “Our decision was if 1st child was a girl, all kids would be raised Catholic, if 1st child was a boy, all kids would be raised Lutheran.” (Q4, R1059, H:L/W:C, Y3, C:Y) This indicates again couples have different approaches to the baptism of their children, approaches which may be seen as undesirable by one or other of their churches. Appropriate ways of dealing with baptism of children in interchurch families have not yet been developed and agreed to. Meanwhile, I submit that interim approaches may be taken on several fronts.

We could have the minister of one tradition perform the baptism, then the minister of the other tradition immediately receive that validly baptized child into his/her tradition, in accordance with the intent of the parents. Let us cease viewing such reception as a rejection of, an exiling from, the church of baptism. Let us see it instead as an incorporation of all that is rich and good from that tradition into the tradition in which one is being received. Let us allow the parents and children to live out their incarnational reality within their two Christian traditions. Let us recognize the orthopraxy of such a lived unity, even as we wait for the theological and legal orthodoxy to be established. Were this done, not at separate ceremonies (which would emphasize the partial separation of the churches) but at the same ceremony, (which would emphasize what is held in common), then blood family and church family alike would see and be called to rejoice in the rich reality that is being lived out before their eyes.

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<sup>284</sup> *Matrimonia Mixta – On Mixed Marriages* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1970) [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/motu\\_proprio/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_motu-proprio\\_19700331\\_matrimonia-mixta\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/motu_proprio/documents/hf_p-vi_motu-proprio_19700331_matrimonia-mixta_en.html) (accessed 16 Nov 2010).

Where one parent is from a tradition which practices infant baptism, and the other is from one which practices believer baptism, a further opportunity is needed. The proposal put forward in 1995 by Ruth Reardon of the Association of Interchurch Families of the United Kingdom is worth considering. Here, the suggestion is made that the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) be adapted for children and infants. Children would be accepted into the order of catechumens in a public ceremony witnessed by the church community, with the Church accepting them as persons intending to become its members. Reardon points out that during this time, according to Article 47 of the RCIA, “catechumens are considered part of the household of Christ.”<sup>285</sup> She goes on, “[t]he catechumenate is an indeterminate period; the Presentations of the Creed, the Lord’s prayer and the Ephphetha Rite can all take place during this period, and would make a lot of sense in the development of a growing child. The second big stage, the Rite of Election, would need to take place at a time when the child was more immediately preparing for baptism.” Recognized as joined to the Church, the catechumen could be appropriately catechized until he/she makes a faith decision and accepts baptism. Such a process may well serve to satisfy the aspirations of both baptismal traditions.

In these ways, the unity of the body of Christ will be built up, baptism by baptism, blood family by blood family, and church family by church family, sifting and sorting and together growing into what is true and authentic until such time as we are able to come to complete mutual recognition of each other as fully a reflection of ourselves, in the one Church of Christ.

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<sup>285</sup> cf *What about the child of a Roman Catholic-Baptist couple?* in *Interchurch Families Journal*, Vol 11, No 2 (September 2003): 3 <http://interchurchfamilies.org/journal/2003jul03.shtm> (accessed 19 Jan 2011).

## Eucharist

We turn now to the question of Eucharistic sharing, *the* neuralgic issue facing interchurch couples. The Eucharist is known by many names, e.g. the Lord's Supper, the Breaking of the Bread, the Eucharistic Assembly, the memorial of the Lord's Passion and Resurrection, the Holy Sacrifice, the Holy and Divine Liturgy, Holy Communion, and Holy Mass.<sup>286</sup> Again we see the exile-making pattern that is common in our Christian traditions. One woman says "It was almost unbearable to sit in the pew with everyone tripping over me while [my husband] and the children went up to the altar rail. It seemed that the unity we had achieved at home was being shattered by the Church." She speaks of "the exclusion and non-acceptance" experienced by her and by their children. (Q10, R1070,, W:M, Y4, C:Y) Her husband likewise names the issues which caused difficulty, "the baptisms; the exclusion of [my wife] from unity with us all at communion." (Q10, R1070, H:C, Y4, C:Y) These sentiments are expressed by couple after couple.

Various churches have different approaches to the Eucharist. For some, it is open to all who love the Lord and are in communion with their own church. The Iona community of Scotland, for example, says:

The table of bread and wine is now to be made ready. It is the table of company with Jesus, and all who love him. It is the table of sharing with the poor of the world, with whom Jesus identified himself. It is the table of communion with the earth, in which Christ became incarnate. So come to this table, you who have much faith and you who would like to have more; you who have been here often and you who have not been for a long time; you who have tried to follow Jesus, and you who have failed. Come. It is Christ who invites us to meet him here.<sup>287</sup>

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has published its own guidelines in keeping with the DAPNE. The part of interest here is as follows:

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<sup>286</sup> CCC, § 1328-1332.

<sup>287</sup> The Iona Community, *Iona Abbey Worship Book* (Glasgow: Wild Goose Publications, 2010).

***FOR OUR FELLOW CHRISTIANS:*** We welcome our fellow Christians to this celebration of the Eucharist as our brothers and sisters. We pray that our common baptism and the action of the Holy Spirit in this Eucharist will draw us closer to one another and begin to dispel the sad divisions which separate us. We pray that these will lessen and finally disappear, in keeping with Christ’s prayer for us “that they may all be one” (John 17:21 ). Because Catholics believe that the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign of the reality of the oneness of faith, life, and worship, members of those churches with whom we are not yet fully united are ordinarily not admitted to Holy Communion. Eucharistic sharing in exceptional circumstances by other Christians requires permission according to the directives of the diocesan bishop and the provisions of canon law (canon 844 § 4). Members of the Orthodox Churches , the Assyrian Church of the East, and the Polish National Catholic Church are urged to respect the discipline of their own churches. According to Roman Catholic discipline, the Code of Canon Law does not object to the reception of communion by Christians of these Churches (canon 844 § 3).<sup>288</sup>

This statement is informative, though only in part. It presumes something highly unlikely, namely that Christians present from other Christian traditions will know “the directives of the diocesan bishop and the provisions of canon law (Canon 844 § 4).” The language asks no questions, invites no dialogue. It calls no one, not even Catholics, to learn anything more about the Eucharist, or why one should or should not receive. As such, it is a pedagogical evangelistic failure, more reminiscent of a country trying to keep people out, than an institution concerned with the salvation of souls through incorporating all within its embrace. We will look at ways in which the same information might be differently presented, such that there is a potential for learning. Before we do that, however, we must look at the “provisions of canon law” referred to.

Canon 844 first states, in what appears to be a very restrictive manner (§1), “Catholic ministers may lawfully administer the sacraments only to catholic members of Christ’s faithful...” In §4, however, it qualifies the restriction, saying “If there is a danger of death or if, in the judgment of the diocesan Bishop or of the Episcopal Conference, there is some

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<sup>288</sup> USCCB, *Non-Catholics and Holy Communion* <http://www.usccb.org/liturgy/q%26a/mass/communion.shtml> (accessed 23 Nov 2010).

other grave and pressing need, catholic ministers may lawfully administer these same sacraments to other Christians not in full communion with the catholic Church.” It then goes on to specify the requirements, namely that this is for people “who cannot approach a minister of their own community and who spontaneously ask for them, provided that they demonstrate the catholic faith in respect of these sacraments and are properly disposed.”

Clearly, then, the canon foresees the possibility of this happening. While we will discuss this further, it is noteworthy that §5 specifies that no diocesan bishop or Episcopal Conference is to establish general norms on the matter “except after consultation with the competent authority, at least at the local level, of the non-catholic Church or community concerned.”

This is a clear recognition that such churches or ecclesial communities of other traditions are in some way part of the Body of Christ, to be accorded the full respect that accrues to this reality.

Once again, we can seek guidance from the DAPNE. Article 130 makes very clear that “In case of danger of death, Catholic ministers may administer these sacraments when the conditions given below (n. 131) are present.” It goes on, however, to indicate there are other cases, in which “it is strongly recommended that the diocesan Bishop ... establish general norms for judging situations of grave and pressing need and for verifying the conditions mentioned below (n. 131).” Finally, it says “Catholic ministers will judge individual cases and administer these sacraments only in accord with these established norms, where they exist. Otherwise they will judge according to the norms of this Directory.” While the Article does not specify what constitutes a “case” warranting administration of the Eucharist to someone of another Christian tradition, Article 131 offers some clarification. It says

the conditions ... are that the person be unable to have recourse for the sacrament desired to a minister of his or her own Church or ecclesial Community, ask for the sacrament of his or her own initiative, manifest Catholic faith in this sacrament and be properly disposed.

While the guidelines for the Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon explicitly state, “These conditions are always to be met simultaneously,”<sup>289</sup> we will take each of these conditions in turn.

“The person must be unable to have recourse for the sacrament desired to a minister of his or her own Church or ecclesial Community.” This raises the question: does the Christian of another tradition have recourse to a minister of his or her own Church or ecclesial Community? People do not generally go “church shopping”, looking for a place they might call home. Even if they do, it will usually be for a church within their own Christian tradition, or one very close to the style of worship they are familiar with. It is possible a person may be visiting solely to experience other traditions. In such a case, the person would normally answer that question in the affirmative, and thereby fail to meet this criterion. More often, however, the fact a Christian of another tradition is present in a Catholic church is a good indicator that the person is unable to have recourse to his or her own Christian tradition. In such a case, this criterion may well be said to be met.

Where interchurch families are concerned, the unity of marriage suggests the criterion is met whenever both spouses are worshipping together. The *one coupled person* created by marriage is **here**, in **this** place and time of worship which is that of half of that coupled person, and therefore unable to participate in the worship of the other half of the coupled person.

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<sup>289</sup> *Pastoral Directives for Sacramental Sharing in Particular Circumstances* (Diocese of Saskatoon, 2007) [http://www.ecumenism.net/archive/stoon\\_sacramental\\_sharing\\_directives\\_feb\\_13\\_2007.pdf](http://www.ecumenism.net/archive/stoon_sacramental_sharing_directives_feb_13_2007.pdf) (accessed 20 Nov 2010).

The person must “ask for the sacrament of his or her own initiative.” While seemingly minor, this is an important requirement. The person must in no way be coerced, however well-meaning, to “ask for the sacrament”. While it is Christ who says “Come to me, all who are weary and are burdened, and I will give you rest” (Mt. 11:28), the person must in no way be made to feel an affirmative response is demanded. It is in this context that, I submit, formal invitations to the Eucharist, such as that of the Iona community (given above) should be used with caution, sensitive always to the needs of the people present. That said, it is always possible to let people know that, should they wish to receive, they will be welcome. If the person can say, with complete integrity, that he or she is asking for the sacrament on his or her own initiative, we can say that the second criterion is met.

The person must “manifest Catholic faith in this sacrament.” To satisfy this criterion, it is first important to know what is Catholic faith in the sacrament, in this case the Eucharist. The Code of Canon Law is very specific on the matter: “The most venerable sacrament is the blessed Eucharist, in which Christ the Lord himself is contained, offered and received, and by which the Church continually lives and grows.”<sup>290</sup> For the Catholic Church, then, the Eucharist is not merely an action (blessing, breaking, taking, eating) or physical material (bread, wine) which causes us to remember the event of long ago. It is an action of remembering whereby the event of 2000 years ago becomes truly present to us today, and in which the elements of bread and wine, while retaining all that is available to our physical senses, by the words of institution and the invocation of the Holy Spirit become, in a mystical and metaphysical but thoroughly real manner, the body and blood of the living Christ. There is no need to know or understand *how* this happens, there is only need to have faith that it

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<sup>290</sup> *Code of Canon Law*. (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983), Can. 897.



does. If a person can, in all good conscience, say “Amen” to that, we can say that this criterion has been met.

The person must “be properly disposed.” The Code of Canon Law provides us with some guidance on what this means:

To respond to the invitation of Christ, we must *prepare ourselves*. St Paul urges us: “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself.” (1 Cor. 11:27-29) Anyone conscious of a grave sin must receive the sacrament of Reconciliation before coming to communion.<sup>291</sup>

While appropriate dress, gestures, etc. are also called for, it is the internal disposition of the person which is of key importance. Unless the matter is in the public domain, it is left to the individual to determine whether he or she meets this criterion. We will look in greater detail at the situation of interchurch families regarding reception of the Eucharist, but for the moment, let us look at ways to express the criteria while being pedagogically more effective.

I suggest that, rather than simply state the criteria in a dry and concise, if accurate, way as the USCCB has done, the criteria be presented as a series of questions, the answers to which will help people determine whether they may, in conscience and with a true welcome from the Catholic Church, receive the Eucharist. These questions might take a form similar to the following:

- Do you have a serious and pressing need to receive the Eucharist?
- Are you unable to attend services of a Church or ecclesial community of your own tradition?
- Are you asking for the Eucharist of your own free will?
- Do you believe that, in the Eucharist, you are receiving the true body and blood of Christ?
- Have you been reconciled with God and the Church for anything you have done which would stand between you and Christ in the Eucharist?

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<sup>291</sup> Code, Can. 1385.

If you are a visitor from another Christian tradition, and can say a sincere ‘yes’ to *all five* questions, then you are welcome to receive. If you are from another tradition, and are considering continuing to worship here, we invite you to meet with the pastor to discuss the way forward.

Such a series of questions allows the person to enter into the decision-making process, by inviting true moral discernment of explicitly stated criteria, rather than simply making statements about criteria referred to but never specified. In addition, it opens the way for catechesis, not only for Christians of other traditions, but for Catholics themselves, many of whom are not aware of the teachings of the Catholic Church on the matter of exceptions for Eucharistic sharing, and of whom, according to a recent Pew Forum survey, only 55% knew the teaching of the Catholic Church was that in the Eucharist the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ.<sup>292</sup> Such a series of questions would also change the issue of Eucharistic sharing from a seeming closed door to an invitation to dialogue. Even if the answers to the questions result in the same decision that would come from the direct statements that presently exist, the change in process would go a long way toward ending the exile many Christians of other traditions experience from the Catholic Church.

Where we interchurch families are concerned, however, the question of exile goes even deeper. The scriptures proclaim,<sup>293</sup> our churches believe and teach,<sup>294</sup> and we experience and believe, that in marriage a man and a woman become *one*, a unity so real, so profound, that it is recognized as being indissoluble. While each individual spouse has been incarnated into the body of Christ through a specific Church or ecclesial community, there is now a new *one* who, in the persons of the two spouses, is incarnated into the body of Christ

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<sup>292</sup> U.S. Religious Knowledge Survey (The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 28 SEP 2010) <http://pewforum.org/U-S-Religious-Knowledge-Survey-Who-Knows-What-About-Religion.aspx#Christianity> (accessed 21 Nov 2010).

<sup>293</sup> Gen 2:24, Mt 19:6, Mk 10:8.

<sup>294</sup> Cf CCC, Part Two, Section Two, Chapter Three, § 7.

through both. Then we find themselves facing the neuralgic question: where does that *one* made so by God take and eat, take and drink? Phrased in the language of negation, if half of that *one* is not welcome to receive at *this* Eucharistic celebration in *this* place, how can the other half of that *one* be welcome, and receive? Interchurch couples find themselves asking: do we live faithfully the unity of our marriage, and forego the Eucharist? Or do we receive the Eucharist, that great sacrament of unity, by dividing to go individually to our respective churches – and in dividing, deny the unity of our marriage? And if we deny the unity of our marriage, can we still claim to be “properly disposed” such that we can receive?

Two things are required to end the exile of interchurch families within their own churches insofar as the Eucharist is concerned. One is the clear expression, by all churches, in a manner which invites moral discernment such as the five question posed above, of their criteria for reception of the Eucharist. The other is a clear recognition that, as a result of the fundamental unity which the scriptures and all churches teach exists in marriage, there are no longer two but *one* to take and eat, take and drink.

### **Funerals**

I turn now to a final element for consideration, that of the death of one of the spouses in an interchurch marriage. Some background is in order. My wife and I had begun our married life in a rural community. Our parish priest, having discussed with my wife her faith in the Eucharist and her need to receive, welcomed her to participate with me in worship, including receiving the Eucharist when that need was experienced. Several priests later, our situation changed to one in which sacramental participation of any kind was absolutely forbidden. Worse still, over a period of time, comments made from the pulpit took away any sense of welcome, and created a situation of exile. It was then that I approached our

Anglican priest, and asked that, if I were to die while the situation remained as it was, he would preside at my funeral. It was not that I did not wish to be buried with the rites of the Catholic Church. It was, rather, that I could not, would not subject my Anglican wife to having to deal with this priest and congregation, now that I would no longer be present to help her manoeuvre not only the legitimate requirements of the Church, but the multifaceted minefield of sentiment she would face. It is in that context that I included in the survey a question of funeral preparation.

The death of a spouse is, for interchurch families, a key event where the strength and stability of the family life that flows from marriage is threatened, with exile-ending and home-bringing needed. In death, of course, the marital union has been broken. It is in this time, however, that the experience of exile can be deeply felt, if the remaining spouse cannot be made truly welcome, in the community and before God, as he or she brings closure to their married life together. When asked what they wanted their spouse to arrange for their funeral, several responded that they hadn't given it any thought. This is fairly common, both because it is often not talked about until it becomes a pressing issue, and because day-to-day events of life take precedence over something seen as taking place in a far-distant future. The responses of those who had given the matter some thought are worth hearing.

One Catholic husband said "I want a Roman Catholic funeral mass because I'm Roman Catholic." His Presbyterian wife had a different view: "Just plant me in the ground. I won't be here anyway." (Q11, R1041, H:C/W:P, Y2, C:Y) More often, there was a desire for both their churches to be involved. "The way each of us has planned, both traditions will participate in each service." (Q11, R1056, H:D/W:C, Y4, C:Y) A Catholic husband wants "Catholic Mass of Christian Burial, with cremation." (Q11, R1058, H:C, Y4, C:Y) His wife,

wanting “My pastor and a cemetery plot with spouse,” observes: “His friends would be welcomed in my church. His church is awkward for visitors.” (Q11, R1058, W:B, Y4, C:Y) This points to the feeling of exile, of unwelcome, that she expects people will experience in her spouse’s church, even at a funeral. Another Catholic husband says: “I hope to have both of our churches involved: clergy, choirs, congregations, liturgy, music, and lay ministers. I hope to have a wake at one church and funeral at the other. I hope that by the time of my death, burial can be arranged at one of the churches. How better to wind up my life in which ecumenism and interchurch marriage have meant so much?” (Q11, R1061, H:C, Y4, C:N) His Baptist wife equally longs for involvement from both their churches: “I would like to have some involvement from the Catholic church in the form of readings by lectors, some aspect of liturgy, perhaps certain prayers.” (Q11, R1061, W:B, Y4, C:N)

Some are not so concerned about the church(es) involved. Their primary concern is for a funeral that will meet the needs of the people present. One Catholic says “I feel that funerals are for the bereaved so I am happy for my spouse to arrange what he feels comfortable with. I don’t mind if he needs to have it in his church because it is what he needs. I will be in heaven I hope, and not too concerned which church my funeral is in.” (Q11, R1066, W:C, Y3, C:Y) Another Catholic expresses the hope that her funeral be done: “Prayerfully, in a way which seems most meaningful for him and the family at the time.” (Q11, R1067, W:C, Y3, C:Y) An Anglican desires the interchurch unity of their marriage to be expressed: “In my church as a recognition of my tradition - but with involvement of RC priest to reflect our interchurch marriage & for pastoral support for [my husband].” (Q11, R1071, W:A, Y2, C:Y) Her Catholic husband, however, says “Sacrament of the sick if possible, but once I’m gone, I’m gone. I would rather [my wife] and the girls be comfortable

with the arrangements than to be hung up about RC involvement.” (Q11, R1071, H:C, Y2, C:Y)

Unity of the family takes precedence over church tradition. A Catholic husband indicates “in whatever way [my spouse] feels comfortable” (Q11, R1072, H:C, Y2, C:Y) though his Anglican spouse is forceful on the matter of Eucharistic sharing: “with clergy from both churches, at the local C of E church, with a Eucharistic service and with formal RC permission for ALL (including, if not especially, the RC priest(s)) to receive.” (Q11, R1072, W:A, Y2, C:Y) One couple says simply “We both want the funerals to represent both sides of our church life, (i.e. the other church to play a role in the funeral).” (Q11, R1083, H:C/W:A, Y3, C:Y) A Catholic husband is direct about the matter: “Whatever she is comfortable with. There will be enough problems without getting upset over the rigmarole of a funeral.” (Q11, R1085, H:C, Y4, C:Y)

Again, family unity and stability is of greater importance than the funeral rite, or the Eucharist. One couple alludes to the issue of understandings and welcomes being subject not to some objective criteria, but to the sentiment of the clergy: “[The husband] would like a normal Anglican Common Worship service with an input from the Catholic Priest. As far as [the wife’s] funeral is concerned, the form of service would depend entirely on the response of whoever is parish priest at the time. (At present the local Catholic Church is without a parish priest and they always seem to move on quickly.)” (Q11, R1087, H:A/W:C, Y4, C:Y) Another Catholic spouse, married more than 30 years, addresses the sense of exile directly: “If possible (priest shortage) a Requiem Mass with the Minister of [my wife’s] church participating in some way. Unless all the members of the family are welcome to receive communion I want a simple burial service.” (Q11, R1070, H:C, Y4, C:Y) If the family can

be welcomed at communion, a Requiem Mass is desired. If not, the Eucharist is to be foregone.

We see that, while spouses would prefer to have their funeral service held in their own tradition, the remaining spouse must be able to deal with the funeral in a way which minimizes stress – even if that means having the service in a different church. Finally, and this is important for churches to note, the unity of the marriage, now symbolized in the unity of the family that remains, is more important than reception of the Eucharist, the ultimate sacrament.

If we cannot recognize the grave and pressing need for expressions of unity, and for Eucharist as the ultimate sign and symbol of unity, at the point of final celebration of life, what will we consider sufficiently grave and pressing that we may offer it, welcome interchurch couples, and end their exile? Conversely, if we can do so then, why not now, in life, when strength and nourishment are needed for the journey, and for what is seen as the primary moving force in marriage, i.e. the unity and stability of their marital union?

I present these suggestions, not to change the way things are done so interchurch spouses and their families may be returned from exile at funerals. (That is, of course, deeply to be desired.) Rather, it is so that we may begin to be aware of interchurch families, incorporate them within our church communities, so that their gift of unity may be manifest, for the blessing of all.

## Afterward

We have visited the ancient “marks” of the Church, being unity, sanctity, catholicity and apostolicity. We have seen, from the voices of interchurch families themselves, that the community which is the interchurch family carries within itself those “marks” to a sufficient extent that interchurch families can rightly be called *domestic churches*.

To see what we might do in order to facilitate the unity and stability of their marital unions, we have also looked at the pressures interchurch couples face, and proposed ways those pressures might be alleviated, within the self-understanding of their churches, such that these families are set free to be themselves, their exile ended, life given. In so doing, the unity they live within their marriages and their churches will, like the Eucharist, become a sign and means of the unity of the Church.

In closing, let us remember Ruth, the Moabite, who went with her mother-in-law Naomi to live among the people of Israel. She is blessed in the process, of course, but more importantly, Naomi, Boaz, and all Israel are blessed in her.<sup>295</sup> All this can happen as we begin to recognize the gift of interchurch families in our midst. The memories of the bible are set toward the future. The promises God has made will come to pass, bringing freedom, ending exile, and giving life, for interchurch families and for their churches.

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<sup>295</sup> cf The Book of Ruth



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