

THE ECUMENICAL HOUSEHOLD AS DOMESTIC CHURCH?
ECCLESIAL THREAT OR PASTORAL CHALLENGE AND EVEN RESOURCE?

I. “DOMESTIC CHURCH” WITHIN THE BROADER ECCLESIAL CONTEXT OF *LUMEN GENTIUM*

The Second Vatican Council’s Constitution on the Church describes the Church “as a kind of sacrament, or sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of unity among all humans” (article 1)¹. The foundational role of the Eucharist is emphasized in articles 3, 7, 10, 11 and 26. Article three declares that “in the sacrament of the Eucharistic bread, the unity of believers, who form one body in Christ (cf. 1 Cor 10,17), is both expressed and brought about”². Article 7 discusses the ongoing, manifold presence of Christ within the church: in those who minister; in the Eucharist; in all the sacraments; in the proclamation of the scriptures; and wherever two or three are gathered together in his name (Mt 18,20). It emphasizes that the life of Christ is communicated to believers through the sacraments. In baptism, “fellowship in Christ’s death and resurrection is symbolized and brought about”. In the Eucharist, “[r]eally sharing in the body of the Lord in the breaking of the Eucharistic bread, we are taken up into communion with him and with one another”. The same article further declares that “Christ loves the Church as his bride, having been established as the model of a man loving his wife as his own body” (cf. Eph 5,25-28).

Lumen Gentium (articles 9 and 10) presents the people of God as a priestly people (1 Pet 2,9-10), meaning that all the baptized and the ordained together share a “common priesthood of the faithful” in which all have equal dignity. That common priesthood of all who form the church is said to be essentially different from “the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood”, although there was much discussion within the conciliar sessions about the ways in which the “priesthood of the faithful” and the “ministerial priesthood” are both dissimilar and similar³. The conciliar text describes ministerial priests as endowed with a sacred power by which they “form and rule” the priestly people, but at the same time declares that the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood are mutually ordered to one another. Both participate, in distinctive modes, in the one priesthood of Christ.

Article eleven of *Lumen Gentium* emphasizes that, having been deputized to worship by their baptismal character, the unity of the priestly People of God is “aptly signified and admirably realized (effected)” in their celebration and reception of the Eucharist. Turning to the sacrament of Matrimony, by which the faithful “signify and share (cf. Eph 5,32) the mystery of the unity and faithful love between Christ and the Church”, the council teaches that “Christian married couples help one another to attain holiness in their married life and in the rearing of their children

¹ Translation is mine: “veluti sacramentum seu signum et instrumentum intimae cum Deo unionis totiusque generis humani unitatis”; Latin text in N.P. TANNER (ed.), *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, v. 2, *Trent to Vatican II*, London, Sheed & Ward – Washington, DC, Georgetown University Press, 1990, pp. 820-1135.

² Unless otherwise noted, citations are from A. FLANNERY (ed.) *Vatican Council II*, v. 1, *The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Northport, NY, Costello Publishing, 1992.

³ See A. GRILLMEIER, *The Mystery of the Church*, in H. VORGRIMLER (ed.), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, v. 1, New York, Herder & Herder, 1967, pp. 157-158.

... by reason of their state in life and of their position they have their own gifts in the People of God (cf. 1 Cor 7,7)". The marriage of Christians gives rise to the family in which, "by the grace of the Holy Spirit in Baptism", offspring "are made children of God so that the People of God may be perpetuated throughout the centuries". It is here that *Lumen Gentium* uses the term "domestic Church" in reference to the family, in which "the parents by word and example, are the first heralds of the faith for their children".

II. PERSPECTIVES ON "DOMESTIC CHURCH" IN THE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* has further developed this concept⁴. Section 1666 declares that "the Christian home is the place where children receive the first proclamation of the faith. For this reason the family home is rightly called 'the domestic church', a community of grace and prayer, a school of human virtues and of Christian charity". In section 1655, it affirms that "[f]rom the beginning, the core of the Church was often constituted by those who had become believers 'together with all [their] household.' When they were converted, they desired that 'their whole household' should also be saved. These families who became believers were islands of Christian life in an unbelieving world". Section 1656 then declares, "In our own time, in a world often alien and even hostile to faith, believing families are of primary importance as centers of living, radiant faith. It is in the bosom of the family that parents are 'by word and example ... the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children'. Section 1657 observes that "[i]t is here that the father of the family, the mother, children, and all members of the family exercise the *priesthood of the baptized* in a privileged way 'by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life, and self-denial and active charity.' Thus the home is the first school of Christian life and 'a school for human enrichment.' Here one learns endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generous – even repeated – forgiveness, and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one's life". That stands in stark contrast with the experience of ecumenical families, particularly because the Catholic Church has not fully developed a common *pastoral* practice regarding Eucharistic hospitality.

III. AN ECUMENICAL HOUSEHOLD AS "DOMESTIC CHURCH"

The council and the catechism appear to presuppose that the domestic church under discussion involves two Catholic parents. How should one think about the shared life of two baptized spouses in an ecumenical household? That is a family in which we have a Catholic spouse and a baptized non-Catholic spouse. For liceity (but not for validity), the Catholic spouse would have requested permission to enter such a marriage "for a just and reasonable cause". Canonically, such permission is given if the Catholic party has fulfilled the following conditions: "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 own power so that all offspring are baptized and brought up in the Catholic Church" and the other party is "informed ... about the promises that the Catholic party

⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Mahwah, NJ, Paulist Press, 1994.

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”⁵.

As Heinrich Fries has noted, “an inter-confessional marriage, earlier referred to by the derogatory term ‘mixed marriage’”, was, in the past, “considered a very great misfortune that could wound a family and for this reason people of all the Churches were expressly warned about such marriages. The Catholic Church forbade them in principle and allowed exceptions only with strict stipulations”. Speaking from his German context, Fries further observes that despite all these warnings and prohibitions the number of inter-confessional marriages has constantly increased; today they include more than a third of those couples who still wish to have a church wedding; they have almost become the rule”. He advocates that “this situation must not simply be deplored, nor should it be regulated as a matter of pure discipline. Instead everything must be done so that such marriages are not discriminated against or made the focus of constant insults and rejections or a cause of religious indifference or alienation from the Church”⁶. Fries does acknowledge that much has happened between the churches in the legal and pastoral areas to moderate the previous harshness.

The official church’s ambiguous view of such marriages is still evident in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Section 1634 asserts that “[d]ifference 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. 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. The spouses risk experiencing the tragedy of Christian disunity even in the heart of their own home”. The *Catechism* goes on to acknowledge that “[t]hrough ecumenical dialogue Christian communities in many regions have been able to put into effect a *common pastoral practice for mixed marriages*. Its task is to help such couples live out their particular situation in the light of faith, overcome the tensions between the couple's obligations to each other and towards their ecclesial communities, and encourage the flowering of what is common to them in faith and respect for what separates them” (section 1636). In that regard, this paper will propose that the lived experience of ecumenical households might further be considered an ecclesial resource for growth toward unity – after first reviewing selected pastoral initiatives regarding Eucharistic hospitality for ecumenical households.

IV. ECUMENICAL FAMILIES AND THE ISSUE OF EUCHARISTIC HOSPITALITY

As noted above, Vatican II saw the Eucharist as both sign and source of unity. Reiterating the theme emphasized in the Constitution on the Church, the Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio* (article 2) declared that Christ instituted “the wonderful sacrament of the Eucharist by which the unity of the Church is both signified and brought about”. It went on to say that worship in common (including shared Eucharist) should express the unity of the church and provide a sharing in the means of grace. The expression of unity was said to “generally forbid

⁵ CIC 1983, can. 1124 and 1125, § 1 and 2.

⁶ H. FRIES, *Suffering from the Church: Renewal or Restoration?* Collegeville, MN, Liturgical Press, 1995, p. 59.

common worship”. Yet the gaining of grace “sometimes commends it”. The course to be adopted, after considering all the circumstances of time, place, and personage, is left to the prudent decision of the local episcopal authority, unless the bishops’ conference according to its own statutes, or the Holy See, has determined otherwise” (article 8).

In his article on “Eucharistic Sharing as an Ecumenical Problem”, Avery, later cardinal, Dulles noted a “deficient yet helpful analogy” of the Eucharist as a family meal to which only acknowledged members of the family have a right to come. He asked whether members of other ecclesial families might, as friends, be invited to participate⁷. I would take the analogy a step further and ask whether the familial meals of church should be hospitable to the non-Catholic spouse living as a *companion*, that is “sharing bread” and daily meals with a Catholic spouse in the unity of a sacramental marriage within an ecumenical family. Must such love and unity in an ecumenical family, built upon a sacramental marriage, be deemed secondary to ecclesial unity? That appears to be the case when a bishop refuses to grant the request that a Protestant mother receive communion at her child’s first communion because he judges that is a special but not an exceptional occasion, without even seeking any input from the Catholic pastor who knows the couple.

A mindset in which ecclesial disunity simply trumps and disregards the unitive love of spouses in an ecumenical, sacramental marriage has too often prevailed. In the years after the council, official Catholic Church documents more and more emphasized that shared Eucharist expressed or was a sign of communion in faith and therefore could occur only if there was full unity in faith. That Eucharist as a participation in grace made Eucharistic sharing desirable in individual cases was scarcely mentioned. A protective rigorism was the tone established in the Ecumenical Directory of 1967 and the Instruction of 1972. The Ecumenical Directory issued by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity stated that Protestants may receive the Eucharist at a Catholic liturgy in cases of danger of death or urgent necessity, such as during persecution or imprisonment. Even then the Protestant had to meet four conditions: no access to a minister of his/her own faith; spontaneously ask for communion from a Catholic priest; Eucharistic faith in harmony with that of the Catholic Church; and be rightly disposed. In other cases, the judge of the “urgent necessity” was the diocesan bishop or the episcopal conference⁸. In 1972, the Secretariat loosened the notion of “urgent necessity”, no longer restricting it to persecution or danger of death. It spoke of “serious spiritual need”, defined in relation to personal spiritual growth and deeper involvement in the mystery of the Church and its unity. But the instruction now more stringently specified that the unavailability of a minister of one's own community must go on “for a prolonged period”. It also emphasized that allowing non-Catholics to receive the Eucharist should not endanger or disturb the faith of Catholics⁹. A further explanatory Note issued in 1973, reminded local ordinaries that they could not dispense from, or ignore, any of the conditions set forth in the Instruction, but rather that they could, in particular cases, judge whether the conditions were verified¹⁰.

⁷ A. DULLES, *Eucharistic Sharing as an Ecumenical Problem*, in IDEM, *The Resilient Church: The Necessity and Limits of Adaptation*, Garden City, NY, Doubleday, 1977, pp. 154-155.

⁸ *Ecumenical Directory*, 55, cf. 59, in FLANNERY (ed.) *Vatican Council II*, v. 1, pp. 499-500.

⁹ *On Admitting Other Christians to Eucharistic Communion*, IV.2, *ibid.*, pp. 557-558.

¹⁰ *Note*, 6, *ibid.*, pp. 561-562.

As Dulles noted, in comparing Vatican II's Decree on Ecumenism with these documents, "one may note a movement toward greater strictness ... The Directory and the subsequent Roman clarifications are more legalistic in tone. They greatly restrict the discretion of local authorities, including the local bishop. The Directory and the Instruction seem to emanate from a mentality that looks upon intercommunion not as an ambiguous and partly desirable phenomenon, but as an evil not to be permitted without serious justifying reasons. This represents, in [Dulles's] opinion, a recession toward the preconciliar theology of '*communicatio in sacris*'"¹¹.

Dulles argued that "[i]f one were to see occasional intercommunion not simply as a concession to weakness but as an appropriate sign of the partial but growing unity among separated churches, one could take a more positive view than these Roman documents do. A certain liberalization would have the advantage of bringing the directives into closer alignment with what many conscientious and committed Christians are now doing, and would thus tend to make such persons better disposed toward church authority and toward ecclesiastical legislation". From this point of view Dulles proceeded to question the necessity of some of the conditions laid down. He advocated that the negative language, such as "urgent need" be dropped, in view of the fact that the Decree on Ecumenism indicates that intercommunion may be positively desirable. He added that intercommunion is especially commended by the "grace of showing forth and fostering the partial but growing unity among churches that are as yet imperfectly in communion with one another". In determining Eucharistic faith in harmony with the Church, Dulles noted that a "correct worshipful attitude is more important than an exact theological expression". In his view, the stipulation that the communicant be rightly disposed "should not be separated from a sense of needing God's pardon for one's sins" and "communion should not be interpreted if it were a reward for merit rather than a remedy for weakness". Finally, Dulles noted that, "[a]lthough some are perhaps shocked by the practice of intercommunion, others are scandalized by the refusal of communion to a baptized Christian who approaches the sacrament with sincere faith and devotion. Indifference is fostered not only by indiscriminate eucharistic sharing, but also, and perhaps more virulently, by the inability of Christians, even on exceptional occasions, to share in altar fellowship. Bigots who resent it when anyone outside their own denomination is treated as a Christian should not be confirmed in their obsessive attitudes, but should, on the contrary, be educated to appreciate better the real and growing unity of which we have spoken".

Dulles concluded "that the present instructions could suitably be liberalized to include the idea that suitably disposed baptized-Protestant believers who feel spiritually united to the Catholic Church and to its leaders, and who recognize the sacramental presence of the Lord in a Catholic Eucharist as Catholics do, might on certain special occasions be permitted or invited to receive Holy Communion at a Roman Catholic service. The determination of the kind and number of occasions might be further specified by the regional conference of bishops or by the local episcopal authority; considerable discretion in applying the directives might appropriately be left to the local pastor or celebrant"¹².

V. EUCHARISTIC HOSPITALITY FOR ECUMENICAL FAMILIES – SELECTED PASTORAL INITIATIVES

¹¹ A. DULLES, *Eucharistic Sharing as an Ecumenical Problem*, p. 158.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 158-160.

In stark contrast to the Ecumenical Directory of 1967 and the Instruction of 1972, issued by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, Bishop Elchinger of Strasbourg took a courageous, pastoral position in his 1972 Instruction on Eucharist hospitality, addressing the spiritual need of ecumenical couples to nourish their love by receiving the Eucharist together. Elchinger extended the notion of serious spiritual need “to include the need to foster the growth of an ecumenical community”¹³. This approach was replicated by some other European bishops.

The *Eucharistic Sharing Guidelines for the Dioceses of Helena and Great Falls-Billings*, Montana, U.S.A., issued in April 1982, likewise showed a remarkable pastoral sensitivity¹⁴. “In our time there are significant events in the lives of individual Christians and their families when spontaneous requests to receive the Eucharist are possible. If we consider the high frequency of marriage between Roman Catholics and other baptized Christians, the fact that many of our people are well informed about other Churches, the extensive sacramental preparation programs which require the participation of parents, and the increasingly favorable ecumenical climate in our dioceses, it is very likely that such requests for sharing the Eucharist will be forthcoming on a variety of occasions, for example, when a baptized Christian of another denomination is: a. a parent of a child baptized within the context of a Mass; b. the parent of a child receiving First Communion within the context of Mass; c. the parent of a child receiving First Communion or Confirmation and has taken part of the child's preparation for the sacraments; d. the spouse in a mixed marriage celebrated with a Nuptial Mass; e. attending a funeral of a relative in the Catholic Church; f. confined in a health care facility; g. subject to some form of institutional confinement; h. living in an ecumenical marriage and wants to celebrate in faith a significant event in the marriage. The aforementioned occasions are not mentioned by way of category for which a general regulation is issued. Each particular request must be evaluated on an individual basis”.

The guidelines then noted that, according to the 1972 Instruction issued by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, it often falls to the bishop of the diocese to make a decision. “He alone will know all the circumstances of particular cases”. The bishops of Montana chose to share this authority with the priests and deacons of their dioceses. “The priest or deacon in the local situation will know best all the implications involved in responding to a request for Eucharistic sharing on an individual basis”.

Later Vatican pronouncements created more room for a pastoral response. Canon 844, § 3-4, of the revised, 1983, Code of Canon Law declares that, beyond danger of death, bishops can judge whether “some other grave necessity” urges reception of the Eucharist by Christians not having full communion with the Catholic Church. The canon lists four conditions: 1) that the person cannot approach a minister of his or her own community for the sacrament desired; 2) that the person ask to receive on his or her own initiative; 3) that the person manifest Catholic faith in the sacrament desired; and 4) that the person be properly disposed.

The *Note on Eucharistic Hospitality with Christians of churches coming from the Reformation in France*, issued in 1983 by the French bishops' Episcopal Commission for

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

¹⁴ *Eucharistic Sharing Guidelines for the Dioceses of Helena and Great Falls-Billings*, 12.04.1982, available online at http://www.dioceseofgfb.org/userfiles/file/Policies/29_Eucharistic%20Sharing%20Guidelines.pdf; accessed 21.07.2011.

Christian Unity, considered conditions under which exceptional Eucharistic hospitality might be envisaged for spouses in ecumenical families¹⁵. Recognizing that such Eucharistic sharing can be “a means of grace”, it spoke of real need and spiritual desire arising from deep, ongoing bonds of personal relationship, shared Eucharistic belief – including Real Presence, and an active engagement in service toward the unity that God wants. The note did not list particular occasions for Eucharistic sharing, but directed that a decision made in conscience be discerned by the local bishop or the priest appointed for ecumenical relations. Ten years later, in 1993, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity issued its *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*¹⁶. It stated that “[i]n general the Catholic Church permits access to its Eucharistic communion and to the sacraments of penance and anointing of the sick, only to those who share its oneness in faith, worship and ecclesial life. For the same reasons, it also recognizes that in certain circumstances, by way of exception, and under certain conditions, access to these sacraments may be permitted, or even commended, for Christians of other Churches and ecclesial Communities” (Section 129). The directory also made explicit reference to the decision about admitting the non-Catholic party to Eucharistic communion at the wedding celebration. It is said to involve “taking into account the particular situation of the reception of the sacrament of Christian marriage by two baptized Christians” (section 159). But section 160 then declared that, “[a]lthough the spouses in a mixed marriage share the sacraments of baptism and marriage, Eucharistic sharing can only be exceptional”. In section 130, the Directory strongly recommends “that the diocesan Bishop, taking into account any norms which may have been established for this matter by the Episcopal Conference or by the Synods of Eastern Catholic Churches, establish general norms for judging situations of grave and pressing need”. In that regard, the French bishops indicated that their earlier Note on Eucharistic Hospitality had already implemented that directive.

In 1995 Pope John Paul II’s encyclical letter, *Ut Unum Sint*, declared “[I]t is a source of joy to note that Catholic ministers are able, in certain particular cases, to administer the Sacraments of the Eucharist, Penance and Anointing of the Sick to Christians who are not in full communion with the Catholic Church but who greatly desire to receive these sacraments, freely. Conversely, in specific cases and in particular circumstances, Catholics too can request these same sacraments from ministers of Churches in which these sacraments are valid. The conditions for such reciprocal reception have been laid down in specific norms; for the sake of furthering ecumenism these norms must be respected” (par. 46)¹⁷. Subsequently, there have been a series of pastoral guidelines regarding Eucharistic hospitality issued by bishops on multiple continents.

¹⁵ COMMISSION ÉPISCOPALE POUR L’UNITÉ DES CHRÉTIENS, *L’hospitalité eucharistique avec les chrétiens des églises de la Réforme en France: Note de la Commission épiscopale pour l’unité des chrétiens aux prêtres et aux fidèles catholiques*, 14.03.1983, available online at <http://cdo-lyon.cef.fr/spip.php?article20>; accessed 21.07.2011.

¹⁶ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 25.03.1993, available online at: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_25031993_principles-and-norms-on-ecumenism_en.html; accessed 21.07.2011.

¹⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *Ut Unum Sint*, 25.05.1995, available online at http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0221/_INDEX.HTM; accessed 21.07.2011.

In 1995, the Archdiocese of Brisbane, Australia, issued *Blessed and Broken: Pastoral Guidelines for Eucharistic Hospitality*¹⁸. Noting “our Church's openness to responding to the spiritual need of other Christians”, the guidelines spoke of special occasions or significant events in the lives of individual Christians and their families. It provided examples of possible spiritual need: “for the partner at a marriage celebrated with a nuptial Mass; for the parent of a child baptized at a Catholic Mass; for the parent of a child receiving confirmation and first holy communion; for the family of the deceased at a funeral Mass”. The guidelines deem it sufficient for the presiding priest to establish, by means of a few simple questions, whether or not the canonical conditions are met. They direct that, when a Christian from another Church makes frequent requests to receive holy communion, there should be a mutual ecumenical deliberation about the case.

In October of 1996, the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, New Mexico, U.S.A., issued *Guidelines for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs*. In section II it noted that the Catholic Church has dramatically changed since 1917 when the old Code of Canon even forbade joining other Christians in prayer. Keeping with the spirit and norms of the Pontifical Council's 1993 *Directory*, “[i]t should be noted that there is a difference between the Code of Canon Law #844, n. 4 (grave necessity) and the New Ecumenical Directory 130 (grave and pressing need). This difference and the context established by the *Directory* indicate that occasional Eucharistic sharing may be both permissible and even commended. The following pastoral situations deserve special consideration: 1. Ministry to the Sick and Dying; 2. Weddings and Funerals; 3. Baptisms and First Communions; 4. Ecumenical Celebrations; 5. Retreats, Cursillos”.

In November of 1996, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in the United States approved a new set of guidelines regarding the reception of communion¹⁹. These replaced the earlier guidelines approved by the Administrative Committee of the NCCB in November 1986. The new guidelines state: “We welcome our fellow Christians to this celebration of the Eucharist as our brothers and sisters ... 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)”. The tone of these guidelines, included in missalettes and other participation aids, is more exclusionary than the statement found at the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris, France: “The bread distributed during mass has a high significance for Christians: It is the body of Christ, their Lord and God. If you do not share our faith in the living presence of Christ in the Eucharistic bread, we ask you not to join your neighbours at communion time”.

In February, 1997, responding to a request from the Council of Churches in Nuremberg, that all member-churches exercise mutual Eucharistic hospitality in the case of interchurch marriages and families, the Ecumenical Commission of the German Bishops' Conference issued

¹⁸ ARCHDIOCESE OF BRISBANE, *Blessed and Broken: Pastoral Guidelines for Eucharistic Hospitality*, 1995, available online at <http://www.litcom.net.au/documents/eucharistichospitality.php>; accessed 21.07.2011.

¹⁹ UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, COMMITTEE ON DIVINE WORSHIP, *Guidelines for the Reception of Communion*, 14.11.1996, available online at <http://www.nccbuscc.org/liturgy/current/intercom.shtml>; accessed 21.07.2011.

*Guidelines for Eucharistic sharing in Interchurch Marriages and Families*²⁰. The guidelines recognized that families in interchurch marriages may experience “serious (spiritual) need” in certain situations. They acknowledge that being separated at the Lord's table may lead to serious risk to the spiritual life and the faith of one or both partners. It may endanger the integrity of the bond that is created in life and faith through marriage. It may lead to an indifference to the sacrament and a distancing from Sunday worship and so from life in the church. It noted that married partners who are endeavoring to build their married life on religious and spiritual foundations are precisely those who suffer by being separated at the Lord's table. It is said to be essential that the church pastorally respond to their particular situation.

The commission declares that the norms for the admitting a non-Catholic Christian to receive communion are grounded in the firm belief of the Catholic Church. The norms state “that in certain circumstances, in exceptional cases and under certain conditions” admission to communion of Christians of other churches and ecclesial communities may be permitted or even commended (Ecumenical Directory 1993, n. 129). In paragraph 2, the guidelines specifically direct that, in situations of pastoral need, spouses in interchurch marriages may be admitted to receive communion in the Catholic Church under certain conditions. Paragraph 5 explains that establishing objective criteria for “serious (spiritual) need” is difficult and can usually only be determined by the minister concerned, in pastoral discussion. In that regard, one should consider whether being separated at the Lord's table places a hurtful burden on the shared married life and faith of the spouses (and their children). By contrast, paragraph 4 cautioned that neither a refusal for all, nor a permission for all spouses who are not Catholics to share in the Eucharist would be appropriate. When full sharing in the Eucharist is granted to the spouse who is not a Catholic, care must be taken that an individual case such as this does not become a general precedent. The guidelines state that, in the ecumenical time before full unity of faith and church communion, “the Roman Catholic Church is convinced that its responsibility is to grant communion at the Lord's table to Christians of other denominations only in exceptional cases”.

In 1998, the Bishops' Conferences of England and Wales, Ireland, and Scotland issued *One Bread, One Body: A Teaching Document on the Eucharist in the Life of the Church, and the Establishment of General Norms on Sacramental Sharing*²¹. It “envisages that a grave and pressing need [for Eucharistic sharing] may be experienced in some mixed marriages”. It allows Eucharistic sharing at unique occasions for joy or sorrow in the life of a family or an individual in which there may be an objectively grave and pressing spiritual need for a person to receive Holy Communion. It insists that “[a] Catholic priest may not make such a decision himself unless duly

²⁰ ÖKUMENE-KOMMISSION DER DEUTSCHEN BISCHOFSSKONFERENZ, *Zur Frage der eucharistischen Gastfreundschaft bei konfessionsverschiedenen Ehen und Familien*, in: *Una Sancta* 52 (1997) 85-88. Text also in ARBEITSGEMEINSCHAFT CHRISTLICHER KIRCHEN IN NÜRNBERG, *Zur Frage der eucharistischen Gastfreundschaft bei konfessionsverschiedenen Ehen und Familien: Eine Problemanzeige: Text und Dokumentation*, 4. Aufl., Nürnberg, Peter Athmann, 2003, pp. 29-32 (available online at <http://www.ack-nuernberg.de/ack.php?problemanzeige.pdf>; accessed 21.07.2011). An English translation is found at <http://www.interchurchfamilies.org/journal/98ja10.shtm>; accessed 21.07.2011.

²¹ BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND & WALES – BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF IRELAND – BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF SCOTLAND, *One Bread, One Body: A Teaching Document on the Eucharist in the Life of the Church, and the Establishment of General Norms on Sacramental Sharing*, 1998, available online at http://ecumenism.net/archive/docu/1998_one_bread_one_body.htm; accessed 21.07.2011.

delegated by his bishop”. That requirement contrasts with the French bishops’ 1983 Note on Eucharistic Hospitality which states that “the specific needs of particular couples” be determined at the local level. It likewise differs from paragraph 5 of the guidelines of the Ecumenical Commission of the German Bishops’ Conference, which states that “ascertaining such a need can as a rule only be done by the minister concerned”.

In 1999, the Diocese of Rockville Center, New York, issued norms regarding *Special Circumstances for the Admission of Other Christians to Communion at Catholic Celebrations of the Eucharist*²². The norms list situations when, with due consideration of canonical norms, “a ‘grave necessity’ may be discerned and Eucharist may be shared with Episcopal or Protestant Christians if all the conditions are met”. The list included 1) Catholic Eucharist in Institutional Settings: People who out of necessity are confined to institutions ... may seek out the comfort and healing of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, from a minister and with a community with whom they share a spiritual kinship ... Their situation may indeed be judged by Catholic ministers as constituting a grave spiritual need ... When in the prudent pastoral judgment of the local pastor all five conditions of canon 844.4 are met, no further permission is needed”. 2) Catholic Funeral Mass: “At a funeral, a Christian spouse, family member, relative or friend of a deceased Catholic might be drawn to Eucharistic communion as a source of strength and consolation in his or her sorrow. This might well be judged as a moment of grace and fulfill the condition of a grave and pressing need ...”. 3) Catholic Nuptial Mass: “A decision as to whether the spouse who is not Catholic may be admitted to the Eucharist is to be made according to applicable general norms, ‘taking into account the particular situation of the sacrament of Christian marriage by two baptized Christians.’ The spouse who is not Catholic already shares with the Catholic spouse the sacraments of baptism and marriage. There may be an occasion where the spouse who is not Catholic desires to receive the Eucharist at the nuptial Mass. A spiritual need constituting a ‘grave necessity’ may indeed be present on such an important occasion”. Because of the very public nature of the wedding ceremony, the diocese requires that in such cases a specified process be followed.

In March 2001, the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, Australia, issued *Real Yet Imperfect: Pastoral Guidelines for Sacramental Sharing*²³. The guidelines acknowledge that “[t]he situation for eucharistic sharing between spouses in mixed marriages (interchurch families) has been specially noted in the *Directory for Ecumenism* (#145-151). Those who attend Mass together in a Catholic Church, present a unique case in that their baptismal unity has been further sealed by the Sacrament of Marriage. Conscious of the pain of the present division within the body of Christ, both may experience a real need to express their unity by receiving the Eucharist whenever they attend Mass together. If this occurs infrequently, both may receive the Eucharist provided that it is the spontaneous desire of the non-Catholic spouse to do so, and provided that the non-Catholic

²² DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE, *Special Circumstances for the Admission of Other Christians to Communion at Catholic Celebrations of the Eucharist in the Diocese of Rockville Centre*, 28.11.1999, available online at <http://www.drvc.org/the-chancery/special-circumstances-for-the-admission-of-other-christians-to-communion-at-catholic-celebrations-of-the-eucharist-in-the-diocese-of-rockville-centre.html>; accessed 21.07.2011.

²³ DIOCESE OF MAITLAND-NEWCASTLE, *Real Yet Imperfect: Pastoral Guidelines for Sacramental Sharing*, 03.2001, available online at http://www.mn.catholic.org.au/about/policies/policies_real_yet_imperfect.htm; accessed 21.07.2011.

spouse professes Catholic faith in the sacrament and is properly disposed. This need may arise on the occasions listed above, and other special occasions known to the family. If this occurs frequently, the non-Catholic spouse may request permission to receive the Eucharist every time s/he attends Mass with his/her spouse, but joint pastoral care by the clergy of both denominations should be offered to help the person understand the significance of such requests. Cases where the only Church the non-Catholic partner attends is the Catholic Church should be referred to the bishop through the parish priest”.

The final, second revision of the *Directory on Ecumenism for Southern Africa* was issued by the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference in January 2003²⁴. This version followed two previous editions of 1998 and 2000, and incorporated revisions requested by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. (The first edition dated February 26, 1998 drew critical attention after U.S. President Bill Clinton, a Southern Baptist, received communion at a Mass in Soweto, South Africa, in March 1998.) Citing the Pontifical Council’s 1993 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (section 129), sections 6.3.1-7 present a summary of governing principles for sacramental sharing and the general rule about shared worship, while noting that “circumstances can exist in which such a sharing becomes not only permissible but commendable”. The circumstances are said to include “cases of grave and pressing need determined by proper authorities”. Conditions that must be met for such sharing are likewise spelled out. In regard to the condition that the person admitted to such sharing “must manifest Catholic faith in the sacrament,” section 6.3.8 notes “that there is a crucial distinction between the substance of the faith and the way in which it is expressed. What is required is unity in the substance of the faith. Moreover, in judging whether or not such unity is present, one could consult those ecumenical agreements that display the existence of a substantial agreement in faith, while recognising that such statements are not binding on the Catholic Church until they have been approved by appropriate ecclesiastical authorities (cf. *Directory on Ecumenism* 178). But in the final analysis what is required is that the individual requesting admission to the Eucharist must personally manifest Catholic faith in the sacrament”.

The *Directory* goes on to make recommendations that are said to be “permissive, not prescriptive, since they clarify what can be done within the framework of Church discipline”. Section 6.5.3 states: “As regards the Eucharist, a spiritual need can arise for a Christian from another church or Ecclesial Community when attending a Eucharistic celebration for special feast or event or when accompanying his or her Catholic marriage partner at Sunday Mass”.

The first version of the *Directory*, issued in January 1998, said that, in making a judgment about unity in faith, “due cognizance must be taken of those ecumenical agreements that display the existence of a substantial agreement in faith”²⁵. One example of such an agreement is that which was reached by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission regarding the Eucharist. In the light of that agreement, “members of the Anglican Communion may be presumed to share the essentials of Eucharistic faith with us” (section VI.A.8). The 2000 edition and the final 2003 *Directory* declare that “such statements are not binding on the Catholic Church

²⁴ SOUTHERN AFRICAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE, *Ecumenical Directory for Southern Africa: Final Text*, in *Origins* 33 (2003) 91-96.

²⁵ BISHOPS OF SOUTHERN AFRICA, *Directory on Ecumenism for Southern Africa*, in *Origins* 27 (1998) 505-510.

until they have been approved by appropriate ecclesiastical authorities”. The 2003 Directory likewise makes no reference to Eucharistic sharing as expressing “the degree of unity that the participating Christians already have with each other (1998 edition, VI.B.3)” or “the real but imperfect communion that already exists between that Christian and the Catholic Church (2000 edition, 6.5.3)”²⁶.

The first version of 1998 further stated: “A unique situation exists as regards spouses of a mixed marriage who attend Mass together in a Catholic Church. The uniqueness consists in the fact that their baptismal unity in Christ has been still further sealed by the sacramentality of their marriage bond. Hence both may experience a real need to express that unity by receiving Holy Communion whenever they attend Mass together. If such couples attend Mass together only infrequently, then they may both receive Communion on those occasions, provided that it is the spontaneous desire of the non-Catholic partner to do so. In cases where both parties attend Mass together virtually every Sunday, then the non-Catholic party may approach the local Ordinary through the parish priest for permission to receive Communion every time he or she attends Mass with his or her spouse. In all the above cases it is assumed that the non-Catholic lives devotedly within his or her tradition. Cases where the only Church that the non-Catholic partner attends is the Catholic Church must be referred to the local Ordinary through the parish priest” (VI.B.3.b). The revised version of 2000 kept the first two sentences ending with marriage bond and added “a bond that of its very nature seeks to be expressed and deepened by the unity of the couple at the eucharistic table. Hence a spouse in such a marriage, now commonly called an interchurch marriage, could well experience a serious spiritual need to receive holy communion on occasions when he or she accompanies the family to a Catholic Mass” (7.13). The final version of 2003 completely dropped the paragraph.

The *Pastoral Notes for Sacramental Sharing with other Christians in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon*, Canada, issued on August 22, 2008, had been reviewed by The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and found worthy²⁷. That fact buttresses the Saskatoon document’s application of the Pontifical Council’s Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism, namely, that by “acknowledging that the other Christian party to an Interchurch marriage may be permitted to receive Communion at a wedding Mass and in exceptional cases afterwards”, the Holy See thereby broadened the category of grave need “to include the spiritual need of a Christian spouse who wants to participate fully in the Eucharist at his or her wedding Mass and other important occasion in the family’s life. All the terms of the Policy are subject to broad interpretation: ‘regular access to their own minister’, ‘serious spiritual need’, ‘manifest catholic faith’, ‘proper disposition’, ‘occasions of ecclesial and familial significance’”. The document goes on to observe that “Interchurch marriages are a particular life situation for many Christians whose communion is rooted in baptism and strengthened by the sacramental nature of their Christian marriage. They require special consideration and pastoral sensitivity. A heavier burden of the pain of church divisions is felt by these committed families”.

²⁶ BISHOPS OF SOUTHERN AFRICA, *Revised Directory on Ecumenism for Southern Africa*, in *Origins* 29 (2000) 733-737.

²⁷ DIOCESE OF SASKATOON, *Pastoral Notes for Sacramental Sharing with other Christians in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon*, 22.08.2008, available online at <http://www.saskatoonrcdiocese.com/pages/ecumenism.cfm>; accessed 21.07.2011.

The *Notes* then state that “[t]he partner who is a baptized Anglican or Protestant in an Interchurch marriage may wish to receive Holy Communion in a Catholic Church on occasions of ecclesial or familial significance, when he or she experiences a serious spiritual need. In such a case the normal canon law requirements are in effect. Prior consultation with the pastor will assist such a person to consider all the criteria for proper discernment. In light of such discernment, the spouses themselves will recognize occasions when they have a strong spiritual need to receive Communion, and the conditions are met”. It adds that “[t]here should be special meaning to such occasions; they are not meant to become routine practice”. Examples of such special occasions are then provided: “a) their marriage and subsequent anniversaries celebrated with a Mass; b) the Baptism, First Communion, Confirmation, graduation Mass and wedding or ordination of a child, grandchild or close family member; c) major Feast days: Easter, Pentecost and Christmas; d) times of serious illness and/or approaching death; e) funerals of their partner, child, or grandchild; f) at retreats, Marriage Encounters, Parish Missions and religious workshops attended with their partner; g) other special circumstances in consultation with the pastor”.

“The baptismal and marital oneness of an Interchurch marriage may draw a particular couple, in a singular way, toward further sacramental sharing as a sign of deep unity in Christ and as a source of grace for their marriage. Such oneness offers a particularly strong basis for exceptional admission to the sacrament of the Eucharist”.

VI. NEED FOR A NEW MINDSET – ECUMENICAL “DOMESTIC CHURCHES” AS ECCLESIAL RESOURCE

Sadly, despite the many initiatives described above, there are still bishops who tell non-Catholic spouses that they may not receive the Eucharist at the First Communion of a daughter or son because that occasion is special but not exceptional. Karl Rahner’s earlier observations thus remain on the mark: “[t]he basic question of what our attitude should be to unity in the sphere of ritual observance seems ... to remain unresolved ... since the prior question of what unity of faith can really be achieved, demanded, or looked for in the future remains obscure”²⁸. Moreover, many questions bearing upon so-called “mixed [ecumenical or inter-church] marriages” have still not received sufficient attention. “In practice there is often a complete failure to draw the necessary distinction between that which pertains to genuinely divine law and that which pertains merely to ecclesiastical law. Over and above this, it is often wrongly assumed that everything in this sphere depends on the free consent of the Church’s authorities, and there is a failure to recognize that the matter itself and the concrete circumstances prevailing today impose their own norms and limitations upon the Church’s authorities”²⁹.

In a 1971 lecture entitled “Ecumenical Theology in the Future,” Rahner noted that “we have Churches which are separated from one another institutionally and in terms of religious sociology”. He added that “in terms of faith the same Churches are at one so far as the majority of their members are concerned”. They are separated “only so far as minor groups within them are concerned, groups with a higher degree of theological awareness, and so constituted

²⁸ K. RAHNER, *The Congregation of the Faith and the Commission of Theologians*, in IDEM: *Theological Investigations*, v. 14: *Ecclesiology: Questions in the Church, The Church in the World*, trans. D. Bourke, New York, Seabury, 1976, p. 114.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 113-114.

particularly by officials and theologians”³⁰. Ecumenical dialogues usually gather such ecclesial representatives, ministerial office holders or theologians. Drawing upon doctrinal, liturgical and spiritual sources, they probe the nuances of diverse terminology, and seek to clarify the criteria and boundaries of legitimate diversity.

Rahner observed that “[t]he separation that is truly based on faith, which should correspond to the institutional separation, is in no sense present in the great majority of the members of all these churches”. The reasons why most belong to *either* this *or* that Church are the outcome of a long historical line of succession. “But properly speaking these reasons are not covered by those decisions of faith which could justify a separation between the Churches”³¹.

In his 1971 lecture, Rahner proposed a converse possibility, namely, forming “a Church which was *single* in institutional terms and in terms of religious sociology in which of course the plurality of creeds upheld by those maintaining theologically distinct doctrines would be recognized as legitimate within this institutional unity”³². The shared life experience that Rahner proposed for the macro-ecumenical situation is already a feature of ecumenical families. At the micro-ecumenical level, the sacramental married life within ecumenical households may be seen and studied as an experiential/experimental domestic Church in which the baptized spouses live in mutual fraternal exchange of all aspects of their life, so that the previous history and experience of their churches separated earlier become effective and recognized as legitimate in their unity of life together.

As Fries remarks, the task regarding inter-confessional marriages is certainly not completed. “An aid and a solution are possible only when such marriages become more and more a form and expression of *Oikoumene* in which communality in faith is realized and differences treated with respect. The partners can and should be mutually enriched. From confessionally-different marriages there should be more and more confessionally-unifying marriages”³³.

If, as Paul Murray has proposed, “receptive ecumenism” involves asking “whether we can live difference for mutual flourishing” and “show signs of this in ... relations with ... close but nevertheless separated brothers and sisters in Christ”, the ecumenical family is an existing micro-model of “living and working together to be sacramental of – a living witness to – difference well-lived” and “correlatively learning from and receiving of each other’s particular gifts”³⁴. It reflects an already existing “strategy for living between the times” of our present ecclesial disunity and the fulfillment of the hope for being one. The life of ecumenical families should be a contributing, integral component of ecumenical dialogue. They are an experiential resource in which an ecumenical relationship is being lived through the unitive sacramental love of spouses who with their children form an ecumenical “domestic Church”. As the 1993 Pontifical Council’s *Directory* acknowledges, quoting John Paul II’s *Familiaris consortio* (78), these marriages “contain numerous elements that could well be made good use of and develop both for their intrinsic value and for the contribution they can make to the ecumenical movement” (145).

³⁰ K. RAHNER, *Ecumenical Theology in the Future*, *Ibid.*, p. 268.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 268.

³³ H. FRIES, *Suffering from the Church*, p. 59.

³⁴ P.D. MURRAY, *Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning Receiving Gifts for Our Needs*, in *Louvain Studies* 33 (2008) 30-45, pp. 31 and 33.

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THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD AND
LOCAL HOUSEHOLDS

REVISITING THE DOMESTIC CHURCH

THOMAS KNIEPS-PORT LE ROI – GERARD MANNION – PETER DE MEY



Thomas Knieps-Port le Roi
Gerard Mannion
Peter De Mey (eds.)

The Household of God and Local Households Revisiting the Domestic Church

In the growing body of theological and spiritual literature on the family over recent years there is hardly any publication that does not explicitly refer to the “domestic church”. In spite of this broad interest, however, the concept itself today still remains

unclear. Where the model of the “church in miniature” is not used to further align the family with the hierarchical ecclesiastical institution, it simply serves as a pious metaphor to instil some spiritual dignity to the Christian household. Likewise, theological treatises insist that the church is not a family and so the domestic church has remained a marginal and exotic note in ecclesiology as well. One may wonder, however, whether small communities, as families are, have indeed so little to tell the “new family of God” to which Christ has called his disciples to belong. Can the churches afford to neglect the specific competences that families have when it comes to serving and sharing with each other, to dealing with differences and otherness of its members (be they related to gender, age, ethnicity, or religious conviction), and to encountering God in ordinary life with its everyday ties, duties and responsibilities? This volume is intended to critically revisit the notion of domestic church and to explore both its pitfalls and potential for the life of the churches and of families.

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