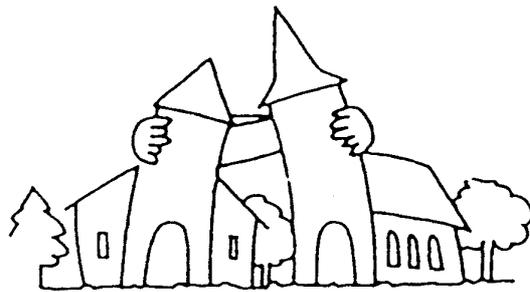


“DOUBLE BELONGING”

“Double belonging” is a term which has been used by some interchurch couples and families to describe their lived experience in their marriage and family life. We use it for lack of a better one. Here a Roman Catholic wife from Cornwall explains what “double belonging” has meant for her family.



For us, double belonging focuses very sharply what it is to be joined by the sacrament of matrimony. Our marriage means that we share each other without reservation, giving to each other our strengths and attractive qualities as well as our faults and weaknesses — conferring on each other an opportunity for growth and liberation because we live in an environment of constant love and commitment. Just as part of us is our extended families, our friends and respective communities, and of course our church families and traditions, so also for each of us the welcome into all of these communities has been a consequence of our union, and an overwhelmingly enriching one: Robert has discovered a perspective of the Roman Church which goes beyond the English experience both in terms of geographical and historical diversity to something much more culturally varied and developmental in nature; as for me, I have discovered the joy of a Church much more rooted in my own Cornish and Celtic culture and appreciate greatly its immediacy even in the small communities of this place — the Church of England is much more locally present. I have also been able to develop my relationship with Our Lady more fully in sharing attitudes which are different from the piety in which I was brought up.

But what level of belonging do we each acquire by virtue of our marriage? Robert is still an Anglican and I am still a Roman Catholic and we would not pretend to have become the other. But just as neither of us becomes genetically part of each other's family and yet find that we are not entirely separate either, our respective church communities likewise increasingly become something without which we are incomplete as worshipping and committed Christians.

It is indeed true that we bring our churches' divisions into our marriage just as we bring our other sins, but it is our experience that the grace of the sacrament by which we live on a daily basis gives us a perspective on those divisions which enables us truly to know a degree of unity which is far, far greater than the areas which divide us. Inevitably then for us this unity is passed on to our son. The love, differences, misunderstandings which we share as a couple, in our extended families and our church families are all part of the legacy which we pass on. It is difficult for us to see how it could be otherwise. Within this context we feel that our spiritual need to share sacramentally is both serious and a special case. In the reality of our marriage God joins us in both body and spirit and so we feel that this sharing becomes essential, as an expression of unity already achieved as well as food for the ongoing journey. I am sure that others will claim similar exceptional status, although it is difficult to imagine large numbers coming forward with such restricted conditions in place.

We understand that the Roman Catholic Church claims that 'the one Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church' (1993 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, n. 17), but also that 'Human folly and human sinfulness however have at times opposed the unifying purpose of the Holy Spirit and weakened that power of love which overcomes inherent tensions in ecclesial life' (n. 18).



Perhaps interchurch couples can live a prophetic witness which is more consonant with that unifying purpose as we work to overcome those tensions within our domestic church and beyond, bearing more of the pain in being privileged to experience the vision of unity a little more fully.