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Review: 'Double Belonging: Interchurch Families and Christian Unity'

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Double Belonging: Interchurch Families and Christian Unity. By George Kilcourse. New York: Paulist, 1992. viii + 179 pages. \$11.95 (paper).

In this book George Kilcourse, a priest of the Archdiocese of Louisville and professor of theology at Bellarmine College, addresses forthrightly a growing ecumenical reality. According to one set of statistics, 36 percent of Roman Catholics aged 18-29 have married non-Catholics, whereas 14.4 percent of their parents, aged 50 and over, did so. This reality gives rise to a number of questions regarding the best way to preserve family unity in this situation. Does one spouse adopt the other's religious tradition? Do both agree to attend no church? Or do they decide to have an interchurch marriage, with each spouse practicing in his or her church? It is the last option that this book envisions.

The author uses the term "interchurch marriage" because "mixed marriage" can describe marriages between people of different races as well as different religions, and "interfaith marriage" can include marriages where only one spouse is a practicing Christian. The interchurch family is one in which "the wife and husband each participates in his or her respective church, and to various degrees in one another's church; and each takes a conscientious active role in the religious education of his or her children. The children find themselves at home in the church of either parent" (1).

The author proceeds to address many of the issues that interchurch couples must confront. Three of these can be noted here. First, there are the "hurdles" that must be faced before the marriage: interchurch marriage preparation, dispensations, the promises regarding the religious upbringing of the children, and the wedding liturgy. Kilcourse outlines sensitive pastoral approaches that respect the partners' desire to maintain their identity within their respective church traditions, as they strive to meet these challenges.

An important issue that interchurch couples must face is the religious education of their children. The fact that parents are the primary religious educators of their children has implications for interchurch families. The children can be provided unique ecumenical experiences that can be integrated into their ongoing process of conversion and their stages of faith development. These experiences can also serve as "a potent antidote to the cultural lures of individualism" (91).

The matter of sacraments is a significant concern for interchurch families. Kilcourse provides a number of suggestions that can help such families approach baptism, first eucharist, and confirmation. He bases much of his treatment of these topics on the work done by the British Association of Interchurch Families, and articles in the French *Foyers Mixtes* publications.

Kilcourse has presented us with an excellent volume that sensitizes the reader to the complexities of an interchurch marriage. The author's suggestions are based on sound ecumenical theology and insightful pastoral concern. The book may be a bit too deep and technical for the average undergraduate marriage course, but would make a good contribution to any ecumenical treatment of marriage for religious studies majors and graduate students.