

PRESS RELEASE

JOINT PRESS RELEASE ISSUED THROUGH THE VATICAN SECRETARIAT FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY IN ROME AND THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS IN LONDON.

EMBARGOED UNTIL 00.30 HOURS  
FRIDAY 26TH APRIL 1968

JOINT ANGLICAN/ROMAN CATHOLIC SUB-COMMISSION ON THE THEOLOGY OF MARRIAGE AND ITS APPLICATION TO MIXED MARRIAGES

The Joint Anglican/Roman Catholic Sub-Commission on Mixed Marriages met for the first time at St. George's House, Windsor Castle from Tuesday, 16th April to Thursday, 18th April 1968.

Members of the Sub-Commission

Roman Catholic Members

- The Most Revd. Ernest L. Unterkoefler, Bishop of Charleston, South Carolina, U.S.A.
- The Most. Revd. Langton D. Fox, Auxiliary Bishop of Menevia, Llanelly, Carmarthenshire, South Wales
- The Most Revd. Francis J. Spence, Auxiliary Bishop to the Military Vicar, Canadian Forces Headquarters, Ottawa, Canada
- The Revd. Professor P.F. Cremin, D.D., I.U.D., St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, Ireland.

Anglican Members

- The Most Revd. Edwin Morris, formerly Archbishop of Wales.
- The Most Revd. George O. Simms, Archbishop of Dublin
- The Right Revd. Donald H.V. Hallock, Bishop of Milwaukee (Episcopal Church in the U.S.A.)
- The Revd. Professor Gordon R. Dunstan, Frederick Denison Maurice Professor of Moral and Social Theology at King's College, London

Secretaries

- The Very Revd. Canon W.A. Purdy (Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity)
- The Revd. Canon J.R. Satterthwaite (Church of England Council on Foreign Relations)

An apology for absence was received from the Most Revd. Dr. Edwin Morris, D.D., formerly Archbishop of Wales.

His Grace the Archbishop of Dublin and His Excellency the Bishop of Charleston were unanimously elected chairmen.

Canon Dunstan gave a short paper, tracing the course of events that led to this Sub-Commission having before it a document entitled "Mixed Marriages" which had been prepared by a group of Roman Catholic theologians and canonists at the instance of the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity for discussion with members of non-Roman Churches (including Orthodox) brought together by the Faith and Order Department of the World Council of Churches. The discussions took place at Nemi from 26th February to the 4th March, 1967.

This document was accepted as a basis for discussion by this Sub-Commission.

Bishop Spence presented a paper he had prepared setting out the Canon Law on marriage insofar as it concerns mixed marriages, indicating the history of the legislation up to and including the discussion of the subject in the Synod of Bishops in October, 1967.

The indissolubility of marriage was discussed and explanations were invited and given of the Anglican practice of admitting to Holy Communion certain members of their Church who have been divorced in civil courts and have remarried. Whilst it was explained that the practice in the Church of England (as distinct from the other Provinces of the Anglican Communion) is affected by Statute Law, it was made clear that the general principle governing Anglican practice was to refuse the Marriage Service in church to persons thus remarried, in witness to and in safeguard of the integrity of the Christian doctrine of marriage. The concessions of accepting second marriage and of eventually admitting those remarried to Holy Communion was dictated by pastoral concern. Roman Catholics welcomed the assurance that an Anglican priest would always require of people entering marriage that they should do so with a full and unconditional intention of lifelong and exclusive fidelity.

The Sub-Commission began a comparison of Anglican treatment of nullity with the Roman Catholic.

It emerged from the discussion that although the Reformation formularies in particular might suggest a divergence between

Roman Catholics and Anglicans as to the sacramental status of marriage, in fact the two Churches agree in recognizing marriage as a sign covenanted by Christ as an instrument of His grace, as expounded in St. Paul's nuptial symbolism.

It was felt that a distinction should be drawn between (a) general teaching which the Church should give concerning the undesirability of mixed marriages; (b) the pastoral advice to Christians who are contemplating, but have not yet committed themselves to, a mixed marriage; and (c) the provision to be made when they have either determined upon, or entered into a mixed marriage. It is in situation (c) that the duty to educate children in the Roman Catholic faith is circumscribed by other duties, e.g. to preserve the unity of the family. It leaves open the question whether morally a Roman Catholic may voluntarily enter into a situation in which he foresees he will be so circumscribed. Opinions on this question varied with estimates of the dangers involved in the present day situation.

Discussion also brought out that it would be valuable to both sides to have fuller information about the actual exercise of present marriage discipline in both churches.

Considerable attention was given to the problems raised by the canonical requirements concerning the Roman Catholic upbringing of children of mixed marriages, especially in those cases where undertakings about this are unacceptable to the non-Roman Catholic party on the grounds of conscience. It was agreed that all serious proposals for solving this problem and all contributions to and designs for pastoral guidance in such situations should be carefully and sympathetically considered.

Towards this and other further studies the Commission felt stimulated and encouraged by the fact that it was able to agree in formulating three fundamental theological principles on the basis of which future progress might be made. These concern the unity conferred by baptism, the unity conferred by marriage and the pastoral and disciplinary consequences of these.

Members unanimously recorded their gratitude to His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury for so generously acting as host to the meeting and to the Warden and staff of St. George's House, Windsor, for what they did to make it enjoyable as well as fruitful.