

ARCJPCNAG

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PROPOSED PASTORAL GUIDELINES FOR INTER-CHRISTIAN MARRIAGES

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(This paper was prepared for discussion at Detroit, October 1968, by the Mission and Worship Section of the Joint Roman Catholic/Presbyterian and Reformed Conversation Group. It is an exploration of a possible solution to the problems posed by marriages between christians of different religious heritages.)

To anyone engaged in dialogue among christians, whether locally or nationally, it is increasingly clear that Pope Paul's marriage instruction of March 1966 (providing in a union between two christians of diverse denominations for some modification of the promises concerning the rearing of all the children in the Catholic faith and for a limited participation in the nuptial ceremony of non-Roman Catholic clergy) has only served to intensify Protestant frustration over the present handling of the so-called 'mixed marriages' in the Roman Code of Canon Law. Because the new regulations are proving an obstacle rather than an aid to efforts at christian unity, Roman Catholics who are aware of the pastoral dimensions of this problem have a duty in conscience to bring forth suggestions for the ending of the impasse. What follows is an effort at such a solution, offered for consideration to ecumenists and to the competent Roman canonical authorities. That it is acceptable to Protestant christians has been evidenced at a national conversation with the Reformed Churches meeting at Detroit in the fall of 1968.

and Roman Catholics

It is now abundantly clear that the contemporary Roman Catholic discipline on inter-christian marriages is not satisfactory. Whatever disadvantages may be seen in changing that discipline, it is simple honesty to recognise that large numbers of Roman Catholic christians are not attending to it. Much too frequently a Roman Catholic and a Protestant, contemplating matrimony deliberately avoid contact with

either of their churches lest they be discouraged by the clergy. As a result, they receive no pastoral counselling prior to marriage and precious little thereafter. Serious enough as this is with reference to the couple, it is catastrophic with reference to their offspring. Far too many children are reared without any real connection with the christian faith because their parents have found the denominational issue impossible.

The present writer is a convinced Roman Catholic. He is not indifferent to the high value of his faith. But he is convinced that the overriding question today is to assist the multitudes who are not receiving pastoral help in preparing for marriage and the larger multitudes who are growing up bereft of a christian underpinning to their lives.

It is realism to recognise that all the censures of Canon Law will not prevent two christians of separate churches who love one another from marrying. Wisdom, therefore, indicates that every thing be done to make such inter-christian unions succeed as christian, i.e., as a sign of the love of Christ for His Church. This is not beyond our present strength if both partners and clergy adopt a genuinely positive attitude. What is needed on the couple's part is that each be truly committed to his own system of belief and yet be authentically open to the values expressed in the tradition of the spouse-to-be. Ordinarily, this will imply that each has already enjoyed empathic experience of the faith and worship of the other. There should be no hesitancy in the man's continuing to broaden his knowledge of the woman's faith and in the woman's enlarging her understanding of the man's. What is needed on the side of the clergy is the frank recognition that inter-christian marriages are here to stay.

To tolerate them begrudgingly is to lose the golden opportunity of building here and now a bridge between divided christians that may lead ultimately to the unity of the churches.

BEFORE MARRIAGE

When two christians of different traditions begin seriously to consider marriage, it is advisable for them to approach together the clergy of the two churches. From each cleric they may expect a clear understanding of the thought and requirements of his own communion on the contracting and living out of the marital sacrament. Here, too, they are brought face to face with what their churches see as their duty in the religious education of prospective offspring. Only against such a background of sound information, requiring, perhaps, repeated counselling with clergymen whether separately or in joint sessions, can they seriously decide how and where they wish to be married and in which christian framework they will rear their children.

Spouses-to-be should not have to be anguished over the how and the where of an inter-christian marriage. (It should be solemnized by the clergy of the two churches acting jointly and equally.) ~~And~~ In cultures having the usage, it should ordinarily be celebrated in the church where the bride worships, <sup>with the priestly participation of the priest of the bride's father or the priest of the groom's father.</sup> On this score, there should not be hesitancy in changing the canonical discipline so that the contracting couple be spared needless torment.

In the more difficult question of the upbringing of the children a decision should normally be reached prior to the marriage. It should always permit all the children to be raised in one faith, thus obviating the boys going to one church and the girls to another. But in deciding

which faith should be followed, several alternatives have to be looked at.

- 1) Where each of the spouses-to-be is personally convinced that all the children must be nurtured in his own church and neither sees a way of conceding to the other's church there is an impasse which <sup>might</sup> <sup>be</sup> ~~is~~ best avoided by deciding against marriage.
- 2) Where the conscience of one dictates that the children follow in his faith and where the conscience of the other <sup>does</sup> <sup>not</sup> <sup>feel</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>same</sup> <sup>imperative,</sup> <sup>then</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>offspring</sup> <sup>should</sup> <sup>be</sup> <sup>reared</sup> <sup>in</sup> <sup>accord</sup> <sup>with</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>conscience</sup> <sup>of</sup> <sup>the</sup> <sup>former.</sup>
- 3) Where neither partner feels himself duty bound to transmit his own religious tradition to ~~his~~ children, an attempt should be made to determine which is the more <sup>committed</sup> practical christian and to form the offspring in that stronger heritage.
- 4) Where there is no appreciable difference in the religious commitment of the couple, priority should be given to the woman's faith on the ground that normally the wife and mother is more intimately involved in the nurturing of the children. In options 3) and 4) it must be stressed that they are only operable when the conscience of the other partner is at peace in making the concession.

Upon the fiancés having reached their decision, the need arises of sharing this with their families and their pastors. Often this may be difficult to do with serenity, for relatives and clergy may regard the agreement (or an aspect of it) a dereliction of duty. Should their decision be challenged, the couple should seriously attend to all the criticisms. If either finds himself wavering as to its rectitude, this is evidence enough that the conviction is not yet sound. Only when their decision can be sustained in



Similarly the unsk. person should ~~similarly~~ do all in his power  
to uphold the unity of the marriage ~~and~~ as one <sup>part</sup> function of his  
duty to communicate the gospel of X<sup>rist</sup> life to ~~the~~ family.

PROPOSED PASTORAL GUIDELINES

to the beauty of a life-long endeavor whereby two persons, diverse in sex and in religious orientation, so blend as truly to become one flesh and one spirit.

AT THE MARRIAGE

*in* [ Unless the nuptial rite take the form of a Eucharist (with necessary attention to the problem of intercommunion), it would seem fitting to an inter-christian marriage that it have as its prelude either on the day of the wedding or on the Sunday preceding, a public form of worship in which both spouses may conscientiously participate. If this public worship be the Eucharist, the couples should seriously inform themselves as to what their churches say on the shaping of the sacrament and form their consciences in fidelity to their traditions.]

The actual wedding ceremony should ~~jointly~~ <sup>normally</sup> be conducted by the ~~clergy~~ <sup>pastor</sup> of the ~~contracting partners~~ <sup>parish</sup> and normally in the ~~parish of the bride~~ <sup>parish of the bride</sup>. ~~A true~~ <sup>pastor</sup> equality of ministry should be exercised on such an occasion. ~~Whatever changes~~ <sup>in Canon Law</sup> are needed for this authorization should undoubtedly be made. ~~And whatever steps must be taken to provide for these situations an approved marriage rite of uncontested validity in ~~all~~ <sup>both</sup> traditions should equally be authorized.~~ To evidence the equality of ministries in ecumenical marriages, one of the clerics ~~might take the introductory portion and the other the concluding prayers and benediction.~~ <sup>the groom's pastor</sup> At the interchange of vows, the groom's pastor fittingly put the formula to him and the bride's pastor the formula to her, for the interim each using his own ritual. The blessing of rings ~~should~~ <sup>when it takes place</sup> be done jointly by the pastors as should the proclamation that man and woman are now husband and wife. And it is suitable that some amplification be introduced into the present rituals to call attention to the symbolism of an inter-christian marriage as a forecast of the eventual unity of christians. Because this unity has not yet been achieved, the records of the ceremony should be preserved in the archives of the two cooperating parishes with the notation that the ceremony has validity in each

of the faith-communities.

To make this joint service as meaningful as possible, every persuasion should be employed by each of the clergymen to insure that the entire families of both bride and groom attend the nuptials and join joyfully in the subsequent reception.

Thus the way to christian unity is paved by small beginnings.

Add para  
re. H.C.  
later.

AFTER THE CEREMONY

That problems confront married couples is everywhere evident. Pastors find this among the faithful who wed within their own tradition. They find it, too, often with special overtones, in families of mixed religious background. But here a clergyman is sometimes at a loss since he is not fully cognizant of the attitudes and needs of the christian not of his own communion. Where counselling is in order in such households it is wise to suggest that the spouses arrange to meet jointly with the clergy of the two heritages. In cooperation the wisdom of both churches can be brought to the problem. If lasting aid is to be obtained, however, both clergy and both spouses must show empathy to the advice from the other side. ~~Often this can be fortified by resort to the good offices of the kin of the couple if the in-laws have accepted the union graciously.~~

For their own part, partners in ~~an~~<sup>the</sup> ~~ecumenical~~<sup>in the home</sup> marriage will help their togetherness by adopting the custom of ~~home~~ worship. Grace at meals and prayer in common, taken from each of the heritages, should have daily place in inter-christian households. On Sundays, indeed, husband and wife ~~will~~<sup>may feel bound to</sup> attend services in ~~different~~<sup>their respective churches</sup> ~~communities~~, but they should not forgo <sup>usually</sup> the experience of ~~sharing~~<sup>worship</sup> each other's ~~rites~~<sup>prayers</sup>. In addition, a common enjoyment of the social activities of their respective congregations can only enrich their life together. Thus the ideal to be commended is full fidelity to the faith and practice of one's own tradition enlarged by a wide acquaintance with the christian experience of the other partner.

With the birth of a child, the religious needs of a couple now be-



come the concern of a family. Where prior to marriage agreement had been reached as to the faith in which the children are to be reared, this should now be implemented, unless, indeed, in the interim there has been some basic change in the religious commitments of the couple. Where such a decision has not yet been made, then it will have to be faced with the first offspring, ~~using the norms suggested above.~~ Whenever and however the decision comes, all subsequent children should be reared according to the same pattern, for to provide one religious heritage for the boys and another for the girls is to cast the family in confusion.

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*Obst*

~~With churches practicing infant baptism, the commitment to rear a child in a specific faith involves arrangements for its baptizing. This means the use of a definite liturgical rite and, normally, the ministry of a single clergyman. Both parents and both the maternal and paternal families should endeavor to be present at the ceremony. Fortunately, even in an as-yet-divided christendom, churches commonly recognize the validity of each other's baptism. In this validity the parent whose heritage the child is not embracing should come to discover deep comfort. Far deeper comfort could be supplied for all christians if only the various churches would see the pressing need of extending approval to a common baptismal rite. This is not a difficult task since there is immediately to hand the text of <sup>the</sup> third-century baptismal formula in St. Hippolytus's Apostolic Tradition. Here, in a period antedating christian divisions, is a formula of undoubted antiquity. Its official use today would speak to divided christendom of how much they still hold in common.~~

~~In homes that are striving to be ecumenical a para-liturgu within the domestic walls following upon the church baptism makes good sense. In a manner fashioned by themselves, the parents jointly dedicate their child to Christ and with all their kinfolk celebrate a love-feast in gratitude for the infant's incorporation into the people of God. From year to year this might well be renewed, thus giving familial expression to its concern with the rearing of its offspring and ultimately extending to children the~~

\*

validity administered

Concerning H.A. it is presupposed that <sup>the</sup> baptism is a sacrament of the H. Trinity and its matter is baptism into the Church of God where the Church in which the rite is administered is of secondary importance to this. The decision as to where the baptism should take place ought to rest with the named congregations, taking into account their loyalties to <sup>their</sup> respective ecclesiastical obligations.

~~opportunity of ratifying their own baptism in a context of unity and~~  
~~concord.~~ <sup>When (Whenever & However)</sup>

Because true commitment should attend baptism, the growing child needs sound training in the belief and practice of the church whose faith-community he has entered. <sup>^</sup>To give no more than superficial contact with the church of his christening is to weaken the whole structure of his life. Yet he is offspring also of a parent whose religious heritage he has not followed. Surely it is vital to him that he know sympathetically the faith-pattern of that parent. Just as married partners should have joint experience of each other's worship, so the children of an inter-christian marriage should be warmly linked with the religious customs of the father or mother whose denomination they have not embraced. Always and ever this must be a loving contact and never a routine gesture. The child should learn to worship reverently and regularly according to the usages of his own church and reverently, though less regularly, according to the tradition of his other parent. Thus he develops as an earnest of church unity.

Together-ness on the part of both parents is still possible where a son or daughter is being reared in a specific religious commitment. There are, thank God, many doctrines and practices in which all christians are at one. These should be communicated to the child by both father and mother jointly, leaving to the parent whose heritage the youngster shares the task of explaining the tenets proper to that church. In such a manner, each parent genuinely forms all his children in a christian setting.

With perceptive married partners, both devoted to the same Christ, both concerned with integral christianity, both anxious to preserve themselves and their offspring from any trace of bigotry, both open to the varied beauties of differing traditions, both intent upon divine worship and christian living, an inter-christian marriage should prove a stimulant to charity and an harbinger of that day when church unity will be consummated in one faith, one Lord, one baptism.