

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

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THE PASTORAL APPROACH TO THE PROBLEMS OF MIXED MARRIAGE

by

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Introduction

Before engaging in the problems of mixed marriage let me first, by way of warm-up, outline the chronological procedure that takes place around Holy Matrimony in the Episcopal Church, U.S.A., which probably doesn't differ too much with that of other provinces of the Anglican Communion, and perhaps only in details here and there in the Church at large.

The Church first becomes involved with a call from the prospective bride, or more likely her mother, wanting to reserve the church building for such and such an hour on such and such a day a month or two later for a wedding. Then comes a check of the church calendar that that is, or isn't possible but also making known to the girl or her mother that there are a few other details they are probably not aware of. There is the matter of instruction, for instance, and more especially before any invitations are ordered, the determination that the couple are truly free to marry one another.

At the first meeting the priest has with the couple he will ascertain that all the canonical requirements are in order: that there is no impediment existing, that neither party has been previously married, that at least one of the parties has received Holy Baptism, and I will return to that point shortly. He will also speak in general terms of what Christian marriage is and ascertain that this is their mind also and that they are willing to sign the "Declaration of Intention".\*

Instruction will almost always be given to individual couples. We envy our Roman Catholic brethren the excellent pre-Cana

\* See Appendix A

conferences with their use of experts on medical matters, family finance and other aspects of marriage, but in most dioceses we don't have the numbers being married to make this possible. In my see city the Catholic Family Life Program has invited couples of other Churches to take part in their Cana conferences, and quite a few do, although more often where one of the parties is Roman Catholic.

#### Problem of Mixed Marriage

By and large there is no great problem in mixed marriages with us unless one of the parties is a Roman Catholic, a Christian Scientist, or a Jew, much more rarely a Hindu or Moslem. This may seem a strange bag but I think I can explain.

The problem with all but Roman Catholics is Baptism, or the lack thereof. The Anglican Communion acknowledges that Christian marriage can be entered into only by the union of two baptized persons. But we have recognized the fact that, despite St. Paul's injunction, Christians will fall in love with non-Christians and we have to do our best to meet the situation pastorally, rather than by way of automatic rejection. So the U.S. Canon requires only that one of the parties be baptized if the Church is to solemnize the marriage. Most of the time both will be but provision is made for the possibility of a marriage of a baptized Anglican with a Christian Scientist, a Quaker, a Jew, or even Muslim or Hindu. There are clergy who have scruples about doing even this and the Canon specifically states that no priest is required to solemnize the marriage of any persons he does not wish to.

The problem when an Anglican and a Roman Catholic wish to be married is quite different. Here were are dealing with two baptized Christians caught in the grinding of a larger millstone - Anglican-Roman Catholic polemics despite the Catholic faith that both profess. In any mixed marriage between an Anglican, a Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian or other in our U.S. social culture it will be the Church of the bride's affiliation which will almost always be used for the ceremony.

The couple must work out for themselves any problems that will be brought about in their marriage because they belong to different churches, more particularly, of course, what will be the church membership of their children. These may be difficult problems or they may not, but at least they will be solved within the framework of the established family and without pressure from outside the family, except perhaps of their respective in-laws where there might be some jockeying for position.

But the family unity will already have been established long before the problem must be faced. Husband and wife each will have found as the fruit of their union, one with the other, the wholeness (holiness) of their own integrity and even so important a matter as the religious training of their children can be much better solved within the framework of their union.

However, when it is laid down by Church authority that the marriage may not take place unless a prior surrender to certain propositions has been made by one of the parties, this has effects built in that bode ill for the future of the marriage relationship, because one partner will already have been placed in an inferior status and his or her own integrity violated.

It is the necessity for unity within the marriage that we would urge and uphold. Catholic theology has always understood that the two partners as ministering the Sacrament each to the other, that which they have undertaken formally before witnesses of the Christian community. The history of marriage until at least the Council of Trent for Roman Catholics and until the present day for other Christians always has placed the great emphasis upon the intentions and actions of the couple themselves. Abbé Duchesne writes:

"No ecclesiastical law obliged Christians to seek a blessing on their marriage. It was a matter of custom or propriety, and although it subsequently became the rule, it was never a condition of validity. The marriage is independent of the rite." \*

\* L. Duchesne, Christian Worship, p.428, cit. W.K. Lowther Clarke, ed., Liturgy and Worship (London: S.P.C.K., 1950), p.461.

Not too long ago, whenever we discovered a very nominal Anglican contemplating marriage with a Roman Catholic we would urge him to take instruction from the Roman Catholic priest and join the other partner. Better they both be in one household than two. Today I think we would be much less ready to take so easy a solution. Attendance at church on Sunday is too simple a test of commitment and we have a deeper understanding of the complex meaning of personality. Vital to the bond of union is the understanding each partner has of his own personal identity and how successfully, how completely, this can be communicated in a creative way to the other partner. An Anglican may not give evidence of being particularly devout, in the usual ways we measure such things, but nevertheless the things that have value and meaning to him, that really count in his whole make-up, may bear a label called "Anglican" and will not readily be cast aside. This would be true in reverse, of a Roman Catholic.

The parental responsibility for the bringing up of children brings us our most acute problem. It is just as much an essential element to the marriage union as the promise that they will "cleave" one to the other and any demand that that responsibility should be set aside from their union and made dependent upon only one partner would appear immoral. It is conceivable that one partner might be totally indifferent to the religious training of offspring, but where there is a mutual concern of both parents it would seem that together they must solve the problem and agree upon the method to achieve the end. Each of them bring to their union their own integrity and identity, the existential matter of Holy Matrimony, and this the Churches must be prepared to accept.

I am not sure how much standing our Roman Catholic brethren would give today to the argument of former days that "error has no rights" and therefore no consideration need be given any supposed rights of a non-Roman Catholic. But in this instance we are not dealing with "things", which may be used without any regard to the "thing" itself. We are dealing with persons and persons do have inalienable rights, most notably the right of conscience. The

Instruction on Mixed Marriages of March 18th, 1966, has certainly tried to approach this problem pastorally, but it has not gone far enough, in our view. If I may say so boldly, but nonetheless charitably, we would never lay down by law that Anglicans marrying other than Anglicans must promise that any issue will be brought up as Anglicans. And we, together with most, if not all non-Roman Catholics would feel that Rome errs here in two ways, i.e, violating its own theology about marriage and also about conscience.

A further point, and I think it was this that brought our Commission into being in the first place. When the Archbishop of Canterbury met with the Holy Father it was this very problem of mixed marriages that he found to be a great stumbling block in the way of ecumenism. Every mixed marriage is a little ecumenical movement and what is essential to produce unity with a marriage may be seen as essential to produce unity in the Church Catholic. Trust, rather than distrust, is most essential within marriage, and certainly it is essential among Christians.

APPENDIX A

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

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DECLARATION OF INTENTION

We,

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and

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desiring to receive the blessing of Holy Matrimony in the Church, do solemnly declare that we hold marriage to be a lifelong union of husband and wife, as it is set forth in the Form of Solemnization of Matrimony in the Book of Common Prayer.

We believe it is for the purpose of mutual fellowship, encouragement, and understanding, for the procreation (if it may be) of children, and their physical and spiritual nurture, for the safeguarding and benefit of society.

And we do engage ourselves, so far as in us lies, to make our utmost effort to establish this relationship and to seek God's help thereto.

Dated.....A.D.

Signatūre of Groom.....

Signatūre of Bride (Maiden Name)