

A Teenager Asks, Is Interracial Marriage a sin?

Dear Father,
My problem, although simple, has me and my boy friend confused. I'm seventeen, a Catholic, and white. Bob, my boy friend, is also seventeen, Catholic, but he's a Negro. I know this may sound funny and even sound like "Bob and I are very

hard up for dates, but the truth is that we like each other a lot. We've both sat down and talked about the white and Negro thing and what would happen if we ever married. We're not too immature or too young to know what's going on. We are both seniors in high school.

Both my parents and Bob's think it is all right for us to be seeing each other now. But I'm worried about what would happen if I ever got an engagement ring from Bob. Will they say it's all right then?

Before I go any farther, I

must tell you that I wasn't brought up to hate or dislike a person because of his faith, his ideas, or his skin color. To me, Bob is just as good as (maybe better than) some of the white kids I've gone out with. He's a lot more respectful of the virtue of purity, too.

The kids in school don't bother us much. Most of them say we look real "boss" together and that we could make a go of it in marriage. So what other people think has nothing to do with it.

What we really want to know is: Will we be committing a sin if we keep going with each other? Also, if we do get married and raise a family (both of us love children), will we or our children be stained with a bigger sin?

Thanks for listening to our problem. Please print it in your column. I'm sure a lot of other kids who are just a little scared to ask about it will appreciate an answer, too.

Kitty

Dear Kitty,
Please excuse me for holding your letter so long. There were several reasons for this. One is a selfish reason—I do not like to lose "Liguorian" subscriptions! Some people have an automatic reaction to the very idea of interracial marriage. As soon as they see the words in print, they become exceedingly disturbed and angry. When they recover from the shock, they cancel their subscriptions.

But the main reason is that interracial marriage is not a

By DANIEL LOWERY, C.S.S.R.
(Reprinted from the April, 1965, Liguorian Magazine.)

simple subject to discuss. There are many angles to it. As a priest and adviser, I consider it my duty to point out as many of these angles as I can.

We can start with the religious angle. According to Catholic teaching, this aspect of the Catholic Church, which is universal, holds that all men are equal in their fundamental dignity as images of God.

Man's dignity springs from his nature which has been designed by God. Because his nature is spiritual as well as material, every man has intrinsic worth and value.

This God-given nature of man is the foundation of human equality. Men are equal because they are equally men. Obviously, they are not equal in intelligence, beauty, skill, money, education or culture. Essentially, however, these things do not matter.

This God-given nature is also the foundation of the human rights of man. It is fundamental Christian doctrine that all men possess certain inalienable rights which no state and no individual may morally take away from them. It is noteworthy that these basic rights have been incorporated in most modern constitutions.

One of man's basic rights is to marry. And, in the words of Dr. J. Messner, who has written the classic book "Social Ethics," the right to marry implies "the right to seek a partner and enter into a union without hindrance from state or society on any grounds other than those dictated by nature."

According to Catholic teaching, there is no natural impediment to interracial marriage. Nor has the Church herself placed any canonical impediment to such marriages. Therefore, the teaching of the Catholic Church on this point can be simply summarized: The Catholic Church does not forbid Catholics to enter into interracial marriages as such.

From the religious angle we must move to the legal angle. Of the fifty United States, twenty-two have laws forbidding interracial marriage. (Outside the United States is the only nation in the world where such laws exist.) Although these laws have not been particularly effective, they do present many practical difficulties to a Catholic priest and a Catholic couple.

There is no doubt in my

mind that these laws are unjust and immoral. And this is the opinion of most Catholic moral theologians who have studied the question. Father Joseph Leonard, S.S.J. has written the most complete treatise on theology and race relations.

Father Leonard says: "The right to marry is a basic human right and the right to marry a person of one's choice is a necessary corollary. Hence, laws which declare marriages invalid solely because of racial differences are unjust laws because they interfere with the exercise of this right. This right belongs to all, baptized or unbaptized, by reason of their nature. These laws are unjust not merely because they interfere with the right of the baptized to receive a sacrament, but because they impede a basic natural right" ("Theology and Race Relations").

These simple truths about the religious and legal aspects of interracial marriage are easy enough to understand, Kitty.

But there are other angles that must be considered. First, the "sociological" angle. I think it is fair to say that American society places heavy burdens on the marriage between a white person and a colored person. The society will not let such a marriage be a happy one—at least, not without a struggle.

Of course, this is the sin of the couple, not of the society. Yet the couple must take a long and realistic look at the situation.

What will such a look reveal? In the first place, the couple may be practically excluded from their own families. Even those people who, like your parents, are quite unprejudiced often find it extremely difficult to accept the fact that their daughter has married a Negro. Your boy friend's family may resent his marrying a white girl. In many cases, there is gradual ostracism from the family circle.

Secondly, former friends often do not remain loyal to those who have entered an interracial marriage. They may not come right out and say so, but actions (and reactions) speak louder than words. Finally, I need hardly mention the severe pressures a couple would face in neighborhoods, schools, social organizations, clubs and activities of all kinds.

These difficulties will obviously touch the couple most directly, and most immediately, but there is a quick change of mind and heart in American society, they will cast their shadow of the children's lives.

You may be tempted to say you

that such social pressures cannot get inside people and hurt them. You may be tempted to say that your marriage and your children would be different. But these social pressures can easily give rise to psychological difficulties. The stresses and strains which are placed on an interracial marriage may quite subtly damage the interpersonal relationship of the husband and wife. Every marriage demands some degree of emotional maturity. But an interracial marriage, because of the added tensions demands a level of emotional maturity higher than most.

It takes a strong and stable person to put up with almost constant harassment. It takes a very balanced person to accept suffering as a normal thing in one's life. The temptation is to begin "to take it out" on one's wife or husband or family, to begin to feel sorry for oneself, to begin to wonder if the whole deal is worth the effort.

Please do not misunderstand me, Kitty. I am not saying that an interracial marriage cannot be happy. Even within the range of my limited experience, I know several successful interracial marriages. What I am trying to say is that the problems are many and the difficulties great.

Because this is so, the people who enter into the relationship must do so with open eyes.

Naturally, I am not going to give you any definite advice to enter or not to enter an interracial marriage. Ultimately, the choice is yours.

You have no doubt already surmised my answer to your questions about sin. Entering an interracial marriage is not a sin. The children of an interracial marriage are not stained with any sin. There is no question of sin at all.

But there is a question of looking at the situation realistically and coming up with an honest judgment. You have going for you the fact that you have been raised without any great prejudice or hatred in your heart. You should thank God, and your parents, for that.

You also have the advantage that you live in a state where interracial marriage is not forbidden by law. On the other hand, as you yourself have said, the reaction of your family (and your boy friend's) may be quite negative. And the reaction of the society in which you will have to live is already well known. I ask only that you consider all of the difficulties before you make a decision.

I join my prayers to yours that your decision may be a wise and good one. God bless you.

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Huge Organ to be Blessed At Shrine in Washington

Washington (NC)—Francis Cardinal Spellman of New York, Military Vicar for Catholics in the United States Armed Forces, will bless the great organ recently installed in the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception here on Sunday afternoon, April 25.

The organ, built at a cost of \$250,000, is a gift to the shrine from Cardinal Spellman as Military Vicar and from the Catholic chaplains and members of the U.S. Armed Forces in memory of those who died for their country.

Msgr. (Reg. Gen.) William J. Moran, deputy chief of chaplains, U.S. Army, will preach the sermon. Music for the dedication ceremonies will be provided by Catholic University of America A Capella Choir under the direction of Michael Cordova and the United States Naval Academy Catholic Choir under the direction of Chief Musician Joseph M. McCuen.

The instrument, reputed to be one of the finest in this hemisphere, consists of two organs. The great organ is located in the south gallery over the shrine's main entrance, and the chancel organ is located in the west chancel gallery. The distance between the two consoles is that of a city block.

Following the blessing, Charles M. Courbin, organist at St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York, will give the first in a series of dedication concerts.

Ministers Against Bus Ride Plan
Harrisburg (RNS) — The Rev. Jesse D. Reber, general secretary of the Pennsylvania Council of Churches, charged tax-supported bus transportation of parochial school students would be an "opening wedge" for further public aid as he vigorously opposed the measure at a hearing of the Senate Education Committee.

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