

Mixed Religions an Impediment to Marriage

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There are all kinds of mixed marriages. It is a mixed marriage when a university professor marries a girl who doesn't know how to read. It is a mixed marriage when a black lad marries a white girl; when a man of sixty-nine marries a girl of twenty-three. All these are in some way mixed marriages. And all of them could spell trouble.

Where there is such lack of harmony intellectually, racially, socially, or physically, it is hard to attain perfect marital concord. However, the Church puts no obstacles in the way of such marriages; because difficult though it may be to create harmony, it is not impossible.

If, however, unity in religion is lacking in a marriage, the difficulty is thrice-compounded. For religion is a way of life, a total commitment. Religion must seep into one's every-breathing pores and color one's every action. Union of two in one flesh demands communion of spirit. For love is more than sex. Without religious unity, then, incompatibility is always highly probable.

Moreover, in mixed marriages, the faith is often weakened or lost for both the Catholic party and the children of the marriage. And this is understand-



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able. When two are in love, they will try to do all they can to avoid tensions. They will sedulously skirt any issue that is liable to offend the other. For the sake of peace, the most fervent feelings in life, those of religion, will be smothered in silence. As closing a draft puts out a fire, so the faith soon dies. The man who buried his talent lost it.

As for the children of such marriages, they often reach maturity indifferent to all religion. For children love their parents. When one practices re-

ligion and the other does not, one uproots what the other plants, leaving no harvest.

Once an old retired couple spent their declining years in a house surrounded by a garden. One spring day, the lady of the house decided to plant some green beans. "My husband loves green beans. I'll surprise him." So she planted the beans. Unbeknownst to his wife, her husband had a similar inspiration. "My wife loves peas; I'll plant some for her. How surprised she'll be!"

A week or so later, his wife went out into the garden to see if the beans were sprouting. She saw something green, but not beans. "These must be weeds," she thought. So she plucked them up. Shortly after, her husband stole quietly into the garden for a look at his planting. He saw no sprouts of peas, yet something green. "Must be weeds," he thought. So he uprooted them. Their planting was in vain.

So the Church has thrown up an obstacle to mixed marriages. Difference in religion is still an impediment to marriage. But in a pluralist society, such as our is, mixed marriages are here to stay. When people live together, work together, do business together, recreate together, they will join together in marriage. For this reason the Church has always granted a dispensation for a mixed marriage under the

condition that the sacredness of the marriage and the faith of those entering it are safeguarded.

On 18 March 1966, for ecumenical reasons, the Church mitigated the conditions required for a dispensation for a mixed marriage. However the two basic conditions remain: fostering the sacredness of marriage and protecting the faith of those entering such a union.

Marriage is sacred. For it deals with the transmission of life. And life is sacred. Hence all peoples have always treated marriage as something special and have linked it with religion. So the new mixed marriage regulations have conceded to Bishops the faculty to permit the use of sacred rites in the celebration of a mixed marriage.

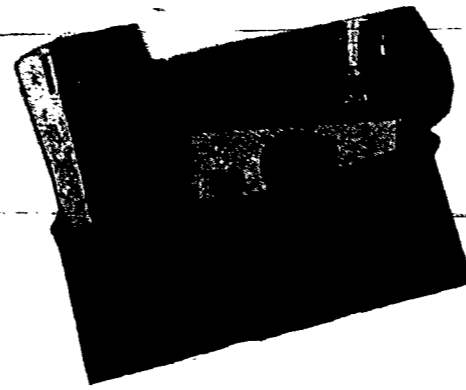
Bishop Fulton J. Sheen has granted general permission for a Nuptial Mass when both parties in a mixed marriage request it. And to make the non-Catholic party feel more at home in the midst of Catholic rites, permission is also granted for his minister to be present at the marriage ceremony. Marriage is one of those times in the life of a person when he wishes to have with him those who have played a vital part in his life. Nor is the presence of the minister to be a purely passive one, merely tolerated. He ought to be cordially invited to attend the religion ceremony to give his blessing to the

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