

## Mixed Religions an Impediment to Marriage

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couple after the exchange of the marriage vows.

The second concern of the Church in a mixed marriage is the faith. As all know, the non-Catholic was required to sign a pledge to bring up the children Catholic. This pledge created one of the greatest problems in a mixed marriage. Could we blame the non-Catholic if he felt this to be ecclesiastical blackmail. "Either I sign the pledge or else I cannot marry the girl I love. What is this but extortion?" What could this breed but deceit, resentment, and later retaliation? The Church realized the delicacy of the problem.

So the Decree sought to ameliorate the situation. The Church can never condone error. She cannot permit her children to raise their offspring in a faith other than her own. But she could make it easier for the non-Catholic, this oral commitment could suffice. It need not always be in writing.

Of course, this is only a relaxation, not a solution. Should the non-Catholic refuse to cede his rights to the religious training of his children to anyone, then the marriage should be called off. Otherwise both parties will have a bone stuck in their throats for the rest of their married lives.

Another refinement the Decree has made is to put the responsibility for

the Catholic education of the children right where it belongs — squarely on the shoulder of the Catholic partner! The Catholic must see to it his children are brought up Catholic. This throws the whole problem into the hands of those contracting marriage. It removes the stigma of the Church playing "nursemaid" to the Catholic party. It doesn't make a Catholic's loyalty to the Church depend on a non-Catholic's promise. It assures the non-Catholic that his spouse is bringing up the children Catholic because he wants to in conscience, not because he is ordered to.

A Catholic must live up to his faith in his business, in his social relations, in his profession, in every situation in life. So why should he not stand up for the things he believes in when preparing for marriage. Courtship is a time of preparation, not of gratification. The question of religious loyalties should be settled then — to the best interests of both parties.

Instruction should be part of courtship. The non-Catholic party ought to be given the opportunity to know what the Catholic faith demands of a Catholic in marriage and why. And the Catholic should discuss privately with the non-Catholic how he feels about his own obligations in this matter. If they cannot agree, the marriage should be called off. Engagements have been broken for far less important reasons.

The form of marriage for validity still remains in force (Canon 1094). Marriage before a minister is still invalid. However the Decree has suspended the excommunication attached to such marriages (Canon 2319). This suspension is retroactive and takes the penalty of excommunication away from marriages contracted outside the Church years ago.

This form is that the marriage should take place before a priest and two witnesses. And why does the Church insist on this form? Not as a reflection on any other marriage ceremony, but only to safeguard the sacredness of marriage. How else can the Church control proper instruction, proper religious emphasis, proper recording of marriages, if she had no authority over them? One of the reasons for the high divorce rates are hasty marriages and the cavalier treatment that cheapens them. By insisting on the proper form, the Church hopes to spotlight the sacredness of marriage and to give it the solemnity it deserves.

In the interests of ecumenism, even the law on form is now being relaxed. In April, 1967, the Holy See granted permission for a young couple in Oakland, California, to have the bride's father, a Protestant minister, officiate at her marriage in a Catholic ceremony.

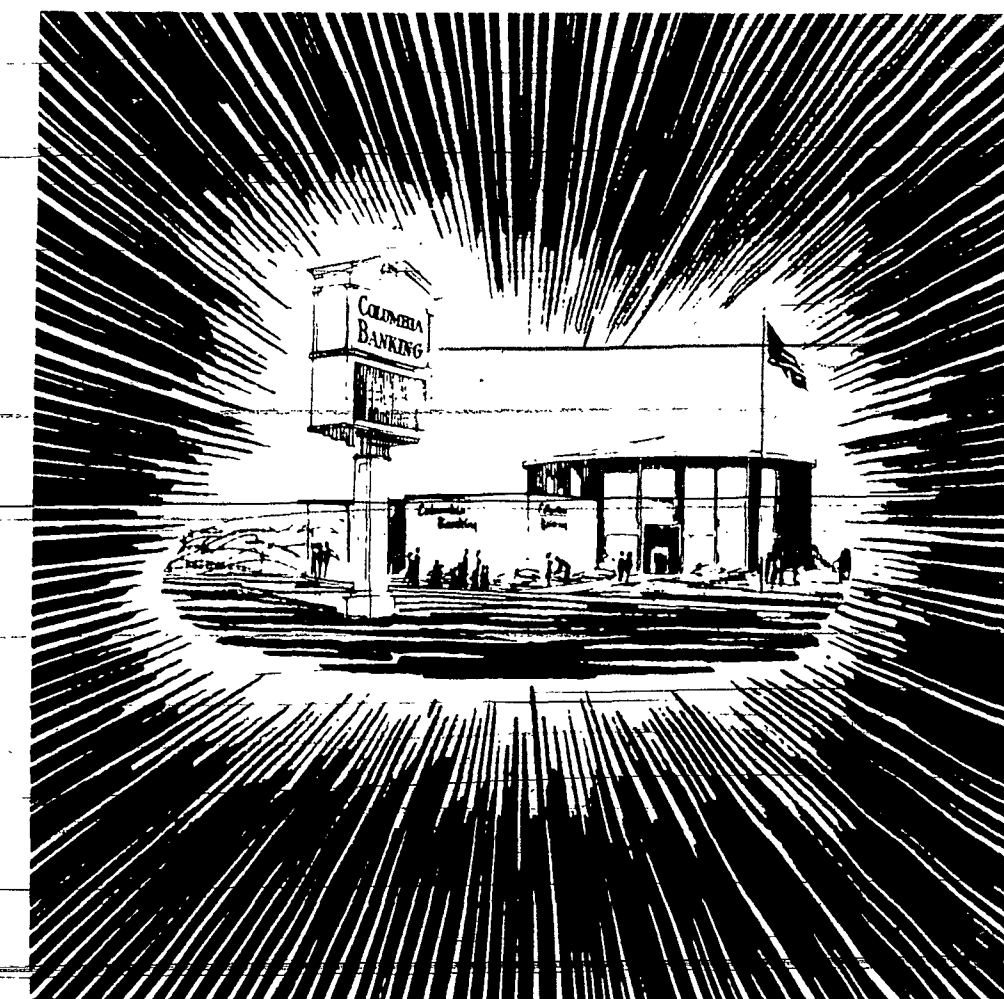
This is not so radical as it might at first seem. For centuries, the Church

has recognized a mixed marriage before someone other than a Catholic priest — but after the event. It is called *sanatio in radice* — a "healing from the root." Suppose a mixed marriage had been contracted before a civil magistrate or a Protestant minister. Years later, suppose the Catholic party wants to validate it by having a ceremony before a priest and two witnesses. And further suppose that the non-Catholic party adamantly refuses. He believes his first consent is and always has been present or he is just hostile to the whole idea. The Bishop in such a case could grant a dispensation from renewing the consent. The moment the dispensation is granted, the marriage is valid — even should the non-Catholic party have no knowledge of it. This sanction is retroactive: it gives the marriage the same effects as though it had been valid from the beginning — *heals it from its roots.*

There is a saying that "well begun is half done." If the problems of a mixed marriage are aired and settled before the marriage, then half the battle is won. Marriage is not for a moment, but for a lifetime. It is not to be leaped into, but to be entered with solemn steps of deliberation. In guiding those steps, a loving Mother's counsel — that of Holy Mother Church — is invaluable. To change the figure, who gives heed to the rudder will not have to give heed to the rocks.

# Why short-change yourself?

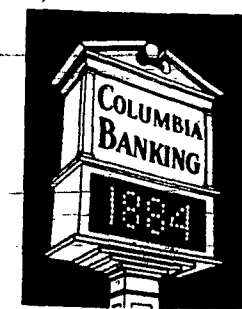
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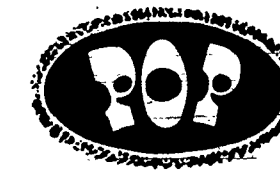


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