

# MIXING YOUR MARRIAGE

## 3

### To the Non-Catholic

**O**UR APOLOGIES for the use of such a negative term as “Non-Catholic.” Hardly anyone could feel flattered to be merely classified as *not* something! You certainly have many good qualities and many positive convictions, otherwise your fiance would not want to marry you. The Catholic Church has a deep respect for your convictions and your conscience, and above all, for your freedom. Though the Church would be delighted if you showed an interest in the Catholic faith—and ultimately in becoming a Catholic—She will never try to trap or sandbag you when you are not looking. Indeed, though the Church, like anyone deeply convinced of a truth which he deems important for others to possess, will use every possible method to attract you to Catholicism, once you show that attraction She makes your possible entrance into the fold almost as difficult as possible!

A possible convert to Catholicism is subjected to a long series of instructions, and, only after you would fully and freely agree to all Her teachings would She accept you into the Church. Even if you were to protest that out of love for your future partner you would “change” to make him or her happy, the Church would not consider this a sufficient reason to admit you to Catholic baptism. She would demand that this change come from your inner convictions and from that source alone. Therefore, the only purpose of this instruction on mixed marriage is to help you understand the problems of a mixed marriage and to cope with them with reasonable success.

*Mutual Understanding.* Widely divergent tastes in food or dress, incompatible social levels, family ties—all these can cause difficulty or put strain on the wedding bond. But one of the most frequent circumstances to cast a fly in the ointment of marital happiness is a difference in religious belief. Your marriage may fail, not because you refuse to become a Catholic, but because you do not understand Catholicism. Please read what follows carefully, because you intend to spend the rest of your life under the same roof with a Catholic. If you understand your partner’s beliefs without

emotional rejection, you will eliminate many potential tensions in your future marriage and family life.

We wish that there were some secret formula that we could give you to insure the happiness of your marriage, but there is none. Instead, we will give you a summary of the things that your intended spouse accepts as true. You may find little that is surprising. In fact, you may find yourself agreeing with some of them, for many of these beliefs are not the exclusive property of Catholicism, but belong to the world. They are part of what is called "truth" and, therefore, every human being has a right to them. You will recognize many of the following statements as true. Remember that you, too, have a right to them!

### WHY THEY ARE CATHOLICS

*Catholic Conviction.* Each Friday, in homes and restaurants all over the United States, more than thirty-seven million people eat fish! For the most part, this evidences little fondness for the finny creatures, but it is rather a fulfillment of a religious tenet. Thirty-seven million people abstain from eating meat because they are Catholic and their Church forbids them meat on Friday. Your prospective husband or wife is one of these "fisheaters." Rather than merely accept the phenomenon, question it! Just why do they do it *Year After Year*? Why do they obey this injunction? Church entrances have swinging doors. After all, it is easy to walk in and just as easy to walk out; nobody nails their shoes to the floor. No one forces them to remain Catholic, yet they do. The reason is found in the following six propositions which they accept, not from blind faith or authority, but from logic, history, and common sense. Catholics are convinced that:

1. They can prove the existence of a personal God with unaided reason.
2. They have evidence to prove that the events of the Gospels are historically true.
3. The Gospels show them that Jesus Christ is both God and man.
4. History proves that Christ started a Church, which He commanded all men to join, to bring divine help to all of the world and to direct its members in all their daily living.
5. History proves this Church to be the Roman Catholic Church.

INSTRUCTIONS: Read each of the following statements carefully, then place an "X" in the box following the word or phrase which best completes the statement. Mark only one box for each statement. Each correct answer is worth five points.

1. Surveys indicate that nearly \_\_\_\_\_ per cent of Catholics entering mixed marriages become lost to their faith.  
 eighty       twenty       thirty       fifty
2. In order to contract a mixed marriage the Catholic must \_\_\_\_\_ a dispensation from the impediments involved.  
 purchase       bargain for       demand       request
3. The Church, by insisting that a non-Catholic attend a course of instruction before marrying a Catholic, seeks to \_\_\_\_\_.  
 protect him       discourage him       convert him       irritate him
4. The Catholic Church teaches that there are \_\_\_\_\_ sacraments.  
 three       five       seven       nine
5. In a mixed marriage involving a Catholic, \_\_\_\_\_ must be reared in the Catholic Church.  
 all children       the boys       no children       the girls
6. The Catholic Church is \_\_\_\_\_ in her attitude toward mixed marriage.  
 unreasonable       out of date       unrealistic       logical
7. The Sacrament of \_\_\_\_\_ incorporates men into the Mystical Body of Christ.  
 Matrimony       Confirmation       Baptism       Extreme Unction
8. The Church will never repeal the law protecting marriage from divorce because it is a \_\_\_\_\_ which cannot be changed by man.  
 Church law       law of God       state law       international law
9. A Catholic entering a mixed marriage wishes to avoid divorce, contraception, and \_\_\_\_\_.  
 children       poverty       the suburbs       loss of faith
10. Marriage is meant to be a means by which two people can \_\_\_\_\_.  
 earn heaven       get rich       live together       escape the world
11. A Catholic is firmly convinced that \_\_\_\_\_ is always and at all times wrong.  
 mixed marriage       contraception       continence       passion

POSSIBLE SCORE

55

MINUS  ERRORS X 5 \_\_\_\_\_

SUB-SCORE II \_\_\_\_\_

SUB-SCORE I \_\_\_\_\_

SUB-SCORE II \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL SCORE \_\_\_\_\_

CUT ON D ED LINE

6. Logic, as well as revelation, shows that God must prevent His Church from allowing error to mix into its official teaching.

Space does not permit us to explain these six steps, but there are lots of good and popular writings on the subject which any priest can recommend to you, and there is a list of a few at the end of this lesson. At this point, it is sufficient to show that Catholicism is a system of thought and not a question of arbitrary authority.

### WHAT CATHOLICS BELIEVE

Once God created man after His own image and likeness and man has been returning the compliment ever since, because people often paint God according to their own ideas. There are probably as many portraits of God as there are people, but millions of these portraits are similar to the point of identity. These are the likenesses of God reflected in the minds of present day Catholics. All Catholics the world over will describe God as follows: God is an Infinite and Eternal Being who made the world by an act of His will using no previously existing material. He also created the first man and woman, Adam and Eve. He raised them to the supernatural order, in which order He destined them to share in His own eternal happiness. He made Adam head of the human race, on whose fidelity the destiny of all his descendants would depend. Tasted on their submission to Him, Adam and Eve offended God. From that moment, their children—and that means all mankind—were barred from seeing God. This continued for thousands of years until God Himself became truly man. As Jesus Christ, He lived and worked among men to give them a graphic example of how to use their lives. Finally, He allowed Himself to suffer and die in reparation for the sins of Adam and all his descendants, so that they should be restored to the supernatural destiny to which they were originally ordained.

It now remains for us to receive the merits earned by Him for us. These benefits are to be applied by a unique and permanently established Church through a group of ceremonies called the Seven Sacraments which were instituted by Christ Himself while He was here on earth. The primary sacrament is called Baptism and is intended to bring these merits to all men, and to incorporate them into the Church which is both a society and a real union with Christ. If, through serious sin, men reject God's helps, they can

regain sanctifying grace—or the sharing in God’s nature—through the use of another sacrament called Penance. The other five sacraments (Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Matrimony, Holy Orders, and Extreme Unction) are designed to intensify the effects of these graces in the souls of those already in sanctifying grace and apply them to any special need we might have of them. Catholics believe their Church to be the warehouse or distribution center of God’s gifts through these ceremonies. This is why you will find that your spouse will be concerned with “going to confession or Holy Communion.” The motive is not that we think that we are more or less sinful than the rest of the men, but rather that we want to use these means to get closer to God.

This is not the complete story of Catholic teaching, but only a few sentences from what is an endless volume. The teachings are endless because the questions, doubts, and problems of the human race are without end, and the nature of God is infinitely mysterious. The mission of the Church to the world is to satisfy the ever searching mind and heart of man, and to lead him to deeper and deeper knowledge and love of God.

WHAT CATHOLICS DO IN CHURCH

*The Mass.* Today, people go to church to pray, to sing, to learn, and to be comforted. Catholics do all these—and something more. The *primary* reason for their attendance is to participate in a sacrifice offered to God. This is called “Mass,” and the word is really a misnomer taken from the Latin phrase, “Ite, Missa Est” (Go, you are dismissed), which concludes the ceremony. Prior to the fourth century, the most prominent word in the phrase, “missa,” came to be understood as a noun signifying the ritual rather than the past participle of the verb “mitere,” which means to send or dismiss. More correctly, the Mass is called “The Holy Sacrifice” because it is the re-presentation of the essential act of Christ’s offering of His life on Calvary for all of us. Its purpose is to apply the spiritual benefits of the Crucifixion to you and every other person. We human beings join ourselves to it, but it is not ours alone. It is essentially an act of Jesus Christ.

Historically, every sacrifice involves a priest, a victim, and an intended effect. Thus, in the Old Testament, the Jewish priests offered an animal to God for the Chosen People. The animal

Mixing Your Marriage

INSTRUCTIONS: Read each of the following statements carefully. If a statement is true, mark an “X” in the box at the left labelled “true.” If it is false, mark an “X” in the box at the left labelled “false.” Each correct answer is worth three points.

- |                          |                          |   |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| TRUE<br>↓                | FALSE<br>↓               |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. From logic, history, and common sense Catholics can prove the existence of a personal God.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2. Only non-Catholics entering a mixed marriage are subjected to a premarital investigation.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 3. Statistical studies show that divorce and separation is no higher in mixed than in unmixed marriages.                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 4. The Gospels show that Jesus Christ was both God and man.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 5. The Church will not allow a man and woman to marry unless both receive a passing grade in this premarriage course.                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. If a validly married Catholic obtains a civil divorce and attempts another marriage he would be excommunicated.                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 7. The Church cannot give her nuptial blessing to couples entering a mixed marriage.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 8. The Church is saddened when a Catholic decides to enter a mixed marriage.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 9. Authorities agree that mixed marriages provide many problems for the couple, but no more than any other marriage complication.     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 10. Catholic literature should be ostentatiously displayed in the home in order to insure the non-Catholic spouse's conversion.       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 11. In order to rear children of a mixed marriage in the faith, the Catholic partner must assume full responsibility.                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 12. It is more important for couples in mixed marriages to agree on passing, temporary matters than risk discord over ultimate goals. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 13. The non-Catholic spouse is required to sign and keep a set of promises that he will not interfere with his partner's religion.    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 14. The natural desire of a Catholic partner in a mixed marriage is for the conversion of the non-Catholic spouse.                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | 15. Christ does not shed His blood again at each Mass, but He is truly offered as a sacrifice.  |

CUT ON THE DOTTED LINE

POSSIBLE SCORE

45

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

MINUS

ERRORS X 3

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

SUB-SCORE I

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_

represented the whole people. The purpose of the sacrifice was to adore and praise God, to propitiate and make reparation to Him for human offenses and to beg His gifts. In ascending the cross, Christ was the priest who sacrificed Himself as a victim for these same purposes. In this He represented the whole human race. Catholics believe that the Mass does this same thing over and over again. Christ acts through the Catholic priest as an animated instrument. It is Christ who is again the victim offered to God in our place, and He is present as victim in the bread and wine transformed into His own Body and Blood. True, Christ does not shed His blood again at each Mass, but He is truly offered as a sacrifice. As a remembrance of His life, Christ might have left us a great monument, a picture, work of sculpture, or even some sort of passion play. Instead, Catholics are thrilled to think that He left this sacrifice which is part of himself. Through their participation in the Mass, Catholics will be "with Him and in Him." Naturally, the Catholic will wish to take part in this re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice as often as he can. The Church sets down a minimum attendance on Sundays and "Holy Days of Obligation," unless a serious reason intervenes, such as illness.

#### WHEN A CATHOLIC MARRIES

*Real Union.* Catholics believe that when two people marry properly, a relationship springs up between them somewhat akin to the relationship between a mother and her son. Imagine how ridiculous it would be for a man to appear in court and plead: "Judge, I no longer like my mother. She drinks. She is abusive. Please declare to the world that she is no longer my mother." The court would probably hold such a plaintiff for psychiatric examination! But to be completely ridiculous, suppose the judge gravely prepared a formidable legal document and armed it with a heavy seal of red wax to announce to all society that he had dissolved the bond between a mother and her son. Think of the tumult of angry criticism such an action would arouse, for humanity knows that no judge, no court, no earthly power can sever the relationship of parent and child.

Humanity should be likewise informed that there is no human power that can dissolve the bond between two properly married people. If we accept the meaning of divorce to be the dissolution of a valid, consummated, sacramental marriage with permission to

enter a subsequent valid marriage, then Catholics say that there is no such thing. Yet, there are millions of men and women who are caught in a web of wishful thinking. They have divorced themselves not from their spouses but from reality. Their attitude is: "So long as I think I am divorced, I am." Now of course, the judgment of modern man has been clouded by the peculiar philosophies that have molded our culture. This is a world of confusion and God will mercifully judge us according to our confusions. It is not for any of us to pre-empt this divine prerogative. Therefore, Catholics do not accuse those who follow their convictions of being dishonest or hypocritical. They only insist that the *objective fact* remains that no human power can dissolve a proper marriage.

This is not the teaching of a pope or of a church. It is the intention of the deity who created us and who spoke these words:

Have you not read that the Creator, from the beginning, made them male and female, and said, "For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?" Therefore now they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder. (Matthew 19:4-7.)

*Laws.* Not long ago, everyone agreed that the marriage contract was unbreakable. Though today civil governments accept the validity of divorce, the Catholic Church refuses to change the words of the Gospel. She attempts to protect the beauty, holiness, and permanence of matrimony with a series of Her own laws. These regulations may seem unbending and arbitrary, but remember their purpose! They are something like the fence a suburban homeowner might build around his front lawn. The man is proud of his lawn but he knows that, unless he protects it from the feet of pedestrians, it will be ruined and lose its beauty. Occasionally, a passing neighbor may bark a shin against the fence. At such times, the householder apologizes and sympathizes over the injury, but he does not remove the fence. To remove this protection would guarantee the destruction of the lawn. So it is with the beautiful institution of matrimony. The Church has protected it with a fence of law. To those who feel offended by these regulations, the Church offers sympathy or advice, but She will not repeal the laws that protect marriage. Some laws She *cannot* change because they are laws of God beyond man's control. Some laws She *will not* change because without protective laws, men will trample all over matrimony and reduce it to a mere instrument of pleasure.

terested in a certain series of articles or pamphlets, one can hardly object to your buying, reading, or talking about them.

There may well come a time when you could explicitly ask a partner, "Why don't you become a Catholic?" It is strange how many converts come in and complain about our weak apostolicity. They wait for years until they get enough courage to approach someone for instruction, and always they comment, "Nobody asked me—ever!" or "If only someone had suggested to me the joy and enthusiasm they had in the Catholic Church!" The Gospel means "good news" and good news is something we cannot keep to ourselves. Obviously, however, the question, "Why don't you become a Catholic?" should never be asked in a nagging, querulous, or pugnacious spirit.

### CONCLUSION

Consider carefully all that is involved in living a lifetime in a mixed marriage. Total up the sacrifices and difficulties it might entail. Ask yourself whether you have the strength to face each problem as a challenge and so solve it as it comes up. Check carefully whether all the requirements are present for a proper dispensation. After these evaluations, if you choose a mixed marriage, predetermine to carry out as many of the above suggestions as possible. Know that, if you do, you can hope for the graces to carry them out and achieve both a happy marriage and a holy life in faith.

### Cases for Discussion

Why does the Church harp on the evils of mixed marriages?

I know of several mixed marriages right in our neighborhood which are very successful. Besides, some of the nicest boys I know are non-Catholics. How is our faith going to be known if Catholic young people can't date with those of a different religion?

Are culture and manners the only important aspects of a prospective marriage partner?

Isabell Bankman, a Catholic, has taken a liking to Lincoln Herrick, a Baptist. "Don't you think that Lincoln is cultured?" she asks her bosom friend, Martha Nash. "And he is so handsome!" "Yes," Martha admits, "he is very refined and good-looking, but don't forget he's a non-Catholic and you shouldn't marry him." "I don't see why not," Isabel says. "He treats me with more respect than any of the Catholic boys I know. He's much more gentlemanly."

Man is an animal, but one gifted with reason. The great challenge he faces is the job of learning to control not just his surroundings by his reason and will, but also himself.

This includes the use or non-use of the rights and privileges of marital life. When this is the result of the mutual consent of husband and wife for a good reason, this type of birth control is approved by the Church. What is condemned is the use of the faculties of procreation for pleasure alone and the frustration of their natural purpose by some artificial means. There are several reasons for this which are outlined elsewhere in the manual. Basically, it is condemned as being an intentional misuse of the talent of procreation. Men today confuse the purpose of this faculty with the pleasure its use gives us. Just as the pleasure of eating *filet mignon* is distinct from the nourishment of the body by good food, there is a like distinction in the use of marriage between purpose and reward. Often the stimulating here-and-now reason we eat is the smell and appearance of food, but our ultimate reason is nourishment and so long as we do not deliberately exclude or frustrate the nourishment found in food, we use food correctly. The here-and-now reason in the minds of young people who marry is to express their mutual love. They do this best by using the faculty designed ultimately for another purpose. So long as they do not deliberately frustrate this purpose of procreation, they use it correctly. Temptations to frustrate the procreative function may be strong, and it may be difficult to avoid yielding to them, but it is never impossible, with the help of grace, to conquer them. Reason is a two-edged sword—a unique privilege given only to man yet at times a heavy burden. A man must live by reason and not by instinct. Reason demands self-control and condemns contraception. Your Catholic partner will expect you to live in accordance with reason.

*Loss of Faith.* At all costs a Catholic wishes to avoid any danger to faith. A Catholic will, therefore, ask you never to place any stumbling blocks in the path of his religious practice and even, if possible, to promote it. The fear of losing Catholic faith in mixed marriages is based on very hard facts. Surveys have indicated that nearly thirty per cent of Catholics entering into mixed marriages become lost to their faith. Perhaps some of them would have lost their convictions anyway. Some others may have run into violent opposition from their spouses; still others fail to measure up to the

that our rigidity is a doctrinal one and in no way personal. Perhaps your non-Catholic partner would like to attend a series of instructions on Catholicism so he can enter into the religious life of the family.

*Christian Vitality.* It is most necessary for the Catholic partner to live his or her religion with joy! If you have thought so much of your Catholicism as to put your partner through all the legal procedures, dispensations, promises, and so on, he would naturally expect it to mean a great deal to you. He will, then, look to see what it does mean to your life. If you live a life in no way different from the secularistic families about you, he will find your practices merely formalized fetishes to be humored and not respected. To live your faith with joy means to develop patience, humility, self-sacrifice, kindness, forgiveness, and a firm inner control over the vices of anger, bitterness, hatred, back-biting, complaining, and nagging. Unless your faith is a source of mature joy to you, it will always be a mystery to him.

Negatively, it will be necessary to avoid every possible sin against your convictions as a Catholic. If your pledges against contraception are ignored at the first difficulty, your partner will wonder how serious you were in going through all the preliminaries to marriage. If Catholic practices bring grumbles to your lips, be they the obligation of Sunday Mass, the difficulties of Confession, your dislike of fish on Friday, or the burden of material support of the Church, your non-Catholic partner cannot help wondering how convinced you really are in your faith. If you constantly air your gripes about your pastor, the nuns in your parochial school, other Catholics, or the content of last Sunday's sermon, your partner will be able to conclude only that you are a hypocrite.

Above all, never gripe about the difficulties of the Catholic morality you profess. A non-Catholic husband once said in the presence of his Catholic wife, "When I married a Catholic, I made some promises, and she's stuck with them." In this particular case his meaning was perfectly clear. Though married only about ten years at the time, they had six children and were expecting a seventh. To paraphrase, his meaning was, "When I married a Catholic, I promised not to use contraception. I am quite willing to support the children we have, but she had better never gripe about having them!"

## BRING A PARTNER TO CONVERSION

The unexpressed desire of almost every Catholic partner in a mixed marriage is for the conversion of his or her spouse. No matter how intense the love, no matter how successfully the numerous problems are worked out, every Catholic would like to achieve fullness of unity in mind and heart and share fully the one objective of knowing, loving, and serving God *together* in the spiritual vocation of matrimony. But faith is not something we can achieve; we must pray for it. A non-Catholic may come to respect—yes, even to love—the Catholic Church, he may find its arguments convincing, its doctrine sound, its practical application sensible, its religious practices inspiring. But he cannot embrace the Catholic faith unless God gives it. Therefore, pray daily that your partner may see as clearly, and embrace as convincingly, the faith as you hold and practice it.

Of course, your desire for your partner's conversion can never be achieved by nagging. We can invite people to enter the fold, but we cannot make them captive or force them to come in. If you, as the Catholic partner, have adopted the program we have so far outlined, very little more can be expected of you. If your non-Catholic husband or wife hears your sweet reasonableness, sees your determined devotion, experiences the joy and consolations that you find in your faith, observes your growth in virtue and your struggles to conquer the vices all human flesh is heir to—if he mulls over the meaningfulness of the Catholic events in his children's lives and ponders the Catholic conversations they bring home from school, he cannot help but be attracted.

Should such attraction become apparent, it remains only for you to suggest that your partner attend some instructions or read some literature. Once it is explained that instructions or inquiry classes are not snares, but merely methods of helping more people understand the Catholic Church, it will be easy for the non-Catholic to attend.

Regarding Christian and Catholic literature in the home, this should neither be ostentatiously displayed for the use of the non-Catholic nor hidden from him. No person of convictions would take kindly to special articles placed at his bedside or propped open over his evening paper. Such a campaign would be doomed to failure from the start. On the other hand, if you are honestly in-

## WHAT A CATHOLIC WISHES TO AVOID IN MARRIAGE

*Divorce.* The thought of divorce or separation is absolutely intolerable to two people in love. You and your fiancé are convinced that it "can't happen to us." However, from what we have seen above, your Catholic partner is supported in his or her conviction that marriage is "until death" by the absolute dictates of the Church's law. The Catholic is forbidden even to think of divorce as a way out. The Catholic also knows that foolishly to go through the formality of a civil divorce would be to draw down the disapproval of the entire Catholic community, and, if followed by attempted remarriage, would bring automatic excommunication from the Church.

*Separation.* Again, the Church will not permit your Catholic spouse to separate from you at whim. No acrimonious argument or dispute will justify a separation for the Catholic. Your Catholic partner, to prevent an arbitrary decision, must approach a special Church court even to separate temporarily! The only reasons the Church recognizes for separation are adultery, evil life of a partner, and physical, moral, or mental danger in continued cohabitation. Naturally, the Catholic is bolstered in his vow to love for a lifetime by the stringent laws of the Church.

Naturally, too, the Catholic would like to see your pledge of love also bolstered by similar convictions. Unfortunately, there is no social or religious grouping in the United States which absolutely interdicts divorce or prohibits separation with such stringency. Since this is so, the Catholic fiancé would like even stronger protestations from you that these thoughts will never lightly enter your mind. Certainly, it would be unfair for you to have such "outs" in the back of your mind, however hidden or semi-conscious. This should be thoroughly talked out. It is for this reason that the Church asks you to agree explicitly that you are entering marriage as an institution which cannot be terminated upon the will of the partners.

*Contraception.* The Catholic Church supports wholeheartedly the use of birth control! That may sound incredible to you, but it is absolutely true. The word "control," means, of course, the governing of the various faculties of the body by the mind and will. This is not the usual definition of this term, but it is much more accurate. Man has been designed by God to demonstrate that the material world can be formed, shaped, and dominated by reason.



or vocation to achieve eternal happiness. Marriage is not meant to be heaven itself, but only the means by which we earn heaven. The adjustments the spouses make to live in peace earn eternal reward. The discomforts of rearing a family, of living within a budget, paying bills, are all so many coins which purchase your ticket into heaven. Your Catholic partner wishes to make your marriage a stepping stone to heaven for both of you. Therefore, he or she will never want to face a difficult choice of choosing peace in marriage in preference to God. Your spouse wants *both* married happiness and eternal happiness, but wants them in relation to each other and not in opposition to each other. It will fall to you to help avoid such emotionally charged opposite choices.

### THE CHURCH AND MIXED MARRIAGE

By this time you have gathered that the Catholic Church is generally opposed to mixed marriages. This opposition She shares with experts in all fields, those who are Protestant, Jewish, and even agnostic! Statistical studies have shown that the incidence of marriage disaster ending in divorce and separation is much higher among mixed marriage. Three separate studies covering a total of 24,184 families found that the divorce and separation rate is three times higher in mixed Catholic-Protestant marriages than in marriages where both parties were of the same faith! Dr. Leiffer, a Methodist minister, after exhaustive analysis, concludes his survey: “. . . divergent religious attachments, if they are taken seriously, generally constitute a basis for conflict, especially after the advent of children.”

Surveys also show that the tensions engendered by the differences in fundamental approaches remain even in those mixed marriages that are successful and reasonably happy. As mentioned, the Catholic Church is further concerned that the high percentage of those who enter mixed marriage are lost to religious practice, and that two out of three children born of such mixed marriages practice no religion at all. If the Catholic Church is true to her conviction that She is sent to bring accurate religious belief and practice to Her children, She must be concerned about these defections.

*Logical Position.* The Church finds itself in a very embarrassing but logical position. Many people who are not Catholics feel that the Church is very arrogant and narrow in her approach since she

the other. People who say they have no problems do not speak truly. They may have no notable difficulties at the moment or they may have no problems of such a nature as utterly to destroy their peace of mind. But everybody has daily problems.

Because Americans want a problem-free life, they tend to run away from the problems. Rather than face the difficulties of living on the farm, they frequently run off to the city. When they discover that city living is not quite what they expected, they retreat to the suburbs. One explanation of the mobility of our American people might well be that people constantly move to avoid facing up to decisions and rolling up their sleeves to implement those decisions.

Another American approach to problem-solving is to ignore them altogether. With wishful thinking, they suggest that if we pretend the problem is not there it will go away. This attitude is probably one of the chief causes for the high incidence of neuroticism in our country. It explains, also, our too frequent passing over a difficulty in rearing a child with the phrase, “It’s only a phase.” We imply that if the phase is ignored it will go away.

When we can neither run away nor ignore a problem, our tendency is to seek some quick, simple solution. Our national temperament inclines us to think that, if we collect enough money (or get it from the government) and lock enough scientists up together with the problem, they will come up with a simple, quick solution. This might work with physical or chemical problems or even medical ones, but it will never solve social, human, and spiritual difficulties.

A problem is really a challenge for solution. In social, human, and spiritual areas, this solution may demand a lifetime of effort and may never be fully achieved. In such a case, we must learn how to live with it. An only child has a problem when he faces the care of an aged bedridden mother. He cannot, in conscience, run away from it or pretend that it is not there. There is no quick, simple solution other than murder or suicide, which would be contemptible cowardice. The only way to meet the problem is to face it, examine all its facets, evaluate what can be done, and *live with it!*

*Problems in Mixed Marriage.* All authorities are agreed that mixed marriages provide many problems for the couple, more

problems than any other single complication of marriage. You cannot wish the problem away, run away from it, or find a simple solution. For these problems will stay with you as long as you are married—that is, until death parts you. Study carefully, then, all that is said above to the non-Catholic partner so that you truly understand the difficulty he faces. In turn, ask your future spouse to study this section carefully. Then, together, you might work out practical implementations which will help you to achieve both contentment in this life and eternal happiness.

### PROTECTING FAITH

*Your Own Faith.* Since your non-Catholic partner loves you truly, he or she will certainly not be a deliberate danger to your faith and its practice. However, on the other hand, neither can he be of much help since he can hardly understand and sympathize with your point of view. Therefore, you must intensify your own faith by daily prayer and frequent approach to the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist. At the same time, try to practice a regular prayer life together.

It is imperative, also, that you increase your Catholic reading. You will frequently need to explain why you perform a certain religious practice or why you believe a certain truth. If your partner loves you at all, he will want to understand how your mind works in this area and you will have to be much more literate and articulate than you would be in a marriage to a Catholic who would automatically understand.

*Religious Education of Children.* In rearing your children as Catholics, you must take full responsibility. In other areas it will be easy for you to reinforce each other's education, but in the areas of religious belief it might be difficult. However, this should be no excuse for keeping your non-Catholic spouse out of things religious. He wishes to share as far as possible in the religious experience of his children. Certainly, the non-Catholic mother or father should not be excluded from the Baptism, First Communion, prayer life, and catechism of the children. Excellent material is available which will help him understand and appreciate the rich significance of all these events. Ask the non-Catholic partner to attend an occasional parochial social affair, to become a member of the parochial parent-teacher group, and to meet the priests, nuns, and other Catholic parents. He will come to understand his children's faith and learn

weariness of meeting their everyday obligations alone and unaided. At any rate, the fact remains that one in three Catholics ceases to practice his faith when he enters a mixed marriage. A serious Catholic, then, who enters a mixed marriage, wants to avoid this very notable risk as carefully as possible. Your fiancé, therefore, will hope that you will not only avoid discouraging him but will positively help him or her to practice the faith.

This applies even more to the religious practice of children. Studies made by non-Catholic groups have revealed that, where both parents are Catholic, ninety-two per cent of the sons practice Catholicism; where both are Protestant, sixty-eight per cent of their sons practice Protestantism, but, where one person was a Protestant and the other a Catholic, only thirty-four per cent of the sons were practicing members of either faith! With such serious convictions about the necessity for instructing children in Catholicism, your Catholic partner certainly wants to avoid every possible hindrance to the Catholic training of all the children.

*Marriage—an End in Itself.* The love that binds you together for life must be more than a physical attraction or compatibility of temperament. It must be a true love which desires unselfishly to do all manner of good to and for one's spouse. St. Paul speaks of this in one of his many letters. Those who contemplate marriage should measure their affection for each other with this classic description of love:

Love is patient,  
Is kind;  
Love does not envy,  
Is not pretentious,  
Is not puffed up,  
Is not ambitious,  
Is not self-seeking,  
Is not provoked;  
Thinks no evil,  
Does not rejoice over wickedness,  
But rejoices with the truth;  
Bears with all things,  
Believes all things,  
Hopes all things,  
Endures all things. (I Cor. 13:4-7.)

If you wish to love in such a way, you will want to do everything possible to make your spouse happy, both in this life and in the next. It is important, therefore, to understand that, to a Catholic, marriage is not an end or a goal of all existence, but only a means

or later demand that the non-Catholic learn to like fish on Friday. Seldom is the household well enough off to prepare two complete Friday meals.

A Catholic is firmly convinced that contraception is always and at all times wrong. This may involve some very hard sacrifices on the part of the non-Catholic entering marriage. Economic and social pressures as well as medical difficulties may well advise a postponement of pregnancy. For the Catholic, this can only mean extended continence, either absolute or relative. The Catholic's extended continence demands an equal continence of the non-Catholic partner!

A Catholic's conviction of his obligation to support his Church involves a financial burden upon the mixed marriage family. It involves helping support a Church and even a parochial school system. It is only fair to both partners to a mixed marriage that they understand all that is involved by the promises they both sign.

Though keeping the promises might be difficult, these promises should be made seriously with every intention of keeping them. These are not like so many other promises. They are much more sacred than the promise to pay off a debt within a certain time, to live with your mother-in-law, or to live in a certain area of the city. Circumstances might make the latter promises inapplicable. No circumstances will make religious promises less sacred to a Catholic partner. They involve your partner's conviction that God must be loved above all things in this specifically Catholic fashion.

The Church's request that the Catholic partner promise to do all in his or her power to bring the non-Catholic into the Catholic faith may seem a bit offensive. But again, however hard as it may be to accept, it is only reasonable. A Catholic, convinced as he is that this faith is the only sure road to God, could hardly protest that he loved his spouse if he were indifferent to what road she traveled! Of what value is such a conviction if it is not to be acted upon? But this is not a two-way street, for again the non-Catholic's position of private interpretation allows him to accept his Catholic spouse's convictions.

*Premarital Investigation.* The Catholic Church is firmly convinced that marriage is a social institution and that the future of our entire society is at stake. She insists that the marriage be witnessed by a priest and two other witnesses. She puts you through a great deal of paper work so that the knot in your mar-

## THE CHURCH AND YOUR MIXED MARRIAGE

The Catholic Church is called Holy Mother, the Church, because we expect Her to be a kind and loving mother. Her warnings about mixed marriages flow only from Her love and concern for your temporal and eternal happiness. Just as you would expect your own mother to point out traits and characteristics in your beloved which might cause difficulty later on, so you should expect your mother, the Church, to do the same regarding mixed marriages. Not only should you expect both your earthly and spiritual mothers to point out moral defects or defects of character, but even habitual traits, perfectly good in themselves, which might make living together difficult. No doubt your non-Catholic fiancée is a wonderful person. The Church does not say that he or she is depraved, immoral, or irreligious. As a matter of fact your beloved might be a far better person than yourself. Your loving mother feels constrained to point out that your future partner has a set of religious principles and ways of looking at things which are utterly foreign to your principles and your manner of seeing. This difference is far greater than a difference of social background because reaching God is the ultimate goal for every human being whereas reaching social position or financial security is relatively unimportant. Though maximum agreement should be striven for by all married couples, agreement on ultimate goals in life is more important than agreement on more passing and temporary affairs.

*Dispensation for Mixed Marriages.* In order to contract a valid mixed marriage you must request a dispensation from the impediments involved. The dispensation comes from the bishop of your particular diocese. You should understand that a dispensation is a favor granted by the Church to one of Her children because of some particular circumstance which would justify a relaxation of the law in your particular case. A dispensation cannot be demanded but only requested, and the Church will give a dispensation only if there is a good reason. Though it might seem strange to you, love—or being in love—is not a good reason. If, after obtaining a marriage license, you were to go before a court of civil law and request that the waiting period, required in most states, be waived, then you would have to plead a reason other than that you love each other! Law is concerned with the common good and is rather cold to personal and emotional involvement! It is doubtful if any law even mentions love! The weightiness of your reason

for requesting a dispensation must be judged by the pastor or priest to whom you go for your wedding arrangements. He, in turn, will refer it to the proper ecclesiastical superior for final decision.

*Promises.* Besides your good reason, both you and your future married partner will be expected to make certain promises in writing. Your promises have serious binding power on both of you and oblige you under serious sin to carry them out. You will promise that you will live as a Catholic and have all your children baptized and reared as Catholics; that you will have but one wedding ceremony (and that the Catholic one), and, that you will do all that is reasonable and prudent to bring your partner to the Catholic faith. Your non-Catholic partner will second your promises by promising not to interfere with the religious practice of you and your children, and that he or she will not demand a second ceremony other than the Catholic one.

*Will the Promises be Carried Out?* You must have reasonable certainty that the promises made will be carried out by both you and your marriage partner. If you find your own promises weak, or your future spouse is resentful, grudging, or hesitant about making these promises, then beg him or her not to make them and do not go through with the marriage. This may seem strong, but faith demands that we place God above all. As a Catholic, you would be expected to face a firing squad rather than to deny God or lose your faith. No matter how much you think you are in love, it is better to choose God's commands than to choose what, to you, appears a most happy temporal marriage. Further, if there is no reasonable certainty that the promises will be carried out, the dispensation you might obtain would be invalid.

On the other hand, it is most important to be very sympathetic with your future spouse over the difficulty he or she might have over making or keeping these promises. It is both unrealistic and uncharitable to ignore the quite understandable difficulties the non-Catholic might well have. Being convinced is one thing; being arrogant in your convictions is quite another!

### PROBLEMS OF MIXED MARRIAGES

*American Approach to Problems.* People in the United States want to have a problem-free life. This is an unobtainable goal. The process of living is the solution of daily problems one after

will allow for no lowest common denominator of doctrine to guide two people who disagree. Though this may seem arrogant, it is really a logical necessity. If I believe that there is only one, true, certain road to a distant city, and I feel it absolutely necessary for me to get to that city; and if you believe that there are several roads to that city, among which one is mine, I cannot logically drive with you on any road other than the one I am convinced will get me there. However wrong I might be in my opinion, I am logically committed to follow that conviction. On the other hand, you may ride in the car with me because you admit that my road is one way to that city, though you believe that there are other roads. In a similar fashion, the Catholic is convinced that there is only one true and certain road to the City of God which is Heaven. On the principle of private interpretation, most members of faiths other than the Catholic believe that there are many roads upon which one may save his soul. On the same principle, that of private interpretation, they must admit that the Catholic road is one way. It is possible, then, for one not a Catholic to go along with a Catholic in his conviction, but it is not possible for the Catholic to go along with the non-Catholic in believing that other roads lead to the same goal. The embarrassing thing about this logical position is the appearance the Church gives of being unsympathetic, intransigent, and unyielding, not to say bigoted and smug; Really, She draws the only conclusion She can honestly draw from Her conviction of being *the Church of Christ*.

*Promises to Sign.* For this reason, upon marrying a Catholic, one not a Catholic is required by the Catholic Church and by the Catholic partner to sign a set of promises that the non-Catholic will not interfere with the religious practices of the Catholic partner and that all the children, both boys and girls, will be reared in the Catholic faith. Though this is uncompromising, it is a logical deduction from the conviction of the Catholic partner. A thinking non-Catholic must, at very least, admire and respect the consistent application of Catholic promises to concrete action.

*Promises to Keep.* It is not enough to make promises. The difficulty of keeping them must be faced. Love will protest that any sacrifice is easy, but, when the chips are down, the sacrifices can loom very large. Not to interfere with the practices of the Catholic partner involves some positive activity on the part of a non-Catholic. To permit a spouse to eat fish on Friday may sooner

so with gentleness and fear, having a good conscience, so that wherein they speak in disparagement of you they who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame." (I St. Peter 3: 15-16.) Nowhere in the teaching of their Church will Catholics find defense for smugness or arrogance in their faith.

However, the consistency of Catholics which drives them to draw the clear conclusions from their principles must certainly be admired. If only they lived their consistent doctrines with joy and enthusiasm, the rest of the world could agree with the old Romans who said, "See how these Christians love one another."

It is real love which has prompted the above pages for your perusal as a non-Catholic entering a mixed marriage with a Catholic. It was felt only fair to you to explain all the pitfalls and difficulties involved in a mixed marriage. You should not be asked to buy into a partnership in which the contract is not clearly explained. Once you have taken all the facts into consideration and have definitely made your choice of a mixed marriage, you will find the Catholic Church wholeheartedly behind you in your efforts to make of your love union the greatest possible success.

## To the Catholic

**D**ESPITE THE warnings of the Church about the difficulties of a mixed marriage, you have decided to enter one. This makes the Church sad since the centuries of bitter experience She has had with mixed marriages make Her very hesitant about yours. She has seen too many young couples, triumphant in love, come to grief. She has lost too many children from God. The Church shows Her hesitance and sorrow by refusing to allow you to be married at a Nuptial Mass with the Nuptial Blessing. This is not so much an exclusion as a recognition that your future partner, since he or she has not been baptized a Catholic, cannot actively participate in the Mass or receive the special blessing which requires the Catholic faith in order to be fully operative. A blind man cannot complain that nobody shows him movies; he has no faculty of sight. In the same way, your future partner does not have the faculty of participating in either the Mass or the Blessing. The Church is sad for both of you that this is so.

riage will be as firmly and permanently tied as possible. Hence, She asks you a great number of questions under oath. These questions are not designed to offend a non-Catholic since the same questions are asked of Catholic spouses! They are designed to ascertain whether you truly know what marriage is and truly desire marriage as it is. The Church wants certain proof that there is no previous marriage in existence; that you agree that marriage is a permanent union between one man and one woman for a lifetime without any conditions contrary to the nature of marriage; that there are no possible impediments to such a permanent and indissoluble union.

You probably know that Catholics find it extremely difficult to dissolve a marriage. One of the chief reasons for this difficulty is the universal administration of this questionnaire under oath. The Church knows from centuries of experience that, though love protests that it is eternal, and that nothing will ever shake it, the very same love can seem terribly distant when there is a dispute, a mental upset, a financial disaster, an alcoholic incident, or a physical illness. The Church is concerned that your pledge of perpetual love be no mere mood of the moment but a true, total, lifetime dedication.

Before performing the Catholic ceremony, the Church usually asks you to take six instructions in the Catholic faith. This is not proselytizing. It is honest concern that you understand your spouse's convictions in order to find it easier to live successfully with them!

### LIVING IN A MIXED MARRIAGE

Once the Church has made all these investigations and obtained all the necessary promises, once She has pointed out to you all the areas of difficulty and possible pitfalls which might plunge your marriage into disaster, the Church will second your marriage and try to give you all possible helps to make yours one of the two out of three mixed marriages which are reasonably successful.

*Mixed Marriages Can "Work."* No doubt there are many mixed marriages that work. Many may work a great deal better than some hasty and ill-advised marriages between two Catholics. Catholics are not automatically good marriage risks simply because they are baptized. But certainly you want to be able to say more about your marriage than that "it works." Would the answer, "It

works,” from the owner of an imported sports car impel you to buy one yourself? If you were considering a new position and you asked the man who now holds the job how he likes it, would an answer, “It’s work,” urge you to drop your present position and take the new job? That a marriage “works” is the least that can be expected of it. You want your marriage and family life to be enthusiastic and triumphant. The two of you can *exist* together, but can you be fully *alive* together?

Catholics believe that the union between Christ and the Catholic Church is so alive that, together, they are compared to head and body—one, whole, Christ. Again, the union of Christ and His Church is described as the union of a bridegroom to the bride. Indeed, they believe that the union of a Catholic husband and wife is a miniature reliving of the union of Christ and His Church. St. Paul says, “Wives be subject to your husbands as to the Lord; because a husband is head of the wife, just as Christ is head of the Church . . . . Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the Church.” (Ephesians 5:22-25.) How can your Catholic spouse find in you this model when he or she must believe that you are not fully of the Body of Christ? The fullness of spiritual unity must, of necessity, be rather tenuous in a mixed marriage. Pope Pius XI, in speaking on mixed marriages, tells us, “Assuredly, also, will there be wanting that close union of spirit which, as it is the sign and mark of the Church of Christ, so also should it be the sign of Christian wedlock, its glory and adornment.” As you probably know already, the Church will not give Her “nuptial blessing” to a mixed marriage. This does not mean that She will not pray for the success of your marriage or that She does not love you very much. It means that She cannot share this special treasure of blessing with you since its whole meaning flows from the unity which Christ has with His true Church. Obviously, if you cannot share the life the Church believes She has, since you are not a member, then you cannot share in the treasures of that Church. While your Catholic spouse is a member of the Mystical Body, there will always be a part of your spouse which is not yours.

*Practical Daily Living.* Will you always feel somewhat a stranger in your home? Will the crucifix your Catholic spouse will desire in the bedroom or living room be an affront to you? Will the blessed palm, blessed candles, holy water, and holy pictures have a place in your home without seeming to intrude?

More important, what about your conversation? Most people say that religion is a poor topic for discussion since it only leads to argument. Surely, you do not want disunity in your home, so you will find often that, in your intellectual discussions, you will have to prescind from the subject of religion. If both of you are fully convinced about the importance of religion, this will leave a queer vacuum. If you are not so convinced, your indifference will seem almost an affront to your Catholic spouse.

Who will teach your children religion? Will you feel yourself inadequate talking to your children about God, their first Holy Communion, their Confirmation? Will you feel an outsider as your Catholic spouse teaches them family prayers, the Rosary, and the Hail Mary, all prayers in which you can hardly join with any inner conviction? So it will continue in the practical daily living of your Catholic spouse and children. They will go Sunday after Sunday to Mass and frequently receive the Body of Christ at Holy Communion. You will see in them a devotion in which you cannot share and with which you might not even sympathize.

Finally, in marrying a Catholic you are developing a mother-in-law problem of which you are not aware. You can recognize and love your spouse’s mother in the flesh. You must recognize that your Catholic spouse has two other mothers, the Virgin Mother of God and Holy Mother, the Church. The possibility of mother-in-law problems must be faced in these two as well as in the first!

## CONCLUSION

To many of those outside the Church, the most exasperating thing about Catholicism is the sureness that Catholics have of the truths they hold. This sureness verges upon a smug certainty. On the one hand, our non-Catholic friends might envy our certainty and, on the other, they might well resent our unruffled smugness. Too frequently Catholics give the impression to others that, “I am right and you are wrong. There can be no discussion, and that’s that!” For any smugness that Catholics might exhibit, they certainly are not to be praised. Their Church teaches them that faith is a free gift from God for which they must humbly pray and which they must carefully treasure lest they lose it. They are further admonished by St. Peter to prepare themselves to give the reasons for the faith that is in them: “. . . Be ready always with an answer to everyone who asks a reason for the hope that is in you. Yet do