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from a
Catholic
Father

**ON
DATING
PROTESTANTS**

by Dale Francis



a **dialogue pamphlet**



From a Catholic Father

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PROTESTANTS

by DALE FRANCIS

No. 167

An OSV Dialogue Pamphlet

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More than a quarter of a century ago, Ellis Guthrie and Dale Francis were at college together. Now Ellis is a Church of the Brethren minister in Eaton, Ohio, and a writer for Protestant magazines, Dale is a writer for Our Sunday Visitor, and both have teen-age daughters. The letters to their daughters discuss the problem of Catholics and Protestants dating each other.

DEAR MARIANNE,

You're going to be dating next year. You've accepted, maybe not always entirely happily, our decision to wait until you were 16 to start your dating. I realize this hasn't been easy, not with so many of your friends already dating, but, as you told us last winter when all your classmates were making dates for the Catholic school dance, "I'll do what you say because you're my parents but you shouldn't expect me to be enthusiastic about it."

PROLOGUE TO MARRIAGE

All right, now that you're approaching dating there is something else I want to offer as the advice I must give as your father — I hope you'll date only Catholic boys.

That may sound like a contradiction. From the time you've been old enough to understand you've been told you should love and respect those of the other faiths. Now here I am telling you that you shouldn't date young men of other faiths. It sounds like a contradiction but it really isn't.

You see dating is a prologue to marriage. Don't get me wrong. I'm not suggesting that when a young fellow asks you for a date you have to consider whether or not you'd want to marry him. Dating is a prologue to marriage, all right, but it is also a time in which you are learning to find values in other people. You may or may not have a dream man in mind — my guess is you don't — but even if you do it may well turn out the man you'll finally fall in love with and marry won't look anything like that dream man.

So I'm not suggesting that when you date every fellow you go out with fit some preconceived idea of the man you want to marry, but I am saying that the boys you date should be boys who will be men with whom you could enter into the complete commitment of marriage.

And you couldn't enter into the

complete commitment with a Protestant boy? No, I'm afraid not. Understand, I'm not saying that a young man who is a Protestant can't be in every way as fine a young man as a Catholic boy. I'm just saying that marriage with someone who could not share your faith would have a certain incompleteness about it.

FAITH MOST IMPORTANT

Do you remember the time you came home from the third grade with a report card that was — well, not one of the best report cards you've ever brought home? You watched me as I looked at it and then you said, "I got an A in religion, Dad. You remember you told me that religion is the most important of all."

It is, Marianne, it really is. Your faith is the foundation of your life. Of all the gifts we have offered you, your faith is the most important. Maybe the figure of speech of your faith as a foundation isn't a good one for it isn't just something you stand on, it is something that is woven into the very pattern of your life.

But when you marry your life is no longer just your life; you become one with the man you marry, your two lives

are inseparable, everything you are is combined with everything he is.

So your faith, which is the most important thing in your life, must be shared with him or there is an incompleteness in your life together. I'm not saying there haven't been happy mixed marriages; I know there have been, but even those who have achieved happiness in a mixed marriage will tell you — if they are to be completely honest — that the inability to share together their faith has somehow left them deprived of the fullness of happiness. If something is important to you, if it is a vital part of your life, you cannot be fully satisfied unless you are able to share it with the one you love best.

NOT BIGOTRY OR PREJUDICE

I hope you've read my old friend's letter to his daughter. It will show you, for one thing, that my concern as a Catholic father that my daughter not date those of other faiths is shared by his concern as a Protestant father that his daughter not date those of another faith. It isn't bigotry or narrow-mindedness on the part of either of us; it is concern that our daughters find happiness in marriage.

If you've read his letter, then you know that he tells her of some things that she as a Protestant could not accept in the teachings of Catholicism. I think you'll believe, as I do, that he presents the Catholic Church in a way that we could not accept — the Church isn't exactly as he sees it.

But what is important is to know that he speaks honestly, without any conscious prejudice. He doesn't see the Catholic Church as we see the Catholic Church, and he doesn't because his entire background has been different.

This would be true of any Protestant, not because of a prejudice but because his background would be different from yours. He would try to be fair, he would try to be free of any prejudice, but he would be unable to get the full vision you have simply because he is outside that vision.

But suppose he became a Catholic. As you know, I became a Catholic as an adult. I am completely, entirely, with every fibre of my being, a Catholic. I became a Catholic without any rejection of my Protestant origins but with a projection of all I believed as a Protestant into what I see as a completeness of the faith I once held.

So I know that it is possible for one who is not a Catholic to become a Catholic, wholly and completely. But this could never be done just because he wanted to please you, just because he thought it was best to have a family belong to the same faith; it would have to be an action of complete conviction. It happens, no one knows this better than I do, but it does not always happen.

The best thing, I am certain, is to seek the company of those with whom you already share what is most important to you both. When you are both already committed to the same faith, then it is easier for you to commit yourselves to one another — not holding back the fullness of who you are and who he is because you can't bring to one another the wholeness of yourself which is woven with your faith.

My friend has said many things about the problems of mixed marriages with which I would agree. I'll not repeat them for you will have read his letter. The practical problems of material relationships, of the rearing of children, are complicated by the mixed marriage.

SACRAMENTAL MEANING OF MARRIAGE

But there is one other thing that I would remind you of — we believe marriage is a sacrament, most Protestants do not. We believe that the husband and wife administer this sacrament to one another, in every act of love they perform towards one another, from the making of love to the making of dinner, from the work the husband does to provide for his family to the easy chair fixed for him when he comes home from work.

If you are to share with one another the realization of this sacramental meaning of marriage you really must show your religious faith.

Just as my friend wished for his daughter the guidance of God through dating to a happy marriage, I wish for you that God will direct you, that you may be led to the full commitment of yourself to someone with whom you can share all that is important in life — and of all the elements of your life, your faith is the most important.

Love,
Dad







from a
Protestant
Father

**ON
DATING
CATHOLICS**

by Ellis G. Guthrie

a  dialogue pamphlet

From a Protestant Father

ON
DATING
CATHOLICS

by ELLIS G. GUTHRIE

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DEAR BARBARA,

Now that you are away from home perhaps I should review with you a deep concern I have about dating boys of the Catholic faith.

In all fairness we must admit that we share many beliefs with the Catholic church. Let me mention a few. 1. The Trinity. 2. The Deity of Jesus Christ. 3. His birth to the Virgin Mary. 4. The Sanctity of Marriage. When Catholic writers take Protestants to task for denying these fundamental girders of the Christian faith my sympathy lies with the Catholic. He, not the Protestant, is defending the faith once delivered to the saints.

This brings us to a key thought of this letter, Barbara. Real honesty causes us to face frankly our disagreements as

well as to recognize the beliefs we share.

One of the first that comes to mind is the Catholic attitude towards the Virgin Mary. We strongly feel that Catholics show a devotion to Mary that should be reserved for God alone. We both believe that God honored Mary above all other women. But we do not accept Catholic dogma concerning her place in redemption. It appears to us that Catholics make her different in kind from other women next to being divine. Probably Catholics would say this is not their attitude. One example is the matter of prayer. It looks to us as though they pray to her. They say not to her but through her. Even if the distinction can be made it is wrong to us. Perhaps sometime concepts can be clarified to the point of agreement. But until then this is a very real difference between us.

PROBLEMS IN MIXED MARRIAGES

There are a number of other differences — the use of images, the confessional, the concept of the church, etc. What should be your attitude towards a Church that holds such dramatically opposed beliefs to ours?

A most difficult thing to do Bar-

bara, is to have strong convictions and, at the same time, to love and respect those who hold opposite views. Yet you need to do this. No other course of action can be pleasing to God.

Before we get back to mixed dating let me share with you some thoughts on mixed marriages. There are several alternatives. Here they are with comments.

1. You leave your church for the church of your Catholic husband.
2. He leaves his church for yours.
3. Compromise on a third church.
4. Each remains as loyal to his own church as the situation permits.

For a person with strong religious convictions number one is unacceptable. Even if you accept the Catholic faith it still might be a poor alternate. There are two dangers. The first has to do with your family. Because the Catholic church claims to be the one true church, your joining it would imply that the church of your family was in error. Thus your family was in error. You might not want to say this and we might try to understand. Still the implication would be there. Because you have a tender heart this would put you under a strain and indirectly put a strain on your marriage.

The second danger lies in the power of the mind to convince a person that he really believes what he wants to believe. The Protestant may convince himself he really believes this if it is the only alternative to a broken romance. Then after the honeymoon the sickening realization comes. There was no conversion — only wishful thinking.

CAN BE A BOOBY TRAP

On the surface number two might seem an ideal solution. This can also be a booby trap. Here a Catholic may hurt his parents deeply. This strain is bound to affect the marriage. Believe me, Barbara, with all of the unavoidable strains that threaten marriages youth ought to avoid as many as possible. Again the Catholic boy may be a victim of wishful thinking when he accepts your religious convictions. Think of the agony he endures when he finally realizes that he has betrayed his true beliefs.

To be sure you could marry a nominal Catholic who had no real convictions. However, your future children are too precious to risk their spiritual upbringing to any pagan parent be he either Catholic or Protestant.

Number three looks like a fair com-

promise. Yet all the dangers of the previous alternatives are present. The possible results — two dissatisfied people instead of one.

The last solution may be the best if no children are involved. Let us look at it. If the Catholic is to be true to his Church a priest will perform the ceremony. Your dream of being married in your church will be denied you. Furthermore, you must promise to make no effort to convert your husband to your faith. At the same time he would be free to try converting you to his.

EFFECTS FOR FAMILY

When children are involved the stage is set for real heartache. You must promise to raise them as Catholics. If you believe in your church, Barbara, yet see your children going to another church the experience can break your heart. They will be taught to believe things you cannot accept. And when you see your children kneeling in front of a statue of a saint or the Virgin Mary there is a conflict that will fill you with concern. For you this is wrong. But for your children it is right. In one of the most meaningful experiences of life —

the religious — you cannot join with your family.

We ought now to mention one difference in another sphere — birth control. Catholics believe all birth control, except the rhythm method, is wrong. If you do not trust this method the most intimate part of your marriage may crumble into a tense and harmful relationship. If you worry about pregnancy you cannot give yourself to your husband. If you fail to give yourself you will strike him where he is most vulnerable — his masculine ego. He may refrain from the sacred act because the meaning has gone. Or his biological needs may force him to continue. Either way you will feel rejected and unloved. He will know; and your marriage, once so beautiful will have degenerated into ugliness. You could *insist* upon some form of birth control. If you do you ask your husband to violate his conscience.

DATING TIME OF TRIAL

I hope by this time, Barbara, you are beginning to see the situation in its true perspective. A mixed marriage is beset with so many problems that can rob it of joy and leave it in shambles.

It is too sacred even to contemplate with so many foreseeable difficulties.

By now it ought to be obvious that mixed dating is even unwise. You will never be faced with the agony of deciding on a mixed marriage if you never fall in love with a Catholic boy. You are not likely to fall in love if you do not date a Catholic. And please, Barbara, never say "We're just good friends." Many have said that only to discover that love slipped in unexpectedly.

There must be friendship before there can be real love. It is not traitorous to our own church to admit that Catholic boys are as nice and as attractive as Protestant boys. It is the honest difference of belief that needs to be kept in mind.

I know you don't want to seem bigoted by refusing to date Catholic boys. When you make it clear that you think too highly of them to risk hurting either them or yourself by learning to care there can be no bigotry.

One last thought! Believing you will not fall in love with a certain Catholic boy you appreciate you may decide: "Why deny myself the pleasure of his

company? I'll tell him about my religious beliefs and forestall any problems." Assuming that you do not fall in love you still are being very unfair. He may fall in love with you. If you have more than two or three dates with a boy he will feel that you accept him as a person. He does not divide himself into who he is and what he believes. He is one entity. In a dating situation objectivity is often lost. The truth is when you start dating a boy and he feels really accepted as a fine person by you he may well feel you accept the whole person — what he is and what he believes. And unwittingly you hurt a boy who has learned to care. I believe you are too concerned for the welfare of others to allow this to happen. The only way to escape the heartaches of a mixed marriage is to refrain from mixed dating.

May God bless you and direct you in your dating experiences and lead you to one with whom you can share in the fullest way.

Love,
Dad

