

Mixed

Marriages

are

Risky!

By

Rev. J. Lover, C.S.S.R.

SPEC
CAPAM

Imprimi Potest:

VERY REV. JOHN SEPHTON, C.S.S.R.,
Provincial Superior, Baltimore Province.

New York, N. Y., November 19, 1953.

Nihil Obstat:

REV. THOMAS W. SMIDDY, S.T.L.,
Censor Librorum.

Imprimatur:

MOST REV. THOMAS E. MOLLOY, S.T.D.,
Archbishop-Bishop of Brooklyn.

Brooklyn, N. Y., February 25, 1954.

COPYRIGHT, 1954, BY
THE MISSIONARY SOCIETY OF ST. PAUL THE APOSTLE
IN THE STATE OF NEW YORK

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED IN THE U. S. A.
BY THE PAULIST PRESS, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

MIXED MARRIAGES ARE RISKY!

REV. JAMES F. LOVER, C.S.S.R., M.A., J.C.D.

EVERY normal man and woman contemplating marriage wants the choice of a life-partner to be a happy one. Even the proverbial gold-digger who marries an older man for his money is looking for happiness, although she goes about it in a base, ignoble way. When the old gentleman passes out of the picture and she is the sole heiress to his finances and the security they bring, she will be completely happy. Or, so she thinks. But, at any rate, she is looking for happiness, at least happiness *through* her marriage.

Most people, of course, are looking for happiness *in* marriage. They want the marriage to be successful and their lives together happy. It would be an odd person indeed, if not an abnormal one, who would marry without looking for and hoping to find happiness in marriage. In fact, most couples about to marry are adamantly convinced that their marriage will not only be happy, but ideal as well, and a truck-load of contrary reasons will not budge them one inch from their convictions.

The Inevitable Risks of Marriage

All this is normal enough. It is as it should be. Yet with all this there is a truth having a direct and important bearing on happiness in marriage that should not be overlooked. It is this: In every marriage, regardless of its actual outcome, there is always a certain degree of risk involved. In the words of the traditional

formula by which the marriage vows are exchanged, a man and woman take each other "for better, for worse; for richer, for poorer; in sickness and in health, until death." The very fact that such a promise is made indicates the margin of error and the element of chance that exists in the lives of all married couples.

Several reasons account for the fact that there is a certain degree of risk inevitably bound up in any and every marriage. The fact that no two personalities are identically alike is the basic reason. Then there are the differences in background, in education and environment and other such factors that go into the moulding of a person's character. These factors may be very similar in a given case, yet there is always some shade of difference between any two people.

Again there are the vast and important differences that exist between men and women. Quite obviously God created the two sexes physically different. But men and women also differ emotionally, temperamentally and in mental outlook. There are certain characteristics that can be spoken of as dominant male characteristics, and others as dominant female characteristics, for example, men do not think in the same way as women do, and vice versa.

It is not a matter of one sex being superior to the other, or inferior either. The two are just different, because that is the way God created us.

Any of these differences can become the cause of difficulties between husband and wife. They need not cause trouble and unhappiness, of course. On the contrary, the two sexes were so created as to be complementary of each other in every way. But the fact that

such differences do exist inevitably introduces a degree of risk and chance into every marriage.

Finally, the risks involved in marriage arise from the possibility of unforeseen circumstances, such as long illness or tragic accidents, that can make married life complicated and difficult. In specific cases there may be even further risks due to character and personality defects that manifest themselves, perhaps, only after the marriage has been contracted. But in all marriages there is an unavoidable element of risk and chance. It is all part and parcel of the bargain.

Since a certain degree of risk is run by every man and woman who marries, it would seem to be elemental common sense for a person, as a matter of firm conviction and determination, to shun any marriage which would entail some grave and evident risk that is unnecessary and therefore avoidable. In other words, persons who hope to marry some day should by design refuse to be drawn into an infatuation or a love affair that could lead to a proposal of marriage, but which also involves an obvious and avoidable risk to the happiness of that marriage.

That is only common sense. Yet, experience proves how frequently this bit of fundamental prudence is ignored. Often a decision to marry is based on nothing more solid than the fact that the proposed marriage offers such advantages as physical beauty or attractiveness, financial security or social prestige. To allow one's judgment in the important matter of marriage to be swayed entirely by such factors is shallow thinking.

Often enough, the blame for such ill-advised decisions is to be laid, at least partially, at the door-step

of overly solicitous and even greedy parents. An honest, unemotional appraisal of such a situation will show clearly how insignificant are such advantages when there is also present an unnecessary and avoidable disadvantage which quite evidently constitutes a grave risk to the happiness of the marriage. It is foolhardy of any couple to marry while risking the development of a major problem which very easily may mar and even destroy forever the happiness of the marriage, or, worse still, break up the marriage itself.

No doubt, the classic example of such foolhardiness is that of the girl who, despite all advice to the contrary, stubbornly insists on marrying a man who is obviously more or less of an habitual drunkard or an inveterate criminal. One of the chief points of objection to such risky marriages is that in such cases it is highly unlikely, indeed almost impossible, that a complete and perfect understanding between husband and wife will ever be achieved. Almost inevitably the result is that situations and circumstances so develop as to make married life unbearable.

Complete Mutual Understanding

It is a cardinal rule, of course, that a successful and happy marriage depends in large measure on a complete and mutual understanding between husband and wife. Such an understanding is especially important in view of the fact that, once validly contracted, marriage binds the couple to each other permanently—until death. Marriages are not made in bargain basements where a purchased article can be exchanged or the contract rescinded. Marriage is for keeps!

A lifetime of constant opposition, of endless misunderstanding and strife is not a happy one. Still that is what is in store for couples between whom there is little or no grounds for mutual understanding. Despite the free and easy divorce laws, despite the lack of noble marriage-ideals, the low esteem for marriage and the pagan approach to it so prevalent in our society today, despite all these, this basic truth remains: Marriage is a permanent proposition. It was so instituted by God Himself. No society can long flout the law of God in such an important matter and not pay the dire consequences. Nor can any church connive at, much less approve of, divorce and "re-marriage" and still claim to be a Christian church. Christ Himself commanded: "What God hath joined together let no man put asunder."¹ And St. Paul warned the early Christians: "Let marriage be held in honor with all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the immoral."²

Therefore, since marriage is so important, because it is permanent and irrevocable, eliminating all unnecessary risks to the happiness of the marriage is only basic common sense. Entering a risky or hazardous marriage may be lamented in time. Eventually, most of them are. But the union itself cannot be undone. Then, if any degree of happiness is to be achieved, the couple will be faced with the real and difficult job of adjusting to such a marriage. But, it is far too late to back out of the bargain and start all over again!

¹ Matt. xix. 6.

² Heb. xiii. 4.

Mixed Marriages

One of the most grave hazards to a happy marriage is present when the couple concerned are of different religious beliefs. Very often it is a totally unnecessary hazard, one that could have been avoided easily.

Mixed marriages are risky! This is true, regardless of the particular religious convictions of the two persons. Even if neither party to the marriage is a Catholic, but yet each is firmly convinced of his or her particular religious beliefs, such marriages are risky and inadvisable. A marriage of a sincere, orthodox Jewish person to an equally sincere and convinced Lutheran, for instance, would give rise to situations that would find the couple at loggerheads as long as they each remain steadfastly loyal to their respective religious convictions.

However, we are concerned here with marriages in which one party to the contract is Catholic.

The Catholic Position

In discussing the attitude of the Catholic Church toward mixed marriages, it is essential to realize clearly just what is her law on the matter. Many people, even some Catholics, are of the opinion that the Church frowns on mixed marriages, advises against them, but that is as far as it goes.

Actually, the Church does nothing of the kind. On the contrary, the opposition of the Catholic Church to mixed marriages is far more specific than that, for she positively and bluntly *prohibits* them. In her official code of law it is clearly stated that the Church every-

where and most severely prohibits marriages between a Catholic and a non-Catholic. Indeed, if there is danger in such a marriage that the Catholic party, or the children of such a union, would be perverted and would suffer the loss of Faith, then such a marriage is prohibited not merely by the positive law of the Church, but by the Divine Law itself.³

This law is based on the fundamental and firm belief of the Catholic Church that she alone is the sole divinely authorized teacher of the one true Faith of Jesus Christ and, therefore, is charged by divine authority with the commission of defending the true Faith and preserving it inviolate for all time. Then, too, from experience gained over long centuries, the Church knows all too well and all too sadly the risks involved in such marriages—not just the risk of dissension between husband and wife and the consequent unhappiness in the home, but, more important still, the great risk to the spiritual welfare, to the Faith itself, and to the salvation of the Catholic party and of the children who may be born of such a union.

The Church did not enact this law out of antipathy toward non-Catholics. Nor is it evidence of contempt or hatred toward the various sects and denominations. The chief concern of the Catholic Church in her legislation, as in everything else, is the salvation of immortal souls. Whatever is found conducive to this end, she advocates; whatever is found harmful or threatens the welfare and salvation of souls, she resolutely opposes and condemns.

³ Cfr. Canon No. 1060.

Dispensations

It is true, of course, that the Church does on occasion dispense in individual cases from the observance of the law prohibiting mixed marriages. But the very fact that such a dispensation is required shows clearly her displeasure. Actually such a dispensation is granted only under certain well-defined conditions and only for very grave reasons. The Church's opposition to such marriages is not a mild opposition, consequently she does not grant a dispensation from this law automatically at the mere request for it. The mere fact that a Catholic would like to marry one not of the Faith is no guarantee that a dispensation will be granted. Indeed, it is only under protest and to avoid greater evils that such a concession is ever made.

The Church realizes the grave risks involved in such marriages and warns her subjects against them. Yet taking a practical view of things she knows full well that occasions will arise when such a marriage will be contemplated despite her warnings and despite the risks involved. In such instances, provided sufficient assurance can be given that the dangers involved will be effectively avoided, then to prevent some other likely evil, perhaps even some actual evil, a concession is made and a dispensation is granted. For example, if both the Catholic and the non-Catholic party to a proposed marriage sincerely and honestly make the so-called "pre-nuptial promises," and provided sufficient assurance is had that these solemn promises will be carried out faithfully, then for grave and serious reasons, as avoidance of some evil such as an attempted marriage in the presence of an official other than an au-

thorized Catholic priest, the Church reluctantly grants a dispensation from her law and permits one of her members to contract marriage with a non-Catholic.

The Pre-Nuptial Promises

Regarding the pre-nuptial promises, as they are often called, it is important to realize that both parties to the proposed marriage must make these promises, not just the non-Catholic person. The promises must be made sincerely, and the persons concerned must be prepared to carry out their promises faithfully. This duty obliges the non-Catholic even in the event of the death of the Catholic partner.

Ordinarily, it is required that these promises be made in writing before witnesses. The actual promises are concerned with the solemn assurance (1) that in the solemnization of the marriage there shall be only one ceremony, the Catholic ceremony; (2) that all the children, both boys and girls, who may be born of the marriage will be baptized and educated in the Catholic religion. The non-Catholic must also promise not to obstruct in any way or hinder the Catholic partner in the exercise of the Catholic religion. And the Catholic also promises to do what he or she can, chiefly through prayer and personal good example, to bring the non-Catholic partner into the true Faith. These promises must be made sincerely in each and every case prior to any consideration being given to the reasons why a dispensation is sought. To put it in another way, unless these promises are made and sufficient assurance is had that they will be observed faithfully, a dispensation to marry a non-Catholic is simply out of the question.

Yet this requirement is not an arbitrary demand on the part of the Church. On the contrary, it is a matter of reasoned conviction. Indeed, the Church is forced by the logic of her position to require these promises. Were she to do otherwise she would thereby be guilty of inconsistency and contradict herself. For the Church teaches officially, and every Catholic is taught to believe, that there is and there can be only one, true, authentic Church of Christ, the Son of God. Further, the Catholic Church believes and adamantly preaches that she alone is the true Church of Christ, the only one officially authorized by divine commission to preach the Gospel, administer the Sacraments and lead men along the one road to salvation.

In other words, the Catholic Church not only believes in her divine origin and mission, but likewise has the courage to translate that conviction into action.

Not Intolerance!

The Catholic Church definitely does not subscribe to the obvious and insidious error that one Church or one religion is as good as another. Hence, it is not intolerant of her to insist on these pre-nuptial promises being made, and to demand guarantees that they will be observed faithfully. A person can be tolerant and kindly toward another and at the same time heartily disagree with the other's convictions.

Truth is one, and a person possessing the truth has rights and obligations which differ from those of a person in error. Two times two makes four. There is no other answer. And even though every child in the first grade may think differently, they are wrong. They

each may be sincere, industrious, and firmly convinced. But they are wrong. No one in his right mind would accuse the teacher of intolerance when she insists that "four" is the only answer, and points out each child's mistake. Indeed, the teacher has a right to correct and an obligation to teach the truth. The children on the other hand have an obligation to learn the truth and a right to expect that it will be taught to them.

Similarly, when the Catholic Church insists on her position she is not being intolerant. She is merely insisting on the truth. In the matter of mixed marriages, she is merely being consistent with her own fundamental doctrines. She would be abandoning her divine mission of defender of the Faith if she acted otherwise.

Incidentally, few persons realize that the Church takes very similar measures when a Catholic contemplates marriage with an unworthy Catholic, one who is more or less of a reprobate, and where, therefore, the same and perhaps even greater dangers are present which jeopardize the faith of the loyal Catholic and would prove harmful to whatever children may come.

Though the Church has due regard for the convictions of individual non-Catholic people, still she cannot contradict her own position. Having been divinely commissioned with the truth and with its defense, she must take measures to defend the faith of her children and to safeguard it from an atmosphere which is liable to damage it. From long experience, she knows that such an atmosphere often exists in cases of mixed marriages.

"My Case Is Different"

Of course, many people contemplating a mixed marriage will insist that they have come to a reasonable understanding about religion and will stoutly maintain that their case is different. In their case, they claim, the atmosphere has been cleared, there is no danger, the usual risks connected with a mixed marriage just do not exist for them. They are just not going to permit religious differences to interfere with their lives. But, whether they like it or not, religion *is* going to interfere with their lives. It is too big an issue, far too important an item and has long since had a deep and lasting influence on their character development and outlook on life not to have far-reaching effects on their marriage and on their home. The fact that difference in religion is one of the leading causes for separation and divorce bears this out.

The validity of this statement is clearly evidenced by a survey of a given parish made in 1942 by Brother Gerald J. Schnepf, S.M., now associate professor of Sociology at St. Louis University. The total number of marriages studied in this survey was 1,046, and of these 357 were mixed marriages. Twelve and five-tenths (12.5) per cent of these mixed marriages ended in divorce or separation, as against 6.1 per cent of the marriages in which both spouses were Catholics. This seems to show that the chances are twice as great for the breakup of mixed marriages as they are for Catholic marriages.⁴

⁴ *Marriage and the Family*, Mihanovich-Schnepf-Thomas, Bruce Co., 1952, pp. 206-207.

The testimony of a Presbyterian minister is very similar. Rev. Robert Good, speaking in Ottawa, Canada, expressed the view that mixed marriages should be avoided at all costs because of the high rate of failure of such marriages. He found that only six per cent of the marriages in which husband and wife were of the same faith ended in failure as compared with fifteen per cent in cases of mixed marriages.⁵

The Specific Risks

So far in this discussion the dangers involved in a mixed marriage have been referred to in only a general way. It is worthwhile, therefore, to consider the actual specific hazards and risks involved in such marriages.

In the first place, even before the marriage ceremony takes place there is a strong likelihood of disagreement arising between the couple over the prenuptial promises that must be made. Many sincere non-Catholics cannot understand why they should be asked to make such sweeping promises. In some instances the non-Catholic honestly objects to them on the grounds that his or her conscience would be violated thereby. The nature of the promises and why they are required have already been discussed. The point here is that they are often a source of misunderstanding, ill-feeling and outright bitterness between the couple prior to the marriage. That is hardly a fitting prelude to life-long partnership in marriage and it usually plants the seed of future disagreements and quarrels.

⁵ Quoted in: *Cana Is Forever*, Rev. Charles Hugo Doyle, Nugent Press, Tarrytown, N. Y., 1949, p. 74.

The Ceremony

Then, regarding the marriage ceremony itself, the non-Catholic very often feels discriminated against since the Church, as evidence of her disapproval of mixed marriages, prohibits the special ceremonies and blessings with which marriage in the Church is usually surrounded. Indeed, the ceremony may well have to be performed in the rectory rather than in the church. In any case, it adds up to a rather cold and one-sided ceremony that often occasions disappointment to the couple and to their family and friends.

Sometimes pressure is brought to bear on the couple by the family of the non-Catholic, urging them to go before the priest and then go to the non-Catholic's church for a second ceremony. Yet this is prohibited to the Catholic and cannot be agreed to under any circumstances. In fact, the solemn promise to avoid any such procedure is required of the couple.

Finally, it happens at times that the non-Catholic has a close relative who is a Protestant minister and whom the family would like to have officiate at the marriage ceremony. But here, too, the non-Catholic is opposed and cannot have the wish granted. Nor can there be any compromise, such as that once suggested to the author, namely, of allowing the minister to stand next to the priest while the couple exchanged the marriage vows. The minister may attend, if he wishes, but it would have to be solely in the role of a spectator.

Risks During Married Life

But granting that the ceremony goes off smoothly enough, it is chiefly afterwards that the difficulties and

hazards arise. First among these is the great danger of loss of faith on the part of the Catholic, or at least of an undesirable cooling off of faith and fervor in religious practice. Pope Pius XI alluded to this when he said that even though a dispensation is granted, "it is unlikely that the Catholic party will not suffer some detriment from such a marriage."⁶

Catholics who are contemplating marriage with a non-Catholic will most likely protest that such will not happen in their case. But what such persons forget is that just about every Catholic on entering a mixed marriage said the same thing. Yet, the facts of bitter experience show that all the good resolves and firm determination soon dissolve in the face of constant religious differences and the difficulties and quarrels to which these differences lead. Despite the promise of non-interference with the practice of the Catholic religion, in spite of the guarantees that were given to this effect, it is almost inevitable that disputes will arise.

For example, the non-Catholic is welcome to accompany the Catholic partner to church, but the Catholic is forbidden to attend Protestant services. The non-Catholic cannot understand this inequality for the simple reason that most non-Catholics today subscribe to the fallacy that one religion is as good as another. Being of that mind, they fail to appreciate the reasons behind a Catholic's refusal to participate in a non-Catholic service. Moreover, if a non-Catholic goes to his own church on Sundays while his Catholic spouse goes to Mass, the two are very liable to hear their re-

⁶ Pope Pius XI, "On Christian Marriage," New York: The Paulist Press, 1931.

spective clergymen explain some fundamental doctrine of Christian belief in diametrically opposite ways. If this is so and if our Christian faith is to be part and parcel of our lives and is to govern our conduct as it should, what sort of harmony can there be between two married people of different beliefs?

If the non-Catholic does not attend church on Sundays, there will be comments and complaints when the Catholic partner rises to attend Mass, if for no other reason than the disturbed and interrupted sleep occasioned by the rising of the partner. Then there is the possibility of quarrels because of abstinence from meat on Fridays. After a hard day's work a non-Catholic husband is liable to grumble over fish or eggs and then a couple of chops have to be prepared. If the wife's eggs get cold in the process, the sparks are almost bound to fly.

Baptism of Children

Far more serious trouble often arises over the baptism of a child. Despite the solemn promises that were made before marriage, bitter debates often occur over the baptism or over the sponsors at the baptism. Yet, here the Catholic must take a firm stand and insist that the promises be observed. The children, regardless of their sex, must be baptized and educated in the Catholic religion. And the godparents at baptism must be Catholics, non-Catholics are not permitted at all. Nor can a compromise be resorted to whereby the child is baptized in both churches to satisfy the non-Catholic or the immediate relatives of the non-Catholic.

Schooling

If the Catholic Baptism of the child goes by without undue trouble, in the majority of cases there will be trouble when the child begins its schooling. Many non-Catholics cannot see why they should bear the financial burdens entailed in maintaining parochial schools. So, the child is bundled off to a public school, even though a parochial school may be equally available. The net result is, in all too many cases, that the religious instruction and training of the child is slipshod and negligible, and, frequently, altogether neglected and dismissed.

Effects on the Child

Statistics are available showing that in many instances the pre-nuptial promises are not carried out. A recent study turned up evidence that, in general, more than forty per cent of the children of valid mixed marriages are either unbaptized, baptized Protestants, or even if baptized as Catholics, receive no formal Catholic education. This study also showed that the religious fate of the children is less apt to be neglected when the mother is the Catholic party. In other words, although the proper Catholic training of the children is endangered regardless of which parent is the Catholic, there is a greater risk if the mother is not a Catholic than there is if she is of the true faith.

Likewise, studies have shown that mixed marriages tend to breed mixed marriage. That is, children of a mixed marriage are twice as likely to enter mixed marriages themselves, with the consequent multiplication of all the risks and hazards involved.

Undesirable repercussions occur in the child's mind when he realizes his father and mother do not share the same faith. If the non-Catholic parent goes to his or her own church, this only tends to give substance in the child's mind to the fallacy that one Church is as good as another. If the parent does not go to church at all, there is danger of this example engendering laxity and unconcern in the child, particularly as the child grows into adolescence and approaches adulthood.

Younger children of a mixed marriage are very frequently genuinely distressed at the thought of one parent not going to Mass on Sundays, or not being a member of what the child believes is the one true Church necessary for salvation. The youngsters judge that Dad or Mother, as the case may be, is living at enmity with God and is in danger of damnation. The point here is that this situation can be the cause of genuine concern and even heartbreak to a child.

Contraception

One of the great dangers in our modern materialistic world is that of the non-Catholic spouse wishing to resort to the use of contraceptives, with or without any pretext. This of course raises a serious problem for the Catholic spouse. If the latter opposes the partner in this matter, disharmony results on a large scale. If the Catholic gives in, he or she knows full well the serious sins involved and is aware that, as long as the situation goes on, the consolations and the graces of Confession and Communion are beyond him or her.

The disputes and disharmony which can arise so easily regarding each one of these issues will inevitably

cause unhappiness. The pressure on the Catholic party will increase with each dispute, become more and more irritating with each disagreement. The lack of cooperation and understanding will jar on the nerves of both parties and the Catholic party's fidelity to his or her religion will be tested to the breaking point. In view of such emotional strain, who will deny that there is grave danger of the Catholic capitulating and violating his or her conscience in the process? Yet, compromising on issues as important as these involves a gamble in which the stakes are one's own salvation and very often the salvation of one's children.

Divorce

Another point often overlooked by Catholics contemplating marriage with one not of the Faith is that in such marriages the Catholic has a minimum of matrimonial security. If the marriage turns out unsatisfactorily, the non-Catholic may turn very easily to infidelity and eventually to divorce. This is not to say that all non-Catholics do, or would, behave in this manner. Nor, on the other hand, is it to say that such a thing could never happen in a marriage where both parties are Catholic. The point here is that there is a far greater danger of this when one's partner is not a Catholic than in cases where both of the spouses are Catholic. The reason for this is that the majority of people not of the Catholic Faith take divorce for granted; and infidelity, especially on the part of the husband, is looked upon by many as almost a thing to be expected.

True, at the time of the marriage there may be no specific intentions of being unfaithful or of resorting to

divorce. But should circumstances so develop as to make married life unbearable, or even only ordinarily difficult, resort is very readily had to the divorce court. No doubt in many cases the difficulties could be ironed out and a happy married life achieved—if the partners really wanted to exert the effort and make the necessary adjustments. But this requires a good deal of sacrifice, honest good-will and hard work, and these somehow are unappealing to human nature. Therefore a much easier solution is sought. And divorce *is* an easier solution, not only from the standpoint of the comparative ease with which it can be granted, but also from the fact that it is an accepted thing in present-day American society. There no longer is any opprobrium or shame connected with it. It is part and parcel of the thinking of most Americans not of our Faith.

Yet, should such a thing happen in cases of mixed marriages, the Catholic spouse is fully aware that he or she is still married, and the divorce means nothing but a tragic failure at marriage—a life of loneliness and abandonment until death. As any Catholic knows, the civil authorities are powerless to dissolve a valid marriage contract. Therefore, from the viewpoint of the immutable law of God, a decree of civil divorce leaves neither party free to enter another marriage. Only the death of the lawful partner can do that. The Catholic victim of such a tragedy knows well that he or she can no more be “de-married” than he or she can be “de-baptized.” The marriage is as permanent and as lasting as the life of the partner.

As a conclusion to this particular point of our discussion it may be interesting to quote from an article

written by a Protestant minister, which appeared in *The Star*, an evening paper in London. The writer says:

One cannot live in the world today without recognizing that marriages do fail; and that the modern tendency, when they do, is to dissolve them all too lightly and start again. Let a man or woman who marries a Catholic recognize quite plainly at the outset that anything of that kind is absolutely out of the question. To the Catholic, marriage is a Sacrament, a bond which is indissoluble. . . . The Catholic standard of marriage is very high and no man should bind it upon himself by marrying a Catholic woman unless he is fully resolved to honor and respect it come what may.

Actually, of course, many mixed marriages do work out happily and satisfactorily. They do not all go on the rocks. Sometimes it even happens that the non-Catholic is led to the true Faith as a result of having married a Catholic. But the number of these is far less than most people like to believe. One study shows that only three or four out of every ten end in the conversion of the non-Catholic spouse to the true Faith:

Thirty to forty per cent of all mixed marriages result in conversion of the non-Catholic party. An additional forty per cent continue as they were, with the Catholic party faithful to the Church. The remainder of the mixed marriage group, viz., twenty to thirty per cent seem to disappear from active parish life.⁷

It is true that many of the difficulties that have been spoken of here could also arise in marriages where both of the partners are Catholic. The point is, however, that there is far greater danger and risk of their arising in mixed marriages.

⁷ Bishop's Committee on Mixed Marriages. *A Factual Study of Mixed Marriages*. Washington, D. C.: National Catholic Welfare Conference, 1943, p. 14.

"Marry Your Own!"

Every worthwhile Catholic, therefore, should adamantly rule out of his or her life the possibility of marrying a non-Catholic. Therefore, they should also avoid designedly and purposely any entanglements with non-Catholics which give evidence of leading into serious company-keeping and the possibility of a proposal of marriage. This should be done as a matter of personal conviction, based upon a thorough and intelligent understanding of our holy Faith, a deep love for it and a loyal consistency with its teachings.

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that practically all marriage authorities—whether they be Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, or of no particular religious conviction—are in agreement that marital happiness or success is best assured when one marries a person of his own faith.⁸

In every Catholic home it is the duty of parents to take an attitude of reproach toward mixed marriages. It should be part of the solid and thoroughly Catholic education of the children. If the children are trained in a deep respect and appreciation of their Faith, and see a love of the Faith exemplified in the parents' conduct, then normally there will be little difficulty in stressing the importance of religious agreement between husband and wife when the time arrives for the grown children to start thinking of marriage.

True enough the growing sons and daughters will almost inevitably have non-Catholic friends and associates. But when it comes to dating and keeping company, it should be an inviolable rule in every

⁸ *Marriage and the Family*, p. 215.

Catholic home, a rule born of deep conviction on the part of both parents and children; that even the consideration of becoming serious with a non-Catholic is out of the question. Every means should be used to build up and strengthen this conviction. Especially should the beauty, splendor and deep significance of the Nuptial Mass and Nuptial blessing be stressed, so that when the time comes every young Catholic man and woman will have no more ardent desire than to be married at a Nuptial Mass.

Attendance at Catholic schools, especially during the high school and college years, is another important means that can help in reducing the rate of mixed marriages. Not only is close association with non-Catholics reduced, but more important still, a complete Catholic education will impart a deep and thorough Catholic outlook on life and an intelligent understanding and appreciation of the laws of God and of the Church.

Company-Keeping with Non-Catholics

It was just stated that every worthwhile Catholic as a matter of conviction should be set on not contracting a mixed marriage. But, from the standpoint of moral obligation there is more to it than that. Indeed, as was seen earlier in this discussion, the law of the Church most severely prohibits Catholics from marrying non-Catholics. This is a serious prohibition binding in conscience under pain of mortal sin.

It follows from this that company-keeping with non-Catholics with a view to marriage is equally forbidden under pain of serious sin, unless some valid and seri-

ous reason intervenes to justify such company-keeping. The reason for this deduction seems plain enough. If a Catholic begins courting a non-Catholic seriously, such a one obviously is placing himself or herself in proximate danger of violating a very serious and severe prohibition of the Church. To place oneself in such a danger, without a really serious and valid reason, is itself a serious sin.

In other words, a Catholic who begins to keep company with a non-Catholic, cherishing the hope that this will lead to marriage, is guilty of mortal sin, objectively speaking, unless he or she has a good reason to believe that there is, or there will be before the marriage, a justifying cause for entering such a union.

An example of such a justifying cause would be a case in which the non-Catholic almost at once gives evidence of a sincere interest in the Catholic faith and thus gives solid grounds for hoping that he or she will become a Catholic, preferably before marriage, but at least afterwards. If such is the case, company-keeping with such a person would be justified. However, it must be remembered that this hope of conversion must be a well-founded hope, one based on solid evidence of a sincere and genuine interest in the Catholic faith. A mere vague hope or wish regarding conversion certainly is not sufficient.

The chief point to be stressed is that some such solid reason must exist if the company-keeping is to be justified at all. Otherwise, at least from an objective viewpoint, company-keeping with a non-Catholic with a view to marriage is gravely sinful. It is unfortunate that this basic principle, which can-

not be questioned, is not better understood by our Catholic people.

Signing the Promises Not Enough

It is still more unfortunate that so many entertain the erroneous notion that a Catholic is perfectly free to marry a non-Catholic as long as the latter is willing to sign and to fulfill the pre-nuptial promises. Of course, there would be still greater reason to condemn the company-keeping as sinful if there were cause to doubt that the non-Catholic would sincerely make and faithfully fulfill these promises. In such a case, a dispensation from the law prohibiting mixed marriages would be out of the question. And, consequently, the marriage itself would be out of the question. Indeed, if there is danger that the faith of the Catholic or of the offspring would be perverted, the marriage (and, therefore, company-keeping under such circumstances) is prohibited by the divine law and from this prohibition the Church has no power to dispense.

But, even presuming that there is no reason to doubt that the promises will be sincerely made and will be faithfully observed, that fact alone does not justify company-keeping with a non-Catholic. For, over and above this, there must be just and grave causes present which impel the granting of the dispensation. Consequently, if the company-keeping is not to be branded as gravely sinful, these causes must exist at the very outset of the courtship or, at the least, it must be prudently foreseen with solid probability that they will exist prior to the marriage.

Therefore, the mere fact that a non-Catholic young

man or woman happens to appeal to a Catholic, or for one reason or another is regarded as a good "catch," is not sufficient reason for the Catholic to begin serious company-keeping with a view to marriage. This is particularly true in areas where Catholics predominate or, at least, form an appreciable portion of the population. And, let it be noted, a confessor would be perfectly within his rights, as a physician and guardian of souls, in refusing absolution to a penitent who adamantly refuses to discontinue company-keeping with a non-Catholic, when there is little or no reason for such an association other than the fact that the couple like each other, or a vague hope that he or she may one day become a Catholic.

Divorced Non-Catholics

Company-keeping with non-Catholics in their late twenties or thirties is especially risky. It happens frequently in such instances that only after the association has become quite serious and marriage is being considered, is it discovered that the non-Catholic has been married before. With the comparatively easy divorce laws, cases of this sort are becoming more and more frequent. Yet, many times there is absolutely no hope of that person marrying again, for the very simple reason that the first marriage, despite the civil divorce or civil annulment, is a perfectly valid marriage bond in the eyes of God and of the Church. The divorced non-Catholic may honestly believe that he or she is free to enter another marriage, but what such a person thinks and what are the actual facts are two entirely different things. At any rate, under no

circumstances would a Catholic be justified in continuing the company-keeping. In almost all such cases there is one and only one solution short of the death of the divorced partner: The relationship must be broken up promptly and resolutely. To do otherwise would unquestionably be a mortal sin.

From the standpoint of the law of God a divorced person who has been validly married cannot under any circumstances begin keeping company with a view to marriage, be he Catholic or non-Catholic. Therefore, no single person, Catholic or not, has any right to associate with such a person on such a basis. To attempt marriage with such a person is adultery varnished over with a slight coating of respectability.

Cut Off from the Church

One final risk often taken by Catholics who contemplate marriage with one not of our faith deserves to be mentioned. It is the risk of finding oneself cut off from the Church, from friends and even family. Such a situation develops when the non-Catholic refuses to be married before a Catholic priest, or refuses to make the necessary promises regarding the Catholic baptism and education of the children. In such instances, it is extremely difficult for the Catholic to realize that the parting of the ways has come and that the only feasible solution is to break off the relationship. Unless the Catholic prizes his faith above all else, unless his faith is strong as steel, he will be in grave danger of "running off" and attempting "marriage outside the Church." Even poorly instructed Catholics must know that such a "marriage" is no

marriage at all. Regardless of how the civil law regards such a union, it is from the standpoint of the law of God and of the Church not a valid marriage, but rather an illicit and sinful union.

Living up to these principles is not always an easy thing to do. On the other hand, abiding by the tenets of our Christian faith must be a matter of principle and firm conviction, not a haphazard thing guided by mere emotion. Perhaps misunderstanding will follow, but being misunderstood is often the price we must pay for loyalty to Christ and to His doctrines.

So, it is a good thing, especially for our younger people, to realize clearly all the risks involved in a mixed marriage. Once a clear realization and appreciation of these facts and principles are had, then there will be a great deal more common sense and logic and far less mere emotion in our thinking about mixed marriages. Then we can expect every worthwhile Catholic to make it a matter of firm principle to avoid at all costs mixed marriages and company-keeping with non-Catholics. Perhaps then our Catholic people will begin to see the wisdom of the Church's condemnation of mixed marriages and the good sense behind the old maxim "Marry your own."



4603692

Completely New
PAULIST 10¢ PAMPHLETS

NEW SIZE • NEW FORMAT • COLORFUL COVERS

SEARCH FOR HAPPINESS

Rev. Walter Sullivan, C.S.P.

CONFESSION: PEACE OF MIND

Rev. John B. Sheerin, C.S.P.

I BELIEVE IN GOD

Rev. John T. McGinn, C.S.P.

CONFLICTING MORAL STANDARDS

Rev. Vincent Holden, C.S.P.

EVERYONE ACTS CATHOLIC

Rev. James F. Finley, C.S.P.

PAUL IS FOR ALL

Rev. James F. Finley, C.S.P.

CREMATION: ITS ETHICS AND HISTORY

Rev. Bertrand L. Conway, C.S.P.

IS YOUR MARRIAGE ON THE ROCKS?

Rev. James F. Lover, C.S.S.R.

JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AGAIN

Rev. Kenneth Morgan

CHOOSING YOUR CAREER

Rev. J. I. l'Orsonnens, S.J.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IS HOLY

Rev. Michael X. Frassrand, C.S.P.

IS THERE SALVATION OUTSIDE THE CHURCH?

Henry Churchill Semple, S.J.

WHAT IS THE HOLY TRINITY?

Rev. John J. Keating, C.S.P.

MAKING MARRIAGE CLICK

Rev. John A. O'Brien, Ph.D., LL.D.

10c, \$8.00 per 100, \$67.00 per 1,000

THE PAULIST PRESS

NEW YORK 19, N. Y.