

DON'T MARRY A CATHOLIC!

by Daniel A. Lord, S.J.

Imprimi Potest: Daniel H. Conway, S.J.

Praep. Prov. Missourianae

Nihil Obstat: Frederic C. Eckhoff

Censor Librorum

Imprimatur: Joseph E. Ritter

Archiepiscopus Sti. Ludovici

Sancti Ludovici, die 29 Aprilis 1952

Copyright, 1952, by

The Queen's Work, Inc.

The audience looked shocked. I could tell from their silence that they really were shocked, so, quite frankly, I was pleased. For I had hoped they would be shocked since I had set myself to shock them.

The audience I knew to be at least fifty per cent non-Catholic. The section of the country had an historic reputation for not liking Catholics. And many had come to hear me out of sheerest curiosity; what sort of grisly creature was a priest — and a Jesuit priest at that?

But the question that I had been handed by the usher was the same question that had been sent up in every city where I had lectured on that particular tour, and this time I had tried a slightly different angle.

"What," asked the scrawled note on the card we had been handing out for questions, "do you think of mixed marriages?"

UNFAIR TO THE PROTESTANT

So I had answered the question in all sincerity. "I should strongly advise any non-Catholic not to marry a Catholic," I answered, and one slight gasp punctuated the rather appalled silence. "I don't think it's fair to the Protestant (as it certainly is not to the Catholic), and I advise my Protestant friends, of whom I have many, never, if they can avoid it, to fall in love with Catholics."

Perhaps the odd part is that I meant exactly what I said. Of course, it did need explanation; so for the benefit of those Catholics and non-Catholics who happen to find my answer a little startling, entirely out of line, maybe a little scandalous, let me take the time to give some reasons.

A VERY WISE LETTER INDEED

A number of years ago I got one of the smartest letters ever written to me. "I have just read your pamphlet, 'Marry Your Own'," ran the very feminine script, "and I have broken my engagement." That pleased me, for the pamphlet was written to ward off as far as possible the unhappiness almost inevitable in mixed marriages. But the next sentence jolted me.

"You see, I am a Methodist girl, and I was engaged to marry a Catholic man. After reading your pamphlet, I was sure that I could not be happy married to a Catholic, so I have broken the engagement, and I am now going out to find me a fine young Methodist boy and marry him."

My answer was brief and most sincere: "My dear young lady, I most heartily congratulate you. You have good sense. I take it for granted that you are a sincere Methodist. In that case, find yourself a Methodist and marry him."

But I could have changed that advice to suit the type of religion: "If you are a Baptist, marry a Baptist; if you are a Unitarian, marry a Unitarian; if you are Jewish, by all means marry a Jewish partner; if you are a Christian Scientist, marry a Christian Scientist; if you are an unbeliever, find yourself another unbeliever; and if you are an atheist, marry an atheist and practice your lack of religion together."

THE REASON IS SIMPLE

You see, modern marriage is a tough proposition. It takes a lot of expert handling to make it a success. And nothing is more fundamental than unity of faith or unity of a lack of faith. To start married life in total or radical disagreement about religion is to start marriage with a frightful handicap. There will be problems enough arising out of marriage without taking into marriage one of the biggest and most monumental.

I say now as I have said for many a long and insistent year, "Marry your own!" For I am convinced that disparity of religion is a simply appalling roadblock on the way to happiness in marriage.

A RIVAL PAMPHLET

Not quite so long ago, I was sent a pamphlet published by one of the evangelical churches. It is a church that I respect, for it has a creed, a code, and a cult, which simply means that it demands some faith of its members, insists on their practicing some high degree of morality, and teaches its members how to worship God and work toward the winning of heaven. In that it is quite different from another church of which one of its distinguished and more worldly members said comfortably: "I like my church; it never in the slightest interferes with my politics or my religion." Incidentally, I didn't think up that wisecrack; it is a direct quotation from an important Protestant whom I once met long enough to hear him make the comment.

In many ways I should agree entirely with this pamphlet. For it begged the young members of the writer's church not to marry Catholics. It listed a dozen excellent reasons why they shouldn't. With most of them, I would most emphatically agree.

NOT ALTOGETHER

But then we parted company; for the minister who wrote the pamphlet went off on the subject of the promises. At considerable length he warned his young people that any non-Catholic marrying a Catholic had to make the premarital promises. On their word of honor, indeed usually under oath, in a signed document, the minister reminded them, they had almost to renounce their faith and their "rights to that faith." They would not in any way try to interfere with their partner in the practice of a religion they regarded as false.

All the children must be baptized Catholics, and none of them should be allowed to belong to the religion of the non-Catholic party. All the children must be brought up with a Catholic education — and, the minister reminded his readers, this meant the parochial school, the diocesan high school or the convent academy, and finally college education in a Catholic college or university.

In other words, he reminded them that if they married a Catholic after they signed the promises, they were really being false to their own faith. Either they believed their religion to be true or not. If they didn't, he could hardly discuss the matter with them. But he was addressing sincere members of a strict evangelical church that taught that the Catholic faith was false and that its doctrines and its practices were in notable error.

SURRENDER

So the non-Catholic who signed that series of promises, insisted the minister, agreed:

That he or she would leave the dear partner of marriage in what he is taught to regard as pernicious error. No effort would be made to save their souls from the so-called evils of the "Romish Church."

That the children would be deprived of the "true and reformed faith." They would be baptized into a Church that their ancestors, at least on one side of the family, had renounced for another. They would have to surrender their own children back to the arms of Rome.

That the children would be stripped of their chance of public school education or education in schools supported by that particular evangelic church and submitted instead to the training of priests and brothers and nuns in schools decorated with the crucifix, which was not the evangelical cross, and under the frowns of the pictured saints who were solidly Catholic, and in an atmosphere dominated by Mary and the Real Presence, which that faith did not believe to be either real or a presence.

So his conclusion was: If you must marry a Catholic, don't sign the promises. Make him or her come your way. Force these future partners, while they love you, to study your religion and win them over to your true faith. Don't sign the promises; don't betray your true religion.

I PAUSE TO DISAGREE

Now right here I must say we find the whole heart of our disagreement. First of all, I take it for granted that our good friend, the minister-author, is a sincere believer in what he teaches and does himself. He ought to believe his church is the true one, or he certainly oughtn't try to give its faith to others.

In this I find him singularly refreshing compared with another minister, who, approached by one of my Protestant friends, made an outstanding answer, one that surprised and shocked his own parishioner. The young man had fallen in love with a member of another Protestant church. He married her in a "neutral" church, one that neither of them attended, and then started going to his wife's church. When he went to see his former pastor to explain why he was no longer appearing for services, the minister patted his shoulder in fatherly and reassuring fashion: "That's right, my boy; go to your wife's church. It's your obligation —and a wise course — to stick with her."

When the young man told me of this, he was delighted but amazed. He thought it mighty broad-minded of his former minister; but he was astounded that his pastor so willingly saw a member of his flock slip into another sheepfold.

SCRAMBLED

I am sure that my sincere minister-writer would be deeply annoyed by the conversation I overheard on a railroad diner. The exact wording of the comment I did not take down; but its import I never forgot, and if I have made a few substitutions, the sense is exact. (And also, by the way, the incidents I am mentioning are all true, personal experiences. I am not writing from fancy or imagination.)

Said the speaker to his three male associates: "I'm a Baptist and my wife is a Presbyterian; but since we didn't have any strong church connections, we were married in a Methodist church. Now we go to the Congregational church in our town, but one of our children is Episcopalian and one is a Christian Scientist. So I always feel that we are democratically scrambled in our religious connections."

CAFETERIA RELIGION

To a man with that loose approach to his type of religion, it wouldn't make a great deal of difference into what religion he married . . . unless, of course, he married a Catholic. For to him, religion is not one faith taught by Christ, one way of salvation, but a sort of cafeteria service, and a man samples as he runs. None of them are very important because precisely none of them are very important. They are all merely pleasant because none are essential. They all offer something, but none of them offer anything absolutely true. But to return to my minister-author of the pamphlet, his final advice was "Not to sign the promises."

With that I would agree, but only under a condition. I should advise sincere Protestants or convinced Jews not to sign the promises — but not to attempt to marry the Catholic either. For the greatest possible mistake he could make would be not to sign the promises and still marry the Catholic.

That would be an almost infallible recipe for a doomed marriage. It would be the way to start the game of matrimony with two strikes and four fouls on the batter and the umpire's hand itching to signal the next fast one right over the plate. Why?

THE REASONS ARE CLEAR

Catholics themselves recognize two kinds of Catholics. There are good Catholics. There are bad Catholics. So the young non-Catholic refuses to sign the promises, persuades the young Catholic to marry anyhow, and the marriage takes place — in a Protestant church, a Jewish synagogue or, more often, in a snap-dash marriage before a justice of the peace.

By that very act, if the Catholic had up until then been a good Catholic, he or she is convinced, deep down and beyond any possibility of ridding his soul of that guilt, that he is now a bad Catholic.

As a priest, I could tell you of case after case of Catholics married in that fashion for twenty, thirty years, half a century, and still regarding themselves as bad, almost as doomed. They have acted directly against their faith. They have turned away from what they are convinced is the law of God.

Indeed, if they are instructed Catholics, they are sure that they are not really married. In the eyes of men, yes; but in the eyes of God, no. I have seen bitter tears, after the lapse of half a century, flowing from the eyes of a man or woman who "married outside the Church" and, despite deep love for the partner and apparent success in life, has never known happiness. The Catholic faith is root deep. The Catholic Church maintains that Christ did not establish a social club, but a Church with obligations, responsibilities, a heavy charge over Christ's sacraments, and a duty to see that people receive, not just a marriage license, but the grace of a Christ-instituted sacrament. So Catholics who have once believed all that, go on believing it, even when love has led them to attempt marriage some other way.

A man or woman who persuades a good Catholic to marry outside the Church is simply preparing for the partner of married life miserable days of remorse and long nights of sickness, worry and disloyalty

AVOID BAD CATHOLICS

But let's say the man or woman who happens to be a Catholic is also what we Catholics regard as a "bad Catholic." There are a variety of so-called Catholics whom we Catholics regard as "bad Catholics." I would advise you to have no dealings with any of them, at least not with marriage in view.

There is the bad Catholic who is weak, sinful, with some bad habit, some sin that makes him a risk in marriage. A Catholic drunkard, a Catholic of uncontrolled temper, a Catholic cheat is no one on whom to stake your happiness. And Catholics can be sinners, and on occasion are.

There is the Catholic who says he is a Catholic but who knows nothing about his faith. He wouldn't, he claims, be anything else; but he frankly knows hardly any reason for staying a Catholic. He makes stupid statements about the Church. He is full of wrong information. He will call himself (the newspapers often do) a "devout Catholic," but he is also a highly unintelligent one.

There is the Catholic who is just on the fringe. He uses his religion as little as possible. He flirts with other religions. He could be out-talked or out-argued by the representative of almost any other religion or anti-religion. It doesn't take him long to be shown that his faith is all wrong; and he has a sneaking suspicion, even before the argument begins, that he is going to come off second best.

None of these "bad Catholics" make good partners in marriage. I should not want them to marry a good Catholic; and I see no reason why a Protestant should be stuck with them.

SOMETHING SPECIAL

For you see, a "bad Catholic" with us means something different from just a bad man or a sinful woman. That doesn't mean he is a gangster or a murderer on the loose. It doesn't imply that his morality is gutter-type and his language obscene. He need not be a liar or a sneak-thief. To us a bad Catholic is a Catholic who neglects his fundamental duty to God. He does not practice God's religion. He does not worship God as God has commanded. He shrugs off the commandments of God and is contemptuous of what St. Paul taught is the Mystical Body of Christ, His Church.

Any non-Catholic who marries a bad Catholic (disloyal to his Church, living a life he regards as sinful, too weak to observe God's law) has the sincere sympathy of every intelligent Catholic.

The bad or disloyal Catholic is a mighty bad risk. And the man or woman who would attempt to marry against his Church without a struggle of conscience and real subsequent remorse is a bad Catholic.

Why a bad risk? We regard a bad Catholic as a man or woman who has been disloyal to his first of all loyalties — his loyalty to God. If he has been disloyal to God, his disloyalty to his wife, or her disloyalty to her husband, will be an easy second step.

We consider them as traitorous to the Kingdom of God on earth. That is deep treason. Anyone is a fool who marries a traitor to something deep and important. He or she is clearly very casual about duty. He or she does not keep faith. He or she has slight hold on hope. He or she is not paying much attention to the First Commandment given us by the Savior: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind." Failing in the first, he won't find it too difficult to fail in the second, the love of his neighbor — including his partner in marriage.

WE DON'T LIKE BAD CATHOLICS

The Church is deeply ashamed of and embarrassed for its bad Catholics. They are the strongest objection met by anyone who defends the Church. They are like the citizens of a democracy who are really its enemies and who destroy democracy, and the crooked athletes who undermine sports. We should not want to pawn off any of our bad Catholics on anyone. We don't want to see our non-Catholics stuck with no-good Catholic men or women.

The truth is that the "corruption of the best becomes the worst." The intelligent Catholic has never denied that there are bad Catholics. Christ Himself foretold them in the terrible parable of the wheat and the cockle. Both good and bad would grow up in the field that He had sown and tended. And He would let them grow until the end when the wheat would be gathered and the cockle burned. The servants of the lord wanted to tear out the cockle at once.

Almost strangely, the lord let them grow. So the Church does not fulminate its excommunications against bad Catholic, unless they are notorious public scandals. (In some cases a Catholic who attempts marriage before a minister actually is excommunicated.) Only it would prefer not to see them passing themselves off as Catholics and marrying non-Catholics to whom they bring their blighted faith, their corrupted loyalty, their slovenly attitude toward their carelessness about sin, and the thistles of their vices.

If you find that a Catholic shrugs his shoulders over the idea of marrying you outside the Church, you're a fool to marry him. He is or she is a no-good Catholic; and you're stupid to trust your life to the keeping of someone for whom we Catholics have slight esteem and much anxiety of soul.

AREN'T THERE JUST LAX CATHOLICS?

"But," says my non-Catholic friend, "there are lax Catholics, aren't there? "The young person I want to marry certainly isn't a devout Catholic; but he isn't a bad one either. Sometimes he goes to Mass. He told me that he usually made his Easter duty. He thinks that there is good in all religions. But he loves me and he wants to please me by doing what I ask. I won't make the promises; and he wants to marry me. So I'll not make them, and we'll be married, by way of compromise, by the mayor of our small town."

Sorry, sister!

He's still what we Catholics call a bad Catholic. The Lord said simply that "He that is not with Me, is against Me." Your young man is only the slimmest sort of a Catholic. A good Catholic must go to Mass every Sunday. He must make his Easter duty every year or he is not a practicing Catholic. He can't think that all religions are good any more than a professor of mathematics can think that two plus two makes four, five, or seven-and-a-half. You're not getting a good Catholic or a lax Catholic, but a bad one. For your own sake, ditch him. Go get yourself a faithful member of your own church. Don't ask for the personal loyalty of a man who hasn't any loyalty toward his God or his religion.

THE REAL CONCLUSION

I should, were I in the place of the minister who wrote that pamphlet, most fervently advise my young people not to make the promises. For making the promises is a public statement that they have put their own religion in a bad second place.

But I should certainly not advise them, after refusing to make the promises, to go ahead and marry a Catholic. They are cheating him. But more than that, they are badly cheating themselves. They are setting the stage for a tragic disillusionment.

The person they marry has possibly been a good Catholic, and in that case, some day he will break down and out of the tragedy of his soul tell you the truth: He should not have given up his God for you; he should not have been loyal to you at the expense of loyalty to Christ's Church; he should not have pretended all the time he was married to you, when he still believed what he had learned: that, for Catholics, marriage outside the Church is not marriage at all.

Or the person they marry is a bad Catholic, and they are starting their careers with someone for whom the Church has pity, good Catholics have regret, and any thinking man might well have distrust. One major disloyalty is an easy prelude to a dozen others. His disloyalty in religion is an easy step toward disloyalty in marriage. So if the minister wants to state something with which I, out of my experience, would entirely agree, let him state his case this way:

"As a loyal member of an evangelical church, don't make the promises necessary for marrying a Catholic; but don't under any circumstances marry a Catholic."

That would be logical. And admitting his own faith in his faith and his conviction that the young evangelical people were real believers in what they were taught and he believed, I would quite agree with him.

TOUGH CONDITIONS

When my non-Catholic father (later a converted Catholic) married my mother, he solved his problem very simply: He gave up whatever slight practice of his religion he once had known. He never went near a Protestant church again, save for the occasional funeral of close friends. He never felt that the Protestant religion made many claims on him, and he stopped being, except in the most negative sort of a way, a Protestant. That was on the face of it easy.

Yet for my mother he gave up what religion he had. True, with later years, she gave him what he came to regard as the fullness of Christ's religion. He found in the Catholic Church great joy for his declining years. After being first a Protestant, then religiously nothing at all, he became an excellent Catholic and was deeply happy in what he found.

But the immediate effect of his marriage was the dropping of his religion. I have often wondered what his father, to his death a practicing Protestant minister, thought of this defection of his own son. It could not have made him very happy.

BOTH STOP

Many a "mixed marriage" — not merely between Catholics and non-Catholics, but between Baptists and Episcopalians, between Congregationalists and Unitarians, between Presbyterians and Lutherans, between Jews and evangelical Christians — is solved by that simple expedient: Both parties stop going to Church.

Believe me, that is no solution for a Catholic in a mixed marriage. He does not so easily forget what is his serious duty. He can't slough off his faith simply by not showing up at the parish Mass. He doesn't cease to be a Catholic because he fails to receive the sacraments any longer. He has no more solved the problems induced by mixed marriage than a man could cure a sore toe by cutting off his leg. The process of ceasing to be a Catholic is much, much more than any question of stopping church attendance.

Any Catholic who gives up the practice of his faith goes through a revolution. He is likely to be rocked by internal convulsions. He is at least spiritually upset. After knowing the rich food of the Catholic faith, he is starved and hungry. He suffers real nostalgia, a deep homesickness. And he sometimes does strange and nasty, unpleasant or inexplicable things to free himself from bitter memories and to reassure himself that his new course is justified and right.

You don't remake Catholics easily into religious nothings. You can make a bad Catholic into nothing, or even into a haphazard member of another faith. But bad Catholics are something I do not willingly wish off on you. And Catholics who have been educated in their faith cannot give it up without a shocking wrench. I should not envy the partner in marriage who has to live with a Catholic bothered by a guilty conscience, hungry for what he has lost, secretly eating out his heart for what, as the glamour of marriage dies away, seems a big price to have paid for any human being.

HERE'S WHAT IT MEANS

But let's say that in all sincerity you, the non-Catholic, make the promises. You are married to a Catholic on his terms. A priest witnesses the marriage, either in the parish rectory or outside the altar rail of the parish church. (I have always felt a little sorry for the non-Catholic bride married in the rectory parlor. On that big day of her culminated romance, she is subjected to a second-class sort of marriage. The Church realistically means it to be just that. It does not want Catholics to marry other than Catholics. It would realistically advise non-Catholics against marrying Catholics. So it has for this mixed marriage a brief ceremony, no official blessing, and something like ritualistic reluctance. Even where the marriage takes place in church, before the altar though outside the altar rail, the contrast to the Catholic Nuptial Mass is startling in its depth and scope. Anyone who has seen a Catholic couple married at a Nuptial Mass knows how the Church thinks married life ought to start. The brief ceremonial of the mixed marriage is scant courtesy by contrast.)

But the mixed marriage is the best the Catholic can arrange. The couple are truly married. Non-Catholic and Catholic are united and begin together their valid married life. My claim is that

the new life is extremely tough on the non-Catholic.

For just a moment, I am rubbing the Catholic considerations out of the picture entirely. I shall not even look at the problems of the Catholic in the mixed marriage. My sympathies and considerations are now entirely for the non-Catholic.

DIFFERENT VIEWPOINTS

It all starts with an entirely different attitude of mind and heart toward marriage. Now, despite the vast differences, the non-Catholic is expected to accept the Catholic's point of view.

Yet, it took a lot of teaching, and some vigorous persuasion perhaps, for the Catholic to accept Christ's attitude on marriage as the Church holds it: That one man and one woman are bound together for life.

That nothing in the world will ever excuse a divorce with remarriage. That they must accept the children whom God sends to them. That this is forever and a day, and they have to make the best of it in sickness and in health, in riches and in poverty, till death do them part.

Christ, when He spoke of marriage, was rebuilding an institution which had been shattered by the dissolute lives of the pagans and the somewhat casual Jewish attitude in His day toward the marriage bond.

No one can pretend that the high morality and noble law of Jesus Christ is easy to observe. And we should be fools to suggest that His attitude toward marriage was any easy concession to the natural man. Right now, we are not discussing the rightness or wrongness, the convenience or inconvenience of Christ's views. We are just discussing the fact that the non-Catholic married to the Catholic finds a partner in marriage who has, and expects others to have, very strict ideas about the whole situation.

WHAT'S ALL THIS?

Now anyone taking obligations on himself ought to realize just what those obligations are. Any "all for love" nonsense must be ruled out. You are marrying a Catholic. A Catholic has very tough marriage laws. What's more, he will expect you to follow him in accepting those laws.

So since the non-Catholic is now moving into the atmosphere of a Catholic marriage, he or she ought to understand that some changes may well have to be made in old familiar attitudes on the subject.

Most non-Catholics these days find divorce a very simple solution for the problems of marriage. If at first you don't succeed, try, try, again. "The Number Two Marriage is likely to profit by the mistakes of Marriage Number One." "Divorced people often make very good second husbands and wives." "If you can't make a go of marriage, call it off and start the next one."

I do not wish to be unkind, to exaggerate, or to make fun of anyone. Yet, that utterly casual attitude towards marriage, with the exception of a very few old conservative evangelical groups, is fairly universal.

So the non-Catholic finds the Catholic a mystery. He (or she) just HAS to make a success of this marriage, for he has, pending the death of his partner, no second chance. The non-Catholic admits no such obligation, and the life-and-death attitude of the Catholic quite reasonably seems unreasonable.

So, should any question of divorce come up, the non-Catholic finds the Catholic totally without sympathy or a willingness to cooperate. He refuses to go along with the divorce in any expectation of remarriage. He is irritated that the partner thinks it any solution at all. He is very annoyed indeed that she will be free to enter another marriage while he is bound for life. She can't understand what so upsets him; divorce with remarriage is a very normal thing in this world, and here he is regarding her as abnormal.

The two viewpoints are utterly divergent. And while the Catholic has come to accept that viewpoint after years of training in faith and the full acceptance of Christ's law, I can imagine the non-Catholic would be completely at sea to understand why all the fuss and the bullheaded objections to so simple a solution.

AND THOSE CHILDREN

Now the non-Catholic had better be very clear on the subject of the children. If she or he is not, he or she is in for some tough sledding.

The Catholic Church demands, the non-Catholic agrees to, and the Catholic reasonably expects a lot of things about the children. The non-Catholic had better take them into consideration before he or she plunges into this marriage. Later on will be too late. All the children, without exception, will have to be baptized in the Catholic Church. All the children, without exception, will have to get a Catholic education.

In case the Catholic parent dies, the non-Catholic parent must continue to see to it that the Catholic children (which means all of them) are brought up Catholics. The non-Catholic parent must not expect the children to accompany him or her to a non-Catholic church even on rare or state occasions. The children go to the Catholic church and only to the Catholic church.

When the children are ready for school, the non-Catholic must consent that the children go to the Catholic schools . . . and that means, in the wish and law of the Church, a complete Catholic education. Even if the non-Catholic parent wants the children in a beloved non Catholic school, getting the same sort of training that had seemed to him a rare privilege and opportunity, it must still be the Catholic school.

Should the Catholic parent die, the obligation remains of giving the children a Catholic education. The attitude of the Catholic Church on the subject of children would naturally appeal

only to a Catholic. Yet a non-Catholic accepting marriage to a Catholic must also accept — probably without understanding it, possibly resenting it — the Church's viewpoint.

For the Church is convinced that the Savior established a Church and not divergent churches. The Church believes that baptism is essential for salvation, and that when Christ called Himself the way, truth, and life, He was not thinking of various forked ways, discordant truths, and a pick-and-choose attitude toward life. The Church knows that the truth of Christ is magnificently complex, the structure that forms steel girders in the fabric of a career, of a character, and of a life; such truth needs the completeness of Catholic education and systematic training.

And the non-Catholic, knowing almost nothing of this, must accept the consequences without knowing or accepting the reasons. Can you see why I advise a non-Catholic to be very slow about marrying a Catholic?

A DIFFICULT LIFE

My father, during his days before conversion to the Catholic Church, was, as ever afterward, a dear and generous man who loved my mother and who gave us children the full measure of his generous service.

Yet, the Church into which he had married — without joining — endlessly baffled him. Family arguments were mercifully few in our household; but one recurred, gently, persistently, with bewilderment on his part and an almost unexplained insistence on the part of my mother. He came from that type of English ancestry that believe in big breakfasts. But once we had passed a certain age, my mother began a ridiculous practice:

She dragged us off in the early dawn of a wintry Sunday with nary a sign of breakfast. The argument that ensued was proverbial:

"Jane, why so early this morning?" "We're going to Mass." "But you haven't had any breakfast." "Yes, dear, I know." "Now, Jane, you must not drag those children out without something warm in their stomachs." "This morning, dear, we are going to Holy Communion." "That's wonderful, but can't you give them some warm milk? Can't you at least have a cup of coffee?"

Sunday after Sunday, year after year, the problem of a Catholic's fasting baffled him, annoyed him, and until the time of his conversion remained one of our few family controversies.

THESE BAFFLING CATHOLICS

If you are marrying a Catholic, you may as well steel your soul for some of the Catholic oddities. After a time, you'll get used to fish on Friday, though you may retain your good Protestant stomach (many Catholics have one) and turn away from fish in undisguised distaste.

But you will return from work some Thursday. Ah, never is Thursday a meatless day. That's what you think. Fish again . . . and the explanation: The Vigil of Christmas.

"You mean that on a day of celebration like Christmas Eve, we can't have meat?" "You can, darling, but the children and I . . ."

QUESTIONING EYES

Ah, that awful cleavage. "You can, but the children and I . . ." As a non-Catholic, you're in for a lot of that division. The Catholic parent and the children go to Mass on Sunday; you are the outlander who doesn't go.

On Christmas morning, the parish Solemn High Mass is a lovely event. Either you go along, a stranger in the midst of something charming but strictly esoteric, or you stay home waiting for your family to return.

Lent implies things for the other sector of the family. What for you? Parish retreats and novenas mean almost the breaking up of your home. Off go the Catholic and the children, every night and every morning for a full week. If you went along, it might nicely be an exciting and uniting experience. You're out. If they invite you, you feel they are trying to dragoon you into their Church. If they don't invite you, you are left out of something very important to them.

Surely this is Friday morning, and what are they all getting up for so early? "Sorry, dear, it's the First Friday." "So it's the First Friday or the Fifth Tuesday. What's so important that you're up at the crack of dawn?" "The children and I are making the Nine First Fridays . . ." "Do you mean to tell me that every month for nine months you're going to wake me up and drag the children off like this . . .?"

It's asking a lot to expect understanding. On the other hand, it's asking too much of the Catholic to expect a foregoing of this wonderful devotional life of the Church. AH, AND THERE'S MONEY

A Catholic can be a good Catholic — in fact, a saint — and be utterly penniless. Yet, the normal Catholic is the sort of person who likes to pay his way. He is, in America, proud that his Church has no taxes from the government and hence no government interference. He rather brags that of necessity, since God and religion are not permitted in the public schools, he has built and supports by voluntary contributions the huge enterprise that is the Catholic school system.

All that is fine. But now the non-Catholic finds that he is married to someone who has financial obligations to a Church. Did you ever hear of the parish envelopes on Sunday? Have you heard the commandment of the Church which orders the faithful to contribute to the support of their pastors? The Church does not, like many Protestant groups, tithe; but it believes with the Apostle that the laborer is worthy of his hire.

There will be mission collections to spread the Kingdom of God in the foreign lands. And when the children come of school age, besides the normal taxes paid to the state, the Catholic will pay for the tuition of his children in the Catholic school system. Have you taken all that into consideration? You had better. You accept all this when you marry a Catholic.

JUST A MINUTE, NOW

You do know the law of the Church on the subject of children, don't you? Then you know that the Church does not regard this as something it thought up, but as the unchangeable law of God, confirmed by the Savior. It is adamant on the subject of artificial birth control. It demands that people who live together accept the consequences of their love. It says that those acts are against nature and the laws of the God of nature which frustrate the conception of children by artificial means.

That's a heavy responsibility you are accepting. You must accept the children God sends you, or, for the best and most serious of reasons, practice self-restraint. As a non-Catholic, perhaps nothing of the sort was asked of you. Married to a non-Catholic, the subject might never have come up. But you happen to be married to a Catholic.

A Catholic is taught that in the eyes of God frustration of conception is a mortal sin. A Catholic cannot without serious offense against God practice artificial birth control. You as a non-Catholic may not agree with this law. But you are married to someone who must either accept the law of Christ or stop living as a good Catholic.

YES, BUT I KNOW PEOPLE . . .

I can hear your quite understandable protest: "Look, I know non-Catholics married to Catholics who are practicing birth control." You are quite right. In some cases, the Catholics have agreed and know they are living in serious sin. They love their non-Catholic partners too deeply to hurt their feelings. They go on doing what they are sure is mortal sin rather than interfere with the expressions of love. They prefer their partner to their God.

In many a case, though, the Catholic is suffering intense remorse. The Catholic is living with a bad conscience. He or she is seriously disturbed. Love itself is taking a beating. The Catholics want love, yet they cannot accept love that means mortal sin. They are constantly torn between a God who says, "You must not," and a partner who pleads, "Please!" I know too many such intolerable situations to find them easy to pass over without this brief reference.

A non-Catholic married to a Catholic is bound by the rules of God and the Church on the subject of birth control. These are strict by many modern standards. They are based on a deep respect for human life. They demand sacrifices and restraints on the part of the married couple. Often they imply high heroism. Are you ready for all this?

YES, THERE IS AN ALTERNATIVE

So this is part of the reason why I advise a non-Catholic never to marry a Catholic. "But," you protest, "I love a Catholic, and I want to marry and that marriage is so essential to me that I should be miserable without it. Must I simply give up that Catholic?" There are two alternatives, one of them snide and dishonorable, the other Let's take the snide, dishonorable one first.

Unfortunately, it happens too frequently to be passed over in silence. For there are bad non-Catholics as there are bad Catholics. And in an age when honor has taken a severe beating, it is not surprising that there are dishonorable men and women. Take a case: John, a non-Catholic, has fallen madly in love with Joan. Marriage is essential for his happiness, for he has entered that period of emotional upset when he cannot, or so he

protests, live without her. But Joan happens to be a very good Catholic, even if in this case a not too wise or provident one. So there are arguments, recriminations, breakups, and reconciliations, and in the end, John gives in. Okay, he'll make the promises.

HE MAKES AND BREAKS 'EM

So he takes the instructions necessary before marriage to a Catholic. Oh, you didn't know about them? Well, this is as good a place as any to tell you that in the United States, before you can marry a Catholic, you must go to a priest and receive six or sometimes twelve instructions on Catholic faith, practice, and the Catholic attitude toward marriage.

The Church insists on this for many good reasons:

1. A non-Catholic ought to know a little something about what his or her Catholic partner in marriage believes concerning God and the way to salvation.
2. It is only fair that they, the non-Catholics, find out clearly what they have agreed to when they marry Catholics; they should not be blindfolded by love into accepting something that never was explained to them.
3. Perhaps the Church feels that if they know something about the faith of their future partner, they may be led to consider it seriously.

So John agrees to the instructions, through which he sits in a sort of docile daze. His mind is on the girl, far from the perhaps not too inspiring presentation of the faith by the priest who instructs him. And at the end, with a glib pen, he signs the promises. Why not? He hasn't the slightest intention of keeping them!

A WALKOUT

As the girl who has married him shortly finds out. "Now we're married, Joan; now I've got you, and I know this much about Catholics: once they are married, they are married for good. But as far as the promises are concerned, I do not intend to keep them. "First of all, they are Catholic promises and they do not bind me, a non-Catholic. "Then I regard them as unfair to me and my children.

"So, no matter what I told your priest, I made them with no intention of ever doing anything about them. What a person promises under conditions like that simply doesn't bind. And I regard myself just as free as if I had never made them."

HOW ABOUT THAT?

As I say, that is a tough situation for the Catholic party, and yet it is a situation in which many a Catholic husband or Catholic wife finds himself these days. The non-Catholic, under the impulse of love and out of determination to win the Catholic to marriage, will make the promises and then gaily walk right out on them. Right?

Well, there is the whole question of honor, which is not a matter of Church law but of the law of God. The non-Catholic party signed a lie, and lies are pretty nasty business. He or she said he meant to do something and didn't mean it for one moment. The non-Catholic solemnly protested he intended to follow one course of conduct, and all the time he meant to do something entirely the opposite.

That is why I called the conduct — this alternative — snide. The non-Catholic has tricked and cheated the Catholic. The marriage begins with a lie and in deceit. The Catholic has been won by false promises. The marriage now begins with the ugly fact revealed: the Catholic is married to a liar, to a trickster, to a cheat.

But, protests the non-Catholic, I am not bound by Catholic law. Granted, you had no obligation to marry the Catholic; in fact, I have advised you, as others probably advised you before marriage, not to go ahead with the wedding. But lying is not only against Church law. The violation of a written promise is not something that the Church alone regards as ugly and contemptible. Honor is a great natural virtue binding on all. And no one may trick a future partner as has been done in this case.

We are dealing here not with a crime thought up by the Church, but with a crime against nature, against love, against someone supposedly dear and beloved. That is the contemptible alternative; and I'd say the sort of thing that any person of decency or honor, with any regard for truth or a pledged, signed, and solemnly given word, should avoid at all costs.

Don't sign the promises if they offend your beliefs. But don't sign them with your tongue in your cheek and a lie on your lips and then expect your marriage to a Catholic to be other than a fraud begun with deceit and carried on in treachery.

THE RIGHT ALTERNATIVE

There is one other alternative, and I suggest it as the only proper one. Don't stay a non-Catholic and try to marry a Catholic. But if you feel that marriage to a Catholic is the thing that will make you happy, become a Catholic and make it a really happy marriage.

Don't think you can "join the Church" as you can join, let's say, the Elks or a poker club. You don't become a Catholic just to marry a Catholic. That is unfair to the Catholic and to yourself. Being a Catholic is accepting a way of life, Christ's way of life, not just taking up a new name, a new club membership, something that can be shrugged off right after the marriage.

Converts go through conversion, a change of mind and heart. This is serious and important. "I'll join the Church to marry you" is a poor prelude to a happy or honest marriage. If you don't

believe that the Church is Christ's Church, "joining it" to marry is a road to happiness neither for you nor the Catholic. Indeed, it's a fine prelude to a miserable partnership, devoid of sincerity or trust.

Remember that as a non-Catholic you have never been taught (save in a very few rather unusual and minority religions) that your church is right and that all other religions are wrong.

It is a ten-to-one bet these days that you were taught that all religions are equally good. One religion is as good as another. It doesn't make a great deal of difference what you believe, provided you act correctly. There is nothing very startling about a transition from being a Methodist to being a Presbyterian or a Baptist. In fact, the easy moves from one Protestant church to another are characteristic of our times. I'll admit that most non-Catholics make an exception for the move into the Catholic Church. That they regard as something quite different — and indeed it is.

POSSIBLE APPROVAL

But since most non-Catholic religions are broad in their attitudes, don't feel that there is any absolute religious truth, advise their members to read the Bible and find the truth for themselves, and feel that the individual conscience is the ultimate rule of faith, you might avail yourself of those attitudes.

See if the Catholic Church isn't at least as good as the church you belong to, or used to follow. (You'll find out that it has all the truth that your church taught truly and so much more truth that is wonderful and consoling and Christ like and divinely revealed.)

Search your Bible and find out how very Catholic the Bible is. (You'll first discover that the Protestant church to which you belonged wouldn't have had a Bible at all, except for the Catholic Church. And then you'll learn how the Bible proves what the Church teaches, and that the Catholic accepts the full and complete Bible.)

YOUR CONSCIENCE

If your conscience is your ultimate rule of faith, why not question your own conscience? Will you be happy married to someone separated from yourself by faith and religious practice? Will you want to bring up your children Catholics if you believe the Catholic faith is false? Will you want your children to regard you as a heretic? As Catholics, they regrettably will. Will you want to be separated from your family in the fundamental things, which are their attendance at church, their approach to God, their hope of the eternity God would like you to spend together?

It might well be that what you heard about the Church will turn out to be untrue. Most people do not hate the Catholic Church; they hate the lies they have heard about the Catholic Church. Find out if these are lies. Find out what the Church really teaches and what Catholics are supposed to do.

Your conscience may turn out to be really your guide. And it may guide you, as I sincerely believe it will, right into the Catholic Church, at the side of your partner in marriage, along with the children you have promised to bring up in what hitherto was an alien faith.

PLEASE COME IN!

If you are a non-Catholic, and are interested in a Catholic, find out what your Catholic interest believes and practices and why he or she is as he is. If you find you agree, become a Catholic. If you find you can't agree, go off and marry someone else.

But if you are a Catholic, you are wise to put the case very strongly to your non-Catholic suitor — or pursued: "Marriage between Catholics and non-Catholics is much harder than any other kind.

"Quite frankly, it will be hard on you. We Catholics have strict ideas about marriage and our religion is one that makes demands upon us. We accept all this for the wonderful things which come from the religion of Christ. You will have to carry the burdens without the blessings, observe many of our laws without our larger Liberty of Christ.

"I dread our children regarding you as a religious stranger, as a heretic, as one who does not understand their love of Christ in the Eucharist, their childlike devotion to Mary, their growing enthusiasm for their faith, the practices which they cannot share with you. "I want to be united with you in everything, mostly in my faith and my hope and my love of God.

"The Catholic Church does not believe that all religions are equally good and that people may pick and choose from any of the churches without offending God. The Church teaches — as Christ does — that one either possesses truth or is in error, follows Christ or is against Him, is a member of the Mystical Body or a withered and cut-off branch. I cannot go your way; but you can come mine."

FIRST PLEASE

"Before anything further happens, please find out what it means to be a Catholic. "If in all sincerity you are impressed and convinced, become a Catholic and we shall find happiness and unity in marriage. Without unity of faith, there is too big a hazard to our future. I cannot risk it. I should not ask you to risk it.

"Don't make the promises that will force you to put your church in second place. But see if my Church is right when it claims to be in first place, Christ's Church, Christ's only Church. "If you become a Catholic, we'll go ahead and marry.

"If you will not, let's drop it all. Love is not the whole of marriage. And you will find someone of your own faith, and I shall look for someone who is a Catholic. That way lies happiness, not in the mixed marriage we propose. "I should love to marry you as a Catholic. You will be unwise to marry me if you are not a Catholic, and I cannot be unfair to one I love."

SIMPLER STILL

Or there is a still easier way: If you are a non-Catholic interested in a Catholic, read this booklet carefully and make the wise decision. If you are a Catholic interested in a non-Catholic, give the person this booklet. And if you are a non-Catholic reader, make this wise decision: Either become a Catholic . . . Or go and marry someone of your own faith.

The third road in marriage is unfair to you, too difficult, and in the overwhelming majority of cases, doomed to failure and unhappiness.

Reprints available from the Immaculate Heart of Mary church web site at:
<http://www.ihm-church.org>