

POINTS OF VIEW

Difficulties of a Mixed Marriage

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THE difficulties of a mixed marriage are many, and vary according to whether the marriage is between a born Catholic and a non-Catholic, or a Catholic and a 'Good Pagan'. Other problems arise when a marriage is contracted between members of other denominations and one or other of them is later received into the Catholic Church.

In the first case the non-Catholic partner has been instructed and so has some idea of his, or her, partner's beliefs. The Catholic has well-rooted habits of thought and behaviour, and probably a home background which prevents the feeling of strangeness and loneliness often experienced by the convert.

If the non-Catholic partner is religious, and believes in the sanctity of marriage, matters are of course easier, and when difficulties arise both will seek in prayer the help they need.

A 'Good Pagan's' approach to marriage is probably to regard it as a social contract; while admitting that a home should be stable, and in it a civic sense of responsibility, kindness and other human virtues encouraged and fostered, he is unlikely to regard it as indissoluble, and certainly not as 'a perfect figure of [Christ's] union with his spouse the Church'.

In both these cases youth, and love, help to form the pattern of the marriage in its initial stages, and as the different problems arise to adapt them to the growing pattern.

Where however the marriage has started from a good but non-religious foundation, but where one of the partners has, after thought and instruction, become a Catholic a certain lop-sided strain may occur. To converts, tired, yet inflamed with the wonders they have just found, there comes a sense of loneliness, of apartness from those who are nearest to them. Their sense of values changes and a new life must be begun. At this point, inexperienced and unready, converts may have to face arguments, and to see that their loved opponent feels that those of the Faith are arrogant in their claim that the Church of Rome is the only true Church; an iron curtain seems to descend between them. The necessary readjustment in the customs and ways of the home may

further increase this sense of separateness. There may be difficulties over the early rising necessary in order to go to Communion; Sunday Mass, and Mass on Days of Obligation may be a further cause of friction. Throughout these practical details of adjustment the convert has to, in a way, think twice; the old familiar desire to act and to do, to use one's private judgment, must be replaced by a greater calmer trust in God, by a more vivid realization of the supernatural—in fact, there has to be a new relationship between themselves and God.

This new life of the spirit must, and does, percolate through every detail of the daily life of the two people who up till now have moved in the same climate, spoken the same language. What grace is needed to weld these differing ways of life! Matters heretofore agreed upon may become areas of conflict; actions and modes of thought may clash.

Their unity of interests and of enjoyment may be split by the different approach of either the husband or the wife.

The balance of interest changed, so naturally to a certain extent are their friends, and here again opposition may occur.

Individual choice on matters such as birth-control or divorce must now give place to that of the Church's ruling, and on the one side only. Is it to be wondered at that the unity and close companionship of a happy marriage may seem threatened?

Where the marriage is one made outside the Church, the question of the children's education may be another stumbling-block. At the best, where parents belong to a different faith, religious education has to be very carefully fostered and guarded. Where one of the two is not only anti-Catholic, but perhaps antagonistic to religion, matters are even more acute.

For the Catholic partners there are always two great dangers: the one to become separate and encased in their own beliefs and thus losing charity and engendering a certain spiritual pride; alternatively to drift into a laxity, or even to lapse altogether. These dangers are obviously best combated by increasingly turning to the help of the Sacraments, prayer, and a deepening of their inner spiritual life.

One difficulty always remains, and that is: 'That there is always a likelihood that a difference in religion will cause quarrels; thus that which ought to be the strongest bond of union between husband and wife becomes a source of disunion.'¹

¹ The Students' Catholic Doctrine. Hart. p. 398.