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### A Pastoral Approach to Interfaith Marriage in the Light of Significant Sociological Data and Christian Principles

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A PASTORAL APPROACH TO INTERFAITH  
MARRIAGE IN THE LIGHT OF CHRISTIANITY  
ACADEMICAL SHORT TITLE

**INTERFAITH MARRIAGE: ANALYSIS AND APPROACH**

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty  
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,  
Department of Practical Theology  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Divinity

by  
Ronald L. Johnson

June 1960

Approved by:

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[Name]

A PASTORAL APPROACH TO INTERFAITH  
MARRIAGE IN THE LIGHT OF SIGNIFICANT  
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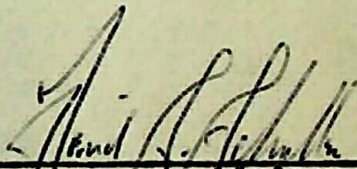
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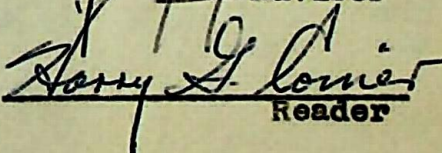
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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The modern-day ministry and ecclesiastical scene find themselves facing a number of problems which in former days either occurred rather infrequently, or at least did not loom so significantly as they do today. The reason behind this is that the society in which the church finds itself at work has changed. Cultural values have changed. Norms have changed. Our general cultural surroundings and attitudes have changed. Not only has society changed, but it has also in turn had an influence upon the church and its members. This is true simply because the church and its members find their existence within society and feel its pressures and stimuli. For example, when society regarded engagement in a legal, binding sense as tantamount to marriage, the church could view it similarly without finding it necessary to delve extensively into the matter. Also, when divorce was a rarity in society, and when there were strong negative cultural sanctions against it, the church also could briefly state its position against marriage dissolution and find general cultural and societal support. Also, when management had autocratic control over the working force, and when there was no effective or audible dissenting voice of organized labor, then the church could

speaking in general terms of servants obeying their masters without finding it necessary to investigate or speak to many of the specific problems which are present in this area today. But in these as well as other areas, society and societal attitudes have changed, and the church has found it necessary to re-think its position, elaborate upon it, and speak to changing conditions.

This is especially true of the interfaith marriage question. We have here a phenomenon facing the church and its people today which the church of the nineteenth or even early twentieth centuries did not so frequently confront. Societal changes have forced the church to investigate something which does not easily fit into any previous dogmatic category. This means the church constantly finds itself evaluating its position and speaking to new problems, or perhaps old ones in a different form and guise. At least it must attempt to evaluate and speak explicitly and relevantly, if it is to maintain communication with the society about it and continue to witness to the message with which it has been divinely entrusted.

It has been recognition of these social factors at work upon the church, as well as recognition of the increasing frequency with which interfaith marriages are occurring, that prompted the writer of this thesis to delve into this specific subject. This is a problem being brought before Christian pastors with increasing frequency today.

Consequently, in addition to giving advice concerning an approach to the subject, it seems necessary to present some relevant facts. This requires an examination of the phenomenon with regard to its frequency and causes behind its increase. It will include sociological evaluation concerning the interfaith factor as it relates to success in marriage. It will present attitudes of people regarding the subject, as well as Scriptural and denominational approaches and pronouncements on the topic. However, in addition to this more objective, empirical investigation or analysis, it is also necessary to endeavor to interpret what has been observed and attempt to collate it all into a combination of principle with practical approach which can become a part of a pastor's general and specific policy in his dealing with people. Thus, this paper will proceed from a presentation of the interfaith marriage situation as it obtains today statistically and attitudinally, to sociological interpretation and evaluation of the facts, to a presentation of the manner in which Scripture approaches the subject as well as the attitudes, evaluation, and approach of the various ecclesiastical bodies in our country today. The discussion will then conclude with a suggested approach to the problem speaking from and to the Christian pastoral viewpoint.

The writer of this thesis has drawn upon two general resource areas. The first is a strictly sociological one in which sociological studies in the area of marriage and



the family, and the specific phenomenon of interfaith marriage, will be investigated and presented. The second resource area draws from ecclesiastical resources. This includes official denominational statement and policy concerning the interfaith marriage phenomenon, as well as literature (books and pamphlets) designed to present facts and give advice concerning the topic from the religious viewpoint.

Since now, there exists a confusion and interchange of terms. Some writers on the subject, as well as most popular discussions, speak of "mixed marriage" when referring to this phenomenon. Others use the term "interfaith marriage." In this paper, the term "interfaith marriage" will be used since "mixed marriage" is in reality used in two ways. First, it is used as a non-specific term for any marriage mixed in some way whether this be religiously, ethnically, racially, or any other way. In this connection, we can say that every marriage is mixed in some sense. Every marriage involves a conjunction or mixing of different personality types, ages, educational levels and experience, interests, cultural backgrounds, or economic status. Secondly, the term "mixed marriage" is used as a technical term for marriage involving a mixture of races with no necessary religious connotation, although this may frequently be associated. The term might, therefore, be reserved for this technical usage.

The subject, however, concerns itself with marriages

## CHAPTER II

### INTERFAITH MARRIAGE TODAY

#### Definition of Terms

In literature, both popular and technical-scientific speaking of marriages involving partners of different religious denominations, there exists a confusion and interchange of terms. Some writers on the subject, as well as most popular discussions, speak of "mixed marriage" when referring to this phenomenon. Others use the term "interfaith marriage." In this paper, the term "interfaith marriage" will be used since "mixed marriage" is in reality used in two ways. First, it is used as a non-specific term for any marriage mixed in some way whether this be religiously, ethnically, racially, or any other way. In this connection, we can say that every marriage is mixed in some sense. Every marriage involves a conjunction or mixing of different personality types, ages, educational levels and experience, interests, cultural backgrounds, or economic status. Secondly, the term "mixed marriage" is used as a technical term for marriages involving a mixture of races with no necessary religious connotation, although this may frequently be associated. The term ought, therefore, to be reserved for this technical usage.

Our subject, however, concerns itself with marriages

in which two denominations or "faiths" are joined together. Hence, "interfaith marriage" becomes a more descriptive and specific term. Actually, "inter-denominational marriage" would be an even more accurate and specific term since denominations within Christendom do not involve different "faiths" in the sense of central Christian doctrines. However, in this paper, "interfaith marriage" will be the designation used to refer to the subject of inter-denominational marriages, whether the combination be Roman Catholic and Protestant, two different denominations within Protestantism, Jewish and Protestant, or Jewish and Roman Catholic. Any marriage involving persons of a non-Christian or non-Jewish religion is outside our discussion, both because they are relatively rare in this country and, also, because they usually involve a mixture of races as well, thereby qualifying as a "mixed marriage." This, as we have indicated, is another subject.

#### Prevalence of Interfaith Marriage Today

In considering the present state of affairs with regard to interfaith marriage, we would like to be able to make some statistical statement concerning the prevalence of such marriages today. However, it is impossible to state accurately either the number or percentage of marriages existing today which are of an interfaith nature. This is the case since only one state (Iowa) is presently keeping record of the

religious affiliation of persons contracting marriage. Therefore, no national or state totals are available. Even Iowa has kept this record only since 1953. However, some idea of the relative number or percentage of interfaith marriages can be obtained from some recent studies of limited scope.

One survey of 835 marriages in rural Minnesota reported 92.9 percent of the Protestants married to Protestants.<sup>1</sup> Such a figure might be taken to indicate a very low interfaith marriage rate in the United States. A New Haven, Connecticut, study by Hollingshead, however, reported only 74.4 percent of the Protestants to be married to Protestants. In the same study, 93.8 percent of the Roman Catholics and 97.1 percent of the Jews were married to persons of their own faith.<sup>2</sup>

In a study by Father John L. Thomas, it is concluded after examining the available data that close to one-half of all Roman Catholics in this country have found their matrimonial mates in recent years outside of their church. Approximately three out of five such cases are valid marriages, that is, performed in compliance with the requirements of the church and sanctioned by it, while two out of every five are invalid marriages because they are not so performed and

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<sup>1</sup>E. E. LeMasters, Modern Courtship and Marriage (New York: The MacMillan Company, c.1957), p. 335.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

sanctioned.<sup>3</sup>

A study of interfaith marriages involving members of the United Lutheran Church in America was made several years ago by the Rev. Harold C. Letts, of the Lutheran Board of Social Missions, and James Bossard, of the University of Pennsylvania. Data on 382 Lutheran congregations showed that, for the years 1946-1950, more than one-half (58 percent) of the Lutherans who married found their mates outside of their church. Of all such Lutherans, one out of every five married a Roman Catholic, close to another fifth married non-church members, and about three-fifths married members of other Protestant churches.<sup>4</sup>

Although marriage records including the religious affiliation question have been available for the state of Iowa only since 1953, a preliminary study in 1955, by Chancellor and Monahan, reaches the following conclusions:

- a. 42 percent of all marriages involving a Roman Catholic in 1953 were mixed.
- b. Protestants in Iowa, in 1953, overwhelmingly married within their own faith--92 percent of the husbands and 91 percent of the wives.
- c. There are significant differences between first marriages and subsequent marriages. For example,

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<sup>3</sup>John L. Thomas, "The Factor of Religion in the Selection of Marriage Mates," American Sociological Review, XVI (July, 1951), 487-492.

<sup>4</sup>Reported in James H. S. Bossard and Eleanor Stokes Boll, Why Marriages Go Wrong (New York: The Ronald Press Company, c.1958), pp. 79-80.

in first marriages, only 22 out of 100 Roman Catholics marry outside their faith, whereas in subsequent marriages, the rate goes up to 42 out of 100.<sup>5</sup>

Other writers and studies reach similar conclusions.

Clement S. Mihanovich, writing in a Roman Catholic periodical in July, 1949, said, "Over 40 percent of all Catholic marriages in 1946 were mixed marriages."<sup>6</sup> Paul Blanshard thinks that there are over one hundred thousand Catholic-Protestant marriages in the nation every year. He says,

There are more than 100,000 priestly mixed marriages a year in the United States and recently studies by priests show not only that such marriages are increasing rapidly in spite of ecclesiastical pressure, but also that a very large proportion of mixed families are lost permanently to the church.<sup>7</sup>

James A. Peterson adds to this. He says,

To the mixed marriages performed by priests must be added all those marriages performed by Protestant ministers and justices of the peace. This would probably mean that 50 percent of Catholic youth are marrying non-Catholic mates.<sup>8</sup>

What these statistical studies and conclusions tell us, in very simple terms, is that interfaith marriages are frequently occurring phenomena today and shall probably remain so.

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<sup>5</sup>Loren E. Chancellor and Thomas P. Monahan, "Religious Preference and Interreligious Mixtures in Marriages and Divorces in Iowa," American Journal of Sociology, LXI (November, 1955), 234.

<sup>6</sup>James A. Peterson, Education for Marriage (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, c.1956), p. 146.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 146-147.

### Factors Leading to the Present Situation

As we attempt to analyze and evaluate the interfaith marriage phenomenon and keep in mind the statistical indications above, we need to attempt to answer the question why this has come about. Actually, the frequency of occurrence of this phenomenon today is not really surprising when consideration is given to the cultural and environmental atmosphere and milieu surrounding people today. Everywhere the age-old barriers which have separated people from one another are going down. Facilitated communication has resulted in contacts between people who formally would never have met. Appreciation, tolerance, and cordial respect have been gained for other viewpoints and convictions. All of this contrasts with the old world approach in which prejudice, as well as geographic location, kept adherents of different religious and social groups at a "safe" and suspicious distance from each other.

Today, however, there is a definitely increased freedom of the individual to move about and choose his own friends. This is, of course, not only true of men but of women as well, who now move about freely, being no longer restricted so closely to home and family surroundings. The increased mobility of the individual through improved transportation methods and work, recreation, and business associations, brings people into an increasing number of personal contacts.

Urbanization has been a prime factor in this development. People today are concentrated in larger towns and urban settlements where the individual and the family are forced into contact with many different persons of different cultural, ethnic, religious, and economic backgrounds, experience, and convictions. This contrasts to former days when people lived in smaller and more isolated communities where ethnic, religious, and cultural differences were less sharp, if, in many cases, present at all.<sup>9</sup> Associated with this also is the anonymity which urbanization produces. This means a breakdown in external controls and throws increased responsibilities upon those within the individual.<sup>10</sup>

The decline in the use of the home and family as the center of activities and influence is also an important factor. The home has become less and less the center for recreational and social contacts and the setting where the young family members establish and cultivate their social contacts. Modern industrialization has done much to contribute to this decline of the family-centered life.<sup>11</sup> The family unit is no longer even remotely self-sufficient. Children are rarely

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<sup>9</sup>Noel P. Gist and L. A. Halbert, Urban Society (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, c.1956).

<sup>10</sup>James H. S. Bossard and Eleanor Stokes Boll, One Marriage, Two Faiths (New York: The Ronald Press Company, c.1957), pp. 92-93.

<sup>11</sup>John Sirjamaki, The American Family in the Twentieth Century (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, c.1953), pp. 42ff.



required to contribute to the economic support of the family unit. Nearly all work activities take the family members away from the home. Recreation and entertainment also become of a specialized nature taking people away from the home setting, often as individuals and not as families.<sup>12</sup>

The emancipation of women has also played an observable role. The fact that many women work and attend colleges and universities broadens their contacts and makes it possible for them to meet men of diverse backgrounds--cultural, economic, and religious.<sup>13</sup>

The fact that both young men and young women now attend institutions of higher education, in ever increasing numbers, not only throws them into contact with people of differing backgrounds, but also contributes to more tolerant, broad-minded attitudes in general. These tend to play down differences, such as religious distinctions.

#### Prevailing Attitudes

As will be indicated in chapter four of this paper, caution with regard to interfaith marriage is being voiced by religious groups as well as family sociologists. Words from

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<sup>12</sup>For a discussion of the changing functions of the family, see William F. Ogburn, "The Changing Family," The Family, XIX (March, 1938), 139-143; Margaret P. Redfield, "The American Family: Consensus and Freedom," American Journal of Sociology, LII (April, 1946), 175-183.

<sup>13</sup>Ralph Linton, "Women in the Family," Sourcebook in Marriage and the Family, edited by Marvin B. Sussman (Cambridge, Mass.: The Riverside Press, c.1955), pp. 94-101.

the latter will be discussed in chapter three. However, as Robert Blood says, "Despite the organized opposition to interfaith marriage, considerable popular support for them exists."<sup>14</sup>

In a study of 2,000 students at Michigan State University, in 1949, Landis found that fully half of the 2,000 would be willing to marry a person of another faith, "other things being equal."<sup>15</sup>

Father Thomas found that over one-third of the Roman Catholic students attending a Roman Catholic college expressed a similar willingness.<sup>16</sup>

In a study at Cornell University, in the early 1940's, the following views and attitudes toward interfaith marriage are reported:

Practically unanimous (97.3 percent) was the opinion that there can be a satisfying marriage between two Protestants of different denominations. Almost 80 percent (79.9 percent) believed there can be a satisfying marriage between a Catholic and a Protestant, but only 58.2 percent believed that there can be a satisfying marriage between a Jew and a Gentile.<sup>17</sup>

Certainly such general attitudes help account for the fact that many interfaith marriages occur in reality, and

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<sup>14</sup>Robert O. Blood, Anticipating Your Marriage (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, c.1955), p. 47.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Lemo D. Rockwood and Mary E. N. Ford, Youth, Marriage, and Parenthood (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., c.1945), p. 86.

illustrates much popular opinion regarding the subject which is quite optimistic with regard to the success of such marriages.

#### Prospects for the Future

With this background in mind, we can hazard a guess that the frequency of such marriages will probably not decrease in the immediate future but will actually probably increase. Bossard and Boll say, ". . . we must rely on scattered bits of evidence, but all that is obtainable shows quite clearly that they are on the increase."<sup>18</sup>

Father Thomas, after examining the Roman Catholic statistics, concludes that there has been a steady but gradual increase since 1910. During the periods of the World Wars, there was a considerable increase, in some dioceses as high as 10 percent. Father Thomas predicts that there are excellent reasons for believing there will be a gradual and steady increase of marriages between Roman Catholics and members of other denominations in the future.<sup>19</sup>

In the Lutheran study by Letts and Bossard mentioned before, in which a fifteen-year period was covered from 1936 to 1950, the following percentage increase became evident. Grouped by five-year periods, the percentages of Lutherans

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<sup>18</sup>Bossard and Boll, One Marriage, Two Faiths, p. 58.

<sup>19</sup>Clement Mihanovich, Gerald Schnepf, and John Thomas, Marriage and the Family (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, c.1942), pp. 202-203.

marrying outside of their church were 46 percent in 1936-1940, 47 percent in 1941-1945, and 58 percent in 1946-1950.<sup>20</sup>

Father Thomas, in predicting a continued increase as indicated above, offers five factors to support his position:

- a. National groups are gradually fusing with the host culture.
- b. Catholic and non-Catholic interaction is increasing.
- c. Interfaith marriages seem to have a cumulative effect.
- d. There is increasing individualism in the selection of a marriage partner.
- e. The attitudes of both Catholic and non-Catholic young people seem to be becoming more tolerant to interfaith marriage.<sup>21</sup>

Along this same line, Truxall and Merrill reach two conclusions:

- a. The population is becoming more homogeneous, insofar as religious barriers to intermarriage are apparently breaking down.
- b. The possibility of marital conflict on religious grounds is increasing proportionately, insofar as more persons of divergent faiths are marrying.<sup>22</sup>

#### Factors Determining the Rate

In addition to general factors contributing to the percentage increase of interfaith marriages in this century

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<sup>20</sup> Bossard and Boll, Why Marriages Go Wrong, p. 59.

<sup>21</sup> Mihanovich, Schnepf, and Thomas, loc. cit.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew G. Truxall and Francis E. Merrill, Marriage and the Family in American Culture (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., c.1947), p. 478.

discussed above, LeMasters lists and discusses several specific factors which may be quite significant in determining the rate in a given area. His discussion follows:

- a. The proportion of Catholics (or any other religious minority) to the total population. Thus the rate of Catholic interfaith marriage in Raleigh, North Carolina, where Catholics comprise only 2 percent of the population, is 76 percent, but in El Paso, Texas, where Catholics are a majority group, the interfaith marriage rate is not over 10 percent. The basic mechanism here seems to be opportunity to find marriage partners within your own group, plus exposure to courtship partners of another religious faith.
- b. The presence or absence of cohesive ethnic groups in the community. In such cities as El Paso, Texas, the Spanish or Mexican subculture is an additional factor preventing marriage of Catholics with non-Catholics. Hence the interfaith marriage rate is considerably lower than one might expect.
- c. The socioeconomic or social level of the religious minority. For Catholics, Thomas found that the interfaith marriage rate in an urban community ranged from 8.5 percent in the lower income areas to 19.3 percent in the higher socioeconomic groups of the suburbs. Judging from the work of Thomas, it seems that the chances of any given person marrying outside his religion depend upon his exposure to eligible mates from another group, plus his willingness to intermarry; and this latter seems to be partially the result of his economic and educational level.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>LeMasters, op. cit., p. 337.

## CHAPTER III

### SOCIOLOGY INTERPRETS THE PROBLEM

#### Factors Conducive to a Successful Marriage

From a general discussion of the practice and attitude structure of American society with regard to interfaith marriage, we now turn to a more detailed examination and interpretation of this phenomenon primarily from a sociological point of view.

Before examining specific problems and difficulties involved, as well as discussing sociological criticism and evaluation, the writer feels it advisable first to summarize briefly what sociologists find as the positive factors contributing to a satisfactory marriage and enduring marital adjustment. This will then serve as a general background orientation for any criticism of interfaith marriage which will be forthcoming.

In recent years, considerable research has gone into finding the correlatives for marital happiness and adjustment. In the 1930's, two major pioneering studies were made, one by Terman and his associates<sup>1</sup> and the other by Burgess and Cottrell.<sup>2</sup> These studies indicate that "happiness" or

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<sup>1</sup>Lewis M. Terman, et al., Psychological Factors in Marital Happiness (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., c.1938).

<sup>2</sup>Ernest W. Burgess and Leonard S. Cottrell, Jr., Predicting Success or Failure in Marriage (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., c.1939).

"adjustment" is positively correlated with: (a) Generally non-neurotic personalities of the spouses; (b) Cultural homogeneity of the spouses; (c) Their moral conservatism; (d) Amicable relations between each spouse and his parents; (e) The marital happiness of the spouses' parents.<sup>3</sup> Winch and McGinnis say, "By implication these studies condemn romantic love as a basis for a happy marriage."<sup>4</sup>

Harvey J. Locke lists several conclusions from a study made by him which he states are to be viewed as hypotheses for future research, yet presented as dogmatic statements on the basis of his study:

- a. Marital adjustment ranges along a continuum from very great to very little adjustment.
- b. The alienation process is generally a slow cumulation of conflicts and disagreement, accompanied by the psychological withdrawal of one or both spouses.
- c. The development of binding ties of affection, common interests and activities, similar attitudes and values, along with respect for the individuality of the partner, begins prior to the marriage ceremony and continues afterwards.
- d. Marital adjustment involves adaptation not only to the mate, but also to the mate's parents.
- e. Sexual relations in marriage are to be considered in terms of conflict, or lack of conflict, between the behavior of the individual and cultural values.
- f. There is no relationship between the presence or absence of children, or the size of the family, and marital adjustment.

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<sup>3</sup>Robert F. Winch and Robert McGinnis, editors, Marriage and the Family (New York: Henry Holt and Company, c. 1953), p. 454.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

- g. Marital adjustment is associated with directorial ability, as measured by the ready acceptance of responsibility, strictness in dealing with children, leadership, the ability to make decisions readily, determination, and not being too easily influenced by others.
- h. Marital adjustment is associated with a general personality pattern of adaptability.
- i. The capacity to give and receive affection, as measured by replies to questions on affectionateness and demonstration of affection, is associated with success in marriage.
- j. Sociability, or the tendency to join with others for companionship, is highly associated with marital adjustment.
- k. Conventionality is highly associated with marital adjustment.
- l. The companionship family, defined as having intimate communication, sympathetic understanding, common interests, mutual respect on the basis of equality, democratic behavior, and shared rather than individualistic behavior, is highly associated with marital adjustment.
- m. Certain economic factors, such as economic security and stability, certain values associated with homemaking, appreciation of the efforts of the husband to provide for the needs of the family, appreciation of the work of the wife in homemaking, and other variables related to economic factors, are associated with marital adjustment.
- n. The gainful employment of the wife outside the home is not associated with marital adjustment or maladjustment.<sup>5</sup>

LeMasters lists the following suggestions as possible criteria for a happy, successful marriage:

- a. The potentials for growth or maturation in each

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<sup>5</sup>Summarized from Harvey J. Locke, Predicting Adjustment in Marriage: A Comparison of a Divorced and a Happily Married Group (New York: Henry Holt and Company, c.1951), pp. 358-360.



partner are at least partly achieved.

- b. There is a mutually satisfying relationship between the married couple and their parental families.
- c. In a good marriage there is love for children and a desire to rear a family.
- d. In our society, a successful marriage has to be adaptable.
- e. The husband and wife, and their children, look toward the home for their deepest satisfactions.<sup>6</sup>

In his book, Education for Marriage, James A. Peterson indicates that happiness in marriage depends in part on the maturity of the individuals concerned and in the way the configuration of personality of each partner meets the needs of the other in intimate communication. Adjustment within marriage also depends upon the way the attitudes, values, and roles of each matches those of the mate.<sup>7</sup>

Peterson also lists and discusses several factors which ought to be considered in making a wise marriage choice. As primary factors, he discusses mental sex differences, social class, age difference, inter-racial and interfaith marriage, and recreational choices.<sup>8</sup>

By regarding mental sex differences as an important factor, Peterson refers to the need to explore one's own

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<sup>6</sup>E. E. LeMasters, Modern Courtship and Marriage (New York: The Macmillan Company, c.1957), pp. 232-236.

<sup>7</sup>James A. Peterson, Education for Marriage (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, c.1956), p. 135.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., pp. 136-154.

attitudes toward the role of the woman and the man in marriage. This is necessary since we are presently living in a period of transition in the roles of men and women, with some trend toward equality but with stereotypes remaining. Decisions, with regard to family authority, would enter in here.<sup>9</sup>

Social class can become quite significant as a factor in wise marriage choice. In concluding his discussion, Peterson says,

Although a great many heterogamous marriages take place, they are often replete with irritation and conflict. In general, the adjustment in such marriages is not so satisfactory as in those in which class lines are not crossed.<sup>10</sup>

Much has been said on the subject of age and wise marriage choice. Peterson's apt summary conclusion, regarding the age to marry and age differences, is that marrying either very young or very late, or marrying when there is a large age difference, may be quite hazardous and, therefore, should be considered with that much more care.<sup>11</sup>

Peterson counsels against both inter-racial and inter-faith marriages primarily because of social disapproval and societal pressures of many kinds which are brought to bear upon individuals who contract such a marriage. Incurring

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 136-138.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 138-141.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

such a marriage simply increases the possibilities for problems of various kinds.<sup>12</sup>

Peterson also regards recreation as a significant factor in wise marriage choice. Since the use of leisure time is generally believed to be important in America, Peterson says, "Young people need to assess very carefully their recreational backgrounds and activities to be sure of common interests after marriage."<sup>13</sup>

Peterson also suggests as important a consideration of economic factors, such as economic security and the use of money by the family. Associated with this would be a consideration of the occupational pursuit of the male--the degree of stress associated with the vocation, requirements of the vocation in hours and mobility, and general attitudes associated with specific vocations.<sup>14</sup>

Out of all this we can see that the factors relating to a successful marriage certainly are multiform, with one or more in given cases carrying more weight and influence than others. Although some writers have rated one factor more highly than others, general agreement is often lacking. But when all conceivable factors are included, it is possible to speak generally concerning factors which contribute to marital

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 143-152.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 136-165.

success. In broad summary, we can say that two persons in marriage must look for and maintain mutual interests, aspirations, and goals based upon a background relatively similar with regard to family life patterns and happiness, class level, ethnic origins, and religious feeling. As each seeks to enrich the life of the other, they need to realize that success in marriage is a cooperative effort and can be achieved only through such effort over a period of time. This means the couple must be adaptable and willing to give up a measure of personal freedom in exchange for the element of togetherness, which is one of the permanent values of marriage.<sup>15</sup>

Very significant in the success of marriage is the congeniality of the two persons. Adams and Packard say:

This congeniality must be built upon the things they have in common. The more things they have in common and the fewer the differences, the greater the likelihood of congeniality. . . . The success of a marriage depends upon the total adjustment the two personalities can make to each other. Even where couples are highly compatible, far-reaching adjustments must be made. When to the normal differences you add fundamental differences of background, the sheer problem of adjustment will add a severe strain to the union.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Judson T. Landis and Mary G. Landis, Building a Successful Marriage (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., c.1948), p. 2.

<sup>16</sup>Clifford R. Adams and Vance O. Packard, How to Pick a Mate (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., c.1946), p. 139.

## Analysis of Interfaith Marriage

### Motivation and sources

From a general discussion of factors relating to a predictable successful marriage, we now return to a more scientific discussion of our topic. However, before we consider the inner dynamics of an interfaith marriage and sociological analysis thereof, it is helpful and necessary to investigate what is at the basis of such marriages-- what are the motivations and specific sources. In the preceding chapter, we stated some of the general factors composing a social climate conducive to such a phenomenon as an interfaith marriage. Now, however, we need to consider somewhat more specifically factors both psychological and sociological which are behind a given marriage of an interfaith nature.

With regard to the personal psychology of individuals contracting an interfaith marriage, there are some observations which have been made which are not only interesting but probably carry some validity as well. Although not universally applicable to all persons involved in an interfaith marriage, yet they may be helpful in understanding some of the reasons behind a given interfaith marriage which presents itself.

James Bossard and Eleanor Boll say:

Interfaith marriages are often made by persons who

are of the rebellious type or who are in a state of rebellion at the time. This may be a rebellion against the parents, their kinsfolk, their social or national group origin, their traditional culture, or society in general. To marry across the line becomes a symbol of their defiance, consciously exalted by them as evidence of their "emancipation."<sup>17</sup>

In a study by Slotkin and Resnik, the following findings regarding the personalities of those who make out-marriages are stated:

- a. The unorganized or demoralized person, a product of the deteriorated areas of cities where people do not conform to the cultural standards of the larger society.
- b. The promiscuous person, who looks outside his own group for casual contacts that sometimes lead to marriage.
- c. The adventurous person, who is stimulated by the new and different.
- d. The detached person, out off from his own group and with little opportunity to marry within it.
- e. The rebellious person, who turns against his own culture and defiantly adopts another.
- f. The marginal person, who marries for superior status for himself or children and who remains marginal to both his own and the new group.
- g. The acculturated person, who has come to value the character of the dominant group as superior.
- h. The emancipated person, who has lost those traits of his own group that are an obstacle to inter-marriage.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> James H. S. Bossard and Eleanor Stokes Boll, Why Marriages Go Wrong (New York: The Ronald Press Company, c.1958), p. 84.

<sup>18</sup> Reuben B. Resnik, "Some Sociological Aspects of Intermarriage of Jew and Non-Jew," Social Forces, XII (October, 1935), 94-102; J. S. Slotkin, "Jewish-Gentile

Outside of some general personality and psychological factors, which in given cases may be motivational in contracting an interfaith marriage, there are certain attitudinal and cultural patterns with regard to marriage in general which are significant, frequently when found in combination. Bossard and Boll say:

Modern methods do not always make for wise choice of lifelong matrimonial partners. The current emphases often are upon success in party-giving, dancing, sports, petting, and the skillful manipulation of a patois that in our day was called a "good line." There tends to be an impersonality about present-day courtship such as one finds in other aspects of social life. . . . Many young people tend to choose their matrimonial partners in the same way they buy a car--without ever looking under the hood. Both car and mate must be streamlined.<sup>19</sup>

What the authors are saying is that frequently consideration is not given to more basic things such as a person's cultural and religious background. Superficial items become primary criteria.

Sirjamaki lists two value configurations which summarize American attitudes toward marriage in general. The second of them is more relevant to our present discussion.<sup>20</sup>

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Intermarriage in Chicago," American Sociological Review, VII (February, 1942), 34-39, quoting James H. S. Bossard and Eleanor S. Boll, One Marriage, Two Faiths (New York: The Ronald Press Company, c.1957), pp. 100-101.

<sup>19</sup>Bossard and Boll, One Marriage, Two Faiths, pp. 62-63.

<sup>20</sup>The first is "that Americans regard marriage as a major life-goal, for men quite as much as women, because it provides a more mature and satisfying existence than does single status." John Sirjamaki, The American Family in the Twentieth Century (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, c.1953), p. 57.

It is, that to ensure a satisfying and happy marriage, a marriage should be based on mutual affection and free choice of spouses.<sup>21</sup> This is something held to very tenaciously by American young people. If there is any kind of attempted home influence, or pressure, such young people may rebel against such an accepted standard as marrying within one's religious group.

As an outgrowth of the mutual affection and free-choice criteria for marriage mentioned above, we have the American dating system which is supposed to lead to a wise, compatible selection of mate.<sup>22</sup> However, at present, there is one divorce for every four new marriages. Sirjamaki says:

Either the wrong persons marry each other, or they know each other's nature so little or so wrongly at the outset that they cannot build a mutually satisfying marriage.<sup>23</sup>

In discussing reasons for the inadequacy of the mechanism of mate selection, Sirjamaki states, as one possible reason, that romantic love is not always a stable basis for marriage. Also, dating does not provide couples with an invariably reliable opportunity to become well acquainted with each other as persons and, therefore, to gauge each other's potentialities for marriage accurately.<sup>24</sup> He says:

Dating tends, in brief, to train young people for

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.



companionship more than it does for marriage. Thus, it develops their physical charm, friendliness, self-assurance, and gaiety, which are undoubted assets of personality, but do not exhaust the adequate criteria of selection of marriage partners.<sup>25</sup>

In brief, the dating system and the criteria for mate selection are often neither basic nor complete enough.

Closely associated with the above is the younger age-at-marriage today with a concomitant probable lack of maturity and sound judgment. Concerning the trend toward younger age-at-marriage, Bossard and Boll have the following to say:

Back in 1890, when life began theoretically so much earlier for the young, the average man married shortly after he turned twenty-six. Today he marries at twenty-two. The average young woman, in 1890, married at twenty-two; today she marries at twenty.

Another indication of what is happening can be seen from comparisons in specific age groups. According to the most recent United States census returns, the proportion of men at ages twenty to twenty-four years who are married almost doubled during the fifteen-year period from 1940-1955. The change in percentage married was from 27 percent in 1940 to 51 percent in 1955. For women in the same age period and during the same fifteen-year period, the proportion married increased from 51 percent in 1940 to 69 percent in 1955. Even more striking are the changes for the age group fifteen to nineteen years old. For boys, the percentage increased from 1.7 percent to 3.3 percent; for girls, from 11 percent to 17 percent.<sup>26</sup>

Not only does young age-at-marriage probably mean a lack of mature judgment but also may mean that, at this time of life, religion is least important to the minds of such

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>26</sup>Bossard and Boll, One Marriage, Two Faiths, p. 6.

individuals. This is to say that, although religion in general and denominational affiliation in particular may not seem important at the time of marriage, this does not mean it will always remain so, either for the individual or the couple. Concerning this point, Rockwood and Ford say:

The period of courtship often coincides with the period of minimum interest in the church. After marriage, especially if they have children, the couple may awaken to a new sense of religious values. If their religious backgrounds are too divergent, their sense of spiritual alienation may be a detriment not only to the marital relationship but also to their relationships with their children.<sup>27</sup>

It is interesting to note that young people willing to contract an interfaith marriage, at least theoretically, do express certain cautions. Although there is a general optimism and pervasive idea that love will somehow conquer all, an underlying sense of danger is usually present in people. In the Cornell study referred to before, some qualifying statements by the people interviewed, regarding the predictable success of Protestant-Roman Catholic and Jew-Gentile marriage, are interesting in this regard. They indicate doubts and reservations often of a very strong nature, yet, paradoxically, this did not keep an extremely high percentage from saying they felt satisfying interfaith marriages were possible. I quote from the Cornell study as reported in Youth, Marriage, and Parenthood, by Rockwood

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<sup>27</sup>Lemo D. Rockwood and Mary E. N. Ford, Youth, Marriage, and Parenthood (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., c.1945), pp. 88-89.

and Ford:

a. Typical qualifying remarks of Protestant young people:

1. Depends on the couple.
2. Depends on what they decide about the children.
3. For a Catholic and Protestant or a Jew and Gentile to marry is asking for trouble.
4. Yes, if they start married life in a new place.
5. Yes, if they are willing to sacrifice their religions.
6. The Catholic-Protestant marriage has the least chance.
7. A Catholic-Protestant or Jewish-Gentile marriage could be successful only if there are no children.
8. Yes, if they respect each other's views.
9. Yes, provided one is converted to the religion of the other.
10. Yes, if social pressure does not cause unhappiness.
11. I have seen it done.

b. Roman Catholic young people:

1. Yes, but only if one will change to the other's belief.
2. If a definite agreement can be made as to which faith the children will be reared in, I believe a satisfactory marriage can be made between a Catholic and a Protestant.
3. If neither is too devout.
4. Depends on the persons involved and their families.

c. Jewish young people:

1. Yes, if neither is deeply religious.
2. No, too dangerous to risk.
3. A deep affection can survive religious differences.
4. Depends on the persons, the attitudes of their families, the depth of their religious beliefs, and whether or not they have children.
5. It would be difficult but could be accomplished if the individuals were courageous and tolerant.
6. My brother is married to a Gentile and they are very happy.<sup>28</sup>

Causes of conflict and breakdown

As we analyze the actual dynamics of an interfaith marriage now, specifically from the viewpoint of factors relating to conflict and actual breakdown, we are able to rely on considerable sociological analysis and data. We now also approach, more specifically, the actual religious factors of conflict found in interfaith marriage.

It is necessary at the outset that we describe and understand the concept of "culture," and more specifically of a "subculture" within society, since religious denominations are viewed in this paper as "subculture" within broader society. Actually, we have been using the concept of culture or society all along as we have described certain attitudes

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp. 86-87.

and atmosphere fairly universal and generally prevalent in the minds of American people. "Culture" refers simply to a way of life, developed by a particular society or grouping of people, which is expressed not only in what the people produce but also in their manner of doing and approaching things--their attitudes and ideals, their interpretation of and approach to phenomena. Of course, culture is extremely variable. And to speak of such a broad concept as the "American culture," is to speak in the most general of terms. It is because of this great diversity present in our society that it is necessary to speak of something more specific in terms of a "subculture"--"a distinctive set of behavior patterns adhered to by a subgroup within a large and heterogeneous society, such as the United States."<sup>29</sup> Here not only do we speak of the rural subculture, the southern subculture, the various subcultures of ethnic groups, etc., but we also speak of religious or denominational subcultures. Although religious subculture groups, such as Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Pentecostals, etc., share most of the basic cultural patterns of their broader society, in certain specific areas they are distinctive. Thus, to be a Methodist, a Christian Scientist, a Pentecostal, a Lutheran, or a Jew, is in most cases to come from a decidedly different cultural background, each with its own distinctive

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<sup>29</sup> Lemasters, op. cit., p. 17.

elements which have been at work forming the personality of the individual adherent:

- a. One denominational orientation may cause an individual to think of sex generally and specifically as inherently evil.
- b. Another may regard drinking, whether in moderation or excess, to be sinful.
- c. Another may regard recourse to any form of medical or surgical help as contrary to God's design.
- d. Another may view all forms of commercial entertainment as sinful.
- e. For another, birth control or planned parenthood is against God's plan for man.
- f. For another, Sunday recreation is failing to sanctify the holy day.
- g. For another, dancing is impure.
- h. One denomination may stress authoritarianism.
- i. Another may make individualism a virtue.

As we view any given religion or denomination within Christendom, we can describe it according to three primary manifestations:

- a. Each has its creed or doctrinal formulations.
- b. Each has its cultus or pattern of worship and devotional practices.
- c. Each has its culture or relationship to the life and environment in which it finds itself.

It is this latter manifestation which frequently looms so important in interfaith marriage problems. Specific doctrines, or teachings of denominations (aspects of creed and cultus), are often not nearly so important in considering the dangers of an interfaith marriage, as are basic

attitudes inherent in a denomination's philosophy and its general approach to life (culture) which motivates the daily interaction of the individuals involved.

With the preceding general background in mind, we can proceed to a more detailed analysis of specific problem areas encountered in an interfaith marriage. In this analysis and criticism, we shall consider interfaith marriage primarily from a sociological point of view. It will become evident that problems arise in interfaith marriages, not so much from conflict and argument over specific doctrines as from general attitudes and approaches toward aspects of everyday living which have been molded and conditioned by one's general religious orientation. Although different interpretations of the doctrines of predestination, or the "Real Presence" in the Lord's Supper, may in given cases enter into the problem, such disagreements may be merely symptomatic of other difficulties. More important than official theological differences, considered by themselves, is the general cultural, familial, and geographic-environmental background which denominational affiliation may reflect.<sup>30</sup>

Paul Landis supports this view when he says:

The problems which interfaith marriages encounter are

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<sup>30</sup>Specific doctrines may be a significant disruptive factor when, for example, a Roman Catholic is involved who does not recognize the Christian faith of the partner, although a member of another Christian denomination, or wishes to carry out the implications of a doctrine such as that related to birth control.

not, as we might suspect, primarily the result of constant clashes in religious discussions. They are more frequently the outcome of differences over child training and over general values in life. Religion has an influence over far more than the spiritual life of its adherents.<sup>31</sup>

Roy Baber speaks similarly when he says:

A common error is made in the assumption that two young people of different religious faiths are different only in their religious beliefs. Far more than that is involved. Catholic and Protestant youth, for example, might have very similar theological views and yet be far apart in certain basic attitudes. The concentration of authority in one church versus individual decisions in the other, the teachings of each church on the subject of birth control, church pronouncements on how children of mixed marriages shall be raised--these and similar items can cause much trouble.<sup>32</sup>

As we discuss and delimit specific areas of difficulty arising within a marriage, because of its interfaith nature, we shall follow the categories of James A. Peterson. He suggests four problem areas:

- a. The problem of family participation. Where will the family worship?<sup>33</sup>
- b. The problem of family planning.
- c. The problem of the religious pressure of in-laws.
- d. Culture and style of life.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Paul H. Landis, Making the Most of Marriage (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., c.1955), p. 174.

<sup>32</sup>Ray E. Baber, Marriage and the Family (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., c.1939), pp. 100-101.

<sup>33</sup>Peterson lists three generalizations in this regard: (a) A few individuals are converted to the spouse's faith; (b) Many drop out of religious groups altogether; (c) Children tend to go with the mother to the church of her choice.

<sup>34</sup>Peterson, op. cit., pp. 150-151.



The first problem area, that of family participation, makes a significant presupposition, namely, that children usually and eventually will be involved as a product of a marriage. This immediately suggests one of the primary sources of conflict. Although no studies have been made on childless interfaith marriages, Judson T. Landis suggests that such marriages would probably have no higher percentage of dissolution than intrafaith marriages, other factors being equal.<sup>35</sup> Two adult people will frequently be able to make an adjustment or compromise of some sort, with regard to religious differences which do not apply satisfactorily to a situation in which children are involved.

Here the basic question of the denomination in which the children should be trained arises immediately. Should the child be educated in public or parochial schools? Finally, what about confirmation instruction? Even general child-rearing practices are somewhat conditioned by various religious orientations.

Concerning the problem of children in an interfaith marriage, Black says, "Children present the greatest challenge to those who enter mixed marriages."<sup>36</sup> He mentions

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<sup>35</sup>Judson T. Landis, "Marriage of Mixed and Non-Mixed Religious Faith," American Sociological Review, XIV (June, 1949), 401-406.

<sup>36</sup>Algernon D. Black, If I Marry Outside My Religion (Washington: Public Affairs Press, c.1954), Pamphlet No. 204, p. 23.

two major aspects of the problem:

- a. The psychological welfare of a child, his emotional and mental health, are fundamentally dependent upon the security of the home, the strength of the marriage, and the ways in which the parents work together for the child's welfare. . . . If the parents are in conflict over religion, or feel guilty at having married outside their faith, the religious factor can play havoc with the welfare of the children.
- b. The religious training of the children can become ground for conflict and division. This is no simple matter unless both parents eventually embrace the same faith.<sup>37</sup>

Closely associated with the above discussion of family religious participation, and actually preceding it, is the second problem area, that of family planning or limitation. What about conception of children in the first place? Here the primary question is the one of birth control and planned parenthood. Shall contraceptives be used to prevent the occurrence of children at all? Shall contraceptives be used for desirable spacing and limiting of children in the family? Or, does any recourse to contraceptive measures conflict with church dictum or Scriptural injunction? Here, of course, the Roman Catholic Church has specific regulations prohibiting any unnatural contraceptive devices or practices. Most Protestants have laid down no laws concerning the question,<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> For a recent book on the subject by a Protestant (Lutheran) seminary professor, the reader is referred to Alfred M. Rehwinkel, Planned Parenthood and Birth Control in the Light of Christian Ethics (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1959).

but leave it to the individual conscience while perhaps placing the individual decision within a certain Christian framework of responsibility.<sup>39</sup>

The third problem area, that of the religious pressure of the family systems involved, is also a very real one. Although a couple may think idealistically that they are the people getting married and no one else matters or enters in the relationship, it is difficult, if not impossible, to eliminate family pressure and influence. Bossard says that even the details of the arrangement for the wedding and establishment of a new household are apt to create conflicts and tensions. He says, "Many interfaith marriages stumble or fall on the roadblocks of kinsfolk interference."<sup>40</sup>

In marriage, not only two individuals are involved but two whole families and kinship systems are brought together. Loyalties to one's family background are not easily ignored, even if a person desires to do so. Family displeasure and, perhaps, even interference of some sort can be extremely disruptive to a marriage, and will be likely to occur if the

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<sup>39</sup>It is interesting to note that in a study by Friedman at the University of Michigan, on the use of contraceptives, 71 percent of Roman Catholic women admitted using some form of contraceptive measures, both those condoned and condemned by the Roman Catholic Church. This compared to 86 percent and 89 percent for Protestant and Jews respectively, citing D. V. Varley, class lecture, Sociology 116, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan (March 19, 1958). Lecture notes in the possession of Ronald L. Johnstone, writer of this thesis.

<sup>40</sup>Bossard and Boll, Why Marriages Go Wrong, p. 85.

families are staunch in their religious and denominational convictions. This will be heightened if there are also strong ethnic or class ties intertwined with denominational elements. Black says:

Although families, churches, and communities have only an indirect influence, they can do much either to complicate and injure or to support and further the happiness of those concerned.<sup>41</sup>

The fourth problem area, which speaks of the differences of culture and style of life, is in reality the general problem surrounding all the more specific causes of difficulty, and has been referred to frequently in the preceding discussion. Concerning this category, Peterson says:

Religion is more than a special way of genuflecting or subscribing to creeds. It involves a whole cluster of attitudes and values. One church may use raffles and dice games to raise money and a church not far from it may preach against gambling. The Protestant church may have a large dinner serving turkey or a roast on Friday night but the Catholic partner cannot attend that dinner. During Lent some Protestants deny themselves some luxury, while others do not. . . . In these and hundreds of other ways religion is a strong cultural force in determining not only religious beliefs but specific family and personality rituals and attitudes. Interfaith couples need to be aware of the many ways in which their religious background reflects a way of life.<sup>42</sup>

In an effort to summarize and tie together much of the above, I shall quote at length, from Bossard and Boll, as they summarize the idea of the subcultural influence of one's religious background upon an interfaith marriage.

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<sup>41</sup>Black, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>42</sup>Peterson, loc. cit.

- a. An interfaith marriage is really an intercultural marriage. It combines two people, in what is expected to be a lifelong relationship, who have different ideas about many vital matters, who have many different values, and who are duly drawn to differing obligations, as well as accustomed to different forms of worship. Moreover, these differences are apt to be deeply ingrained, so much a part of ourselves as to seem as natural as the air we breathe. It is that way with other aspects of our culture, like our political life, our speech, our ideas about clothing, or our dietary habits. If our religious culture differs in any of these other aspects, it is in the direction of being more deeply implanted and often more emotionally tinged.
- b. There are matters which differ, not only between persons who are actively identified with some particular church or religious group, but between all persons who have been reared in homes of some kind of religious persuasion. Many persons are Protestant, Roman Catholic, or Jewish in their character and outlook upon life even though they may be lukewarm or even rebellious toward their historic faith. In particular is this true of young people in their marrying years. Over and over, the rebellious skeptics of eighteen or nineteen develop into the devout fathers and mothers of thirty, proud of their traditional background . . . . Religious coloring is deeply pervasive, often operating silently and subtly, and appearing in many shades as life situations change.
- c. Marriage involves relationships that are unique in the field of human associations. It is necessary to emphasize this for two main reasons. One is to meet a criticism that has been voiced against the approach we are making here. Aren't we constantly meeting, working, and associating with people who are the product of different cultures, and particularly of different religious cultures? Why not in marriage? The answer is that marriage relationships differ from those in work, play, discussion, business, and the like. As has been said, marriage is life's most intimate and embracing relationship. It is also established with the expectation that it will be of lifelong duration. . . . A second distinguishing thing about marriage as a human relationship is that it involves the sexual process, which every society seeks to regulate and protect, and the reproductive process, without which no

society could continue to exist. This means that the marriage relationship carries its own criteria of selection of those with whom it is to be established.

- d. The sex aspect of interfaith marriage has its own particular significance. Unfortunately, most discussion of interfaith marriage speaks of sex only as it pertains to birth control. . . . And this is a difficult problem in many cases, creating tension, disagreement, separation, and even divorce. The role of sex in marriage, however, is a much broader one than contraception and reproduction. It is a pervasive aspect of the marital relationship by which and through which the married pair develops, expresses, and enriches its emotional relationship. This means, among other things, that the attitude toward sex and the emotional responses of the marital partners to each other are highly important, and these are derived in large measure from religious sources.
- e. The cultural differences in interfaith marriage involve not only the relationship between the married pair, but also the development of their children and ultimately of their children's children. Not infrequently, such marriages have their own meaning for the kinsfolk on one or both sides of the house. It will help clear thinking in this connection, as well as in regard to most problems of family life, if we remember that a family is more than a sidewise union of the married pair; it is also a lengthwise union of two family streams, each with its own biological and social history. Few married people live in a vacuum so far as their kinsfolk are concerned. It is only that many young people think they do at a fleeting period in their lives.<sup>43</sup>

### Sociological Interpretation

Now we turn to sociological interpretations of experienced and predictable success of interfaith marriages. Certainly, not all marriages fail. Some people apparently

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<sup>43</sup>Bossard and Boll, Why Marriages Go Wrong, pp. 81-84.

overcome or live with problems inherent in such a marriage. As we view the concept of success of interfaith marriage, we need both to have at hand some statistical percentage indication of success as well as some sociological conclusions and evaluation of the available data.

In a study of 1,200 young people in Maryland, quoted in How to Pick a Mate, by Adams and Packard, the young people were asked the religious affiliation of their parents, as well as if their parents were currently living together, divorced, or separated. The following is the percentage of broken marriages in the major religious groupings:

- a. When both parents were Jewish--4.6 percent.
- b. When both parents were Roman Catholic--6.4 percent.
- c. When both parents were Protestant--6.8 percent.
- d. When the marriage was mixed religiously--15.2 percent.<sup>44</sup>

Adams and Packard conclude from this, "In other words, a mixed religious marriage is two or three times more likely to end in unhappiness than when the marriage is not mixed religiously."<sup>45</sup>

Landis found, in a study of parents of Michigan State University students, that Roman Catholic women married within the faith had a divorce rate of only 4.4 percent but those married to Protestant husbands were divorced half

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<sup>44</sup>Adams and Packard, op. cit., p. 142.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

again as often at the rate of 6.7 percent. Protestant wives jumped even more, from 6 percent, when married to men of their own faith, to 20.6 percent, when their husbands were Roman Catholic.<sup>46</sup> Landis says:

We know from studies of almost 25,000 couples, that in fertile marriages the divorce rate is three to four times as great for mixed marriages as for those of like faith.<sup>47</sup>

LeMasters cites the Iowa study, by Chancellor and Monahan, which found that Roman Catholics married to non-Roman Catholics had roughly twice as many divorces as did Roman Catholics married to Roman Catholics. When Roman Catholics married within their own group, and it was a first marriage for both parties, they had 7 percent of all divorces, even though they comprised 18 percent of the first marriages in Iowa for the year.<sup>48</sup> LeMasters concludes: "In other words, the unmixed first Catholic marriages were only half (or less) as prone to end in divorce as marriages in general."<sup>49</sup>

Another study of divorce by Goode, using a random sample of divorced women in Detroit, also cited by LeMasters, found interfaith marriages to be less stable than non-mixed

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<sup>46</sup>Landis, "Marriage of Mixed and Non-Mixed Religious Faith," p. 403.

<sup>47</sup>Paul H. Landis, For Husbands and Wives (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., c.1955), p. 96.

<sup>48</sup>LeMasters, op. cit., pp. 337-338.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 338.



marriages, but the author does not seem to think that religious differences were a major cause of divorce in his sample. The mixture of religious backgrounds seemed to be a contributing factor.<sup>50</sup>

In opposition to this finding is that of Locke, who compared 200 divorced couples with 200 happily married couples, using a relatively representative sample drawn from a single county in Indiana. He did not find religious differences to be a significant factor in the divorced group. In fact, he found such differences just as often in his successfully married group.<sup>51</sup> LeMasters says: "This study leads one to be rather skeptical of the argument, not too rare, that 'religion doesn't mix in marriage.'"<sup>52</sup>

LeMasters also cites two earlier studies which support the view that religion plays a minor role in marital success.

- a. In 1938, Lewis Terman revealed that of the 792 middle-class couples studied, "religious beliefs" ranked twenty-seventh in the wives' complaints and twenty-eighth in the husbands' list.<sup>53</sup>
- b. In the 1939 study of 526 middle-class married couples, Burgess and Cottrell conclude, "Apparently, . . . disagreements over religion . . . play only a relatively small part in marital unhappiness."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Terman, et al., op. cit., p. 236.

<sup>54</sup>Burgess and Cottrell, op. cit., p. 51.

The above studies by Locke, Terman, Burgess and Cottrell, and some of the conclusions by LeMasters, seem to contradict previous studies cited, as well as the general inference throughout this paper that a mixing of religion in marriage has a statistically general negative effect. At least these studies raise the question of whether anything definite can be said on the matter. As with all scientific studies of this nature, it is difficult and hazardous to generalize too broadly, especially when contradictory evidence and conclusions are present. However, in justification of the thesis of this paper, namely, that differences of religious background is negatively associated or correlated with success in marriage, we must realize that the studies by Terman, and Burgess and Cottrell were early, that they were not designed to investigate the religious factor specifically, and they refer to religious differences within a more narrow definition than is done in this paper. Specific disagreements and conflicts over religion or doctrinal distinctions may not be significant. But this does not mean that religious differences stemming from attitudes, training, and background are insignificant. In fact, as previously indicated, most writers and recent studies indicate that, when religious differences are considered from the latter point of view, religious and denominational differences can be quite significant in the success or disruption of a marriage.

In fact, most recent studies indicate a proneness to breakdown within an interfaith marriage which is two to four times as great as in a religiously non-mixed marriage. Yet, when this is said, it is wise that we pay some heed to the caution expressed by LeMasters,<sup>55</sup> and beware of drawing direct relationship conclusions too readily. Too easily a one-for-one equation may be drawn between a marriage breakup and its interfaith nature. Actually, as Black says:

The religious factor in marriage is only one among many. Misunderstanding and conflict between man and wife is not limited by any means to the religious factor where the partners are of different traditions and beliefs. Even within the same faith, whether it be a Catholic, a Protestant, or a Jewish marriage, the relationships may vary from happiness through to a merely tolerable marriage and finally even to great unhappiness and possibly separation.

Differences in religious affiliation and belief may or may not affect the happiness of a marriage. As with other differences, much depends on how important they are in the minds of the married pair. Where these interests are not very strong or where the couple are united in a basic religious outlook, or where their love is stronger than traditional loyalties, then differences in belief or affiliation need not cause serious difficulty.<sup>56</sup>

Certainly it has to be admitted that not all interfaith marriages end in unhappiness. Mace studied fifty couples, whose interfaith marriages were seemingly quite successful, and tried to discover the factors which seemed to promise the best results in such a marriage. He says:

What emerged very clearly was that the successful

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<sup>55</sup> LeMasters, op. cit., pp. 245-250.

<sup>56</sup> Black, op. cit., p. 45.

marriages were generally those in which the couples had carefully and thoroughly faced and explored their differences beforehand. . . . The wise couples who looked ahead tried to think through honestly the implications of their relationship. They faced and discussed the problems they thought lay ahead and agreed together on a policy to meet them. In some cases they made a careful study of each other's faith. . . . Though they retained their own religion, . . . they understood and respected each other's beliefs and convictions. On the basis of their understanding they were able to compose their differences as they arose. Perhaps this is just another way of saying that these were mature people. . . . At one point, however, the testimony of these couples was significant. While their marriages were clearly successful, most of them were ready to admit that something was lacking. They loved each other and found marriage satisfying. Yet they were aware--especially in their most profound experiences of joy and of sorrow--that at the core of their relationship they could not be, as a couple of the same faith could be, completely of one heart and of one mind. The interfaith marriage cannot soar to the greatest heights of which marriage is capable.<sup>57</sup>

Although few writers on the subject of interfaith marriage go so far as LeMasters, who says, "The writer is convinced that religious differences often play a minor role in interfaith marriages that fail,"<sup>58</sup> they all are reluctant to condemn wholeheartedly all such marriages per se. At the same time, however, most writers make the reader aware of a general proneness to failure of such marriages. Perhaps the factor cannot be isolated as a strictly religious one; certainly, it also includes cultural and personality differences which are related to religious affiliation;

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<sup>57</sup>David R. Mace, Success in Marriage (New York: Abingdon Press, c.1958), pp. 121-122.

<sup>58</sup>LeMasters, op. cit., p. 345.

yet the danger remains. Even LeMasters, who states that for those sociologists who are committed to cultural pluralism and view the diversity of religious faiths in America as a beneficial thing, says, "At the same time, however, they admit that this diversity does create problems in courtship and marriage."<sup>59</sup>

Along this same line the family sociologist, Ray Baber, says:

Religious intolerance is slowly breaking down, and it is reasonable to expect that such artificial barriers will in time be minimized. Until that time, however, intermarriage between faiths involves from the very first a distinct handicap which should be assumed only after honest penetrating thought has been given to its implications.<sup>60</sup>

Robert Harper speaks similarly, when he says:

A major forethought, required of persons contemplating intermarriage of any kind, is the lessened probability of making a successful adjustment. Men and women certainly should not decrease their statistical opportunity for adequate marital adjustment, without being certain that enough favorable factors are present to counterbalance this generally unfavorable one.<sup>61</sup>

Duvall and Hill regard differences among the larger Protestant bodies as presenting no serious problem in such an interfaith marriage. However, they say that the teachings and expectations of certain smaller groups, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, Mennonites, and Seventh-day Adventists,

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 328.

<sup>60</sup>Baber, op. cit., p. 101.

<sup>61</sup>Robert A. Harper, Marriage (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., c.1949), p. 43.

are so much at variance with those of other Protestant groups that intermarriage can cause serious difficulty.<sup>62</sup> But even more significantly, they say that marriage to one of the same denomination may also be an interfaith marriage. If one is ultra-conservative and the other liberal, if one regards church as very important and the other as not important, serious clashes over religion may result.<sup>63</sup>

With this in mind, it would seem correct to say, with regard to the prediction of success or failure of an interfaith marriage, much depends upon the relative strength of the religious convictions of the persons involved. If one or both are quite staunch in their religious convictions, conflicts will probably be more real. Yet, when this is said, we need to consider the implications of what Paul Landis says of religion as a general positive influence on marriage. He says:

Few influences in a person's background are as important to the success of his marriage as religion. Although a great deal of attention has been given to the many difficulties of marriage in which the partners are of different faiths, even these marriages fail less often than do those in which there is no religion at all, or in which one partner is religious and the other not.

Religion has more to do with the success or failure of the marriage than do different backgrounds in nationality, age, money, or education. . . . A background steeped in the Christian virtues of meekness, kindness,

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<sup>62</sup> Evelyn M. Duvall and Reuben Hill, When You Marry (New York: Association Press, c.1953), p. 39.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

and consideration for others, helpfulness, self-sacrifice, and other basic human values, cannot help bearing on the success of a marriage as it does on life itself.<sup>64</sup>

In considering and evaluating interfaith marriage, it would be well to keep in mind a number of suggestions or principles for exploring the interfaith marriage problem suggested by the sociologist, E. E. LeMasters. His suggestions are as follows:

- a. Religion is only one factor determining marital adjustment.
- b. It is certainly possible to tolerate religious differences in marriage.
- c. In considering an interfaith marriage, it is crucial to explore non-religious areas of compatibility: sex, educational level, mutual friends, common interests, personality needs, social class backgrounds, etc. . . . It may be relatively easy for a marriage to support religious differences if it does not also have to carry a variety of other basic differences.
- d. Landis' study seems to indicate that the most hazardous mixed marriage, as far as religion is concerned, may be between a devout person of any faith and a person with no religion at all.
- e. It is essential to consider depth and intensity of faith in attempting to determine religious compatibility. Mere membership in some sect or denomination often tells us very little.
- f. It is helpful to differentiate between religious differences and religious conflicts. A man we know, for example, is not very religious but he admires persons who are. For this reason, this man, a Protestant by background, is able to live happily with his devout Catholic wife, since he is glad that his wife has the religious faith that he wishes he had. This couple, in other words, have a deep religious difference, but no religious conflict.

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<sup>64</sup>Landis, For Husbands and Wives, p. 97.

- g. In considering an interfaith marriage, the writer believes it to be more important than ever to become well acquainted with each other's family and to have their support in your marriage.
- h. It is essential that the religion of the children be carefully considered before an interfaith marriage takes place.<sup>65</sup>

As a summary conclusion of the sociological evaluation of interfaith marriages, I list four basic conclusions by Bossard and Boll from their book, One Marriage, Two Faiths:

- a. Each marriage and each family situation is unique and different from every other one.
- b. A mixed marriage adds to the scope and variety of problems in any given case.
- c. The problems of mixed marriage, like those of all marriages, are both changing and persistent. That is to say, the conflicts between the marital partners that grow out of differences in religious backgrounds manifest themselves in changing forms as the years go by.
- d. Whatever the possibilities of happiness in mixed marriages, the path to them must ever be through the areas of understanding, tolerance, compromise, and mutual respect.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>LeMasters, op. cit., pp. 350-352.

<sup>66</sup>Bossard and Boll, One Marriage, Two Faiths, pp. 168-170.



## CHAPTER IV

### SCRIPTURAL AND DENOMINATIONAL APPROACHES

#### Scripture Speaks to the Problem

##### Introduction

At the outset of any discussion of Scripture relating to the topic under discussion, we have to realize that the ecclesiastical situation today is considerably different from conditions existing when the books of either the Old or New Testaments were written. Then the distinction was a clearcut dichotomy of Jew and Gentile, or Christian and non-Christian. The denominational confusion within the Christian Church, as extant today, was then unknown. Thus, "mixed marriages," which may be referred to either directly or by implication in Scripture, do not speak directly to our more limited area of discussion--"interfaith" marriages. This already indicates that Scripture probably does not speak directly to our present problem. Perhaps, however, it does have something to say at least by implication or general principles.

##### Scriptural view of Christian marriage

Before we discuss Scripture, as it relates to our specific question of interfaith marriage, we shall look for a

foundation and general orientation to our topic by asking how Scripture defines the broader concept of Christian marriage. With this background in mind, we shall then look more specifically at a Scriptural approach to interfaith marriage.

Marriage, according to Scripture,<sup>1</sup> belongs to the orders of creation and is part of God's plan for human existence and welfare.<sup>2</sup> It is an estate ordained by God as a personal and sexual union of one man and one woman in a continuing relationship of mutual love and service based on fidelity toward each other (Gen. 1:27-28; Matt. 19:5-6).<sup>3</sup> It is not a command of God obligatory upon all (Matt. 19:1-12). Nevertheless, it is a relationship to be regarded as a gift of God for mankind's benefit, and is a good and honorable estate wherein God may reveal and bestow His grace. It is intended by God to be a lifelong union in which man and woman are to complement and enrich each other in a purposeful and covenanted relationship,<sup>4</sup> in which they are

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<sup>1</sup>For extended New Testament statements on marriage, the reader is referred to 1 Cor. 7; Eph. 5:22-33; 1 Pet. 3:1-7.

<sup>2</sup>Paul G. Hansen, and Others, Engagement and Marriage (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1959), p. 157.

<sup>3</sup>United Lutheran Church in America--The Board of Social Missions, "Summary Statements on Marriage and Family Life," Christian Guidance on Marriage and Family Life (New York: The Board of Social Missions of the United Lutheran Church in America, c.1956), pp. 3-4.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

responsible both to God and society.<sup>5</sup> In His creation, God made male and female and built into man and woman a desire for each other. It is God's will that husband and wife love each other, maintain a permanent companionship, bear children, and accept a mutual responsibility in rearing the family God has given them.<sup>6</sup> Thus, marriage is intended not only for the procreation and nurture of children but for mutual love, helpfulness, and companionship, as well as sexual intercourse as a conjugal right and duty.<sup>7</sup> The relation should be one of personal encounter in which the love received and given breaks down the wall between the selves and reveals to each the heights and depths of the life of the other. This encounter should, in turn, bear witness to and foretell the richness of man's encounter with God in Christ (Ps. 68:5; 103:13; 1 Cor. 7:2-16; Eph. 5:22-23).<sup>8</sup>

The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod "Statement on Inter-faith or Mixed Marriages" says:

This marriage union involves physical, economic, social, psychological, and spiritual factors which may lead either to unity or divisiveness.

In marriage, as in personal life, spiritual factors are of primary concern. For Christians, the highest expression of mutual love in marriage is comparable to

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<sup>5</sup>Hansen, loc. cit.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>United Lutheran Church in America, loc. cit.

the redeeming love of Christ for His Church (Eph. 5: 18-33; Rev. 21:2-9).<sup>9</sup>

Hansen and others in the book Engagement and Marriage, have this to say:

The Scriptures, while describing marriage and stating its purposes, do not, however, define marriage. Whether the mere "leaving father and mother and cleaving to a wife," or the exchange of vows, "I do," or the words of the officiant, "I pronounce them husband and wife," or becoming one through sexual intercourse actually is the effecting cause of marriage, Scripture does not say. Only the leaving of the parental domain, taking a wife in a permanent relationship (cleaving until death), and becoming one flesh are consistently mentioned by the creation account, the Gospels, the apostles (Eph. 5:31). Social approval of parents is implied but not directly commanded. Legal sanction by the community as regards marriage is also implied from Hebrew political law and the general command to be subject to government (Rom. 13).

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God has built into human beings the normal sex drive and the desire for children and has provided the institution of marriage as the best and only divinely approved way of protecting the family and meeting its basic needs. God has given us no code or particular procedure for entering marriage. He has given prohibitions regarding its willful dissolution. Marriage is a lifelong union of a man and a woman unto one flesh. Scripture says no more than that regarding its essence.<sup>10</sup>

#### Old Testament approach to interfaith marriage

Now, what does Scripture have to say regarding interfaith marriage? As we look at the Old Testament, we find

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<sup>9</sup>The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, "Statement on Interfaith or Mixed Marriages," Proceedings of the Forty-Fourth Regular Convention, June 17-27, 1959, San Francisco, California (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1959).

<sup>10</sup>Hansen, op. cit., pp. 158-159.

explicit statements and prohibitions regarding marriage with persons outside the covenant faith and relationship with the God of Israel. Very early in the book of Genesis, the intermarriage between "the sons of God" and the "daughters of men" is mentioned as one of the destructive practices which finally led to the flood (Gen. 6:2). Abraham set an example by seeking a wife for his son, Isaac, from among his own people (Gen. 24:3-9). Isaac followed in his father's footsteps and sent his son, Jacob, many miles to find a believing wife (Gen. 28:1-2). Esau aroused the displeasure of his parents by marrying two Hittite women (Gen. 27:46).

Near the beginning of the national history of Israel, Moses warned the people against intermarriage with the natives of the land of Canaan (Ex. 34:16; Deut. 7:3-4) and emphasized the fact that intermarriage would probably lead to idolatry. Joshua voiced a similar warning (Josh. 23:12) and his prediction of idolatry as a result of mixed marriages finds fulfillment in a story from the book of Judges (Judges 3:6-7). King Solomon's unbelieving wives are blamed for turning his heart away from the Lord (1 Kings 11:1-4). The rule of Ahab is portrayed as the most godless Israel had known up to that time; the explanation given is that Ahab had married Jezebel, daughter of the king of Sidon (1 Kings 16:31-33). Both Ezra and Nehemiah record how the Jews, returning from the Babylonian exile, were kept from completely restoring the temple worship by the influence of their

Canaanite wives (Ezra 9:1-2,12; 10:1-14; Nehemiah 10:30; 13:22-27). In fact, the situation became so serious that Ezra required the people to divorce their heathen wives.

Although there are instances of mixed marriages with no disapproval voiced (Num. 12:1; Judges 8:31; 14:3; Ruth 1:4), still it seems apparent that God preferred to have His people of Old Testament times marry within the family of faith.

E. Neufeld says,

The introduction of paganism into their life was feared more than anything else as weakening faith in one God and making them like other nations, and mixed marriages were regarded as a menace mainly, if not solely, on that account.<sup>11</sup>

David Mace says, "There was . . . great danger that marriages contracted outside the Hebrew community might introduce idolatry."<sup>12</sup>

Here, of course, we note that the problem was not one of interfaith marriage, as we commonly confront it today, but the problem of mixed marriage--marriage with heathen and people of other races. Then there did not exist the diversity of denominations within Christendom as they obtain today. Thus, the Old Testament does not speak specifically to the problem we face in interfaith marriage today. We can, however, draw the conclusion that God desired that His

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<sup>11</sup>E. Neufeld, Ancient Hebrew Marriage Laws (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., c.1944), p. 217.

<sup>12</sup>David R. Mace, Hebrew Marriage (New York: Philosophical Library, c.1953), p. 145.

people not place themselves in a position where their belief in Him might be compromised or destroyed.

#### New Testament approach to interfaith marriage

In the New Testament, with racial considerations no longer important (Acts 8:25,27-39; 10:34f.; 11:1,18,20), we do not find statements so emphatically warning against mixed or interfaith marriage. In fact, the apostle Paul very definitely admonishes Christians involved in a religiously mixed marriage not to break the marriage (1 Cor. 7:12-13). However, people who remarry are urged to do so, "only in the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:39). Paul also writes, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor. 6:14). From the context this would seem to apply to all relationships of believer with unbeliever, social as well as religious. By inference, this would also include the marriage relationship.

As in the Old Testament, so in the New Testament, no direct statements speaking to our present-day denominational divisions are given. Applications can only be made from passages which speak of the danger of any too close association with those who teach falsely (Rom. 16:17). As in the question of ecumenical union and cooperation, considerable variation in interpretation and application of such a passage is both possible and practiced. It is, therefore, extremely hazardous to use such a Scriptural reference to

condemn any and every form of interfaith marriage, especially in an interfaith marriage in which one's Christian beliefs apparently are neither compromised nor renounced.

It is another matter, however, when a denomination requires, as a condition of granting permission for an interfaith marriage, the renunciation of any portion of a person's faith, or a pledge of support to beliefs and practices contrary to one's faith and conscience. Since the duty and privilege of confessing one's faith, and of training one's children in that faith, is plainly taught in the New Testament (Matt. 10:32; Eph. 6:4), a marriage where this is questioned, hindered, or forbidden would be against God's command.

In brief, the New Testament speaks against a marriage in which it would be impossible to participate in a wholesome Christian family life, or in which a compromise or surrender of personal Christian convictions and responsibilities would be involved (John 8:31-32), or in which the couple would be hindered in speaking the Word of God to each other (Col. 3:16).<sup>13</sup> If a Christian in an interfaith marriage would find it impossible to testify to his or her spouse concerning "the hope that is in him," namely, salvation solely through the atoning work of Christ and justification in God's sight by faith alone, with a faith that works by love

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<sup>13</sup>The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, loc. cit.



(1 Pet. 3:15; Rom. 3:28; Gal. 5:6), or would find it impossible to teach, influence, and train his or her children fully according to the Word of God, and not according to the traditions of men (Eph. 6:4; John 8:31; Mark 7:7,9,13), then the New Testament would counsel the individual against contracting such a marriage.<sup>14</sup> The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod "Statement on Interfaith or Mixed Marriages" says, "Christians whose faith is clearly founded in Holy Scripture cannot compromise their fundamental beliefs" (1 Cor. 1:10; John 18:37).<sup>15</sup>

The question to be determined, therefore, is whether in a given marriage such a compromise would be likely to take place. This leads us to a discussion of the actual confrontation of an interfaith marriage, and the application of principles and methods of dealing with such a situation, as the Christian pastor meets with his people. This will be the burden of the final chapter.

### Denominations Approach the Problem

#### Introduction

Partly because Scripture does not speak very explicitly on the subject of interfaith marriage and partly because it is primarily a modern problem, it is only recently

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

that denominations have officially come to grips with the problem. Local pastors have, in recent years, increasingly had to deal with the problem as it confronts their young people, as well as older members already in an interfaith marriage situation. As a result, denominations have found it necessary to state official positions, as well as suggest some policy and procedures for resolution of the problem.

In addition to official denominational statements, which will be referred to below, various church bodies or representatives have conducted research in the area. Most of this has already been indicated. There is the United Lutheran Church in America study by Bossard and Letts<sup>16</sup> and several Roman Catholic research studies.<sup>17</sup> Recently, the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod has included some study of the interfaith marriage question in its broad family-life study, with results as yet unpublished. Tracts, books, and articles also have been published by church leaders, indicating both denominational stands as well as methods of

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<sup>16</sup>James H. S. Bossard and Harold C. Letts, "Mixed Marriages Involving Lutherans--A Research Report," Marriage and Family Living, XVIII (November, 1956), 308-310.

<sup>17</sup>Harry F. Hoover, Attitudes of High School Students toward Mixed Marriage (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, c.1950); Clement Mihanovich, Gerald Schnepf, and John Thomas, Marriage and the Family (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, c.1942); John L. Thomas, The American Catholic Family (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., c.1956), pp. 148-169; John L. Thomas, "The Factor of Religion in the Selection of Marriage Mates," American Sociological Review, XVI (July, 1951), 487-492.

resolving, or at least approaching and living with the problem.<sup>18</sup>

#### Roman Catholic position

Within the Roman Catholic Church marriage is regarded as a sacrament. As such it is under the control of the church. Since marriage is a sacrament, it follows that any marriage between a Roman Catholic and a non-Roman Catholic involves a communion in sacred things with someone outside the fold, thus degrading the holy character of matrimony. Historically, therefore, the Roman Catholic Church has opposed interfaith marriage, first against Mohammedans and Jews, later against the new "heretics" following the Reformation. The present situation--doctrine and practice--is summarized by Bossard and Boll as follows:

- a. The canon law recognizes differences in religious faith as one of the "prohibitory impediments" to marriage.
- b. Two kinds of such marriages are recognized. One is between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic; the other, between a Catholic and an unbaptized non-Catholic. . . .
- c. When a priest is approached with a request for a dispensation to enter a mixed marriage, three

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<sup>18</sup>James H. S. Bossard and Eleanor Stokes Boll, One Marriage, Two Faiths (New York: The Ronald Press Company, c.1957); Bossard and Boll, Why Marriages Go Wrong (New York: The Ronald Press Company, c.1958); F. E. Mayer, To Sign or Not to Sign (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, n.d.); James A. Pike, If You Marry Outside Your Faith (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, c.1954).

conditions are imposed for the granting of such a request:

1. There must be "just and weighty reasons" for such a request. . . .
  2. Certain guarantees must be given by both the Catholic and the non-Catholic parties in writing.  
 . . . . .
  3. There must be "moral certainty that the guarantees will be fulfilled."
- d. Marriages for which dispensations are granted must be contracted before a properly accredited priest and at least two witnesses.
  - e. Mixed marriages made in accordance with these requirements are valid; others are termed invalid.
  - f. Additional requirements are found in specific dioceses.<sup>19</sup>

Although the Roman Catholic Church provides means for dealing with an interfaith marriage, yet it does not encourage them. In fact, the Roman Catholic Church officially disapproves of marriages between Roman Catholics and non-Roman Catholics, no matter what other Christian denominations are involved.<sup>20</sup>

The Council of Trent declared all matrimonial unions between a Roman Catholic and a non-Roman Catholic "null and void" unless entered into before the ecclesiastical authority.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Bossard and Boll, One Marriage, Two Faiths, pp. 76-78.

<sup>20</sup>Mario Colacci, Christian Marriage Today (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing Company, c.1958), p. 107.

<sup>21</sup>H. J. Schroeder, Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., c.1941), p. 184.

For the issuing of a dispensation for an interfaith marriage, the Roman Catholic Church requires three conditions:

- a. That the Roman Catholic party be allowed free exercise of religion.
- b. That all the children are to be brought up Roman Catholic.
- c. That the Roman Catholic party promise to do all that is possible to convert the non-Roman Catholic.<sup>22</sup>

The Catholic Encyclopedia continues:

The bishops are . . . to warn Catholics against such marriages and not to grant dispensations for them except for weighty reasons and not at the mere will of the petitioner.<sup>23</sup>

The Encyclical of Pope Pius XI, On Christian Marriage, has this to say:

They, therefore, who rashly and heedlessly contract mixed marriages, from which the maternal love and providence of the Church dissuades her children for very sound reasons, fail conspicuously . . . , sometimes with danger to their eternal salvation. This attitude of the Church to mixed marriages appears in many of her documents, all of which are summed up in the Code of Canon Law: "Everywhere and with the greatest strictness the Church forbids marriages between baptized persons, one of whom is a Catholic and the other a member of a schismatical or heretical sect; and if there is, add to this, the danger of the falling away of the Catholic party and the perversion of the children, such a marriage is forbidden also by the divine law."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>August Lehmkuhl, "Marriage," The Catholic Encyclopedia, edited by Charles G. Herbermann, et al. (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910), IX, 699.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Gerald C. Treacy, Five Great Encyclicals (New York: The Paulist Press, c.1939), p. 101.

The reason the Roman Catholic Church forbids interfaith marriage is expressed by Father Connell as follows:

The Church forbids Catholics to marry non-Catholics because mixed marriages often bring about family discord, loss of faith on the part of the Catholic, and neglect of the religious training of the children.<sup>25</sup>

#### Jewish position

From the very beginning, Jews have looked with disfavor upon intermarriage with non-Jews. In fact, it seems their survival as a distinct religious and ethnic group, throughout the centuries, has been due in large measure to their abstinence from marriage with other groups.

To this country, the Jews brought with them their ancient opposition. In keeping with their status as a minority group, this has taken the form of recognizing the validity of such marriages but opposing them as a threat to the survival of Judaism.<sup>26</sup> This view goes back in history to the Rabbinical Conference held in Braunschweig, in 1844, where a resolution was adopted to the effect that marriages between Jews and such as hold monotheistic beliefs are valid, but added a proviso to the effect that intermarriage of Jews with adherents of any other of the monotheistic religions, is not prohibited, providing that the parents are permitted

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<sup>25</sup>Francis J. Connell, The New Baltimore Catechism, No. 3 (Revised edition; New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., c.1954), p. 191.

<sup>26</sup>Bossard and Boll, One Marriage, Two Faiths, p. 71.

by the law of the state to bring up the offspring of such a marriage in the Jewish faith.<sup>27</sup>

However, even the author of the Braunschweig resolution, Dr. Ludwig Philippson, later changed his mind on the matter and declared that religion must pronounce against mixed marriages.<sup>28</sup> So, too, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, in 1909, passed a resolution declaring "that mixed marriages are contrary to the tradition of the Jewish religion and should therefore be discouraged by the American rabbinate."<sup>29</sup>

Milton L. Barron says:

Orthodox and Conservative rabbis in the United States have opposed marriages between Jews and Gentiles as vigorously as their predecessors in Europe and elsewhere. True, American rabbis of the Reformed wing of Judaism were lenient in this matter for many years, and many of them officiated at mixed marriages. In recent decades, especially since 1909, there has been an unmistakable trend among these Reformed Jewish clergymen back to the traditional Jewish position. Virtually all of them now concur with other rabbis in the policy of officiating at a marriage between Jew and non-Jew only after the latter has become a convert to Judaism.<sup>30</sup>

It is known that some Orthodox Jews are so firmly

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<sup>27</sup>"Interfaith Marriage," a research study (New York: The Americana Institute, n.d.), mimeographed copy No. 1906-752, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup>Isaac E. Marcuson, editor, Central Conference of American Rabbis, Fifty-Eighth Annual Convention (Philadelphia: Press of the Jewish Publication Society, c.1948), p. 7.

<sup>29</sup>Bossard and Boll, One Marriage, Two Faiths, p. 72.

<sup>30</sup>Milton L. Barron, "Race, Religion, and Nationality in Mate Selection," Modern Marriage and Family Living, edited by Morris Fishbein and Ruby Jo Reeves Kennedy (New York: Oxford University Press, c.1957), p. 62.

opposed to interfaith marriages that they hold a burial service for the son or daughter who has contracted with a Gentile and regard him henceforth as dead. In fact, certain Orthodox rabbis will not marry a Jew and a non-Jew under any condition.<sup>31</sup>

The following form is used by one of the most liberal rabbis in the country and must be signed by the non-Jewish applicant for an intermarriage before the rabbi will officiate at the marriage:

I, . . . in the presence of witnesses here assembled and at the time of the solemnization of my marriage under Jewish auspices, do hereby solemnly promise and swear that:

I shall hereby sever all affiliation with any other religious faith except the Jewish faith. I shall regard my home as a Jewish home and shall do everything in my power to acquaint myself with the meaning of this term. Any children born to me of this marriage shall be reared by me in the Jewish faith. Any male children born to me of this marriage shall be circumcised according to the tradition of the Jewish religion.<sup>32</sup>

In 1947, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, meeting in Montreal, strongly reaffirmed its stand on the subject of interfaith marriages adopted in 1909.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>"Interfaith Marriage," loc. cit.

<sup>32</sup>Clariss E. Silcox and Galen M. Fisher, Catholics, Jews, and Protestants (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, c.1934), p. 117.

<sup>33</sup>Barron, loc. cit.



## Protestant approach

Nearly all major denominations or groups within American Protestantism have, within the last ten years, expressed themselves in some kind of official manner on the dangers of contracting interfaith marriage. These have been resolutions primarily adopted at denominational conventions.<sup>34</sup> In all of these, the directive is, either explicitly or implicitly, against interfaith marriage between Roman Catholics and the particular Protestant denomination issuing the statement.<sup>35</sup> Little mention, if any at all, is made with regard to interfaith marriage within Protestantism. This, I feel, is a lack. True, interfaith marriages, involving a Roman Catholic, present some of the most immediately obvious problems, partly because of the official requirements of the Roman Catholic Church. However, Protestant bodies have no such rigid rules with regard to marriage, yet the differences of background, belief, practice, and commitment are just as really present in many

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<sup>34</sup>For readily available statements from the following denominations: Anglican, Northern Baptist, Southern Baptist, Disciples of Christ, Reformed Jewish, Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, United Lutheran Church, Methodist Church, Northern Presbyterian, Southern Presbyterian, and United Church of Canada, see Pike, op. cit., pp. 91-101.

<sup>35</sup>Only one statement takes up the question of interfaith marriage between people of different Protestant denominations in an explicit way. For the most recent Protestant statement available, the reader is referred to the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, loc. cit.

cases of Protestant intermarriage as they are in a Roman Catholic-Protestant combination.

These denominational statements in reality accede to popular opinion which equates interfaith marriage with marriage between a Roman Catholic and a Protestant; they get bogged down somewhat in discussing the ante-nuptial agreement and its consequences; and by implication they present a narrow definition of "interfaith marriage." Of course, it is to be admitted that Roman Catholic-Protestant marriages present great dangers for success and happiness in marriage. Therefore, the denominational statements speaking against them are helpful. Since, however, they are not the only interfaith marriages occurring, additional statements or amplifications of present ones are required to present some of the basic principles necessary in confronting an interfaith marriage of any type.

The recent "Statement on Interfaith or Mixed Marriages" prepared by the Family Life Committee of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, and adopted by the Forty-Fourth Regular Convention of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, held in San Francisco, California, June, 1959, attempts more helpfully and completely to speak to the problem. It enunciates general principles with regard to Christian marriage; discusses Lutheran-Roman Catholic marriages, marriages between Lutherans and other Protestants, and Lutherans with non-Christian partners; and suggests procedures for applying the

principles of action in an evangelical manner.<sup>36</sup>

While Protestant denominations have largely failed to admit dangers present in Protestant interfaith marriages, this Lutheran approach has broadened its scope and recognized dangers and problems in interfaith marriages within Protestantism as well as the more frequently mentioned interfaith marriage between Protestants and Roman Catholics. Perhaps this difference can be partially explained by the ecumenical feeling within much of Protestantism. Frequently, this produces a certain feeling of unity which may lull many Protestant denominations into short-sightedness concerning differences of culture, as well as doctrine, and which may exhibit themselves with unfortunate results even in a Protestant interfaith marriage.

All of the Protestant statements agree:

- a. That the Roman Catholic requirements contained in the ante-nuptial agreement are contrary to and involve a compromise of faith and principle for the Protestant member who must in reality thereby violate his Christian conscience.
- b. Protestant people are to be strongly warned against entering a marriage involving a Roman Catholic.
- c. The question and problem of interfaith marriage ought to play an increasingly important part in the religious education of Protestant young people.
- d. The usual result of interfaith marriages are disillusionment, conflict, suffering, and tragedy.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Colacci, op. cit., p. 131.

The reader, who is interested in the texts of the various Protestant statements referred to above, is directed to James A. Pike's book, If You Marry Outside Your Faith. However, as an illustration of the manner in which denominations are approaching the problem, I feel it helpful to quote the resolution on interfaith marriage approved by the International Convention of Disciples of Christ, 1950, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. This, I feel, is one of the better short resolutions available and is as follows:

Whereas, Mutual religious convictions, a common philosophy of life, and a similarity of cultural backgrounds are factors which contribute to a happy marriage; and

Whereas, Mutual respect for and sincere tolerance of differences on the part of both persons entering the union are indispensable, so that marriage can be a union of equals; and

Whereas, Some religious bodies (notably the Roman Catholic Church) officially forbid their adherents to enter marriage with non-adherents except on the condition that non-adherents subscribe to certain agreement, particularly that the children of such a union be trained in the faith of the adherent, which in effect destroys any basis for tolerance and equality; and

Whereas, Failure to understand and adequately to appreciate the implications of such agreements, before mutual attachment makes objective evaluation impossible, frequently leads later to disillusionment, family conflict and heartbreak; therefore

Be It Resolved, That this International Convention of Disciples of Christ urge parents, ministers and leaders of young people, to provide in the home, in the church, and through the normal channels of the teaching program, instruction that will help youth, before or as they arrive at the age of forming intimate friendships between the sexes, to understand and appreciate the divergent interpretations relative to marriage held by different religious bodies; and further

Be it resolved, That we request our young people to seek

an understanding of the principles which underlie their Christian faith, to give prayerful consideration when faced with a situation where their wedding vows would entail agreements disparaging their basic Christian beliefs; and further

Be It Resolved, That we urge our young people to stand on their rights as self-respecting Christians, and that in no event they enter into a marriage contract which places them in a position of disadvantage in their family relationship and in the training of their children.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Pike, op. cit., pp. 94-95.

<sup>1</sup>John L. Thomas, The American Catholic Family (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1954), pp. 155-156.

## CHAPTER. V

### PASTORAL APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM

#### Facing the Facts and Trends

Although there may not be universal agreement on the frequency of interfaith marriage today, nor even on the dangers or hazards involved, yet out of all of this comes the fact that interfaith marriage has become a phenomenon with which Christian pastors must deal. Perhaps in a given locality the interfaith marriage rate may not even be near the fifty percent or more which some Roman Catholic figures indicate;<sup>1</sup> still it is a problem confronting all pastors today. This requires that a pastor first of all acquaint himself with some of the facts and trends which relate to this subject. It requires an understanding of the general cultural factors responsible for a cultural climate conducive to the growth of a phenomenon such as interfaith marriage. It means he must take stock of the fact that young people today are exposed to a greater diversity of thought and religious belief as well as people holding such beliefs, than was the case in former generations. He needs to realize that the home and community have lost much of their control and

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<sup>1</sup>John L. Thomas, The American Catholic Family (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., c.1956), pp. 155-156.

influence over young people. He must realize that the church has lost much of its former control over the lives and behavior of its people. This could be interpreted as beneficial for all concerned if it means destruction of legalistic compulsion on the part of the church. It could be interpreted as detrimental if it means people have lost respect for the "One" for whom the church attempts to speak.

The Christian pastor needs to take stock of his community and the place and status of his church and members within that community. If his denomination has a majority character both numerically and influentially, interfaith marriage questions and problems will probably not be so frequent as if the church possessed a minority character in the community.<sup>2</sup>

Although ethnic and religious sub-groups in the population have served as a check on marriage choice in the past, the Christian pastor needs to realize that such checks are breaking down today. The decline in immigration, the horizontal and vertical mobility so characteristic of our population, and the increased cultural contacts facilitated by modern means of communication make it increasingly difficult for these groups to maintain both their isolation and their in-group loyalties.<sup>3</sup>

The Christian pastor must realize that interfaith

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>John L. Thomas, "The Factor of Religion in the Selection of Marriage Mates," American Sociological Review, XVI (July, 1951), 490.

marriages seem to have a cumulative effect. Children of such marriages tend to marry outside their religious group more often than do children of religiously unmixed marriage.<sup>4</sup>

He must also realize that the attitude of both Roman Catholic and Protestant young people toward interfaith marriage seems increasingly tolerant.<sup>5</sup> This reflects the spirit of the age which tends to regard religious differences as insignificant. This attitude is partially caused by the tolerance of other views and sympathetic hearing of diverging opinions which becomes part of the mental attitude and structure of college-educated individuals.

In short, although religious endogamy is still a prevalent phenomenon in America today, the Christian pastor must realize that statistics show a gradual trend in the direction of more frequent marriages of an interfaith nature. This is a fact that cannot be ignored. Neither can the Christian pastor ignore the fact that most studies show that a marriage of an interfaith nature is more prone to failure than a religiously endogamous one. Of course, most religious leaders already hold this view. However, it is important to recognize that objection is not only on specific Scriptural prescription, but also includes objection on sociological grounds

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<sup>4</sup>Gerald J. Schnepf, "Three Mixed Marriage Questions Answered," Catholic World, CLVI (November, 1942), 204.

<sup>5</sup>Thomas, "The Factor of Religion in the Selection of Marriage Mates," loc. cit.



as the social sciences have observed the effects of denominational cultures in forming the character and attitude structure of their adherents.

### Solutions in Practice

Before attempting to express elements necessary to a positive, helpful approach to the problem, it would be instructive to investigate briefly various "solutions" attempted and practiced by couples involved in an interfaith marriage situation. Since, as will be indicated, these approaches or solutions are not regarded very highly by the writer of this thesis, this discussion will serve as an introduction and background for the approach and principles the writer feels ought to guide the Christian pastor in his dealings with the interfaith marriage question.

An obvious solution is for the one partner to join the denomination of the other. This would seem to be the ideal, since it would in reality remove the designation of "interfaith" from such a marriage. However, it must be a heartfelt commitment and definite conversion, not just an attempt simply to keep or establish peace within an interfaith marriage. Otherwise the same problems will eventually occur which would be present had no such change been made. This is very evident in a Roman Catholic-Protestant marriage where the Protestant becomes Roman Catholic, or at least signs the antenuptial agreement, perhaps with mental reservations not to

fulfil its requirements or simply to ignore its implications.<sup>6</sup>

In such a conversion solution, realistic attention must be given to the differences in cultural, family, community, class, and ethnic backgrounds of the people involved. These factors and their influence will not and cannot be eliminated even if the conversion is genuine. These are cultural factors which have exerted influence in the past and cannot, therefore, be eradicated.

Another solution employed quite frequently is for the couple to settle upon a third "neutral" denomination and both affiliate themselves with it. Advocates of this solution grant that this is, of course, most possible and practicable when both individuals are of Protestant background originally. Although some would say that such a solution can be quite successful, yet it must be made clear that the couple must deal with the same basic problems mentioned in the conversion solution discussed above.

Another solution designated by some students of the

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<sup>6</sup>Although a significant problem in the interfaith marriage question involving a Roman Catholic and Protestant, the ante-nuptial agreement and its implications will not be discussed in detail in this paper. Ample literature is available presenting the text of the agreement and what is involved. The reader is referred to the following books: James H. S. Bossard and Eleanor Stokes Boll, One Marriage, Two Faiths (New York: The Ronald Press Company, c.1957), pp. 76-78; James A. Pike, If You Marry Outside Your Faith (New York: Harper and Brothers, c.1954), pp. 74-80; Mario Colacci, Christian Marriage Today (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing Company, c.1958), pp. 106-131.

family as personal schematization becomes one of "you go your way and I'll go mine."<sup>7</sup> In spite of possible success based on this approach, if children are involved, the problem becomes quite complicated. This may mean the children will be reared in different denominations, perhaps the boys affiliating with their father's denomination and the girls affiliating with their mother's denomination. Certainly it is obvious that such a solution will not contribute in a positive way to family solidarity and unite. Criticism of this separate-paths solution centers around the fact that here there is not the real at-oneness and basic communion with complete mutual sharing and giving which is theoretically and also practically possible where both share a common religious faith and attitude toward life.

Another approach to the problem is for both people to drop away from their denominations entirely. This may be the result of a conscious decision or, more commonly, the apparently easiest way out of a difficult situation in which each was going his own way. It will probably come on gradually. From a sociological-psychological point of view, we can say it is impossible to renounce completely what formerly was an integral, important part of one's life. Probably in most instances, however, religious commitment never was strong with such individuals.

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<sup>7</sup>Bossard and Boll, One Marriage, Two Faiths, p. 159.

Closely associated with this approach is one in which one of the partners gradually accedes to the stronger personality and gives up his own affiliation, but does not at the same time join the denomination of his or her spouse. Certainly, from the religious point of view, this is one of the worst solutions, since no matter what antagonism between denominations may exist, affiliation with some Christian denomination is deemed better than no membership at all.

Bossard and Boll list as a final proposed solution what they call "the solution of compromise between intelligent persons who both give and take on the issues involved in a mixed marriage."<sup>8</sup> The line of thought expressed by advocates of this approach is as follows:

Every marriage brings together people who differ in some respects in the backgrounds from which they come. Mixed marriages differ from other marriages not so much in kind as in degree. Interference from the families of the mixed pair, trouble made by their respective friends, issues inherent in the basic conflict between the two religions, these are serious. But if the couple understands all these complications and difficulties, if their love is strong enough, if their personalities are balanced enough, and if they are sufficiently intelligent, then it may be possible to work out everything happily.<sup>9</sup>

It might be said that the conditions which Bossard and Boll place upon such an effective solution indicate personalities and a situation which are quite ideal.

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 163-164.

### Establishing an Approach

Now as we consider factors which ought to become part of the Christian leader's approach to the problem at hand, we need to state something very basic. If a Christian pastor wishes to maintain the confidence of his people as well as aid them in their many problems, it is imperative that he think through and develop some kind of operational approach and guiding principles with regard to this specific problem. If the Christian pastor either implies or specifically states prohibitions of any such marriage upon the basis of a convenient legalistic category, he has a policy, and may save time and produce a repressed sort of peace of mind, but is not dealing with the problem. If, upon a request to perform an interfaith marriage ceremony, he politely ignores the circumstances and proceeds to take care of the practical arrangements of performing a civil, social service promising a monetary reward, he may think he is helping the couple by easing any embarrassment present, but he is not solving any present or future problems.

In developing an approach, I believe we have to face the problem in two broad ways: (a) Remedial--dealing with an interfaith marriage already contracted; (b) Constructive or preventative--avoiding, if possible, the problem in the first place.

## Remedial approach

This approach concerns itself with interfaith marriages which either have already occurred in the past or are soon to be consummated in spite of attempts at discussion.

As the Christian pastor approaches such situations, he must remember what has been indicated previously in this paper. Sociology has said that there can be a measure of success in an interfaith marriage. They have been observed to produce personal happiness and satisfaction. Christian pastors have also observed interfaith families, who have established themselves "in the Lord," to grow together in love and thanksgiving to God. A positive outlook and attitude derived from such observations must be at the heart of the remedial approach. A despairing or condemnatory attitude at this point would do nothing of a positive nature for the individuals involved.

When a couple has announced its intention of entering an interfaith marriage, this is the time for helpful pastoral premarital counseling to apply. It must be assumed here that a pastor has such a program or practice, and that his people have the confidence to come to him even in a proposed interfaith marriage situation. Certainly, the pastor will present the facts, as sociology has observed them, pointing to dangers involved in an interfaith marriage. The couple must be made to face these questions and problem areas of which they may not have been aware previously. Also, they ought to be made

cognizant of doctrinal positions in crucial areas which may conflict. If the proposed mate is Roman Catholic, the antenuptial agreement and its implications needs to be discussed. The couple needs to be shown what problems there are and that these must be faced realistically before entering such a marriage. It is at this point that the couple decides either that the risks are too great to consummate the marriage, or they may decide to go ahead and take the risks which they have been brought to recognize. In any case, the pastor must face the couple with the problems and lead them to a clear understanding of all that is involved. A naive approach, either on the part of pastor or couple, in which no possible problem areas are recognized, or which has a vague impression that love will conquer all differences, is very prone to lead to subsequent disillusion and possible dissolution when the day-by-day realities of marriage are encountered and the romantic idealism has worn thin.

Another aspect of the remedial approach--a more difficult one--occurs when problems are encountered in an interfaith marriage at various time stages after the wedding ceremony itself. Perhaps this will come at specific times such as the birth of a child, or decisions concerning the religious training of the children, etc. Or, perhaps, it may be a deterioration in the marital relationship in general. Here, however, it needs to be said that one must be wary of using the interfaith nature or character of a marriage as a scapegoat upon which all dissatisfactions and problems in a

marriage can be placed. Other factors such as sexual maladjustment, personality clashes, differences in class and ethnic practices, interests, and customs, may be more basic to the generalized problems. Of course, here we remember a thesis propounded frequently in this paper. Denominational affiliation carries with it many of these other "cultural," personality, and attitudinal factors. Although not specifically "religious," yet they are associated with religious affiliation.

In such situations where problems arise in an interfaith marriage which has already occurred, the Christian pastor's concern must be first and always a pastoral concern for individual blood-bought persons. The goal must be to preserve and strengthen what is there. This is where, rather than condemning the individuals involved, the pastor must first speak the Gospel to them. They already know they have a problem. This does not have to be elaborated. Rather, emphasize that witness and steadfastness for which the Christian person is primarily responsible, in marriage or any other life situation. Stress the imperative necessity of remaining firm in the saving faith in Jesus Christ and maintaining an opportunity to testify to this faith. Not only should this be done in a pastoral conversation with the member of the counseling pastor's church, but also, and preferably, in the presence of both. If both are professed Christians and this is stressed and brought out clearly to both people, it should be possible to live with other differences. If they can see



that they actually agree on the most important matters of life and death, this should serve as a binding force.

This is, however, where denominational bias and congregational parochialism might hinder the pastor. The Christian pastor must beware lest he be more concerned about membership statistics than individual persons. His primary concern, when his member has decided to join his or her mate's denomination, is that the person will continue to hear the Gospel of Christ and possess a firm trust in Christ as Savior. His concern is to determine, as best as is humanly possible, that both persons will continue to face life with a confident hope and trust in Christ their Savior. He is concerned that both people maintain their faith in Jesus Christ and that their life on this earth, especially within the marriage bond, be as happy and edifying as possible. He is thus thinking solely of the eternal well-being of the individuals involved, specifically of his own member who has changed to the mate's denomination or is considering doing so. If this is a Christian denomination and the mate shares a confident hope and trust in Christ, it could be possible that both will grow together in their love for God and service to Him as they share their faith with the One they truly love. The Christian pastor must be very careful, therefore, lest by his attitude and approach he discourage them or drive them away from the Church, which with Christ as Head is in reality One. Certainly, the Christian pastor can be thankful that the union brings together two members of Christ's Church, and is not a

mixed marriage in the sense of marriage with an unbeliever, a heathen, or a person who trusts in self-merit for his salvation.

In any problem which may arise as a result of an interfaith marriage, the pastor must above all exhibit his concern for individuals, regarding them especially as individuals whom God has redeemed. This will lead to a presentation and application of Christ's Gospel for strengthening both of the individuals and their marriage. And it will overcome a placing of statistical concern above concern for individuals.

In short, in dealing with members who have entered into an interfaith marriage, the church and its leaders should exercise sympathetic understanding and sincerely endeavor to save and build the marriage with its counseling ministry. In discussing procedures for applying action in an evangelical manner where an interfaith marriage already exists, the "Statement on Interfaith or Mixed Marriages," by the Family Life Committee of the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, lists the following principles of action:

- a. Where marriage has taken place, it should be saved, not destroyed. The words of Jesus apply, "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" (Matt. 19:6). St. Paul tells the Christian to remain even with an unconverted spouse (1 Cor. 7: 12-13).
- b. The Lutheran party should be strengthened in his faith and in his fellowship with his church. No marriage should be the cause of severing one's relation with Jesus Christ as personal Savior and with the Church of which He alone is the Head.

- c. The Lutheran party should be encouraged to steadfastly witness to the truth. Those being counseled should be warned against relinquishing and denying the freedom which Christ died to earn for them. . . .
- d. In every case of an interfaith or mixed marriage, the pastor and the Christian congregation should bring their concerned and effective witness to bear, speaking the Word of truth "person to person" and "in love," seeking:
  1. To build up the marriage on a solid Christian base, considering both parties in this ministry.
  2. To bring the Lutheran party, as well as his or her spouse, of whatever religious persuasion, to the conscientious conviction that a Christian cannot be denied the right and duty of witnessing to the truth and teaching his children the Word of God.

Only faith-destroying impenitence, not weakness, warrants the full application of Matt. 18:15-18.

- e. Where husband and wife, while of different denominational persuasion, nevertheless accept Jesus Christ to be their Savior, they should be encouraged:
  1. To read and discuss the Word of God together.
  2. Exercise the patience of Christ in their study of the truth.
  3. As they find agreement, confess together the Apostles' Creed and unite in table prayers and the Lord's Prayer.<sup>10</sup>

### Constructive approach

As we recall former discussions indicating real or at least possible dangers inherent in an interfaith marriage,

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<sup>10</sup>The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, "Statement on Interfaith or Mixed Marriages," Proceedings of the Forty-Fourth Regular Convention, June 17-27, 1959, San Francisco, California (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, c.1959).

it would seem to be the ideal that such unions be avoided in the first place. Not that every marriage between Christians of the same denomination would be successful, but at least religious mixing in the formal sense would not be the source of conflict. One less possible source of unhappiness would be eliminated. Of course, this will remain impossible in all cases, our society being what it is. But at least attempts can be made along the line of avoidance and preventative measures.

Education is a key word here. Certainly, pastors have a definite obligation to point out dangers as they see and know them to their people. If the pastor has become convinced that there are dangers involved when an interfaith marriage is contracted, he is constrained to make them known. He ought to be neither ignorant of nor silent on the subject.

Of course, legalism or dogmatism would be neither advisable nor in most cases successful. In the past, unfortunately this has constituted some of the approach to such a subject. Although dangers may indeed be present, the pastor will meet with little success in categorically forbidding such marriages without backing up his advice and conclusions with support recognized as significant by the people involved. This will not only include Scriptural statement and implication. It will also include the findings of modern-day social science, such as sociological findings and conclusions indicated within this paper. There is a definite need here to make a clear distinction between what is inherently sinful

and what is inadvisable on other grounds.

Much of the success in this area will depend on the degree of the pastor's rapport with his people, parents as well as children and young people. If the pastor gives evidence that he has time for them, is interested in them, wants to hear their problems, and seems to have sound judgment and knows what he is talking about, then he will be better able to communicate with at least some success. From the rapport he has established, he can begin to communicate and bring out the facts as he interprets them lovingly and with concern for individuals. Once rapport has been established, the pastor will be better able to communicate the Gospel which for Christian people becomes the strongest motivating factor. The Christian message, and its application in the lives of people, is more than Law which reveals sin, error, and unsatisfactory courses of action. It is also Gospel which forgives sin and empowers God-pleasing action and decision. Much of the pastor's success will thus depend upon the basic approach and attitudes of his entire ministry. If he is evangelical, concerned with individuals, in contact with reality, patient, and timely, as well as founded in conviction, his work with people will be helpful and God-praising also in the area of interfaith marriage problems.

Although the Christian pastor cannot pick out mates for the young people of his congregation, he can attempt to delimit the areas of choice by sound instruction and warning, and by providing association with Christians of like mind and

faith. The Christian pastor needs to maintain an interesting, appealing youth program; he needs to be a friend and confidant to his young people; he ought to secure support for campus pastors, campus chapels, and Lutheran student centers, and refer college-bent youth to them; he must not be afraid to talk frankly with his young people about dating, sex, and marriage; he must work closely with the parents and maintain a cooperative team effort. Above all, he must practice sound instruction in Biblical, Lutheran doctrine so that young people understand distinctions and what is the central core of their Christian faith, so that when they are faced with interfaith dating and marriage questions they have a basis for comparison and judgment. They need to see that what one believes and practices is important.

Of primary importance in the pastor's constructive approach to the problem is that he attempts to make Christian faith and teaching relevant to life. The Christian pastor does not want only "right" answers from his young people but he also wants right living, right attitudes, right faith-- faith which is more than assent, but is trust and commitment and desire to place God at the center of one's life. One of the factors leading to interfaith marriages is a dichotomous view of life which relegates one's religious orientation to a position of negligible influence in one's daily activities and associations. The "Statement on Interfaith or Mixed Marriage," by the Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod, has this

to say:

By every possible means we should give our young people opportunity to seek and find a clear understanding of the principles which underlie their Christian faith. Our task is to build them up in a positive and vital Christian faith and to instruct them in the wisdom of choosing life-partners of similar Christian beliefs who will share with them in marriage a mutual love for Christ.<sup>11</sup>

It is imperative that the Christian pastor give sound instruction in the nature of Christian marriage in general.

On this point, the "Statement on Interfaith or Mixed Marriage," referred to above, has this to say:

A clear understanding of the meaning of Christian marriage will enable them to exercise an instructed conscience and valid judgment when faced with a possible situation in which marriage promises would deny them the privilege of a Christian home, compromise their oneness in Christ, and hamper the Christian training of children. A positive approach is to urge our young people to stand on their rights as self-respecting, responsible Christians. In no event should they enter into a marriage contract which would place them in a position of disadvantage in their family relationships and in the training of their children. In confirmation instruction, in youth groups, in Bible classes, in family life education, and in personal counseling sessions, positive and constructive information, motivation, and practical guidance concerning Christian marriage should be given to our young people with regard to: (a) The establishment of a truly Christian home; (b) The choosing of a future life-partner among those with whom they may be one in Christian faith and love.<sup>12</sup>

After establishing a positive and firm background of Scriptural instruction, coupled with sound sociological facts and conclusions, it is the pastor's obligation to urge his

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

young people to date only persons they could picture themselves ultimately marrying. If secular experts in the field can advise this way,<sup>13</sup> so can the Christian pastor. This implies strong urging upon Protestants against dating or marrying Roman Catholics, as well as against contracting Protestant interfaith marriages. However, when a relationship has become one of imminent marriage, the Christian pastor will find himself submitting to it, although he may not condone it. Above all, he dare not legalistically excommunicate even when an ante-nuptial agreement signing has occurred. What he now strives for is opportunity to continue to witness and speak the Gospel of Jesus Christ to these people. He places very strongly upon the conscience of his member what is involved in this interfaith marriage, especially what the ante-nuptial agreement means for him as a non-Roman Catholic Christian, if this should be involved. Above all, if they marry, the pastor both hopes for and strives to produce as fact a continuing opportunity to counsel and speak God's Gospel to these people.

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<sup>13</sup>"Dating only persons you would be willing to marry, if love develops, is a safe and conservative procedure. More important than dating is not to become too emotionally involved with some you would not choose to marry." Rex A. Skidmore and Anthon S. Cannon, Building Your Marriage (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, c.1951), p. 173.



## CHAPTER VI

### SUMMARY

From this study of the phenomenon of interfaith marriage, we have to say that indications seem to be that young people will increasingly be faced with the question and problem of the possibility of interfaith marriage. This is true because of the present social milieu which is conducive to an attitude of broad-mindedness in this area. It is also true because many of the old barriers, both social and ecclesiastical which formerly inhibited interfaith marriage, have now largely broken down. This implies for Christian pastors that they become cognizant of these facts and trends, and then proceed to approach the phenomenon realistically and sympathetically. With Scriptural and sociological findings to support them, they are taking proper action in advising against such marriages as a general rule. This, however, requires a planned program of education for church young people on the subject as a constructive, preventative measure.

In becoming acquainted with the facts, however, it is discovered that religion in general, and denominational affiliation in particular, is only one of many factors which relate to happiness, satisfaction, and success in marriage. Although religious conviction and affiliation are very important factors, they are not the only factors of a significant nature.

Associated with this observation is the fact that membership in a particular denomination indicates and includes more than certain doctrinal beliefs which may cause conflict in marriage. It also implies certain important cultural traits and background which have become a part of the individual, and which may loom more important than actual church membership or theological views considered by themselves. A common error is made in assuming that two people of different religious faiths are different only in their religious beliefs.

This broadens the concept of possible differences and difficulties arising from an interfaith marriage. But it does not thereby say that all interfaith marriages are doomed to failure or that adjustments cannot be made to a fair degree of satisfaction.

However, from the religious standpoint, we have other things to consider. The Christian pastor, in dealing with proposed or actual interfaith marriage situations, needs to determine whether the Gospel of Christ still has opportunity to work in the lives of these people. He wants to determine whether the individuals involved have a common faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. He wants to determine whether he will continue to have opportunity to witness to the saving Gospel of Christ to these people. He wants to determine whether his present or former member will continue to have opportunity to witness to his or her faith, as well as practice it freely.

These are the primary considerations from a religious viewpoint. If the resulting conclusions are positive, he then cannot categorically forbid such a marriage or despair of its success, either for the personal or eternal happiness of the people involved. However, since there is a great tendency today to smooth over religious differences and water down Christian doctrine, the Christian pastor must recognize, in an interfaith dating or marriage situation, a challenging opportunity for Christian witness. Also, the prevalence of the problem ought to stimulate the pastor to attempt sound indoctrination and instruction of his young people. Difficulties and problems involved in an interfaith marriage as seen both by religion and Scripture, as well as sociology and psychology, need to be communicated by the pastor with concern both for the temporal and eternal welfare of his people.

The Christian pastor will thus strive to maintain an ongoing program of a positive, constructive nature, designed to avoid the interfaith marriage problem in the first place. But this will be coupled with realistic and sympathetic attempts to deal with individual problems as they arise. He will do this within an attitudinal framework which is evangelical and optimistic, as well as sympathetic and informed.

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