

9-1-1963

The Church and Mixed Marriage

Otto E. Sohn

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Sohn, Otto E. (1963) "The Church and Mixed Marriage," *Concordia Theological Monthly*: Vol. 34, Article 56.
Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol34/iss1/56>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

Sohn: The Church and Mixed Marriage

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

The Church and Mixed Marriage
OTTO E. SOHN

Divorce and Remarriage
HARRY G. COINER

Theological Observer
Book Review

VOL. XXXIV

September 1963

No. 9

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

Volume XXXIV

September 1963

Number 9

Published by

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD

Edited by

THE FACULTY OF CONCORDIA SEMINARY
SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI

CONCORDIA PUBLISHING HOUSE
SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY is published monthly by Concordia Publishing House, 3558 S. Jefferson Ave., St. Louis 18, Mo., to which all business correspondence is to be addressed. \$3.50 per annum, anywhere in the world, payable in advance. Second-class postage paid at St. Louis, Mo.

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

Vol. XXXIV

September 1963

No. 9

The Church and Mixed Marriage	517
OTTO E. SOHN	
Divorce and Remarriage	541
HARRY G. COINER	
Theological Observer	555
Book Review	566

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

VICTOR BARTLING, PAUL M. BRETSCHER

ALFRED O. FUERBRINGER, GEORGE W. HOYER, HERBERT T. MAYER

ARTHUR CARL PIEPKORN, WALTER R. ROEHRS

LEWIS W. SPITZ, GILBERT A. THIELE

*Address all communications to the Editorial Committee in care of
Walter R. Roehrs, 801 De Mun Ave., St. Louis 5, Mo.*

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

Volume 34, Number 1, January 1963

1	The Church and Social Justice
15	John D. Gresham
25	Evangelical and Social Justice
35	John D. Gresham
45	Evangelical Social Justice
55	John D. Gresham

EDITORIAL BOARD

EDITOR: JOHN D. GRESHAM
 ASSISTANT EDITOR: JOHN D. GRESHAM
 READING AND COMMENTARY: JOHN D. GRESHAM
 BOOK REVIEW: JOHN D. GRESHAM

The Church and Mixed Marriage

By OTTO E. SOHN

MIXED MARRIAGE DEFINED

IN a certain sense every marriage is a mixed marriage, inasmuch as no two people are completely identical and perfect personalities, hence do not possess the same quality and measure of desirable traits and characteristics which diminish the probability of marital conflict and the necessity of day by day adjustment. Even the most exemplary Christians have sinful natures which make them variable, doing things they should not do, not doing things they should do (Rom. 7:19), and failing to preserve flawless control of themselves, especially when unexpected crises descend upon them. Even the noblest Christian hearts are still tainted with selfishness which may at any time erupt and disturb the family peace. Marital harmony and bliss are not a wedding gift, or an inheritance or dowry, but an elusive treasure that must be acquired and clutched by dint of ceaseless effort blessed by the God of all grace. In Luther's language marital happiness, like the Christian himself, is in the process of becoming, not in the state of having become.

But this is not the usual meaning of the term "mixed marriage." This term denotes a marriage in which there are unusual and significant differences between husband and wife. Henry A. Bowman gives the following list: Age, size, race, nationality, economic status, family background, education, intelligence, previous marital status, and religion.¹ To this list Landis and

Landis add striking physical differences and internationality differences.²

It will be readily seen that the continuing presence of one or more of these differences constitutes marital hazards which dare not be ignored, but must be faced courageously and frankly, and that before marriage has taken place. To be sure, these differences are not equally disruptive. Some of them can be more readily adjusted and composed; others, because of their very nature, are part and parcel of the individual and extremely difficult to overcome. Still others are permanent, ineradicable, necessitating lifelong effort to prevent them from dealing the deathblow to the marital union.

DIFFERENCES IN AGE

Consider first the difference in age. Obviously, this differential between spouses remains constant. The same number of years will always separate the two spouses. And that poses special problems. When a middle-aged man marries a woman in her early twenties, or vice versa, it is actually a union of two different generations, each having its own experiences, ideals, hopes, outlook, desires, and preferences. The sex element also enters in. The one partner is near the beginning, the other near the end of the reproductive period of life. Nor does this problem vanish if the age differential is not quite so pronounced. True, this situation can be thoroughly re-

¹ H. A. Bowman, *Marriage for Moderns* (New York: McGraw-Hill Co., 1948), pp. 171 f.

² J. T. and M. G. Landis, *Building a Successful Marriage*; 3d ed. (New York: Prentice-Hall Co., c. 1958), pp. 235—265.

viewed before the marriage and the assurance mutually given that neither partner considers it a valid obstacle to marriage. Yet the difference remains throughout life and may aggravate a troublesome situation that arises from another source, especially when the older spouse reaches and passes the age of nonreproductivity and declining interest in sex. This would be true particularly when the wife is considerably older than her husband.

DIFFERENCES IN STATURE

A second and similarly significant strain is placed on the matrimonial bond when there is a marked difference between the spouses with respect to size or stature, be it vertical or horizontal. Theoretically it should make no difference whether the husband is taller or shorter, heavier or lighter, though it is common consensus that in general he should be the taller and older. Hence if the difference between spouses is pronounced, he being a giant and she a mere wisp; worse still, if the situation is reversed, there will not merely exist a harmful self-consciousness in both spouses, but the couple will at all times have to be prepared for unkind and uncomplimentary remarks which cut still deeper when disagreement on other issues arises between them.

LESS SERIOUS DIFFERENCES

Basically the situation is the same when there are pronounced differences in economic status, nationality, family background, education, intelligence, and previous marital experiences, not to overlook marked physical defects. Taken individually, these factors in themselves need not prove to be serious obstacles. If both partners see eye to eye, but in

Christian love resolve to ignore the differences and not permit them to rise up as barriers between them, the hazard is not beyond their power to overcome. As Bowman has stated concerning intellectual and educational differences: "A genius and a dullard can make a go of it if the former is not unhappy in intellectual isolation, enjoys his home, and has his needs satisfied; and if the wife is satisfied to serve her husband and be content with giving him hero-worshiping admiration."³ But these differentials take on added weight and frequently become disintegrating factors when gossiping tongues begin to wag or serious difficulties arise from another direction. Then they tend to make a bad situation worse and prove a powerful strain on the marital tie.

INTERRACIAL MARRIAGES

More serious than the differences just listed are those of interracial marriages, primarily because race, like age, cannot be changed, but remains constant. Biologically there is no problem involved, since reproduction is possible in any human racial combination. Nor are there any ill effects of race cross. The consequences of interracial marriage are in themselves not much different from those which occur when an intellectually superior person marries an intellectually inferior person of the same race. Nor are they contrary to the Holy Scriptures.

The difficulty of the interracial problem lies rather in the social area. While a few countries, like England, France, and particularly Brazil, have reputedly made greater advances in accepting interracial

³ Bowman, p. 185.

marriages, many other countries, our own included, have not progressed to that stage. Not only are interracial marriages, notably those between the white and the black races, forbidden by law in many (29) states, but even where they are permitted, the partners in such unions do not usually find social acceptance, not even by their own race, making it difficult for them to achieve and enjoy emotional security and various social advantages. And for their children the burden is even more crushing. Baber writes:

We must conclude that interracial marriage has little to commend it and much to condemn it. No moral question of right and wrong is involved, but the implications of social expediency are tremendous. . . . The honeymoon is soon over and its comparative isolation is at an end. The couple must have economic and social contacts and be an accepted part of the social fabric if they are to live normally. But here is where the strain comes in . . . The children of interracial marriages are particularly handicapped. Not only are they subject to ridicule and sometimes ostracism at school and on the playground, but also the chances of intrafamily conflict are increased. Frequently one child is white and another colored in the same family. The children of interracial marriages actually have no race, being frequently rejected by both races.⁴

Landis and Landis have this to say:

The children of mixed racial marriages are sometimes subjected to discrimination by both races represented in the marriage. People who can endure criticism or prejudice when it is directed against themselves sometimes suffer intensely when such atti-

tudes strike at their children. For this reason some of the most difficult problems arising in mixed racial marriages, as in marriages of mixed religion, are in relation to the children. Parents may possibly change their religion when they see that their differences are the cause of insecurity or confusion for their children, but they cannot change their race.⁵

In view of the many disintegrating factors which are inherent in some, or easily enter into all, types of mixed marriages mentioned above, it would appear mandatory that also these matters be included in their early premarital counseling program in order to prevent, if possible, marriages which from the outset are doomed, if not to outright failure, then surely to conflict, frustration, and bitterness. Overall homogeneity is the ideal. The more traits the couple have in common, the less adjustment is required, the less friction and conflict is likely.

MIXED RELIGIOUS OR INTERFAITH MARRIAGES

A little thought will quickly reveal to us that in our American society with its 268 or more registered church organizations there are various possibilities in the area of mixed religious marriages on the part of our people: (1) Lutheran people with the unchurched, even professedly unbelieving, people of varying background; (2) Lutherans with people holding membership in non-Christian churches; (3) Lutherans with members of Christian groups not in fellowship with us, Lutheran or otherwise; also with Roman or Greek Catholic people. Each union in these categories will pose problems of its own, though not of the

⁴ R. E. Baber, *Marriage and the Family* (New York: McGraw-Hill Company, 1953).

⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 261.

same degree or intensity. Basically, however, the difficulty will revolve about the duty of a Lutheran Christian toward his God, his church, his spouse, his children, and finally himself.

As for the duty of a Lutheran Christian toward his God, the underlying principle is stated by the apostle Peter in the words: "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). To begin with, a Lutheran Christian cannot without sinful denial or compromise yield in the matter of church membership, neither to an unbelieving nor to an unchurched spouse, by ceasing to attend divine services and to be active in church work, nor by surrendering his Christian faith and adopting the false, Christless religion of his marriage partner. Nor can a devout Lutheran Christian lightly give up his Lutheran convictions in favor of a heterodox religion or church, even though that group is within the Christian fold. For Christian people have the divinely imposed duty of avoiding false teachers and teachings (Rom. 16:17; 1 John 4:1). Even the transfer of a devout Lutheran to a Lutheran church in which laxity of doctrine and practice patently holds sway should cause him to ask himself in all sincerity whether before God and his fellow Christians such a transfer can be made with a good conscience and without detriment to his soul's well-being. The Christian religion is not a medium of exchange toward the purchase of earthly benefits or family peace. Else what could the Savior have meant with that soulsearching question: "If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26)? Cp. John 8:31, 32; Rev.

2:10. Martin Luther was hardly in error nor suffering from hypersensitivity of conscience when he stated that one little word of Scripture made the world too narrow for him. Loyalty to God demands loyalty to His Word and to the church that proclaims His Word in its truth and purity. It is neither right, safe, nor advisable to affiliate with a false church for the sake of pleasing one's unbelieving or heterodox spouse, for in so doing one would permit his spouse, at least with respect to the false doctrines and practices involved, to come between him and his God. But if such action were legitimate, then it would likewise be permissible to barter away one's faith and church completely for the sake of other earthly advantages.

Similarly a Lutheran Christian has solemn obligations toward his spouse. If his prospective mate is still outside the pale of Christianity, he is to seek to win her. If she belongs to a non-Christian church, his duty is the same. If she is a member of a Christian, though not Lutheran, church, he will not seek to entice her away, but will always be ready to witness and to give her the reason of the hope that is in him (1 Peter 3:15), seek to enlighten her on the teachings of Holy Scripture, and as occasion demands let it be understood that he cannot and will not surrender any part of his faith, nor his church, in order that he might marry her. This may be considered by some as one-sided counsel inasmuch as she has the same right to her views and convictions, but it points up precisely the problem that is involved in mixed religious marriages. There must be for God's people no denial, no surrender, no compromise of God's truth. (Matt. 10: 37-39; 2 Cor. 13:8)

The same divinely imposed obligation holds true for a Lutheran Christian with respect to the children of a mixed marriage. Both parents have an equal responsibility with respect to the spiritual nurture and training of their children, even though in Ephesians 6:4 the apostle Paul imposes this duty specifically on Christian fathers. This responsibility excludes all manner of support given to one's children by way of helping them to learn false doctrines or to engage in unscriptural practices (Matt. 18:6). But if, as in all good conscience they should, both parents resolve to take this duty seriously, their differences in faith and principles will clash immediately. Both will feel compelled to have the training of their children carried out in their own way. A devout Lutheran Christian cannot with good conscience teach his children false doctrines or unscriptural practices, nor can he calmly look on while that is being done by others (2 Cor. 13:8). He will feel compelled to counteract such unscriptural doctrine and influence by positive instruction. He can and will have due respect for his wife, but he can and will have no respect for false doctrine and principles. That such a situation is precarious and explosive and bodes ill for the peace of that home is at once admitted. Yet that must not deter a loyal child of God, for he will not dare to have stumbling blocks placed into the path of his own flesh and blood unchallenged.

Now, since the husband is the divinely appointed head of the household, a Lutheran mother may not be able to persuade her non-Lutheran husband to have the children reared in her faith and in her church, but she can and must steadfastly refuse to aid and abet the false indoctrination of her children. She must show them the right

way. That in turn may kindle the fire of conflict, but that is part of the great hazard of mixed religious marriages, a hazard which takes on increasing intensity in the measure that both spouses are vitally interested in their religion and church. Truly a disheartening and frustrating prospect to which earnest consideration should be given before the binding consent is mutually given!

Henry Bowman alerts us to further complications arising in religiously mixed households when he writes:

Marriage does not occur in a vacuum. It is not merely a matter of two persons being in love and living together as husband and wife. Interfaith marriage, like any marriage, occurs in a societal milieu. There are other people involved. For example, there are typically two sets of parents who are interested in the new marriage and the children who may be born to it. The parents of each spouse are usually interested in having that person remain close to the parental family's practices, beliefs, and rituals. This interest is often intensified when grandchildren are born. In addition to parents there are friends, other relatives, clergymen, all of whom may be interested and some of whom may bring pressure to bear upon the young couple. Families visit and are visited. Grandchildren are accepted wholeheartedly, accepted reluctantly, or rejected. Parents either attend the wedding or they refuse to attend. They accept the child-in-law of different faith enthusiastically or at least graciously, or they may take the opportunity to snipe at the young couple and say, "I told you so."⁶

⁶ H. A. Bowman, *A Christian Interpretation of Marriage* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1939), p. 84.

THE AMBIVALENT INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON MIXED MARRIAGES

Religious and secular writers alike stress that the profession and practice of religion exerts a most potent influence on matrimonial success and happiness. James A. Pike writes:

In the long run the best single thing a marriage can possess is a common religious grounding, just as the best thing an individual can possess is a sound religious orientation.⁷

Meyer Nimkoff puts it this way:

Fairly regular attendance at church — not mere membership — is favorable to marital adjustment, as is Sunday School attendance through adolescence.⁸

Bowman emphasizes particularly the tremendous influence of the Christian religion when he says:

Christianity contributes to consistence of behavior both because it suggests the integration of personality around basic values and also because it affects decision-making. Once an individual has committed himself to the Christian point of view, once he has made the major decision, then many other decisions become of lesser importance. If an individual had to make a judgment concerning his overall goal every time he had to make a decision, every decision would seem of major proportions. If he makes decisions that are inconsistent, he may precipitate conflict within himself. If, on the other hand, he commits himself once and for all to a central purpose, conflict is reduced and consistency is promoted.⁹

⁷ J. A. Pike, *If You Marry Outside Your Faith* (New York: Harper's, 1954), p. 167.

⁸ M. Nimkoff, *Marriage and the Family* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Co., 1947), p. 446.

⁹ H. A. Bowman, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

It must be conceded in all fairness that the above-quoted statements not only apply to orthodox Christianity, but that even heterodox and non-Christian religions exercise a modicum of beneficent influence upon the home life of their adherents. All churches, Christian and others, are interested in the well-being of their people. None of them favor divorce, all of them seek to contribute to marital success and happiness. But it is Christianity which is the most powerful, yea the only, force that can produce true character, that precious fabric from which strong marriages are fashioned. Since without Christ we can do nothing (John 15:5), it follows that only the Spirit-activated Gospel of Jesus Christ can produce true, God-pleasing character. The love of God in Christ Jesus alone can recreate men into new creatures. It alone can also produce Christian love, also between spouses, whose love is to be patterned after the love of Christ for His church (Eph. 5:22-24). It moves Christian people to accept without question the God-willed permanence of marriage (Matt. 19:9) and to abhor the breaking of marriage (Matt. 5:32; 19:6), an attitude which, as Landis and Landis point out, is the only logical starting point from which successful marriages can be built:

Successful cooperation is not possible when any limitations are set upon it. Today, when a divorce is relatively easy to get, it might seem questionable to imply the logic of taking the marriage vows literally — "for better, for worse, until death." But commitment to marriage as a lifetime undertaking is the only logical starting point from which successful marriages can be built.¹⁰

¹⁰ Landis and Landis, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

There are other beneficent influences of Christianity upon marital success and harmony. The love of God in the hearts of Christian spouses moves them to avoid all possible occasions and sources of marital friction. It motivates immediate attempts at peaceful adjustment and reconciliation when differences have arisen, the joint daily praying of the Fifth Petition being a powerful incentive in that direction. Where the Word of God dwells richly and reigns supreme in a home, the devil of discord will find it difficult to gain a firm foothold and to cause a destructive rift between the spouses.

Christianity also gives marriage a definite goal. Having made man and woman "heirs together of the grace of life" (1 Peter 3:6), it motivates them to establish a Christian family and to give assistance to one another on the glory road. It impels them to combat selfishness and fosters a life of self-giving and willing service rather than loveless self-seeking. The Christian man loves his wife, nourishes and cherishes her, even as the Lord the church (Eph. 5:29), while the Christian woman knows of no greater delight than to love and serve her husband as it is fit in the Lord (Col. 3:18; Prov. 31:10-31).

Oscar E. Feucht summarizes the benign influences of the Christian Gospel on the home in this manner:

Religion serves as a family bond; gives security midst changes, problems, crises; supplies an integrating philosophy; cultivates consideration, love; teaches self-discipline; gives confidence, a set of values, eternal destiny; develops responsible parents. Religion gives meaning and purpose to all aspects of family life and is a source of wisdom, insight, and power.

A common faith gives to marriage the

necessary undergirding. It is related to marriage as the keel is to the ship. A man may, despite his membership in a church, live chiefly for his business, money, or position and honor; while his wife is deeply spiritual and has a different set of goals in life. Dr. George Crane, a psychologist and newspaper columnist, advises bride and groom: "Join a church and become an active member. Nothing in society will give you greater protection in your marriage."¹¹

But these benign and noble fruits of the Christian religion can truly sprout and mature toward a happy and successful marriage only when there is religious homogeneity, when both spouses have the same Christian religion and faith. Interfaith marriages on the other hand can enjoy a semblance of harmony and success only when one or both spouses grow indifferent or cold in the exercise of their respective religions and knowingly ignore or violate the convictions of their hearts.

THE HAZARDS OF MIXED RELIGIOUS MARRIAGES

The great risk involved in interfaith marriages is quite generally, one is tempted to say uniformly, recognized by sociologists and religious writers alike. Let us note first a few brief statements by prominent sociologists.

There are enough differences among the teachings of the Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish faiths to make interfaith marriages one of the more difficult types of mixed marriages. Interfaith marriages are opposed by all three faiths.¹²

¹¹ O. E. Feucht, ed., *Helping Families Through the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1957), p. 192.

¹² J. T. and M. G. Landis, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

Foster expresses it thus:

In general, it is better for Roman Catholics to marry Roman Catholics, conservative Protestants conservative Protestants, and members of unusual cults within their cults. The reason for this is that deep-seated religious convictions are not easily altered . . . they will show up in many ways after marriage.¹³

Koos has this to say:

It is necessary to indicate that these differences are of such importance as to cause concern about the interfaith marriage. For one thing, religious values do not exist in a vacuum, but are usually related to other values. For another, few persons are able to predict at any one point in marriage how they may feel about certain values at a later time.¹⁴

Baber describes the situation in these words:

Religious separatism is still a formidable barrier to the free intermarriage of persons otherwise compatible . . . Intermarriage involves from the first a distinct handicap which should be assumed only after honest, penetrating thought has been given to its implications . . . Even when religious differences seemingly have been dissolved, they often remain a latent source of tension, coming to the surface only when other antagonisms arise.¹⁵

E. Schmiedeler, a Roman Catholic, makes several important observations on the perils of mixed marriages from the religious point of view. He says:

Mixed marriages lead in many ways to

¹³ R. Foster, *Marriage and Family Relationships* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950), pp. 88, 89.

¹⁴ E. L. Koos, *Marriage* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1957), p. 235.

¹⁵ R. E. Baber, *op. cit.*, pp. 100, 101, 107.

a watered-down type of religion; and a watered-down type of religion does not make a cement which firmly and effectively binds the family group together. . . . Since courtship is the beginning which leads ultimately to a marriage contract, the sound starting point toward this goal will be to avoid courtship with any and all non-Catholics.¹⁶

The same author writes on another page:

Religion deals with the most fundamental attitudes of life, and where there are differences in fundamentals, discord is usually not far distant. Hence, even when husband and wife agree on all other things, how can there be real union as long as there is lack of agreement, if not outright disagreement, regarding the most important question of life, namely religion?¹⁷

From our own circles the following statements deserve our attention:

A marriage outside of one's own church entails grave and frequently insurmountable difficulties . . . There are marriages of this kind in which harmony and contentment seem to prevail, but they are not frequent. And below the serenity of the surface there is often a resignation to a sense of hopelessness which bravely resolves to make the best of a disheartening situation. The fact that most divorces involving members of the Lutheran Church occurred in mixed marriages should be an unmistakable warning.¹⁸

O. A. Geiseman, one of the pioneers from our circles in the marriage counsel-

¹⁶ E. Schmiedeler, *Marriage and the Family* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1946), pp. 111, 112.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 190, 191.

¹⁸ W. A. Maier, *For Better, Not For Worse* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1939), pp. 250, 251.

ing field, has this message for young people contemplating marriage:

Before entering upon such a marriage you ought to realize that differences in denominational affiliation will create serious problems for you. . . . You may both be tempted to neglect your respective churches and thus gradually . . . to give up your religion entirely. This has happened in many instances, to the temporal and eternal impoverishment of both. . . . Your divided church life will become a particularly acute problem when your children grow up.¹⁰

As one examines the disruptive influence of interfaith marriages more closely, one finds that it is not so much the doctrinal differences in themselves—these could temporarily, though not in good conscience, be shelved by the mutual agreement to disagree and ignore—but rather the implications of such differences in the daily lives of the marriage partners that form the barrier to marital success. Except in the case of nominal Christians, Christian doctrine and principles are a dynamic which affects every phase of life. They have a very direct bearing on one's habits, choice of entertainment, recreation, and friends; on one's ideals concerning childtraining; on one's attitude toward, and behavior during, reverses, sickness, bereavements, and the like. They combine to fashion a definite philosophy and outlook on life which needs to be mutual if the problems arising in the home are to be met squarely and successfully. Differences of religion and religious background also make family worship, which in the case of religious homogeneity can properly be termed "Happiness Insur-

ance," highly unsatisfactory, if not impossible. There is also lacking in interfaith marriages the unifying influence of common church membership, attendance, and activity.

Nor can the religious differences fail to have an evil and chilling effect on the conscientious exercise of Christian stewardship, all the more since the spending of the family income is admittedly one of the major sources of marital friction. It is hardly possible for a Christian spouse to concur joyfully in the expenditure of funds for the support of a false religion, nor will the unbelieving or heterodox partner rejoice to promote a religion which to him is foolishness and a rock of offense—situations in which relatives and friends frequently intrude and by their meddling aggravate an already highly sensitive situation which the distressed couple are trying desperately to salvage and improve.

These and other problems, furthermore, become intensified in the measure that both partners are interested and active adherents of their faith. The more highly both partners regard their religion and church, the more difficult they find the preservation of peaceful coexistence. Constantly recurring clashes are inevitable.

And then children come and with them new problems. What to do? Where shall the children be baptized? Which school shall they attend? Shall they be confirmed, and where? And what about their religious training at home where, above all, united, not divided, counsel must prevail, if it is to prove successful? And may not divided counsel on the part of father and mother, together with the ever-recurring bickering over religion finally sour the children so completely on religion that in later years

¹⁰ O. A. Geiseman, *Make Yours A Happy Marriage* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1946), p. 45, 46.

they will have none of it and solemnly resolve never to foist it on their children?

Last but not least, there seems to be no rainbow in the matrimonial sky to give rise to hope for a better day. As Baber puts it:

The religious differences are a latent source of tension that may suddenly explode when tensions arise in other areas.²⁰

Landis and Landis describe this hopelessness in this manner:

The differences in mixed marriages do not usually decrease with the passing of time after marriage. They tend to become magnified in the minds of the couple and of their families.²¹

ATTEMPTED SOLUTIONS OF THE INTERFAITH MARRIAGE PROBLEM

Paul Popenoe, in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* of May 1951, listed the following methods by which couples living in interfaith marriages attempt to work out a way of meeting this problem:

1. One spouse gives in and adopts the religion of the other.
2. Both spouses compromise and unite with a neutral church.
3. Both retain their respective membership, but give up active participation in worship and church work.
4. Both agree not to hinder the other in active membership in their respective churches.

To these a fifth course of action might be added, namely that they remain free agents and become church tramps, going from church to church but never identify-

ing themselves with any of them. All of these efforts leave out of consideration the new threats to marital harmony created by the arrival of children. Here, too, different expedients are tried. In some instances the non-member allows the Lutheran Christian complete jurisdiction in the training of the children. Some couples seek to lessen the problem by agreeing to bring up the boys in the father's faith and the girls in the mother's faith. Others decide to forbid the participation of their children in the services and educational activities of any church, allowing them to grow up without positive religious training and compelling them to make their own decision with respect to church affiliation when they mature. In some cases the religiously divided parents resolve to send their children to both of their respective churches and then leave it to them to make their own choice when they mature. Or they may send them to a neutral church, possibly that of their children's close friends.

What shall we say to these things? Let us take up the various points in order. To change one's faith to that of one's spouse is good, provided it means an advance from error to truth and is done sincerely with conviction. As Foster puts it, "the change-over from one religion to another must be a conviction of faith, not an act of the hysteria of love."²² But for the orthodox partner in a marriage to join a heterodox or non-Christian church merely for the sake of marital harmony constitutes a sinful denial of his faith and of Holy Writ. The same is true when both spouses compromise and join a neutral church, unless indeed it is an orthodox church, in which case the step must also be taken sincerely

²⁰ R. E. Baber, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

²¹ Landis and Landis, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

²² Foster, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

and with conviction. Furthermore, to discontinue church attendance and activity entirely in a desperate effort to salvage the family peace is likewise sinful, for it means placing earthly advantage, however worthy, above the truth of God and above the new obedience unto which a Christian is called. Lastly it must be pointed out that even when two spouses agree to allow one another to practice their religion without let or hindrance, and when this agreement is actually put into practice, the problem still remains unresolved. They are not denying their faith and convictions, yet this arrangement can last only until children come. Disturbing decisions can then no longer be postponed and someone will have to yield. To use but one illustration: What shall a devout Lutheran and a devout Baptist do about the baptism of their newly born son or daughter? There are roadblocks in every direction.

As far as the above-mentioned procedures with respect to the religious training of children in interfaith marriages is concerned, the outlook is equally bleak and disconcerting. All of them do violence to the souls of the children. To bring up boys in one faith and the girls in another means to sin grievously against the children which are brought up in a false religion. Can a devout Lutheran Christian actually agree to subject his children to false doctrine? The second alternative is worse. For to allow children to grow up without any formal religious training means to deprive them of God-willed instruction and training when they need it the most, namely in the formative years of life. Such a course is the high road to delinquency. Furthermore, how could such children be expected to make the correct choice of a religion

and a church, when the foundation on which to base such a choice has been denied them by their indifferent or desperate parents? Finally, the attempt to bring up the children in both religions can only spell utter confusion to growing children who need nothing more than clear, positive, uncontradictory instruction in the Word of Truth. Without this they can base their choice only on externals, on beautiful buildings, on attractive equipment, on the personality of the pastor or teachers, or on the activities in which they may participate. They can only infer that religion is unimportant. Else how could their parents deliberately withhold it from them? Such children will also lack the right motivation for Christian living. They will have no security, but will remain religiously confused and frustrated. Would it be surprising if in a few years they lost interest in religion completely and grew up to be thoroughly worldly and materialistic men and women? What a fearful burden on the consciences of such parents! Where do they stand in the light of Eph. 6:4? What answer can they give the righteous Judge on that great day?

THE VARIOUS TYPES OF INTERFAITH MARRIAGES COMPARED

In a way all interfaith marriages constitute a threat to the full and free exercise of a Christian's faith life and are thus a constant temptation to indifference, compromise, or denial. True, some of them appear to work out well. There are some good-natured non-Christians who place no obstacles in the way of their believing partners. Yet even then, how much better and more gratifying, if both spouses were united by a common faith and exercised

a united counsel in the rearing of their children!

Again, there are interfaith marriages in which the heterodox partner has few if any definite religious convictions, attends church together with his Lutheran spouse, and eventually decides to unite with the church via adult confirmation (cp. 1 Peter 3:1). Among the thirty to forty thousand adult accessions which our Missouri Synod experiences year after year there are doubtless many thousands who belong into the category just described. For that we can only be thankful, though that by no means constitutes a valid reason for ceasing to warn our young people against the hazards of interfaith marriages. Nor dare it silence our testimony in our preaching against false doctrine, though it should impel us to make sure at all times that we are speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). We must hold the line, but we should also refrain from name-calling. We should make it clear at all times that we are not opposing people, but false teachings and principles. But having said all this, our testimony against mixed marriages must continue.

In commenting on the hazards of interfaith marriages, James Pike by way of illustration pictures a man who inquired in an airline office whether that company provided plane service from New York to Ireland. Receiving an affirmative answer, he proceeded to ask: "How many of your planes arrive safely in Ireland?" The clerk replied: "Occasionally one of our planes manages to get through." Thereupon the man refused to buy a ticket.²³ An occasional successful mixed marriage by no

means removes the hazard that lies in all of them. A large percentage of such disparate unions fail and leave misery and anguish beyond description in their wake.

The most dangerous type of intermarriages from our point of view is that between our people and members of more militant churches and sects such as Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Latter Day Saints, and various Pentecostal groups. Yet it is impossible to generalize. Not all are equally militant, and it is also true that any mixed marriage, however promising at the outset, can prove very troublesome, depending upon the value placed by its partners on their respective religions.

The ultimate in dangerous and explosive marriage situations, again from our Lutheran point of view, is doubtless a Lutheran-Roman Catholic marriage. The reason for this is that the Roman church, unlike other churches, has drawn up the so-called Antenuptial or Prenuptial Agreement which must be signed by both parties before a Roman priest will perform the ceremony. This agreement requires that in order to have validity the marriage must be performed under the auspices of said church. If that is to take place, the non-Roman party must take at least five hours of instruction on the essentials of the Catholic religion from a priest (after the marriage, if time was lacking before the ceremony), while the Roman Catholic party must promise not to submit to similar teaching from a minister or rabbi. The non-Roman party must also agree in writing "not to obstruct, hinder, or persuade the Roman Catholic spouse in the exercise of his or her religion," though the latter is required to do all he can to win

²³ James Pike, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

the non-Roman party over to the Catholic church. Furthermore, the promise is exacted from the non-Roman party to have all children issuing from the union baptized and educated in the Roman Catholic religion, even in the event of the Roman Catholic spouse's death. To this the provision is added that the agreement is to be considered "binding upon their respective heirs, next of kin, executors, administrators, and subsequent guardians and successors." In addition, the non-Roman party must promise that no plans will be made to have a second marriage ceremony performed, though the Catholic church makes it mandatory that a Catholic ceremony be arranged if the marriage has been performed by a minister or rabbi. Failure to comply with these stipulations will result in the excommunication of the Catholic party and the subsequent loss of all his rights in said church. There is also a written promise required that the couple will abstain from the use of contraceptive devices of whatever type. It must be added that the wording of the Antenuptial Agreement may vary from archdiocese to archdiocese, but its provisions are in the main the same.

No Lutheran Christian can with a good conscience sign this agreement, even though at the outset he voices his refusal to abide by it. It is sin to take religious instruction from a false teacher (Matt. 7:15; Rom. 16:17; 1 Tim. 6:3), even though one does not pay attention to the instruction and has no intention to accept or be guided by it. It is also sin to fore-swear one's duty to his spouse or children (Eccl. 5:4, 5; Matt. 5:33); in fact, it is impossible to do so, for one can only relinquish rights and privileges, not duties. The entire agreement is unchristian because it

muzzles the mouth of the non-Catholic, even in his own home, in all religious discussions. If a Lutheran signs a contract with the intention of keeping it, he sins grievously against God. But if he signs without such intention, he not only sins against God, but also against his Roman Catholic partner. Nor is he honest with himself nor with his Catholic spouse. He enters marriage by base deception and establishes a lifelong union which is supposedly based on mutual trust.

More. To help bring up one's children, or nonchalantly agree to have them brought up in the false religion and idolatrous practices of the Roman church and to abstain from teaching them the truth of Holy Writ as confessed by the Lutheran Church is likewise a most reprehensible and sinful procedure. But the very height of folly and willful disobedience to God and the Bible is for a Lutheran spouse to unite with the Roman church and to assist wholeheartedly in the training of the children in the doctrines and ways of that church, unless indeed he considers the teachings of that church to be the true and correct teachings of the Holy Scriptures. That in turn would betray either a woeful lack of Bible knowledge and Christian understanding or it would constitute a vain attempt at rationalization and self-justification. An individual contemplating such a step might properly ask himself:

Could I start the practice of enforced confession to a priest? Could I accept *without question* the stated beliefs of that church? Could I give up my *right* to interpret the Bible as I understand it? Could I accept the rosary, images, and other objects associated with the "sacramentals" (which form the basis of the devotional life for

the Roman Catholic)? Could I bring myself to *believe* that there is only "one true church" and so act as if the church from which I came is no church at all? Could I bring myself to believe that my past religious ideas are not to be trusted; that faith in the adequacy of Jesus Christ to lead me to salvation is not enough; that only through the Roman Catholic Church and its priesthood can I be saved?²⁴

It must be remembered, however, that the Antenuptial Agreement cannot be legally enforced in the United States, as some fear, though attempts to do so are not rare. James Pike presents a judicial verdict in a case in which a Roman Catholic husband brought a suit of estoppel [= judicial prohibition to change one's mind] against his wife who refused to live up to the agreement. He writes:

To invoke the principle of estoppel against the plaintiff because of her antenuptial agreement, as defendant urges, would be to disregard the overriding consideration of what is best for the children and to determine—arbitrarily—their future welfare by an act with which they had nothing to do. In addition, it would deprive the mother of her right to change her mind—to choose a religion which apparently gives her greater spiritual comfort—and to inculcate in the children entrusted to her custody the religious principles which, for the time being, seem best to her. For like reasons, the court will not adopt defendant's contention that there has been an abandonment or waiver by plaintiff of her right, as custodian, to give other than Catholic training to the daughters.²⁵

²⁴ Matthew H. Gates, "Before I say 'I Do,'" *The Walther League Messenger*, LXIII (October 1954), 29.

²⁵ J. A. Pike, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

In a similar case a judge of the Superior Court of the State of Connecticut rendered the following decision:

The law is absolutely impartial in matters of religion. A court will not take a child's religious education into its own hands, short of circumstances amounting to unfitness of the custodian. . . . In a dispute relating to custody, religious views afford no grounds for removing the children from the custody of a parent otherwise qualified.²⁶

Landis and Landis sum up the situation in the following manner:

The question often arises whether the antenuptial agreement is a legal agreement that is enforceable. Usually this agreement has not been considered legally binding; its force has existed in the moral responsibility people feel when they have given their word by signing the antenuptial agreement. Recently, however, the legality of the agreement was tested in the courts when a Catholic man sued his former wife because she was not bringing up their son in the Catholic faith as she had promised at their marriage. The Court of Appeals of the state of New York decided the case by a split vote of five to two, which in effect upheld the right of the mother to rear the child in her faith after her divorce from the child's father. Whatever force the antenuptial agreement may or may not have, it represents an effort of the Catholic church to develop a program to deal with a type of marriage considered by the church to be a major problem.²⁷

What has just been said with respect to the hazards of Lutheran-Roman Catholic marriages may with proper adaptations be applied to interfaith marriages generally.

²⁶ *The Christian Century*, May 29, 1957.

²⁷ Landis and Landis, *op. cit.*, p. 240.

Except in cases where the non-Lutheran is religiously indifferent and gives the Lutheran spouse free rein, the outcome of mixed marriages will as a rule be disappointment, disagreement, concern for the indifferent spouse's spiritual welfare, offense to the children, and not too infrequently marital disharmony and strife. Whenever the non-Lutheran has positive and aggressive convictions, interfaith marriages present most serious difficulties and should be avoided. Still it must not be overlooked that even the more congenial mixed marriages are still mixed marriages which cannot provide the same measure of satisfaction and security as marriages in which husbands and wives are truly one in Christ, worship in the same church, kneel at the same Lord's Table. Nor is the hope always justified that the non-Lutheran spouse will eventually adopt the Lutheran faith and thus help to build a unified Christian home. At best, mixed marriages entail a much greater risk than those in which husbands and wives share the same faith, a fact which is borne out by Pike's statement that the divorce rate in interfaith marriages is $2\frac{1}{4}$ times as great as when there is religious homogamy.²⁸

PASTORAL COUNSELING WITH RESPECT TO INTERFAITH MARRIAGES

The major and most effective approach to the problems of interfaith marriages is purposeful premarital counseling which has three chief phases. The first of these is thorough indoctrination and information imparted in confirmation classes and in sermons and addresses at opportune times and occasions as these offer themselves in

the course of the church year. Our synodical catechism opens the door for this in the discussion of the Sixth Commandment, where the chief principles of Christian marriage may be discussed and strong emphasis laid on its divine institution and permanence. Accepting God's principles of marriage is a long step toward successful marriage, while the couple which already at the altar have their mental eye fixed on the divorce door in the event of an unhappy marriage are then and there steering toward divorce. To impress God's principles on youthful minds early is a vital phase of premarital counseling.

Another point deserving of strong emphasis is the unifying influence of a common faith, a common religion, and membership in the same church. When husband and wife are members of one church, establish their home in direct harmony with the principles of their church, and rear their children accordingly, the outlook for a happy and successful home is exceedingly bright.

Thirdly it is essential that a pastor make his preaching and teaching program as meaningful and thorough as possible. Laying a strong foundation of Bible truth in the hearts of people, particularly the young, will prove a strong bond between them and their church and make them highly reluctant, yea steadfastly determined, not to give it up for the sake of a non-Christian or non-Lutheran spouse. To this end it behooves Christian pastors not only to utilize the opportunities offered by the weekly pericopes to touch on marital matters, but to arrange special sermon series now and then in which the essential principles underlying courtship, engagement, marriage, and divorce are presented. Like-

²⁸ J. A. Pike, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

wise it can only help the good cause if occasionally, in sermons and organizational addresses, the distinctive doctrines and practices of our church are presented in order to strengthen our people in the conviction that our teachings and principles and practices are Scripture-based. A superficial pastor builds on little more than sand (Matt. 7:26,27). Unswerving obedience and faithfulness to God (Acts 5:29; Rev. 2:10) as well as loyalty to the church can be expected only when a firm foundation has been laid.

It is of paramount importance that Christian parents be instructed and reminded that theirs is the first responsibility in the Christian training of their children (Eph. 6:4) and that they should give their fullest cooperation to church and school in order that a firm foundation might be laid and a solid building be reared on the foundation.

Under the heading of premarital counseling also belongs ever recurring emphasis on the blessings of common and unified family worship. Joint daily reading of the Holy Scriptures and joint prayer before the throne of grace in the same mind and the same spirit cannot fail to prove true "happiness insurance" in that it provides the incentive to avoid situations which make for marital strife or to compose without delay differences and disharmony that may already have arisen. Where the entire family daily prays the Fifth Petition with sincerity of heart, the devil of discord will have little chance to divide and conquer the home. For there will always be present the cheerful readiness to forgive and forget that is based on, and springs from, the never-failing forgiveness of God in Christ Jesus, the Savior.

COUNSELING IN YOUNG PEOPLE'S GROUPS

Besides enlarging upon and discussing the subjects listed above, it is well to point out that courtships which in advance pre-empt difficulties and conflicts should be avoided and terminated. While it is true that courtship does not necessarily lead to engagement and marriage, it is equally true that steady association of two individuals has a dynamic way of moving forward toward that goal. As Nimkoff puts it:

In courtship there can be no standing still, no marking time. With each passing day and with each new experience the pair becomes either more attached to each other, or less. That is the reason that those who have once been lovers can seldom be "just friends" in the way they were friends originally.²⁰

The time therefore for young people to make their convictions regarding mixed marriages known is before, or at least as soon as, the serious stage of a courtship begins to shape up. To postpone this vital matter until after engagement or marriage is to invite trouble. It is much better to experience the anguish of parting company early than to be doomed to painful and vexing experiences throughout life. The pain of breaking a courtship early is certainly not as poignant and persevering as is commonly supposed. Landis and Landis point out that on the basis of one of their extensive studies no less than 69% of the young people interviewed experienced healing of their broken hearts before five months had elapsed, 22% forgot the former romance within one or two weeks, while 31% needed from six months to two

²⁰ M. Nimkoff, *op. cit.*, p. 392.

years to regain their former happy estate.³⁰ Edgar Schmiedeler, a Roman Catholic, is therefore very correct when in the case of conflicting religions he urges prompt ending of the courtship, as we have already seen.³¹

Young people should also be taught not to permit themselves to be lulled into a false security by an unchurched person who claims to have nothing against church or religion and promises not to interfere with the religious life and activity of his spouse. Not only is there reason to fear that this promise will be forgotten after the marriage, but the Christian spouse will forego the spiritual aid and encouragement which would be his if his spouse were likewise a devout child of God. The promises of unchurched and non-religious people are not too reassuring, to say the least.

Likewise the fallacy of the "agree-to-disagree" policy must be exposed for what it really is, namely a short postponement of the difficulties already discussed. What, for instance, could a devout Lutheran wife expect of a Christian Scientist husband if she became ill, or met with an accident, or is approaching a confinement? Would he be eager to provide adequate medical aid and care? The reader may pursue this thought further.

PREMARITAL COUNSELING

Premarital counseling has two aspects. In its broader sense it comprises all counsel given by a pastor for the benefit of his young people in sermons or classes or organizational meetings to prepare them for marriage; in its narrower sense it is the specific counsel given by him to prospec-

tive bridal couples as the time of their marriage is approaching. In not a few cases the couple come to the pastor but a few days before the wedding, which is particularly regrettable in cases of mixed marriages. The time is then so short that the pastor can do little more than to assure himself that all is in order, that both parties to the contemplated union are entering into marriage voluntarily; that in the case of younger people parental approval has been secured; that the legal license will be delivered to him before the ceremony; that neither partner is engaged to another person or has been unscripturally divorced. Valid impediments must be removed before the wedding, else a conscientious pastor cannot officiate, even though a legal license has been obtained. It is good practice to have the couple fill out a comprehensive questionnaire to furnish the pastor with all the data required for his officiation at the wedding as well as for the church records. This is also the time to discuss the ceremony itself and to arrange for a rehearsal, if it is to be a church wedding. When more time is available, it is possible to have several counseling sessions and to impart much wholesome counsel which will stand the couple in good stead before and after the marriage.

The method of premarital counseling may vary. Some pastors are content to have the couple ask questions concerning matters which cause them the most concern and from there to branch out into other useful areas. Other pastors use the longer marriage form from the Lutheran Agenda, of which reprints are available at a small cost from Concordia Publishing House, and take it through paragraph by paragraph, making pertinent comment or asking questions as they move along.

³⁰ Landis and Landis, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

³¹ See footnote 16.

As for the content of premarital counsel, the following ideals and practices can be mentioned and discussed in addition to the points listed at the beginning of this section: Mutual trust and honesty, unselfishness, willingness to share and serve, acceptance of responsibility, mature behavior, emotional control, respect for each other's parents, fairmindedness, living within their means, united counsel with respect to the rearing of children, affectional responses, selection of friends, moderation in sex activity, planned parenthood, and whatever else the couple might suggest. It goes without saying that such counseling should be carried out in a serious manner, though there is also room for remarks in a lighter vein.

SPECIAL COUNSEL WITH RESPECT TO MIXED MARRIAGES

In counseling with respect to mixed marriages the pastor will, as time permits, not merely state and stress the components of successful Christian marriage but, taking into consideration the special nature of the impending marriage, emphasize the various factors which will be helpful to the couple after the household has been established, just as he would do if both were members of his church. Points to be stressed are the paramount necessity of showing love, respect, forbearance, and courtesy toward each other; entering the marriage with the firm purpose of contributing to, not merely receiving benefits from, the impending union; establishing a "family altar" at once and making daily joint Bible reading and prayer an unbreakable custom in the new household, provided that the devotions are of such a nature as not to conflict with the Holy Scriptures nor the conscience of one

or the other spouse. The Lutheran partner will also be exhorted strongly to remain true to his God and church, to be faithful in the exercise of Christian stewardship, and, if the Lord blesses the union with children, to bring them up in the true nurture and admonition of the Lord. For the benefit of the non-Lutheran the pastor will extol the blessings of a religiously united home, will invite him to attend the church services as well as to read the religious literature which will find its way into the new home. Depending upon the individual case, particularly the extent of previous acquaintance, the pastor will also extend to the non-member an invitation to attend the adult membership class, emphasizing clearly that no obligation to unite with the church is connected with such attendance. The Lutheran spouse will receive a special exhortation, preferably in private, to be an exemplary mate who by his sincere and upright behavior may eventually induce the non-Lutheran to unite with the church "without a word" (1 Peter 3:1,2). If the prospective bridal couple is a Roman Catholic-Lutheran combination, it must be made clear to him that the former's willingness to have the ceremony performed by a Lutheran pastor is not to be balanced out by a subsequent marriage according to the Roman ritual in order to restore him to good standing in his church, since that would imply the fulfillment of the sinful requirements of the Antenuptial Agreement as well as the invalidity of a marriage performed by a Lutheran pastor. Throughout the discussions the pastor will endeavor to be objective and fair and thus inspire confidence in the mind of the non-Lutheran. Willfulness and prejudice can only harm the good cause.

POST-MARITAL COUNSELING

When serious problems arise in a religiously mixed household, the pastor will do what he can to assist the couple through the difficulty. If they do not come to him, he will seek them out and offer his services in a friendly and tactful manner. At times it may be advisable to discuss the situation with his own member privately before he meets with both. In all fairness he must then permit also the non-Lutheran to state his case, if he is willing or desirous to do so and does not refuse the pastor's efforts. That is one of the difficulties in mixed marriage counseling situations that a pastor has no claim on a favorable response to his endeavors on the part of a non-member. However, if a joint meeting has been arranged, let him do his utmost to get a true understanding of the situation and maintain strict fairness and objectivity. To condone unfairness or wrongdoing on the part of his church members would be disastrous to the outcome of the discussion. Yet it must be pointed out candidly that loyalty to God and His Word does not constitute unfairness or wrongdoing on the part of a Christian spouse. Perhaps all that can be gained will be the agreement to respect one another's religion and faith and to make the best of a situation on which both feel they cannot yield. A spouse's change-over to the religion of his partner should be made and accepted if there is conviction that it is the right religion. To unite with the Lutheran Church without such conviction is not a God-pleasing solution of the problem.

Mention must also be made at this point of extreme cases in which the non-Lutheran threatens to leave, and actually does leave,

the marital union because his Lutheran spouse refuses to surrender his faith and religion. Such cases were envisioned by the apostle Paul when he wrote: "But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart; the brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases; but God has called us to peace" (1 Cor. 7:15). If all attempts to persuade him to return and to practice peaceful co-existence fail, he is guilty of malicious desertion and the deserted one is no longer under marital bondage. That would also apply if by willful and brutal behavior he makes it impossible for his spouse to live with him without personal danger, as Quenstedt explains:

Not only he becomes guilty of malicious desertion who flees from his spouse, but also he who by his raging and tyranny compels his spouse to flee.³²

C. F. W. Walther echoes the same persuasion when he writes:

Whether a spouse himself maliciously forsakes the other, or whether he compels the other to leave through tyranny of conscience, that is one and the same thing.³³

An important question arises at this point which has been frequently raised: Does this apply to heterodox church members as well as to unbelieving spouses? This question is frequently answered negatively. It is maintained by some that malicious desertion can only be recognized by the church if the deserter is not a member of the Christian church. Is the objection valid? A glance at the apostle's statement reveals that he is speaking of an "un-

³² J. Quenstedt, *Theologia didactico-polemica* (Leipzig: Fritsch, 1685) IV, 14, p. 1583.

³³ C. F. W. Walther, *Pastoraltheologie* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1872), p. 245.

believing" spouse. Yet both situations are identical. Martin Luther expresses his opinion thus:

What St. Paul here says about a pagan spouse, is also to be understood concerning a false Christian; so that if he tried to force his spouse into unchristian ways and will not permit him to live a Christian life, or separates himself from him, that Christian should be loosed and free to betroth himself to another.³⁴

Dr. J. H. C. Fritz appears to be a bit more cautious on this point when he writes:

Leaving the spouse in a state of anger does not constitute malicious desertion, nor does a threat or an attempt upon the life of the other. In the latter case a temporary separation may be granted.³⁵

This judgment is correct, for a single emotional outburst followed by an impulsive departure from the home does not constitute malicious desertion. Time alone can tell whether sincere efforts to induce him to return are fruitless. Only then does it become malicious desertion.

Theodore Laetsch, finally, uses the following approach:

First Corinthians 7:15 does not apply. Since he is a member of a Christian congregation, his case is not identical with that of 1 Cor. 7:15 . . . until all the requirements of Matt. 18:15-17 have been complied with and have proved ineffectual in gaining him. . . . If the deserter is, after the application of Matt. 18 declared a heathen man and a publican, he is then

before God and man an unbeliever and consequently 1 Cor. 7:15 applies.³⁶

This is likewise sound advice. Since sufficient time must elapse before malicious desertion is established, the church has ample time to deal with the deserter and either induce him to return and continue the marriage, or to follow through with the application of Matthew 18.

DEALING WITH MEMBERS WHO HAVE SIGNED THE ANTENUPTIAL AGREEMENT

The question remains: What is to be done when a Lutheran church member has signed the Roman Catholic antenuptial agreement, or has made similar arrangement with his partner who belongs to another heterodox church?

There are those who have held that we should fight fire with fire and demand that the Roman Catholic spouse be made to pass through the same procedure in the Lutheran church as is demanded of the Lutheran spouse by the Roman church. Thus S. Deyling, discussing whether the bans were to be published in church for people preparing to enter into a mixed marriage, made this statement 200 years ago:

The partner who adheres to the papistic or Calvinistic religion must promise before the marriage and give bond that he will not only make no attempt to seduce his spouse who adheres to the pure religion to embrace his religion, . . . but will also grant permission that the children who will be granted to them by God in this marriage be instructed and brought up in the evangelical religion.³⁷

³⁴ Martin Luther, *Saemmtliche Schriften* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), VIII, 1062.

³⁵ J. H. C. Fritz, *Pastoral Theology* (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1945), p. 170.

³⁶ Theo. Laetsch, "Malicious Desertion," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, IV (March 1933), 201.

³⁷ S. Deyling, quoted in C. F. W. Walther, *Pastoraltheologie* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1872), p. 238.

To this statement Kuestner adds the remark that such promise must be made to the civil court so that its fulfillment could in case of necessity be enforced even after the death of the orthodox partner.³⁸

We readily admit that such procedure would gratify our spirit of revenge, but we can hardly insist that we have the right to outrage the conscience of a Roman Catholic (or anyone else) as his church does with respect to non-Catholics. Two wrongs do not make a right. Hence Walther is more reserved when he expresses himself thus:

The pastor however need respect all this only to the extent that he earnestly admonish the orthodox partner to make such conditions. If, however, the heterodox partner would agree to be married by a Lutheran pastor only with the express protest that the children of this marriage must be reared in his false faith, it would indeed be doubtful whether the pastor could agree to publish the bans for such a couple.³⁹

Others weakly hold that the agreement, if duly signed, is valid and binding and that the Lutheran spouse must therefore refrain from taking any diverse action, which, however, runs counter to Acts 5:29. Still others swing over to the opposite extreme and declare that any member who signs the agreement automatically excommunicates himself, which, however, cannot be squared with the procedure for church discipline outlined by Jesus in Matt. 18:15-17. Then there are those who suggest that such Lutherans be counseled and even given the Lord's Supper in the hope that thereby they would acquire the strength to right the wrong as much as possible. But such pro-

cedure would leave out of consideration that the participation of such disloyal members in the Holy Supper would be in conflict with 1 Cor. 11:28, 29. They have given offense, but have not made amends and must therefore be denied the Sacrament until the offense has been removed by proper repentance.

Last but not least, there are those who insist that such a member must repudiate his part in the wicked agreement to his spouse as well as to the priest before whom it was made, the alternative being church discipline according to Matt. 18. Included would be the acknowledgment of the grievous sin that was committed, coupled with a proper apology to the congregation and a plea for forgiveness. To all this we would readily agree except to require repudiation before the priest. If the erring member is willing to do that, well; but it must not be made an inexorable condition. It is understood too, that there is to be no aiding or abetting of the instruction of the children in a false religion, but rather a deep and active concern that they be taught the Word of God in its truth and purity.

One more thing needs to be said. If the Lutheran spouse is a woman, she may have to bow, though ever so unwillingly, to her heterodox husband's demand that the children be reared in his religion and attend his church. The children are his too and he is the head of the house. Or does his heterodoxy void his right to the headship of the home? However, this does not exonerate the Lutheran wife and mother from carrying out her Christian responsibility to her husband and children, which are hers as well as his. She still has the obligation to witness to him and to them (Matt. 10:

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

32,33). She still may not aid and abet the false religious training which they are receiving, but must counteract it and show them the right way (Gal. 6:1; James 5:19,20). Many Christian and Lutheran parents are daily confronted with an analogous situation when by force of circumstances they are compelled to send their children to nonreligious schools, both primary and secondary, in which evolution and other pernicious, soul-destroying theories, principles, and philosophies are taught. They must counteract such false instruction to the best of their ability.

One can in a small measure appreciate the well-nigh hopeless dilemma of orthodox spouses in a mixed marriage and the divided loyalty which gnaws away at the hearts of the children when mother must take issue with the convictions of father. But that is the unholy and deplorable price that must be paid under such circumstances. Those are the hazards and vexations of interfaith marriages. To be faithful unto death does not mean to yield, or compromise, or keep silent in order to avoid or reduce the inevitable friction. These things should be thought through in advance and such precarious alliances avoided, unless the prospective mate is willing to embrace the faith of the orthodox spouse, preferably before the marriage, in fact, before the engagement. This is not always possible, but it is the ideal toward which all should strive.

THE LUTHERAN CHURCH—MISSOURI SYNOD ON INTERFAITH MARRIAGES

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod at its convention held in San Francisco, California, June 17—26, 1959, adopted the following procedure to be followed by our

pastors and congregations in situations where an interfaith marriage exists:

In dealing with members of the Lutheran Church who have entered into an interfaith or mixed marriage, the church should exercise sympathetic understanding and sincerely endeavor to save and build the marriage with its counseling ministry. The following principles of action should apply:

- 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 fellowship with his congregation. 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 brought to the conviction that his Christian liberty and a clear, untrammelled conscience are to be safeguarded. The Lutheran party should be encouraged steadfastly to witness to the truth. Those being counseled should be warned against relinquishing and denying the freedom which Christ died to earn for them. When the Lutheran party who has signed the Roman Catholic premarriage agreement is convinced in his or her conscience that this agreement is to be repudiated, such action should be undertaken after due discussion with the spouse. In such discussion, patient witness and Biblical instruction should be brought to bear in the spirit of Christian love. In all situations the Lutheran spouse should not

act arbitrarily or spitefully, but endeavor so to witness within his family that both spouse and children are led closer to their Savior and to Christian doctrine as revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures.

- 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.

Where husband and wife, while of different denominational persuasion, nevertheless accept Jesus Christ to be their Savior, they should be encouraged to read and discuss the Word of God together; exercise the patience of Christ in their study of the truth; and, as they find agreement, confess together the Apostles' Creed and unite in table prayers and the Lord's Prayer.

This is both possible and necessary: possible, because both have been baptized into Christ; necessary, because otherwise they become wholly indifferent or even bitter toward the Christian faith.

The Christian congregation should show special concern for people in a mixed marriage; comfort them with good counsel; and assist them so that truth and love have their right, and a joyful faith may be developed and

maintained. The church must be fully confident that the Gospel has more power and promise than legalism.

The church will employ constructive procedure in endeavoring to (1) instruct, (2) build, and (3) heal. The faith of Christians must be safeguarded and the marriage preserved as well. Barriers are not to be erected between the couple, but the faith of Christians is to be strengthened. To pronounce excommunication in an arbitrary manner on the basis of a refusal to abrogate the Roman Catholic premarriage agreement is to deal legalistically. Such action is not in keeping with the task of the church to instruct, admonish, and strengthen its members with the means of grace, leading them through repentance and faith to wholeness of life. Excommunication can be valid only when the party involved persistently refuses to hear admonition or to exercise his responsibility to upbuild the Christian church in his home and to bring up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Until evidence of rejecting God's truth is manifested, the Lutheran party should by all means be supported in his witness by Word and Sacrament. Where the Roman Catholic premarriage agreement is not renounced, the reason should be determined and Christian admonition employed in patience and charity, with each case weighed in the light of its own particular and variant circumstances.⁴⁰

To summarize: The least with which a congregation could content itself in cases of this kind would be: (1) the retraction

⁴⁰ *Proceedings of the Forty-Fourth Regular Convention of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, San Francisco, California, June 17—26, 1959, pp. 212, 213.*

of the promise before the spouse; (2) the admission of guilt and due apology before or to the congregation, in person or by signed statement; (3) the promise to cease aiding and abetting the religious upbringing of the children in the Roman Catholic or any other false faith; (4) the promise to impart the maximum possible instruction to their children in the true doctrine and principles of Holy Scriptures. Refusal to repent and amend would subject the individual to church discipline according to Matthew 18.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Despite the many accessions which our church annually experiences via mixed marriages, our counsel to young people must continue to be negative and to urge discontinuance of the courtship unless the non-Lutheran agrees to unite with our church before marriage, preferably before engagement. In already existing mixed marriages the Lutheran spouse should be counseled to initiate serious, objective discussion of church differences, to bring the non-Lutheran to attend church as often as possible, to encourage membership in adult class instruction, to lead an exemplary life as a spouse so as to win the non-member "without a word" (1 Peter 3:1,2), to con-

duct daily family worship if at all possible, and to pray without ceasing for guidance and religious unity.

Postmarital counseling is always difficult, because the problems have already arisen. The differences in mixed marriages do not usually decrease, but increase and become magnified in the minds of the couple and their families. But the Word is still powerful, hence we need not be fearful nor pessimistic. We can accomplish much good if the problem is approached in the right manner, with all fairness, with tact, with prayer, with sincerity. Our greatest hope for success lies in prayerful and thorough premarital counseling.

PERMISSIONS

The following publishing firms have graciously granted permission to quote from their publications:

McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., New York, N. Y. E. Schmiedeler, *Marriage and the Family*; Baber, *Marriage and the Family*

Harper and Row, Publishers, New York, N. Y. J. A. Pike, *If You Marry Outside Your Faith*

Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N. J. J. T. and M. G. Landis, *Building a Successful Marriage*; 3d ed., c. 1958

The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, Pa. H. A. Bowman, *A Christian Interpretation of Marriage*; copyright 1959 by W. L. Jenkins, Philadelphia, Pa.