

upon each other. Say what is in your heart, not what is in your ears. Excitement is all very exciting; but our God is a God of peace. 'In the stillness of your heart you will know him.'

Interchurch Marriages by Martin Reardon

Some comments by an Anglican in the light of a Directory by the Episcopal Conference of England and Wales based upon the Apostolic Letter Issued Motu Proprio on 31st March, 1970, by His Holiness Pope Paul VI determining Norms for Mixed Marriages¹

Until the publication last year of the *Motu Proprio* and the *Directory by the Episcopal Conference of England and Wales* mixed marriages looked very different to different people. It depended where you stood. In fact there can be few states of life which appeared so different according to viewpoint.

If you were an average Roman Catholic priest or bishop brought up in the One True Church with a firm Catholic tradition, they were a major problem. More than half your marriages were mixed and the majority of the non-Catholic partners were merely nominal Christians. One of your primary concerns must have been that the Catholic partner continued to practise his or her faith and the children were brought up as Catholics. The Catholic Church in this country has been the only major Church which has increased in numbers in recent years, and, apart from the Irish immigration, the children of mixed marriages have probably accounted for the largest part of this increase.

If you were an average Anglican priest or bishop brought up in a firm Anglican tradition, mixed marriages with Roman Catholics were a minor, but very sharp, problem. You came across few of them where the Roman Catholic practised his religion, but the ones you did meet showed that 'One True Church of Christ' at its most intransigent, intolerant of the conscience of the Anglican partner. You were tempted to be as intolerant in return, leaving the couple as bewildered and unhappy pawns of a different colour trying to make love in the middle of an ecclesiastical game of chess.

If you were a starry-eyed couple very much in love, you were puzzled what all the fuss was about. It was hard enough to imagine yourselves with a child in your arms, let alone considering the problem of his religious upbringing. Better just sign on the dotted

¹Available from the Catholic Truth Society.

line like you do at the dentist and get it over quickly. A few years later you may regret this bitterly—your marriage, running into difficulties (often for quite other reasons), may focus on this religious difference so that you cannot even mention religion without squabbling. Or you may be like one couple I know, who agree almost entirely on religious matters, who are bringing their children up as Roman Catholics, but who take them from time to time to an Anglican communion service; and now that the services are so similar, the parents have to whisper a password along the line to let the children know whether to go up to receive communion or not.

If you were a staunch Catholic or Protestant parent the knowledge that your son or daughter was marrying 'outside their faith' was almost a worse shock than if they were having an illegitimate child, and you had either to adjust your whole attitude to religion or else disown your offspring.

Perhaps some of these attitudes and viewpoints will change in the wake of the *Motu Proprio* and the bishops' *Directory*. Some changes have already begun. Perhaps also the above caricatures may seem a little highly coloured, so let me confess my own viewpoint: I am an Anglican happily married to a Roman Catholic. I do not see mixed marriages in terms of black and white only, but as a very rich field of human, religious (and ecumenical) experience. For three years now my wife and I have helped to organize conferences for couples both of whom practise their faith (one a Roman Catholic and the other a Christian of another tradition).¹ Roman Catholic clergy have often pointed out that such marriages, which may better be termed 'interchurch' rather than simply 'mixed', are a small minority. One bishop told me that in his experience they were only one in a hundred of mixed marriages as a whole. I would not presume to question his experience, nor even the objective statistical reality of his figures for certain parts of the country only a few years ago. Unfortunately we have only very scanty statistics on mixed marriages in this country (unlike Switzerland, Germany and Holland, for instance, where detailed figures are readily available). However, I think we should expect the proportion of interchurch marriages (where both partners are practising) to increase for two reasons:

- (1) With the encouragement of ecumenical co-operation, it is inevitable that boys and girls will meet and marry.
- (2) More significantly there has been a change in the make up of the Roman Catholic community in this country in recent years. Not long ago it was overwhelmingly working class (whereas the other Churches, particularly the Church of England, were and are very weak in working-class areas). Now there is a very significant middle-

¹A fourth national conference for interchurch families is planned for Spode House, 19th–21st November, 1971; for further details write to the Warden, Spode House, Hawkesyard Priory, Rugeley, Staffs. The Association of Interchurch Families is now organized regionally; for further details write to Martin and Ruth Reardon, 58 Bocking Lane, Sheffield S8 7BH.

class Roman Catholic element. As the other Churches are preponderantly middle-class a larger number of middle-class couples will be interchurch couples.

In their commentary on the *Motu Proprio* the English and Welsh hierarchies claim that interchurch marriages are not more than one in ten of all mixed marriages. I'm happy with one in ten. Let's settle for that until someone produces some authenticated statistics. That means that about 3,000 interchurch marriages are celebrated each year in England and Wales. Quite a large number of people!

In his recent *Motu Proprio* Pope Paul claims that mixed marriages 'do not, except in some cases, help in re-establishing unity among Christians'. While not disagreeing with the fact he states negatively here, one could wish that he had stated it positively. Let us examine which are the 'some cases' which could help in re-establishing unity and look for ways in which they can be encouraged to do so. Obviously the marriages which could foster unity are primarily those where both partners are practising members of different Churches—what we have termed 'interchurch marriages'. The hierarchies of England and Wales, in commenting upon the *Motu Proprio*, have implied some ways in which such marriages could improve relations between Christians of different Churches. They say:

'The Holy Father commends families founded upon mixed marriages to the pastoral care of the clergy. If they have special difficulties, they need special care.

'Whenever possible this pastoral help must be given in co-operation with the clergy of the non-Catholic partner of the marriage. This we agree to be highly desirable. As everybody realizes, it pre-supposes the sincere confidence with ministers of other religious communities which, as the Holy Father says, we must establish.

'In some places Catholics and non-Catholics combine in organizing preparatory courses for those intending to marry. Joint witness to Christian principles of marriage, before, at and after the wedding, within the home and in public, is eminently desirable.'

Here the bishops point out that interchurch marriages should be cared for by both clergy working in co-operation. They can thus provide an occasion of co-operation for clergy, even to the extent of arranging joint preparatory courses for those intending to marry. This could only happen where relations between the Churches are cordial, but could also encourage the improvement and deepening of interchurch relations.

One of the great problems facing the ecumenical movement today is to find motives for unity which are powerful enough really to move ordinary Christians. We have the theological and Biblical motives of the will of Christ, which, though all-important, do not seem to come alive for the majority of us. Our minds may be con-

vinced, but our wills are not sufficiently sustained. We have also the economic motive. This does not convince everyone despite (or perhaps because of) the pre-eminence of economic questions in our time—and, anyway, we are not all feeling the pinch sufficiently yet. The sort of incentive to work for unity which we all need today is a human one to move the heart and a permanent one from which we cannot escape and which we cannot forget. An interchurch marriage, where both partners belong to different Churches and yet minister to each other the sacrament of marriage, a sacrament of unity *par excellence*—such a marriage provides just the motive for Christian unity which we are looking for.

This is not to say that ecumenists should go round introducing likely partners of different Churches to each other, and then lighting a candle at Cupid's altar. It is not for a third party to try to engineer a vocation which will inevitably have extra problems besides those normal to any marriage. It does, however, mean that not only for the unity of the family (*ecclesiola in ecclesia*) but also for the unity of the wider Church, we ought to do all we can to encourage the joint pastoral care of such marriages where they occur.¹

While we are on the subject of vocation to marriage, perhaps I could make a comment on the wording of the hierarchy's *Directory*.

'In England and Wales at the present time it is normally possible for a Catholic to choose . . . a partner . . . who will not be opposed to the fulfilment of the obligation . . . to see that as far as possible the children will be baptized and brought up in the Catholic faith.'

This seems to treat the vocation to marriage as parallel to the vocation to celibacy—that is to say that one has a vocation to marriage *in general*. This may be true of a few people, but I would have thought it a commoner experience to have a vocation to marry a *particular person*. And is there a relic here of the bad old idea that it was better for a Catholic to marry someone who didn't practise the Christian faith, but had no objection to his children being brought up as Catholics, rather than to marry a fervent member of another Church who had difficulties about promising to bring their children up as Catholics?

The most critical section in the *Directory* on the *Motu Proprio* is the one following norm 4. The whole section is very important and a great deal will depend on how it is applied in practice. I will confine myself now to the closing paragraphs of this section. These contain a splendid statement of the central importance of the parents in the religious education of the child. They also point to the fact that both the Catholic and the non-Catholic parent normally hold in common 'nearly all of what is fundamental to the Christian

¹The Joint Working Group of the British Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church has published some recommendations on *The Joint Pastoral Care of Interchurch Marriages in England, Wales and Scotland*. It is available, price 3p, from the B.C.C. or from Benedictine Priory, Priory Close, London N14 4AT.

faith. . . . We think that many parents of differing Christian traditions who face their responsibility for the spiritual formation of their children will discover that the field in which they can co-operate is much wider than they at first imagined.' (The passage would have been even better in my eyes had there been no presumption that all children would be brought up as Catholics. One would have thought that if, say, an Anglican and a Catholic partner had all this in common, the Catholic partner might equally have shared in the Anglican upbringing of the children; but this possibility is not considered.)

It is certainly my experience that many interchurch couples grow together in the understanding of their faith to such an extent that there is virtually no internal difference between them but only their external attachment to separated Churches. This is something which the clergy and the theologians find it very difficult to understand: 'How have they found agreement on the Papal Supremacy or the Assumption?' The answer to this is paradoxical. On the one hand such couples see that neither of these doctrines is central to their everyday living. They can get by with their everyday lives without knowing too precisely what their respective Churches teach on such matters. On the other hand, just because they see such doctrines to be secondary, they are able to see them in better perspective, and even to work out a common approach to the role of Mary and of the Pope in the Church. I am not claiming that clergy and theologians should go and sit at the feet of such couples and all their theological problems will be solved. There will be few couples whose theological erudition is of that order; but clergy and ministers might well learn from their ecumenical approach.

Such couples also raise a further question for the authorities of their Churches. Agreement on all that is fundamental to the Christian *faith* cannot convincingly be presented to their children without sharing together in what is fundamental to the Christian *life*—in particular in receiving eucharistic communion together. Several couples met together recently and discussed this. Their conclusions were as follows:

'We realize that our experience of being at one in believing is not widely shared by members of the Christian Churches. But we regard it as of crucial importance for the families for which we bear parental and pastoral responsibility. We presume to think that we see a way forward. The third paragraph on page 21 of the *Directory* refers to certain circumstances in which, in urgent cases, non-Catholics may be admitted to Holy Communion. We would like urgently to pursue the possibility of these regulations being interpreted in such a way as to include interchurch families.

1. We would claim to be rightly disposed.
2. We are ready to declare a faith in the Eucharist in harmony with that of the Church.

3. While, as individuals, we have access to a minister of our own communion, *as a family* we do not.
4. We are more than willing spontaneously to ask a priest for Holy Communion.
5. We consider ourselves to be in urgent need *as parents*.

Further, we are available for any consultation which would satisfy the church authorities, or a priest, of our dispositions in a way in which those at the point of death are not. This would allow ample scope for any reasonable enquiry to be made.'

If the experience of France, Switzerland and other continental countries is anything to go by, a new flexibility on the part of the Roman Catholic bishops in dealing with interchurch families, and in particular the joint pastoral care of such families, could raise a lot of responsible but searching questions about the ecumenical life of our Churches. If these questions are taken seriously, they could lead to a great step forward in ecumenical relations in this country just where it is most needed—at the local level.

The postal strike has cut communication with most of our reviewers so we have a rather short review section this month. Next month we will be back to our usual eight pages.