

**A FEW THEOLOGICAL AND PASTORAL PERSPECTIVES  
OF INTER-FAITH MARRIAGES**

Edited by  
Fr. Vimal Tirimanna, CSsR  
Executive Secretary  
FABC Office of Theological Concerns

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## EPILOGUE

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## **SOME PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON THE EVOLUTION OF THIS PAPER**

Ever since its inception, in 1986, the Theological Advisory Commission (TAC) of the FABC [which was later promoted to the status of an Office of the FABC, and came to be called the Office of Theological Concerns (OTC) from 1997] has endeavoured to produce theological reflections on various topics relevant to the Asian Churches. A collection of all the eight reflection papers produced till 2006 was published under the title *Sprouts of Theology from the Asian Soil* in 2007. This present paper is the ninth in that series.

OTC's main role is to serve the FABC and its member Episcopal Conferences, by highlighting and deepening certain theological/pastoral topics, which are either assigned to it by the FABC or chosen by the OTC itself. The theme of the VIII Plenary Assembly of the FABC, held in Daejeon, Korea in August 2004, was "The Asian Family Towards a Culture of Integral Life". In keeping with this Assembly theme, the OTC produced a reflection paper in 2006, entitled "Respect for Life in the Context of Asia", and it was published as an FABC Paper No.120 in 2007.

In a further effort to deepen the discussions of the Daejeon meeting, the OTC also organized a special Theological Colloquium of Asian bishops on the theme "Inter-Faith Marriages in the Pluralistic Context of Asia" in Hong Kong, in May 2006, under the gracious and generous patronage of His Eminence Joseph Cardinal Zen, SDB, the Bishop of Hong Kong. In fact, the particular theme of this Colloquium was the popular choice of the majority of those bishops who partook in the VIII Plenary Assembly (as indicated by them in a survey conducted by the OTC during the sessions of the Assembly). Some 25 bishops took part in the Colloquium, and a very lively discussion based on theological reflections, pastoral experiences, challenges to Christian faith and pastoral approaches with regard to Inter-Faith Marriages, took place. Some of the main in-puts of this Colloquium were later published as an FABC Paper No.118 in 2006. Realizing the crucial importance of the theological and pastoral issues linked with Inter-Faith Marriages, especially in our multi-religious Asian contexts, the participant bishops of this Colloquium made a special request from the OTC to go further deeper into the theological, and especially the pastoral, aspects of the now almost universal phenomenon of Inter-faith marriages. In response, after more than two years of laborious work with study, reflections and deliberations, the OTC has now brought out the present reflection paper. In no way, does the OTC claim this paper to be exhaustive in its theological or pastoral treatment of the issues of Inter-Faith Marriages. Neither does the OTC claim this document to be "the last word" with regard to the theology and pastoral practice in connection with Inter-Faith Marriages. Rather, it is a modest effort to spur all the readers on, in general, and the Asian Churches, in particular, for further study and reflection.

*Vimal Tirimanna, CSsR*

*Executive Secretary*

*FABC Office of Theological Concerns (OTC)*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Vatican II, in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, affirmed that "the well-being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of conjugal and family life"; furthermore, the

Council also expressed satisfaction at witnessing “the various ways in which progress is being made in fostering those partnerships of love and in encouraging reverence for human life”, so that married people and parents may “fulfill their lofty calling” (GS, 47). The Churches in Asia have not been lagging behind in this regard, convinced as they are of the paramount importance of the family in creating a new civilization of love. That is why FABC for its Eighth Plenary Assembly in Dijon, South Korea, in 2004 had taken up for study and reflection the theme : “Towards a culture of Integral Marriage and Family in the Context of Asia”. One of the recommendations of this Assembly was the study of Inter-Faith Marriages in theological and pastoral perspectives. The present paper is a modest and tentative response to the recommendation of the VIII Plenary Assembly of FABC.

In the context of our continent, there has been a growing concern regarding the reality of Inter-Faith marriages, which are becoming an increasingly common phenomenon in our times. **In this paper, by an Inter-Faith marriage, we refer to the marriage of a Catholic with a believer who is not a Christian, that is non-baptised.**

Today Asia is in a situation of rapid change and consequently becoming more inter-cultural, especially as a result of globalization and tourism. More importantly and more particularly, the continent is multireligious. People of different faiths live as neighbors and mix together in work places. In this situation, interfaith marriages have increased. Inter-Faith marriages are so frequent that bishops in Asia, spurred on by a desire for the spiritual well-being of their little flock, have taken it into serious consideration for their ministry to families in the context of mission in a multireligious context of Asia.

The Churches in Asia obviously cannot turn a blind eye to a reality in which several of their faithful find themselves, with its attendant difficulties, anxieties and pains; and as a consequence, standing in need of specific pastoral care, support, assistance and guidance. As an expression of their serious pastoral concern, the bishops in Asia had turned to the Office of Theological Concerns (OTC) of the FABC for assistance. OTC, in response to this request, in its turn, organized the last BITA (*Bishops’ Institute of Theological Animation*), BITA-III in Hong Kong in May 2006, adopting as its theme the issue of Inter-Faith marriages and reflected together with some bishops of member Episcopal conferences on the theological and pastoral perspectives of such marriages. Moreover, during BITA III, at further request of the participant bishops and other members, OTC itself felt the need of entering into a deeper theological and pastoral reflection on the reality of Inter-Faith marriages. This concern explains the additional motive for the study of this topic, and this document which is a result of that study.

The elaboration does not adopt a piecemeal attitude to the issue of Inter-Faith marriage, but rather, an overall approach which involves the theological, pastoral and spiritual perspectives ushered in by Vatican II. From a methodological point of view, the paper first identifies the questions arising from the concrete situation; this constitutes, as it were, a community reading of the signs of the times in the context of the local Churches of Asia. Secondly, it reflects on the Christian doctrine of marriage so that the faithful in Asia, especially those involved in an Inter-Faith marriage, may experience anew the love of God in the midst of their blessings and difficulties. The paper hopes that it may furnish light, wisdom, guidance and strength for a renewed mission of love and service. Finally, the paper articulates certain concrete responses wherein the Holy Spirit is seemingly at work in the Inter-Faith marriage, opening up new avenues for the realization of the Kingdom of God. It will highlight the dimensions of interfaith dialogue entering into interfaith marriages and their positive potential for the wellbeing of

interfaith marriages and families and the mission of the Church in multicultural and multireligious Asia.

## **SECTION I - *Situating the Issue***

### **1. The Phenomenon of Inter-Faith Marriage and the Contextual Factors that Influence it**

#### **1.1. Clarifying the Theme**

The challenges of Inter-Faith and Inter-Cultural marriages are issues that we are increasingly encountering these days, especially in regions where Catholics are in a minority. In the pluralistic societies which characterize much of the continent of Asia, men and women of different racial, religious and ethnic backgrounds encounter one another on a daily basis. In the course of these encounters, it is not uncommon for people of these different backgrounds to fall in love, enter into marriage and establish families. There are no official statistics to show the incidence of Inter-Faith marriages in Asia, but it is a reality that is evident.

There are two forms of marriages in which Catholics do not marry Catholics: one in which a Catholic marries a non-Catholic Christian and another in which a Catholic marries a non-Christian (or a non-baptised person). These two kinds of marriages in the language of Canon Law are known respectively as “Mixed Marriage” (‘Mixed Communion’) and “Disparity of Cult”. Canon 1124 of the Latin Code of Canon Law defines a Mixed Marriage as a union between “two baptized persons, one of whom was baptized in the Catholic Church or received into it after Baptism and has not defected from it by a formal act; the other of whom belongs to a Church or ecclesial community not in full communion with the Catholic Church”. Today this kind of marriage between Catholics and Christians of other churches and ecclesial communities could be more properly called an “ecumenical marriage” in the spirit of ecumenism. In the same sense, a marriage of Disparity of Cult as a union between two persons, one of whom was baptized in the Catholic Church, the other not baptized can be called an “Inter-Faith marriage” in the spirit of interreligious dialogue because in such a marriage two faiths meet. This study treats of the latter form of marriage, namely, “Inter-Faith marriage” (in canonical tradition a marriage of Disparity of Cult).

#### **1.2. Reasons for the Increase in Inter-Faith Marriages**

We acknowledge that Inter-Faith marriages are on the increase, perhaps not because people are less committed to their religious traditions, but because the social realities have undergone a rapid transformation in recent decades, making such marriages, as it were, inevitable. The motives behind this increase in Inter-Faith marriages are varied and can be attributed to several reasons:

- ⇒ The small number of Catholics;
- ⇒ The phenomenon of migration;
- ⇒ The issue of cultural/family alliances, etc.

A recent study on Inter-Faith marriages attributes three reasons for the increase of such marriages:

- ⇒ First, it is argued that people have become more secular than they were in the past, and that, as a consequence, religion, at least in its traditional form, matters little to many.

Even some of those who say they have a religion may not participate in formal religious services except on special occasions. Consequently, if religion has become less important, Inter-Faith marriage no longer tends to be seen as something extraordinary and is widely accepted as part of contemporary society.

- ⇒ Second, for some individuals, the very fact that a partner belongs to a different faith/culture makes him/her especially fascinating and attractive. There are various psychological explanations which try to account for this; but it seems that there can be a particularly romantic aura about such relationships.
- ⇒ Third, perhaps the most important reason for the rise in Inter-Faith marriages is that, as ethnic and religious minorities have become increasingly more integrated into mainstream society, it is to be expected that young people will meet each other, in the course of their work or university studies, perhaps fall in love and marry. “A combination of love and chance” is how one writer explains the phenomenon.

### **1.3. The Attitude of Other Religions to Inter-Faith Marriages:**

Hinduism declares that there are always innumerable paths to God. As a consequence, one's belief or perception of God is an individual matter, best left to the individual to decide. Thus, the Hindus have never hesitated to respect the freedom of other faiths to coexist and flourish; hence, generally speaking, inter-religious marriages are accepted in Hindu society. Furthermore, Hinduism also does not impose any obligation of faith on the non-Hindu partner.

According to Islam, a Muslim male is permitted to marry ‘a person of the Book’ – in other words, a Jew or Christian in practice. The only objection to this would be if the woman he was marrying was not living up to the requirements of her own religion. To safeguard the Muslim faith, a Muslim girl is not allowed to marry outside the religion. However, a non-Muslim male who wishes to marry a Muslim woman could proceed if he first sincerely converted to Islam (cf. [http://www.religioustolerance.org/ifm\\_deno.htm](http://www.religioustolerance.org/ifm_deno.htm)).

For the Bahá'í Faith, all religions are inspired by God; therefore Inter-Faith marriages are allowed.

Buddhism allows Inter-Faith marriages.

### **1.4. Possible Responses of Couples entering into Inter-Faith Marriages.**

When a man and a woman following different religions want to marry and the religious laws of the faith upheld by one of them forbid this, they might:

- ⇒ abandon the relationship and seek a partner of their own faith;
- ⇒ consider the conversion of one spouse;
- ⇒ live as married without any formal ceremony;
- ⇒ have a purely civil marriage ceremony;
- ⇒ if one of the two religions does allow Inter-Faith marriage, celebrate the wedding according to the ritual of the accepting religion;
- ⇒ withdraw from organized religion;
- ⇒ live in what they call “multi-faith and/or inter-faith harmony”.

The rise in Inter-Faith marriages poses new challenges to the Church, and more specifically to pastors who have to deal with these situations directly. The uniqueness of every Inter-Faith marriage makes it difficult for the Universal Church and also the Episcopal Conferences to draw up standard universal guidelines that all can follow. Therefore pastors are often compelled to rely on their wisdom and experience when handling delicate issues related to couples involved in Inter-Faith marriages and their families.

## **SECTION II - A Theological Vision**

### **2. Catholic Theological Perspectives**

#### **3. 1. Inter-Faith Marriages in the Bible**

In spite of the common experience that a marriage with a “stranger” brought all kinds of trouble, there were many Inter-Faith marriages in Israel (cf. Gen 38:2, 41:45, 26:34; Ex 2:21). In Gen 26:34 and 36:2, we are told that Esau married Hittite women. In Num 12:1, we read that Moses married a Cushite woman, and when Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses over this marriage, God supported Moses and struck Miriam with leprosy. In Judges 12:9, a judge, Ibzan of Bethlehem allowed Inter-Faith marriage. In 1 Kings 3:1, such a fact is mentioned without any judgment as such. In 1 Kings 3:1, Solomon married Pharaoh’s daughter, but there is no judgment passed against this marriage; neither is there any indication in the succeeding verses that the Lord was displeased with Solomon (cf. 1 Kings 3:2-15). In fact, in Dan 2:43, such marriages are viewed as a way of sealing alliances, but at the same time as not long-lasting. Ezra 10:18-36 reports of marriages to foreign women of priests, Levites and other Israelites. Rahab who first appears in Josh. 6:25 is praised in Heb. 11:31 and this could be the same Rahab married to Salmon in the genealogy of Jesus as given by Mathew (Mt.1:5). Ruth, a Moabite woman (Ruth 1:4) became the wife of Boaz (Ruth 4:30), the ancestor of David and the Messiah (Mt 1:5). Another prominent Israelite woman, Esther was married to the non-Jewish King Ahasuerus (Esther 2:17-18) and became a means for the protection and salvation of her people.

However, running through the Old Testament, there are also prohibitions against Inter-Faith marriages (cf. Gen 24:3; Ex 34:16; Ezra 9:12; 1 Kings 11:2; Deut 7:3-4; Josh 23:12-13). In general, such marriages were regarded as a source of unfaithfulness to the covenant and of sinfulness (1 Kings 11:8-9; Deut 7:3-4; Josh 23:12-13; Mal 2:10-11; Ezra 9: 1-2; 10:2; 10:10; Neh 10:28-30; 13:26-27)

In this regard Edward Schillebeeckx observes:

“Originally, a “stranger” was somebody from outside one’s own tribe or clan, and this was in itself an indication that no marriage should take place, especially if it is borne in mind that even within Israel a man preferred to find a bride from among his own blood-relatives (Gen 20:12; 24:15; 28:9; 29:12; Num 26:59). Such a wife would always be subject to the protection of the entire clan. If she were given in marriage to a stranger, she would place herself in an unprotected position (Gen 29:19; Num 36:1-12). Social factors, then, undoubtedly played an important part, in this regard.”

But an even more important part in the matter of mixed marriages was played by Israel’s religion. Israel was above all a “holy people”. She was “set apart” from other nations, and consequently also remarkable among them in her way of life. She was “different” from all other peoples, and for this reason mixed marriages were an abomination for Israel. A stranger did not

simply come “from a different nation”. He or she came also “from a different god”. One’s own tribe or nation and one’s “own god” (henotheism) were intimately connected. (Ruth 1:15; 1 Sam 26:19; 1 Kings 18:24; 2 Kings 17:26; Judg 11: 23-4) (Cfr., Edward Schillebeeckx, *Marriage: Human Reality and Saving Mystery*, Fifth Impression, London: Sheed and Ward, 1988, 94-95).

As Schillebeeckx explains, even the Deuteronomic writers began to oppose mixed marriages for religious reasons: “For they [mixed marriages] would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods” (Deut 7:4). In Exodus 34:12-16, such marriages are fully ruled out. The only exception against this commandment not to marry from among pagans is found in Deut.21:10-14. The basic reason for opposing Inter-Faith marriages was the danger which they constituted for the education in faith in Yahweh of Israel’s children (Mal 2:15), who belonged to Yahweh and had to live according to the commandments of the covenant (Deut 7:6-11) (Schillebeeckx, *op.cit.*, 95).

During the exile and its aftermath, as Israelites began to get married to “strangers”, the religious view against such marriages was propounded with increasing emphasis. Both Ezra and Nehemiah worked resolutely to put an end to such marriages (Ezra 2:59-62; 9:1-10, 44; Neh 7:61-64; 8:23-29). The “holy people” of Israel was on no account to “mix itself with the peoples of the lands”, “the strangers” (Ezra 9:2). Accordingly, Inter-Faith marriages were infidelity to Yahweh and to the covenant of Israel’s election. They broke the covenant, and this was why Nehemiah, in his zeal, “cleansed them from everything foreign” (Neh 8:30).

Schillebeeckx’s conclusion is poignant:

*All this may well sound rather like what we would call apartheid, but for Israel, and especially for post-exilic Jewish Israel, the “set apart” secular reality of the people could not be separated from the reality of salvation – her election as the one, chosen people of God..... The basic and essential dogmatic meaning of this Old Testament vision is undoubtedly that faithfulness to God takes precedence, even in marriage, should this ever lead to infidelity in religion; and moreover that in a mixed marriage it is a grave matter of conscience for the parents to bring up the children in this religion. How this duty was to be reconciled with the conscience of the other party in a mixed marriage is a problem which was not posed in Israel; it is a problem which has arisen out of modern man’s sensitivity towards the validity of his fellow-men’s convictions (Schillebeeckx, *op.cit.*, 95-96).*

Although Paul tells the believers in Corinth that the fact of being a non-believer is no reason for a Christian to separate or divorce his/her unbelieving spouse (1 Cor 7:12-15), even in the New Testament, the predominant trend is to discourage Inter-Faith marriages. Thus, in 2 Cor 6:14-16, we read: “Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteous and iniquity? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, ‘I will live in them and move among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people’”. Then, in 1 Pet 3:1-2, we read: “Likewise you wives be submissive to your husbands, so that some, though they do not obey the word, may be won without a word by the behaviour of their wives, when they see your reverent and chaste behaviour”.

## **2. 2. Historical Perspectives of Inter-Faith Marriages**

### **2.2.1. Inter-Faith Marriages in the Early Church**

Christians in the first centuries (at least till the fourth century) surely conformed to the cultural practices of the respective country they were in, even with regard to marriage. There was not any official Church legislation concerning marriage. The Letter to Diognetus which was written in the second century says: “Christians do not differ from other men and women in country or language or customs....They marry like everyone else”.

Early Christianity was a movement of converts. Among them, surely there were some who had non-converted spouses or those who got married after their conversion, to non-converts. In other words, there were in those communities what we may call today, ‘Inter-Faith marriages’, i.e., marriages that had taken place between a convert to Christianity and a non-convert. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians is a good example of the existence of such a situation [1Cor 7:12-15]. In no known document that has come down to us, nor in any historical element extant in the tradition do we find that it was ever required of such converts who were in a marital union with a non-convert to get rid of the marital union merely because the convert [now full of grace thanks to baptism] was in bodily union with the non-convert [who did not have the baptismal grace]. On the contrary, in the above mentioned text of Paul, Paul says that the non-convert is sanctified by the convert.

Schillebeeckx believes that the strongest biblical evidence for sacramental marriage is to be found in 1 Cor 7: 15: This is why... the strongest biblical evidence for the sacramental aspect of marriage is to be found in 1 Cor 7:15 – the self-dissolution of a marriage with an unbaptized person when this person refuses to live with the believing partner (Schillebeeckx, op.cit., 159).

The marriage of the unbaptized person is in no way reduced in status by this view – on the contrary, Paul forbade separation if the unbaptized partner wished to continue the marriage with the Christian partner. This view simply indicates that marriage has a special character for a baptized person. It is quite different from the situation in which a marriage “dissolves itself” on moral and religious grounds because of persistence in adultery; for in that case not only is violence done to the moral obligation, but the objective bond of marriage remains, in this biblical vision, unimpaired. This can only mean that baptism is the real and concrete bond in Christian marriage – baptism continuing to have an effect in the establishment of the marriage, and, resulting from this, the moral obligation to be “one flesh”. The real bond, exempt from human intervention, is present in marriage by virtue of Christian baptism. This real bond is still present in the marriage of an unbaptized person, or in marriage with an unbaptized person, insofar as the mystery of Christ is not denied. Such a marriage can therefore be called an implicitly Christian marriage – an implicit reality which automatically disappears if there is an explicit denial of the mystery of Christ. And so if the unbaptized partner wishes to continue to live with the Christian husband or wife, this marriage remains – according to Paul – undissolved.

If, on the other hand, the unbaptized partner is explicitly confronted with the historical reality of Christianity – the husband or wife who has been converted to Christianity – and yet refuses to continue in this living communion with him/her, it is evident that she/he is denying the implicit relationship to Christ of the marriage, and

consequently also denying the real and indissoluble bond which this relationship confers upon the marriage.

Schillebeeckx goes on to explain further his views when he says:

*The statement of Jesus concerning the indissolubility of marriage, made on a basis of the Old Testament view of creation that marriage was “one flesh”- a single, living communion – is shown by I Cor 7:12-16 in its full saving significance. There is an intimate connection between this indissolubility and baptism; as a result of this close interconnection the marriage of unbaptized persons has – in a sense – a lesser value (though it is in no way inferior), and lacks the special distinct significance which characterizes the marriage of baptized partners. In its orientation towards salvation, what is usually known as “natural” marriage undoubtedly has a similar significance, but in this case an implicit one. However, if this orientation towards salvation is denied by the unbaptized partner, the marriage may be dissolved in favour of the “peace” into which salvation has incorporated the baptized partner. From this it is once again apparent that salvation in Christ, the communion with Christ, transcends married life.*

When one examines Paul’s response in 1 Cor 7:12-15, it is apparent that he attributed a certain stability to these Inter-Faith [‘Christian and non-Christian’] marriages because of that blessing which afforded such unions through the Christian spouse. In fact, Paul envisioned the Christian party as one confronted with a definite Christian apostolate: to consecrate in holiness the infidel spouse and their children through the presence and power of faith.

In resolving the particular problem in Corinth, Paul exhibited a genuine concern for the well-being of the Christian partner and the stability of the correlative virtues of faith and peace. Concern for the person was concern for the faith and ‘if one is faithful to God’s call, one should not be forced to suffer the loss of the very peace that God’s call promises’. Paul was caught in a certain dichotomy: the words of Christ forbid divorce but the call of Christ begets peace. In the resolution of alternatives, the Apostle opted for the value of Christian peace, the choice of concrete situation over commandment.

It is interesting to note here that when advising those in Inter-Faith marriages, Paul does not speak about any ‘validity’ or ‘sacramentality’ of their marriages. Of course, we need to keep in mind that in the early Church there was no ‘canonical form’ as such [as we would understand it in today’s Canon Law!] to decide whether a marriage was ‘valid’ or ‘invalid’ or whether it was sacramental or not! Canonical form as necessary for validity of marriage even between two baptised persons (sacramental marriage ) was promulgated effectively, much later [after the Council of Trent].

An Instruction of the Holy Office, given on December 12, 1888, contains the following historical information with regard to what we may call today, “Inter-Faith marriages”:

The early Councils forbade Catholics to marry both heretics and infidels, unless they embraced the orthodox faith. For instance, the Council of Laodicea (A.D. 343-381) decreed: “It behooveth not to marry heretics, or to give sons and daughters to them; let them be accepted only if they promise to become Christians”. In like manner the Council of Agatho (A.D. 506) declared: “It is not befitting to join marriage with heretics, or to give sons and daughters to them; let them be accepted, if they promise to become Christians and Catholics”. And the Council of Chalcedon (A.D.451) says: “Let no

marriage be contracted with a heretic, a pagan or a Jew unless the person who is joined to an orthodox believer promises that he will be converted to the orthodox faith”.

While the early Church recognized some sacredness of marriage, it did not give adequate expression to this basic posture. The earliest Christians, accustomed to marriage as a secular reality, attributed the sacredness of marriage to its very essence. St. Paul for instance, as we have seen above, rather than offering a clear definition of marriage as a sacrament, indicates its openness to the realm of salvation. In the early centuries Christian marriage was never withdrawn from its basic context as a secular event. Nevertheless certain questions peculiar to Christians accompanied a “marriage in the Lord”. The works of the great Fathers of the Church, especially those of St. Augustine, as well as those of other early Christian writers, indicate that the primary direction of scholarship was toward meaning of the sacredness of marriage. In time (by the 11th century) the great Christian thinkers began to speculate on when exactly a marriage came into being, relating this to when and in what the sacramentality consisted.

### **2.2.2. Inter-Faith Marriages in the Medieval Era**

Although according to the prevailing opinion of this period, Inter-Faith marriages were not regarded as ‘sacramental’ in the proper Catholic sense of the word, yet every marriage of its very nature was presumed to prefigure in a remote manner the union of the Son of God with human nature. Hence, we find in two well known papal decretals the term sacramentum applied even to unions between the so-called ‘pagans’. Thus, Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) wrote in 1201: “the sacred sign (sacramentum) of marriage exists both among the faithful and infidels”. His successor, Pope Honorius (1216-1227) also employed precisely similar words when he wrote: “the sacramentum of marriage exists not only among the Latins and the Greeks, but also both among the faithful and infidels”. In other words, though Inter-Faith marriages were not regarded as the ideal sacramental marriages, yet that there was ‘something holy’ in such marriages was presumed by the use of the term sacramentum.

It is important to note here that the Catholic tradition explicitly recognized a marriage between two baptized persons to be one of the seven sacraments only in the 12th – 13th centuries. However, along with many theologians of his time, Thomas Aquinas held that the bond of Christian marriage (between two baptized persons) is, in virtue of its sacramental character, far stronger than that of a marriage contracted between unbaptized persons. The terminology he used was “believers” and “unbelievers”. Commenting on 1 Cor 7:12-15, Thomas could write:

The marriage of unbelievers is imperfect, but the marriage of believers is perfect, and hence stronger. Always the stronger bond dissolves the weaker one if there is a clash between them. Therefore, marriage which is contracted afterward in the faith of Christ dissolves the marriage that was contracted earlier in unbelief. Therefore, marriage of unbelievers is not strong and it is not a fully confirmed/ratified bond. But it becomes such through the faith in Christ.

With Aquinas, the long and problematic development of the sacramentality of marriage reached its final resolution. There were dissenting voices concerning the efficient cause of marriage, the nature of its sacramentality, whether or not it conferred grace...etc. Yet from the second half of the thirteenth century, the position that marriage

was truly a sacrament and that it conferred grace was generally considered to be certain in the theological arena.

That marriage is truly and properly one of the seven sacraments of the New Law instituted by Christ the Lord, is Catholic doctrine, was officially defined in the Council of Trent in the 16th century. However, the sacramentality of marriage had already been solemnly affirmed earlier in the Council of Florence in 1439 in the bull of union of the Armenians, which fixed the number of the sacraments as seven. The ecclesial position that has come down to us with regard to marriage is based on the argument that since the ministers of the sacrament of marriage are the spouses themselves, in the case of “Disparity of Cult”, there is no sacrament, because no unbaptized person can be its minister.

### **2.2.3. Inter-Faith Marriages in the Post-Tridentine Era**

That marriages between baptized persons have to be sacramental for their validity, and that their validity is determined by the canonical form, are of relatively recent origin. It was after the Council of Trent that the Church introduced what we may call today, ‘the canonical form’ to ascertain the validity of a Christian marriage. The immediate historical reason for such an introduction was to check the many clandestine marriages that were taking place then in Christian Europe. In fact, the roots of the juridical concept of ‘canonical form’ do not go back to beyond the 17th century, i.e. to the controversies between the Church and the State (in Europe) to have jurisdiction over marriage. Under the influence of Gallicanism in France and Josephinism and Febronianism in Austria (the beginning in the late 17th century), the Church’s competency in matters of marriage was slowly eroding. Due to the excessive nationalism in society, the process of secularization was in progress. There emerged controversies between the Church’s legislation and that of the State over marriage. It was as a response to these controversies, that the Church (especially the Papal magisterium) came up with the doctrine that the sacrament of marriage and the marital contract between two baptized persons are inseparable. Eventually, this doctrine did shape the evolution of ‘canonical form’ within the Church. Since, according to this doctrine, any marriage that did not have the canonical form came to be perceived as invalid, what we call today ‘Inter-Faith marriages’ automatically came to be perceived as invalid within the Catholic canonical tradition.

The Instruction of the Holy Office given on December 12th 1888 (already cited above in part 3.2.1), having given the succinct historical details of the teachings of the early Councils on ‘Inter-Faith marriages’, continues to say how such marriages were not allowed in the tradition of the Church:

From all this.....it is quite evident that mixed marriages are absolutely forbidden, and therefore our Holy Mother the Church has always rightly detested them and has tried to prevent the faithful from contracting them (Gasparri, *Fontes Codicis Juris Canonici*, IV, 442).

We note here that use of the phrase “Mixed Marriage” refers to both marriages between Catholics and non-Catholic Christians and marriage between Catholic and non-baptised person of another faith. According to Haar, this has been a constant teaching of the official Catholic magisterium:

These same laws continued in force during the Middle Ages, although it was not necessary to draw attention to them frequently, one reason being that heretics were comparatively few, and another reason being that both the canon and the civil laws prevented too intimate a friendship with such persons. When however, in the sixteenth century, Protestantism had spread over Europe, and intercourse between Catholics and Protestants became frequent, the synods and particular councils of those countries, and much more the Roman Pontiffs, deemed it their duty repeatedly to forbid and to condemn mixed marriages in the most emphatic and weighty terms (Francis Ter Haar, *Mixed Marriages and their Remedies*, New York, 1933, 4).

Thus, up until the 20th century, we find a long line of Popes – Urban VIII, Clement XI, Benedict XIV, Clement XIII, Pius VI, Pius VII, Gregory XVI, Pius IX, Leo XIII and Pius XI – in their apostolic letters and exhortations given on various occasions, appealing to their flocks and their pastors, to avoid the danger of a “Mixed Marriage”. Finally, we may quote the words of Leo XIII in his encyclical *Arcanum* (1880):

Care must be taken that they do not easily contract marriage with those who are not Catholics, for when minds disagree about religious observances; it is scarcely possible to hope for agreement in other things. And the reason why persons should turn with dread from such unions is chiefly because they give occasion to a forbidden association and communion in religious matters, endanger faith of the Catholic party, are a hindrance to the proper education of the children, and very often lead to the erroneous belief that one religion is as good as another, by confounding truth with falsehood (Gasparri, *Fontes*, III, 166).

However, in the same encyclical, Leo XIII also re-affirms with his two early predecessors, Innocent III and Honorius III that a sacramentum exists in marriages of both the faithful and the infidels. What these Popes mean by sacramentum is “something holy”, and certainly not what we call today “a sacrament” in its proper specific Catholic sense. The following is what Leo XIII says:

Marriage has God for its Author, and was from the very beginning a kind of foreshadowing of the Incarnation of His Son: and therefore there abides in it something holy and religious: not extraneous but innate: not derived from men but implanted by nature. Innocent III, therefore, and Honorius III, our predecessors, affirmed not falsely or rashly that the sacramentum of marriage exists both among the faithful and infidels.

However, we need to keep in mind that in any social, ethnic or religious group, there is the inherent human tendency to close in especially when one confronts another of another group; this is most obvious in that most intimate of all human institutions, marriage. As such, we can well understand how a religious group of any given time in history, normally prefers that their members marry a person of the same group, rather than someone from outside the group. We already saw this with regard to Judaism in the Old Testament. The Catholic community was no exception. As we have already seen, and shall see further in what follows, the main reason for such prohibitions against marriages outside the Catholic community seems to be the danger which such marriages pose to the Catholic partner, and also to the religious faith of the would-be children.

#### **2.2.4. Inter-Faith Marriages in the Code of Canon Law**

In Canon 1060 of the 1917 Code of Canon Law, we read:

The Church most severely forbids everywhere marriages between two baptized persons, one of whom is a Catholic and the other a member of a heretical or schismatical sect; and if there is danger of perversion of the Catholic party and of the offspring, such a union is also forbidden by the divine law itself.

**In the same Code, Canon 1061 reads:**

1. The Church does not dispense from the impediment of mixed religion unless:  
There are just and grave reasons thereof;
  - A) The non-Catholic party shall have given a guarantee to remove all danger of perversion from the Catholic party, and both parties shall have given guarantees to baptize and educate all the children in the Catholic faith alone;
  - B) There exists moral certainty that the guarantees will be fulfilled.
  
2. The guarantees as required are to be given in writing.

Thus, the obvious danger to the Catholic faith of the Catholic spouse as well as that of the children to be born was the main reason for forbidding Inter-Faith marriages. Almost all the Popes who condemned the Inter-Faith marriages during this period gave more or less the same reasons, as illustrated by the quotation given above from Pope Leo XIII's *Arcanum*. That this was precisely the reasoning during the period prior to the Vatican –II can be seen by reading the following quotation from Pope Pius XI in his encyclical letter *Casti Connubii* (1930): Here I stopped.

This religious character of marriage, its sublime signification of grace and the union between Christ and the Church, evidently requires that those about to marry should show a holy reverence towards it and zealously endeavour to make their marriage approach as nearly as possible to the archetype of Christ and the Church. They, therefore, who rashly and heedlessly contract mixed marriages, from which the maternal love and providence of the Church dissuades her children for very sound reasons, fail conspicuously in this respect, sometimes with danger to their eternal salvation....If the Church occasionally on account of circumstances does not refuse to grant a dispensation from these strict laws....it is unlikely that the Catholic party will not suffer some detriment from such a marriage. Whence it comes about not infrequently, as experience shows, that deplorable defections from religion occur among the offspring, or at least, a headlong descent into that religious indifference, which is closely allied to impiety. Then this is also to be considered, that in these mixed marriages it becomes much more difficult to imitate by a lively conformity of spirit the mystery of which we have spoken, namely, that close union between Christ and His Church.

The 1983 Code of Canon Law lists inter-faith marriages under the sub-title "individual diriment impediments" and Canon 1086 reads: "A marriage is invalid when one of the two persons was baptized in the Catholic Church or received into it and has not by a formal act defected from it, and the other was not baptized". The Code enumerates specific conditions in Canons 1125 which need to be fulfilled if this diriment impediment is to be dispensed from. Accordingly, the Catholic party is to declare that he or she is prepared to remove dangers of defecting from the faith, and is to make a sincere promise "to do all in his or her power in order that all the children be baptized and brought up in

the Catholic Church”. Thus, again we notice that what the Church’s juridical tradition is really concerned about is the faith of the Catholic party and that of the would-be children. Ladislav Örsy, one of the most competent contemporary canon lawyers, commenting on canon 1086/1 of the 1983 Code says:

*This impediment is known traditionally as “Disparity of Cult”. If dispensation is granted, canon law handles the resulting marriage as a natural, that is, non-sacramental union, with all the consequences that such a status entails. Since it does not have the “particular firmness” that the sacrament brings, it can be dissolved through the grant of the privilege of faith (Ladislav Örsy, Marriage in Canon Law: Texts and Comments, Reflections and Questions, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1988, 112-113).*

Having commented thus, Örsy goes on to pose “a question for investigation”:

This attitude of the law is a pragmatic one; it should not be taken as settling a more subtle theological issue, whether or not the marriage covenant can play the role of sacramental sign for the Christian party. The traditional approach of the law has been and remains the denial of any such possibility. The justification of this negative response is usually summed up in the principle *sacramenta non possunt claudicare*, “sacraments cannot limp”, meaning that there must be evenness in the reception of the sacrament; if one party cannot receive it, the other cannot have it either. The correctness of this principle, however, is far from having been critically established; the issue requires more study. The point of departure of such inquiry may well be the doctrine of Paul in 1 Cor. 7:14: “For the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband. Otherwise, your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy”.

Clearly for Paul a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever is radically different from a marriage between two unbelievers. Canon law has not taken any notice of this forceful passage; nor have systematic theologians paid much attention to it. Paul leaves no doubt that there is a new sanctifying power in a union where one of the spouses is “holy”. This sanctifying power is very close to what we call today the “effect” of a sacrament. On this issue, Örsy, however, is quick to caution that even if the exchange of promises could be interpreted as a sign that signifies and confers grace to the Christian party, such a marriage itself could never be as fully sacramental as marriages between Christians are.

### **2.2.5. Inter-Faith Marriages in the Recent Magisterial Teachings**

Under this heading, we limit ourselves only to consider very briefly the two of the most important magisterial documents in recent times with regard to marriage, namely, *Familiaris Consortio* of Pope John Paul II (1981) and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992). In the former document, the Pope has the following to say about what we call in this paper, “Inter-Faith marriages”:

Today in many parts of the world marriages between Catholics and non-baptized persons are growing in numbers. In many such marriages the non-baptized partner professes another religion, and his beliefs are to be treated with respect, in accordance with the principles set out in the Second Vatican Council’s Declaration *Nostra Aetate* on relations of the Church to non-Christian religions.....In these marriages there is a need for Episcopal Conferences and for individual Bishops to ensure that there are proper

pastoral safeguards for the faith of the Catholic partner and for the free exercise of his faith, above all in regard to his duty to do all in his power to ensure the Catholic baptism and education of the children of the marriage. Likewise, the Catholic must be assisted in every possible way to offer within his family a genuine witness to the Catholic faith and to Catholic life (*Familiaris Consortio* 78).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says:

In many countries the situation of a mixed marriage (marriage between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic) often arises. It requires particular attention on the part of couples and their pastors. A case of marriage with disparity of cult (between a Catholic and a non-baptized person) requires even greater circumspection (CCC, 1633).

Furthermore, the same Catechism adds:

In marriages with disparity of cult the Catholic spouse has a particular task: 'For the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband'. It is a great joy for the Christian spouse and for the Church if this 'consecration' should lead to the free conversion of the other spouse to the Christian faith. Sincere married love, the humble and patient practice of the family virtues, and perseverance in prayer can prepare the non-believing spouse to accept the grace of conversion (CCC, 1636).

So, again, we notice even in these recent magisterial teachings that from the Church's point of view, what really is at stake in 'Inter-Faith marriages' is the faith of the Catholic party and that of the would-be-children of such a marriage.

### **3. Christian Marriage and Sacramentality**

The Catholic faith affirms that marriage is one of the seven sacraments by which Christ, through the mediation of the Church, continues his work of redemption. Every marriage is, in some sense, a sacrament or *samskara*, in the Hindu sense of being a sacred rite and sacred reality by which two partners are bound together by a sacred bond and are called to beget and form new children of God. But marriage between two baptized Christians (man and woman) is a sacrament in a special sense. Theology of the sacramentality of Christian marriage affirms that marriage is a covenant of mutual irrevocable consent and conjugal love. It is a covenantal communion of love and it is sacramental. That it is a sacramental communion means that it embodies and participates in Christ's own love union with the Church His spouse (as alluded to in Ephes. 5:25). We can affirm rightly that Christian marriage is a sacramental communion in so far as it is an effective prolongation of the embodiment and participation in the love union of Christ with the Church.

The theological foundation for the sacramentality of marriage is already prefigured in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament. That prophets Hosea, Jeremiah, Isaiah and Ezekiel speak of Yahweh's covenantal relationship in the symbolism of marriage and that His faithfulness to Israel is that of a zealous husband despite the unfaithfulness of Israel is a distant prefiguration of the sacramentality of Christian marriage in the New Testament.

In the New Testament, it comes to a fuller expression, especially in St Paul. The passage in the letter of Paul to Ephesians 5: 21-33 provides the sacramental underpinnings for the sacramentality of marriage. Here we must properly understand what Paul says to Christian couples in the above-mentioned text. While speaking of the mutuality of respect between husband and wife as to Christ, Paul goes on to say in 5: 25 "As for you, husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her". The text speaks of the profound

love of Christ for the Church that went to the extent of giving His life for her. Paul links this love of Christ to the love of husbands for their wives. Paul is not just telling the husbands that the sacrificial love of Christ for the Church is a powerful example for them to follow in their love for their wives, but they should do so because their love participates in the love of Christ for the Church. That Paul, in a patriarchal setting of society, tells husbands to love their wives as Christ loved is truly revolutionary. Husbands are called to model their love for their wives on the self-sacrificing love of Christ which would call them even to die for them in their love. This exhortation, theologically speaking, applies to wives too. Wives also must love their husbands as Christ loved the Church. Both husband and wife as disciples of Christ and as members of the Church, the Body of Christ, participate in the love of Christ. It is this love that enters their mutual conjugal love and makes it a sacrament of Christ's love. This sacramental reality of marriage becomes a source of grace from within for sanctification and transformation of their married life and family. The core meaning of the sacramentality of Christian marriage is that mutual self-giving conjugal love of married Christians is a tangible embodiment of Christ's own love union. Therefore we can say that marital communion of the Christian spouses is the sacrament of Christ's love union with the Church. "Husband and wife are a sacrament of Christ's love as well as sacrament of Christ's love of the Church. Christ's love becomes an inner presence in their love, relationships and family life as well as the source of their spiritual sustenance and growth"( Eighth FABC Plenary Assembly Final Document "The Asian Family Towards a Culture of Integral Life", FABC Papers, no.111, 37).

It is clear from the above explanation that the sacramentality of Christian marriage is not something extrinsic, but it is intrinsic to the human reality of marriage transformed by baptismal faith and raised to participation in and embodiment of Christ's own self-sacrificing love for the Church and for the redemption of humankind. The sacramentality of marriage is seen not only in its celebration but it embraces the totality of married life and family and continues to transform it through the experience of lived faith of the couple on whom the Lord bestows special gifts of healing, grace and charity. The sacrament is both an elevation and a source of sanctification.

As Vatican II puts it:

*Authentic married love is caught up into divine love and is governed and enriched by Christ's redeeming power and the saving power of the Church...For this reason, Christian spouses have a special sacrament by which they are fortified and receive a kind of consecration in the duties and dignity of their state. By virtue of this sacrament, as spouses fulfill their conjugal and family obligations, they are penetrated by the Spirit of God. This Spirit suffuses their whole lives with faith, hope and charity (Gaudium et Spes, 48).*

In the Catholic understanding, the sacrament begins and endures in the irrevocable personal human consent itself of the two Christian spouses. Their mutual human consent, raised to the dignity of a sacrament, becomes an efficacious sign of divine grace. This reveals the profound transformation of human values brought about by the Christ event. The marital union is not something merely profane that is sanctified by an extrinsic blessing, but is the very self-giving of the partners that is inwardly transformed by the saving grace of Christ.

In the Catholic tradition, in so far as the Christian marriage is a sacrament because of baptismal faith, the partners themselves are the ministers of the sacrament. It means that each of them is an instrument of grace and salvation with regard to the other. In this, they exercise the Common Priesthood of the Faithful they have received in Baptism. The priest or deacon is the authorized witness who by his blessings brings out the inner sanctity of marriage and its

relationship to the Christian mystery. The assistance of the priest or deacon is required not to make marriage holy, but because it is holy. In extraordinary cases, in danger of death or when an authorized priest or deacon is foreseen to be not available for a month, a Christian marriage is valid and sacramental if contracted before two witnesses only (Canon 1116). Traditionally, especially in canon law, marriage was spoken of as a contract raised to the dignity of sacrament. In the Second Vatican Council, marriage is spoken of as a covenant of irrevocable personal consent. The marital sacrament is a covenantal reality of love in the heart of the Church. Hence we can say that Christian marriage is destined to form new cells of Christ's Mystical Body.

According to Vatican II:

From the wedlock of Christians there comes the family in which new citizens of human society are born. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, received in Baptism, these are made children of God, thus perpetuating the people of God through the centuries. The family is, so to speak, the domestic Church (Cfr., *Lumen Gentium*, 11). Just as in the Local Church and its active self-realization the whole Church is realized, so also, we can say that the Church is present in a Christian marriage. It is the smallest community of the redeemed whose unity is built on the same foundation as that on which the Church is founded. It is the smallest of Local Churches, but a true one, the Church in miniature, called the domestic Church. A Christian family is the first realization of the Church, the most incarnate form of her charity. Through each of the partners, Christ exercises His spiritual action over the other. Each one, as recipient of the sacrament represents the waiting and preparation of the Church for the final fulfillment.

### **3.1. Marriage and the Eucharist**

Here we see some specific aspects of sacramental marriage and the deeper roots of the sacramental spirituality of Christian marriage. *The Eucharist is the ultimate source of marital love*. In Scripture, both the union effected by the Eucharist and the marriage union are described primarily in terms of the covenant. Marriage is called a covenant (or berith, in Hebrew) to signify the total devotion of husband and wife to each other (cf. Mal 2:14). Marriage is concerned with a particular and unique modality of Christian love which is derived above all from the Eucharist. In both the sacraments, the faithful commit themselves to love one another as Christ has loved us.

Hence it is most fitting that the marriage rite should be performed within the Mass, and the couple share the same chalice of the New Covenant. In the Nuptial Mass, they offer themselves together in Christ to God the Father, fully realizing that the commandment of the New Covenant – love one another – from then on will take a new meaning for them. Each Mass should be a renewal of their commitment to live the commandment of love. While in the marital act they reinforce their total love, in the Eucharist they receive the ultimate source of their charity. Both call for a continual self-giving in all the details of married life.

### **3.2. Marriage and the Trinity**

The union of husband and wife issuing in procreation finds its ultimate model in the inner life of the triune God where the relation of Father and Son issues forth in the Holy Spirit. By the sending of the Spirit from the Father, the glorified Christ establishes the Church, the Spirit-filled community of love. The Church is the visible expression of the inner life of the Trinity. Christian marriage, being the prolongation of the union of Christ and Church, is also a manifestation of

and participation in the intra-Trinitarian life of God. This manifestation and participation of Christian marriage in the Trinitarian life of God is also sacramental.

We spoke of the intimate link between the Eucharist and the sacrament of marriage as a source of spirituality and Trinitarian faith providing both source and model nourishing married life Christians. However we must acknowledge that the sacramentality of marriage is itself the first source of spirituality for the married life of the Christian couple and family. Sacramentality of Christian marriage means that the mutual conjugal love of the partners sacramentalises and participates in Christ's own love-union with the Church. That reveals that Christ's love indwells in the conjugal love and becomes an inner source of grace for sanctification of the couple and their married love. It means that God in Christ comes to each partner through the other. Similarly, each returns to God in Christ also through the other. In this way, each becomes a channel of grace to the other in every detail of daily life.

Married people must realize the dignity of their calling. By their sacramental consecration, Christ Himself gives them a part in His holy and sanctifying love for the Church. Through it, they are led to an ever-increasing participation in the divine life through Christ in the Holy Spirit.

### **3.3. Marriage and Grace**

Marriage is a path to Christian perfection. Those who administer the sacrament to each other are called to care for each other's spiritual welfare. God comes to each partner and each returns to God through the other so that each becomes a means of grace to the other in every detail of daily life. Each receives the other from Christ 'as a grace'. Each becomes a grace to the other in all his or her characteristics and activities. This is possible because the couple in and through their conjugal love share in, and therefore, sacramentalise Christ's own self-sacrificing love for the Church and for all humankind.

Conjugal love is essentially self-giving, embracing the whole of life. Love needs to undergo constant purification. Each must accept the partner as he or she is, with gratitude and patience, trying to bring out all the potentialities in the other. Thus with the aid of divine grace, married love becomes:

1. Total, having as its model and measure the love of Christ for the Church;
2. Personal, able to appreciate the unique natural and supernatural value of the partner;
3. Sanctifying, which tends to perfect the spouse, helping him or her to realize perfectly his or her Christian vocation;
4. Fruitful, opening itself to the children and to others.

### **3.4. Marriage and Redemption**

The bodily gift of man and wife is the deepest realization of their mutual surrender to each other. According to Vatican II:

This love is uniquely expressed and perfected through the marital act. The actions within marriage by which the couple are united immediately and chastely are noble and worthy ones. Expressed in a manner which is truly human, these actions signify and promote that self-giving by which the spouses enrich each other with a joyful and thankful will (*Gaudium et Spes*, 49).

The grace of matrimony, like that of other sacraments, as referred to above, has a redemptive aspect. The beauty of conjugal love and fidelity shows itself in fallen humanity only

at the cost of sacrifice. Hence matrimony in its sacramentality is an invitation to enter more deeply into the mystery of the Cross. The ups and downs of common life are drawn into the saving mystery of Christ's sacrificial love. The difficulties of life, the daily tensions and problems, even all the bitter realities of sinful humanity are transformed by the light and strength of Christ's sacrifice.

The life of the couple is to be nourished by the common reception of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation. It is also nourished and strengthened by receiving the Word of God through Bible reading and listening to the Word of God proclaimed in the community and worship.

### **3.5. Marriage and Indissolubility/ Sacramentality**

We need to affirm that the two properties of marriage, namely unity (monogamous conjugal union between a man and a woman) and indissolubility (of marital bond of marriage between two baptized Christians ratified and humanly consummated) belong to the sacramentality of Christian marriage. The sacramental meaning of marriage supposes these two properties. A sacramental marriage validly celebrated and humanly consummated is absolutely indissoluble because the sacramental union between two baptized persons is a vital sharing in the indissoluble union of Christ and the Church.

The Catholic Church from early times has firmly upheld the absolute indissolubility of sacramental marriage after its consummation. Of late many theologians have suggested a certain mitigation of the discipline when an innocent spouse has been unjustly abandoned or even when a person has built up another and a fairly successful union after a previous marital failure. Pope John Paul II in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*, on the one hand, acknowledges the different degrees of culpability of those 'married' outside the Church and calls for pastoral sensitivity to such couples. On the other hand, he has reaffirmed the traditional stand of the Church, i.e., the Church does not recognize a "second" marriage, between two baptized persons. At the same time, the Pope insists that those who have attempted a "second" marriage outside the Church are to be treated with compassion and understanding but cannot be admitted to the sacraments, as such (*Familiaris Consortio*, 84).

However, in its canonical tradition, the Church does dissolve a marriage bond in the following two cases:

1. A sacramental marriage even though validly celebrated but not humanly consummated, can be dissolved when there is good, valid reasons for doing so.
2. A non-sacramental bond is dissolved 'in favour of the faith' either by general provisions or by a special act of the Pope. Among general provisions the most important is the so-called "Pauline Privilege" based on 1 Cor. 7:15. If two unbaptized persons had married and now, one is converted while the other refuses to cohabit peacefully with the convert, then, this latter party has the right to enter into a new marriage after the 'departure' is officially verified by 'interpellation' (special inquiry).

The reason for the stand of the Church that the bond of a sacramental marriage ratified and humanly consummated is absolutely indissoluble is that the sacramental union between two baptized is a vital sharing in the indissoluble union of Christ and the Church; and the sacramental signification is completed by the first marital act performed in a human way. It means the

presence of some measure of love in the marital act. Marital act is an expression of mutual self-giving love with openness to life.

As mentioned above, the basis for the practice of the “Pauline Privilege” is 1 Cor 7: 12-15. In relation to interfaith marriage, the message and stand of St Paul on marriage between a baptized Christian and a non-Christian partner in this text is relevant. This is what he says in 1 Cor 7: 12-16: “To others I say- from me and from the Lord- if a brother has a wife who is not a believer but she agrees to live him, let him not divorce her. In the same manner, if a woman has a husband who is not a believer but he agrees to live with her, let her not divorce him. Because the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband who believes. Otherwise, your children also would be unclean; they are consecrated to God”.

In this text Paul points to the impact of the faith of the Christian partner on the unbelieving partner; and hence the effect of the grace of his/her faith for the sanctification of the non-Christian partner. Though the Catholic doctrine states that marriage between a baptized person and a non-baptized person is not a sacrament, it is not devoid of grace. That the non-believing partner is sanctified through the believing partner means that grace is operative in the former through the faith of the latter. Hence we can say that the ‘grace of the sacramental marriage’ is in some way reflected in the marriage between a baptized and a non-baptized. In such a marriage, though the specific sacramentality of Christian marriage is absent, one could speak of ‘broader sacramentality’ that is present in every marriage insofar as it is a covenant of love between man and woman participating in God’s love. All authentic human love or conjugal love in some measure embodies and makes visible God’s love because God is the ultimate source of all love. This understanding has implications for pastoral care of those in interfaith marriages.

#### **4. Contemporary Theology of Inter-Faith Marriages**

Catholic theology, basically a “Wayfaring Theology”, or as St. Thomas Aquinas styles it: “Theologia in statu viae”, is the ongoing articulation of the faith of the Christian disciple, who seeks understanding within the journeying Christian community. As such, it involves constantly confronting the Word of God which addresses human beings; and likewise, constantly confronting the words of human beings about God, attempting to understand, follows and realizes the implications of the self-communication of God. This process accompanies Catholic believers during their pilgrimage here on earth, helping them discern the significance of God’s presence in their midst. By that very token, it also has a dialogical dimension, since it involves a continuous interaction which the committed Catholic believer has with God on the one hand, and with human beings and the world, on the other.

This “wayfaring” dimension is a trait significantly present in Asian theology. An important factor, which accounts to a certain extent for this presence, is the socio-religious context of Asia, home to the major religions of the world, which, on their part, present themselves as soteriological in character, offering different interpretations of the Absolute, of the human person and the means of liberation [Cfr., Cardinal Paul Shan Kuo-hsi SJ, Bishop of Kaohsiung -Taiwan, *Relatio ante disceptationem* during the Synod for Asia, in *L’Osservatore Romano*, n. 17 (29 April 1998), 7]. The Church in Asia has had few precedents to guide her in the task of the encounter with religions, since the historical realization of the Christian mission in Asia, though valid in itself, has, in the past, been also subject to human weaknesses and mistaken

priorities, incomplete theological and methodological assumptions. Narrowing the focus still further, within Asian theology itself, this wayfaring characteristic acquires a still greater prominence when one deals with the issue of Inter-Faith marriages. There has been awareness within the Christian community of the problems which could arise when Catholics marry outside the Church. As a consequence, such marriages were frowned upon, considered a threat to the faith of the Catholic party, a stance considerably reinforced by the overly negative attitude generally adopted by the Church vis-à-vis other religions during the pre-Conciliar era. A strict canonical legislation against such marriages was articulated in canon 60 of the 1917 Code of Canon Law: they were “most severely forbidden”, and dispensations from the incurred impediment were regarded as wholly exceptional.

Already prior to the 1917 Code of Canon Law, the impediment of disparity of cult was applied to the marriages of all the baptized, regardless of the fact whether they were Catholic or not. In the 1917 Code, in canon 1071 § 1, however, the invalidating force of this impediment was restricted to marriages involving only the party baptized in the Catholic Church (cf. J. P. Beal, J. A. Coriden, T. J. Green, eds., *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, New York 1983, 1341ff.).

Although not much documented Christian reflection directly concerned with Inter-Faith marriages, is available, in recent decades, new theological insights have emerged, opening up fresh avenues for a renewed understanding of this topic. The Second Vatican Council has proved to be a veritable watershed in this regard; as it indicated several paths to guide ongoing theological reflection along what seemed, till recently, uncharted ways. With regard to the issue under consideration, one can mention two such insights, viz., a renewed understanding of God’s universal salvific will, and the new attitude to religions.

A marriage between a Catholic and a non-baptized person is not a “sacrament” in the strict Catholic understanding of the term. Since among the basic requirements for sacramental marriage is that both parties should be validly baptized. These marriages are not considered the “ideal”. Nevertheless, the underlying change of attitude embodied in the documents of the Second Vatican Council such as: the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*), the Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*) and the Declaration on Religious Freedom (*Dignitatis Humanae*), has had a major impact on changes in the post-Conciliar period which were subsequently incorporated, at least to some degree, into the 1983 Code of Canon Law.

According to the current canonical legislation, those baptized in the Catholic Church, who wish to enter into an Inter-Faith marriage, are bound by the impediment of Disparity of Cult. Canon 1086 of the 1983 Code of Canon Law states that dispensation from the impediment of Disparity of Cult is subject to the same canonical conditions as permission for a Mixed Marriage (Cfr., canons 1125 & 1126), viz.

- ⇒ The Catholic party is to declare that he/she is prepared to remove dangers of defecting from the faith and is to make a sincere promise to do all in his/her power in order that all the children be baptized and brought up in the Catholic Church.
- ⇒ The other party is to be informed in good time of these promises to be made by the Catholic party, so that it is certain that he/she is truly aware of the promise and of the obligation of the Catholic party.
- ⇒ Both parties are to be instructed about the purposes and essential properties of marriage, which are not to be excluded by either.

From the above, it is clear that, although Inter-Faith marriages are not envisaged as “the ideal”, they are nevertheless “permitted” provided a dispensation is duly obtained. Such a stance calls for theological justification and needs to be explained in its implications.

Generally speaking, Western theology tended to view marriage as a “secular reality” to be experienced “in the Lord”. Theological reflection on these two dimensions inevitably raised the question as to how, in the final analysis, one was to explain the relationship between the “secular reality” and the “saving mystery” (or sacrament). The articulation of this relationship was spelt out by Thomas Aquinas, in a masterly fashion (Cfr., Edward Schillebeeckx, *op.cit.*, 338 – 343). He distinguished three aspects in the reality of marriage: first, the “natural datum” of marriage as a commission for the human being as creature to perpetuate the human race; secondly, marriage as an “anthropological reality” and civil duty; (Cfr., Thomas Aquinas, *In IV Sent. D. 26, q. 2, a.2*); and finally, marriage as a “natural commission”. He included in the “civil function” of marriage, mutual love of the partners for each other – a love which embraced both friendship and readiness to help each other, especially in everything connected with the home and the household economy and also the partner’s service of the civil community.

Catholic tradition, especially the canonical tradition, holds that this secular reality of marriage - that is to say, both the “natural” and the “anthropological and social” aspects of marriage - was, as a whole, raised by Christ to the dignity of a sacrament. By thus raising this reality, already naturally present in society and experienced in a specifically human way, to the level of a sacrament, marriage became – according to Aquinas – a supernatural and religious communion. Marriage, in its natural, personal and social aspects, was, as it were, the “matter” which, by virtue of Baptism, became a sacrament. The sacramental character of marriage in no way diminished its secular reality, but only brought it within the sphere of Christian salvation. The ordinary, secular reality of marriage with all its personal, social and civil obligations continued without any diminution in the sacrament.

But, from a theological point of view, does the fact of being merely “permitted” imply that an Inter-Faith marriage is “devoid of grace”? Such a conclusion would be unwarranted. Between the sacramental “ideal” and what has been, with due safeguards, “permitted”, there is an entire gamut of theological options, which allows for the presence of grace. Important though sacraments are, it is to be remembered that God's power is not restricted to the sacraments. As Thomas Aquinas himself acutely observes: God did not bind His power to the sacraments, so as to be unable to bestow the sacramental effect without conferring the sacrament. (Cfr., Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III, 64, 7; also III, 64, 3; III, 66, 6; III, 68, 2).

Vatican II has had much to say on this issue. All human beings are situated in a milieu of grace. The Council recalled many times the universality of God's saving will which extends to all people (1 Tim 2:4)[Cfr., *Lumen Gentium*, 15-16; *Nostra Aetate*, 1; *Dignitatis Humanae*, 11; *Ad Gentes*, 7]. All “share a common destiny, namely God. His providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all humankind” (*Nostra Aetate*, 1, Cfr., *Lumen Gentium*, 16). In a more particular vein, presenting a conception of human life founded on the dignity of the human being created in the image of God, *Gaudium et Spes* recalls that: “Human dignity rests above all on the fact that humanity is called to communion with God,” specifying that “the invitation to converse with God is addressed to men and women as soon as they are born” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 19). The same conciliar document proclaims with vigour that only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of the human being take on light. Furthermore, there is the renowned statement of the Council which asserted: “since Christ died for all, and since all are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the

possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22) [Cfr., International Theological Commission, *The Hope of Salvation for Infants who die without being baptized*, 31].

Elaborating on the entire issue, Karl Rahner asserts that God loves the world. His grace is at work everywhere and in every age. What is called the sacred sphere is ultimately constituted by the grace of God, in which God is ultimately the sustainer. In this ultimate sense, then there is no “sacred” sphere. In the final analysis, there is only one ultimate line of division between the “sacred” and the “non sacred” – the human rejection of God. Hence, without in any way, downplaying the uniqueness and universality of the mediation of Jesus Christ and the universal mission of the Church, His sacrament, it must be affirmed that it is not fitting that the Church be envisaged primarily as if it were a “holy” community set apart from an “unholy people” (Cfr., Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith. An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, New York, 1987, 138ff.).

This stance received a further endorsement (and nuancing) in the positive attitude assumed by the Church vis-à-vis religions during Vatican II. The Council observes: “The universal design of God for the salvation of the human race is not carried out exclusively in the soul of people with a kind of secrecy” (*Ad Gentes*, 3); nor is the salvation of people a purely private matter; it always assumes a social form (for example the religions). In this context, it can be categorically affirmed that, for Vatican II, the adherents of other religions are not saved in spite of their religions. But to infer thereby that the documents of Vatican II affirm the salvific value of “non-Christian” religions per se, is a conclusion which the data do not seem to warrant. In other words, Vatican II does not go so far as to assert that adherents of other religions are saved because of their religions. The restrained statement of the International Theological Commission on the issue seems to be more consonant to the mind of the Council in this regard: “Those who have not yet received or heard the gospel are oriented in different ways to the People of God and belonging to these different religions does not seem to be indifferent to the effects of this orientation” (International Theological Commission, *Christianity and the World Religions*, 81).

Interreligious dialogue expresses itself in different forms which, though distinct, are interrelated. The more important of these forms are: the dialogue of life, the dialogue of action, the dialogue of theological exchange and the dialogue of religious experience (Cfr., Secretariat for Non-Christians, *The Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of Other Religions. Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission*, Rome 1984). Of all these forms, the most basic is the dialogue of life, which has been evocatively described during the Synod for Asia: “In Asia people believe what they see; people value relationships...we experience how much people value persons and relationships, especially those which embody, respect, concern, compassion. Asian ethos of humanity is the first invitation to begin our mission. When we relate to people, especially people of other faiths, with basic confidence in our fellow humanity, we discover people’s concerns, values, pains and agonies. It is here we discover their search for meaning, faith, their values and yearnings. In this dialogue of life, we discern what the Spirit of God has been doing in them for ages before we encounter them. Hence in Asia, we need to begin with a discerned spiritual knowledge what the Spirit of God has been doing. This we do in a dialogue of life” (Intervention of Archbishop of Semarang of Indonesia during the Synod for Asia L’Osservatore Romano, 13th May 1998, No.19, 11).

An Inter-Faith marriage can be considered a pre-eminent and privileged expression of the dialogue of life, wherein two human beings, a Catholic and a person belonging to another faith,

share their very lives and in a most intimate sense affect each other. As regards the role of the Catholic partner in such a marriage, there is the forthright testimony of the New Testament, specifically St Paul, who teaches that the unbelieving husband or wife of a Christian believer is “consecrated” through their wife or husband, respectively, and moreover that their children too are “holy” (1 Cor 7:14-15). This is a remarkable indication that the holiness that resides in the Church reaches out to people outside the visible bounds of the Church by means of the bonds of human communion, in this case the family bonds between husband and wife in marriage, and parents and children in the family.

But what of the role of the non-Catholic partner in an Inter-Faith marriage? Not a few trends in contemporary theology envisage the presence of grace in every moral action and decision (even of one who is outside the Catholic faith – in this instance, the “non-Catholic” partner in an Inter-Faith marriage). Karl Rahner, for one, firmly holds that whenever and insofar as any individual makes a moral decision, it can be said to measure up to a supernaturally elevated and saving act. Such an encounter can be experienced in a variety of real-life situations [Cfr., Karl Rahner, “Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions”, in *Theological Investigations*, 5(1966), 122ff].

However, while it is true that every marriage is unique, nevertheless, it cannot be denied that an Inter-Faith marriage does pose very special pastoral challenges: on the one hand, it calls for an intimate communion of life between the two partners; on the other hand, there is the diversity of religious faiths which is apt to separate them. Religious faith is not peripheral to a person’s existence, but, generally speaking, constitutes the concrete way in which a person usually learns to relate to God, to the human being and to the world. Consequently, these two characteristic dimensions of an Inter-Faith marriage, viz. the intimate union of life and the diversity of faiths, can easily become dialectical tensions, leading to syncretism, fanaticism or indifferentism with serious negative repercussions on the lives of the couple. Hence there is need for an appropriate instruction. (Cfr., Code of Canon Law, canon 1125 § 3).

Apart from the catechesis which concerns the anthropological dimension, safeguarding the core understanding of marriage, there is need for a special catechesis which deals with the Inter-Faith dimension of marriage; thereby enabling the couple to face the major challenge involved in an Inter-Faith marriage viz. communion of life and diversity of faiths.

An Inter-Faith marriage is, therefore, a multi-faceted reality, whose theological contours, ramifications and implications involve and touch on several sectors of theological reflection, viz. Ecclesiology, Theology of Religions, Theological Anthropology, Theology of Grace, Canon Law and finally, Pastoral Theology. Consequently, the following theological assertions can be made as regards Inter-Faith marriages:

- 1) In an Inter-Faith marriage celebrated with the due dispensation, the secular reality of marriage is present in its integrality. However, this dimension is not publicly and officially subsumed to the level of a sacrament in the Church. A basic requirement for sacramentality in the strict sense is Baptism by water, which has not been undergone by both members involved in the Inter-Faith marriage. Consequently, an Inter-Faith marriage is not considered a sacrament in the strict sense of the term.
- 2) An Inter-Faith marriage nevertheless is per se not devoid of grace because the need for the sacrament is not absolute. Hence, while it is true that an Inter-Faith marriage cannot be considered objectively a “grace-filled state”, in the sense that a sacramental marriage between two Catholics is, it can certainly be a “grace-filled encounter” between persons.

- 3) Within an Inter-Faith marriage, the Catholic partner can certainly serve as the mediation of grace as is evident from 1 Cor 7:14-15.
- 4) Likewise, within an Inter-Faith marriage, the “Non-Catholic” partner can serve as the mediation of grace, as several contemporary theological trends attest.
- 5) Given the nature of the challenges involved, an Inter-Faith marriage needs to be specially nurtured; hence, the need for a suitable catechesis, which deals, not only with the anthropological aspect of marriage, but also with its Inter-Faith dimension. Moreover, when an interfaith marriage is lived in love and peaceful harmony, it embodies a dialogue of life in the fundamental unit of human community that marriage and family are.

### **SECTION III - Pastoral Practice: Challenges and Opportunities**

#### **5. Care for and Promotion of the Faith of the Catholic Partner (and of the Children) in Inter-Faith Marriages**

##### **5.1. Situating the Issue**

As Catholics we share the basic assumption that all people, being images of God, are basically good, and share common aspirations and values of life, harmony and happiness. People of other faiths too are called to the ultimate destiny for which they have been created by God: eternal life and happiness with their Creator. Such a commonality in being human should precede other divisions. As a consequence, the principles of respecting religious freedom and conscience laid down in the Declaration of Vatican Council II, *Dignitatis Humanae* should be applied in Inter-Faith marriages.

On the other hand, the reality of sin and its consequences are also apparent and cannot be ignored. Marriage and family values are being threatened by individualism, hedonism, materialism, religious indifference and relativism. Today more than ever the Church’s pastoral solicitude requires that in all Mixed marriages, including Inter-Faith marriages, the sanctity of marriage according to Catholic teaching and the faith of the partners should be safeguarded. It also demands that the Catholic education of the children be safeguarded with the greatest possible diligence and effectiveness.

The Church’s discipline with regard to Mixed Marriages as laid down in the Latin Code of Canon Law of 1983, demonstrates this careful vigilance as well as the sensitivity to and respect of religious freedom and conscience:

Canon 1125: The Local Ordinary can grant a permission of this kind (Mixed Marriage) if there is a just and reasonable cause. He is however not to grant it unless the following conditions have been fulfilled:

- 1) the Catholic party is to declare that he or she is prepared to remove dangers of defecting from the faith and is to make a sincere promise to do all in his or her power so that all offspring are baptized and brought up in the Catholic Church;
- 2) the other party is to be informed at an appropriate time about the promises which the Catholic party is to make, in such a way that it is certain that he or she is truly aware of the promise and obligation of the Catholic party;
- 3) both parties are to be instructed about the purposes and essential properties of marriage which neither of the contracting parties is to exclude.

The above canon refers to Mixed Marriages, that is, the marriage between two Christians, one of whom is Roman Catholic and the other is not. Strictly speaking, it does not refer to marriage between a Roman Catholic and a non-baptized partner. But the principle could be applied to Inter-Faith marriages, too, the principle of respect for religious freedom and the respect for the conscience of the other. Besides, Canon 1129 specifically states that “The prescriptions of canons 1127 and 1128 are applicable also to those marriages which are impeded by the impediment of disparity of cult”; canons 1127 and 1128 are concerned with the canonical forms of Mixed Marriages as well as the care of the Catholic spouse and the children born of a Mixed Marriage. There is an internal logic in extending the scope of the norms given for Mixed Marriages to Inter-Faith marriages since the issues at stake are similar: the faith of the Catholic ought to be protected and the conscience of the non-baptized should be respected.

The guideline from the canon 1125 of the Code of 1983 mentioned above is significantly more friendly towards Mixed Marriages than the previous Code of 1917. There is a greater emphasis on the integrity of the conscience of both the Catholic and the unbaptized partner; the freedom of a person to choose his or her spouse; the insinuation that harmony and peace among the spouses can be more important than the specifically Catholic education of the children; the insistence that the Catholic party has a duty to communicate his/her faith to the children but not without taking into account other values. The old law was articulated on the principle “error has no right”; hence Catholic beliefs were upheld irrespective of the conscience of the non-Catholic partner. The new law is based on the principle “persons have rights”; hence the freedom of both persons is upheld. In consequence, they must accept the responsibility of working out a prudent solution for their mutual differences.

The guideline shows that safeguarding the Catholic faith of the Catholic party and children depends very much on the sincere and tireless efforts of the Catholic partner, and the cooperative goodwill of the non-Catholic. “To do all in his or her power” assumes that the Catholic is intensely committed to his/her faith and to his/her Church; in real life it could so happen (and it does happen, at times) that the non-Catholic is the one who is more dedicated to Christian beliefs and practices. If so, the Catholic should be humble enough to admit that acting on his/her religious strength, the child would learn less about Christian life than by letting the non-Catholic take care of his education.

The guideline also shows, however, that basically there is no guarantee of the success. And it is not unrealistic to say that there is the real danger of loss of faith. The strain is not only from tensions between the couple intending to enter into an Inter-Faith marriage, but often increased by the pressure from their respective families, religious customs and laws. (For example, if a Catholic girl marries a Muslim boy, it is likely that the girl will be converted to Islam if marriage takes place according to Islamic custom.) The Church, in her wisdom therefore, discourages Inter-Faith marriage for the good and true happiness of the couple who are supposed to be serious in their religious faiths and who seek genuine union of mind and heart --- that link between souls --- in their marriage life, as well as for the proper Catholic education of the children. And it should be acknowledged that this prudent attitude is shared by other religions also, as, for example, the Jewish community has its own sensitivities and concerns with regard to mixed marriage. Muslims may be even more so.

For the Catholic who has decided to enter into or has already entered into an Inter-Faith marriage, the Church authority and the faith community should do their best to help promote the faith of the Catholic partner and of children of such a marriage. Hopefully, the non-Catholic

partner, moved by the Church's and the Catholic partner's love and compassion, can be as cooperative as possible.

This care for and promotion of the faith should include the care and promotion of stability and harmony in the family. When the family is in peace and harmony, the promotion of Catholic faith would be facilitated. Furthermore, promotion of Catholic faith in Inter-Faith marriages will be helped by a milieu of good and healthy inter-religious relations between different religious communities in which the family is situated. To care for and to promote this Catholic faith of the Catholic partner and of the children in an Inter-Faith marriage is not discussed in the new code, but we can draw inspiration from the guidelines the Church gives with regard to marriages between two Catholics:

Canon 1063: Pastors of souls are obliged to take care that their ecclesiastical community offers the Christian faithful the assistance by which the matrimonial state is preserved in a Christian spirit and advances in perfection. This assistance must be offered especially by:

- 1) preaching, catechesis adapted to minors, youth, and adults, and even the use of instruments of social communication, by which the Christian faithful are instructed about the meaning of Christian marriage and about the function of Christian spouses and parents;
- 2) personal preparations to enter marriage, which dispose the spouses to the holiness and duties of their new state;
- 3) a fruitful liturgical celebration of marriage which is to show that the spouses signify and share in the mystery of the unity and fruitful love between Christ and the Church;
- 4) help offered to those who are married, so that faithfully preserving and protecting the conjugal covenant, they daily come to lead holier and fuller lives in their family.

In light of this Canon 1063, in what follows, we focus our considerations on 1) Pre-Marriage Discernment and Preparation; 2) The Marriage Ceremony; and 3) Post-Marriage Efforts, for the care and promotion of faith of Catholic partner and of children in inter-faith marriages.

## **5.2. Pre-Marriage Discernment and Preparation**

Neither of the persons to be married should be asked to violate the integrity of his/her faith. However the couple should be counseled as regards the many difficulties they face for their life together, the upbringing of their children, maintaining their religious identities, and the development of their respective faiths.

Not everyone is fit for Inter-Faith marriage. Those who are involved in the discernment of a possible Inter-Faith marriage should:

- ⇒ Avoid religious indifference. Sooner or later religion will play a part in their married life, especially after children appear on the scene.
- ⇒ Be realistic: the fact is that today about half of all marriages fail even without the strain of Inter-Faith problems.
- ⇒ Tackle the Inter-Faith problems directly: pre-marital problems do not disappear after marriage and need to be resolved while the couple is still engaged.
- ⇒ Try to assess how important each spouse's religious tradition is.
- ⇒ Explain their religious needs to each other. It is only fair that the non-Catholic should be informed about the promise and the obligation on the part of the Catholic. It is equally

fair that the Catholic should be made aware of the state of the conscience of the non-Catholic.

- ⇒ Study his/her own and the other's faith tradition. This requires more than what Catholics in most cases get in the course of catechetical lessons and religious education. Therefore, a more than ordinary and basic grounding in the faith is essential. Avoid religious syncretism, since all religions are not the same.
- ⇒ Decide whether they will worship together or separately.
- ⇒ Decide how they will support their respective religious institution(s) financially.
- ⇒ Decide how to handle the religious education of the eventual children.
- ⇒ Decide how to handle rigid stances on the part of the respective religious institution(s) towards Inter-Faith marriage ceremonies, child-rearing, etc.
- ⇒ Learn how to deal with possible criticism and opposition from in-laws as regards religion. (In Asia especially, often, marriage is a marriage into an extended family).
- ⇒ Realize that in some Asian countries, the caste factor can become a major irritant in Inter-Faith marriages.
- ⇒ Be aware of the fact that Asian society is predominantly patriarchal. This impacts on all marriages including Inter-Faith marriages.
- ⇒ Be aware that there must be an effort on the part of each partner to understand the religion and culture of the other by a sort of a "Cultural Analysis". A lack of that understanding will only lead to tensions, divisions, quarrels that will make family peace hard, if not impossible, to attain.
- ⇒ Be aware that there must be real love. Love, as the saying goes, will conquer all. The couple will have to make serious efforts to sublimate possessive and self-centered eros into oblation and self-giving agape. Marriage is not merely a sharing of bodies, but of minds, hearts and spirits too, for the essential unity of man and woman.

Often when people come to meet the priest to arrange for a marriage they have decided to enter into despite an impediment of disparity of worship, it is often too late to dissuade them. It is then more important for the priest to remember that this possibly is the non-Catholic's first contact with a priest and that he as a priest can contribute considerably to the present and future happiness of the couple, especially the happiness of the Catholic. The priest who meets people, especially the young, with friendship and understanding, would know how to avoid giving the mistaken impression that the Church's concern is purely 'legalistic'. He should never declare the law of the Church without explaining its pastoral purpose.

Canon 1063 emphasizes the importance of the preparation for those intending to enter into marriage. Accordingly, in our dioceses, we need to have some form of marriage preparation program. The document Preparation for the Sacrament of Marriage (1996) states that preparation for marriage should include: instruction regarding the natural requirements of the interpersonal relationship between man and woman in God's plan for marriage and family: awareness regarding freedom of consent as the foundation of their union, the unity and indissolubility of marriage, the correct concept of responsible parenthood, the human aspects of conjugal sexuality, the conjugal act with its requirements and ends, and the proper education of children (#35)

The above statement certainly implies that any form of preparation must include the Catholic understanding of marriage. The Inter-Faith partners who choose to be married with due dispensation, have to participate in some form of preparation initiated by the Catholic Church to

bring to consciousness Catholic understanding of the ends of marriage. In cases of Inter-Faith marriages where the requirement of participation in some programme may cause a certain amount of tension in the non-Catholic, pastors or any other assigned person can take even greater initiative to prepare the couple for marriage. On the other hand, if the non-Catholic party refuses to participate in the preparation program or refuses to acknowledge the Catholic conditions for marriage (e.g., monogamy or indissolubility of marriage), it is incumbent on the priest to reconsider whether to give them a Catholic marriage.

In the pastoral setting of a pluralistic society, Catholics entering into Inter-Faith marriages could be encouraged to participate in other forms of marriage preparation organized by the religious tradition of the future spouse. Possibly our Catholic programme itself could offer such a possibility of incorporating these aspects. It is the Local Ordinary who should ensure that fitting preparation be ensured for couples preparing for an Inter-Faith marriage (Cfr., Canon 1064).

During the phase of the immediate preparation, i.e., the final stage before the wedding takes place, couples preparing for marriage should “review all they have learned and receive spiritual and liturgical preparation”. This provides an opportunity to the pastor to dialogue and also instruct the couples in a more personal way. The application for dispensation for marriages of the impediment of the Disparity of Cult from the Local Ordinary and in some instances, the application for dispensation from canonical form, can be a moment of grace when the couples could be informed on the properties and ends of a marriage as understood by the Catholic Church.

In the period preceding the Inter-Faith marriage, there is also a great opportunity for pastors to prepare families of the inter-faith couple to accept a person of another faith into the family. In this sense, preparation need not only be focused on the couples preparing for marriage, but also directed to the families, if they are receptive to the idea.

Canon 1125-2 only states that the non-Catholic partner be informed at an appropriate time of the promises made by the Catholic party. The most appropriate time should be sometime during Pre-marriage discernment or preparation. Therefore, the non-Catholic partner may be informed verbally or preferably (also) in written form, of the promise. And in other instances, he/she may be required to sign a document indicating that he/she is aware of the obligation of the Catholic partner. This last requirement must be followed if it is pastorally judged necessary.

### **5.3. The Marriage Ceremony**

In Can. 1125 of the 1983 Code, we see that no promises or undertakings are required of the non-Catholic partner as regards the faith of the eventual children. This is a further acknowledgment of the non-Catholic party’s equal rights within the marriage.

In the spirit of interfaith dialogue, we have made many changes and adaptations. However, we have to avoid making too many changes, so much so, that the Catholic identity of the ceremony is lost, which actually is a disservice to both partners who desire a Catholic ceremony. If the non-Catholic party agrees to a Catholic ceremony, what is needed is that he or she be instructed in the Catholic meaning of marriage itself and in the different parts of the rite. For example, in the rite of the exchange of rings, although saying the words “in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit” is not part of the non-Catholic party’s belief, the non-Catholic party should at least understand and respect it as an invocation of the blessing from God according to the faith of the Catholic partner.

Another challenge is the issue of a “double religious marriage ceremony”. It is clear in the Code of Canon Law (1983) that when an Inter-Faith marriage is celebrated according to the prescribed canonical form, another religious ceremony in which consent is exchanged or renewed is strictly forbidden either before or after the Catholic ceremony. Nevertheless, the Code does not forbid a blessing by minister/official of another religious tradition, as long as it is understood that the marriage in the Catholic Church is the only true marriage, since according to the Catholic understanding, we see consent as that which makes the marriage. This understanding should be made known to the non-Catholic party if he or she wants to have a Catholic marriage ceremony.

On the other hand, if consent is not exchanged or renewed in a non-Catholic ceremony, could a double ceremony which merely involves a double blessing not be allowed or even encouraged, since a double blessing is a noble thought especially when two people of two diverse faiths are coming together to begin a new life? There is no objection on the part of the law (Canon 1127-3), to another religious celebration which does not include the giving or renewing of the consent.

Liturgical celebrations designed for Inter-Faith families can promote a sense of communion, mutual care and respect through the collaboration of the priest and officials of another religion, thus making the ceremony meaningful to the couple and their families. Their collaboration also will provide role models for the couple and their families.

The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (1994) states that “as particular churches, especially the young churches, deepen their understanding of the liturgical heritage they have received from the Roman church which gave them birth, they will be able in turn to find in their own cultural heritage appropriate forms which can be integrated into the Roman rite where this is judged useful and necessary”. This suggestion could perhaps be applied to the case of Inter-Faith marriage, too.

#### **5.4. Post-Marriage Efforts**

The Church recognizes the particular problems that couples in Mixed Marriages often encounter. Canon 1128, which also applies to Inter-Faith marriages, states that Local Ordinaries and other pastors of souls are to take care that the Catholic spouse and the children born of a Mixed Marriage do not lack the spiritual help to fulfill their obligations, and are to help spouses foster the unity of conjugal and family life.

Yet the post-marriage stage is most often neglected, with few programs as compared to the pre-marriage period. This can partly be attributed to the fact that the couples themselves do not see the need to belong to some group; hence there is no necessity/compulsion to attend a particular program for marriage enrichment; furthermore, the demands of daily family life does not afford them the time; or the difficulties that Inter-Faith couples faced as they were preparing for their marriage sometimes make it difficult for them to make use of an organized post-marriage pastoral care program and to benefit from it.

Inter-Faith families may need support groups that enable them to have a sense of belonging to a wider community of faith and mission. Parishes may need to establish support for Inter-Faith couples appropriate to the level of their growth. Concerned couples may initiate their own support groups and they will be greatly helped by the encouragement of pastors and family ministries. The following are some insights and practices that Inter-Faith couples have found helpful:

- ⇒ Give each other the right to continue practicing their respective religions. It is vital to understand the importance of religious beliefs and the special need to support each other. Discontinuing their religious practices in the hope of pleasing their spouse or making life simpler is never the answer.
- ⇒ Communication is vital to the successful sharing of religious traditions and beliefs in Inter-Faith marriages. The need to strive to learn more about their partner's religious convictions is very desirable and necessary. Often they will find areas of agreement and understanding.
- ⇒ Build a combined family spirituality that includes elements from both faith traditions.
- ⇒ Listen to the feelings of their partner about his/her faith.
- ⇒ Occasionally, attend their partner's religious services and get to know the faith community and ministers. This can be a rewarding and unifying experience and can help one understand more about their partner's religion, including putting misconceptions to rest.
- ⇒ There is some danger to the religious life of the children inherent to the situation of having to make their own decisions. Statistics show that often the children of Inter-Faith marriages never really make a decision about which faith they wish to belong to and end up becoming religiously indifferent. So, there is need to take the time to discuss the religious upbringing of their children. Not giving their children any religious training to avoid conflict, is unfair to them.
- ⇒ Children are the next generation and the future of the Church and society. When it becomes possible to bring up the children in Catholic faith, it is also important that children are educated to appreciate values of the religion of the other partner. This is in harmony with the spirit of Inter-Faith dialogue which supports both appreciation of other religions and spirit of religious freedom. This would help also healthy and harmonious relations.
- ⇒ Speak with other married couples who have Inter-Faith relationships and who are striving for unity. Ask how they have dealt with the challenges and how they share the joys of their respective faiths with each other. Sharing success stories of interfaith couples can be a service to others who are struggling to make their Inter-Faith marriage work. Use inter-Faith websites which carry such stories.
- ⇒ Participate as a couple in appropriate ministry activities within both religious communities. This can strengthen the individual faiths and be a sign of their mutually understood faith convictions.
- ⇒ Family prayer is an important part of any couple's relationship, and sharing the prayers and rituals of the two faiths can enrich and strengthen the family.
- ⇒ Generally speaking, the traditional religions of Asia do project an image of holiness and asceticism and have the tradition of holy people. In this context, the Catholic idea of discipleship with its strong emphasis on witnessing would be most appealing to Asian minds. In Inter-Faith families, the Catholic partner should be truly a disciple --- dialogic in words and deeds, imparting the faith not so much through words and arguments as through faithfulness to and the practice of the values of the Gospel.
- ⇒ Respect each other's differences and celebrate each other's similarities. In an Inter-Faith marriage, one of the best ways to solve difficulties lies in concentrating on the similarities of beliefs rather than the differences. The following are some of the similarities among various religions which the couple should try to take advantage of:

### ***Catholic-Jewish Relations:***

The spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is considerable. With our Scriptural heritage having such mutuality, it is highly recommended that joint Scripture exploration be encouraged.

### ***Catholic-Islamic Relations:***

Belief in a monotheistic God, identification with the prophet Abraham, and reverence for Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary should be of help.

### ***Catholic-Buddhist Relations:***

There are crucial issues of discussion on which much fruitful development, even agreement has transpired: respect for life, the monastic tradition, contemplative prayer and meditation. It is in areas such as these that Catholics and Buddhists stand to gain beneficial insights and to break down the barriers of misunderstanding on both sides. The issue of peace, international, national and local has become a very creative area of dialogue between our two communities.

### ***Catholic-Hindu Relations***

Prayer, spiritual life, moral values (such as the respect for life- a key concept in all branches of Hindu Tradition) are areas where Catholic-Hindu dialogue will surely blossom. Moreover, the respect for the Person of Jesus Christ and His teachings by the Hindu community is an especially positive point of departure for some discussion.

## **6. The Mission of the Local Church and Interfaith Marriages**

In Asia which has witnessed so many tensions, divisions and conflicts, caused by ethnic, social, cultural, linguistic, economic and religious differences, “the Local Churches..., in communion with the Successor of Peter, need to foster greater communion of mind and heart through close cooperation among themselves” (Ecclesia in Asia, 24). Essential to the evangelizing mission in Asia are: building unity, working for reconciliation, forging bonds of solidarity, promoting dialogue among religions and cultures, eradicating prejudices and engendering trust among peoples.

In pluricultural and multi-religious Asia, marriage and family exist in a texture of social, cultural and religious relations. The socio-cultural and religious pluralism of Asia is the milieu of interfaith encounter and the locus of Inter-Faith marriages.

The daily contact of life and relations in neighborhoods and work situations provide opportunities for the Catholics to live in a dialogue of life. Given the reality of people mixing and working in cities and metropolises, possibilities of Inter-Faith marriages are more frequent in cities and metropolises than in rural areas. This can happen among migrant workers who flock to cities.

Rooted in such a milieu, the Church discerns and defines its mission. While the Inter-Faith marriage may pose a threat to Church membership, it is in fact a lived reality where the so-

called “essentials” of the mission of the Church are experienced. Insofar as the Inter-Faith marriage points to and reflects a unity that transcends the division between different faiths and practices, it can be a sign of the presence of the Church among other faiths. In Inter-Faith marriage, the challenge and opportunity of inter-religious dialogue happen at a deeply personal level.

Every marriage is to some extent “mixed”. It is established between two individuals of different sexes, from different families, usually from different places and varying backgrounds, with their own individual attitudes, interests, values, opinions and beliefs. Built-in in every marriage is a certain diversity and partnership. The extent, to which this diversity becomes a source of growth and strength, rather than of fragmentation and conflict, largely determines the success of a marriage. Shared religious beliefs and practices help build the foundation of a marriage. Common religious affiliation may be a source of strength for the marriage and family, and the coherence of the family contributes in turn to the stability and continuance of the Church or the faith. Thus, the Church upholds marrying within one’s faith and discourages the contracting of Inter-Faith marriages, especially when the non-Catholic partner has stronger religious convictions than the Catholic partner who could be in danger of losing his/her faith. Moreover, the Catholic partner might find it difficult to have his/her children baptized and educated in the Catholic faith.

However, today, the Church respects the natural right of people to choose their marriage partner and allows Inter-Faith marriages under certain conditions, provided the faith of the Catholic spouse and the religious education of the children are not compromised. The mission of the Church in Inter-Faith marriage is commonly understood as that of assisting the Catholic spouse in every possible way to offer within his or her family a genuine witness to the Catholic faith and to Catholic life (*Familiaris Consortio*, 78).

At the heart of the interpersonal social reality of marriage is love. That two persons, man and woman fall in love is a fundamental datum of most marriages including Inter-Faith marriages in their human dimension. We know, nonetheless, that some marriage alliances, Inter-Faith or otherwise, do now and then end up in failure on other counts. In the “limitless confidence” of love, the couple decide to marry and see their common future with the same confidence. That love is at the heart of marriage is an important locus to situate a theology of and pastoral ministry to Inter-Faith marriages.

A holistic approach to Inter-Faith marriage has to reckon with the reality that all marriages have an anthropological foundation of human or personal nature whose healthy or flawed condition can affect marriages for good or bad. Also, the Church cannot ignore the economic, political and juridical dimensions as part of the human and social reality of marriage including Inter-Faith marriages.

All marriages, including Inter-Faith marriages, call for human wholeness. If there are problems on the level of humanity, then Inter-Faith marriages will be burdened with problems for living their married life in fruitful harmony with the faiths of the couple. The human wholeness of the Inter-Faith couple is a necessary foundation for a peaceful and fruitful harmony of married life for which their faiths can and ought to be a rich resource. This dimension has to enter into the theology of marriage and help towards a meaningful ministry of the Church to them.

In an Inter-Faith marriage, two community identities cut across each other. The impact of religious differences in an Inter-Faith marriage is influenced by the attitudes of individuals toward their own religious faiths. Those who take their religion very seriously may experience

more strongly the pull of members and loyalty to their own Church or faith group against family membership and loyalty. These two principles, which ordinarily support each other, come into conflict in an Inter-Faith marriage. The bottom line here is allegiance to one's group. The tension between family membership and membership in one's Church or faith group may be experienced as tensions between the rights of the individual and the claims of the institution, expressed largely in juridical terms. Understanding this dialectic may help the Church understand its mission in view of the challenge of Inter-Faith marriage. When the unity of the family is not supported by Church affiliation, a threat of division is apt to replace a potential source of unity within the family; when the family unity does not contribute to the stability of a faith group, a potential source of cohesion within the Church or faith group is replaced by a threat of alienation.

In the Asian situation, marriage is not merely a matter of two individuals, a man and woman or only interpersonal, but also of two families, two clans in rural areas, two communities, perhaps two villages in some situations. Such a situation poses a challenge to both the theology of and pastoral ministry to Inter-Faith couples and families. What happens often is that the spouses in Inter-Faith marriages may have accepted to respect each other's faith; and the families or communities to which the spouses belong can be a help in this regard; but as far as we know, they often become a source of conflicts for the couples including Inter-Faith couples. In Asia, some communities or families, given their urban and cosmopolitan culture, may accept the Inter-Faith marriages as a dimension of contemporary society and culture. Others, instead, are apt to raise strong objections to Inter-Faith marriages and staunchly resist such marriages, often resulting in the ostracism of the Inter-Faith couple by the family or the community. That Inter-Faith marriages disrupt the harmony of faith communities is a legitimate concern both for the Church and other faith communities, even if there is no conversion of one spouse to the faith of the other. Here the approach of Inter-Faith dialogue becomes relevant. The Church, committed to Inter-Faith dialogue as part of being Church in Asia, has to include Inter-Faith marriages as part of Inter-Faith dialogical praxis and reflect on them theologically and pastorally in order to fulfill its mission in Asia.

The Church needs to recognize that the objections raised against Inter-Faith marriages are not only due to differences of faith alone, but also due to socio-cultural factors, ethnic and family affinities - and in South Asia - also caste affiliations. Inter-Faith marriages become a significant testing ground for the Church in Asia to be a Church in dialogue. Inter-Faith marriages will be helped tremendously by a milieu of good and healthy inter-religious relations between different religious communities. Good and successful Inter-Faith marriages will be manifestations of the Church in dialogue. Stories of such marriages will help the Church's own pastoral approach and ministry to Inter-Faith marriages.

Theology of evangelization must also be concerned with Inter-Faith marriages and develop perspectives towards sound and helpful pastoral praxis and ministry to Inter-Faith couples and families. The Church also needs to be prepared to face the unexpected problems arising from Inter-Faith marriages.

In religiously diverse situations, such as in Asia, Inter-Faith marriages will call for different approaches. The Local Churches which live in dialogue with such diverse religious traditions need to have a deep grasp of these traditions so that the Church in dialogue can design meaningful and pastoral approaches for Inter-Faith marriages in such situations.

The Inter-Faith marriage can be a place where the Churches or religious traditions meet, not merely in opposition and separation, but in the movement of growth towards each other. This

growth begins with the couple and, because of their Church loyalties and membership, also involves, even to a limited extent, the Churches or religions themselves. Underlying this growth process is a fundamental willingness of the couple to respect each other, even in disagreement in points of doctrine and in matters of religious practice. Both the couple and the pastor dealing with the Inter-Faith marriage need a spirit of sincere openness and enlightened confidence. Inter-Faith couples may need sympathetic and open treatment by the clergy or representatives of both Churches and faith groups; an atmosphere of welcome in the congregations themselves and opportunity of the gathering of information on the other Church and for participation in worship and other activities.

Considering the rise in Inter-Faith marriages and families, the Church needs to broaden the scope of its family ministry to include Inter-Faith couples and families. The point of departure with regard to family ministry to Inter-Faith families must be the recognition of the very existence of Inter-Faith families as a witness to the possibility of at least partly reconciled diversity in unity. There are enough stressors in marriage. The spouses have to deal with differences such as economic background, age, race, religion, language, country of origin, education, personal goals, political views, etc. In Inter-Faith marriages, the religious factor can be an added stressor, especially when the couple has conflicting views on morality, religious practices and family traditions. These may influence their decisions, wants, priorities and needs. The added risk in Inter-Faith marriages is that marital difficulties may be blamed on religious differences when the issue is basically communication, love or sexual relationship. The Church, then, needs to provide suitable information and counseling to young people who are thinking of entering into Inter-Faith marriages.

The communities can support the Inter-Faith family by strengthening the faith of each spouse and helping them to mature in understanding and practicing their faith, so that they become credible witness within the family through their own life and through the quality of love shown to the spouse and the children. The Inter-Faith couple may discover common beliefs at the personal level: faith in God, in providence, in goodness, in the need to forgive, in the obligation of loyalty, in the acceptance of what is true. What is important is to highlight what unites rather than what divides them.

The Church may initiate or support joint pastoral care of Inter-Faith couples with ministers of other faith groups. Efforts may be exerted by the Catholic minister to establish cordial cooperation with the ministers of non-Christian faith groups, if any, in the process of accompanying the couple in marriage preparations and wedding ceremony. The faith communities of both spouses need also to be prepared to accept the Inter-Faith couple. The Church also has to give attention to the family of the Catholic partner who is contracting the Inter-Faith marriage. All too often, the news of a possible Inter-Faith marriage causes break-up in the family. The struggles and conflicts in the family are additional hurdles to be overcome. Considering the importance of the support of the parents and siblings, the Church may provide opportunities for the parents to be enlightened about the whole situation and to discuss with their son or daughter the impact of the Inter-Faith marriage on the rest of the family and their faith so that all may move towards acceptance and reconciliation.

A predominantly patriarchal society impacts on all marriages including Inter-Faith marriages. Despite catechesis and pastoral approaches for Inter-Faith marriages, given the social-cultural trend of patriarchal culture, the family and community of the male partner exercise pressure on the female partner and gradually absorb the latter into their community and their faith. The immediate persons who exercise such influence are often the in-laws of the girl or the

parents of the boy. This socio-cultural factor works strongly in some Asian contexts. The Church has to reckon with this trend, too, in the overall approach to Inter-Faith marriages. This trend of strong influence of the male partner's family and community over the female partner is a serious obstacle to the marital harmony of Inter-Faith marriages. The Church will have to pay special attention to the situation of women in Inter-Faith marriages.

The Inter-Faith marriage if it is to be adequately and positively assisted must be seen in a constructive and favorable light in order to bring out its potential. Can the Church see the Inter-Faith couple as pioneers who "step out to extend the frontiers of fellowship"?

## **7. The Mission of the Catholic Partner**

The mystery of marriage is that two unique individuals experience their love strong enough to decide to bind themselves to each other in a lifetime relationship. Two people coming from different backgrounds commit themselves to grow together into wholes as they celebrate love amidst challenges and difficulties. The Church affirms the holiness of marriage and acknowledges the beauty and grandeur of this vocation to love and the service of life. By its very nature the institution of marriage and married love is ordered to the procreation and education of the offspring and it is in them that it finds its crowning glory (*Gaudium et Spes*, 48). In the Christian understanding of marriage, the couples are cooperators of grace and witness of the faith for each other, for their children and for their relatives (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11). Their duty which is the most important aspect of their apostolate includes the following: to give clear proof in their own lives of the indissolubility and holiness of the marriage bond; to assert with vigor the right and duty of parents and guardians to give their children a Christian upbringing; to defend the dignity and legitimate autonomy of the family.

To fulfill their responsibility to create a community of love, the spouses need to develop what it takes to build good human relationships for a healthy marriage, namely; acceptance of self and the other, trust, respect, emotional maturity and communication among others. The intimacy of marriage can be the proving ground of common attitudes and faith. In Inter-Faith marriage, the lack of common faith and tradition is an added challenge to building this community of love. On the other hand, the will to undertake an Inter-Faith marriage may indicate strong trust and confident ability on the part of both partners to be one in love. The Catholic partner needs to be deliberately aware of the responsibility involved in entering into Inter-Faith marriage and must have the will and the ability to fulfill this responsibility.

The Catholic faithful has the responsibility to know the requirements of her or his faith regarding an Inter-Faith union. Dispensation from Disparity of Cult to contract an Inter-Faith marriage by a Catholic is granted only on certain conditions as mentioned earlier (cf *Can.1125*). These conditions emphasize the serious responsibility of the Catholic partner. He or she has the mission to lead a community that will grow in common humanity. It might be better if both parties prepare for their marriage by taking seriously their religious faith and respect the faith of the other. The Catholic partner needs to clearly understand the nature of Christian marriage and be informed about the way his or her partner understands marriage according to her or his faith tradition. Without necessarily compromising their faith, both parties may discover affinity and recognition of their faith, perhaps in altered expressions, in the form and practices familiar to the other. The partners can grow in understanding of each other and of their different traditions.

## **8. A Call to Renewal of Pastoral Perspectives**

### **8.1. Pastoral Outlook that Accepts Challenge and Opportunity of Inter-Faith Marriages.**

Before the renewal ushered in by Vatican II, the Church tended to discourage Catholics from marrying members of other faiths. Disparity of Cult was not only a problem, but also an impediment. However, if a Catholic insisted on what is now called “an Inter-Faith marriage”, a simple exchange of vows was held in an inconspicuous place within the parish premises. The Church also tried to convince the non-Christian spouse to convert to Catholicism.

Since Vatican II, the Church has shown greater respect for Inter-Faith marriages and the wishes of the non-Catholic spouse, even as it continues to stress the advantages of couples having the same religion and raising their children in the Catholic faith. The growth in incidence of Inter-Faith marriages demands of pastors an appropriation of the renewed vision of marriage and non-Christian faiths taught by Vatican II and elaborated upon by the subsequent teaching of the Church and other theological-pastoral researches. Pastors should strive to acquire an adequate understanding of the fundamental tenets and world-views of other faiths so as to heal and transcend their own prejudices. Study and positive relationships with couples in Inter-Faith marriages could provide pastors a realistic and sympathetic view. They would be in a position to see in Inter-Faith marriages, not only challenges that surely abound, but also opportunities to promote the Church’s mission of inter-faith dialogue and social harmony beginning with the family (Cfr., “Interfaith Marriages – Challenges and Opportunities”, Editorial of *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection*, 70(2006), 481 – 486).

### **8.2. A Humble Examination of the Influence of the Faith of the Church**

In certain parts of the world, the rate of Inter-Faith marriages continues to rise. Instead of reacting adversely to the situation, pastors could benefit from a humble examination of themselves and of the Church. Complex factors come into play in people’s decisions to enter into Inter-Faith marriages, among which are race or ethnicity, socio-economic status and religion [Cfr., Matthijs Kalmijn, “Intermarriage and Homogamy: Causes, Patterns, Trends”, *Annual Review of Sociology* 24(1998), 395 – 421]. But focusing on the faith-factor, we learn from some empirical data gathered by researchers that the so-called “Catholic influence”, that would be expected to prevent Catholics from marrying someone outside their faith community has declined over time [Cfr., William Sander, “Catholicism and Intermarriage in the United States”, *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 55(1993), 1037-1041]. Without demeaning Inter-Faith marriages, pastors should seriously evaluate the role played by the faith and the Church in people’s lives and decisions. Hard questions should be asked: How attached are young adult Catholics to the Church? How do Catholics perceive the Church’s canonical process? How could we make marriage preparations more meaningful? Do Inter-Faith marriages have much to say about the significance of the Church in the lives of the faithful or the lack of it?

### **8.3. Pastoral Care of Couples in Inter-Faith Marriages: An Emerging Priority**

The difficulties experienced by couples in Inter-Faith marriages should provide an occasion to pastors, not to blame them, but to provide pastoral care. The increasing number of Inter-Faith marriages calls for a program of accompaniment and mentoring for these couples at different stages of their married life. Pastors need to be more aware of this growing sector of their parish community and make it one of their priorities. Aside from forging deep personal

relationships with them, pastors should make sure that the parish family ministry includes a specific programme of support and enrichment for couples in Inter-Faith marriages. This holds true for diocesan programs for the pastoral care of marriage and families. Pastors must seek personal training to equip them for this special ministry. They should earnestly help these couples make their marriage truly a sign of grace, personal commitment and hope. [Cfr., Gianpaolo Salvini S.J., “I matrimoni tra cattolici e musulmani in Italia”, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 3727(2005) IV, 46ff.; André Vingt-Trois, “Le mariage, acte d’espérance” *La Maison-Dieu* 244(2005)4, 91-106].

#### **8.4. Programs for Inter-Faith Couples both for Preparation and Ongoing Ministry**

Canon 1063 envisages a pastoral care of marriage preparation that begins in infancy and spans a lifetime. This pastoral care is meant to offer assistance to the faithful so that the matrimonial state is preserved in its Christian character, and develops in perfection. The purpose of marriage preparation is to stimulate growth or spiritual and human development on which depends the possibility that the new family can responsibly achieve its task in society and in the Church [Cfr., Gavin Fintan, “Canon 1063: Marriage Preparation as a Lifetime Journey”, *Studia Canonica* 39 (2005), 181-201].

Canon 1064 states that pastors of souls are obliged to ensure that their own Church community provides for Christ’s faithful the assistance by which the married state is preserved in its Christian character and develops in perfection. The parish priest is obliged to provide this pastoral care in the parish under the direction of his bishop. The canon suggests four ways to carry out this pastoral obligation: 1) general education and catechesis (1063#1); 2) specialized preparation prior to marriage (1063#2); 3) liturgical celebration of the marriage itself (1063#3); 4) continuing support for married couples after marriage (1063#4). The list does not exclude other ways of achieving the obligation of pastoral care.

Marriage preparation is a gradual and continuous process. Three stages of marriage preparation are described in *Familiaris Consortio* and the Instruction of Pontifical Council for the Family (1996): remote preparation, proximate preparation, and immediate preparation.

Remote preparation happens during infancy, childhood and adolescence. It takes place in the family and in the school and formation groups within the parish. General catechesis should include formation of character, self-control, self-esteem, the proper use of one’s capacities, respect for persons of the other sex and the inculcating of respect for all authentic human values both in interpersonal and social relations. The diocese or parish may establish structures and provide resources so that remote preparation can happen. Some have proposed “mother/daughter, father/son” programs and youth ministry programs with workshops on dating. A youth get-together may be planned to include food, music, speakers and discussion on topics relating to dating and marriage. The Catholic teaching on marriage is to be emphasized with a discussion on principles of interreligious dialogue as well as the liabilities and assets of an Inter-Faith marriage. Materials can be prepared, based on consultation with various groups, including those of other faiths. These materials should address attitudes found among different faith groups towards one another and the official positions from tradition and current teaching on the relation of these religious traditions to one another. It is important that marriage preparation materials undergo theological scrutiny.

Proximate preparation refers to the more specific preparation for the sacrament of Marriage that enables the couple to discover the depth and richness of the Christian vocation to

marriage. This takes place during the period of engagement. The diocese/parish has to plan the specific courses in terms of content, duration, speakers or facilitators, depending on local needs and situation. The parish may design a special program for couples entering into an Inter-Faith marriage in which they are made well aware of their responsibilities in relation to each other and to their faith affiliation. It will help greatly if the catechesis for the Catholic partner is done by a pastor who is engaged in Inter-Faith dialogue, who can inform him/her of the principles of Inter-Faith dialogue. Having such a pastor may encourage the partner belonging to a different faith to be involved in this stage of marriage preparation. It is important for both partners to be led to a deeper understanding of their faith and their Church. They can be made aware that they are living in a different environment and would need competence in providing answers for self and for children.

The diocese/parish may have to consider ministry to parents of the Catholic partners. More often than not, it is the family that provides strong reactions and opposition to Inter-Faith marriages; yet it is the support of this family that is most needed by the Catholic partner to sustain his/her faith even as he/she enters into an Inter-Faith marriage. This family needs to go through the process of dialogue, healing and reconciliation with the family member that breaks the family tradition.

The immediate preparation has to do with what proximately precedes the celebration of marriage itself. The couple is helped to understand the meaning of the liturgical actions and the texts of the marriage ceremony. Some circles have designed rites for Inter-Faith marriages. The diocese or parish may, with due approval, formulate its own rite for Inter-Faith marriage or choose to use rites formulated by some circles.

The couple need to be well informed that if they seek to marry within the Church they must implicitly accept what the Church intends to do in the celebration of marriage.

Post-marriage assistance may be rendered to the Inter-Faith couple. To sustain and nurture Inter-Faith marriage and family life, ongoing education in the faith of spouses and children is necessary. Such a continuing education actually presupposes trained pastors, ministers and lay people competent in implementing specially designed programs for this group. The training may include further theological dialogue on the religious dimensions of covenant and contract, family life, religious instruction and formation in the home and Inter-Faith relations, spiritual upbringing of children,...etc.

The diocese/parish may initiate or support the formation of Inter-Faith support groups. These support groups are needed so that the Inter-Faith couple may have a sense of belonging to a wider community of faith and mission. Concerned couples who initiate their own support groups will be greatly helped by the encouragement of pastors and family ministries. How well Inter-Faith couples live together is a sign of growth in Inter-Faith relations. Those couples who continue to grow in their respective faiths with the care of each other's religious freedom give a sign of the peace and interchange that can exist among faith communities.

Liturgical celebrations designed for Inter-Faith families can promote a sense of communion. Understanding that mutual love and marriage are universal gifts from God within and across all faiths entails that the ceremony be given particular attention so that it will be meaningful, not only for the couple, but for their families and friends as well. It matters that family members are present at the wedding, especially given that this marriage crosses the lines of faith and culture. Pastors can demonstrate care and respect by collaborating to make the ceremony meaningful to the couple. The ritual should flow with integrity from the past of each partner into a future in which both pasts will be honored and treasured. This is how a wedding

ceremony may bless, not only the deepest personal intentions of the couple, but also the history and longings for their families. In its very form and carrying out, the ritual can bless the past and influence the future.

As already mentioned above, the diocese/parish may provide opportunities for Inter-Faith couples to share their success stories. This can be a service to others (yellow-partners in such marriages) who are struggling to make their Inter-Faith marriage work. They can assist in the discernment process of people who are involved in love relationship with persons of a different faith. They can share the wisdom and richness of their experience. Among the issues which could be taken up are the following:

- ⇒ Building a relationship of love with one's partner
- ⇒ Preparation in faith – a deeper knowledge and appreciation of one's faith
- ⇒ Awareness of hostility/indifference toward their religious traditions
- ⇒ Contact with the minister/priest/rabbi (prior to marriage) to learn of each other's faith and get a deeper grasp of their own faith as well.
- ⇒ The faith of the children – both parents are responsible for the religious formation of the children
- ⇒ Opportunity of preparing partners for adult faith
- ⇒ The “Why” of marriage? - animated by a marriage counselor
- ⇒ What is love? - animated by a priest and a married couple
- ⇒ Human physiology – animated by a gynecologist-obstetrician – The physical aspect of human sexuality
- ⇒ The Psychology of sexuality – male/female differences in attitude, expectation, needs
- ⇒ Communication in marriage – animated by a married couple
- ⇒ Moral values – animated by rabbi, priest, minister etc.
- ⇒ Marriage breakdown – animated by a marriage counselor
- ⇒ Toward a happy home – animated by a married couple

## **9. Inculturation in the Rites of Inter-Faith Marriage**

### **9.1. Some General Considerations on Inculturation**

“By inculturation, the Church makes the Gospel incarnate in different cultures and at the same time introduces peoples, together with their cultures, into her own community”( *Varietates Legitimae*, Fourth Instruction issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship of the Sacraments, 1994, 4). Inculturation, therefore, indicates a double movement, a mutual interaction and a reciprocal assimilation between the Gospel and various cultures. In the third part of the document referred to above, the language of inculturation falls back to that of “adaptation” which connotes modifications of a somewhat transitory and external nature. However, as noted by many scholars, it is not the focus of this instruction to treat the practical aspects of liturgical inculturation.

A subsequent document issued by the same Congregation makes it clear that the thrust of inculturation is not the creation of new varieties or families of rites. “On the contrary, it should be recognized that any adaptations introduced of cultural or pastoral necessity thereby become part of the Roman Rite, and are to be inserted into it in a harmonious way”(Liturgiam authenticam, Fifth Instruction issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship of the Sacraments, 2001 on the use of Vernacular Languages in Liturgical books, 5).

The basic criterion of adaptation was laid down by Vatican II “the substantial unity of Roman Rite is to be preserved” (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 38: *servata substantiali unitate Ritus Romani*), and is reiterated in subsequent documents. “As regards projects of inculturation in liturgical matters, the particular norms that have been established are strictly and comprehensively to be observed”(Redemptionis Sacramentum, Instruction issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship of the Sacraments, 2004, on the matters to be observed or avoided regarding the most Holy Eucharist, 27).

The renewal of the Rite of Marriage was issued respectively in 1969 (*Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium editio typica*) and in 1990 (*editio typica altera*). The OCM- 90 underscores the important link between the Word of God and the sacramental celebration (of Marriage). It shifts also from the viewpoint of *contractus* (contract) to that of *foedus* (covenant). Greater emphasis has been given to the role of the bride and bridegroom (as the true ministers of the sacrament) than to the priest. The OCM-90, furthermore, stresses the pneumatological dimension of the sacrament and has articulated a theological synthesis of marriage in terms of Creation, Christ, Church, Holy Spirit, elevation to the dignity of sacrament, participation in God’s creation through procreation, and the call to witness to God’s love (OCM-90, 1-44). As for the celebration, it mentions the ministers, their rights and duties: the ministers who administer the blessing (Bishop, Priest, Deacon, Lay Officiant), and the role of the community. Both editions of the Rite of Marriage offer the rite of the marriage between a Catholic and an unbaptized person. As for the adaptation of the rite, the OCM-69 recalls the provisions in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 37-40, and 77-78. It envisages the possibility of creating new marriage rites (OCM-69, 17-18) – an attitude which is endorsed in OCM-90.

## **9.2. The Rite of Marriage between a Catholic and an unbaptized person**

The rite is structured as follows:

1. Greetings and Welcome
2. Liturgy of the Word
3. Rite of Marriage
4. Reception of Consent
5. Blessing and Exchange of Rings
6. General Intercession
7. Solemn Nuptial Blessing
8. Concluding Rite

If the situation so requires it, the rite should comprehend at least the Liturgy of the Word, the Rite of Marriage, and the Reception of Consent. The order of these three elements should not be altered. For the liturgy of the Word, there should be at least one reading from Holy Scripture. For the Rite of Marriage, the questions and answers between the officiant and the couple should be made on their freedom of choice, faithfulness to each other, and the acceptance and the upbringing of children in accordance with the Catholic principles. Then, the couple should exchange their consent, “I, N. take you N. to be my wife/husband. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honour you all the days of my life”. Afterwards, the officiant, whether lay or ordained, should declare that their consent has been received.

The *OCM-90* encourages, whenever possible, other elements of a Catholic nature, such as, an Opening Prayer in the beginning, more Scriptural readings in the Liturgy of the Word (including the responsorial psalm, acclamation, Gospel, and homily), the Blessing and Exchange of Rings, General Intercessions, Solemn Nuptial Blessing, and the Concluding Rite.

The *OCM-90* likewise leaves ample space for liturgical adaptation. The local customs should be respected, such as, place, time, language, music, gestures, arts, and so on. Readings from other cultural classics or religious texts are allowed. The roles of the parents can be made more manifest. Other cultural symbols may be added or used to signify the bond of the two persons or the bond of the two families. Other forms of blessing or prayers can be chosen. However, all these elements should be taken or designed in harmony with the principle of preserving the substantial unity of the Roman rite.

### **9.3. Some Observations**

The Rite of Marriage expresses the serious commitment of the love and openness to procreation on the part of the couple. It also stresses the fact that liturgy should be made relevant to their living context. In rooting the faith in people's cultures, the liturgical inculturation or adaptation constitutes an important moment. It is a facet of the overall attempt to integrate the Gospel together with its permanent values into their life (*Varietates Legitimae*, 5). Liturgical celebration must be so designed that it may be capable of expressing itself in every human culture, while maintaining its identity and transcending the particularity of race and nation (*Varietates Legitimae*, 18). Thus, inculturation is a concerted effort that requires the collaboration of competent people in the field of liturgy as well as in that of cultural customs and values in the area of marriage and family.

However, since any ritual is always culture-bound, in the case of the Inter-Faith marriage rite, greater flexibility should be given not only to the translation of the liturgical text, but also to the introduction of new dimensions of cultural values in the rite. This form of marriage lends itself to bold initiatives as regards blending the Gospel with the local cultures.

*In what follows, we present two concrete Asian responses and initiatives in the task of the Gospel meeting cultures in the area of marriage rite including that of Inter-Faith marriage and the dialogical dimensions involved in the process of inculturation .*

### **9.4. Inculturation and the Roman Rite of Marriage in Thailand**

This may help learn lessons in the task of inculturation with regard to marriage rite including interfaith marriage rite.

#### **9.4.1. Preamble**

In 1997, a ten-year project was conceived in Thailand on the theme: "The Eucharistic Celebration for Life". It was typically pastoral in nature and focused on two related issues: active participation and growth in faith. At the same time, inculturation was thought of as a means to engage the faithful during the celebration in a conscious and active participation in the liturgy.

In 2004, the Commission for the Liturgy extended its efforts to the Rite of Marriage. This project followed in the footsteps of the preceding, with one exception: There would be a greater focus on Inculturation. Consequently, the stated objectives of the project were:

1. To promote the values found in Thai cultures and to introduce whatever is appropriate into the Rite of Marriage.
2. To arrive at a deeper understanding of the sacramentality of marriage and the Marriage Rite.
3. To assist the faithful in the active participation in the Marriage Rite.

#### **9.4.2. Challenges and Issues**

To effectively implement the project, the Commission identified some challenges and issues to be addressed before inculturation could take place. Among the important issues were the following:

1. **Methodology:** The complex nature of the task involved the religious nature of the Rite of Marriage, the long tradition of the Roman Liturgy and the existence of numerous regulations and prescriptions related to liturgical inculturation. The issue concerned finding a way to incorporate all these requirements in a consistent manner during the implementation. To meet these challenges, the Commission identified an expert on liturgy to be consulted in this matter, Professor Anscar Chupungo, and invited him to present his framework and methodology.
2. **Theology and Liturgy:** Christian Marriage, as a human reality, raised to the dignity of a sacrament in the Church, has been enriched by profound theological significance. The signification and actuality of this meaning are concisely and solemnly conveyed in the liturgy. The main issue is whether the Roman Rite in itself could clearly convey both the meaning and what it actually brings into effect. To address this issue, the Commission engaged a team of scholars to study the Rite of Marriage from the theological, liturgical and sociological points of view.
3. **Process and Procedures:** The inculturation of the Rite of Marriage presented itself as a complex problem and the tasks involved were many and various. This issue devolved on designing an efficient process to ensure that the desirable outcome would be realized. With a view to effecting this purpose, the Commission adapted the design of the previous project involving the following steps: study, dissemination, rite design workshops, experimentation, assessment and finally approval by the Catholic Bishops' Conference.
4. **Social and Cultural Settings:** The Thai religious context is typically Buddhist. Inter-Faith marriage is a common phenomenon. The issue was whether the introduction of Thai cultural elements would help the couples to understand the significance of marriage or would rather impede the knowledge of the value of marriage in keeping with the Christian belief. There was also another question as regards the social acceptance of the use of the Thai elements in the Christian liturgy, both on the part of the Buddhists and on the part of the Catholics. In fact, many people seem to disagree with the inculturation on the basis of appropriation. Many believe that the Thai elements do not belong to the realm of the Christian liturgy and should not be used. This challenge was addressed by organizing "Design Workshops", which aimed at identifying the proper use of language, objects, gestures and even rites.

Experimentation in selected willing parishes with due preparation would be carried out to assess both the effectiveness of the process and to gauge the actual reactions of the people.

#### **9.4.3. Activities – A Brief Historical Journey.**

- ⇒ 2-4 September, 2004 - Seminar on “Liturgical Inculturation” on the Inculturation Methodology by Fr. Anscar Chupungo
- ⇒ The triennium 2005 – 2008 - Research and Study on the Roman Rite of Marriage, based on the two typical editions of 1969 and 1991.
- ⇒ 12 – 14 June, 2005 - Seminar on “Practical Guidelines for the Inculturation of Marriage”.
- ⇒ 17-19 November, 2005 - Second Seminar on “Practical Guidelines for the Inculturation of Marriage”.
- ⇒ The year 2006 - First to Fifth Edition of the “Report on the Study of the Liturgical Inculturation of the Rite of Marriage.
- ⇒ 22 March, 2007 - Workshop on “Design of the Rite of Marriage: Presentation and Comments”.
- ⇒ 30 – 31, May 2007 – Seminar on “The Rite of Marriage: Presentation and Comments on the Inculturated Edition”.
- ⇒ 20-21 February, 2008 – Seminar on “The Inculturated Rite of Marriage: Revision and Preparation for Experiments”.

#### **9.4.4. Achievements**

The four-year involvement with the inculturation of the Rite of Marriage marked the beginning of a new approach to the pastoral care of the life of the faithful, centred on the liturgical celebration. As has already been pointed out, for the Commission for the Liturgy, inculturation was by no means a merely academic practice. It was rather pastoral in nature, and aimed at serving the People of God in their life of faith and witness to Christ. The liturgical celebration, including the Sacrament of Marriage, constitutes an important moment in which the faithful encounter the sanctifying power of God and render unto Him the most worthy form of worship, while being nourished by the Word and the grace of the sacraments.

This having been said, three achievements with respect to the Rite of Marriage are worthy of mention:

1. **Methodology of Inculturation:** The first three seminars and workshops, from 2004 to 2005, were mainly focused on the “Theological and Methodological Framework” to be used during the project implementation. The inputs of Professor Anscar Chupungo proved to be of great help. Efforts were made to understand and to adopt his methodology all through the process. Much attention in this regard was paid to the language, gestures and objects in the Rite of Marriage. The application of this methodology enabled the participants to be consistently faithful to the guidelines and regulations given by the Church authority, while, on the other hand, instilling a dynamism into the efforts at identifying the cultural elements and values which could be used to convey the theological meaning and the grace of marriage in a way understandable to the Thai audience.

2. **Body of Knowledge:** The research and study furnished a comprehensive body of knowledge with respect to the Rite and Reality of Christian marriage. Different views were explained: theology, history of the Rite, the Rite itself, the social and cultural dimension of the Thai marriage, cultural practices in the three major cultural traditions (Thavaravadee, Lanna and Isan). This body of knowledge served as the point of reference all through the implementation of the project. It further ensured fidelity both in the content and in the inculturated rite itself to the Christian significance. The book subsequently published has proved to be a useful reference to all the participants.
3. **The Inculturated Rite:** Though only a modest beginning, it could be said that the introduction of Thai parlance figures prominently in this effort. Some aspects could be singled out to describe the achievements realized so far:
  - ⇒ The Structure of the Rite: This remains unchanged in the overall design. The Introductory Rite is complemented by two actions: one, the parents at the door of the church ask the priest to witness the consent of the couple. This resonates with Thai culture for which marriage establishes the bond between two families. By the marriage bond of their son and daughter, the two families become one. The second action is the lighting of the candle by the bride and bridegroom to signify that it is they who administer the sacrament of Marriage to each other.
  - ⇒ Prayer and Other Texts: The issue of language was taken up for consideration; words were revised so as to make the rite more understandable to the Catholic and more acceptable to the Buddhist party and audience. However, this by no means involved a change in the original significance of the words. Words were chosen to convey the original meaning using the contemporary language. Words which conveyed no meaning to the non-Catholic party were omitted and replaced by alternative words.
  - ⇒ Gestures: In the Thai context, the holding of the right hand during the consent does not seem to convey the meaning it is designed to convey. However, a substitute has yet to be found.
  - ⇒ Objects: Four objects are put into close examination. Sai Mongkol (Bonding Thread), Anointing with Flour, Lustral Water, and Su Kwan. Sai Mongkol is made of thread woven into two connected circles to be placed on the heads of the couples during the pouring of Lustral Water. It signifies the establishment of a new bond between the two families by the bond of marriage between the spouses. The pouring of Lustral Water on the hands of the spouses signifies the blessing imparted over the new family. As for the three-triangular mark anointing with flour on the forehead, various meanings are attributed to this act. However, Buddhists normally take it to signify the protection against all evils by the three powers: Buddha, Tripitaka, and Monks. Su Kwan, a practice originating in the northeast, aims at bringing back good health, spirit and well-being to the person. However, it must be admitted that much hesitation still surrounds the introduction of these practices into the liturgical rite. Even in the weddings amongst the Catholics at home, these objects are not normally used.

#### 9.4.5. Conclusion

It is the dream of the Commission for the Liturgy to design and introduce a more fully inculturated rite with a view to the good of the Catholic couples, as well as the non-Catholic party. The rich content of the faith in the context of the Inter-Faith marriage needs to be

articulated and conveyed in a way that is fruitful for the faith and bears witness to Christ. As such, it is and always remains pastoral in nature.

In realizing this aim, there is still much to do and learn from the cultural assets and from the experience of the Churches elsewhere. In the coming year, further studies will be conducted on the cultural reality of marriage; and, on the practical side, experimentation will be conducted in selected willing parishes in order to assess the possibility of an inculturated rite which is true to the spirit of the Roman liturgy and to the spirit of the people celebrating this mystery of human love which has been raised to the sacrament of Christ's love for His Church.

## **9.5. Inculturation in the Area of Rites and Celebrations in Japan**

### **9.5.1. The Religious Situation in Japan**

The population of Japan according to the statistics of 2005 is 126,869,397. Of these 452,800 are Catholics, which makes up just 0.357% of the total population, while the Protestants number about 1,500,000. Christians together form 1.5% of the total population of the country.

The other major religions of Japan are Shinto and Buddhism. However, according to the statistics of the Agency for Cultural Affairs, the number of Shinto believers is 108,580,457, and Buddhists are 93,485,017. It may seem odd that these numbers when added together work out to a little less than twice the entire population of Japan. Actually the reason for this is because many Japanese attend ceremonies in both Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples, and consequently follow both religions. Unlike Christians who become members of the Church by a profession of faith in God and the Holy Trinity at the time of Baptism, Japanese follow a form of syncretism. Also, for many Japanese, participation in religious ceremonies is merely a social custom, and they do not bother much about religious affiliation.

In these circumstances, we see that many of the marriages in Japan are between Catholics and non-Catholics. In the year 2005, the number of marriages held in Japanese Catholic Churches was 3635. Of these, 296 were marriages between Catholics, 122 were Mixed Marriages (or marriages between Catholics and Protestants), 1577 were Inter-Faith marriages (or marriages where one partner was Catholic and the other non-Christian), and 1640 were marriages where both partners were non-Catholics.

That is to say, many of the marriages held in Japan are between Catholics and non-Christians, and hence in preparing people for marriage it is important for the priest to educate the non-Christians concerning the significance of a Catholic marriage, the teaching of the Bible concerning marriage, and the meaning of the marriage rite, and it is also important that we help the non-Christians to become aware of the difference between a traditional Japanese marriage and a Catholic marriage ceremony.

### **9.5.2. Traditional Wedding Ceremonies in Japan**

In Japan there are three forms of marriage along with their accompanying rites, and these are *Mukoirikon*, *Yomeirikon*, and *Ashiirikon*.

*Mukoirikon* means matrilocal marriage. Here the couple often come from the same locale and meet at the house of the wife's parents during courtship. The wife's family sponsors the wedding ceremony, and it is less elaborate than in the case of the *Yomeirikon*. It begins with a preliminary stage of courtship initiated at the discretion of the couple involved and with little

interference from family heads. The future bridegroom makes a formal visit to the house of the bride and her family, exchanges cups of *sake* (a kind of Japanese rice wine or beer), and drinks with his future in-laws. The groom then continues to visit the bride at her home for a specified interval, after which the couple choose to either remain or move to a separate residence. *Yomeirikon* is patrilocal marriage. Here the husband and wife take up residence in or near the house of the husband's parents, and the drinking of sake, both between the couple themselves and between bride and the parents of the groom, is done in the house of the groom. In *Ashiirikon* the bride drinks the sake in the house of the groom with his parents, and then proceeds to live in the house.

Marriages in Japan developed gradually from *Mukoirikon* to *Yomeirikon*, and in between we had the *Ashiirikon*. Originally marriages took long to be concluded, at times even a few years, but with the development of *Yomeirikon* the period was shortened and eventually concluded within a single day.

It was in the 1900s that weddings developed as Shinto ceremonies, and after the 1950s they became widespread. Until then it was basically a family affair without the presence of religious ministers, ceremonies, vows, or the exchange of rings. It consisted mainly of the exchange of sake cups.

### **9.5.3. The Ceremony of Pledging over Cups of Sake**

There is a ceremony called "San-San-Kudo" during the marriage ceremony. First of all, a groom and a bride pretend to pour sake into a cup in which there are 3 tiers of cups, then, they actually do pour sake into each cup and drink it at each of the 3 steps. This series of action will be done for each of the three cups, and hence it is called "San-San-Kudo" (three-three-nine times). This custom was brought into Japan from China. As for the numbers, 3, 3, 3, and 9, are auspicious because they represent "heaven, earth and humanity." Hence 9, which equals 3 times 3 is said to be the happiest number. Officially the "San-san-kudo" is done in front of the sanctuary of a shrine. However, it has become common to set up a temporary sanctuary in a hotel, so that the couple could proceed with the marriage ceremony and wedding reception in a rational order.

The "*San-San-Kudo*" is held in various ways. In the "*Yomeirikon*" wedding it is conducted as follows. Three cups are prepared one above the other. The bride takes the uppermost cup (the first cup), a small quantity of sake is poured into it, and she drinks it in three gulps. She then hands the cup to the groom, and he drinks the sake newly poured in the same way. He then places the cup under the third cup. Next, the groom takes the second cup and they repeat the same thing. Finally, the bride takes the third cup and the same thing is done again. Now there are cases where the "*San-San-Kudo*" is done in a simplified way. This ceremony is called "San-San-Kudo" because of the triple repetition of the drinking of sake in three gulps. Besides, in Japan, odd numbers express happiness and joy. For example, March 3 is the Doll's festival for girls, May 5 is a festival for boys, July 7 is the Star festival, and September 9 is the Feast of the Chrysanthemums. The "San-San-Kudo" is performed because marriage is a happy event.

The *sake* signifies the "avoidance of malarial air." and it arises from the myth of the god Susanoo killing a large snake by making it drunk with *sake*, and it also indicates "prosperity". In Shinto shrines people receive "sacred *sake*" after praying, and this sake has the meaning of "purification". Also, it was customary for people to come together and drink the sacred sake offered to gods and eat the food offered to gods. Here, drinking and eating together promotes

better mutual relations among the people. Hence drinking sacred sake in the course of a marriage means the bride and groom are strongly bound to each other, and that their life together would be prosperous.

Originally, only those directly concerned in the wedding performed the San-San-Kudo. Here they quietly withdrew into a separate room or shed, or to a place surrounded by a folding screen. This was done in order that the presence of others did not influence their vows.

#### **9.5.4. Sacramentary of Marriage for Catholic Church in Japan**

The *Sacramentary of Marriage* used in the Catholic Church in Japan was prepared according to the *Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium* (Editio typical altera) published on March 19, 1990, and the Church authorities began to use this Sacramentary from January 20, 1996.

In this Sacramentary, there is a part called “Appendix to the General Instruction for the Church in Japan,” where we see some pastoral points to be kept in mind for the wedding celebration and its preparation. However, there is no concrete adaptation of rites for the Church in Japan. This is because there was no consensus, although the adaptation of Japanese traditional codes of courtesy and marriage customs to the Church’s rites had been studied.

#### **9.5.5. Appendix to the General Instruction for the Church of Japan**

As an appendix to the Sacramentary there is a section dealing with “some pastoral points to be kept in mind”. Here one finds matters relating to the wedding celebration and its preparation. In the case of Inter-Faith marriages the points are as follows:

There are many Inter-Faith marriages in Japan. For this reason, pastors have to try to make the non-baptized understand the Christian view of human beings and marriage, and the meaning of the rites in the matrimonial celebration. If the pastors do not, there is a possibility that the religious life of the Catholic people would not be protected, and their marital relationship may run into difficulties. In fact, there are many Catholics who face problems in continuing their Christian life because of their Inter-Faith marriage, and who eventually leave the Church.

Many who are not baptized participate in wedding celebrations in Japan. For this reason, pastors must conduct the marriage ceremony keeping in mind the non-Catholics who are in attendance. Since they are people who will support the couple, and since it is helpful to know how the couple view the sacrament of Marriage, it is necessary for pastors to introduce the teaching of the Catholic Church on marriage in a simple way. It is also helpful to distribute some printed matter whereby those in attendance may follow the marriage ceremony, and understand the meaning of the rite.

Generally speaking followers of Shinto and Buddhism do not have much resistance to Inter-Faith marriages in the Catholic Church. However, in the case of foreigners and those belonging to new religions that have recently increased in number in Japan, there is a relatively strong sense of attachment to their religion. Inter-Faith couples have to discuss with each other before marriage their respective views of religion, marriage, and the human person, and thereby deepen their mutual understanding. A Catholic should try to persuade the other to hold the wedding in a Catholic Church, and it is also necessary to consider the language to be used in the celebration.

In the case of Inter-Faith marriages, the wedding celebration is performed with the Liturgy of the Word. Also for marriages between Catholics, it would be better to celebrate the

marriage with the Liturgy of the Word, if most of those attending are not baptized. Suitable Scripture readings should be chosen whereby the people might understand the meaning of marriage, followed by a homily and Prayer of the Faithful. This will result in a more fruitful ceremony, because the Eucharistic celebration is difficult for non-baptized people to understand, and besides it would be better not to celebrate the Eucharist in a situation where only a few would receive Holy Communion.

#### **9.5.6. Some Challenges**

As mentioned earlier, concrete adaptation taking into account Japanese tradition and custom, has not yet been included in the Sacramentary of Marriage for the Church of Japan. After World War II the social situation and life of the people of Japan have been changing considerably, owing to the inflow particularly of European and American culture, and also because of the high economic growth. Under such circumstances many traditional customs have been disappearing, and it is said that the younger generation are no longer interested in traditional ceremonies. This is one of the reasons why it is difficult for the Church in Japan to embark upon Inculturation. In a sense we may say that the traditional Japanese marriage ceremony has been influenced by the Christian marriage, and so the next two points present us with a future challenge.

##### *1. The Marriage Vows*

In celebrating a marriage in the Catholic Church both partners pronounce the vows to each other. People in Japan generally do not pronounce vows easily in public. In the past couples used to pronounce their vows silently while drinking cups of sake. Even now in Shinto and Buddhist marriage ceremonies there are no vows as in a Christian wedding, although Christianity has influenced their rites. The vow is read aloud only by the groom, after which the bride adds her name. They affix their signatures to the vows. The “San-San-Kudo” is never held in public, and if people happen to be present they are usually either the parents or witnesses.

There are some Catholic priests who have already adopted the tradition of “San-San-Kudo” in the Christian celebration. It is performed in silence just after the vows, and lends a feeling of dignity and sanctity to the celebration. It is effective in expressing joy and showing that the vows of marriage are blessed and bear a relationship to God.

Also, permitting the couple to write out the vows themselves, read them aloud during the celebration, and then affix their signatures, will enable them to realize the sanctity of the vows. Since signing of the register is something that is already being done, allowing them to read aloud the vows by themselves and then sign them will enable them to experience even more the essence of a Christian marriage.

##### *2. The Celebration of the Engagement*

In Japan, the marriage ceremony was held after a period of time, and sometimes this even amounted to a few years. Even after the marriage ceremony it took a rather lengthy period for the bride and groom to begin to live together, and during this period they slowly deepened their relationship and love. Since cohabitation is not accepted in the Catholic Church, the engagement ceremony served to deepen the relationship of the couple. In Japan the “Yuino” ceremony is often held. Yuino is an engagement ceremony in which the groom-to-be presents money and gifts to his fiancée. The couple’s families gather in a hotel or restaurant for the presentation of the engagement ring and other keepsakes. In the Catholic Church of Japan, although there are

only a few cases where the engagement ceremony is held, some devout Catholics conduct the Yuino ceremony in accordance with social custom, particularly in the case of Inter-Faith marriages. Conducting the engagement ceremony within a Catholic Church would be helpful in introducing the Catholic faith to the non-baptized, and thereby gradually enable them to grasp the religious significance of marriage and prepare them for a Catholic married life. A suitable period of time between engagement and marriage would give the couple an opportunity to deepen their relationship, and acquire an understanding of the Church's views concerning marriage.

## **10. Islam and Interfaith Marriages**

### **10.1. Preliminaries**

Since Muslims believe Islam is the perfect religion for them, it covers all aspects of life. Hence, it also gives perfect guidance over marriage. In this section, we only offer a few notes on the Islamic view of marriage, as drawn from the Qur'an and Sunnah – the Tradition. It offers the reader a few ideas on what Islam says with regard to marriage.

Marriage in Islam is recommended as a religious requirement. It also specifically considers the tradition (Sunnah) of Prophet Muhammad. Once the Prophet declared: "Marriage is my Sunnah, whoever disregards my (Sunnah) path is not from among us" (ibn Majah). Furthermore, the Prophet recommended: "Whoever is able to marry, should marry" (Bukhari). The basic principles for marriage in Islam are from the Qur'an and Hadith. Their teachings are perpetual, unconditional, absolute and cannot be changed.

The Qur'an discusses marriage in detail in many verses. According to one count, there are no less than 104 verses, using the phrase marriage which is repeated 23 times, or using the word *zauwi* (spouse) 80 times. In order to understand the real meaning of marriage in Islam one needs to study all these verses well.

However, some scholars, after deep analysis on all the verses on marriage conclude to the five basic principles of marriage: Monogamy principle (Sura 4:3 also 129), love and affection, complement and protection (Sura 2:187) civilized and well-mannered relation both in sexual or human relations (Sura 4: 19; Sura 9:24; Sura 22:13), and the principle of freedom to find a spouse for both men and women.

Marriage in the Qur'an is considered a reflection of a nature and tendency that exists at all levels of creation. When something is created as one part of a pair it is clearly incomplete without the other - as the Qur'an states: "He himself created the pair, - male and female" (Sura 53:45).

The Qur'an also says: "And of everything we have created pairs: that ye may receive instruction" (Sura 51:49). "It is He who created you from a single person, and made his mate of like nature, in order that he might dwell with her (in love)...." (Sura 7:189).

Since Allah created everything in pairs, and since He has created the male and the female, it is He that is the point of reference for the married pair. The male and female complete each other. Together they make a single self; and this is how they must strive to make their lives together, as if they are one being, one person, one spirit. Allah is to be looked for to set all things in the right balance.

Islamic theology teaches that through marriage, the conjugal relationship between a man and a woman becomes lawful. It provides a legitimate outlet for recreation as well as procreation. Islam regards sex as natural and good, and restricts it to the partners of marriage.

At this stage it is important to note that for the sake of compatibility, and the upbringing of future children, Islam recommends for a Muslim to marry another Muslim. However, in some circumstances it is permissible for a Muslim to marry a non-Muslim.

## **10.2. A Brief Summary of Basic Principles**

- In Islam, marriage is prescribed for both men and women as a religious duty. In fact, marriage, conjugal sex, and procreation are religious duties the Muslim man or woman owes to Allah.
- Islam fixes no minimum age for either man or woman. Men of any age can be married to women of any age.
- The preferred marriage is between first cousins, especially the sons and daughters of two brothers.
- In Islam an arranged marriage is considered the best marriage. By contrast, a love marriage is considered improper, immoral, and undesirable.
- The father has the duty to select the partner for his sons and daughters. However, he is required to obtain the consent of the daughter before making the final selection of a husband for her; but he can marry her off to a man of his choice with or without her consent.
- Marriage is a civil contract between a man and woman (Sura 4: 21 and see 4: 154, 33: 7).
- The Muslim marriage has to be a publicized affair. Following the consummation of the marriage, the bridegroom or his family has to give what is called Walima - wedding banquet.
- The Muslim marriage is a transaction between families. The aim is to create a bond between the two families, as the marriage of a man to woman widens the circle of relatives.
- Islam forbids woman to give herself in a first marriage by her own to any man. Unless the father or a guardian gives her in marriage (especially the first), the marriage is invalid.
- A man marries a woman for a mahr - bride-price which he is legally required to pay to the woman, either before the consummation of the marriage or at some future date during the marriage, as agreed upon and stated in the marriage contract (Cfr., 4: 4, 25; 2: 236- 237).
- In Islam a man has the right to marry other women and to have up to four legally wedded wives (“Marry women of your choice, two, three or four” Sura 4:3).
- The husband has the legal duty to support his wife/wives financially and also to protect them socially and sexually, or from seduction by other men.
- According to a Hadith, “a woman may be married by four qualifications: one on account of her money; another, on account of the nobility of her ancestry (shijra); another, on account of her beauty; fourth, on account of her virtue: but if you do it from any other consideration, your hands be rubbed in dirt”.

## **10.3. Inter-Faith Marriages in Islam**

In dealing with Inter-Faith marriages in Islam, the first observation which strikes one is that marriages, even between the different Islamic sects especially Sunni and Shia are avoided and strongly discouraged. Often when these take place, it damages and even destroys family relationships. Hence, Muslim families insist that Muslim marriages must still be based on the model of the traditional arranged marriages. Because of this fact, it is the parental responsibility and children's duty to abide by the traditional rules of match-making and marriage arrangements.

As far as marriages with the people of other faiths are concerned, Islam does not encourage them. The general rule of Islam is that Muslims should marry Muslims. A Muslim male or female should not marry a non-Muslim male or female. This prohibition is simply because all non-Muslims are considered infidels.

The Qur'an categorizes non-Muslims into three groups:

First, the *ahl-kitab*: By this is meant people who recognize the revelation books passed by Allah to His prophets. This group includes Christians and Jews. Muslim men may marry women from ahl al-kitab.

Second, the *musyrikin*: The term mushrik, which comes from shirk, means one who associates or ascribes partners to Allah. It also means denying the existence of Allah, Prophets and the after life. According to a tradition, musyrikin are those who worship statues. Devout men must not marry musyrik women and vice versa because according to the Qur'an: "Do not marry unbelieving women (idolatresses), until they believe; a slave woman who believes is better than an unbelieving woman, even though she allures you. Nor marry (your girls) to unbelievers until they believe; a man slave who believes is better than an unbeliever, even though he allures you. Unbelievers do (but) beckon you to the fire. But Allah beckons by His Grace to the Garden (of bliss) and forgiveness, and makes His signs clear to mankind: that they may celebrate His praise" (Sura 2: 221).

Third, the *kafir*: Kafir means people outside Islam thus unbelievers. The Qur'an commands Muslim men not to marry unbelievers: "O ye who believe! when there come to you believing women refugees, examine (and test) them: Allah knows best as to their faith: if ye ascertain that they are believers, then send them not back to the unbelievers. They are not lawful (wives) for the unbelievers, nor are the (unbelievers) lawful (husbands) for them. But pay the unbelievers what they have spent (on their dower). And there will be no blame on you if ye marry them on payment of their dower to them. But hold not to the guardianship of unbelieving woman: ask for what ye have spent on their dowers, and let the (unbelievers) ask for what they have spent (on the dowers of women who come over to you). Such is the command of Allah; He judges (with justice) between you: and Allah is full of knowledge and wisdom" (Sura 60:10).

According to the Qur'an, the Jews and Christians fall under these categories of mushrik and kafir:

*"O ye who believe! Truly the pagans are unclean; so let them not, after this year of theirs, approach the Sacred Mosque. And if ye fear poverty, soon will Allah enrich you, if He wills, out of His bounty, for Allah is all knowing, all wise.*

*Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Apostle, nor acknowledge the Religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued.*

*The Jews call Uzair a son of Allah, and the Christians call Christ the Son of Allah. That is a saying from their mouths; (in this) they but imitate what the unbelievers of old used to say. Allah's curse be on them: how they are deluded away from the Truth!*

*They take their priests and their anchorites to be their lords in derogation of Allah, and (they take as their Lord) Christ the son of Mary; yet they were commanded to worship but One Allah: there is no god but He. Praise and glory to Him: (Far is He) from having the parents they associate (with Him).*

*Again would they extinguish Allah's Light with their mouths, but Allah will not allow but that His Light should be perfected, even though the unbelievers may detest (it).*

*It is He who hath sent His Apostle with Guidance and Religion of Truth, to proclaim it over all religions, even though the pagans may detest (it)" (Sura 9:28-33).*

The above passages claim that not only are Christians idolaters and blasphemers, who associate partners with Allah, but the Jews are as well. It even classifies the Jews and Christians as unclean: "In blasphemy indeed are those that say that Allah is Christ the son of Mary. Say: 'who then hath the least power against Allah, if His will were to destroy Christ the son of Mary, his mother, and all – everyone that is on the earth? For to Allah belongeth the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and all that is between. He createth what He pleaseth. For Allah hath power over all things" (Sura 5:19).

"They do blaspheme who say: 'Allah is Christ the son of Mary.' But said Christ: 'O children of Israel! Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord.' Whoever joins other gods with Allah, - Allah will forbid him the Garden, and the Fire will be his abode. There will for the wrong-doers be no one to help" (Sura 5:75).

"They do blaspheme who say: Allah is one of three in a Trinity: for there is no god except One Allah. If they desist not from their word (of blasphemy), verily a grievous penalty will befall the blasphemers among them" (Sura 5:76).

The following Hadith confirms the view that Christians are both mushriks and kafirs: "Whenever Ibn Umar was asked about marrying a Christian lady or a Jewess, he would say: "Allah has made it unlawful for the believers to marry ladies who ascribe partners in worship to Allah, and I do not know of a greater thing, as regards to ascribing partners in worship, etc. to Allah, than that a lady should say that Jesus is her Lord although he is just one of Allah's slaves" (cf. Sahih al-Bukhari, Volume 7, Book 63, Number 209).

#### **10.4. Marrying a Non-Muslim Woman**

In spite all that is said above, according to the Qur'an exception is given only to Muslim men who are allowed to marry the girls from among the People of the Book. Allah says: "This day are (all) things good and pure made lawful unto you. The food of the People of the Book is lawful unto you and yours is lawful unto them. (Lawful unto you in marriage) are (not only) chaste women who are believers, but chaste women among the People of the Book, revealed before your time, - when ye give them their due dowers, and desire chastity, not lewdness, nor secret intrigues. If anyone rejects faith, fruitless is his work, and in the hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost (all spiritual good)" (Sura 5:6).

This allowance comes from the understanding that Jews and Christians share similar religious outlooks - a belief in One God, follow the divine commandments and believe in revealed Scriptures. However, the children of such a union are always to be raised in the faith of Islam.

#### **10.5. Marrying a Non-Muslim Man**

Muslim women are not allowed to marry non-Muslim men of any faith. Under no conditions they are permitted to marry anyone but a Muslim man. Sura 2:221 mentions: “Nor marry (your girls) to unbelievers until they believe; a man slave who believes is better than an unbeliever”.

From the Qur’anic teaching and the Hadith the reasons for this prohibition are obvious. For example, because the leader of the family is the husband, and in Islam the woman is enjoined to be obedient to her husband, he will rule the house and make decisions. When the leader of the house is of another faith he is responsible by the authority of his own religion and he may not protect the freedom of religion of his spouse. Furthermore, if the husband of a Muslim woman were non-Muslim, who does not recognize Islam altogether, then divergence of loyalty might arise. Since the wife as a rule takes the nationality and status given by her husband’s law, therefore her Muslim status would be affected. It is also feared that the non-Muslim husband may prevent his Muslim wife from performing some Islamic rituals. Therefore, it is said that Islam made it impermissible for a Muslim woman to marry a non-Muslim with the aim of keeping her away from things that may jeopardize her faith. Allah says: “Never will the Jews or Christians be satisfied with thee unless thou follow their form or religion. Say: ‘The Guidance of Allah, - that is the (only) Guidance.’ Wert thou to follow their desires after the knowledge which that reached thee, then wouldst thou find neither Protector nor Helper against Allah” (Sura 2: 120).

Some Muslim scholars go so far as to state that if a Muslim woman goes on and marries a non-Muslim, by doing so she will commit an act of apostasy.

#### **10.6. Some Recommendations**

One needs to understand that in Islam the Qur’an is the first of the roots of Islamic jurisprudence. The others are Tradition (Sunna), analogical reasoning (Qiyas) and consensus (Ijma). On these bases Islamic law has been developed according to four schools, the Makiki, the Hanafi, the Hanbali; to these could be added the Jafari school, which is that of the Twelver Shi’ites who form the majorities of the Shia. In the case of marriage in Islam mostly a body of Qur’anic teachings are followed and these regulations have been developed by Islamic law. Customs are nevertheless strong and have considerable influence on the way Qur’anic and legal principles are applied.

According to the teachings of Islam it is clear that Islam allows a very limited area of Inter-Faith marriages. Muslim men can marry women who are Jews and Christians. It does not allow Muslim men to marry a follower of any other religion, or an agnostic or atheist woman until they embrace Islam.

It is haram for a Muslim woman to marry a non-Muslim man, regardless of whether he is of the People of the Book or not. There is no way to justify it. This has been categorically forbidden by the Qur’an. The law stands that she may only marry a believing Muslim man. The reasoning is that if the husband is not a Muslim neither will his children be brought up as Muslims, and this would be loss for the Umma, the Muslim community.

The harassment of couples who choose to marry across religions in certain Islamic countries is not unknown. There are cases in which, couples not only had to leave their homelands, but their family members also have been threatened and harassed. Thus such marriages generally lead to a lot of tension within the two families. Muslim women wishing to marry Christian men face the additional worry of potential banishment from the faith

community. Many families break all contacts with couples which is unbearable. They cannot meet their parents nor can attend the family get-together. Many a time such couples live their relationship in secrecy. Such a situation sometimes causes strain between the individuals and this strain affects the quality of their relationships.

It is witnessed in number of countries where Islam is in full strength that in order to marry a Christian woman there is forced conversion, of the latter. Because of such realities women who marry Muslim men face bitter experiences. In many cases it is evident that in the beginning it is said that the man is very understanding and can give any commitment that he would not object to his children being brought up as Christians, or that his wife will have complete freedom to practice her religion. However, soon the reality changes, the women are asked and expected eventually to embrace Islam and children are brought up as Muslim.

Our local Churches in Asia, especially those which have a predominantly Muslim population, need to produce guidelines for Inter-Faith marriages especially in relation to Islam. Of course, such guidelines will keep in focus the multicultural and multi-faith nature of given society, with the view that it will likely increase the number of marriages across faith boundaries.

We are duty bound to emphasize the Catholic understanding of marriage and clarify Catholic understanding of free consent of a man and a woman and the elements of a loving relationship which is lifelong and exclusive. This is of extreme importance especially in the cases where an understanding of marriage is in sharp conflict with a Catholic understanding of marriage. In such situations the marriage of Inter-Faith couples in a Catholic setting may not be appropriate.

In such unavoidable circumstances, we need to provide a very carefully prepared Marriage Preparation Program. In such courses it should be made clear to the Muslim party that he/she should convincingly show respect for fundamental liberties, give the sacrosanct rights of the partner, value the equal dignity of human person and acknowledge that religious principles cannot be surrendered.

Our pastoral care of the faithful would also demand that in such situation the couples are offered true understanding of family life, above all regarding the nurture, education and faith development of their children, and their willingness to respect what is good and life-giving in the cultural and faith traditions of their extended families.

## **EPILOGUE**

This paper prepared by Office for Theological Concerns (OTC) of FABC on Inter-Faith marriage has kept the situation of multi-religious Asia and the mission of the Church in this continent. It is tentative in nature. OTC offers this study paper on Inter-Faith Marriage for further theological and pastoral reflections with a view to serving the ministry and mission of the Church to Catholics who have entered into Inter-Faith marriage alliances and their Families in our continent.

The paper has reflected in the light of Vatican II and post-Vatican-II theological thinking including canonical perspectives on the complex reality of such marriages and families. The paper has also considered them in the light of inculturation and interreligious dialogue inseparable from marriage in general, and Inter-Faith marriage in particular, in the context of our continent. The paper may not answer all the questions raised by Inter-Faith alliances but points out meaningful directions for pastoral solutions and ministry in keeping with the renewed

perspectives of ecclesiology, mission, dialogue and inculturation in the Church today. We hope that this study paper will promote ongoing reflection and serve a pastoral purpose.

FABC