

**MARRIAGE:**  
**ROMAN CATHOLIC AND SUNNI MUSLIM PERSPECTIVES**

**Prepared by the Mid-Atlantic Dialogue of Catholics and Muslims**

Co-sponsored by:

The Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs  
of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops  
and the Islamic Circle of North America

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United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Washington, D.C.

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Msgr. David J. Malloy

General Secretary, USCCB

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## **Preface**

The Mid-Atlantic Dialogue of Catholics and Muslims is pleased to present this joint document, *Marriage: Roman Catholic and Sunni Muslim Perspectives*. It is the fruit of our annual meeting since 1997 under the joint sponsorship of the Islamic Circle of North America and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops through its Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs.

Starting with a preliminary meeting at the end of 1996, Catholics and Muslims from New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey have met regularly to discuss the challenges our families face when trying to live in fidelity to their religious principles. After the tragic events of September 11, 2001, this dialogue interrupted that conversation to explore the relationship between religious faith and the use of violence. This reflection resulted in the document *Seven Points of Reflection on Violence, Scripture, and the History of Christian-Muslim Relations*. The original work of the dialogue resumed in May, 2004.

Most of the Catholic participants have been the ecumenical and interreligious delegates of their respective diocesan bishops; most Muslim participants, already active in local interfaith dialogue programs, were acquaintances of their Catholic partners in those communities. By encouraging diocesan representatives in this way to meet with Muslim partners in their communities, the sponsoring organizations engaged a broadly representative spectrum of experience in interreligious relations. In addition, scholars and specialists were called upon to explain certain aspects of theology, canon law and *shari'ah* relevant to our discussions. After attending regional meetings, members returned home motivated to improve relations with other religions on the basis of the spirit, content, and results of their experience at the dialogue table.

The document *Marriage: Roman Catholic and Sunni Muslim Perspectives* was produced on the basis of a long dialogue process, usually hosted by the Immaculate Conception Center in Douglaston, New York. The two of us, Dr. Khurshid Khan of ICNA and New York and Bishop Dennis Madden, Auxiliary Bishop of Baltimore, have been the co-chairmen of this dialogue through much of the work devoted to this topic. We would both like to express our thanks to Bishop Ignatius Catanello, Auxiliary Bishop of Brooklyn, for his service as Catholic co-chair until 2006. The imams, priests, and scholars who have participated in this dialogue, often at great sacrifice to their families and to the communities they serve, are also deserving of our special gratitude.

As a rule, an oral process can never fully be represented in a written document, and ours is no exception. Careful drafting and fact-checking have given the document a life of its own. Catholic and Muslim scholars across the United States were consulted on controversial questions and generously provided clarifications of the difficult points in the text. As we present it to you, we are aware that much more could be said on both sides. We fully expect that other dialogue groups will improve on our efforts, taking into account the progress that we have made and carrying it further. We, too, have taken account of the documentation on Muslim and Catholic marriages in other parts of the world, being mindful that our communities of faith here in the United States represent a “mutable mosaic” of believers from many countries and cultures.

In light of our discussions, the Mid-Atlantic Dialogue of Catholics and Muslims offers *Marriage: Roman Catholic and Sunni Muslim Perspectives* as a text that can be used in a variety of ways by our respective communities and by those interested in religious approaches to



marriage and family life. We expect that the primary readership of our text will be Catholics active in their local parishes and Muslims strongly committed to particular mosque communities.

The phenomenon of interreligious marriages is becoming more common. Our text candidly discusses the difficulties and possibilities inherent in such marriages. Since marriage preparation has been shown to be an effective way to improve the quality and resilience of marriages, this text could be a valuable resource for those involved in marriage preparation programs and marriage counseling in churches and mosques. This text can also be adopted as a resource for adult education programs. All who have prepared this text hope that it will bring Catholics and Sunni Muslims together in fruitful dialogue that will contribute towards deeper understanding and enduring mutual respect.

Catholics and Muslims in America find themselves in a cultural and religious landscape which has changed significantly in the past few decades and all indications are that it will continue to do so in the future. It is our hope and commitment to accompany this development with the sound insights of our traditions, not only as stated in the present text, but also in our ongoing compassionate service to lively communities of faith. We have tried to attune the contents of this document to authoritative teachings, both Catholic and Sunni Muslim, making reference to controversial points where necessary.

We also believe that this work is as much a point of departure as a culmination. Future efforts in Muslim-Catholic dialogue on marriage may wish to make take up the following critical issues for further discussion:

- How will Catholics and Muslims continue to address the challenges confronting their traditions in the mainstream of American society?

- How can Catholics and Muslims establish ever more effective forms of marriage preparation on the local parish and mosque level?
- What can Catholics and Muslims do together to reduce the levels of divorce and domestic violence?
- How can we improve childhood education, particularly in the content and practice of religious faith?
- How will the relationship between religious and civil law evolve in the United States in the coming years and decades, and how will this affect Catholics and Muslims in American society?
- How is family life evolving under the impact of immigration and human rights issues?

As we came together each year, we did more than discuss various aspects of marriage and faith; we shared our experiences of life and listened to one another in depth. These have been momentous years in which religions in general, and ours in particular, have become the object of controversial coverage in the mass media. The work of our dialogue was constantly stimulated by dynamic issues within our communities as well as in the modern world; for this we are grateful, since—thanks to the times in which we live—our discussions have never flagged in motivation. Most importantly, we have become friends, looking forward to our annual gathering in which we were able to observe the rhythms of our respective prayer services and to share the delightful flavors of *halal* meals together.

We offer this contribution to all who wish to know more about Catholic and Sunni Muslim approaches to marriage, and to grow in appreciation of the religious values that provide grounding for family life in both our traditions. We also welcome responses to this text,

including news about dialogues, programs, panels, and projects based upon it. We encourage all to visit our websites and to contact the sponsoring organizations listed below:

Bishop Dennis Madden, Co-Chairman  
Archdiocese of Baltimore, Maryland  
Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs  
United States Conference of  
Catholic Bishops  
3211 Fourth Street, N.E.  
Washington, DC 20017  
[seiamail@usccb.org](mailto:seiamail@usccb.org)  
[www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org)

Dr. Khurshid Khan  
Ameer, ICNA  
84-27 Smedley Street  
Jamaica, NY 11435  
[Ameer@icnait.com](mailto:Ameer@icnait.com)  
[www.icna.org](http://www.icna.org)

## **INTRODUCTION:**

### **MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE IN A TIME OF SOCIAL CHANGE**

#### **From Distrust to Dialogue**

For the sake of peace and justice in the world, it is critically important for Catholics and Muslims to understand one another. In the multi-religious society of the United States, it is equally important for Catholics and Muslims to know one another's beliefs and practices in relation to marriage and family life. American Catholics and Muslims today are working together to address the tumultuous legacy of their past interaction, which certainly involved violence and animosity, but also cooperation and mutual engagement. Sadly, few modern Catholics and Muslims have a deep, experiential knowledge of each other's faith. As we seek to remedy this situation, presenting our beliefs to one another with clarity and conviction, we hope to inaugurate a new era in Catholic-Muslim relations. In particular, our dialogue over the past twelve years has sought to examine our respective understandings of marriage and family life, with the intention of supporting the families that comprise our communities of faith.

Catholics and Muslims respect one another for their faith in the One, Living, Merciful, Omnipotent God who is Creator of heaven and earth and who has spoken to humanity through divine revelation. As people of faith who recite, pray, teach, and live according to the spiritual traditions that we have received, our mutual commitment to respect and dialogue enhances our cooperation in community projects for the common good and our service of those most at risk or in need. Muslims and Catholics agree that caring for the needy is an essential sign that a believer has heard God's message and is acting upon it. In this atmosphere of charitable cooperation,

mutual respect, and learning, Catholics and Muslims can enter into a truly interreligious dialogue about various aspects of their faiths. In this way, we hope to overcome misunderstandings, undergo a healing of memories, deepen our bonds of friendship, and enhance our outreach to the communities in which we live and serve. In particular, we desire to work together in support of marriage and family life.

### **Marriage and Family: God's Gift to Us, Our Gift to Society**

Catholics and Muslims affirm together that marriage is a blessing from God, established as a part of the created order and hence, as natural between man and woman. We also believe that families, and the relationships woven together in marriage, play a pivotal role in providing an environment in which faith may be nurtured. In the family, we transmit our essential religious beliefs and practices to future generations. While Catholics and Muslims diverge on many points, we nonetheless agree on many important features of marriage and family life. These can be a source of mutual encouragement and enrichment, as well as an inspiration for common action in the face of contemporary social issues.

In order to understand the challenges faced by the family today, we must first understand the reality of family life. Catholics and Muslims see the family as the primary and most vital cell of society. It is here that society is created and that personal dignity is fostered, so that family virtues may be transmitted from one generation to the next. The family is a society in its own right that must be recognized as such by the greater society, - and most especially by the "State."

In his encyclical, *Familiaris Consortio*, Pope John Paul II stated in 1990 that, as a society, the family has certain rights which the State is obliged to recognize and support. These rights include:

- The right to exist and grow;
- The right to exercise its natural responsibilities and privileges regarding the transmission of life and the education of children;
- The right of the married couple to conjugal intimacy;
- The right to protect and exercise stability in the bond and institution of marriage;
- The right to profess one's faith and to transmit it from parents to children;
- The right to raise children in accordance with family traditions, supported by institutions founded for this purpose;
- The right, especially of family members who may be poor and the sick, to obtain physical, social, political, and economic security;
- The right to suitable and affordable family housing;
- The right to freedom of expression for family life and to representation in national and local governments for this purpose;
- The right to form associations supportive of the family;
- The right and duty to protect all minors, but especially those without intact families;
- The right to wholesome recreation for all family members;
- The right of elderly family members to dignity, particularly in their end-of-life care;
- The right to emigrate as a family in search of a better life.

## **Supporting Marriage and the Family in the Face of Modern Challenges**

While Catholics and Muslims affirm their own convictions about these rights, we must also acknowledge that many modern societies often do not favor their exercise. At a time when such pressures often exceed the abilities of isolated families to flourish, we are called as people of faith to help families face the challenges presented by modern society.

An important challenge to married life in our time results from uncertainty and confusion about how marriage and family life are to be defined. The long-held belief that marriage is the union of a man and a woman open to the transmission of life has been challenged by many in today's world. The prevalence of divorce and the normalization of single-parent households have eroded this traditional model of family life. Some believe that same sex unions can also be defined as "marriage." Others believe that the union of a married couple should evolve in the direction of a negotiable agreement without permanent commitment. Trial marriage and *de facto* unions which lack legal formalization have become common. Unfortunately, these approaches to marriage are having a negative impact on the attempts of religious associations and civil society to maintain the rights of family life, as listed above. Additionally, the religious institutions traditionally called upon to support unity, dialogue, and healing in the family, are often unable to bring their historic resources to bear on these problems because of widespread relativism and extreme individualism.

For example, the ease of obtaining divorce in many Western societies creates a climate in which permanence and stability in marriage are eroded from within the legal system itself. As a result, children growing up in a family marked by divorce do not find models for indissoluble unions. While divorce may resolve some intractable human conflicts in a given marriage, its

deleterious effects on society are alarming when more than 50% of all marriages in the United States end in legal divorce.

Catholic and Muslim religious institutions are determined to support the permanent union of a husband and wife through preaching, teaching, counseling, and pastoral care. At the same time, we must compassionately address the needs of divorced couples and their children. Pastorally speaking, religious leaders who deal with divorce strive to be fair, compassionate, and just in providing spiritual guidance to their followers facing this kind of pain and loss.

The current economic structures under which families must operate may also destabilize family life. In some cases, the level of poverty has become so serious that it makes the choice of marriage economically impossible. In addition, the unbalanced distribution of material resources in the world has led to unprecedented migration. All too often, all the members of a family are unable to emigrate together. Instead, only the employable members of the family leave home to seek work in more affluent parts of the world, returning a portion of their income to family members. Ironically, these noble sacrifices often subvert the very fabric of family relationships in ways that are not easy to remedy. Especially in contexts of immigration and unstable working conditions, levels of belief and practice sometimes become a source of division even among family members who claim to profess the same faith. In some cases, family life has been so severely compromised that children are themselves later psychologically incapable of forming a family of their own.

Our efforts at Muslim-Catholic dialogue have attempted to address these challenges by offering opportunities to reflect together not only on our core values and principles, but also on how we may more effectively implement our programs of teaching and spiritual guidance in the



current social and cultural environment. We felt that the greatest social challenge that confronts people of faith is that of remaining true to the respective teachings of their religious traditions and of adhering in total fidelity to those practices that shape religious identity and pertain to their future life with God. In spite of the difficulties that we face, we have found strength and wisdom in our interreligious dialogue and have begun to see the fruits of our work in the renewal of hopefulness among the people we serve.

In diagnosing the problems of the family, we will also offer some positive solutions. Families were created to do much more than survive! They were meant to provide a place of love, sharing, consolation, enduring companionship, and joy. The spiritualities of our traditions remind us to take time for our families. Couples need and deserve their own private time to build their relationships, which are the keystone of the family community. The demands of work, school, memberships in various organizations, and activities outside the home must be balanced with time dedicated to cultivating a meaningful and enduring family life. Spending recreation time together and working on common projects builds intimacy, increases understanding, and creates memories to the benefit and enrichment of all family members.

# MARRIAGE IN THE CATHOLIC TRADITION

## I. Scriptural and Theological Basis of Marriage

The Catholic Church teaches that the intimate partnership that constitutes marriage was written into the very nature of man and woman from the hand of their Creator. By nature, marriage is ordered to the good of the spouses and to the procreation and the raising of children.

Marriage is also a relationship integrated into Catholic life because, for the baptized, Christ raised it to the level of a sacrament. While one enters into a relation with God and the Church through the reception of baptism, marriage is a sacrament that allows the couple to experience God and participate in the life of the Church in a unique way and allows the spouses to “perfect” themselves and each other in order to obtain eternal salvation. In Christian marriage, the covenant between the bride and groom reflects the relationship between Christ and his Church. In the Catholic Church, marriage between one baptized Catholic man and one baptized Catholic woman is considered the normative practice.

The original plan for the union of man and woman is articulated in the Book of Genesis. Although divorce was allowed in Deuteronomy 24:1-4, it was abrogated by Jesus’ own teaching in Mark 10:5 and Matthew 19. Jesus’ prohibition of divorce strengthened God’s original plan of creation as revealed in Genesis (see Mark 10: 2-12, citing Genesis 1:27 and 2:24)<sup>1</sup>. In Matthew 19:3-8, the Pharisees challenge Jesus to give his opinion on the legitimacy of divorce followed by remarriage. In reply, Jesus clarifies the foundational doctrine of the indissolubility of marriage, citing Genesis 1:27 and 2:24. Jesus explains that God’s ultimate intent for marriage in

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<sup>1</sup> See also Luke 16:18; Matthew 5:32, 19: 3-12 and 19:9; 1 Corinthians 6:16 and 7:10f; Ephesians 5:31.

human society requires a bond that only death can terminate. He comments that the divorce granted in the Old Testament was due to the cultural attitude of the ancient Israelites and does not manifest God's complete, revealed will. Jesus' citation of Genesis 2:24 indicates that in the divine "joining together," God ratifies the mutual consent of persons; their sexual union serves as a pledge of exclusive fidelity to each other<sup>2</sup>. Saint Paul's reflection on the theological meaning of this teaching is found in Ephesians 5:21-33, where marriage is the analogy for the relationship between Christ and the Church.

Catholic tradition has preserved Christ's doctrine on marriage down through the ages. Core beliefs about marriage are contained principally in the Bible and, secondarily, in many decrees which proceed from the Church's teaching authority, e.g., the decrees of ecumenical councils, the encyclical letters of the Popes, the Code of Canon Law, and *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The Catholic Church teaches that marriage is a "sacred bond," "a mutual giving of two persons," an "intimate partnership of life and love," and a conjugal covenant of "irrevocable personal consent." The teaching authority of the Catholic Church, exercised by all bishops united with the Bishop of Rome, the Pope, articulated its teaching on marriage in the Second Vatican Council's *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*.<sup>3</sup>

The Catholic Church teaches that matrimony between already baptized spouses shares deeply in the mystery of Christ's faithful love for the Church (Eph 5:21-33). Through matrimony, Christians are consecrated for their duties to one another and to the whole world as witnesses of their faith, promoting the dignity of their state as husband and wife.

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<sup>2</sup> See Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18; 1 Corinthians 7:10f.

<sup>3</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, in *Vatican Council II: Volume I: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (new rev. ed.), trans. Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing, 1996), nos. 47-52.

In the Bible, the mutual love between spouses is often employed as an image of God's absolute and unfailing love for humanity. Scripture characterizes the various covenants between God and his people delivered through Noah, Abraham, and Moses in terms of the fidelity, devotion, and the requirements of a marital covenant. Under God's New Covenant in Jesus Christ, the love between husband and wife is revealed as participative in the same love found between Christ and his Church (Eph 5:21-33). As a sacrament or a visible sign of the inner life of God poured out for those who follow Christ in faith, marriage between a baptized man and a baptized woman is understood to be a sacred union intended to last until death.

Consent between the spouses is what constitutes a marriage. The use of the term "covenant" in Catholic marriage theology emphasizes the mutual, exclusive, faithful, and self-giving consent which is the cause of any marriage. Consent is at the heart of the ongoing, loving, interpersonal relationship between spouses, whereby they will nurture and educate children. The Catholic tradition views marriage as permanent, faithful, and life-giving (procreative). According to this teaching, the husband and wife affirm one another as persons who are able to develop within their relationship the special gifts and qualities each possesses.

Husbands and wives have complementary roles to play in the family. Wives should be loved for their dignity as women. As mothers, they should have every opportunity to exercise a vital role in the upbringing of their offspring. As partners with their husbands, they share in the management of the household. At the same time, wives and husbands are called to live a special form of personal friendship. Husbands likewise should be loved for their dignity as men and as fathers. Along with his spouse, a father should also serve an important role in the nurture and education of his children. He must be attentive to his wife and family, and should not be absent

for long periods except in circumstances realistically beyond his control. When he is with his family, a husband and father should avoid any sense of superiority that might threaten the equality of his marriage partnership.

## **II. Programs of Marriage Preparation**

In order to orient couples towards these ideals, the Catholic Church requires that couples intending to marry undergo some form of marriage preparation. In the United States, one of the ministries which the Catholic Church extends to those preparing for marriage is what has been traditionally called “Pre-Cana,” in remembrance of Jesus’ first miracle performed in Cana of Galilee (Jn 2:1-11). Beginning in the 1940s in the Archdiocese of Chicago, the Pre-Cana Movement in the United States has evolved into a ministry that is among the most widespread, systematic, and successful programs sponsored by the Church. Studies have shown that this ministry achieves its intended objective: to prepare couples for a lifelong bond of faithful love.

In 1995, several independent marriage ministries began to coalesce into what has come to be called the “marriage movement” in the United States. This project was the first of its kind to recognize, research, and advocate for the value of continuing formation at all stages of married life as an effective way to build and maintain stronger, healthier marriages. In particular, marriage preparation is an excellent example of the broader phenomenon of “marriage formation” that now seems to have achieved accepted status in many sectors of contemporary culture, even outside of the Catholic Church.

One of the benchmarks of Catholic leadership in the field occurred in 1995 when the Bishops’ Committee on Marriage and Family Life encouraged Creighton University to undertake

the first-ever national study of the effectiveness of marriage preparation within the Catholic Church in the United States.<sup>4</sup> This study helped to measure the impact that marriage preparation programs are having on engaged couples and, in many cases, to re-evaluate and revise certain aspects of their design, giving the Church a set of national standards to follow. Within the larger marriage movement, this research has triggered similar studies that have encouraged other institutions to support marriage formation. For example, some states passed laws allowing a couple to get their marriage license at a discounted fee if they have taken a pre-marriage preparation program at a church, school, or similar organization.

The “Creighton Study” developed its findings from a number of randomly selected couples who had experienced Catholic marriage preparation through various programs offered in dioceses across the United States. Subsequent research has shown an even closer link between marriage formation and marital success. For example, another national study<sup>5</sup> concluded that couples who had pre-marriage counseling were 50% more likely to report marital success than those who did not. Marital success is defined as enjoying an intact marriage with a high level of quality and satisfaction.

### **III. The Marriage Rites and Their Meaning**

In the first six centuries of Christianity, recognized doctrinal authorities known as “Fathers of the Church” were accustomed to assert the principle: *lex orandi, lex credendi*, which translates to: “the law of prayer is the law of faith”; or more loosely: “as the Church prays, so she

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<sup>4</sup> *Marriage Preparation in the Catholic Church: Getting it Right. Report of a Study on the Value of Marriage Preparation in the Catholic Church for Couples Married One through Eight Years.* Center for Marriage and Family, Creighton University, November, 1995.

<sup>5</sup> Patrick F. Fagan, Robert W. Patterson and Robert E. Rector, *Marriage and Welfare Reform: The Overwhelming Evidence that Marriage Education Works* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 2002).

believes.” The truth captured in this beautiful axiom is expressive of the whole of Christian life and particularly so in the approach the Church takes towards marriage. The Rite of Marriage expresses what Catholics believe about marriage. Indeed, the extent to which the ritual shapes core beliefs about marriage is a mark of the significance the Church attaches to its public and proper celebration. It also indicates the importance the Church places on authenticity in the spiritual life. Christians should pray what they believe and believe what they pray.

It follows then that the marriage between two Catholics is normally celebrated during the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist, commonly called the “Mass” or the “Liturgy.” Catholics view the Eucharistic Liturgy as the “source and summit” of the whole of Christian life.<sup>6</sup> It is the preeminent rite of the Church which commemorates and provides a real participation in Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection. Moreover, the Eucharist is considered the sacrament of Jesus’ new covenant that is itself an image of the wedding feast of God’s reign of grace, salvation, and sanctification, extending from this life to eternal life. Thus it is fitting for the spouses to exchange their consent in a Eucharistic context through the mutual offering of their own lives united with the sacrifice of Christ. In this context, the Rite of Marriage elucidates the Church’s essential beliefs about marriage by including the mutual consent of the spouses, prayers, and blessings. In these rites the newly married couple receives the divine grace necessary to live Church teachings in their daily lives. A celebration of the Eucharist which includes the Rite of Marriage is known as a “Nuptial Mass.” Ideally, it is celebrated with the parish community.

Because marriage is brought about by the valid consent of the spouses, the proper ministers of the sacrament are the man and the woman themselves. The Catholic canonical form

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<sup>6</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctam Concilium)*, 10, in *Vatican Council II: Volume 1: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (new rev. ed.), trans. Austin Flannery.

for marriage requires that the exchange of consent be celebrated in the presence of two witnesses and presided over by an ordained minister of the Church (i.e. a bishop, pastor, or properly delegated priest or deacon) whose duty it is to receive the consent of the couple on behalf of the Church.

As noted above, the Rite of Marriage between two Catholics is normally celebrated within the Eucharistic liturgy. In a marriage between a Catholic and a baptized person of another Christian tradition, the marriage rite usually takes place outside the context of the Mass. However, for a just cause, the diocesan bishop, or his delegate, can give permission for such a marriage to be celebrated within a Mass. When a Catholic marries a non-baptized person the ritual is adapted slightly and takes place outside of Mass.<sup>7</sup>

A closer look at the ritual actions which take place during the Rite of Marriage in the context of a Nuptial Mass helps to illustrate the meaning of this sacrament.

### **The Introductory Rites**

The Introductory Rites of Mass begin with the **Entrance Rite**, during which the minister, the couple, and their attendants enter the Assembly in a solemn procession. In the **Greeting**, the celebrant invokes the Trinity by the Sign of the Cross and greets those assembled in the name of Christ. In the **Penitential Rite**, those assembled acknowledge their sinfulness and their need for God's forgiveness. The celebrant concludes the Penitential Rite with the words of absolution: "May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life." Then the ancient prayer of praise, the **Gloria**, may be sung, followed by the **Opening Prayer**.

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<sup>7</sup> The Rite of Marriage (Introduction), in *The Rites of the Catholic Church, Volume One* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1990), nos. 55-66. See Appendix C.



While there are several prayers to choose from, the first option is particularly illustrative of the Catholic theology of Marriage:

*Father,  
you have made the bond of marriage a holy mystery,  
a symbol of Christ's love for his Church.  
Hear our prayers for N. and N.  
With faith in you and in each other  
they pledge their love today.  
May their lives always bear witness  
to the reality of that love.  
We ask this through our Lord, Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, forever and ever. Amen.*

### **The Liturgy of the Word**

At this point, all are seated for the **Liturgy of the Word**. The posture of being seated is the posture of a student. This is appropriate as those in the Assembly prepare to listen attentively to the Scriptures that will be proclaimed. There follow four proclamations from Sacred Scripture. The first one is drawn from the Old Testament of the Bible and is followed by a Responsorial Psalm, taken from the Book of Psalms. The third is a reading from a New Testament book other than one of the four Gospels. This is followed by the singing of an acclamation (the "Alleluia," a Biblical word that means "Praise the Lord"). A reading from one of the four Gospels is then proclaimed. The dynamic of the Liturgy is one of proclamation and response. The Word of God is read and the people respond with "Thanks be to God" after the first and second readings, and "Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ" after the Gospel reading. After the proclamation of the Scriptures, the celebrant delivers a homily in which he reflects on "the

mystery of Christian marriage, the dignity of wedded love, the grace of the sacrament and the responsibilities of married people.”<sup>8</sup>

### **The Rite of Marriage**

The Rite of Marriage follows. All stand (an active posture) and the celebrant invites the couple and their witnesses to take their proper place in the sanctuary. Other attendants take their proper places according to local custom. The celebrant addresses them in these or similar words:

*My dear friends, you have come together in this church so that the Lord may seal and strengthen your love in the presence of the Church’s minister and this community. Christ abundantly blesses this love. He has already consecrated you in baptism and now he enriches and strengthens you by a special sacrament so that you may assume the duties of marriage in mutual and lasting fidelity. And so, in the presence of the Church, I ask you to state your intentions.*

The celebrant then questions them about their freedom of choice, faithfulness to each other, and their willingness to accept children and raise them in the faith. Three questions are asked.

1. *N. and N., have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?*

The couple responds: *We have.*

2. *Will you love and honor each other as husband and wife for the rest of your lives?*

The couple responds: *We will.*

3. *Will you accept children lovingly from God and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?*

The couple responds: *We will.*

(This last question may be omitted if it is inappropriate; for example, if the couple is advanced in years.)

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<sup>8</sup> *Rite of Marriage*, no. 42.

In this brief exchange, several important beliefs about marriage are summarized. First among these is that marriage is founded upon authentic human love. The rite acknowledges that the couple brings a natural love which has value in and of itself and which can be further sealed and strengthened by the grace of the sacrament.

Catholics believe that every person is created in the image and likeness of God, who is love. Thus, the fundamental human vocation is to love, and, through the total gift of self, to come to know and serve God in this world and the next. Indeed, the Creator has “inscribed in the humanity of man and woman the vocation, and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion.”<sup>9</sup> Marriage is one of the two ways (the other being professed celibacy or virginity) by which persons realize their basic vocation to love.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the specific vocation to marriage is “written in the very nature of man and woman as they come from the hand of the Creator.”<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, marriage is a most profound and sacred institution because it helps to reveal something about God and his plan for men and women within creation. Inasmuch as it was established by the Creator, marriage is endowed with its own set of values and purposes and it has a specific structure governed by its own proper laws.<sup>12</sup>

Because it is part of God’s plan, marriage is both a holy union and a divine calling. A faithful, loving, and fruitful marriage gives human beings the possibility of glimpsing in a partial, yet very concrete way, that unconditional love which is the central fact of divine

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<sup>9</sup> Pope John Paul II, *On the Family (Familiaris Consortio)* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], 1981), no. 11.

<sup>10</sup> For biblical references the Christian practice of celibacy, see: Mt 19: 10-12, 29; Mk 10: 28-31; 1 Cor 7: 6-9.

<sup>11</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2nd ed.) (Washington, DC: Libreria Editrice Vaticana—USCCB, 2000), no. 1603.

<sup>12</sup> *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, no. 48.

revelation, given by God first to the ancient Israelites and then to the whole world in the person of Jesus.

The introductory dialogue goes on to proclaim a second essential belief about marriage between the baptized. When the celebrant says to the couple: “Christ abundantly blesses this love. He has already consecrated you in baptism and now he enriches and strengthens you by a special sacrament so that you may assume the duties of marriage in mutual and lasting fidelity,” he reinforces the belief that the married love of baptized persons takes on added significance. It becomes not only a universal image of God’s love for his people but also a particular sign of the love which Christ has for the Church and of the intimate union between Christ, the spouse, and the Church, his bride. In this sacrament, Christ comes to the couple in a special way and “abides with them in order that by their mutual self-giving [they] will love each other with enduring fidelity, as he loved the Church and delivered himself for it.”<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, when a couple enters a sacramental marriage they express a willingness to receive God’s grace and to respond to that grace in a relationship that will bear witness to the self-sacrificing, totally committed union of Christ to his Church. This is a solemn responsibility and it should not be undertaken lightly. In and through their marital sacrament, Christian spouses become “the permanent reminder to the church of what happened on the cross; they are for one another and for the children witnesses to the salvation in which the sacrament makes them sharers.”<sup>14</sup> In short, marriage is the sacrament whereby a man and a woman become one flesh by dying to themselves and rising to new life in Christ.

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *On the Family*, no.13.

## Exchange of Consent

In the next part of the Rite of Marriage, the celebrant invites the couple to declare their consent:

*Since it is your intention to enter into marriage, join your right hands and declare your consent before God and his Church:*

They join their hands and the bridegroom says:

*I, N., take you, N., to be my wife. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.*

The bride responds:

*I, N., take you, N., to be my husband. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.*

Receiving their consent, the celebrant says:

*You have declared your consent before the Church. May the Lord in his goodness strengthen your consent and fill you both with his blessings. What God has joined, men must not divide.*

If a man and a woman wish to live fully this “great mystery” revealed in the sacrament of marriage then they must strive to live out a consent that is directed toward the good of both spouses and to accept children as a gift of God. They must enter the marital union freely and they must do so with the intention and knowledge that it is to be exclusively faithful and indissoluble.

The Catholic Church insists on the free consent of people entering a marriage. Consent is defined as: “an act of the will by which a man and a woman mutually give and accept each other through an irrevocable covenant in order to establish marriage.” The parties must be free to marry, i.e. they may not be impeded by canon law or any just civil law. This is important because

“the Church holds the exchange of consent between the spouses to be the indispensable element that ‘makes the marriage.’ If consent is lacking, there is no marriage.”<sup>15</sup>

In marriage, the love which a man and woman have for each other becomes a specifically conjugal love. This means their taking on the responsibility of complete faithfulness, of a sincere desire for the partner’s welfare, and of making a concrete commitment to achieve it. Pope Paul VI, in an address to the Tribunal of the Roman Rota, the Church’s highest juridical tribunal, phrased it this way: “From a spontaneous feeling of affection, love becomes a binding obligation.”<sup>16</sup>

Every valid marriage is intrinsically indissoluble.<sup>17</sup> It is intended to last until the death of one of the spouses. This is so for three reasons. First, Jesus himself taught that God’s intent from the very beginning (as expressed in the biblical story of Adam and Eve) was that, in becoming one flesh, a man and a woman were joined by God and therefore no one had a right to dissolve their union (see Matthew 19:3-12). Secondly, we believe a sacramental marriage is indissoluble precisely because of what it symbolizes; i.e., the unbreakable union of Christ and his Church. Because Christ can never abandon the Church neither should spouses who are married in his name forsake one another.<sup>18</sup> Thirdly, once the couple has freely consented to the union, there arises a bond between them that “wells up from the fountain of divine love.”<sup>19</sup> “A marriage

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<sup>15</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1625-29.

<sup>16</sup> Pope Paul VI, “Address to the Roman Rota,” in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 68 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1976), 207.

<sup>17</sup> The law of the Catholic Church presumes that, once consent to marriage is exchanged, the resulting marriage is valid and binding on both spouses. However, certain conditions might have been present at the time of consent that prevented a valid marriage from arising. A declaration of the nullity of a marriage is granted by a Catholic Church tribunal when, after thorough investigation, it is proven that the consent was invalid from the moment it was first exchanged.

<sup>18</sup> See *On the Family*, no. 13.

<sup>19</sup> *Rite of Marriage*, Introduction, no. 3.

contracted and consummated between baptized persons can never be dissolved” for it “gives rise to a covenant guaranteed by God’s fidelity.”<sup>20</sup>

Another important ground for Catholic teaching about the indissolubility of marriage is related to a belief about its ultimate purpose. In other words, a marriage must necessarily be indissoluble if its proper ends are to be achieved. The Church speaks of two purposes or ends of marriage: first, the good of the spouses, for example, their growth in mutual love; and second, the begetting of children, that is, their procreation and education. These two purposes are expressed in the Rite of Marriage when the couple is questioned about their intent: first, to love and honor each another for a lifetime; and, second, to accept children willingly and to bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church. In short, “the intimate union of marriage, as a mutual giving of two persons, and the good of the children demand total fidelity from the spouses and require an unbreakable unity between them.”<sup>21</sup>

In sum, consent makes the marriage. Consent is defined as an external manifestation of the will by which the spouses give and receive each other in matrimony. Having attested that they are free of coercion or constraint and having said that they intend to make their marriage faithful, indissoluble, and open to children, the couple then signifies their consent, which is received by the Church in the person of its official minister. It is also witnessed by two other persons and, if present, by the assembled community.

### **Blessing and Exchange of Rings**

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<sup>20</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no.1640.

<sup>21</sup> *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, no. 48.

The exchange of consent is immediately followed by the blessing and exchange of rings.

Using holy water, the celebrant blesses the rings and says these or similar words:

*Lord, bless these rings which we bless in your name.  
Grant that those who wear them  
may always have a deep faith in each other.  
May they do your will and always live together  
in peace, good will, and love.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

The bridegroom then places his wife's ring on her ring finger and says:

*N. take this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

The bride repeats the ritual, placing her husband's ring on his ring finger.

This blessing and exchange of rings are brief ceremonies towards the conclusion of the rite that further underscore what took place in the exchange of consent. The rings are the visible sign of an act of the will; their exchange is an action that signifies the intention of the spouses to marry and to remain faithful to each other.

The Liturgy of the Word concludes with the Prayers of the Faithful, which include prayers for the Church, the world, the couple, and other particular needs.

### **The Liturgy of the Eucharist**

The Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with the **Preparation of the Altar** and the **Presentation of the Gifts**. Once these are done, the **Eucharistic Prayer** begins with the **Opening Dialogue** and the **Preface**. There are three options for the Preface. The first two are very expressive of the Church's teaching on marriage:

- 1) *Father, all-powerful and everliving God,  
we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks.*



*By this sacrament your grace unites man and woman  
in an unbreakable bond of love and peace.*

*You have designed the chaste love of husband and wife  
for the increase both of the human family  
and of your own family born in baptism.*

*You are the loving Father of the world of nature;  
you are the loving Father of the new creation of grace.  
In Christian marriage you bring together the two orders of creation:  
nature's gift of children enriches the world  
and your gift of grace enriches also your Church...*

OR

- 2) *Father all-powerful and ever-living God,  
we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

*Through him you entered into a new covenant with your people.  
You restored man to grace in the saving mystery of redemption.  
You gave him a share in the divine life  
through his union with Christ.  
You made him an heir of Christ's eternal glory.*

*This outpouring of love in the new covenant of grace  
is symbolized in the marriage covenant  
that seals the love of husband and wife  
and reflects your divine plan of love...*

## **The Nuptial Blessing**

The Liturgy of the Eucharist continues as normal until the **Rite of Communion**. Here, at the end of the **Lord's Prayer**, instead ending as it usually does with the **Embolism** ("For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever"); the **Nuptial Blessing** is prayed over the couple. There are several choices for the Nuptial Blessing, each with its own emphasis which reflects the Church's teachings on marriage.

The first option for the Nuptial Blessing contains an important belief not identified as clearly elsewhere. The celebrant, praying over the wife, indirectly exhorts the husband with these words: “May her husband put his trust in her and recognize that she is his equal and the heir with him to the life of grace. May he always honor her and love her as Christ loves his bride, the Church.”<sup>22</sup> This prayer is an affirmation of the equal dignity of women and men before God and their equal partnership in marriage. The prayer emphasizes that this belief has practical consequences for attitudes and behaviors in the day-to-day marriage relationship.

Two further Catholic teachings about marriage should be mentioned briefly. They are present in the second option for the Nuptial Blessing. Here the celebrant prays over the couple: “Lord, grant that as they begin to live this sacrament they may share with each other the gifts of your love and become one in heart and mind as witnesses to your presence in their marriage. Help them create a home together and give them children to be formed by the gospel and to have a place in your family.”<sup>23</sup>

First, for two baptized persons, their marriage comes into being when they validly express their consent within the Rite of Marriage in the manner described above. At this moment, the couple can be said to be truly and fully married. However, it is also true—experientially and theologically—that they are just beginning to be married and that their vocation from that moment forward will be to live and grow into the sacrament they have embraced. For this reason, it is said that they *receive* the sacrament on their wedding day. In addition, because Catholics believe that the sacrament confers a special grace, or favor, from the Lord, it can be said that they *become* the sacrament for each other and before the whole

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<sup>22</sup> *Rite of Marriage*, no. 33.

<sup>23</sup> *Rite of Marriage*, no. 120.

community. In effect, a married couple continues to grow into the fullest expression of the sacramental bond which they begin to live on their wedding day.

Second, marriage as willed by God for men and women is the ordinary foundation of family life. When the Nuptial Blessing refers to creating a home together and nurturing children, it is expressing Catholic belief that children are the crowning gift of a marriage and that a family achieves its fullest expression of fruitfulness when life is transmitted to the next generation.

#### **IV. Marriages with Other Christians and Interreligious Marriages**

The Catholic Church seeks to uphold the strength and stability of all marriages and the family life that flows from them. This full sharing of life is more easily assured when both partners are of the same faith community. Practical experience and past studies of married life indicate that marriages between Christians of different denominations or between a baptized person and someone who is not baptized present significant difficulties for the couples and for their children. Thus, Catholics are exhorted to marry other Catholics. Nevertheless, there remain numerous instances of Catholics wishing to marry either other Christians or persons of other religious backgrounds.

The marriage between a Catholic and another baptized person entails special sensitivity so that the partners can be faithful to the requirements of their own religious communities. In this way, they can seek to understand their religious differences while respecting each other's religious freedom and sharing many aspects of a common Christian life. As Christians, they share in one baptism, profess a faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and hold to the one message of the Gospel. Furthermore, most Christians share many prayers, hymns, and other

spiritual resources, all of which can enrich their married and family lives. Thus the introduction to the marriage rite for two Catholics or between a Catholic and another baptized person are the same.

Because of the existence of marriage in the order of creation, the Catholic Church recognizes an interreligious marriage, or one between a baptized Catholic and another who is not baptized, as a true marriage. An opening prayer to God recommended for the marriage rite between a Catholic and someone who is not baptized articulates the Catholic Church's teaching on interreligious marriage:

*Father, when you created mankind, you willed that man and wife should be one. Bind N. and N. in the loving union of marriage; and make their love fruitful so that they may be living witnesses to your divine love in the world.*

Many times in today's society, a Christian and someone from another religion choose one another as marital partners. In such cases, care must be taken that each spouse understands and respects the other's religious tradition, especially the requirements placed on marriage. Special preparation within a context of mutual respect is needed for the couple as well as for all others who may be involved in some way in this marriage.

The introduction to the Rite of Marriage between a Catholic and an unbaptized person offered by the celebrant is positive in tone:

*My dear friends, you have come together in this church so that the Lord may seal and strengthen your love in the presence of the Church's minister and this community. In this way you will be strengthened to keep mutual and lasting faith with each other and to carry out the other duties of marriage. And so, in the presence of the Church, I ask you to state your intentions.*

The Catholic Church stipulates that a religious celebration in which the matrimonial consent is exchanged by the couple can be conducted only once, while a blessing or other

prayers can be given at another place of worship either before or after that celebration. For a Catholic to marry someone who is not baptized, a dispensation must be granted so that the marriage will be considered valid by the Church. The diocesan bishop or his delegate may grant this dispensation for a just and reasonable cause, and if the following conditions are fulfilled: 1) the Catholic declares that he or she is prepared to remove any dangers of falling away from the practice of the Catholic faith and makes a sincere promise to do all in his or her power to have all the children of this marriage baptized and brought up in the Catholic Church; 2) the other party is informed of these promises required of the Catholic party so that it is clear that he or she is aware of the promises and obligations placed upon the Catholic partner; 3) both parties are instructed on the ends and essential properties of marriage as understood by the Catholic Church, namely that marriage is a lifelong partnership for the good of the couple and the procreation and education of children, and that it is an exclusive and indissoluble union between one man and one woman.

Special issues arise in a proposed marriage between a Catholic and a Muslim. While it is sometimes permitted in certain circumstances, both the Catholic Church and Islam prohibit interreligious marriage. For a just and reasonable cause, a Catholic may be permitted to marry someone of another religion. Likewise, a Muslim man may be permitted to marry a woman from among the “people of the book” (Jews and Christians). However, Muslim women may only marry Muslim men. Since obtaining a signed contract is always a part of Muslim marriage practice, the Catholic woman must ensure that the terms of the contract do not exclude any essential element required of a Catholic marriage.

If, for a serious reason, it is not possible to use the Catholic Rite of Marriage, then a dispensation, known as a “dispensation from canonical form,” must also be obtained. In view of the practice of drawing up a marriage contract in Islam, these Church documents should be shared, if possible, with the officials of the mosque to which the Muslim spouse is affiliated.

## **V. Conclusion:**

The Catholic understanding of marriage demands more than the faith community’s recognition and blessing of a simply material partnership. Because human beings are social by nature, the marital bond also necessarily entails responsible engagement with society as a whole. Catholic married life is not reducible to being simply a private matter between the spouses. The relationship of a Catholic married couple to society is guided, supported, directed, and mediated in various ways. The married couple’s family ties and friendships, their participation in civic activities and volunteer associations, educational and cultural participation are all part of a healthy, fruitful marriage. Creating a wholesome environment in which to raise children embraces all of these concerns. Catholics have an obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation, and to provide for the religious education of their children. Church attendance, prayer, and religious education provide the means of supporting families to know and celebrate the gifts of God in daily life.

In the case of an interreligious marriage (or even a marriage between a Catholic and a person of no faith affiliation), it is very important for couples to be aware of the seriousness of their decision to wed and the challenges it presents. Otherwise, the positive features of the religions of both parties may be lost in a false effort to accommodate differences. At the same

time, the Mid-Atlantic Catholic-Muslim Dialogue acknowledges that in some cases a marriage between a Catholic and a spouse of another religion can be a source of spiritual enrichment, especially when the family grows in commitment and obedience to the universal call to holiness of life.

# SUNNI MUSLIM PERSPECTIVES ON MARRIAGE AND THE QUESTION OF MARRIAGE BETWEEN MUSLIMS AND NON-MUSLIMS

## I. Understanding the Roots of Islamic Law

A better understanding of Islamic law and spirituality will contribute to a peaceful and tolerant approach to interreligious dialogue about marriage and family life. Islam is a revealed religion that builds upon the essential spiritual truths acknowledged by the ancient Israelites and by the Christians. Islam is above all a way of life centered on God (Allah).

The starting point for understanding this way of life is the Shari'ah, which is an ethical and legal system that encompasses all aspects of life as set forth in the Qur'ān and the Hadīth, the exemplary deeds and teachings of the Prophet. The Qur'ān is Islam's revealed scripture. The contents of the Qur'ān are divine revelations given to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh<sup>24</sup>) beginning in 610 A.D. and ending just before his death in 632 A.D. (cf. Qur'ān 5:4) The Qur'ān contains a total of 6236 verses, of which about 500 contain rules of one sort or another. Most of these rules deal with the rituals of worship. There are only about eighty verses with legal content in the strict sense of the term, dealing with wills and estates, commercial ethics, the administration of justice, and a limited number of criminal offenses. The Qur'ān examines and illuminates the intentions of God in guiding human civilization based on the principles of fairness, justice, compassion, good faith, and integrity. (Qur'ān 17:9<sup>25</sup>): **“The Qur'ān guides [people] toward that which is most upstanding, and promises those Believers who do good**

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<sup>24</sup> pbuh: An abbreviation for *Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him*, used out of respect for the Prophet Muhammad.

<sup>25</sup> References to passages in the Qur'ān are restricted to the number of the *surah* (chapter) and the *ayah* (verse); each *surah* has a title which serves a mnemonic purpose.



**deeds that they shall have great rewards.”<sup>26</sup>** Thus, the Qur’ān declares itself to be a document providing guidance to enlighten the spiritual condition of men and women. That guidance takes the form of general principles and specific ordinances.

However, the Shari’ah is further elaborated on the basis of what were reported to be the practices (*sunnah*) of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and by the interpretation given to those practices by those individuals who, because they lived in accordance with the Qur’an and with the traditions (*hadīth*) of the Prophet, were considered to be reliable guides. Thus there are five traditional schools of Islamic jurisprudence going back to the early period of Islamic history: Abu Hanifa and his two students Abu Yousef and Muhammad al-Shaybani who founded the Hanafi school in Iraq; Awzai who founded a school in Syria which, under Malik of Medina, became the Maliki School; Shafi’i who was the student of both Malik and al-Shaybani who insisted on the use of the traditions of the Prophet alone, and founded the Shafi’i School; Jafar, the teacher of Abu Hanifa, is also the head of a school; and Ibn Hanbal, who took al-Shafi’i’s principles to an even more restricted level, rejecting personal interpretation in matters of theology. His approach to law is embodied in the Hanbali School. These schools defined the legitimacy of the sources of Shari’ah and developed hermeneutical techniques for deriving legislation from the sources.

In all the schools of law, the Shari’ah is expounded as the ideal model for Muslim society. Family law has been, from earliest times, the heart of the Shari’ah, reflecting the centrality of the family in Islam, based on the Qur’ānic texts that uphold the rights of women and of other family members (e.g. Qur’ān 4:1-36).

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<sup>26</sup> Translations from the Qur’ān are by the editor, who has consulted several versions of the text in English in order to create a text that accords with contemporary standard English usage. Muslim scholars from the dialogue group were consulted for accuracy.

Islamic law takes a firm stand against sexual license. Consequently, it not only prohibits fornication and adultery, but also seeks to eliminate occasions favorable to these sins. Islamic teaching also recognizes the natural sexual urge. Accordingly, Islamic spirituality calls people to enter into marriage, prohibiting celibacy or castration. In fact, as long as a Muslim believer possesses the means to marry, he or she should not abstain from marriage, even on the basis of one's dedication to the service of Allah. It is, however, understood that no one should be forced to marry against his or her will.<sup>27</sup> A life of monastic renunciation is not permitted because the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) affirmed that "there is no celibacy in Islam". The Prophet (pbuh) has also said, "Marriage is my tradition; those who refrain from marriage are not numbered among my followers."<sup>28</sup>

## II. Legal Aspects of Marriage

Marriage (*nikah* or *zawaj*) in Arabic means, "joining together." In the technical language of Islamic law, marriage is defined as, "a contractual agreement between an eligible male and an eligible female, concluded in the presence of witnesses, by which they come to be publically recognized as husband and wife."<sup>29</sup>

Marriage is "*mithaq ghalīdh*" (a solemn covenant or agreement). It is, therefore, a decision not to be undertaken lightly. One contracts marriage with total commitment and full knowledge of what it requires.

Once a person is of the proper age to be married, he or she is advised to seek a pious, well-

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<sup>27</sup> Imam Jamal Badawi, personal communication.

<sup>28</sup> These quotations are a reflection of widely held sentiments among Muslims. See: Sunan Ibn Majah, *Book of Marriage*, Hadith no 1846

<sup>29</sup> See 'Abd al-Rahman al-Jaziri, *Al-Fiqh 'ala al-Madhahib al-Arba'ah (Islamic Law according to Four Schools)*, Beirut, Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, 1969, vol. 4, 1-4, and Muhammad Abdul Rauf, *The Islamic View of Women and the Family*, New York, Robert Speller & Sons, 1977, p. 39.

mannered, and religious spouse. A formal betrothal (*khitbah*) takes place during which the couple's intention to marry is made public. The betrothal is not a legal contract and it does not make the parties husband and wife; they merely become engaged. The engagement period provides a chance to become better acquainted and offers a grace period in preparation for marriage itself. Betrothal practices vary widely depending on the family and local customs.

Betrothal entails a strictly moral bond without enduring obligations. If broken, betrothal does not give rise to the right of alimony and does not have further legal consequences. One exception to this would be the return of nonperishable gifts should the betrothal not have been initiated by the party who gave the gift. During the interval between the betrothal and the execution of a marriage contract, it is forbidden for any outsider to attempt to interfere with the relationship. No one else may propose marriage to a woman who has accepted a proposal. The Prophet (pbuh) said, "Let not a Muslim ask for the hand of a woman to whom someone else has proposed marriage." During the betrothal, gifts may be exchanged, but no private physical meeting between the betrothed man and woman is permitted.

### **Requirements of the Marriage Contract In Islamic Law**

In this discussion of Islamic marriage, for the purposes of Muslim dialogue with Catholics, the approach will be broad enough to refer to the classic jurists and their positions as well as to modern practice in Muslim-majority countries and in mosques in the United States. There is a great deal of diversity among legal schools. National legal and cultural traditions vary widely and make it exceptionally difficult to make generalizations in either theory or practice. Whenever a topic entails wide diversity and current lively debate, it will be so indicated. The

following is therefore one among several common ways of expressing the requirements of a valid marriage contract.<sup>30</sup>

The validity of an Islamic marriage entails six requirements: 1) the presence of the legal guardian;<sup>31</sup> 2) the bridegroom must be competent to marry; 3) the bride must be competent to marry; 4) *sighah*, which is the term that sums up both the proposal (*(ijab)* of marriage and its acceptance (*qabul*). 5) the *mahr* (marriage gift or “dower”) which must be agreed upon; and (6) the two witnesses before whom the *sighah* (*ijab proposal*) and *qabul* (*acceptance*)] should take place.<sup>32</sup> Some Islamic scholars add *kafā’ah* (*compatibility*), not as a requirement for validly contracting the marriage, but rather for ascertaining whether there are objections on the part of the guardian.

#### ***The role of the guardian (wali) in the marriage contract -***

A woman can legitimately make the arrangements for her own marriage, just as she may handle all other contracts, such as buying, selling, and the like. However, in practice, her legal guardian draws up the marriage contract on her behalf. She must then clearly express her consent to the contract that has been drawn up for her and her future spouse.<sup>33</sup>

The majority of scholars say that the legal guardian is to be the closest male relative. Naturally, some relatives are closer than others, e.g., the father, then full brothers, then the (half-) brothers from the

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<sup>30</sup> One example of a helpful summary from the Turkish (Sunni) Muslim tradition may be found in Mehmet Ozalp, *101 Questions You Asked About Islam* (Blackheath, Australia: Brandl & Schlesinger, 2004), pages 264-273. See also, for contracts: [www.SoundVision.com](http://www.SoundVision.com).

<sup>31</sup> The legal guardian is not required by the Hanafi School. The Hanafis allow a woman to contract marriage by herself whether previously married or not. They say that it is preferable to ask her guardian to represent her so that she may not be pressured to interact on her own with men, if that is her preference. It is only the bride who has a guardian.

<sup>32</sup> This usually consists of two male witnesses or, for Hanafis, one man and two women. Shia requirements are different.

<sup>33</sup> In practice this varies widely. In most places today, a woman can contract her own marriage, but a number of scholars still hold that women cannot actually conclude a marriage contract.

paternal or maternal side, etc. The validity of legal guardianship depends on the following conditions: maturity, sanity, honesty, and adherence to Islam.<sup>34</sup> Muslim legal scholars also concur that, if the woman does not have a legal guardian, she may authorize a Muslim male of reliable character to handle her marriage contract or she may arrange the marriage herself.<sup>35</sup>

### ***Witnessing a marriage contract -***

The majority of the jurists maintain that the validity of a marriage contract must be guaranteed by the presence of witnesses. They also concur in the view that a marriage is not permissible until two witnesses attest to the contract together.

### ***The Mahr (marriage gift or “dower”) -***

This practice is based on the Qur’ān 4:4: “And give the women (at the time of marriage) their dower as a gift.” The *mahr* is the exclusive right of the wife. It is presented to the wife as a sign of good will, demonstrating the husband’s intention to begin married life with her. The dower is not necessarily a fixed sum of money. In fact, the dower does not have to be monetary at all. For example, the husband could agree to impart knowledge as his gift to the wife. It could be as much as a million dollars or as little as an iron ring. According to the consensus of Muslim jurists, delivery of the dower can be deferred to the husband’s time of death. Delivery of the promised dower may even be delayed until the time of divorce, again according to most jurists. It is also permissible to pay a part of the *mahr* immediately and the rest be designated as deferred. It is strictly a matter of mutual agreement.

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<sup>34</sup> A minority of jurists allow a woman to act as guardian.

<sup>35</sup> Some jurists (in Islamic countries) require that the woman be represented by the public authorities rather than appointing her own guardian.

### ***The Sighah (Proposal and Acceptance) -***

It is generally agreed among the jurists that a marriage is to be contracted with the words "*zawaj*" or "*nikah*." For example, the bride may say, "I have offered you myself in marriage." And the groom may reply, "I have accepted your offer of marriage."<sup>36</sup> It is perfectly valid for the husband-to-be to initiate the offer to the woman directly or to her *wali* (guardian). The verbal act of contracting marriage can be enacted in Arabic or in any other language, as long as the proposal and the acceptance clearly and explicitly convey the concept of marriage. The jurists are also unanimous that the *ijab (proposal)* must be made during the same meeting in which the *qabul (acceptance)* is expressed. There is not to be an extended period of time between the offer of marriage and its acceptance.

### ***Conditions in a marriage contract (prenuptial agreements) -***

There are three categories of the stipulations typical of marriage contracts. These are classified in Islamic law as follows:

First, there are conditions whose fulfillment is *fully acceptable* to the legal tradition of Islam. For example, a woman may stipulate that her future husband may not take her away from her country or the region in which her family resides. Should the husband consent to this stipulation in the contract, but not fulfill it in the course of the marriage, then, in the opinion of some scholars, the wife can petition to terminate the marriage relationship. However, there is considerable variation among jurists with regard to the acceptability and enforceability of such stipulations.

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<sup>36</sup> No contract stated in the present text is valid; it must be in the past tense. The more acceptable manner of articulating the contract is for the woman's guardian or representative to say to the groom: "I have given you [the woman] in marriage to [the man] for a dower of\_\_\_\_\_".

The second kinds of stipulation are those that are *not acceptable* to the legal traditions concerning what is required for the validity of a marriage, but which do not invalidate the marriage contract.<sup>37</sup> For example, the husband may stipulate that the wife will not receive *mahr* or she may stipulate that he cannot have sexual relations with her. These conditions, and others like them, would obviously contradict the concept of marriage, but would not invalidate a marriage contract should all parties agree to them. Muslim jurists agree, however, that such stipulations are void in themselves and, therefore, there is no obligation to fulfill them.<sup>38</sup>

The third kind of stipulation would, in fact, render the marriage contract void. An example of this would be the notorious stipulation that a marriage be contracted to last only for a certain period of time, which is categorically prohibited in Sunni Islam.<sup>39</sup>

## **The Husband/Wife Relationship**

### ***The Wife's Rights: The Husband's Obligations -***

#### **(1) Maintenance**

The husband is responsible for the financial support of his wife. This is in fact established as a wife's right by the authority of the Qur'ān itself and the Sunnah (i.e. the words, deeds, and approval of Prophet Muhammad, pbuh). It is inconsequential whether the wife is Muslim, non-Muslim, rich, poor, healthy, or sick. This responsibility is inherent to a man's role as "*qawam*" (leader); he is to bear the financial responsibility for the family in such a way that his wife is assured economic security. Given

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<sup>37</sup> In fact, though such conditions may be proposed and, though they are not acceptable, they explicitly do not invalidate the marriage.

<sup>38</sup> Imam Jamal Badawi, personal communication.

<sup>39</sup> The Islamic website, SoundVision.com provides "Options for an Islamic prenuptial agreement" and other matrimonial advice for Muslims.

the wife's role in managing the household, economic security ensures that she may carry out her family responsibilities serenely and devotedly.

Financial support entails a wife's right to lodging, clothing, food, and general care, such as medication, hospital bills<sup>40</sup>, and the like. Cohabitation is expected: a wife resides with her husband, in accordance with his financial means. The wife's lodging must be adequate so as to ensure her privacy, comfort and independence.

## **(2) The Dower (*Mahr*)**

The wife is entitled to a marriage dower that becomes her own property in accordance with the stipulations in the marriage contract. This dower may be delivered promptly or deferred, depending on the agreement between the parties. Some Islamic jurists have set a "minimum amount" for the dower. In any case, when the dower must finally be paid, there is a customary way to calculate it. However, as has been indicated above, the dower does not have to be stipulated precisely<sup>41</sup> and may even be waived entirely or in part without making the marriage void.

The dower (*mahr*) is a unique feature of Islamic law, which distinguishes Islamic marriage practices from the customs of those cultures wherein the bride's parents pay a dowry to the future husband when he marries the daughter. The practice of a dowry or traditional "bride price" is considered by the consensus of jurists to degrade women in a way that is contrary to the ethos of Islam. There is no specification in the Qur'ān as to what or how much the *mahr* has to be. It can be freely determined by the parties involved.

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<sup>40</sup> Many jurists restrict the payment of a wife's medical bills to treatment related only to childbirth.

<sup>41</sup> Even then, if a difference of opinion arose or if it becomes necessary to make a decision (for example, in the case of the husband's untimely death), an estimate can be made of the customary *mahr* given to a woman of a particular status in a given culture; this is called "*Mahr al-Mithl*."



### **(3) Non-material rights**

A husband is commanded by Shari'ah to treat his wife with equity, to respect her feelings, and to show her kindness and consideration (e.g. Qur'ān 2:228; 4:19; 30:21). The Prophet's (pbuh) last sermon stresses kindness to women.

#### ***The Wife's Obligations: The Husband's Rights -***

The observations that follow represent the standard practices followed by observant Muslims today. Some recent authors have critiqued the notion that these criteria are actually "Islamic" rather than "customary." The reader should be aware that the debate is ongoing among Muslims today.

#### **(1) Duties of the wife**

One of the main duties of a wife in Islam is to contribute to the success and happiness of the marriage. She must be attentive to the comfort and well-being of her husband. The Qur'ānic *ayah* (verse) which illustrates this point is: "**O Lord, grant us wives and offspring who will bring spiritual comfort to our eyes**" [25:74].

The wife must be faithful, trustworthy, and honest. Since sexual intimacy is exclusively the husband's right, she must not have sexual relations with any other person. The wife may not refuse her husband sexually, as this can lead to marital problems, including a grave risk of adultery. The husband, of course, should take into account his wife's health, showing her kindness and consideration. Without her husband's knowledge and consent a wife may not receive or entertain unrelated males in the domicile. She should never be alone with an unrelated male. The husband's possessions are entrusted to her care, but she may not dispose of his belongings without his permission. For his part, the husband must not have sexual intimacy with any woman to whom he is not lawfully married. Islam

strictly prohibits sexual intimacy with any person to whom a man or woman is not lawfully married in accordance with Shari`ah.

## (2) The issue of obedience

The purpose of obedience<sup>42</sup> in the relationship is to keep the family unit running as smoothly as possible. The husband has been given the right to be obeyed because he is the leader and not because he is superior. Obedience does not mean blind obedience. It is subject to two conditions:

(a) A wife is required to obey only within the morally permissible categories of action.

(b) She must obey only with regard to matters that fall within the scope of the husband's legal and moral rights.

## III. Raising Children in Islam

Every person has been created with good and bad tendencies. This is the human condition such that virtue can be tested. Parents must encourage the growth of good tendencies in the child so he or she can become a person helpful to self and others. Divine sanction for this may be found in the Qur`ān 66: 6:

**"O you who believe, protect yourselves and your families from the fire fueled by human beings and idols."**<sup>43</sup> Protecting oneself and one's family from hell fire requires above all a good education, the practice of good morals, and guidance in developing the virtues.

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<sup>42</sup> It is true that only God has the absolute right to be obeyed. No human being has an absolute right to obedience, not even a husband over his wife. However, two verses of the Qur`ān indicate that a wife should obey her husband. Scholars have discussed the limits and the areas of obedience. See a good discussion on this subject in Hamudah 'Abd al-'Ati, *The Family Structure in Islam*, American Trust Publication, 1977, pp. 170-176.

<sup>43</sup> The word literally means "stones"; Yusuf Ali understands the verse as referring to a 'spiritual fire' that burns even hearts as hard as stones, which he sees as symbolic of those 'idols' that are "all the unbending falsehoods in life." *The Holy Qur`ān: Text, Translation, Commentary*. Muslim Students' Association, 1975. Pg. 1571, fn. 5539.

Islam does not distinguish between the education of male and female offspring. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, "Whoever has a daughter, teaches her good morals, educates her well, and feeds her properly; she will be a protection for him from hell fire."<sup>44</sup>

What do we mean by good education? Good education means the physical, mental, and moral preparation of children so they can become good participants in civil society.

Physical training includes care for the child's body and physical strength through good diet. Parents or guardians are to prevent or treat their children's diseases. The requirements for physical upbringing include making sure that the child is clean in body, clothes, and surroundings. The child should learn to keep clean and appreciate cleanliness. Parents are also to make sure that the child is properly fed, without excess. Moreover, parents are to encourage the practice of sports that make the body strong and active in a wholesome environment of companionship. In fact, parents are to teach their children to frequent good company and avoid bad, because children are influenced by their companions. Bad behavior is easily transmitted through bad company. So the Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) warned us by saying, "A person follows his companions' behavior, so everyone must be attentive to his company."<sup>45</sup>

Mental preparation comprises formation in correct thinking that enables one to make sound judgments. Moreover, Islam recommends developing more advanced cognitive capacities so that children may understand their surroundings, evaluate circumstances, and benefit from experiences, both their own and others'. Children are to learn reading and writing and are to be motivated towards high achievement in all fields of knowledge. They are to become skilled observers of created things

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<sup>44</sup> Sunan Ibn Majah, *The Book of Manners*, *Hadith* no. 3669 and many other sources of *hadith*. Some reports say three daughters and some other reports say two. One companion said that he wished he had asked the Prophet about taking care of one daughter.

<sup>45</sup> *Hadith*, Reported by Imaam Tirmidhi,.

and current events in order to stimulate a growing imagination and impart the ability to draw accurate inferences. Families are encouraged to travel in order to learn about the evidence and signs of Allah observable in the history of people and nations.

Moral preparation entails teaching good moral principles along with correcting bad morals and behavior. Thus parents are to show the effects of good deeds and bad deeds on individuals and society, taking into consideration the child's ability to understand. They are also to give good example because children imitate the way their parents speak and act. Parents are to ensure that the child is taught religious principles and the practice of worship, taking into account the child's age level and ability to understand. The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, "Begin to teach your children to pray at the age of seven."<sup>46</sup>

The Prophet (pbuh) taught that children are to be treated with kindness by setting an example in his own family life. Once when he was praying as an Imam with the people, his little grandson Al-Hasan, son of his daughter Fatima (*may Allah be pleased with them*), rode on his back while he was performing the requisite ritual prostration. The weight of the playful child caused the Prophet (pbuh) to lengthen the time of his prostration. When he finished his prayer, some of the companions said, "It seems that you lengthened your prostration; why was that?" The Prophet (pbuh) answered, "My little grandson was playfully riding on my back and I didn't want to interrupt his play!"<sup>47</sup>

#### **IV. Terminating Marriage in Islam**

Understanding the practice of divorce in Islam requires a grasp of the authority of the Qur'ān, of Sharī'ah, and of spiritual guidance in Muslim life. The classical jurists did not require

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<sup>46</sup> *Hadith*, Reported by [Abu Dawud].

<sup>47</sup> *Hadith*, Reported by Imaam An-Nasaa'ee

any specified reason on the part of the husband for a legally valid divorce. Though the jurists disapproved of divorce in ethical terms, they allowed it legally on the basis of Qur'ānic texts which constitute unchangeable divine revelation. Currently, many aspects of Islamic divorce law are being debated in Muslim-majority countries and among immigrant Muslim communities. One feature of modern interpretations that is bringing about significant shifts in marriage practices is the legislation that emanates from majority-Muslim states. In this chapter, the reader will note that there is an internal dialogue between classical Islamic jurisprudence and modern social conditions throughout the Muslim world. Within the limits of this dialogue report, it is not possible to cover all the specific instances in which Shari'ah and modern legislation interact.

Divorce brings about the disintegration of family life with consequent negative impact on the children born of that marriage. However, the historic experience of the Muslim *ummah* (faith community) proposes that dissolution of a broken marriage might be desirable when the spouses can no longer live in harmony and have irremediably lost respect for one another. Remaining in an unhappy marriage gives rise to negative emotions that can permanently impact the psychological well-being both of the children and of the spouses. Islamic practice tends to take a realistic view of human affairs, emphasizing the value of happiness in married life.

If a husband and wife cannot live together in peace and harmony and are dissatisfied with their matrimonial life, to the point of suffering physical, emotional, and sexual problems, the Qur'ān prescribes divorce as a remedy. It is understood that this remedy is applied only if the problems are truly severe.

**"If they separate, Allah will provide whatever is needed for each one from His bounty, for Allah, the One who cares for all, is wise" (Qur'ān 4: 130).** However, every attempt should be made to

solve the spouses' differences, since Islam does not approve of divorce on frivolous grounds. There must be a valid and significant reason for a disruption of the sacred bond of matrimony.

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said: "Of all the permitted things divorce is the most abominable in the sight of God." He also said: "Marry and do not divorce; I do not doubt that due to divorce, the throne of the beneficent Lord shakes."<sup>48</sup>

In pre-Islamic Arabian society, divorce had been a rather frivolous matter by which an angry man could throw his wife out of the house without a valid reason, leaving the unfortunate woman without any right to maintenance from him, nor recourse to legal procedures. It is said that pagan Arabs used to divorce their wives arbitrarily. They also used to revoke the divorce, and then pronounce divorce again, repeating this as a cruel emotional game. A wife could be mistreated with impunity. She could be accused of adultery, misconduct, or disobedience, thus smearing her reputation so as to deter other suitors.

Islam therefore introduced rules and regulations that are to be followed in order to obtain a righteous and noble life. These Islamic laws, transmitted by the five schools of jurisprudence, take into account the different situations of divorce in order to guide members of the Muslim *ummah* (community of believers) toward decisions that will affect their whole lives.

The Islamic legal term for divorce initiated by the husband is "*al-talāq*". In its literal sense it means "undoing of, or release from, a knot." It is a term used by many Muslim jurists to denote the release of a woman from a marital tie. The process of "*al-talāq*" consists of many components which are required in order to break the bond of matrimony properly and validly. As part of this intricate process, the Qur'ān prescribes that, if a man decides to repudiate his wife, he

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<sup>48</sup> Sunan Abu Da'ud, *The Book of Divorce*, Hadith no. 2178; Sunan Ibn Majah, *The Book of Divorce*, Hadith no. 2018

should call two just men (preferably Muslims) to witness his action: **"Call upon two just witnesses from among you so as to establish the evidence openly before God" (Qur'ān 65:2).**

In divorcing his wife, the words that the husband uses should clearly convey his intention to dissolve the marriage. The husband is to be of sound mind and capable of using his own discretion to reach such a decision. Therefore, a divorce pronounced by an insane man<sup>49</sup> is not considered to be valid.

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said: "Any divorce is lawful except the divorce given by a person whose intellect is overpowered."<sup>50</sup> Islamic jurists have debated at length the question of whether a divorce is valid if given without proper intention, for example, under the influence of alcohol, or drugs, or in a state of extreme anger, or by way of jest, or even under material constraint ( i.e. if the man's life is being threatened or if he risks losing property). According to the majority consensus, such a divorce is invalid and unacceptable to Islamic jurisprudence.<sup>51</sup>

Once the conditions for a valid divorce are met, the act of divorce, "*al-talāq*," falls under two broad categories: "*al-talāq al Raj'i*", which is a revocable divorce, and "*al-talāq al Ba'in*", which is irrevocable divorce.

In "*al-talāq al Raj'i*", the husband pronounces "*talāq*" once or at the most twice. Although this is the legal formula for divorce still practiced today, it is based on the following Qur'ānic

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<sup>49</sup> Or a child. According to classical doctrine, minors of both sexes can be given in marriage by their fathers. The marriages are binding. However a male can terminate the marriage once he reaches majority by divorcing his wife. Current laws in Muslim countries do not allow minor marriages in most places. Legal codes also restrict the practice of divorce or require some type of registration or approved legal procedure.

<sup>50</sup> This gives a general position of Islamic law that divorce pronounced under the influence of intoxicants, rage, insanity, or coercion is not acceptable. Among the hadith cited in connection with these cases, one is considered authentic in the tradition of Ahmad, Abu Dawood, Ibn Majah, and al-Hakim, for which see S. Sabiq, *Fiqhu-ussunnah* (in Arabic, Vol 2, pg.249). A person loses his/her legal capacity or the capacity becomes deficient when he/she is not in control of his/her intellect (*'aql*). There are many rules related to this in Islamic law.

<sup>51</sup> It is important to note that, for many classical jurists, divorce in jest is almost always considered valid. There is an extensive debate on a man's liability for what he may say while intoxicated. Even more complex is the question of extreme anger. In practice, divorce is not difficult to obtain in Islam.

injunction, which in context refers to a second divorce (and not the second enunciation of a legal formula) between a man and woman previously married and divorced once to each other. Thus:

**"A divorce can only be pronounced twice" (Qur'ān 2:229).**

After the first pronouncement, the period of waiting (*iddah*) starts immediately. This is an important component in the process of divorce in Islam. *Iddah* is a waiting period lasting the length of three menstrual cycles during which all sexual contact between husband and wife ceases (Qur'ān 4:228). The purpose of fixing this long period of waiting is to determine whether or not the wife is pregnant. The rationale is to determine paternity and the obligations that appertain thereto. The waiting period also encourages both of them to reconsider the divorce, keeping in mind that the initiator of this type of divorce (i.e. *al-talāq*) was the man alone. Thus, the husband has the right to exercise "*Raja*" which is the act of reconciliation by which his wife returns to him. The Qur'ān says: **"Either take them back on equitable terms, or release them in an honorable way" (Qur'ān 2:231; cf. 2:229).**

Although the topic is much debated in the classical sources, many jurists hold that it suffices to say, "I take you back," or to resume sexual relations, to constitute reconciliation. According to the Shafites, however, a reconciled return requires enunciating a specific legal formula. The other Schools of Islamic Law do not require specific wordings for the act of reconciliation.

*Al-talāq al Raj'i* may take one of the two forms:

"*Ahsan*" or "*al-talāq al Ahsan*" (revocable divorce) is "the most approved" form of *talāq*. It is so named because of the approval it received from the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). "*Ahsan*" is effected by a single declaration of repudiation during a woman's "clean period", and by



subsequent abstention from intercourse with her during her waiting period. In this period of three menstrual cycles, however, the repudiation is revocable and the husband may resume conjugal relations with his wife. Until the period of waiting has expired, the marriage tie is not dissolved. The husband retains marital authority over the wife and, if during this period either party dies, the other inherits the estate. The right to revoke the act of repudiation before the waiting period expires exists only in those cases in which the marriage has been previously consummated. Repudiation of a wife with whom the marriage has not been consummated is irrevocable (i.e. *ba'in*, which means irrevocable). Please note that a woman in the waiting period who completes three menstrual periods without the revocation of the divorce is free to remarry. If it turns out that she is pregnant, she may not remarry until after the birth of the child.<sup>52</sup>

"*Al-talāq al Hasan*", on the other hand, is a less approved form of divorce. It is so named because it is somewhat less valued in the *hadīth* literature (the *Sunnah*) recounting the practices and procedures of the Prophet (pbuh) as compared to "*Al-talāq al Ahsan*." This form of divorce requires the husband to enunciate three repudiations during the wife's three successive "clean periods." After the first and the second repudiation the situation is the same as in the "*Ahsan*" form of divorce, that is, the repudiation is revocable. It becomes irrevocable when the third repudiation has been pronounced or when the period of *iddah* (waiting) has expired without the husband's revoking the act of repudiation.

Another category of divorce is "*al-talāq al Ba'in*" which is irrevocable divorce. It is brought about by the husband's enunciating three repudiations. It is irrevocable in the sense that the husband cannot take his wife back until she completes her waiting period. If the waiting period expires and

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<sup>52</sup> Further detail on divorce can be found in Irfan Ahmad Khan, *Reflections on the Qur'ān: Understanding Surahs Al-Fatihah and Al-Baqarah*, Leicestershire, UK: The Islamic Foundation, 2005/1426 AH, pp. 586-596.

the couple decides to continue the marriage relationship, then the husband must again propose marriage and a new marriage rite must be performed. However, this kind of *talāq* can only be done three times between the same man and woman. After the third divorce between the same man and woman, the husband can remarry his former wife only if she has married another man and been divorced from that union.<sup>53</sup> It is assumed that such a situation would be unacceptable to any husband and should deter the emotionally abusive behavior that the Qur'ān wishes to disallow (Qur'ān 2:230). Unfortunately, in certain cultural situations, husbands find it easy to pronounce the three repudiations at any time and without intervals. However, according to Islamic law, this attitude towards divorce and remarriage is regarded as sinful.<sup>54</sup>

It is reported that on a certain occasion when news was brought to the Prophet (pbuh) that one of his disciples had divorced his wife, pronouncing the three repudiations (*talāq*) at one and the same time, the Prophet stood in anger on his carpet and declared that the man was trivializing the words of God and, for that reason, the man was required to take back his wife.

Once the "*talāq*" process is underway, the law takes up the question of the husband's responsibility for the material well being of the wife. The Qur'ān points out in the *surah* that deals with *al-talāq*: **"Let women in the period of three months (*iddah*) live in the same style as you live, according to your means. Trouble them not in such a way as to make things difficult for them" (Qur'ān 65:6).**

Therefore a husband's responsibility to support his wife and children binds not only when

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<sup>53</sup> Such a marriage must not be arranged as a "legal trick" with the intent of allowing the husband to remarry his divorced wife. This misuse of the law was explicitly condemned by the Prophet (pbuh). This marriage, as all marriages, is contracted with the intention of permanency. If, without any prior plan, this marriage does not succeed, or if the second husband passes away, then the first husband may re-marry his former wife.

<sup>54</sup> Some Muslim-majority countries have enacted civil law to regulate this practice, thus making it more difficult in the modern world. See Khan, op. cit., page 591.

they are living with him, but continues in the event of divorce<sup>55</sup>. There are some selfish men who after pronouncing the act of divorce, mistreat their wives, making their lives miserable while they are still in *iddah*. This is forbidden. A wife must enjoy the same standard of living as her husband. Whether hope for reconciliation remains or not, the parting must still be honorable. According to the Maliki, Hanifi, Hanbali, and Shafii jurists, it is the duty of the husband to provide financial security, housing, and food to the wife (it being understood that the marriage has been consummated) during her period of waiting. In fixing the sum to be paid for support, all the schools lay down the rule that the *Qadi* (Judge) will exercise his discretion considering the rank and circumstances of both the spouses. This principle is based on the following Qur'ānic verse: **"Let the man of means spend according to his means, and let the man whose resources are restricted spend according to what God has given him"** (Qur'ān 65:7) and: **"Mothers shall suckle their offspring for two years...and the father shall be responsible for paying the cost of their food and clothing on equitable terms"** (Qur'ān 2:233).<sup>56</sup> The distinguished contemporary scholar Irfan Ahmad Khan points out that this passage refers to the period of time during which a mother, though divorced, should continue to suckle and care for the child born from a marriage that has ended. Since the mother does this on behalf of the father for a child over whom he will have legal custody, it is the father's duty during that time to provide for the mother to the extent that he is able.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> The question of alimony after the waiting period (*iddah*) is a key and quite separate issue. Child support, custody, and guardianship after divorce are extremely complex issues that vary from one Islamic country to another.

<sup>56</sup> Yusuf Ali and Majid Fakhry translate this verse in two different ways.

<sup>57</sup> Irfan Ahmad Khan, *op. cit.*, p. 596.

It should be noted that in Islam the wife also has the right to ask for a divorce from her husband. However, instead of "*talāq*" it is termed "*khul*" and it literally means releasing or removing clothing from one's body.<sup>58</sup>

The Maliki jurists define "*khul*" as "a divorce acquired by giving something in return. According to the Hanifi, Shafii and Hanbali jurists, "it is the end of a marital relationship by means of mutual consent and with the utterance of the word *khul*."

The Qur'ān permits a wife to ask for a divorce only on legitimate grounds, such as fear of cruelty or desertion. It states: **"If a wife fears cruelty or desertion on her husband's part, there is no blame on them if they arrange an amicable settlement between themselves; such a settlement is best" (Qur'ān 4:128).**

In practice, this involves a wife's obtaining her release from the marriage by giving up all or some of the dower she received at the time of her marriage should she feel that her husband is seriously derelict in his marital obligations. In agreeing to this, the husband accepts the "*khul*" and the divorce is complete.<sup>59</sup> However, "*khul*" cases must go to court where the *Qadi* (judge) must, first of all, ascertain whether or not the wife is irreconcilably dissatisfied with her husband such that she can no longer live with him. If the court is convinced, it will fix a proper compensation which the husband will have to accept along with the act of divorce. All five schools are generally of the opinion that the

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<sup>58</sup> The expression is "*khul al-thaub*," based on the verse 2:187, "women are your vesture and you are their vesture." A wife can ask for a divorce, but most jurists agree that she cannot "demand" it; it has to be mutually acceptable. However, judicial *khul* without the husband's approval has been accepted in Pakistan and Egypt. Although the *sunnah* provides a model of not requiring the husband's consent for *khul*, jurists have, with only a very few exceptions, held that no *khul* is possible without the husband's consent. A wife can also request judicial divorce for cause under circumstances that vary depending on the legal school. If a wife is granted a divorce for cause, such as the husband's failure to provide economic support or for acts of abuse, the husband has no right to financial compensation (restitution of the dower).

<sup>59</sup> *Khul* and judicial divorce for cause are distinct phenomena. *Khul*, like *talāq*, is extrajudicial. Involvement of courts in a case of *khul* is a modern phenomenon. A good survey of contemporary legal discussions of marriage and divorce in Islam can be found on the Emory University website: [www.law.emory.edu/IFL/cases/USA.html](http://www.law.emory.edu/IFL/cases/USA.html).

compensation should not exceed the dower given by the husband at the time of marriage. However, this is a topic of much contemporary juridical debate.

## V. Interreligious Marriage<sup>60</sup>:

With regard to the choice of a spouse, the Muslim man is advised to propose marriage only to women who share his faith. In particular, he must not marry followers of non-Abrahamic religions: **“Do not marry women who venerate idols until they accept true belief. A servant woman who believes is surely better than an idol worshiper, even if she pleases to you. Do not concede your women in marriage to men who venerate idols until those men come to believe, for surely a servant who believes is better than an idol worshiper, even if he pleases you. Idol worshipers draw you towards the Fire, but Allah invites you to the Garden of Paradise and to forgiveness...” (Qur’ān 2:221).**

This verse proclaims that a Muslim man must not marry a *mushrik* (idol worshiper) woman nor is it allowed for a Muslim woman to marry a *mushrik* man, because there is an unbridgeable gulf between the two belief systems. Islam invites people to the Garden of Paradise, while idolatry or polytheism leads to the Fire of Hell. While Muslims believe in God, his messengers, and the hereafter, *mushrikīn* may ascribe divine authority to entities and objects that are not God, reject God’s messengers, and deny the hereafter. Marriage means living under one roof in harmony and love; it is difficult to imagine how it would be possible for persons adhering to such conflicting beliefs and practices to co-exist peacefully in a marital relationship.

Islam has made marriage to Jewish or Christian women lawful for Muslim men, for they are *Ahl al-ktab*, that is, People of the Book, or more precisely people whose faith is based upon a

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<sup>60</sup> See comments on the website link on SoundVision.com, About.com/Islam: “Interfaith Marriage in Islam”.

divinely revealed Scripture. Muslims may differ with Jews and Christians about the extent to which the revelation they received has been preserved and about interpretation of that revelation. However, Muslims hold the conviction that Jews and Christians do truly possess religions of divine origin and share many key beliefs with Muslims. Hence Islam has made some exceptions in dealing with them. The Qur'ān says: **“...And the food of those who were given the Scripture (before you) is permitted to you and your food is permitted to them. And (lawful to you in marriage are) chaste women from the Believers and chaste women from those who were given the Scripture before you, when you give them their due dowers, desiring chastity, not lewdness or secret intrigues” (Qur'ān 5:5).**

Tolerance is a formal characteristic of Islam. Despite the fact that the Qur'ān criticizes the “People of the Book,” it permits a Muslim man to marry a Christian or Jewish woman. A Christian or Jewish woman may retain her own faith as the mistress of a Muslim man's house, as the mother of his children, the source of his repose, and his companion for life.

However, a warning is in order here. In order of preference, a believing, practicing Muslim woman who loves her religion is preferable to a nominal Muslim woman who has merely inherited Islamic culture from her family. It should also be obvious that a Muslim woman, even if her adherence is more a matter of culture than of devout faith, is better suited to a Muslim man than a woman of Christian or Jewish faith, regardless of her merits. It is crucial that a Muslim man avoid marrying a woman who might, even in the slightest way, lead their children away from Islam.

Some contemporary scholars are conscious of the fact that in a situation of immigration to a predominantly non-Muslim country, the number of Muslims in a country may be small.

Therefore, Muslim men should be actively discouraged or even prohibited from marrying non-Muslim women because, under such circumstances, a number of Muslim women in the immigrant community might remain unmarried, given that they are prohibited from marrying non-Muslim men. Since this would be injurious to the Muslim faith community, some jurists are recommending that the permission to marry a Jewish or Christian woman be temporarily suspended.

It is *haram* (forbidden) for a Muslim woman to marry a non-Muslim man, regardless of whether he is of the People of the Book or not. Although it is clear that the verse: “... **And do not marry (your girls) to idolaters until they believe...**” (Qur’ān 2:221) is referring to men adhering to non-Abrahamic religions, there is no text which makes exceptions for males<sup>61</sup> from among the People of the Book. Moreover, the Qur’ānic verse cited above (5:5) explicitly refers only to “chaste women” who are followers of the Abrahamic faiths, without leaving any room for exceptional cases that would allow a Muslim woman to marry a male Jew or Christian. Thus, the prohibition is based on revelation confirmed by the historical consensus among Muslim jurists concerning Jewish and Christian males. From the traditional point of view, the man is the head of the household, the one who maintains the family, and is responsible for his wife; he also has the right to determine the religious practice of the family. From this pragmatic perspective, it would be highly unlikely that a practicing Jewish or Christian man would approve of his children being raised in the Muslim faith by their hypothetical Muslim mother.

## **VI. Ceremonial Matters in the United States**

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<sup>61</sup> This topic is discussed in some detail in: Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006), chapter 1.

In planning the wedding ceremony, there is considerable room for cultural and family customs to be observed. Typically in the United States, the Imam of the mosque to which the family belongs is called upon to perform the Islamic marriage ceremony in accordance with the teachings of Islam. The marriage has to be registered with the civil authorities and with the Islamic center.

It is highly encouraged that the official marriage rite take place in the mosque<sup>62</sup>, but a neutral place is also acceptable. In fact, a civil wedding fulfills the “religious requirements” of Muslim matrimony. However, the two witnesses must be Muslims; there must be the guardian (*wali*) and the dower (*mahr*), as discussed above. If it is to be an interreligious marriage, the guest clergy and family members are welcome to participate in the ceremony.

In Islam, the person who wishes to marry must have the freedom to choose a spouse. It is also understood that the husband must provide a dower (*mahr*) to the wife in accordance with his means and, particularly, in accordance with the wife’s requirements as specified in the contract; that two male Muslim witnesses must sign the Islamic marriage license; that non-Muslim witnesses are welcome to sign the civil marriage document<sup>63</sup>; that any Muslim male has the authority to officiate at a marriage ceremony.<sup>64</sup>

The Muslim wedding ceremony is conducted as follows:

- 1) The groom and the bride, the two witnesses who traditionally serve as the living testimony to the marriage agreement (even apart from a written document), together

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<sup>62</sup> Many Muslim marriages do not take place in mosques. There is no legal requirement for this practice, but it may be customary in some places. In some Muslim majority countries, it can be quite uncommon for a couple to be married in a mosque.

<sup>63</sup> Virtually all Muslim countries now require a written document.

<sup>64</sup> A valid marriage in Islam is not dependent on the gender of the officiant, though it is customary that the officiant be a male. There have been cases of women officiating at weddings and no objections have been raised on legal grounds. Private communication from Prof. Kecia Ali.



- with a document attesting to the dower (*mahr*) and other marriage contract stipulations, the guardian of the bride (optionally), and the Imam gather in the place where the ceremony is to occur.
- 2) The Imam recites from the Qur'ān, (for example: Surah al-Nisa 4:1; Surah al-Baqarah 2:49; Surah Al-i-'Imrān 3:102; Surah al-Ahzab 33:70-71) and the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) (such as: “marriage is my way, and those who refrain from marriage are not numbered among my followers”). Other quotations from the Qur'ān about what was revealed about marriage and *hadith* about the conduct of married life may also be read. The Imam gives a sermon on the rights, duties, and obligations of the husband and wife.
  - 3) The groom will request the hand of the bride either from her guardian or directly from her.
  - 4) After the request has been accepted, the Imam will invoke Allah's blessings on the couple, their family, and all those present.
  - 5) After the groom, bride, two witnesses, and the guardian of the bride sign the Islamic and civil documents, the Imam will announce that the couple is now married.
  - 6) If they wish, where it is the custom, the exchange of rings may now take place.

### **Walima (Wedding Reception).**

A reception is a religious matter and the way it is celebrated depends on custom. Following Arabic custom, it has become the norm in many parts of the Muslim world. Muslims in the United States have added other practices. In any case, the wedding reception may take place on the same day

as the signing of the marriage contract (i.e., the wedding ceremony) or it may be delayed days, weeks, even months. However three things should take place:

- 1) There should be some sort of entertainment, like beating a drum (*duff*) and so forth; this is in order to fill the occasion with happy memories for the newlyweds and to provide greater publicity for the event.
- 2) A wedding feast (*walima*) should be held, to which relatives and friends are invited. Acceptance of such an invitation is a Muslim religious duty. Participation in such occasions enhances feelings of solidarity and declining such an invitation may result in the opposite, should there be no legitimate reason.
- 3) The wedding activities should be conducted within reasonable limits and within the financial capacities of the parties concerned. Moreover, objectionable acts and indecencies should be avoided. Gifts are usually distributed to the guests at the conclusion of the wedding feast in the form of candy, etc. Guests, especially relatives and close friends, usually bring presents to the bride and groom.

Since Islamic law builds upon broad consensus, it would not be surprising if the experience of immigration to the United States and other countries without a Muslim majority will bring about changes in the way laws are applied to particular circumstances. This is especially true with regard to cultural matters which can change rapidly in the course of time. It should also be kept in mind, however, that legal matters deeply rooted in Qur'ānic texts and a long history of application to human needs will change much more slowly, thus supporting the process by which Muslim families integrate into a new society without losing their religious identity.

# WHEN COUPLE AND CLERGY MEET: THE CHALLENGES OF AN INTERRELIGIOUS MARRIAGE BETWEEN A CATHOLIC AND A MUSLIM

*(Editors Note: In the course of their deliberations, the members of the dialogue acknowledged the formidable challenges that warrant attention by Catholic and Muslim clergy when confronted with the possibility of an interreligious marriage between a Catholic and a Muslim. This chapter does not attempt to produce authoritative pastoral guidelines, as that is something which lies outside the mandate of the dialogue. However, the following is offered by the members of the dialogue to help bishops, priests, deacons, and imams appreciate the complex nature of the issues involved in an interreligious marriage between a Catholic and a Muslim and to aid them in discussing these issues with couples contemplating such a union.)*

## **Introduction**<sup>65</sup>

The members of the dialogue noted that the first challenge, generally speaking, is that when couples approach a leader of their faith community, their decision for marriage has already been made. What they are looking for next is assistance in planning and preparation and someone with whom to share their questions. It is important in meetings with the couple that the bishop, priest, deacon, imam, or pastoral minister make every effort to maintain great respect for the religious traditions from which each partner comes and to be sensitive to the cultural heritage

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<sup>65</sup> This chapter includes some material that has been adapted from a prior work of the Canadian Centre for Ecumenism, *Pastoral Guidelines for Muslim-Christian Marriages* (Montréal, 2001).

of both parties. This chapter identifies questions and considerations of a practical and pastoral nature in order to help those involved make good and informed decisions.

Strictly speaking, neither the Catholic Church nor Islam expressly permits interreligious marriage. Nevertheless, for a just and reasonable cause, it is possible for Catholics to be dispensed from this prohibition and to marry adherents of other religions. Similarly, in Islam, there is a provision whereby Muslim men may be allowed to marry “People of the Book” (Jews and Christians). Muslim women, however, may only marry Muslim men.

### **Welcoming the Couple**

The couple should be encouraged to meet with leaders from both faith communities. The members of the dialogue wished to emphasize that, in the initial encounter with the couple, it is important for the religious leader to communicate respect, understanding, and empathy for both parties. The couple is in the process of discerning a commitment in which they have probably invested a great deal of time and energy already. Ideally, they are beginning to appreciate the spiritual riches of each other’s religion and are also discovering and cultivating common values without concealing differences or compromising their own faith.

### **The Muslim Party**

The Muslim may experience some reticence in meeting a representative of the Catholic Church. Welcoming the Muslim involves great sensitivity. Islam, it should be noted, encompasses religion and law as well as social organization. The vast majority of Muslims

understand themselves as belonging to the one and only Islamic community with its vocation to bring a higher level of civilization to humanity.

Belonging to Islam has been compared to belonging to a huge family (*ummah*), albeit one in which disagreements among the members are not uncommon. A Muslim can never claim to be totally independent of it. A typical Muslim is affected more or less consciously by the values and perspectives enshrined in the Islamic tradition, even if he seems to assume a certain distance from it. The majority of Muslims are “religious” in the sense that they are attached to the Islamic faith and to the truths it upholds. They have strong feelings about being the inheritors of the ultimate divine revelation transmitted by the prophet Muhammad.

Beyond this common foundation, Muslims of various ethnic groups are often very different from one another in their religious practice. This pluralism can be found among Muslims in the United States. Depending on the country of origin, diversity in faith and religious practice should be expected in the understanding and interpretation of the Qur’an and, above all, in cultural and juridical matters (particularly regarding matrimonial law). The pastoral challenge is to keep this in mind, especially when working with recent immigrants.

### **The Catholic Party**

Like the Muslim party, the Catholic party is crossing cultural boundaries by contemplating an interreligious marriage, and this may evoke feelings of marginalization, vulnerability, and isolation from the community. Sometimes, marriage to a person of another race, religion, or culture is perceived as a transgression of the sociological norms of one’s own group.

Even if the Catholic party is sufficiently aware of the difficulties inherent in married life, the person in charge of their preparation cannot assume that the Catholic party is also adequately aware of the particular difficulties of an interreligious marriage to a Muslim. More specifically, there is often complete ignorance about juridical norms in Islam regarding, for instance, inheritance or custody of the children in case of death or divorce. Sometimes the influence of the Muslim family on its members will not be well understood or accepted by the Catholic party.

### **Accompanying the Couple**

The members of the dialogue noted that if the couple, while dating, encounters resistance to the relationship from their parents, the threat of parental rejection might bond them even more firmly and could significantly affect their attitude toward their relationship. For example, one party, feeling overwhelmed by the criticism of family and friends, might rebel interiorly and become incapable of viewing the situation objectively.

Above all, it is important to allow the couple to express themselves freely and profoundly in a context that is calm and conducive to reflection. In their determination to overcome resistance from their families or friends, they might avoid addressing difficulties that could later prove problematic in the marriage. If the couple has experienced a lack of understanding by family members, the welcoming, supportive attitude of representatives of their faith communities can provide a significant avenue into deeper dialogue about their respective religious obligations and the wide range of practical matters that are inherent in a married commitment.

Consequently, it is important to focus the initial pastoral dialogue on the more practical aspects of a couple's plan for their future life together before discussing the ritual framework for

their wedding. Those who participate in the process of discernment with the couple regarding an interreligious marriage must be attentive to these four elements:

- the faith and spirituality of both partners;
- the capacity of the couple to live in harmony;
- the ability of each partner to live their own faith in a Muslim-Catholic marriage;
- the capacity for adaptation in the country where the couple will live—particularly in the case of a Christian woman called to live in traditional areas of Muslim countries.

In the initial dialogue with the couple, the freedom of both parties must be carefully ascertained. Are they entering this commitment freely, with no undue pressure? Are they free of any previous commitment? Has one party or the other previously contracted marriage and been divorced? If so, have they done everything necessary for the new marriage to be recognized by and/or celebrated in the Church? Considerations such as these must be raised by faith leaders with any couple that is discerning an interreligious union.

### **Honestly Acknowledging the Challenges and Opportunities**

Marriage is always a venture into the unknown, even within the same social group in which the partners share the same history, conception of life, ideals, and faith commitment; it is an even greater challenge when such things are not held in common. The members of the dialogue cautioned that the mutual affection which an engaged couple enjoys, their desire to establish a home, and the various preoccupations they have shared can divert their attention away from the important differences that exist between them as future spouses. However, if they truly want a successful marriage, they must candidly acknowledge these differences from the outset.

One can render an important service to the couple in a pastoral interview by looking with them, calmly and peacefully, at the cultural and religious differences that may characterize their lives permanently. The couple will need to honestly admit these differences in each other since they will most certainly manifest themselves in the course of daily life. It is important to foresee as objectively as possible the difficulties that will arise as a result in order to resolve them as much as possible before the marriage takes place.

In addition, a serious evaluation of the elements common to both partners may enable them to discern the human foundations on which they can build a life together. Among such elements in common, they may find the following:

- Similar kinds and levels of education
- Commitment to the service of others
- Similar likes and dislikes, especially in regard to social relations generally
- A desire to contribute to positive Muslim-Catholic relations in society.

### **Cultural Challenges for the Catholic Party**

Very often, due either to the cultural or the religious context at hand or to a combination of both, the relationship between a Muslim and a Catholic may not take the same expression as in traditional western Christian models of family life. For example:

- Culturally, the segregation of males and females in non-Western societies, and its implications for one's lifestyle, may pose a problem. Family membership may not be limited solely to the couple and their children, but rather may be a "patriarchal" family model in which other relatives may be included. In certain cultures where



numerous children are considered a gift from God, the non-Muslim wife is seen as bearing children not only for herself and her husband, but also for the larger Muslim community as well. Often, if the husband is permanently separated from the family for any reason, it is the tradition of certain cultures that the children will return to his community and, more precisely, to the family of their father.

- In the Muslim partner's frame of reference, the education of children may not be the responsibility of their mother or father alone, but of the local Muslim community.

When the marriage is contracted legally in a country of Muslim tradition, the situation of the Catholic party is dependent on the legislation of the country, particularly regarding property, divorce, care of the children, and inheritance.

- The role of the family and its approval and blessing of an interreligious marriage is extremely important in Muslim cultures. For example, even if the couple works out various differences, their decision for marriage can still be subject to approval by either partner's family. In effect, a parental blessing can be a prerequisite for going forward with the wedding.

Again, all of these may be cultural rather than uniquely Islamic practices, but it is important for the Catholic party to be aware of the cultural expectations that her partner may bring to the marriage.

### **Cultural Challenges for the Muslim Party**

If the Muslim party has not lived for a long time in the United States, the Western and Christian conceptions of the family may appear confusing. This requires assisting him in

understanding Catholic teaching on marriage as well as how marriage and family life generally exists in the West. The members of the dialogue emphasized that the following points should be especially kept in mind:

- The Muslim who is accustomed to receiving guests, offering traditional hospitality, and making frequent visits to family and relatives, may have difficulty accepting certain Western attitudes of reserve which he might interpret as “non-acceptance.” In some circumstances, the Muslim party might actually not be well accepted by the Catholic family and may experience isolation and insecurity as a result.
- The question of the religious education of the children arises with the start of many families. Islamic tradition imposes on the Muslim an obligation to transmit Islam to his children. The question remains as to how can this be done with his Catholic wife, who likewise has an obligation to have the children baptized and raised in the Catholic faith.
- Men and women are called to very precise rules regarding modesty (Qur’ān 24:30-31). The Qur’ānic conception of feminine modesty regarding clothing might also be a source of tension. What constitutes modest clothing for women may be very different in the Catholic wife’s understanding than it is in her Muslim husband’s.
- According to Islamic teaching, women have equal dignity with men before God. Nevertheless, traditionally in many Islamic cultures, men have a certain preeminence over women because of the importance that the male assumes in a Muslim family (Qur’ān 4:34). In daily life, it may be difficult for the Muslim husband to accept all that is implied by the equality of the sexes in Western society, especially women’s

legal autonomy and the sharing of responsibilities in keeping a home and raising children. If the Catholic wife works outside the home and wants to pursue her career, she will have more independence than is traditionally found in a Muslim family. Will the Muslim partner be able to accept that situation, especially if he belongs to a traditional family? Will the couple know how to come to terms with the situation of dual careers?

### **Accepting the Differences so as to Know the Riches They Offer**

The members of the dialogue admitted that the sharing of significant cultural, religious, and social differences in an interreligious marriage can be mutually enriching, but that not everyone is capable of sustaining its demands. The couple involved must be led through a deliberate discernment process as to whether or not it is realistic for them. Though not easy, it is an essential part of the pastoral preparation for marriage which must be done.

Establishing such an interreligious home life requires a kind of spiritual creativity that can be expressed in different ways. The couple has the opportunity to bring into being something new which, while incorporating elements of Western and Islamic culture, identifies exclusively with neither of them. Such an enterprise would, of course, demand qualities such as understanding, cultural sensitivity, and respectful patience.

The members of the dialogue agreed that the fidelity of one party in a marriage to his or her religious practice can sometimes lead the other party to a deeper spiritual engagement with his or her own tradition. A Muslim's fidelity to religious faith can sometimes inspire a Christian partner to greater faithfulness to the Gospel; conversely, a Christian's devotion can sometimes

inspire a deeper commitment of the Muslim party to Islam. Such a dynamic can also bring a practical dimension to the larger Muslim-Catholic dialogue, broadening it beyond the specialized meetings of experts, and rooting the dialogue in the everyday life of the home.

One way of manifesting this mutual respect in the home on a daily basis surely involves the religious upbringing of the children. As noted before, both Catholic and Muslim traditions have explicit teachings regarding the religious upbringing of children. Therefore, it is essential that the couple discuss this matter before entering into marriage. A coherent upbringing in one faith tradition significantly diminishes the possibility of confusion and stress for the children. At the same time, providing opportunities for the children to learn about the beliefs and practices of both parents, while having a primary relationship to one of the traditions, can be a way of engendering respect for both religions.

Catholic-Muslim marriages can be a living example of the respect that is possible between different people of different cultures and religions. Such marriages make a unique and very valuable contribution by showing how individualistic interests, religious prejudice, and racism can be overcome. As a result, some interreligious couples may discern in their lives together a mission of reconciliation and peace.

To assist Muslim-Catholic couples in working constructively with the many challenges they will face, it is recommended that they meet with other interreligious couples who have encountered similar issues. Support groups for interreligious couples can provide an effective remedy to the feeling of isolation experienced by some couples who have no one with whom they can share their particular joys and difficulties. In addition, such groups can offer a source of mutual inspiration, hope, and strength.

## **The Spiritual Life of the Couple**

It was noted that the spiritual life of the couple depends largely on the quality and depth of the human relationship between the partners. Problems such as social integration, lifestyle, and relationships with extended family, if left unresolved, can make it difficult for interreligious partners to discuss their spiritual life together.

The members of the dialogue advised that the following commitments will help the couple in cultivating this dimension of their relationship:

- to respect the freedom of each other's spiritual journey, e.g. religious practices;
- to acquire a better understanding of one's own religion and of the religion of one's partner so as to eliminate, as much as possible, both prejudices and unnecessary misunderstandings;
- to reject the temptation to avoid problems by refusing to talk about them;
- to avoid the kind of syncretism or uncritical amalgamation of beliefs that produces a religious system of one's own making which is neither truly Muslim nor truly Christian in belief or practice;
- to express one's faith to the other in the context of day-to-day events.

Forming relationships with members of each partner's community of faith can also make an important contribution towards mutual understanding and respect. The opportunity should be taken, while avoiding ambiguity and any hint of syncretism, occasionally to attend the religious services of the partner's community in order to better understand the faith of the other.

## **Mutual Commitments: Some of the Challenges**

After learning about each other's beliefs and practices concerning marriage and family life, the members of the dialogue noted that often when these beliefs and practices encounter one other, certain exceptionally problematic issues arise. The members of the dialogue noted the following:

(1) The Catholic Church professes that indissolubility is an essential property of marriage as an expression of divine positive law. As such, Catholics believe that indissolubility also pertains to Muslim marriages. By contrast, repudiation, according to traditional Islamic law in certain countries, and the right to divorce, in other modernized interpretations, are legitimate for the Muslim. Nevertheless, the tradition of Islam affirms that repudiation, though licit, is a most reprehensible practice.

For the validity of marriage in the Catholic Church, the Catholic party must receive a dispensation from the impediment of disparity of cult. In order for such to be granted, in addition to what is required for the Catholic party, the Muslim party will be asked *not to exclude* what the Catholic Church considers essential to marriage. It will be important for the Muslim party to know that, strictly speaking, this is not incompatible with Islam. There is a diversity of opinion among Islamic legal scholars on this question. Some Muslims who have internally affirmed these conditions in their marriages have gained legal acceptance for their position.

(2) It is not uncommon for the Catholic party to be encouraged to pronounce the Muslim profession of faith or *Shahāda*: "There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger." This occurs more often when the prospective husband is Christian. The Catholic party should be aware that saying the *Shahāda* is regarded by Muslims as a public rite of initiation into the

Islamic community. It is considered a religious act by which the person becomes a Muslim and an integral member of that community.

In encouraging this profession of faith on the part of the Catholic party, pious Muslim family members may be seeking to ensure that the marriage will be valid from the perspective of Islamic tradition which declares any marriage between a Christian man and a Muslim woman invalid. Though encouragement to make this profession of faith may be done out of fidelity to Islamic law, it is an invitation that is not without its own internal tension inasmuch as other requirements of Islam, such as sincerity, interior assent, and no compulsion in matters of religion, would seem to stand as warrant against it.

There have been cases in which the Catholic party, in contacting a priest, has indicated that he or she has already pronounced the *Shahāda*, thinking that such was a necessary step. Given the context in which this happens, it may not automatically constitute apostasy since the Catholic party did not intend to reject the Catholic faith. Recourse to the appropriate local religious authority will help clarify the particular situation. If the Catholic perceives that it is impossible to avoid making the Muslim profession of faith and views it merely as a formality, the matter should be referred to the bishop or his representative in the diocesan chancery.

(3) The marriage contract is an essential aspect of marriage for a Muslim. Careful drafting of the contract is important for both partners; it enables them to face together some sensitive aspects of their interreligious marriage and to avoid misunderstandings that could later become problematic.

The following are some of the elements that may be considered for inclusion in the text of the contract. Catholic pastoral ministers should arrange for a canonical examination of the

contents of any pre-nuptial agreement before it is signed. In this way the Catholic party and the Church can be certain that any clauses proposed for inclusion in the contract will not invalidate the consent of the parties from the perspective of canon law. The following may legitimately be included from a Catholic legal standpoint:

- a commitment by both partners to respect the freedom of religion and the rights of each to worship according to his or her religious tradition;
- an explicit choice of monogamy and marital fidelity by both partners;
- an explicit renunciation of the option of repudiation (divorce);
- an agreement concerning a marriage settlement regarding the ownership of goods and property and the distribution of them in case of separation (the clear renunciation of the option of repudiation governs the intent of the couple against separation and divorce and thus this agreement concerning property settlement in the event of separation is secondary to that greater promise against repudiation);
- a statement of the right of succession of each partner in the case of death of either of the two spouses;
- the choice of their country of residence;
- clauses specifying the intentions regarding the religious education of the children;
- the rejection of the excision of daughters if the question should arise;
- the custody of the children (minors) in the case of the death of one of the partners or the separation of the couple;



- specifications related to the role and responsibility of each partner within the marriage, for example, the possibility of the woman working outside the home, or the entry of children's names on the mother's passport;
- agreement on the marriage gift or dower (*mahr*).

These are some of the many specifications that can be written into a marriage contract for a Muslim-Catholic couple. Some of these concerns may have already been addressed by existing forms presented to one or the other partner. For example, for the purpose of obtaining the dispensation from the impediment of disparity of cult, the Catholic party will be asked to declare:

*“I reaffirm my faith in Jesus Christ and, with God’s help, intend to continue living that faith in the Catholic Church. I promise to do all in my power to share the faith I have received with our children by having them baptized and reared as Catholics.”*

It may also be helpful for the couple to write a “declaration of intent” prior to their marriage. Essentially such a declaration states the couple’s expression and understanding of their respective commitments. The declaration of intent does not replace the marriage contract drawn up by the partners which is of strictly legal value. The declaration of intent complements the contract and indicates the spirit in which the couple will fulfill the clauses of the contract in their daily life.

### **The Form of the Wedding**

The members of the dialogue emphasized that awareness of their religious differences and of the commitments required of them should lead the couple to give careful consideration to their options in deciding on the form of their interreligious wedding. In Islam, marriage is a contract concluded by the exchange of consent by the spouses—or their representatives—in the

presence of two Muslim witnesses. The name of Allah is mentioned. However, the use of the name of God does not determine the validity of the contract; a Muslim knows very well that Allah is “al-Shahid,” the One who witnesses all things.

In the Catholic Church, weddings between a Catholic party and a non-baptized party may be celebrated in a church or other suitable place according to the *Rite for Celebrating Marriage Between a Catholic and an Unbaptized Person*. The Muslim and his family may be very sensitive to any reference to Jesus as Son of God in the Catholic rite. If the one responsible for preparing the couple finds it necessary to call into question the advisability of proceeding with a Catholic marriage rite due to the Muslim party’s hesitation to engage in it, this must be done with great sensitivity and with a clear understanding of the problems involved. Their discernment may reveal circumstances in which the use of the Catholic wedding rite is not advisable. In this case, in addition to the dispensation from disparity of cult, dispensations from canonical form must be obtained from the local bishop for the marriage to be recognized as valid.<sup>66</sup> Simple reticence on the part of the clergy—whether Catholic or Muslim—as to why a Catholic marriage rite should not be used can be misinterpreted. As a result, it is important to explain one’s point of view clearly to the couple.

If the couple seeks to be married in a way recognized and blessed by both faith communities, there is a choice to be made as to the form of celebration that would be most appropriate for the couple’s situation. The options for this are as follows:

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<sup>66</sup> For a serious reason, Church law permits the bishop to grant dispensations from canonical form and place. If granted, the ceremony may be performed in a form other than the Catholic Rite of Marriage and in another suitable place. Any Catholic has the right to request a dispensation, and the Ordinary has an obligation to consider it on its merits before rendering a decision whether or not to grant it.

- Marriage before a bishop, pastor, or properly delegated priest or deacon and two witnesses according to the Rite of Marriage in the Catholic Church. If this option is chosen, care must be taken to avoid problems for the Muslim partner, whose community may consider the Christian rite of marriage legally null and void. It will be necessary to reiterate that, in the United States, the religious minister also has the role of a civil officer and is licensed by the state to conduct weddings. Marriage in this form may take place in a church or other suitable place.
- A civil marriage in which the Catholic party has been granted dispensations from the canonical form. The marriage is recorded in the marriage register of the diocesan curia, in the baptismal register of the Catholic party, and in the parish register where the preparation was carried out, with the appropriate notations. In Islamic law it is not necessary for a marriage to be celebrated before an imam, although increasingly imams have requested and received the requisite government permit to officiate at marriages.

Whichever option is chosen, every opportunity should be taken to underscore the values common to Catholics and Muslims in reference to marriage: submission to the will of the one God; the desire for children; recognition by society; justice; the welcoming of guests; concern for the poor; patience in difficult times; mutual understanding; and, respect. Care should also be taken to avoid giving the impression that one of the partners is giving up his or her faith. If the Catholic Rite of Marriage is chosen, it must be clear that the Muslim is remaining a Muslim and that this ceremony in no way obliges the embrace of the Catholic faith. If a dispensation has been

granted for the celebration of a civil marriage, it must be made clear that the Catholic party retains religious freedom in relation to Islam.

If the couple intends eventually to reside in a Muslim country permanently or for a prolonged period, it is very important that their marriage be in accord with the legislation of that country. They will need to have precise information on the Muslim country's legislation regarding the recognition of the marriage of a Christian and a Muslim and, particularly, the recognition of a Christian marriage ceremony if such has been the case.

## **Conclusion**

The members of the Mid-Atlantic Dialogue between Catholics and Muslims acknowledge the formidable challenges that warrant attention by Catholic and Muslim clergy and pastoral workers when confronted with the possibility of an interreligious marriage between a Catholic and a Muslim. It is our hope that the preceding considerations will help pastors, imams, and others involved to appreciate the complex nature of the issues involved and to help couples contemplating such a union to find an honest and balanced approach in addressing these significant challenges. Pastoral ministers should engage the couple in a deliberate process of discernment which enables each partner, in truth, to acknowledge the challenges involved; to face the responsibilities of his and her religious heritage; then, to decide if they have the practical and spiritual resources to attempt such a union. In the end, the decision whether or not to proceed with an interreligious marriage ought to be made only after the issues mentioned have been resolved by candid discernment that has been guided by fervent prayer.

## Appendix A

### **The Nature and Purpose of Interreligious Dialogue**

Interreligious dialogue is a discussion of religious beliefs that takes place between those who seek the truth of religion, while also respecting freedom of conscience. Such dialogue includes both witness of one's faith to another and the mutual exploration of religious convictions. Prayer and hospitality accompany this kind of sharing of beliefs.

In Catholic-Muslim dialogue, the partners clarify for one another how they understand the gift of God's revelation and how they respond to it in faith. Thus, mutual understanding and respect are two important elements of these conversations that allow each side to grow in knowledge and appreciation of their own faith and that of the other.

Interreligious dialogue is by no means based on acts of compromise, whereby parties negotiate a common religious ground, each perhaps giving up a little in order to reach a mutually beneficial position. Some types of social, legal, or business dialogues are designed to assist groups in precisely this enterprise for the good of society. Interreligious dialogue, however, does not involve compromise in any way, lest authentic religious identity be lost. Although much good can result from religious groups reaching and implementing agreements, such associations are not interreligious dialogues *per se*, the primary purpose of which is the mutual exploration of religious beliefs.

Interreligious dialogue is not a debate or argument over whose religious belief is "right" and whose is "wrong," – though participants make every effort not to ignore differences and disagreements but to explain them as clearly as possible to each another. Nor is interreligious dialogue an attempt to harmonize religious differences nor to syncretize or collapse different

faiths into one another nor to convince dialogue partners to leave their faith in order to embrace another's. For Catholics and Muslims, sharing faith with the world is an essential feature of religious identity.

Interreligious dialogue corrects false impressions, tries to right wrong information, and helps to dispel ignorance. It strives to improve everyday relations between religious communities and to overcome prejudice and ill-will based on misunderstanding. Because of its emphasis on religious belief and practice, interreligious dialogue aids the common life wherever Catholics and Muslims live side-by-side. Supporting one another in prayer and spiritual practice, Catholics and Muslims also try to grow in their openness to the experience of God, who is the source of all life and fulfillment. By meeting one another as people of faith and addressing issues of common concern, Catholics and Muslims hope to form ever-deepening bonds of friendship. Out of their obedience and surrender to God's revelation, they extend their love to all those in need.

## Appendix B

### **USCCB Guidelines for Interreligious Marriages**

In planning interreligious marriages, the Catholic Church relies on various levels of directives: from the universal canon law of the Church to the rules set forth by national bishops' conferences and dioceses. The document of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (now called the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops), *Faithful to Each Other Forever*, summarizes these directives in a section on interreligious marriage. The basis of such norms is that the actions and words of the marriage service correspond to the holy reality of the marital union that is sanctioned and blessed by God.

***Faithful to Each Other Forever:***

***A Catholic Handbook of Pastoral Help for Marriage Preparation***

Bishops' Committee for Pastoral Research and Practices

National Conference of Catholic Bishops

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pages 80-81

**Canonical Regulations**

We summarize here the major provisions of the current Code of Canon Law concerning interreligious marriages, while also including references to earlier universal and national church documents that touch upon those directives:<sup>67</sup>

a) The Catholic Church holds that a valid marriage between two baptized Christians is a sacrament.<sup>68</sup> Priests and deacons may wish to inform and educate couples on the consequences of this point – that marriage to a nonbaptized person is not a sacrament.

b) The marriage of a Catholic and a Christian of another communion calls for special pastoral concern. The Catholic Church shows particular care for these marriages and treats them in a way that is distinct from its treatment of the marriage of two Catholics.<sup>69</sup>

c) Such marriages require permission from the local bishop. They require a just and reasonable cause as well as the following conditions being fulfilled:

(1) The Catholic party is to declare that he or she is prepared to remove dangers of falling away from the faith and is to make a sincere promise to do all in his or her power to have all the children baptized and brought up in the Catholic Church;

(2) The other party is to be informed, at an appropriate time, of these promises that the Catholic party has to make, so that it is clear that the other party is truly aware of the promise and obligation of the Catholic party;

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<sup>67</sup> This summary is based upon the “Province of Chicago Ecumenical Guidelines,” revised in 1986.

<sup>68</sup> Eph 5:30; *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 11; *Code of Canon Law*, c. 1055.

<sup>69</sup> *Code of Canon Law*, c.1124.



(3) Both parties are to be instructed on the essential ends and properties of marriage, which are not to be excluded by either party.<sup>70</sup>

d) The declaration and promise by the Catholic party, necessary for permission to enter any interreligious marriage, is to be made in the following or similar words:

I reaffirm my faith in Jesus Christ and, with God's help, intend to continue living that faith in the Catholic Church. I promise to do all in my power to share the faith I have received with our children by having them baptized and reared as Catholics.<sup>71</sup>

e) The declaration and promise are to be made in the presence of the priest or deacon. The one who submits the request for permission or dispensation to enter an interreligious marriage shall certify that the declaration and promise have been made by the Catholic party and that the other party has been informed of this requirement and fact. This is to be done in the following words:

The required declaration and promise have been made by the Catholic in my presence.

The non-Catholic has been informed of this requirement so that it is certain that he/she is aware of the promise and obligation on the part of the Catholic.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., c. 1125.

<sup>71</sup> *Apostolic Letter on Mixed Marriages*, no. 7; *Statement on the Implementation of the Apostolic Letter on Mixed Marriages*, National Conference of Catholic Bishops (Washington, D.C.: USCC Office of Publishing and Promotion Services, 1971).

f) The instruction on the ends and essential properties of marriage, which are not to be excluded by either party, is in addition to the customary marriage preparation program and should be done on a direct and individual basis.<sup>72</sup>

g) Each one preparing couples for an interreligious marriage should emphasize that such a marriage is an opportunity to live the principles of ecumenism deeply and intensely on a day-to-day basis.

h) In the assistance that is given to prepare for a marriage between a Catholic and one of a church or ecclesial community not in full communion with the Catholic Church, and in the continued efforts to help all married couples and families, the priest (or deacon) should endeavor, where wise and requested, to be in contact and to cooperate with the minister or religious counselor of the other party.<sup>73</sup>

j) The Canonical Form of the celebration of marriage required for validity (i.e., that the marriage take place in the presence of the Catholic pastor of the place [or his delegate, either the priest or deacon] and two witnesses) is to be observed in interreligious marriages.<sup>74</sup> (ft 99)

k) The local ordinary may grant permission for an interreligious marriage, dispensation from the impediment of disparity of cult, and dispensation from Canonical Form for reasons such as the

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<sup>72</sup> (ft 96) *Apostolic Letter on Mixed Marriages*, no. 6; *Code of Canon Law*, c. 1125:3; *Statement on the Implementation of the Apostolic Letter on Mixed Marriages*, no. 3.

<sup>73</sup> (ft 97) *Statement on the Implementation of the Apostolic Letter on Mixed Marriages*, no. 4.

<sup>74</sup> (ft 99) *Code of Canon Law*, cc. 1108; 1127:1.

following: “to achieve family harmony or to avoid family alienation; to obtain parental agreement to the marriage; to recognize the significant claims of relationship or special friendship with a non-Catholic minister; to permit the marriage in a church that has particular importance to the non-Catholics.”<sup>75</sup> (ft 100)

l) In an interreligious marriage, for which there has been granted a dispensation from Canonical Form, an ecclesiastical record of the marriage shall be kept in the chancery of the diocese that granted the dispensation and in the records of the parish from which the application for the dispensation was made.<sup>76</sup> (ft 101)

m) It is forbidden to have, either before or after the canonical celebration of marriage, another religious celebration of the same marriage either to give or receive matrimonial consent; nor may there be a religious celebration of the marriage in which the Catholic priest or deacon and a non-Catholic minister, each performing his or her own rite, ask for the consent of the parties.<sup>77</sup>

o) At an interreligious marriage in a Catholic church, when the party who is not Catholic expresses the wish to have his or her minister present, the Catholic pastor (or his delegate) should issue an invitation, giving an assurance of a cordial reception. When issuing such an invitation, the Catholic pastor (or his delegate) should advise the guest minister to wear whatever

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<sup>75</sup> (ft 100) *Statement on the Implementation of the Apostolic Letter on Mixed Marriages*, no. 10; *Apostolic Letter on Mixed Marriages*, no. 9; *Code of Canon Law*, c. 1127:2.

<sup>76</sup> (ft 101) *Statement on the Implementation of the Apostolic Letter on Mixed Marriages*, no. 12.

<sup>77</sup> (ft 102) *Apostolic Letter on Mixed Marriages*, no. 13; *Code of Canon Law*, c. 1127:3. *Directory for the Application of the Decisions of the Second Vatican Council concerning Ecumenical Matters*, Part 1, no. 56; *Statement on the Implementation of the Apostolic Letter on Mixed Marriages*, no. 15.

is deemed appropriate and that a place of honor will be reserved either in the sanctuary or in the body of the church. However, it should be kept in mind that this invitation will not be accepted in every case and, perhaps, not even be welcome because of either an official church policy or the specific minister's personal preference. The couple, thus, may need to be alerted that even though we will extend the invitation in accord with their wishes, it may be declined by the other minister for reasons of church policy. That will spare them the feeling that they are personally being spurned.

r) In a marriage between a Catholic and one who is not baptized, the Rite for Celebrating Marriage between a Catholic and an Unbaptized Person is to be used.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> *Rite of Marriage*, no. 8, and ch. III.

## Appendix C

### CHAPTER III

#### RITE FOR CELEBRATING MARRIAGE BETWEEN A CATHOLIC AND AN UNBAPTIZED PERSON

If marriage is celebrated between a Catholic and unbaptized person (either a catechumen or a non-Christian), the rite may be performed in the church or some other suitable place and takes the following form.

##### RITE OF WELCOME

55. At the appointed time, the priest, wearing surplice and white stole (or a white cope if desired), proceeds with the ministers to the door of the church or to another appropriate place and greets the bride and the bridegroom.

Where it is desirable that the rite of welcome be omitted, the celebration of marriage begins at once with the liturgy of the word.

##### LITURGY OF THE WORD

56. The liturgy of the word takes place in the usual manner. There may be three readings, the first of them from the Old Testament. If circumstances make it more desirable, there may be a single reading. See nos. 67-105.

##### HOMILY

57. A homily, drawn from the sacred text, is given and should speak of the obligations of marriage and other appropriate points.

##### RITE OF MARRIAGE

##### INTRODUCTION

58. All stand, including the bride and the bridegroom. The priest addresses them in these or similar words:

**My dear friends, you have come together in this church so that the Lord may seal and strengthen your love in the presence of the Church's minister and this community.**

**In this way you will be strengthened to keep mutual and lasting faith with each other and to carry out the other duties of marriage. And so, in the presence of the**

**Church, I ask you to state your intentions.**

## **QUESTIONS**

59. The priest then questions them about their freedom of choice, faithfulness to each other, and the acceptance and upbringing of children:

**N. and N., have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?**

**Will you love and honor each other as man and wife for the rest of your lives?**

The following question may be omitted if, for example, the couple is advanced in years.

**Will you accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?**

Each answers the questions separately.

## **CONSENT**

60. The priest invites them to declare their consent:

**Since it is your intention to enter into marriage, join your right hands, and declare your consent before God and his Church.**

They join hands.

The bridegroom says:

**I, N., take you, N., to be my wife. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.**

The bride says:

**I, N., take you, N., to be my husband. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.**

If, however, it seems preferable for pastoral reasons, the priest may obtain consent from the couple through questions. First he asks the bridegroom:

**N., do you take N. to be your wife? Do you promise to be true to her in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, to love her and honor her all the days of your life?**

The bridegroom: **I do.**

Then he asks the bride:

**N., do you take N. to be your husband? Do you promise to be true to him in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health, to love him and honor him all the days of your life?**

The bride: **I do.**

If pastoral necessity demands it, the conference of bishops may decree, in virtue of the faculty in no. 17, that the priest should always obtain the consent of the couple through questions.

In the dioceses of the United States, the following form may also be used:

**I, N., take you, N., for my lawful wife,  
to have and to hold, from this day forward,  
for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer,  
in sickness and in health, until death do us part.**

**I, N., take you, N., for my lawful husband,  
to have and to hold, from this day forward,  
for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer,  
in sickness and in health, until death do us part.**

If it seems preferable for pastoral reasons for the priest to obtain consent from the couple through questions, in the dioceses of the United States the following alternative form may be used:

**N., do you take N. for your lawful wife (husband), to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do you part?**

The bride (bridegroom): **I do.**

61. Receiving their consent, the priest says:

**You have declared your consent before the Church.  
May the Lord in his goodness strengthen your consent  
and fill you both with his blessings.  
What God has joined, men must not divide.  
R: Amen.**

#### BLESSING OF RINGS

62. If circumstances so require, the blessing and exchange of rings can be omitted. If this rite is observed, the priest says:

**May the Lord bless + these rings which you give to  
each other as the sign of your love and fidelity.  
R: Amen.**

For other forms of the blessing of rings, see nos. 110-111.

#### EXCHANGE OF RINGS

63. The bridegroom places his wife's ring on her ring finger. He may say:

**N., take this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity. In  
the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.**

The bride places her husband's ring on his ring finger. She may say:

**N., take this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity. In  
the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.**

#### GENERAL INTERCESSIONS AND NUPTIAL BLESSING

64. If circumstances so require, the blessing of the bride and bridegroom can be omitted. If used, it is combined with the general intercessions (prayer of the faithful) in this order:

a) First the priest uses the invitatory of any blessing of the couple (see the first part of nos. 33, 120, and 121) or any other, taken from any approved formula for the general intercessions.

b) Immediately after the invitatory, there can be either a brief period of silence, or a series of petitions from the prayer of the faithful with responses by the people. All the petitions should be in harmony with the blessing which follows, but should not duplicate it.

c) Then, omitting the prayer that concludes the prayer of the faithful, the priest blesses the bride and



the bridegroom:

65. Facing them, he joins his hands and says:

**My brothers and sisters, let us ask God for his continued blessings upon this bridegroom and his bride.**

All pray silently for a short while. Then the priest extends his hands and continues:

**Holy Father, creator of the universe,  
maker of man and woman in your likeness,  
source of blessing for married life,  
we humbly pray to you for this bride  
who today is united with her husband in the bond of marriage.**

**May your fullest blessing come upon her and her husband  
so that they may together rejoice in your gift of married love.  
May they be noted for their good lives,  
(and be parents filled with virtue).**

**Lord, may they both praise you when they are happy  
and turn to you in their sorrows.  
May they be glad that you help them in their work,  
and know that you are with them in their need.  
May they reach old age in the company of their friends,  
and come at last to the kingdom of heaven.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord.  
R: Amen.**

## **CONCLUSION OF THE CELEBRATION**

### **LORD'S PRAYER AND BLESSING**

66. The rite may be concluded with the Lord's Prayer (or, if the nuptial blessing has been omitted, another prayer by the priest) and a blessing using the customary form, **May almighty God bless you** or another formula from nos. 125-127.

## Appendix D

Since the *Book of Blessings* contains a large number of prayers supportive of family life, it seemed appropriate to call attention to this resource for the purpose of fostering interreligious dialogue and spirituality.

Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, National Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Book of Blessings*. NY: Catholic Book Publishing Co. 1989

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## Appendix E

This international Muslim document draws attention to the theme of human rights, including those of the family. It should serve as a useful resource for instruction and dialogue.

### **The Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam**

Adopted and Issued at the Nineteenth Islamic Conference  
of Foreign Ministers in Cairo  
on 5 August 1990.

The Member States of the Organization of the Islamic Conference,

Reaffirming the civilizing and historical role of the Islamic *Ummah* which God made the best nation that has given mankind a universal and well-balanced civilization in which harmony is established between this life and the hereafter and knowledge is combined with faith; and the role that this *Ummah* should play to guide a humanity confused by competing trends and ideologies and to provide solutions to the chronic problems of this materialistic civilization.

Wishing to contribute to the efforts of mankind to assert human rights, to protect man from exploitation and persecution, and to affirm his freedom and right to a dignified life in accordance with the Islamic Shari'ah

Convinced that mankind which has reached an advanced stage in materialistic science is still, and shall remain, in dire need of faith to support its civilization and of a self-motivating force to guard its rights;

Believing that fundamental rights and universal freedoms in Islam are an integral part of the Islamic religion and that no one as a matter of principle has the right to suspend them in whole or in part or violate or ignore them in as much as they are binding divine commandments, which are contained in the Revealed Books of God and were sent through the last of His Prophets to complete the preceding divine messages thereby making their observance an act of worship and their neglect or violation an abominable sin, and accordingly every person is individually responsible — and the *Ummah* collectively responsible — for their safeguard.

Proceeding from the above-mentioned principles,

Declare the following:

#### Article 1

(a) All human beings form one family whose members are united by submission to God and descent from Adam. All men are equal in terms of basic human dignity and basic obligations and responsibilities, without any discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, language, sex, religious belief, political affiliation, social status, or other considerations. True faith is the

guarantee for enhancing such dignity along the path to human perfection.

(b) All human beings are God's subjects, and the most loved by him are those who are most useful to the rest of His subjects, and no one has superiority over another except on the basis of piety and good deeds.

#### Article 2

(a) Life is a God-given gift and the right to life is guaranteed to every human being. It is the duty of individuals, societies, and states to protect this right from any violation, and it is prohibited to take away life except for a Shari'ah-prescribed reason.

(b) It is forbidden to resort to such means as may result in the genocidal annihilation of mankind.

(c) The preservation of human life throughout the term of time willed by God is a duty prescribed by Shari'ah.

(d) Safety from bodily harm is a guaranteed right. It is the duty of the state to safeguard it, and it is prohibited to breach it without a Shari'ah-prescribed reason.

#### Article 3

(a) In the event of the use of force and in case of armed conflict, it is not permissible to kill non-belligerents such as old men, women, and children. The wounded and the sick shall have the right to medical treatment; and prisoners of war shall have the right to be fed, sheltered, and clothed. It is prohibited to mutilate dead bodies. It is a duty to exchange prisoners of war and to arrange visits or reunions of the families separated by the circumstances of war.

(b) It is prohibited to fell trees, to damage crops or livestock, and to destroy the enemy's civilian buildings and installations by shelling, blasting, or any other means.

#### Article 4

Every human being is entitled to inviolability and the protection of his good name and honour during his life and after his death. The state and society shall protect his remains and burial place.

#### Article 5

(a) The family is the foundation of society, and marriage is the basis of its formation. Men and women have the right to marriage, and no restrictions stemming from race, colour, or nationality shall prevent them from enjoying this right.

(b) Society and the State shall remove all obstacles to marriage and shall facilitate marital procedure. They shall ensure family protection and welfare.

#### Article 6

(a) Woman is equal to man in human dignity, and has rights to enjoy as well as duties to perform; she has her own civil entity and financial independence, and the right to retain her name and lineage.

(b) The husband is responsible for the support and welfare of the family.

#### Article 7

- (a) As of the moment of birth, every child has rights due from the parents, society and the state to be accorded proper nursing, education and material, hygienic and moral care. Both the fetus and the mother must be protected and accorded special care.
- (b) Parents and those in such like capacity have the right to choose the type of education they desire for their children, provided they take into consideration the interest and future of the children in accordance with ethical values and the principles of the Shari'ah.
- (c) Both parents are entitled to certain rights from their children, and relatives are entitled to rights from their kin, in accordance with the tenets of the Shari'ah.

#### Article 8

Every human being has the right to enjoy his legal capacity in terms of both obligation and commitment. Should this capacity be lost or impaired, he shall be represented by his guardian.

#### Article 9

- (a) The quest for knowledge is an obligation, and the provision of education is a duty for society and the State. The State shall ensure the availability of ways and means to acquire education and shall guarantee educational diversity in the interest of society so as to enable man to be acquainted with the religion of Islam and the facts of the Universe for the benefit of mankind.
- (b) Every human being has the right to receive both religious and worldly education from the various institutions of education and guidance, including the family, the school, the university, the media, etc., and in such an integrated and balanced manner as to develop his personality, strengthen his faith in God, and promote his respect for and defence of both rights and obligations.

#### Article 10

Islam is the religion of unspoiled nature. It is prohibited to exercise any form of compulsion on man or to exploit his poverty or ignorance in order to convert him to another religion or to atheism.

#### Article 11

- (a) Human beings are born free, and no one has the right to enslave, humiliate, oppress, or exploit them, and there can be no subjugation but to God the Most High.
- (b) Colonialism of all types being one of the most evil forms of enslavement is totally prohibited. Peoples suffering from colonialism have the full right to freedom and self-determination. It is the duty of all States and peoples to support the struggle of colonized peoples for the liquidation of all forms of colonialism and occupation, and all States and peoples have the right to preserve their independent identity and exercise control over their wealth and natural resources.

#### Article 12

Every man shall have the right, within the framework of Shari'ah, to free movement and to select his place of residence whether inside or outside his country and, if persecuted, is entitled to seek

asylum in another country. The country of refuge shall ensure his protection until he reaches safety, unless asylum is motivated by an act which Shari'ah regards as a crime.

#### Article 13

Work is a right guaranteed by the State and Society for each person able to work. Everyone shall be free to choose the work that suits him best and which serves his interests and those of society. The employee shall have the right to safety and security as well as to all other social guarantees. He may neither be assigned work beyond his capacity nor be subjected to compulsion or exploited or harmed in any way. He shall be entitled – without any discrimination between males and females – to fair wages for his work without delay, as well as to the holidays, allowances, and promotions which he deserves. For his part, he shall be required to be dedicated and meticulous in his work. Should workers and employers disagree on any matter, the State shall intervene to settle the dispute and have the grievances redressed, the rights confirmed and justice enforced without bias.

#### Article 14

Everyone shall have the right to legitimate gains without monopolization, deceit, or harm to oneself or to others. Usury (*riba*) is absolutely prohibited.

#### Article 15

- (a) Everyone shall have the right to own property acquired in a legitimate way, and shall be entitled to the rights of ownership, without prejudice to oneself, others or to society in general. Expropriation is not permissible except for the requirements of public interest and upon payment of immediate and fair compensation
- (b) Confiscation and seizure of property is prohibited except for a necessity dictated by law.

#### Article 16

Everyone shall have the right to enjoy the fruits of his scientific, literary, artistic, or technical production and the right to protect the moral and material interests stemming therefrom, provided that such production is not contrary to the principles of Shari'ah.

#### Article 17

- (a) Everyone shall have the right to live in a clean environment, away from vice and moral corruption, an environment that would foster his self-development; and it is incumbent upon the State and society in general to afford that right.
- (b) Everyone shall have the right to medical and social care, and to all public amenities provided by society and the State within the limits of their available resources.
- (c) The State shall ensure the right of the individual to a decent living which will enable him to meet all his requirements and those of his dependents, including food, clothing, housing, education, medical care, and all other basic needs.

#### Article 18

- (a) Everyone shall have the right to live in security for himself, his religion, his dependents,

his honour, and his property.

(b) Everyone shall have the right to privacy in the conduct of his private affairs, in his home, among his family, with regard to his property and his relationships. It is not permitted to spy on him, to place him under surveillance, or to besmirch his good name. The State shall protect him from arbitrary interference.

(c) A private residence is inviolable in all cases. It will not be entered without permission from its inhabitants or in any unlawful manner, nor shall it be demolished or confiscated and its dwellers evicted.

#### Article 19

(a) All individuals are equal before the law, without distinction between the ruler and the ruled.

(b) The right to resort to justice is guaranteed to everyone.

(c) Liability is in essence personal.

(d) There shall be no crime or punishment except as provided for in the Shari'ah.

(e) A defendant is innocent until his guilt is proven in a fair trial in which he shall be given all the guarantees of defence.

#### Article 20

It is not permitted without legitimate reason to arrest an individual, or restrict his freedom, to exile or to punish him. It is not permitted to subject him to physical or psychological torture or to any form of humiliation, cruelty, or indignity. Nor is it permitted to subject an individual to medical or scientific experimentation without his consent or at the risk of his health or of his life. Nor is it permitted to promulgate emergency laws that would provide executive authority for such actions.

#### Article 21

Taking hostages under any form or for any purpose is expressly forbidden.

#### Article 22

(a) Everyone shall have the right to express his opinion freely in such manner as would not be contrary to the principles of the Shari'ah.

(b) Everyone shall have the right to advocate what is right, and propagate what is good, and warn against what is wrong and evil according to the norms of Islamic Shari'ah.

(c) Information is a vital necessity to society. It may not be exploited or misused in such a way as may violate sanctities and the dignity of Prophets, undermine moral and ethical values or disintegrate, corrupt or harm society, or weaken its faith.

(d) It is not permitted to arouse nationalistic or doctrinal hatred or to do anything that may be an incitement to any form of racial discrimination.

#### Article 23

(a) Authority is a trust; and abuse or malicious exploitation thereof is absolutely prohibited, so that fundamental human rights may be guaranteed.

(b) Everyone shall have the right to participate, directly or indirectly in the administration of



his country's public affairs. He shall also have the right to assume public office in accordance with the provisions of Shari'ah.

Article 24

All the rights and freedoms stipulated in this Declaration are subject to the Islamic Shari'ah.

Article 25

The Islamic Shari'ah is the only source of reference for the explanation or clarification to any of the articles of this Declaration.

Cairo, 14 Muharram 1411H

5 August 1990

## Appendix F

These excerpts from *Erga migrantes* concerning interreligious dialogue and cooperation provide pastoral workers with a valuable resource for reflection. The document offers important guidelines on interreligious marriages and family life.

### **PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF MIGRANTS AND ITINERANT PEOPLE**

#### **Instruction**

#### **Erga migrantes caritas Christi (The love of Christ towards migrants)**

Vatican City  
May 3, 2004

#### **Migrants of other religions, in general**

59. Recent times have witnessed a growing increase in the presence of immigrants of other religions in traditionally Christian countries. Various pronouncements by the Magisterium, and in particular the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* as also the Instruction *Dialogue and Proclamation*, provide clear guidance on this question.

In the case of non-Christian immigrants, the Church is also concerned with their human development and with the witness of Christian charity, which itself has an evangelizing value that may open hearts for the explicit proclamation of the gospel when this is done with due Christian prudence and full respect for the freedom of the other. In any case the migrant of another religion should be helped insofar as possible to preserve a transcendent view of life.

The Church is thus called upon to open a dialogue with these immigrants, and this “dialogue should be conducted and implemented in the conviction that the Church is the ordinary means of salvation and that she alone possesses the fullness of the means of salvation” (*RMi* 55; cf. also *PaG* 68).\*

60. This requires Catholic communities receiving immigrants to appreciate their own identity even more, prove their loyalty to Christ, know the contents of the faith well, rediscover their missionary calling and thus commit themselves to bear witness for Jesus the Lord and His gospel. This is the necessary prerequisite for the correct attitude of sincere dialogue, open and respectful of all but at the same time neither naive nor ill-equipped (cf. *PaG* 64 and 68).

It is the Christians' task in particular to help immigrants find their place in the social and cultural context of their host country by accepting its civil laws (*PaG 72*). Above all, however, Christians are called upon with the witness of their lives to denounce certain negative aspects present in the rich industrialized countries (materialism and consumerism, moral relativism and religious indifferentism), which might shake the religious convictions of immigrants.

We hope that this commitment with regard to immigrants will not just be practiced by individual Christians alone or by traditional aid organizations but may also be included in the overall programs of ecclesial movements and lay associations of the faithful (cf. *CfL 29*).

#### **Four matters calling for particular attention**

61. To avoid misunderstandings and confusion, and considering the religious diversity that we mutually recognize, and out of respect for sacred places and the religion of the other too, we do not consider it opportune for Christian churches, chapels, places of worship, or other places reserved for evangelization and pastoral work to be made available for members of non-Christian religions. Still less should they be used to obtain recognition of demands made on the public authorities. On the other hand spaces for social use, for free-time activities, games and relaxation and the like, could and should be opened to persons of other religions, respecting the rules followed in these places. The social contacts made there would be an opportunity to favor the integration of the new arrivals and prepare cultural mediators capable of helping overcome cultural and religious barriers by promoting adequate reciprocal knowledge.

62. Catholic schools (cf. *EEu 59* and *PaG 52*) must not renounce their own characteristics and Christian-oriented educational programs when immigrants' children of another religion are accepted. Parents wishing to enroll their children should be clearly informed of this. At the same time no pupil must be compelled to take part in a Catholic liturgy or to perform actions contrary to his or her religious convictions.

Moreover religious instruction provided for in the school curriculum, if given with a scholastic character, may be useful to help pupils learn about a faith different from their own. In religious instruction, however, all must be educated to respect persons of different religious convictions but relativism must be avoided.

63. With regard to marriage between Catholics and non-Christian migrants, this should be discouraged, though to a varying degree, depending on the religion of each partner, with exceptions in special cases in accordance with the norms of the *CIC* and *CCEO*. It should in fact be remembered that, in the words of Pope John Paul II, "In families where both parents are Catholic, it is easier for them to share their common faith with their children. While acknowledging with gratitude interfaith marriages which succeeded in nourishing the faith of both spouses and children, the Synod encourages pastoral efforts to promote marriages between people of the same faith".

64. Finally, in relations between Christians and persons of other religions, the principle of reciprocity is important. It is to be understood not merely as an attitude for making claims but as a relationship based on mutual respect and on justice in juridical and religious matters. Reciprocity is also an attitude of heart and spirit that enables us to live together everywhere with equal rights and duties. Healthy reciprocity will urge each one to become an “advocate” for the rights of minorities when his or her own religious community is in the majority. In this respect we should also recall the numerous Christian migrants in lands where the majority of the population is not Christian and where the right to religious freedom is severely restricted or repressed.

### **Muslim migrants**

65. Today, especially in certain countries, there is a high or growing percentage of Muslim immigrants, for whom this Pontifical Council also expresses its solicitude.

In this regard the Second Vatican Council indicates the attitude to be adopted in the spirit of the gospel, calling for a purification of memory regarding past misunderstandings, to cultivate common values and to clarify and respect diversity, but without renouncing Christian principles. Catholic communities are therefore called upon to practice discernment. It is a question of distinguishing between what can be and cannot be shared in the religious doctrines and practices and in the moral laws of Islam.

66. Belief in God the Creator and the Merciful, daily prayer, fasting, alms-giving, pilgrimage, asceticism to dominate the passions, and the fight against injustice and oppression are common values to be found in Christianity too, though they may be expressed or manifested in a different manner. Beside these points of agreement there are, however, also divergences, some of which have to do with legitimate acquisitions of modern life and thought. Thinking in particular of human rights, we hope that there will be, on the part of our Muslim brothers and sisters, a growing awareness that fundamental liberties, the inviolable rights of the person, the equal dignity of man and woman, the democratic principle of government and the healthy lay character of the State are principles that cannot be surrendered. It will likewise be necessary to reach harmony between the vision of faith and the just autonomy of creation.

67. When, for example, a Catholic woman and a Muslim wish to marry, bearing in mind what is stated in No. 63 and local pastoral judgments, bitter experience teaches us that a particularly careful and in-depth preparation is called for. During it the two fiancés will be helped to know and consciously “assume” the profound cultural and religious differences they will have to face, both between themselves and in relation to their respective families and the Muslim’s original environment, to which they may possibly return after a period spent abroad.

If the marriage is registered with a consulate of the Islamic country of origin, the Catholic party must beware of reciting or signing documents containing the *shahada* (profession of the Muslim belief).

In any case, the marriage between a Catholic and a Muslim, if celebrated in spite of all this, requires not only canonical dispensation but also the support of the Catholic community both before and after the marriage. One of the most important tasks of Catholic associations, volunteer workers, and counseling services will be to help these families educate their children and, if need be, to support the least protected member of the Muslim family, that is, the woman, to know and insist on her rights.

68. Finally as regards the baptism of the children, it is well known that the norms of the two religions are in stark contrast. The problem must therefore be raised with absolute clarity during the preparation for marriage, and the Catholic party must take a firm stand on what the Church requires. Conversion and the request for baptism by adult Muslims also require very careful attention, both because of the particular nature of the Muslim religion and the consequences that follow from this.

### **Interreligious dialogue**

69. Societies today are more and more mixed as regards religion owing in part to migration. They thus require of Catholics a convinced willingness for true interreligious dialogue (cf. *PaG* 68). To this end both the ordinary Catholic faithful and pastoral workers in local Churches should receive solid formation and information on other religions so as to overcome prejudices, prevail over religious relativism, and avoid unjustified suspicions and fears that hamper dialogue and erect barriers, even provoking violence or misunderstanding. Local Churches will take care to include such formation in the educational programs of their seminaries, schools, and parishes.

Dialogue among different religions must not, however, be understood as just looking for points in common so as to build peace together but above all as an occasion to rediscover convictions shared in each community. These include prayer, fasting, man's fundamental vocation, openness to the Transcendent, the adoration of God, and solidarity between nations.

Nevertheless we ourselves must never renounce the proclamation – either explicit or implicit, according to circumstances – of salvation in Christ, the only Mediator between God and man. The whole work of the Church moves in this direction in such a way that neither fraternal dialogue nor the exchange and sharing of “human” values can diminish the Church's commitment to evangelization (cf. *RMi* 10-11 and *PaG* 30).

\*Abbreviations:

<b><i>CIC</i></b>	<b><i>Codex Iuris Canonici, The Code of Canon Law</i></b>
<b><i>CCEO</i></b>	<b><i>Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium, Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches</i></b>
<b><i>CfL</i></b>	<b><i>Christifideles Laici</i> (Pope John Paul II)</b>
<b><i>EEu</i></b>	<b><i>Ecclesia in Europa</i> (Pope John Paul II)</b>
<b><i>PaG</i></b>	<b><i>Pastores Gregis</i> (Pope John Paul II)</b>
<b><i>RMi</i></b>	<b><i>Redemptoris Missio</i> (Pope John Paul II)</b>

## Appendix G

### **The Couples' Dialogue**

The Mid-Atlantic Dialogue of Catholics and Muslims strongly recommends that Catholic, Muslim, and Catholic-Muslim engage in interreligious dialogues on the meaning and values of marriage and family life. During this round of talks (1998-2002), such interreligious dialogue was tried in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and Buffalo, New York, by participants in the Mid-Atlantic Dialogue. Specific questions used to focus discussion in both Harrisburg and Buffalo are appended to the conclusion of this section.

Interreligious marriages provide an opportunities for Catholics and Muslim to move from the general understandings about marriage and family life in this resource booklet to a consideration of how specific details of their marriages and family lives fare in U.S. society. Persons with a strong faith in God, as Catholics and Muslims can be, are able to meet one another as citizens of the same society and with the same social and personal concerns in light of their religious commitment and practice. These sessions can be instances of “the dialogue of daily life” as it is intended to be.

1           Both Catholic and Muslim dialogue participants may find that they have common  
2 concerns and feel that U. S. society does not provide an environment of ready support for their  
3 religious practices. As a society in which religious freedom has been of high value, religion has  
4 tended to become privatized. Although keeping one religious group from imposing its character  
5 on all others, faithful members of religious communities are also concerned that less important  
6 matters may obscure the ways that religious communities define the common good. The whole  
7 of society influences every religious community. The American notion of religious freedom has  
8 been enormously influential throughout the world and in the development of religious traditions  
9 in the United States. This commitment to religious freedom is renewed with each new  
10 generation. Despite mistakes made in the application of the doctrine of religious freedom,  
11 Catholics and Muslims now meet freely as equal partners in this society. Their differences in  
12 belief and practice can enrich their partners in dialogue, while the sharing of their family stories  
13 can help build the bonds of friendship for mutual support.

14           Benefits such as these were reflected in the couples' dialogues in Harrisburg,  
15 Pennsylvania, and Buffalo, New York. When Muslims and Catholics share with one another how  
16 they face various issues, they help to put faces on the general teachings of their religious  
17 traditions. The teachings are enhanced in the light of the lives of individuals who live in  
18 accordance with them. Dialogue partners must also face the false ideas which they may harbor  
19 about one another and try to eliminate any resentment due to their family's experience in this  
20 country or in foreign lands. Fears of proselytism and efforts to convert another, even by  
21 criticism or debate, naturally arise. However, accurate understandings of each other can just as  
22 effectively help to dispel fears and to build friendships among people of faith.



1           The following are questions and summaries of the discussions generated by participants  
2 in this dialogue.

3

4 Study Guide Questions for Muslim-Catholic Couples' Dialogue

5

6 1. How important is religious faith in your life? In your marriage? In your family?

7

8 2. What do you see as the greatest threat to family life today?

9

10 3. How are you passing your faith and traditions on to your children? Please give examples.

11

12 4. How are your children accepting and practicing their faith?

13

14 5. How is the culture of modern America affecting the life of faith in your family?

15

16 6. How are we able to overcome, at least in part, the negative influences of our secular culture?

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18 7. What are the values and traditions that Muslims and Catholics have in common and could be shared

19 on a broader basis?

20

## 1 Appendix H

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