



UNITED STATES CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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NEWS

NATIONAL CATHOLIC OFFICE FOR INFORMATION

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WASHINGTON -- An official Orthodox-Roman Catholic theological dialogue group has recommended that the Catholic Church as a matter of standard practice permit Catholics to marry Orthodox Christians with an Orthodox priest officiating.

Catholic diocesan bishops may now -- as a result of a 1967 Vatican decree -- grant Catholics dispensations to do so where special "difficulties" exist. The dialogue group's recommendation is that the granting of such dispensations be made "a normative practice."

The recommendation is contained in a joint statement on Orthodox-Catholic mixed marriages drafted by 20 members of the Official Orthodox-Roman Catholic Consultation Group during a meeting earlier this month in New York. The group has met six times since 1966.

The statement was released here (May 29) by the Secretariat of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. A secretariat spokesman said the statement would be referred to the bishops' committee itself "in order that the suggestions offered may receive further serious consideration."

The statement says that because of the difficulties faced by couples entering into an Orthodox-Roman Catholic mixed marriage, "both of our churches discourage mixed marriage."

But because such marriages "will continue to take place," it says, it is "imperative" that couples entering into them receive counseling from clergymen of both churches.

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Concerning the Christian education of children of such unions, the statement notes "the responsibility of each partner to raise their children in the faith of their respective churches."

It recommends counselling by pastors of both churches "in the hope of helping to resolve the problem which this responsibility may create."

"Whatever specific decisions are agreed upon by the couple, we urge that both take an active role in the Christian upbringing of the children and in establishing their marriage as a stable Christian union," it says.

The statement notes that, according to the present view of the Orthodox Church, an Orthodox can only marry with an Orthodox priest as minister of the sacrament, whereas, according to the Catholic view, the partners to the marriage are themselves the ministers of the sacrament -- but the presence of a Catholic clergyman as witness is required unless a dispensation is granted.

In view of this, it says, "we...recommend that, in order to further the cause of unity between the Churches and as a sign of consideration for the conscience of the Orthodox party, in cases of proposed marriage between an Orthodox and a Catholic, the Catholic Church, as a normative practice, dispense the Catholic party from the canonical form and allow him or her to be married with the Orthodox priest officiating.

"This procedure should, however, take place only after consultation by the partners with both pastors."

The spokesman said that, besides mixed marriages, the Orthodox-

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Catholic meeting in New York dealt with liturgical practices and common worship. The group agreed to continue its investigation of theological problems connected with common worship.

Presiding at the meeting was Roman Catholic Bishop Bernard J. Flanagan of Worcester, Mass., a member of the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs.

Others present were: (Roman Catholics) Rev. Edward Kilmartin, S.J., Rev. Michael Blecker, O.S.B., Rev. Clarence Menard, O.M.I., Rev. Frederick McManus, Rev. Edward Malone, M.M., Dr. Thomas Bird, Msgr. Myles Bourke, Rev. Feodor Wilcock, S.J., and Rev. John Hotchkin of the secretariat of the bishops' committee; (Orthodox) Very Rev. Paul Schneirla, Rev. Demetrios Constantelius, Prof. George Bebis, Prof. Serge Verkhovsky, Rev. Seraphim Surrency, Rev. Maximos Athiorgoussis, Rev. Florian Galdau, Rev. Robert Dtephenopoulos, Rev. N. Vapovis, and Rev. Th. Stylianopoulos.

Following is the text of the statement on mixed marriages approved by the group.

In the area of Christian marriage the dialogue between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches involves theological and pastoral problems. We recognize the difficulties which continue to be faced by couples who enter a mixed marriage as long as their churches are divided on matters of doctrine and style of Christian life. Because of these difficulties both of our churches discourage mixed marriages.

I. Pastoral Problems

1. We recognize that under the conditions of modern life these mixed marriages will continue to take place. For this reason counselling of couples entering such unions by pastors of both churches is imperative. In the counselling the sincerely held religious convictions of each party, based upon their churches' traditions, must be respected, especially as regards the nature of marriage and the style of life in marriage.

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2. One area in which counselling by the pastors is desirable concerns the Christian upbringing of the children. We recognize the responsibility of each partner to raise their children in the faith of their respective churches. We encourage the pastors of both churches to counsel these couples in the hope of helping to resolve the problem which this responsibility may create. Whatever specific decisions are agreed upon by the couple, we urge that both take an active role in the Christian upbringing of the children and in establishing their marriage as a stable Christian union.

3. Each partner should be reminded of his obligation to respect the religious convictions and practice of his or her partner and mutually to support and encourage the other in growing into the fullness of the Christian life.

II. Theological Problems

1. Since, according to the present view of the Orthodox Church the marriage of an Orthodox can only be performed by an Orthodox priest as minister of the sacrament, and since, according to the present view of the Catholic Church, the contracting parties are the ministers of the sacrament and the presences of a Catholic major cleric as witness of the Church is a canonical requirement established by the Council of Trent for validity which is now dispensed with for weighty reasons, we, the members of the Orthodox and Catholic Theological Commissions, recommend that, in order to further the cause of unity between the Churches and as a sign of consideration for the conscience of the Orthodox party, in cases of proposed marriage between an Orthodox and a Catholic, the Catholic Church, as a normative practice, dispense the Catholic party from the canonical form and allow him or her to be married with the Orthodox priest officiating. This procedure should, however, take place only after consultation by the partners with both pastors.

2. We plan the further study of the Orthodox and Catholic traditional teaching concerning marriage.

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