



UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

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AN AGREED STATEMENT ON MIXED MARRIAGE

The recent dialogue between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches has led to a deeper appreciation of their common tradition of faith. This exploration has helped us to reassess some specific theological and pastoral problems in the area of Christian marriage. We recognize the practical difficulties which couples continue to face when they enter a mixed marriage as long as their churches are divided on matters of doctrine and styles 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 counseling of couples entering such unions by pastors of both churches is imperative. In this counseling the sincerely held religious convictions of each party, based upon their church's tradition, must be respected, especially as regards the nature of marriage and the style of life in marriage.
2. One area in which counseling 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 creates. Specific decisions should be made by the couple only after informed and serious deliberation. Whether the decision is made to raise the children in the Orthodox or Catholic tradition, both partners should take an active role in the Christian upbringing of the children and in establishing their marriage as a stable Christian union. The basis for this pastoral counsel is not religious indifferentism, but our conviction of a common participation in the mystery of Christ and his Church.
3. Each partner should be reminded of the obligation to respect the religious convictions and practice of the other and mutually to support and encourage the other in growing into the fullness of the Christian life.

II. Theological Problems

1. According to the view of the Orthodox Church the marriage of an Orthodox can only be performed by an Orthodox priest as the minister of the sacrament. In the view of the Catholic Church the contracting partners are the ministers of the sacrament, and the required presence of a Catholic major cleric as witness of the Church can be dispensed with for weighty reasons. In view of this, we recommend that the Catholic Church, as a normative practice, allow the Catholic party of a proposed marriage with an Orthodox 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.

Barlin Acres, MA
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Eighth Meeting

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