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Matrimonia mixta — Doctrine, Law, and Spirituality Reality and Challenges

Abstract: The fact that spouses profess different faiths is a major challenge for their life and for building a stable family. A closer examination of the reality of mixed marriages may be helpful in developing the pastoral care they need. The article shows what mixed marriages deal with in their spirituality, in the context of the existing doctrine, law and pastoral practice. It also discusses the shared values and expressions of Christian spirituality as well as areas where tensions or even crises may appear. The article is not only a recapitulation of the applicable laws and existing pastoral practice, but proposes some solutions, both pastoral and canonical.

Keywords: mixed marriages, ecumenism, intercommunion, child rearing, marital spirituality

Introduction

The development of interpersonal (interreligious, international, interfaith) relations and the growing number of interdenominational marriages or even unions where the spouses profess different religions give rise to the question of the Church's approach to such situations. For, on the one hand, the natural law guarantees the possibility of entering into marriage but, on the other hand, people who have been baptized must respect the order of their faith. All this shapes a multi-faceted spirituality, which should determine the way of living, thinking and acting and should set priority values. It is not surprising then that the Church (Churches) regulates the issue of

mixed marriages, keeping in mind the most important objective, which is the salvation of souls. The issue of mixed marriages brings together three areas which are important to Catholics, namely, the doctrine, the law, and the spirituality. A harmony between these three leads to a greater harmony in life and helps the spouses avoid additional difficulties. However, the first two must be there to serve the third, for it is spirituality that gives meaning to life and is a way to pursue the vocation arising from baptism.

In this context, it is worthwhile asking about the manifestations of the spirituality of a Christian marriage, especially a mixed marriage, and responding to the challenges facing spouses of different faiths. We should notice and recognize the status quo, but also, in a process of discernment and reading into the expectations of these marriages, identify solutions to be further discussed. Therefore, this article will first present the Catholic Church's teaching on mixed marriages. Then it will move on to the foundations of conjugal spirituality in the ecumenical context. Finally, the challenges facing mixed marriages and calling for in-depth examination and optimal solutions will be identified.

1. Doctrine and law on mixed marriages

First, the terms “Christian marriage” and “mixed marriage” need to be clarified and then the constitutive elements of marriage in the context of spirituality and the difficulties that mixed marriages have to deal with will be identified. Contemporary consensuses reached between churches on issues of key importance to marriages will also be discussed.

1.1. Christian marriage

In Christianity marriage is not merely a contract, but a covenant between a man and a woman forming a unity for life — “Marriage, understood as the relationship between husband and wife, is the most important of all human relationships. Its importance is greater than that of bonds with the family home, because marriage is the physical and spiritual union of two people.”¹

¹ *Wprowadzenie do nauki o Biblii oraz doktryny i praktyki ruchu zielonoświątkowego*. Eds. E. BEDNARZ, R. TOMASZEWSKI. Warszawa 2010, p. 478.

The Catholic Church defines marriage as follows: “The matrimonial covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of the whole of life and which is ordered by its nature to the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring, has been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament between the baptized.”²

The sacramentality of this relationship is recognized by the Roman Catholic, Old Catholic, Orthodox and Oriental Churches. Communities of the Protestant tradition do not consider marriage a sacrament, which however does not belittle the importance of the church’s blessing and spiritual dimension of marriage. Marriage is intended by God and demands to be respected. It is therefore not only a human institution, but it is — by its nature — subject to God’s law. What it means for Catholics is, among other things, its subordination to the canon law. And this does not preclude the effects arising from the civil law.³ It is therefore not surprising that before getting married people need to be instructed about the purposes and qualities of marriage.⁴

Linked to marriage are spirituality and manifold religious rituals. There are, of course, also marriages in which one of the partners does not practise his or her faith. In such a case, the spiritual dimension of life is limited but may be present to some extent. Marriages between Christians of different denominations or religions are not without tensions in key areas.

1.2. Mixed marriage⁵

The differences existing between individual branches of Christianity also result in different understanding of what marriage is and, conse-

² *Code of Canon Law* [further: CCL], canon 1055 § 1. The Pentecostal Church in Poland defines the marriage covenant as a lasting mutual responsibility and commitment featuring strong involvement, loyalty until death, and end of independence, which implies mutual self-sacrifice of the spouses. *Wprowadzenie do nauki o Biblii...*, p. 479.

³ CCL, canon 1059.

⁴ CCL, canon 1125, 30.

⁵ For information about the history of norms for interfaith marriages, see A. SOB- CZAK: *Aktualna dyscyplina Kościoła wobec małżeństw mieszanych i im podobnych*, <http://mateusz.pl/rodzina/as-mm.htm> [accessed 20.10.2023]; P. M. GAJDA: *Prawo małżeńskie Kościoła katolickiego*. Tarnów 2000, pp. 199—208; E. GAJDA: *Problem dopuszczalności małżeństwa katolika z prawosławnym w prawie kanonicznym*. Toruń 2001, pp. 29—34.

quently, how it is celebrated. A marriage between Christians of different denominations is a mixed marriage.

Marriage between two baptized persons, one of whom was baptized in the Catholic Church or received into it after baptism, and the other a member of a Church or ecclesial community not in full communion with the Catholic Church, cannot be celebrated without the express permission of the competent authority.⁶

From the point of view of the Catholic theology, a distinction should be made between a marriage of a Catholic and a person from a Church that recognizes the sacramentality of marriage and a Catholic-Protestant marriage. Also, marriages between a Catholic and an unbaptized person⁷ or a person who has been baptized but notoriously abandoned practicing their faith⁸ should be taken into consideration.

In order to enter into a mixed marriage the couple must obtain the permission of the local ordinary,⁹ who demands that the Catholic partner declare himself or herself ready to remove any danger of the loss of his or her faith and promise sincerely to do everything he or she can to ensure that their children are baptized and brought up as Catholics, and the non-Catholic partner should be informed of the obligations of the Catholic spouse. The nupturients should be instructed about the purposes and essential properties of marriage, which is particularly important when they have different understandings of the theology of marriage. Since the social contexts may be different, the conferences of bishops establish the method in which these declarations and promises must be

For information about the adaptation of canon norms applying to interfaith marriages in Poland see L. ADAMOWICZ: "Prace Konferencji Episkopatu Polski nad nową regulacją przygotowania do zawarcia małżeństwa kanonicznego (cz. II)." *Stowarzyszenie Kanonistów Polskich* 29 (2019), no. 32, pp. 11—19. Cf. P. MAJER: "Małżeństwa mieszane. Wybrane zagadnienia z praktyki kurialnej." *Studia Oecumenica* 11 (2011), pp. 199—217.

⁶ CCL, canon 1124 § 1.

⁷ "A marriage between two persons, one of whom was baptized in the Catholic Church or received into it, and the other of whom is not baptized, is invalid. A person is not to be dispensed from this impediment unless the conditions mentioned in canons 1125 and 1126 have been fulfilled" (CCL, canon 1086 § 1—2).

⁸ "Except in a case of necessity, a person is not to assist without the permission of the local ordinary at: [...] a marriage of a person who has notoriously rejected the Catholic faith [...]. The local ordinary is not to grant permission to assist at the marriage of a person who has notoriously rejected the Catholic faith unless the norms mentioned in canon 1125 have been observed with necessary adaptation" (CCL, canon 1071).

⁹ "[...] without the express permission of the competent authority. The local ordinary can grant a permission of this kind if there is a just and reasonable cause [...]" (CCL, canon 1124—1125).

made and externally confirmed.¹⁰ The form required by law must also be observed unless a dispensation was granted by the local ordinary; in Poland such dispensation may also be given by the ordinary of the non-Catholic partner's place of residence; the form should be public.¹¹ The non-canonical forms include celebration of marriage in a non-Catholic Christian community with the participation of a non-Catholic clergyman (minister), celebration of marriage in the Registry Office or celebration of marriage in the family circle in a religious form in the presence of witnesses.¹² The solemnity of marriage and its sacramentality (for the parties recognizing it) is also confirmed by the prohibition to repeat it in the other rite.¹³

1.3. The constitutive elements of Christian marriage and their spiritual significance

The canon law identifies two essential properties of marriage: unity and indissolubility (canon 1056). It is therefore obvious to see marriage as a permanent and legal union between one woman and one man, who together form a community of life. Marriage does not have the formal aspect only, but has a deeply vital dimension, where this lasting unity and communion is built day by day. This is why John Paul II said: “they are

¹⁰ CCL, canons 1125—1127. “The Catholic party is to declare in writing that he or she is prepared to remove dangers of defecting from the faith and is to make a sincere promise to do all in his or her power so that all offspring are baptized and brought up in the Catholic Church. [...] The other party is to be informed at an appropriate time about the promises which the Catholic party is to make [...] Both parties are to be instructed about the purposes and essential properties of marriage which neither of the contracting parties is to exclude.” KONFERENCJA EPISKOPATU POLSKI: *Instrukcja Episkopatu Polski o przygotowaniu do zawarcia małżeństwa w Kościele katolickim* [Instruction of the Polish Episcopal Conference on the preparation for marriage in the Catholic Church] [further: IM], no. 82.

¹¹ IM no. 79. “A marriage between two persons, one of whom was baptized in the Catholic Church or received into it, and the other of whom is not baptized, is invalid” (CCL, canon 1086 § 1).

¹² IM no. 92—93.

¹³ CCL, canon 1128. The same applies to sanation of marriage. See CCL, canon 1160—1163, canon 1165 § 2. For information about the forms of celebration of mixed marriages, see B. TROJANOWSKI: “Sposoby zawierania małżeństw mieszanych ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem miejsca ich celebrowania.” *Świdnickie Studia Teologiczne* 17 (2020), pp. 105—117.

called to grow continually in their communion through day-to-day fidelity to their marriage promise of total mutual self-giving.”¹⁴

This unity and indissolubility are rooted in love, where the spouses enjoy equal dignity.¹⁵ This is extremely important because conjugal love implies the totality of the life together encompassing the spiritual dimension, reason, feelings, senses, will, bodily impulses and instincts. They are the basis for the personal unity¹⁶ and inviolable faithfulness.¹⁷ No one can deny these essential properties of marriage, as this would result in the nullity of the wedding vows. A thorough examination must be done of the views and motives of the prospective spouses to ensure that their motives are not contrary to the Christian model.¹⁸ Should either partner deny the indissolubility, unity or sacramentality of the marriage, the priest should refuse to assist in its celebration.¹⁹

In addition, to some Christians,²⁰ marriage is a sacrament.²¹ Protestant communities do not recognize marriage as a sacrament, but do not regard it merely as a contract; they rather live it as a sacred covenant made by God’s will between a man and a woman. This unity leads to a wider fam-

¹⁴ JOHN PAUL II: *Apostolic Exhortation “Familiaris consortio”* [further: FC], no. 19.

¹⁵ See THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL: *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World “Gaudium et spes”* [further: GS], no. 49.

¹⁶ See FC 13. Unity brings the fruit of children and fosters fullness, synergism, security, support, interdependence and mutual openness. *Wprowadzenie do nauki o Biblii...*, p. 480.

¹⁷ “As a mutual gift of two persons, this intimate union and the good of the children impose total fidelity on the spouses and argue for an unbreakable oneness between them” (GS 48). A biblical example of faithfulness is “Hosea (the archetype of God), whose wife (the archetype of Israel) repeatedly betrayed him, but he not only continued to love her, but forgave her and caused her to return to him.” *Wprowadzenie do nauki o Biblii...*, p. 481.

¹⁸ “During the investigation of candidates for marriage, the priest must ascertain whether any of the fiancés denies the indissolubility of marriage, its unity [...], its sacramental dignity or orientation at the well-being of the spouses and the bearing and rearing of offspring. He should therefore make sure that the fiancés really want to enter into an indissoluble union.” KONFERENCJA EPISKOPATU POLSKI: *Dekret ogólny o przeprowadzaniu rozmów kanoniczno-duszpasterskich z narzeczonymi przed zawarciem małżeństwa kanonicznego* [General Decree on Conducting Canonical and Pastoral Dialogue with the Parties Prior to Concluding Canonical Marriage], no. 65. “Questions about the essential properties and purposes of marriage should not be omitted even if one of the partners is not a Catholic or claims to be a non-believer and his or her understanding of marriage differs significantly from the Catholic doctrine, e.g. with respect to its indissolubility.” *Ibidem*, no. 67.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, no. 77.

²⁰ Marriage is a sacrament not only in the Roman Catholic Church, but also in the Orthodox, Oriental, Assyrian or Old Catholic Churches.

²¹ CCL, canon 1056.

ily communion encompassing children, relatives, and other persons close to the family.

It is also necessary to see the purposes of marriage. Among them are the mutual good of the spouses and the procreation and raising of offspring.²² The first good is the communion of persons, which is the foundation for life embedded in the work of creation and God's plan for man. In the deepest sense, it is the communion of love that makes it possible for marriage and the family not only to live, but also to grow and develop. Marital love is centred around an indivisible and indissoluble unity, calling the spouses to live in an ever fuller relationship and bond.²³ This is the proper context of the life and spirituality of marriage — to remain at the service of life, which includes procreation (openness to new life) and the multidirectional upbringing of children. Finally, married people and families are to participate in the development of society (forming relationships and showing social responsibility) as well as in the life and mission of the Church (as a community of faith and evangelization, community of dialogue with God through prayer and liturgical life, community at the service of man and living the commandment of love towards God, man and God's creation).²⁴

The communion (unity) of the spouses is important in carrying out these tasks. United by the Holy Spirit, Christian spouses experience their communion in the Body of Christ together. As the Orthodox Church notes, “the Eucharist leads to communion, and so does marriage. [...] It is by receiving communion together every Sunday that the married couple realizes the purpose of marriage: to enter together into the mystery of Christ, or rather — to enter into this mystery as a whole future family.”²⁵

Unsurprisingly, the separate faiths and lack of intercommunion are impediments to moving towards unity on the Eucharistic path. However, every Christian couple is called to root their bond in spiritual life. For it is the love of God the Father and His faithfulness to man as well as the love of Jesus to the Church that are the strongest foundations for the faithfulness of the spouses. This stems from the grace of the accepted gift of marriage, through which the spouses grow in mutual love and in the love of God, gradually becoming witnesses to God's faithfulness and goodness to man.

²² CCL, canon 1055 § 1.

²³ “[God] wills and He communicates the indissolubility of marriage as a fruit, a sign and a requirement of the absolutely faithful love that God has for man and that the Lord Jesus has for the Church” (FC no. 20).

²⁴ *Ibidem*, no. 28—64.

²⁵ *Bóg żywy. Katechizm Kościoła Prawosławnego. Opracowany przez zespół wiernych prawosławnych*. Trans. A. KURYŚ et al. Kraków 2001, pp. 377—378.

1.4. Facing difficulties of mixed marriages

Since the ancient times, the Church has had to deal with the question of marriages between people professing different religions. In the beginning, marriages of Christians with pagans, Jews and heretics were banned (e.g. the Synod of Elvira). The reason for such a law was the concern that Christians might lose their professed faith or adopt foreign practices. Also, potential difficulties for marital unity, resulting from the existence of vital differences, were cited. However, the validity of such unions was not denied. Nevertheless, the need to make every effort to baptize the children in the Catholic faith and bring the spouse to the faith was clearly emphasised.²⁶

The 1917 Code of Canon Law imposed an obligation on the non-Catholic partner to promise that the children would be baptized and raised Catholic and that he or she would not put the Catholic spouse in danger of losing the faith.²⁷ After Vatican II, the Catholic Church relaxed its discipline on marriages between Catholics and members of non-Catholic Churches and communities.²⁸ The instruction *Matrimonii sacramentum* removed the obligation for non-Catholics to make the promises, *motu proprio De Episcoporum muneribus* allowed for a dispensation from the canonical form, which could be granted by the Holy See, and the decree *Crescens matrimoniorum* recognized that the canonical form of marriages between Roman Catholics and the faithful of the Eastern Churches is required for liceity. The right of dispensation from the form was finally granted to local ordinaries (*motu proprio Matrimonia mixta* of 31 March 1970).²⁹

²⁶ The Council of Chalcedon put forward the following rule in Canon 14: “Since in certain provinces it is permitted to the readers and singers to marry, the holy Synod has decreed that it shall not be lawful for any of them to take a wife that is heterodox. But those who have already begotten children of such a marriage, if they have already had their children baptized among the heretics, must bring them into the communion of the Catholic Church; but if they have not had them baptized, they may not hereafter baptize them among heretics, nor give them in marriage to a heretic, or a Jew, or a heathen, unless the person marrying the orthodox child shall promise to come over to the orthodox faith.” *Dokumenty soborów powszechnych. Tekst grecki, łaciński, polski*. Vol. I. Eds. A. BARON, H. PIETRAS. Kraków 2001, p. 239.

²⁷ CCL, canon 1061 § 1, 20.

²⁸ See M. SKŁADANOWSKI: “Małżeństwa mieszane wyznaniowo — ekumeniczna szansa i życiowe problemy. Perspektywa teologiczna i duszpasterska.” *Studia nad Rodziną UKSW* 15 (2011) 1—2 (28—29), pp. 47—55.

²⁹ SACRA CONGREGATIO PRO DOCTRINA FIDEI: “Instructio de matrimoniis mixtis.” *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 58 (1966), pp. 235—239.

The concern for faith in marriage stems from baptism and derives from God's law. Thus, preservation of one's identity and raising children in the Catholic faith are, according to the canon law, requirements of conscience, although in fulfilling them the marital unity, family communion and the religious freedom of the non-Catholic spouse must be taken into account. Therefore, the partners must be properly instructed and the priest must become certain that the non-Catholic spouse has been effectively instructed on the obligations assumed by the Catholic partner.³⁰ Should the non-Catholic spouse expressly declare that he or she is not going to respect the obligations, it is necessary to discuss the potential source of conflict over the most important values and, where the non-Catholic partner's resistance persists, the pastor should refer the matter to the local ordinary. If the danger of faith loss is real, the local ordinary cannot grant permission or dispensation.³¹ It is also necessary to mention the decision of the Polish Bishops' Conference that in the case of a marriage between a Catholic and a person who has abandoned the Catholic faith, the latter is required to not only acknowledge the obligations assumed by his or her Catholic partner, but also to make a commitment not to disturb the practice of faith by the spouse or the baptism of children in the Catholic Church.³²

Certain specific difficulties that may arise in mixed marriages must be borne in mind, such as: "different understanding of marriage, threat of being unfaithful to one's own Church and the danger of religious indifference, disturbing the practice of faith, difficulty in the religious education of offspring."³³

Indeed, the religious aspect of life cannot be underestimated. Spouses' differing views on vital issues may generate various tensions and conflicts that affect not only the two people themselves, but also their children and the wider family. So before a marriage is celebrated it is necessary to make the couple aware of the difficulties they may encounter in their family life with regard to religious practices, professed truths of faith and the different moral evaluation of certain aspects of life. During meetings with the spouses-to-be the pastor should also indicate ways of resolving the difficulties.³⁴ It might also seem valuable to bring these people in contact with another mixed marriage.

³⁰ IM no. 83—84.

³¹ IM no. 85. In exceptional cases, the local ordinary may refer the matter to the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. See *ibidem*.

³² IM no. 77.

³³ KONFERENCJA EPISKOPATU POLSKI: *Dekret ogólny...*, no. 70.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, no. 75.

1.5. Attempt at ecumenical consensus in Poland

In 2011, the Polish Bishops' Conference and the Polish Ecumenical Council approved a document on mixed marriages entitled *Christian Marriage of People of Different Denominations. Declaration of the Churches in Poland at the beginning of the Third Millennium*. This is an epoch-making text demonstrating how developed the inter-church dialogue is. It needs to be read in the context of other joint declarations, including *The Sacrament of Baptism as a Sign of Unity. Declaration of Polish Churches on the threshold of the third millennium*.³⁵ Even though the document is only a draft, as it has been waiting, since 2011, to be evaluated by the Holy See, it is a valuable material to read.

The document starts with the statement that marriage is not only a human institution, but comes from the will of God and is an image of the covenant between God and the People (the Church). Such a union can only be entered into by one man and one woman. Such marriage features unity of life lived in respect, honesty, self-giving, forgiveness, submission to Christ, multifaceted fidelity, openness to life and the pursuit of the vocation of religious education of children. The Declaration also lists aspects which are different in individual churches' teaching on marriage — for example, Catholics and Orthodox consider marriage a sacrament, while Protestants do not, but they do situate marriage in God's order of creation; churches have different criteria for validity and liceity of marriage; they respect the indissolubility of marriage but have different approach to divorce and remarriage; they also differ in their views on contraception.³⁶ This does not undermine what is shared in the Christian understanding of mixed marriage, namely that they are celebrated "in the Lord," are rooted in baptism and faith in the Triune God, ensure preserving one's own denominational identity, and are an opportunity for ecumenical rapprochement and growth in faith.³⁷

Particularly valuable are the proposals concerning equal treatment of both partners in a mixed marriage: respect for the equal dignity of conscience, for the legal requirements of corresponding churches (e.g. the church's permission, if required), the partners and then spouses having the final say on how and where they want to be married and how they

³⁵ Other joint documents include: *The Appeal of Polish Churches for the Protection of Creation* (2013), *The Churches of Poland's Appeal to Respect and Keep Sundays Holy* (2015), *Message of the Churches in Poland on Refugees* (2016).

³⁶ *Christian Marriage of People of Different Denominations. Declaration of the Churches in Poland at the beginning of the Third Millennium (Declaration)*, I—II.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, III.

want to raise their children in the Christian faith, the joint obligation of religious upbringing of the offspring (with reference to Christ being the foundation), upbringing of the children in a specific confession but with ecumenical sensitivity, and pastoral cooperation.³⁸ In keeping with these principles is the following declaration proposed to be made by the future spouses:

*I declare that I will keep my faith and acknowledge the right of my spouse to keep his/her faith. I promise to do anything I can to ensure that all our children are baptized and brought up in the faith of my Church, taking into account that my spouse has the same right and obligation in his/her Church. I will therefore seek agreement with my spouse in making choices for the good of our community and the spiritual life of our children.*³⁹

The proposed solution is a breakthrough in the attitude to interfaith marriages, because, while respecting the legal arrangements of the individual churches and communities, it leaves the spouses the right to discern and decide on the religious upbringing of the children,⁴⁰ without causing remorse or a feeling of disloyalty towards their own church. On the one hand, it frees the spouses from external legal tensions. On the other hand, it respects their freedom and ability to make the right decisions. Before such a solution is implemented it must of course be revised by canonical legislative bodies.

The Italian *Vademecum* for marriages between Catholics and Eastern Christians offers similar solutions. Even though the Catholic spouse assumes the obligation to raise the children in the Catholic faith, it is ultimately the question of the spouses' shared decision and, if the children are baptized and brought up non-Catholic, the Catholic spouse does not receive a canonical sanction for it; however, even in such a situation he or she cannot avoid sharing their faith with the children.⁴¹ Respect for the conscience of the spouses regarding the decision on the religious upbringing of the children is also emphasized in the declaration signed between the Italian Bishops Conference and the Waldensian and Methodist Churches.⁴²

³⁸ Ibidem, IV.

³⁹ Ibidem, V. 2.

⁴⁰ Non-Catholic churches see the Catholic party's commitments to raise children in the Catholic faith as a manifestation of limiting the parents' right to choose religion for their children.

⁴¹ CONFERENZA EPISCOPALE ITALIANA: *Vademecum per la pastorale delle parrocchie cattoliche verso gli orientali non cattolici*, no. 14.

⁴² "Testo comune per un indirizzo pastorale dei matrimoni tra cattolici e valdesi o metodisti." In: *Notiziario della Conferenza Episcopale Italiana a cura della Segreteria*

2. Marital spirituality and how it is experienced by mixed couples

Spirituality is an important aspect of a Christian couple's life. In mixed marriages, it is particularly demanding for the spouses and their children. Nevertheless, it is good to focus on what is shared by both denominations and to develop the spouses' Christian identity without compromising on their respective faiths.

2.1. Christian spirituality and its constitutive elements

Spirituality is "a set of attitudes with intellectual, cognitive, emotional, evaluative and behavioural references."⁴³ This means that life is concentrated around objective and subjective values, which has an impact on all the constitutive elements of human life and shapes the attitude towards the entire reality. Thus, spirituality is not the same as piety (religious acts) or any cultural activity. However, Christian spirituality is also religious and related to faith.⁴⁴

Christian spirituality is founded on the truth about the Holy Trinity and the divine and human nature of Jesus Christ. On the one hand, it is a model for every human community, especially the Church, marriage and family. On the other hand, working in the incarnational model,⁴⁵ Christian spirituality presupposes harmony between the Divine and the human, the spiritual and the material (physical), the eternal and the temporal.⁴⁶

Generale 1997 no. 5, pp. 162—163. Similar solutions were proposed in Germany. See DEUTSCHEN BISCHOFSKONFERENZ: *Mit Christus gehen — Der Einheit auf der Spur. Konfessionsverbindende Ehen und gemeinsame Teilnahme an der Eucharistie*, no. 33.

⁴³ M. CHMIELEWSKI: "Duchowość." In: *Leksykon duchowości katolickiej*. Ed. M. CHMIELEWSKI. Lublin—Kraków 2002, p. 229.

⁴⁴ Faith is "a fundamental mode of behaviour toward being, toward existence, toward one's own sector of reality, and toward reality as a whole; [...] it is man's attitude to the entire reality and is incommensurable with knowledge; it is the bestowal of meaning without which the totality of man would remain homeless, on which man's calculations and actions are based." J. RATZINGER: *Wprowadzenie w chrześcijaństwo*. Trans. Z. WŁODKOWA. Kraków 1996, pp. 42—62.

⁴⁵ See P. SAWA: "Duchowość inkarnacyjna i jej chrystologiczne podstawy." *Śląskie Studia Historyczno-Teologiczne* 44 (2011) no. 1, pp. 109—125.

⁴⁶ "The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. [...] Since human nature as He assumed it was not annulled, by that very fact it has been raised up to a divine dignity in our respect too" (GS 22).

This helps build a positive attitude to the world. Its source is grace, God's free gift of favour and self-giving projected on life as a whole.

Christian spirituality also calls for specific religious practices. These include personal prayer, participation in the life of an ecclesial community (liturgy, worship), following the church year, especially the key holy days of the Nativity and Paschal celebrations, as well as observing the specific moral system. In addition to the religious aspect, these elements arouse strong emotions rooted in one's history and upbringing.

2.2. Marital spirituality

Christian spouses live out their religious identity in marital unity. The basis is the spiritual life growing out of their baptism and the fact that they form a community of persons bound by wedding vows.

2.2.1. Spiritual life — a life of baptism and faith

Marital spirituality is based on “the shared grace, faith, hope and love and other inner gifts of the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁷ It is a baptismal spirituality, started at the moment of receiving new life and oriented at growing in grace. It is about the dwelling of God in the hearts of people living by His grace, thanks to which “the Trinity is present in the temple of marital communion. Just as God dwells in the praises of his people (cf. Ps 22:3), so he dwells deep within the marital love that gives him glory.”⁴⁸

Thus, God is the strength of the family, surpassing any difficulties that may arise. This helps people grow in holiness in their ordinary lives immersed in God and in the saving work of Christ. Such life manifests itself in the focus on the Passover of Jesus, which implies union with the Saviour's cross and His resurrection. It does not have a devotional aspect only, but assumes that a man's day-to-day life is lived with the Lord. This creates a “God-enlightened space in which to experience the hidden

⁴⁷ KONFERENCJA EPISKOPATU POLSKI: *Dekret ogólny...*, no. 71.

⁴⁸ FRANCIS: *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “Amoris laetitia”* (further: AL), no. 314.

presence of the Risen Lord.”⁴⁹ Prayer, also in popular piety, is a way to strengthen this identity.⁵⁰

2.2.2. Christocentrism and sharing of life

The entire Christian spirituality is Christocentric, as the risen Christ is at the centre of the life of the baptized. He is not any vague idea or creator of a way of life, but a real Person the encounter with whom determines everything else. This was aptly expressed by Benedict XVI when he said: “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”⁵¹

Whatever one’s vocation and state of life is, every Christian is called to develop a personal relationship with Christ and to strengthen it through a life of prayer, sacraments, and morality. A married couple should go on this journey with Jesus together, which does not exclude professing faith individually. It is in Christ that the spouses can discover the inexhaustible source of their bond, love and unity. A relationship with Jesus entails living a lifestyle where one selflessly offers oneself as a gift to others. This has to do with sharing desires, aspirations, expectations, and hopes in different areas of life. However, it is the ability to sacrifice or even give up one’s wishes, because of love, that is the most profound expression of living out divine and human (marital) love. By living in this way, we follow Christ, who gave himself for the salvation of men. This humbleness, which leads to greater love and stronger bond, demands that people respect, listen, freely communicate with and are truly open to each other and accept each other’s feelings and emotions. Love lived in this way is fruitful, not only through procreation (as not all married couples can have children), but also through encouraging people to reach out and serve others.

The life and spirituality of Christians following Jesus should have an incarnational and paschal orientation. Firstly, it should show that the spiritual and the physical, the eternal and the temporal, the divine and the human co-exist. It would therefore be wrong to undermine or eliminate any of these, also in married life. In addition, this creates space for properly

⁴⁹ JOHN PAUL II: *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “Vita consecrata”*, no. 42.

⁵⁰ AL no. 318.

⁵¹ BENEDICT XVI: *Encyclical “Deus caritas est”*, no. 1.

understood sexuality. Secondly, life should have the paschal dimension, showing that by moving from the cross to the resurrection in every aspect of existence life gains an ultimate meaning and hope, which makes it possible to bear witness to the power of the Gospel to others.

2.2.3. Exclusive and unconditional love

Inner unity and harmony (coherence) are other important aspects of Christian life. The basis is “the experience of belonging completely to another person.”⁵² Relationship with God is the source of daily life lived in this way and the spouses can be “a sign and instrument of the closeness of the Lord” to each other.⁵³ A Christian marriage should therefore place God in the centre of life. In no way does this violate the marriage bond. On the contrary, living in union with God safeguards the love of the spouses who live with inner freedom and truth.

This translates into everyday life. First of all, marriage and family are the “nearest hospital” for the family members⁵⁴; thus, they go to Church like to a “field hospital.” This ideal is being actualized by being present, offering a word of comfort, looking at and hugging, caring, supporting and admiring a loved one, and reaching out together to those in need. This can only be done if we accept the work of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁵ In this respect, Francis points to the rooting of love in the Trinity: “Social love, as a reflection of the Trinity, is what truly unifies the spiritual meaning of the family and its mission to others, for it makes present the kerygma in all its communal imperatives. The family lives its spirituality precisely by being at one and the same time a domestic church and a vital cell for transforming the world.”⁵⁶

⁵² AL no. 319.

⁵³ Ibidem.

⁵⁴ FRANCIS: *General audience* (10.06.2015).

⁵⁵ See AL no. 321—324.

⁵⁶ AL no. 324.

2.3. Mixed marriages' shared values

Despite the differences resulting from the spouses' belonging to different communities of faith, the very fact that they are both Christian is a strong foundation of their spiritual unity. The Church's long experience with and the contemporary approach to mixed marriages bring out the importance of baptismal spirituality and the focus on common sources and expressions of religious life, without abandoning the requirements of a particular faith.

2.3.1. Respect for two-confessional identities

Confessional identity is of major importance in human life. Mixed marriages are not to undermine or exaggerate the differences between their faiths or to show any signs of indifferentism. The Church of one's spouse must be respected, including through respect for the truths of faith, forms of worship, and ethical sensitivity. Therefore, an adequate catechesis of both spouses in their own and the other party's denomination is essential.⁵⁷ It may also be helpful to take part in various meetings in their respective communities. An interesting example is the retreat for mixed couples, marriages and families that were held in Łódź on 8 and 9 May 2021 and that featured conferences and celebrations with homilies by the Metropolitan Bishop of the Diocese of Łódź Grzegorz Ryś and Bishop Jerzy Samiec, head of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland. The retreat showed that people in mixed marriages need to have their choices and identity confirmed by the clergy of their respective Churches, which in a way authorises their journey together.⁵⁸ Not only do such meetings serve the purposes of religious formation, but also offer a space for encounter, exchange of spiritual gifts and mutual inspiration for Christian life.

⁵⁷ "To contribute to greater mutual understanding and harmony, each of the fiancés should endeavour to learn more about the faith of the other party and get to know the religious teachings and practices of their own Church or ecclesial community." KONFERENCJA EPISKOPATU POLSKI: *Dekret ogólny...*, no. 72.

⁵⁸ "Building a Christian identity always requires being rooted in a particular tradition, but at the same time this should be accompanied by ecumenical sensitivity" (*Declaration IV. 5*). In this context it is important to mention the support to marriages that started as mono-religious but then one of the spouses converted to another faith, which may be a source of various new tensions.

2.3.2. The Word of God

The Word of God is a foundation of spiritual life for all Christians. And even though different Churches have different views on the relationship between the Bible and Tradition, it is the Scripture that unites Christians. For the Catholic Church, the Scripture and Tradition⁵⁹ are closely connected⁶⁰ through the action of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Catholics take the Word of God in a communal context, which is linked to the personal dimension. The Scripture should therefore be read at liturgy, which provides a light for the public and individual interpretation of the Word of God. Another essential key for Catholics is the teaching of the Church's Magisterium: "[...] in things of faith and morals, belonging to the building up of Christian doctrine, that is to be considered the true sense of Holy Scripture which has been held and is held by our Holy Mother the Church, whose place it is to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the Scriptures; and therefore that it is permitted to no one to interpret Holy Scripture against such sense or also against the unanimous agreement of the Fathers."⁶¹

However, the Bible cannot be read as a source of doctrine only. For lots of Catholics, especially evangelical-oriented ones, the Word of God speaks about the redemptive event that touches particular persons.⁶² It is important to see not only *what the Spirit is saying to the Church*, but *what God is saying to me today through that particular Word*. This opens up a space for personal sharing of faith and one's experience, without debating dogmatic differences between denominations. In mixed marriages, this is particularly important for building spiritual understanding while respecting differences in ecclesiastical interpretations of the text.

⁵⁹ Not some customs or human traditions (although they matter too), but the whole heritage of faith and its understanding, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit leading to deeper truth.

⁶⁰ "[...] there exists a close connection and communication between sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend toward the same end." THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL: *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation "Dei Verbum"*, no. 9.

⁶¹ LEO XIII: *Encyclical "Providentissimus Deus"*, no. 22. "God willed that Christ form the body where his words resound as words of life; it is then in Christ, within him, in the Church that we must read and listen. So, when a believer takes the Bible, they are *a priori* put within the Church..." P. EVDOKIMOV: *Prawosławie*. Trans. J. KLINGER. Warszawa 2003, p. 200.

⁶² See L. BORIELLO, G. DELLA CROCE, B. SECONDIN: *Historia duchowości*. Tom VI: *Duchowość chrześcijańska czasów współczesnych*. Trans. M. PIERZCHAŁA. Kraków 1998, pp. 328—330.

If received personally, “here and now for me,” the Word is not only God’s personal gift to man, but it also unites the spouses who support each other in faith. It does not prevent the Catholic partner from accepting the authority of the *Magisterium Ecclesiae*, and it does not compel the non-Catholic side to recognize it. The only source of Protestant communities’ spirituality is the Bible,⁶³ so the focus on the Word of God safeguards mixed marriages from deep conflicts arising from religious differences. It is of course important that the non-Catholic spouse also respects the theology of the Catholic partner.

At home it may be practical to place the Bible in a spot visible to anyone as a sign of unity. On the one hand, this may show that the family follows a common path relying on the Word of God, shared by all Christians. On the other hand, it may be a reference to the custom of placing the Bible on the Eucharistic table or another prominent place in the churches of Protestant communities, which is also being accepted by more and more Catholic churches, as Benedict XVI asked “that the book which contains the word of God should enjoy a visible place of honour inside the Christian temple, without prejudice to the central place proper to the tabernacle.”⁶⁴

2.3.3. Prayer and religious practices

Prayer is an important pillar of Christian spirituality and a way to build a personal and communal relationship with God. Obviously, prayer life takes place in an ecclesial and denominational contexts, which makes it complicated in a mixed marriage. Nevertheless, prayer that grows out of the Holy Scripture (e.g. meditation on the Word of God, recitation of psalms and biblical hymns) and the prayer of the heart do not arouse tensions or any opposition. One may maintain his or her tradition and does not have to renounce certain religious practices (e.g. in the case of Catholics, praying the rosary or praising Virgin Mary), but the marital and

⁶³ See T. J. ZIELIŃSKI: *Protestantyzm ewangelikalny. Studium specyfiki religijnej*. Warszawa 2013, pp. 171—213. “[...] the evangelical is one who is entirely subservient to the Bible. [...] He is a man of one book; he starts with it; he submits himself to it; this is his authority.” M. LLOYD-JONES: *Kim jest ewangelikalny chrześcijanin?* Trans. J. MURANTY. Włocławek 2008, p. 40. William Chillingworth said: “The Bible, I say, the Bible only is the religion of Protestants.” Z. PASEK: *Kultura religijna protestantyzmu*. Kraków 2014, p. 31.

⁶⁴ BENEDICT XVI: *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation “Verbum Domini”*, no. 68.

family prayers must have universal forms. This requires that the spouses respect their practices and customs.

The prayer life, however, is not just about praying at home, but also about living the liturgical year, in which certain days have special significance (e.g. the observance of Ash Wednesday or the celebration of Corpus Christi by Catholics, or Good Friday by Protestants). An additional difficulty for Catholic-Orthodox or Protestant-Orthodox marriages is the calendar, where, for instance, Christmas or Easter are celebrated on different dates (in the case of Christmas the gap is thirteen days). Not only the celebration itself but also preparations are a challenge, especially for partly Orthodox families, as preparations involve specific fasts.

2.3.4. A sign of the journey towards Christian unity

A mixed marriage which has an inner unity is a sign of the journey towards unity of Christians and in some sense already achieves the unity by being a “domestic church.”⁶⁵ It brings about the unity with Jesus Christ, achieved also through sacraments and living in the ecclesial community. Couples celebrating the Eucharist together and practising intercommunion (in observance of the applicable canon laws) are an even clearer sign of unity. However, if one spouse does not share the Catholic Eucharistic faith, the couple’s life centred around the Word of God and the Eucharist celebrated in the spouses’ respective Churches shows that in fact God has the primacy and that the life is centred around a Christ.

3. Particular challenges facing mixed marriages

Certain specific challenges and tensions arise where the faith meets the life of mixed marriages. These challenges include the formal side of getting married, pastoral care, the Eucharist, decisions about the sacraments of the children, piety and various moral issues.

⁶⁵ DEUTSCHEN BISCHOFSKONFERENZ: *Mit Christus gehen...*, no. 52—53.

3.1. Celebration of marriage

An interfaith couple can marry in the ordinary canonical form, after obtaining the permission of the Catholic partner's local ordinary. It must be remembered though that marriage with a member of an Eastern Church requires the presence of a presbyter or bishop (it is an obligation of the canonical norm in the Eastern rites, which is why a Catholic deacon cannot be an official witness). A dispensation from the canonical form can also be obtained.⁶⁶ Such dispensation is necessary for validity of marriages with non-Catholics, with the exception of Orthodox Christians (where the dispensation is needed for liceity and legality).

The spouses' different religions, and the consequential lack of intercommunion, create a difficulty in the celebration of the wedding itself. In the Roman Catholic Church today, the sacrament of marriage is, as a rule, celebrated during the Eucharist, and the prayers of the Mass clearly show how marital unity is connected with Holy Communion, which is the source of communion for the spouses. Therefore, mixed marriages should be celebrated outside the Eucharistic liturgy, because of the presence of non-Catholics. Nevertheless, it is possible to admit the non-Catholic party to Holy Communion, in accordance with the general principles of Eucharistic sharing — professing of the Catholic doctrine of the Blessed Sacrament and the permission of the local ordinary are necessary in such a case.⁶⁷

3.2. Pastoral care

The Church must provide pastoral care for mixed marriages and especially it should support the Catholic spouse in fulfilling their commitments and caring for unity and indissolubility of the marriage. It is therefore necessary that the leaders of the two communities work together in this regard, especially in situations of conflict.⁶⁸ The pastoral care should in the first place seek to nurture the faith and broaden the religious

⁶⁶ CCL, canon 1127 § 2.

⁶⁷ CCL, canon 884 § 4. THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY: *Directory for the application of principles and norms on ecumenism*, no. 159. Cf. FC 67.

⁶⁸ KONFERENCJA EPISKOPATU POLSKI: *Instrukcja Episkopatu Polski w sprawie duszpasterstwa małżeństw o różnej przynależności kościelnej* [Polish Bishops' instruction on the pastoral care of marriages of different confessions], no. 6.

knowledge (obedience to Christ, formation of conscience, clarification of religious problems). Interfaith communities where people can share their experience can also be helpful. What is more, the pastoral care should seek to strengthen morality (e.g. cherishing love, loyalty, and respect). This is of great importance especially when there are differences in teaching on specific issues. The Church should also support the spouses in celebrating festivals and emphasize the significance of common religious practices (e.g. prayer, reading the Bible, celebrating holy days). Some kind of bond with the church of the spouse is also needed. The priest is there to help understand and respect the non-Catholic community as well as participate in ecumenical services and the liturgy of the spouse's Church. Finally, a mixed marriage should receive support in the Catholic upbringing of the children.⁶⁹

3.3. Participation in the Eucharist (Lord's Supper)

The Eucharist is an important part of the spiritual life. After all “the family's communal journey of prayer culminates by sharing together in the Eucharist, especially in the context of the Sunday rest. Jesus knocks on the door of families, to share with them the Eucharistic supper.”⁷⁰

This is very difficult for mixed marriages, or even impossible for most of them. The doctrinal differences between religions, especially in ecclesiology and sacramentology, prevent a widely practised intercommunion from the Catholic perspective. In this regard the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity reminds us: “Although the spouses in a mixed marriage share the sacraments of baptism and marriage, Eucharistic sharing can only be exceptional and in each case the norms stated above concerning the admission of a non-Catholic Christian to Eucharistic communion, as well as those concerning the participation of a Catholic in Eucharistic communion in another Church, must be observed.”⁷¹

The norms are: sharing the Catholic faith in the Eucharist and great desire to receive the Holy Communion.⁷² Given the current Church rules and the efforts to support sacramental unity between spouses, it is worth con-

⁶⁹ Ibidem, chap. V.

⁷⁰ AL 318.

⁷¹ THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY: *Directory for the application...*, no. 160.

⁷² CCL, canon 844 § 4; JOHN PAUL II: *Encyclical “Ecclesia de Eucharistia”*, no. 46.

sidering some practical solutions, for instance, a more widespread consent for non-Catholic spouses who do not treat Christ's presence in the Eucharist as merely spiritual or symbolic to receive Holy Communion. However, it is difficult to see an analogous movement by Catholics towards participation in the Lord's Supper celebrated in Protestant communities, given the different understandings of the ecclesial authority. This is a matter for further consideration, so that these decisions would apply to the universal Church and were consistent with the sacramental doctrine. The mere desire to receive the Holy Communion and show unity at the Lord's Table is not enough.⁷³

Thus, the pain of not being able to participate in the Eucharist together must be given a thought. It may be experienced as an exclusion in a confessional marriage, which may make the spouses feel wounded in their relationship to the Churches. Therefore, the desire for Holy Communion needs to be recognized and skilfully satisfied by discovering the signs leading up to it, such as spiritual communion or blessing.⁷⁴ Even if it is not sacramental communion, it leads to an encounter with the living Jesus and strengthens the faith of the spouses.

Putting the discussion about intercommunion aside, it may be worth to raise the question of participation in Sunday liturgy or worship, which is a challenge, especially for Catholics who are obliged to attend the Holy Mass every Sunday and on holy days of obligation.⁷⁵ A tension may appear at this point, because it is rather unreasonable to expect people to attend two services and separate attendance does not help them experience their marriage and the Christian faith together. It seems fair, therefore, to consider the suggestion that mixed marriages attend Sunday liturgy alternately in their churches or congregations. Participation in a Protes-

⁷³ In a letter sent in 2018 to Cardinal Reinhard Marx, then President of the German Bishops' Conference, Cardinal Luis F. Ladaria, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, presented Pope Francis' assessment of the proposed wider admission of non-Catholic spouses to Catholic Communion in Germany: appreciating the multiple ecumenical efforts between the Catholic Church and Evangelical Churches in Germany, it is necessary to bear witness to faith together and be active in various areas of social life, but the question of intercommunion must be clarified at the level of the universal Church, by authorized bodies of the Holy See. In grave and urgent necessities, the decision can be taken by the diocesan bishop. See DEUTSCHEN BISCHOFSKONFERENZ: *Brief des Präfekten der Kongregation für die Glaubenslehre vom 25. Mai 2018*, <https://www.dbk.de/themen/oeкуmene> [accessed 20.10.2023].

⁷⁴ DEUTSCHEN BISCHOFSKONFERENZ: *Mit Christus gehen...*, no. 27.

⁷⁵ "On Sundays and other holy days of obligation, the faithful are obliged to participate in the Mass [...]" (CCL, canon 1247). "A person who assists at a Mass celebrated anywhere in a Catholic rite either on the feast day itself or in the evening of the preceding day satisfies the obligation of participating in the Mass" (CCL, canon 1248 § 1).

tant service or Orthodox liturgy should then be recognized by the Church legislation as fulfilling the obligation to celebrate Mass. Since receiving the Holy Communion every Sunday is not an obligation, spouses can thus be helped in their efforts to build joint integrity, without compromising on Eucharistic norms. By praying together in a church setting the spouses will undoubtedly build a deep unity between them. In view of this, it is worth rethinking a change of the canonical norm in relation to Catholics, so as to help them avoid dilemmas of conscience.

3.4. Sacraments for children

The legal and spiritual approach to the baptism of children in mixed marriages is still a challenge. Let us present the canonical aspect first. It must be remembered that when the Catholic partner requests permission from the competent ordinary for a mixed marriage he or she must make a promise to do all in his or her power to baptize the children in the Catholic Church and to raise them in the Catholic faith. The non-Catholic party should be informed of such a promise.⁷⁶ This was upheld by the 1993 Ecumenical Directory, which makes it clear, however, that the Catholic parent does not fall subject to the Church censure if a child is baptized and brought up in the community of the non-Catholic parent.⁷⁷ This is an effect of the inter-confessional dialogue and taking into account various local circumstances. It is worth remembering though that in the Middle East, for example, children are always baptized in the community of the father. Irrespective of this, it is necessary to take into account the need to take care that the child must be brought up in faith if the baptism is to bear proper fruit in his or her life.⁷⁸ For this to happen, the child must be surrounded with a consistent and faith-friendly atmosphere at home,

⁷⁶ “1/ the Catholic party is to declare that he or she is prepared to remove dangers of defecting from the faith and is to make a sincere promise to do all in his or her power so that all offspring are baptized and brought up in the Catholic Church; 2/ the other party is to be informed at an appropriate time about the promises which the Catholic party is to make, in such a way that it is certain that he or she is truly aware of the promise and obligation of the Catholic party” (CCL, canon 1125 § 1—2).

⁷⁷ “If, notwithstanding the Catholic’s best efforts, the children are not baptized and brought up in the Catholic Church, the Catholic parent does not fall subject to the censure of Canon Law.” THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY: *Directory for the application...*, no. 151.

⁷⁸ Cf. THE SACRED CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH: *Instruction on infant baptism “Pastoralis actio”*, no. 30.

which can be created if the parent professing a different religion respects the religious identity of the children.

3.5. Denominational religious practices

Spirituality manifests itself also in rituals and draws strength from the experience of the Church, so being faithful to one's own Church cannot be underestimated. With all the existing theological, devotional, liturgical, calendar and other differences, it is by no way easy to keep one's identity and at the same time bring about unity in the marriage. Unfortunately, with such tensions in hand, it may happen that the spouses distance themselves from religion, diminish the value of the other party's faith or engage in covert proselytism. There is also the danger of religious indifferentism or syncretism.⁷⁹ Adequate information on that needs to be provided to the couple before the wedding and the spouses should be offered opportunities to form their spiritual life together.

3.6. Approach to morality

Morality is an important element of spirituality. It applies to everyday life issues (such as acting honestly, building relationships, communicating), but also to special questions, for example in the sphere of ethics of sex (e.g. contraception) or bioethics (e.g. in case of in vitro fertilization).⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Cf. A. MOROZ: "Małżeństwa mieszane wyznaniowo — w stronę sekularyzacji czy akulturacji?" *Studia Społeczne* 24 (2014), pp. 31—47.

⁸⁰ The Catholic Church opposes in vitro fertilisation (IVF). Non-Catholic Churches and communities have their own interpretation of the morality of such practices. For example, the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Poland allows IVF within marriage. See *Oświadczenie Kościoła Ewangelicko-Augsburskiego w RP w sprawie dopuszczalności stosowania metody in vitro*, https://old2020.luteranie.pl/o_kosciele/oswiadczenia_kosciola/w_sprawie_dopuszczalnosci_stosowania_metody_in_vitro.html [accessed 12.10.2023]. The Orthodox Churches are not radically against IVF, but have their concerns, especially with respect to the question of God's design for childlessness and IVF. Basically, the Orthodox Church does not recommend in vitro fertilization, but it does not sanction its use either. See THE HOLY SYNOD OF THE CHURCH OF GREECE, BIOETHICS COMMITTEE: *Basis Position of the Assisted Reproduction*, http://www.bioethics.org.gr/en/10_frame_5.html [accessed 12.10.2023]; THE HOLY SYNOD OF ORTHODOX CHURCH

One must have proper knowledge of his or her Church's teaching on the various moral norms, but at the same time they need to know the theological and moral stance of the spouse's Church. All of this must be done with mutual respect and remaining faithful to one's conscience. This sensitive area is particularly delicate because it has to do with deeply personal and intimate matters. It is therefore important for spouses to live spiritual life and be open to the Holy Spirit, so that the differences that may arise do not destroy their marital unity.

Conclusions

- a) In their daily lives mixed marriages may face plenty of difficulties and tensions arising between their respective religions and the marital communion. The lack of full unity between churches affects the relation between the spouses, not only with respect to their religions but in other areas too.
- b) Experience shows that mixed marriages are prone to conflict or religious relativism. A proper balance must be found between remaining faithful to the obligations arising from church membership and respecting the spouse's and the children's faith. Appropriate catechesis for people planning to get married is important then.
- c) Care for the spiritual life is a fundamental thing. It involves the duty to defend and guard the faith in the spouses and children. A focus on what is shared by Christian denominations and a responsible and constructive approach to doctrinal and ritual differences are key. There is a need for a more developed and concrete pastoral care of such marriages and families.
- d) Spouses must be offered formation of the conscience and assistance in making key religious decisions for themselves and their children. Some revision of the canon law seems necessary, especially with regard to decisions about the religion of children and the forms of fulfilment of the duty to participate in the liturgy on Sundays and holy days of obligation.

- e) In-depth reflection and consultation on intercommunion is also needed. The lack of unity in the reception of Holy Communion affects mixed marriages. On the other hand, the Catholic understanding of the Eucharist cannot be undermined in any way.

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PRZEMYSŁAW SAWA

Matrimonia mixta — doctrine, droit et spiritualité
Réalité et défis

Résumé

L'appartenance religieuse différente des conjoints constitue un défi pour leur vie et la construction d'une famille stable. Réfléchir sur la réalité des mariages mixtes aide à guider un accompagnement pastoral approprié. Cet article présente la spécificité des mariages mixtes en matière de spiritualité, en se basant sur la doctrine, le droit et la pratique pastorale existants. Il aborde les valeurs communes et les expressions de la spiritualité chrétienne, ainsi que celles qui peuvent générer des tensions voire des crises. Cette réflexion ne se limite pas à la description du droit en vigueur et de la pastorale, mais propose des solutions plus claires, tant sur le plan pastoral que canonique.

Mots-clés: mariages mixtes, œcuménisme, intercommunion, éducation des enfants, spiritualité conjugale

PRZEMYSŁAW SAWA

Matrimonia mixta — dottrina, diritto e spiritualità
Realtà e sfide

Sommarìo

La diversa appartenenza confessionale dei coniugi rappresenta una sfida per la loro vita e per la costruzione di una famiglia stabile. La riflessione sulla realtà dei matrimoni misti offre un aiuto per intraprendere una corretta pastorale nei loro confronti. L'articolo presentato mostra la specificità dei matrimoni misti in ambito spirituale, basandosi sulla dottrina, sul diritto e sulla pratica pastorale fino ad oggi. Sono stati discussi i valori comuni e le manifestazioni della spiritualità cristiana, nonché quelli che possono causare tensioni e persino crisi. La riflessione non si limita a riferire il diritto vigente e la pastorale, ma suggerisce proposte di soluzioni più chiare, sia nel ambito pastorale che canonico.

Parole chiave: matrimoni misti, ecumenismo, intercomunione, educazione dei figli, spiritualità matrimoniale