

INTER-FAITH MARRIAGE, GRACE, AND SOLUBILITY

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Abstract:

Perkawinan antara orang-orang yang dibaptis, oleh Kristus Tuhan diangkat ke martabat sakramen. Ada rahmat sakramental dalam perkawinan ini. Perkawinan antara seorang Katolik dengan seorang yang tidak dibaptis, perkawinan antar-iman, bukanlah sebuah sakramen. Apakah perkawinan antar-iman ini tanpa rahmat? Apakah perkawinan antar-iman tidak dapat diceraikan? Untuk menjawab pertanyaan ini digunakan dokumen-dokumen Gereja Katolik dan pendapat beberapa teolog moral.

Keywords:

Inter-faith marriage, grace, and solubility

INTRODUCTION

The Canon Law no. 1055 §1 states: “The marriage covenant, by which a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of their whole life, and which of its own very nature is ordered to the well-being of the spouses and to the procreation and upbringing of children, has, between the baptised, been raised by Christ the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament”. “The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us” (Catechism of Catholic Church no. 1131). There is sacramental grace in this marriage. Hence, a marriage between a Catholic and a non-baptized person, Inter-Faith marriage, is not a sacrament. Now we have **two questions: first, “Due to non-sacramental, is Inter-Faith marriage devoid of grace?” Second, “Is Inter-Faith marriage indissoluble? This paper tries to answer these questions.**

INTER-FAITH MARRIAGE AND GRACE

Even though Inter-Faith marriage is not sacramental, it does not mean “devoid of grace”. There is a certain sacredness and religious character in natural marriage, Pope Pius IX writes, “it is sufficiently obvious that there is a certain sacredness and religious character attaching even to the purely natural union of man and woman, ‘not something added by chance but innate, not imposed by men but involved in the nature of things,’ since it has ‘God for its author and has been even from the beginning a foreshadowing of the Incarnation of the Word of God.’” (*Casti Connubii* 80). Tirimanna mentions Vatican II,

Thomas Aquinas, Karl Rahner to argue the grace in Inter-Faith marriage.¹ There is grace in Catholic marriage, and there is also grace in Inter-Faith marriage.

What is the sacramental grace in Catholic marriage (two baptized)? So far, the writer finds nine sacramental grace:

1. *Christ's redeeming power and the saving activity of the Church*

The married love is enriched by Christ's redeeming power and the saving activity of the Church, so that this love may lead the spouses to God with powerful effect and may aid and strengthen them in sublime office of being a father or a mother (GS 48).

2. *Fortification and consecration*

The spouses are fortified and receive a kind of consecration in the duties and dignity of their state (GS 48).

3. *The spirit of Christ*

As spouses fulfil their conjugal and family obligation, they are penetrated with the spirit of Christ, which suffuses their whole lives with faith, hope and charity. Thus, they increasingly advance the perfection of their own personalities, as well as their mutual sanctification, and hence contribute jointly to the glory of God (GS 48).

4. *Perfects natural love*

It is a sign and source of that peculiar internal grace by which it perfects natural love (*Casti Connubii* 38).

5. *To be reminder to the Church of what happened on the Cross*

Of this salvation event marriage is a memorial, actuation and prophecy: "As a memorial, the sacrament gives them the grace and duty of commemorating the great works of God and of bearing witness to them before their children. As actuation, it gives them the grace and duty of putting into practice in the present, towards each other and their children, the demands of a love which forgives and redeems. As prophecy, it gives them the grace and duty of living and bearing witness to the hope of the future encounter with Christ" (FC 13).

6. *Power to live their vocation as lay people*

The social and political role is included in the kingly mission of service in which Christian couples share by virtue of the sacrament of marriage, and they receive both a command which they cannot ignore and a grace which sustains and stimulates them (FC 47).

7. *Power for apostolic mission*

The apostolic mission of the family is rooted in Baptism and receives from the grace of the sacrament of marriage new strength to transmit the faith, to sanctify and transform our present society according to God's plan (FC 52).

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¹ See OFFICE OF THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS, *A Few Theological and Pastoral Perspectives of Inter-Faith Marriages*, FABC Papers no. 127, edited by Vimal Tirimanna, Hong Kong 2009, 32-35.

8. *Sanctification*

Christian spouses included in the universal call to sanctity. This call is specified by the sacrament they have celebrated and is carried out concretely in the realities proper to their conjugal and family life. They receive from the sacrament the gift and responsibility of translating into daily living the sanctification bestowed on them, so the same sacrament confers on them the grace and moral obligation of transforming their whole lives into a “spiritual sacrifice” (*FC 52; FC 56; LG 11; Casti Connubii 38*).

9. *Strength*

By the Sacrament of Matrimony spouses are strengthened and consecrated to the faithful fulfillment of their duties (*HV 25*).

After we see the sacramental grace, we want to know the situation in Inter-Faith marriage? Is Inter-Faith marriage *devoid of grace*? Vimal Tirimana explains as follows²:

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

In this text Paul points to the impact of the faith of the Christian partner on the unbelieving partner; and hence the effect of the grace of his/her faith for the sanctification of the non-Christian partner. That the non-believing partner is sanctified through the believing partner means that grace is operative in the former through the faith of the latter. Hence, we can say that the ‘grace of the sacramental marriage’ is in some way reflected in the marriage between a baptized and a non-baptized. In such a marriage, though the specific sacramentality of Christian marriage is absent, one could speak of ‘broader sacramentality’ that is present in every marriage insofar as it is a covenant of love between man and woman participating in God’s love. All authentic human love or conjugal love in some measure embodies and makes visible God’s love because God is the ultimate source of all love. This understanding has implications for pastoral care of those in interfaith marriages.

According to Tirimanna, there is grace in Inter-Faith marriage. Then, he makes the following theological assertions as regards Inter-Faith marriages:³

1) In an Inter-Faith marriage celebrated with the due dispensation, the secular reality of marriage is present in its integrality. However, this dimension is not publicly and officially subsumed to the level of a sacrament in the Church. A basic requirement for sacramentality in the strict sense is Baptism by water, which has

² *Ibid.*, 30-31.

³ *Ibid.*, 38.

not been undergone by both members involved in the Inter-Faith marriage. Consequently, an Inter-Faith marriage is not considered a sacrament in the strict sense of the term.

2) An Inter-Faith marriage nevertheless is per se not devoid of grace because the need for the sacrament is not absolute. Hence, while it is true that an Inter-Faith marriage cannot be considered objectively a “grace-filled state”, in the sense that a sacramental marriage between two Catholics is, it can certainly be a “grace-filled encounter” between persons.

3) Within an Inter-Faith marriage, the Catholic partner can certainly serve as the mediation of grace as is evident from 1 Cor 7:14-15.

4) Likewise, within an Inter-Faith marriage, the “Non-Catholic” partner can serve as the mediation of grace, as several contemporary theological trends attest.

5) Given the nature of the challenges involved, an Inter-Faith marriage needs to be specially nurtured; hence, the need for a suitable catechesis, which deals, not only with the anthropological aspect of marriage, but also with its Inter-Faith dimension. Moreover, when an interfaith marriage is lived in love and peaceful harmony, it embodies a dialogue of life in the fundamental unit of human community that marriage and family are.

The writer agrees with Tirimanna that even though Inter-Faith marriage is non-sacramental, it does not mean “devoid of grace”. It can be a “grace-filled encounter” between persons. Within an Inter-Faith marriage, the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband who believes as is evident from 1 Cor 7:14-15.

INTER-FAITH MARRIAGE AND DISSOLUBILITY

Is Inter-Faith marriage soluble? The writer believes that Inter-Faith marriage is soluble. Only “a marriage which is ratified and consummated cannot be dissolved by any human power or by any cause other than death” (Can. 1141). Michael G. Lawler, an expert in Catholic marriage, asserts: “... Anyone familiar with the jurisprudence and the practice of the Catholic Church knows that the only marriage that it holds to be absolutely indissoluble is the sacramental, consummated marriage (Can. 1141) and the non-sacramental marriage may be, and frequently is, dissolved ‘in favor of the faith’ (Can 1143). If the marriages of non-believers, including baptized non-believers, are non-sacramental, then they are also dissoluble according to the norms of Canon 1143⁴. That conclusion is evident and needs no further elaboration.”⁵

Bernard Cook explains that the essential properties of marriage are unity and indissolubility; in Christian marriage they acquire a distinctive firmness by reason of the

⁴ Canon 1143 §1 In virtue of the pauline privilege, a marriage entered into by two unbaptised persons is dissolved in favour of the faith of the party who received baptism, by the very fact that a new marriage is contracted by that same party, provided the unbaptised party departs. Canon 1143 §2 The unbaptised party is considered to depart if he or she is unwilling to live with the baptised party, or to live peacefully without offence to the Creator, unless the baptised party has, after the reception of baptism, given the other just cause to depart.

⁵ Michael G. LAWLER, “Faith, Contract, and Sacrament in Christian Marriage: A Theological Approach”, in Michael G. Lawler and William P. Roberts (eds.), *Christian Marriage and Family. Contemporary Theological and Pastoral Perspectives*, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville 1996, 55.

sacrament (*CIC* 1056). The bond established by Catholic marriage (marriage between two baptized Christians ratified and consummated) enjoyed an indissolubility that did not characterize other human marriages. This indissolubility was rooted in the fact that Catholic marriages were sacramental, a God-given cause of grace.⁶ For Daniel Hauser, the teaching that marriage is a sacrament is inextricably linked with the notion that marriage is indissoluble. In marriage, the one flesh unity of the New Covenant established in creation is realized in a special way in the life of the believer.⁷ Both Cook and Hauser come into conclusion that only sacramental marriage is indissoluble. In other words, in the opinion of the writer, Inter-Faith marriage is soluble because of non-sacramental.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, we can conclude:

- Even though Inter-Faith marriage is non-sacramental, it does not mean “devoid of grace”. We can mention nine sacramental grace, but we cannot mention exactly the non-sacramental grace. It can be a “grace-filled encounter” between persons. Within an Inter-Faith marriage, the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband who believes as is evident from 1 Cor 7:14-15.
- The Inter-Faith marriage is soluble because of non-sacramental, Canon 1143 can be used for this.

⁶ Bernard COOK, “Historical Reflection on the Meaning of Marriage as the Christian Sacrament”, in Charles E. Curran and Julie Hanlon Rubio (eds.), *Marriage. = Readings in Moral Theology*, Paulist Press, New York and Mahwah 2009, 17.

⁷ Daniel HAUSER, *Marriage and Christian Life. A Theology of Christian Marriage*, University Press of America, Lanham *et al.* 2005, 104.

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