

May 5, 1928.

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Question 72.

"Is it all right to marry a non-Catholic girl if you get married in the Church?"

Ans. The question of mixed marriage is one of perennial discussion. The Bulletin has discussed it frequently; each year the Survey is throwing a little more light on the subject. It is a delicate question, because whenever it is discussed there will be some products of mixed marriage present who will take offense at some of the things that must be said; but it is also a vital question, affecting the salvation of many souls, so it must always be discussed.

Several years ago Bishop Russell, who was then pastor of St. Patrick's Church in Washington, had as Sunday dinner guests three distinguished laymen: Admiral Benson, at that time head of the Navy; the Hon. Hannis Taylor, famous international lawyer; and a Judge of the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia. Msgr. Russell looked from one to another of his guests, and then remarked: "This looks like a good argument for mixed marriage. All three of you were converted by your good Catholic wives. And it would be a good argument if there were not so many cases -- the majority -- in which the issue has been the other way."

Figures gathered by the Holy Name Journal, in a survey made some years ago, show that from the Catholic families of the country only 8 out of a hundred are lost to the Church; from families where both parents are of the same Protestant denomination, 32 out of 100 are lost to Christianity; and from families of mixed Protestant and Catholic parentage, 66 out of a hundred give up the profession of any religion. Sixty-six per cent is certainly a high average of loss.

The average is higher when the mother is not a Catholic. Figures gathered by our own Religious Survey year after year show that there are four times as many boys at Notre Dame with non-Catholic fathers as there are with non-Catholic mothers; in other words, the boy with the non-Catholic father has four times as good a chance to come to Notre Dame as the boy with the non-Catholic mother. There have been several surveys at Notre Dame to determine the proportion of loss to gain in the mixed marriages among the relatives of students here, and the ratio of loss has varied from twenty-eight to forty-three per cent. The Notre Dame figures should be exceptionally favorable, however, as students who come here are usually from families with stronger faith than the average. That is quite natural.

A survey of mixed marriages was made recently in the diocese of Liverpool, England. It showed that of approximately 82,000 families in the diocese, 14,000 were of mixed religion. During the lifetime of these unions there were 1,322 conversions recorded, but nearly twice as many Catholics apostatized -- 2,225. The example of the non-Catholic side of the house was so potent that 7,872 children were lost to the Church.

Many Catholics otherwise well informed have the notion that the Church approves mixed marriages when the two necessary promises have been made -- to bring up the children as Catholics and to place no obstacle in the way of the Catholic party in the practice of his or her religion. The Church never approves them; when she grants a dispensation for them she does so reluctantly and she never blessed them -- in fact, she forbids the priest to perform them in the church and will not permit him to wear a surplice or stole in their performance.

The Catholic student, to make this personal, should remember that when he comes to die God is going to ask him about the faith of his children. If he has done everything in his power to raise them in the faith he has been given, the father will be acquitted of any responsibility even though they have lost what he has given them. But he will not have done everything in his power if he has married a non-Catholic "for love."