

INTERFAITH MARRIAGES, A SOCIAL PROBLEM NOWADAYS. THE THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF IT IN THE BIBLE

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***Abstract:** Marriage is a part of individual life as well as a social issue and when it comes to youth this must be regarded even more carefully. The concept of ‘interfaith marriage’ denotes marital union wherein the partners belong to the different faith or religion. The definition of ‘interfaith marriage’ as well as its type will be discussed in detail hereinafter. For the purpose of this paper, our main concern will be on the issues of interfaith marriage in which one of the parties to such marriage is always in difficulties for social involvement and the families of both parties regard their in-laws as outsiders. Therefore, such kind of couples are always in problems with social behavior, adaptation and acceptance, and their children have also problems in society. Since the traditional response on behalf of Orthodox Church is to deny any of these situations of interfaith marriage on the one hand, and the contractual, legal cases of marriage are growing in number lately...What response should such couples have to this social rejection? What legal possibilities have religions to accept or tolerate these interfaith marriage?*

***Keywords:** family, marital choices, religious preference, marriage, proselytism, interfaith, denominations, main-line religion.*

Introduction

There are over 22 legal and significant religions and denominations in Romania – as the last census from 2011 reveals – and more than that if we take into consideration other denominations that don’t have an established Church in the country, but still have adepts. At the same time, there are lots of issues that religion in general brings into civil society with no intention of negotiating its terms and conditions (e.g. female discrimination, heterosexual

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families, baptism that sometimes implies physical pain, etc.). On the other hand, one of the main activities of almost all known religions is *proselytism*, and each denomination has developed different strategies to accomplish this task. As I could personally see and study in US *on stage*, the method used by almost 70% of US denominations and religions was interfaith marriage; through this *tool* every religious community is trying to gain more adepts, to establish a larger role of its *general priesthood* on speaking *the Truth* to everyone. That is why, seen from different angles, ***interfaith marriage***¹ seems more *used* than *accepted*, more like a *strategy* than a *warm welcoming* of another religion and still ...

Even so, the couples involved in this kind of relationship have real problems regarding their social status and adaptation in a majority, traditional Orthodox Christian environment, and a study on the stage of this particular case would probably bring forward lots of issues to discuss, e.g. *ethnic history and marital choices; democracy and religious assimilation; traditions and heritage blending; family and household in different regions of our country; religious pilgrimage (mobility); the Non-Marital Child conception*, and so on. Unfortunately, there is no surveillance made in this direction in Romania and we can only assume the dimension of this case; mostly, the tendency is to minimize the percentage of these cases. My assumptions are made base on self-made surveil in my parochial Church in Constanta, a place of religious pluralism, and from the data I have gathered in my research in US back in 2014.

The extensive study I propose here has a trifold purpose. 1) To shape a study about this situation in Romania as many other countries already have their own results. 2) To offer a ground for a future projects that can be conduct with this target of reviewing our strategy and point of view in this regard. 3) To compose an overview about the religious mixture inside different religious context with all the consequences that follow.

¹ I will use the acronym for ***interfaith marriage*** – IFM.

A research such as this one is a resource of endless studies and paperwork over the subject, with a different perspective and approach, that we can come with, either from a psychological, sociological, demographic, judicial or theological (itself with a wide range of implications, pastoral, missiology, liturgical, etc.) perspective. I can remind here some examples that are valuable for emphasizing my point of view on this regard: e.g. ethnic history and marital choices; traditions and heritage blending; family and household in different regions of our country; the Non-Marital Child conception et.al. One of the main sociological and anthropological goal I intend to clarify is the preference of these mixt religious couples to live in concubinage and to have a family without the full sanctions of a legal rather than a legal one. In order to understand what would possibly be the reason why should any Christian denomination, Orthodox included, accept inter-faith marriage, we must first see the background of it both in the Old and New Testament, but both these opposed visions had to be regarded from the soteriology of Christ. That is the reason why I step forward into a theological debate over the texts and their meaning to the different community they were issued.

I. Ethnic history and marital choices

The marriage between a Christian and a non-Christian is usually known as an *interfaith marriage*, while the different confessions of Christianity, this may be extended to include *inter-denominational marriage*. The practice of this union was mostly forbidden in all, major religions, but with time this policy was revised for almost every denominations and religions under different explanations and reinterpretations of scriptures. In Christianity, for example, those Churches that forbid interfaith-marriage usually used texts from the Bible as: *Do not be bound together with unbelievers* [ἀπίστος, Apistos = unbelieving, faithless, unbeliever, infidel]; *for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness* [ἀνομία,

Anomia = iniquity, unrighteousness, transgress the law], *or what fellowship has light with darkness?* (2 Cor. 6:14). *Or what harmony has Christ with **Belial*** [בליעל, Beliya`al = Belial, wicked, ungodly, evil, naughty ungodly men], *or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?* (2 Cor. 6:15 cf. 1 Sam. 10:27). Another text used as fundament for this forbiddance is from Old Testament, Deuteronomy 7:3, *Furthermore, you shall not intermarry* [חתן, Chathan = law, affinity, marriages] *with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons*, as well as the prophetic book of Ezra 9–10. But how can we relate to these texts in the religious and cultural context where they have been emerged?

II. The History of Inter-Faith Marriage in the Old Testament. Adultery and Interfaith Marriage

In the Old Testament (abbrev. OT) the Judaic conception on marriage is underlined in major parts, from the creation of mankind to the commandments of G-d. In Genesis 1:26 – 2:21-24 the intention of G-d in this regard is proved by the fact that He has created first humans dual, *man and woman*, in a sense that they complete each other as two halves of the same whole, *a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and **they shall be one flesh*** (Gen. 2:24). This is certainly a conception revealed to all mankind since it is profound written in the human genome for it is most compatible with life and the possibility of procreation in this mixture alone and no in other way (i.e. same sex bond). To be sure of that, one of multiple episodes of trespassing the natural law (Mark 10:6-12; Lev. 18:22), that of Sodom and Gomora, was an example of divine attitude against non-reproductive intercourse. Once we have settled the basics of sexual relationships, we can now discuss the meaning of religious marital bond.

II. 1. Adultery

There are two ways in OT in which a couple can trespass the marital bond: (1) by *fornication and adultery*, and (2) by *mixing with pagans*. Both reasons are faith based and we cannot say so far which one is more targeted by the revelation, and which one is just a vision of Judaism. Almost everything in the Jewish life-style is considered ‘counseled’ by Yahweh, and marital bond is not an exception from this religious belief of the ‘elected people’. That is why an important part of Moses’ religious laws are directed toward marriage and its legislative/cultural context.

But, if the mixing with other faith’s pair is never pronounced before Moses, the (1)st rule was always in place, and not only for Jews, but also to all others (Gen 26:10, *One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt* [אָשָׁם, 'asham = sin, guiltiness, trespass] *upon us*). Same conduct was shown in different situations in OT before Moses (Gen. 12:18, 19; 20:1-14) proving that (1) fornication was a natural law (cf. Rom 2:14) and that all mankind² obeyed it and naturally considered it a wrong conduct. More than that, to every tribe/religion of the old world (Gen 10:19) the adultery was considered a sin – while homosexuality was not – and punished severely. While polygamy was accepted and legally pronounced, adultery constituted part of the marriage code of virtually every society as a taboo. The Code of Hammurabi (18-th century BC) in Babylonia provided a punishment of death by drowning for adultery. In ancient Greece and in Roman

² Hinduism condemns pre-marital sex and adultery. See Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty. *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology*. University of California Press. p. 7. Buddhism also condemn fornication, cf. Warren Matthews. *World Religions*. CengageBrain.com. p. 142. As for Muslims any form of sexual activity outside marriage is illegal (*‘Sex outside of marriage is a criminal offense here’ PH ambassador to Qatar warns Pinoys*. SPOT.ph. 12 September 2011. Retrieved 3 August 2013. <http://www.spot.ph/the-feed/49282/ph-ambassador-to-qatar-warns-pinoys-sex-outside-of-marriage-is-a-criminal-offense-here>).

law, an offending female spouse could be killed, but men were not severely punished³. Same rule goes for Judaism, so that, after the Egyptian exodus, they have regulated fornication as one basic rule of marriage (cf. Ex. 20:14; Levit. 18:20; Deut. 5:18). The mosaic legislation wore the human projection of ancient world of it, for it was narrow and strictly juridical; since the spiritual, G-d loving meaning was still missing from their religious conception, Christ-God explained it once again to prove what is the aim of the commandment (Matth. 5:27, 28:32). The evidence of humanly understanding of God's Law was also the fact that same punishment whole ancient world applied for adultery, stoning, was copied by Mosaism (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22); this regulation was also banned by Christ and Apostles (John 8:3-4).

II. 2. Carnal Adultery became spiritual adultery through idolatry with Mosaism

The 'whore of Babylon' is a Christian figure and also a *place of evil* mentioned in the *Book of Revelation* in the Bible (17, 18) where *Fornication* is interpreted/translated as *idolatry* in the Amplified Bible (AMP), the New American Bible mentions *harlotry*. That was a motif of reconsidering the natural, universal law of marriage becoming the prophecy and prefiguration of the relation between Christ-God with His adepts (Revel. 21:2). This was the conception of Mosaism as well, raised after Moses between Jews as a Law of Yahweh that has *prohibited the interfaith marriage for His people* (Deut. 7:1-4; Nehemiah 13:23-27; Ezra 9:1-2; 10:2-3; Joshua 23:1-12 et. al.). But the 'Moses' moment in Jews' history is also the starting point of transforming (1)st [natural] law against marital bond into the (2)nd one, that of prohibiting inter-faith marriage. It has never been mentioned in the Bible before the Egyptian exodus, therefore it

³ Encyclopædia Britannica Online, *Adultery*. Britannica.com. Retrieved 2010-07-12. <http://www.britannica.com/topic/adultery>

has everything to do with the nationalist conception of Jews as ‘an elected people’ among pagans and idolatries.

Before Moses there was no law given to people in regard of marriage, as in no other regard. The Torah provides very little guidance with regard to the procedures of a marriage. The method of finding a spouse, the form of the wedding ceremony, and the nature of the marital relationship are all explained in the Talmud.

Judaism believes in the concept of soul-mates; in Yiddish, this perfect match is called *bashert*, a word meaning fate or destiny (as the example of Rav Yehuda aka Judah bar Ezekiel, 220–299 CE). Finding your *bashert* doesn't mean that your marriage will be trouble-free. Marriage, like everything worthwhile in life, requires dedication, effort and energy⁴. This *superstition* (named so from the profane perspective) is not without scripture's assistance. We have seen that, after ‘Moses’ moment the religiousness of Jews grew aside from the ‘voice of Yahweh’ and cleaved into two different paths: one of the revelation and real Yahweh displayed by the prophets, and other kept mostly by the priesthood in the obedience over the Law in an imaginary vision of a vengeful God⁵. In this situation was also the marriage itself, for on the one hand was the regulation that forbade (1) & (2), and on the other hand was the spiritual feeling that God ‘is always providencing over His people’. This was the basis for ‘*bashert*’, a belief in God's surveillance and help in every major decision we have to make in life. In spite of a number of statements in the Talmud that would seem to contradict the idea of *bashert*, most notably the many bits of advice on choosing a wife, nevertheless, the idea has a strong hold within the Jewish community: *look at any listing of Jewish personal ads and you're bound to find someone ‘Looking for my bashert’*.

⁴ “Marriage” in *Judaism 101*, <http://www.jewfaq.org/marriage.htm>.

⁵ See Cosmin Tudor Ciocan, *The failure of the ‘Mosaism’ project. What happens when politics and self-centrism mixt with religion*, in: “Proceedings of ‘The Future of Knowledge’”, Cambridge USA, The Scientific Press, 2016, (under publishing).

The very nature of conservative nationalism reflected in religious legislation given to people by Moses and Aaron was meant to keep them away from another corruption (as in Egypt, led to idolatry Ex. 32). This self-affirmed 'revealed commandment' of prohibiting Jews from marrying pagans (Deut. 7:1-4). However, in spite of this religious-nationalist Law, we can witness mysterious cases when God also interferes in people's marital choices and even 'commands' the possibility of IFM, against the Mosaic Law.

A situation in which God's providence overcomes the Law of Moses is the case of Samson who, by *Yahweh's knowledge and wish* [she was from the LORD, vs. 4], married a pagan, idolatry woman, a daughter of the Philistines (Judges 14:1-20) and confronted his Jewish parents that would have wanted him to follow the law (vs. 3). Another notorious case of trespassing this mosaic law of IFM is Solomon who *loved many foreign women in addition to Pharaoh's daughter: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women all of them from nations that the LORD had ordered the Israelis, 'You are not to associate with them and they are not to associate with you, because they will most certainly turn your affections away to follow their gods'. Solomon became deeply attached to them by falling in love* (1 King 11:1,2). In his case Jews didn't applied the rule of stoning, for he was loved by Yahweh. But Solomon's case is different from Salomon, for he did not only married them, instead he followed them in their idolatry and that is why Jews presented this case like *The Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the Lord God of Israel* (vs. 9). So, in the perspective of these particular situations, we can understand that even in the OT the IFM was seen as wrong ONLY when Jews would follow other nations' religiosity, and for the act itself. So, the Law was, once more, overcome by love and faithfulness; *For if those who were given the Law are the heirs, then faith is useless and the promise is worthless* (Rom. 4:14).

III. The History of Inter-Faith Marriage⁶ in the Christian Orthodox Church

Once St. Paul imposed his vision on the superiority of faithfulness over the Law, than the regulation of *marriage within Jews* become obsolete. In Apostles' eyes nationalism was no longer the issue and the prohibition of marrying other nations was banned; *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus* (Gal. 3:28). From now on the (1) & (2) ways of trespassing marital bond should be reconsider; but, if for (1) no religion and culture has ever disagreeing, for (2) Christianity had to justify differently than Jews. As we have seen in chap. II. 2, in the eyes of Apostles, *adultery* was seen as a *prophetic icon of idolatry*, but this was a vision built on the Judaic nationalism and religious forbiddance. It was not a genuine Christian thinking. While the Judaic vision on IFM was definitely seen as a direct threat to nationalism and secondly to the belief in Yahweh, for Christians the nationalism was no longer an issue to fighting for (Matth. 28:19; Mk. 13:10; Lk. 2:32 et. al.). From the perspective of Christ and His universal revelation given to all mankind, idolatry of nations was never a problem unless it brings the apostasy of God's people, but in the perspective of giving God's word to them this was another story.

III. 1. Giving up Mosaism and Judaic nationalism

The plan of Christ-God was revealed for the second time in the New Testament – because the first time it was revealed to Abraham, but misunderstood by Aaron and Jewish people in their 'religion of the only people that matters'⁷ – *the name of one, true*

⁶ I will abbreviate this syntagma, for shortening the manuscript, with IFM.

⁷ More about that in Cosmin Tudor Ciocan, *God's immanency in Abraham's response to revelation: from providence to omnipresence*, in: "Dialogo 2:2, The concepts of 'Transcendence' and 'Immanence' in Philosophy and Theology". Romania-Slovakia, 2016, p. 174-182.

God must be discovered by His people to all nations and correct their idolatry by word, not by swords. That is why St. Paul abolishes the nationalism of Judaic religion and with it every issues of ‘uncleanness’ (Acts 6:11, 14). The very sign of the differentness of Jewish people among all other nations, *the circumcision*, is worthless to Paul (1 Cor. 7:19; Gal. 5:6; 6:15; Phil. 3:2 et. al.), since he dears to confront all other apostles and sustains that Moses and its religious law does not apply to the faithful in Christ (cf. Acts 6:11, 14).

The conflict was so obvious between Christianity – conceived and taught for all nations and beliefs in order to be saved from immorality – and Mosaism – a narrow understanding of what G-d is and wants for real from humankind⁸ – that everyone in the Jewish people rejected Christianity for they were forced to give up Moses and his Laws, including the most characteristic acts of it (e.g. sacrifices, circumcision, stoning, Sabbath, unclean food, etc.)⁹.

In regard of previous hypothesis – i.e. the religious transformation of fornication into idolatry and sin against nationalism – St. Paul puts together his Christianity with a text that was previously regarded by far as a characteristic prophecy for the basics of nationalism between Jews – 2 Cor. 6:17 - Isaiah 52:11, *Depart, depart, go out from there, Touch nothing unclean* [ἀκάθαρτος, Akathartos = unclean, foul / אטמ, Tame' = unclean, defiled, infamous, polluted, pollution]; *Go out of the midst of her, purify yourselves, You who carry the vessels of the LORD* – and prove that basic Judaic nationalism wrong and misunderstood, for there was no prophecy at all, instead was a very important saying on behalf of Yahweh, telling His people to *stay away from everything that makes a man unclean* (thoughts, ideas, adultery cf. Gal. 5:19; Col. 3:5 et. al.). This conception was clearly revealed to him by Christ who said same thing to the conservative Jews before, It's not

⁸ See Idem, *The failure of the 'Mosaism' project. What happens when politics and self-centrism mixt with religion*, in: “Proceedings of ‘The Future of Knowledge’”. Cambridge USA, The Scientific Press, 2016 (under publishing).

⁹ *Ibidem*.

what goes into the mouth that defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man (Matth. 15:11,17), a revelation that started the well-known conflict with Peter, also enlighten afterwards by Christ to renounce the concepts of *uncleanness and unholy*, since everything is made by God and for Him (Acts 10:14-15).

III. 2. *There is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28)*

St. Paul's struggle to convince the Christian community of Christ's true will and vision about world's nations was so direct and deep submitted into his theology, that there is no epistle of Paul's that does not say something to relate the spiritual meaning of Christ's mission into the world of man. Rom. 10:13 *For [Joel 2:32 says], 'Every person who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved' [i.e., whoever appeals to God through obedient faith in Christ], was the fundament of Paul's theology in regard of the relations Christians must have with religious-diverse believers when go preaching the Gospel. Texts like in Rom. 1:14; 10:12; 1 Cor. 1:12-24; 12:13 et. al. emphasis St. Paul's theology and vision in regard of what was strongly appointed in OT as forbidden, any interference and fusion with pagans and other nations: there is no Law above love of Christ and peers when you can do anything to save them from damnation. Don't become a stumbling block to Jews or Greeks or to the church of God, just as I myself try to please everybody in every way. I don't look out for my own benefit, but rather for the benefit of many people, so that they might be saved (1 Cor. 10: 32, 33).*

The fact is that, for Paul, everything [meaning any method] was permitted as long as it bring people to Christ and saves them. To him there was not a thing he wouldn't do if that could bring another one to be faithful to Christ, *I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some of them (1 Cor. 9:22).* Any other thought or hindrance that restrain a missionary from engaging a pagan, by talking, eating, sleeping overnight under the same roof with him, etc. was for Paul the real sin, and not the

disobedience of OT Laws that forbids these kind of acts. So, these being said, was there anything St. Paul wouldn't do for someone to become a new and true believer? From what we have seen there is nothing he wouldn't /couldn't do in order to make pagans and Jews convert to Christ.

But what about IFM: is there any excuse in his theology that can become another mean to fulfil his Christian aim? Apparently it is, for he became this aim and saw his entire work and vision thru this purpose (Gal. 2:20). We cannot see his struggle to convince anyone, by any means, otherwise; he has endured sufferings, deprivations, social stigmatizations, and other obstacles with one purpose alone, *getting people's attention to his God, Christ. For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen ... so that we will cause no hindrance to the gospel of Christ ... so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus* (2 Tim. 2:10; 1 Cor. 9:12).

III. 3. IFM in the Pauline's mission to evangelize

We have seen that marriage is sometimes regarded as prophetic bond, both in the Old and New Testament. Based on prophets like Hosea, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Isaiah the image of the monogamous marriage of the first man and woman (Gen. 2: 21-25) was present the image of Israel as the one wife chosen by the one and only God to whom they are bound by a covenant^[10]. Same allegory last in the NT theology, *Christ is the groom* (Matth. 9:15; Mk. 2:19; Lk. 5:34-35; John 3:28-30; Matth. 25:1-13), and the *Church is the bride* (Efes. 5:21-33; 2 Cor. 11:2-3; Matth. 25:1-13; Revel. 19:7-8; 21:1-2), and on that comparison we must see the theology of Paul on marriage. Starting from the Christ's assertion that Mosaism is more humanly than divine – when, in relation to marriage, Christ appoints

¹⁰ Brian Geoffrey O'Loughlin, *Marriage, a Covenant and Consortium Totius Vitae: Scriptural Basis, Conciliar teaching and the revised code of canon Law*. A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Canon Law, Ottawa, Canada, 1985, p. 70.

that Moses made some concessions for the sake of people, *it was not like that in the beginning* (Matth. 19:8) – Paul take the bond between a man and his wife as the same level as Christ and His Church are (Ephes. 5). Only so we can understand why St. Paul on the one hand accepts no change in the marital bond *Husbands, love your wives, just as also Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her* (vs. 25), and on the other hand he doesn't make any concession what so ever, *For the married woman is bound by law to her husband while he is living* (Rom. 7:2).

This unrelenting view on marital separation is due to the Christ attitude over it, Matth. 19:9 *Whosoever shall put away [ἀπολύω, Apoluo = release, put away, send away, let go, set at liberty] his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery for what God has joined together, man must never separate* (vs. 5; Mk. 10:9). His intransigence in the brakeage of marriage represents somehow the disruption of the link between Church and Christ, since the marriage, once done, is not for man's will, but for God's: *to the married I give instructions, not I, but the Lord, that the wife should not leave her husband* cf. *This mystery is profound, but I am talking about Christ and the church* (1 Cor. 7:10-14; Ephes. 5:32). That is why he considers somehow this social element even bigger than the will of Church or Mosaic religion, since it is not there's to set a couple apart and destroy their bond on under no circumstances. He even pleads that, if a man can forgive his wife's adultery, he should do that (1 Cor. 7:13) and let God judges this sin (Hebr. 13:4). How is this even possible, when the Law says otherwise? To prove that this bond is of more importance for God, to prove each one's faithfulness, than it is the instructions and laws given by religion or church; in this regard God has used prophet Hosea to show His strong will against any reason His bond with 'elected people' would be broken – *Go marry a prostitute who will bear illegitimate children conceived through prostitution, because the nation continually commits spiritual prostitution by turning away from the LORD* (Hosea 1:2).

This consideration of St Paul for the bond itself and that with God made the Orthodox Church say that the bond lasts even after a man deserts his wife¹¹ and consider that divorce is not a commandment for the cheated husband¹². The only sign someone is untied by marital bond is the death or his partner (Rom. 7:2,3). And if the (1)st reason we have discussed here is overcome by love and trust in God's will, what then about the (2)nd one? Without pronouncing the differentness of beliefs [i.e. IFM], St Paul still considers that in a marriage where at least one has right and correct faith in God, he/she must keep the marriage with partner in case he/she is fallen from religious belief.

„For the unbelieving husband is set apart (separated, withdrawn from heathen contamination, and affiliated with the Christian people) by union with his consecrated (set-apart) wife, and the unbelieving wife is set apart and separated through union with her consecrated husband (1 Cor. 7:14 AB)“¹³.

And if someone would try to bring his/hers family to the right belief than enduring a temptation of any kind in regard of divorce, he/she will be saved unharmed by God, for *He is faithful and He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able* (1 Cor. 10:13). These texts fits into St Paul's vision of considering any mean if it is to save someone's soul from damnation and give it back to Christ for salvation. Soteriology is, in the Apostles' eyes, above everything even Church or sin of any kind.

¹¹ Dumitru Staniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. 3. Bucharest, The Biblical and Missionary Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church Publishing House, 1978, p. 184.

¹² Mihai Vizitiu, *Familia în învățătura Mântuitorului și a Sfinților Apostoli*, in: „Familia creștina azi”, Iași, Trinitas Publishing House, 1995, p. 31.

¹³ *The Amplified Bible* (AMP), the first Bible project of *The Lockman Foundation*, 2015.

IV. The Basics of the Conception in the Christian Church

Over time this strong and profound vision of the Apostles had to be translated from theology (advice, as in 1 Cor. 7:6) into a Church regulation. That was the moment when the Apostle's *advice* [συγγνώμη, Singnome = permission, concession] was transformed into a strict rule in some Fathers' writings. Tertullian, for example, denies the second marriage under no circumstances¹⁴, strongly reprove it and pronounce it 'as an obstacle to holiness'¹⁵; he strongly disapprove it as many others did, even if in Paul's theology this was not at all pronounced, no the contrary I might add (1 Cor. 7:39). But the strong current against the breakage of marital bond was made under the paradisiacal engagement. Adam and Eva lived immaculate in Eden; they did not know concupiscence, or any desire of any kind – *they were living like angels in paradise and so they were not burning with desire, not assaulted by other passions, not subject to the needs of nature, but on the contrary were created incorruptible and immortal*¹⁶. This allegorical image has withstood in the literal commandments of early Church, through the writings of Fathers like Tertullian¹⁷, St. Cyprian¹⁸, Novatian, Methodius of Olympus, St.

¹⁴ Constantin Mihoc, *Taina Căsătoriei și familia creștină (The sacrament of marriage and Christian family)*. Sibiu, Teofania Publishing House, 2002, p. 43.

¹⁵ Tertullian, V: *De exhortations castitatis* [On Exhortation to Chastity], translated by S. Thelwall. In Phillip Schaff, coll. "Ante-Nicene Fathers", vol. IV: "Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth", 89, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/anf04.html>.

¹⁶ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, XV, 4: *Comment to [Gen. 2:25]*, <http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/anderson/commentaries/ChrGen.html#glossGen2>:15, p. 203.

¹⁷ Tertulliani Liber, *De Virginibus Velandis*, ed. V. Bulhart, in: CSLL, LXXVL, LXXXIX, Vindobonae, 1957. http://www.tertullian.org/latin/de_virginibus_velandis.htm

¹⁸ Cyprianus Carthaginensis, *Liber de Habitu Virginum*, in: Philip Schaff, coll. "Ante-Nicene Fathers", vol. V: "Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian", [http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0200-0258_Cyprianus_Carthaginensis_Liber_de_Habitu_Virginum_\[Schaff\]_EN.pdf](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0200-0258_Cyprianus_Carthaginensis_Liber_de_Habitu_Virginum_[Schaff]_EN.pdf)

Athanasius the Great¹⁹; thus they all share the thought that marriage should not be broken for no reason at all, since the choice you make in marriage is not yours to make, but it is God's wish, so you have to live with it. But, when it comes to IFM, again another argumentation was in place.

Centuries in a row Apostles and their missionary apprentices have not seen IFM as an issue, but on the contrary, it was used as a missionary engagement to get more people to Christianity (Acts 10). We cannot but assume that people who were engaged by the missioners and became Christians, eventually have baptized their entire family, pagans, Judaic or nonbelievers (Acts 16:15, 32-33; 11:14; 18:8). This interfaith couples were seen as an 'opportunity to do good to all people' (Galat. 6:10). In the eastern ecclesiastical canons there are very few that speak about IFM (Can. **72 Trullo**, 10, 31 Laodicea, 21 Carthage, 23 John Faster), forbidding without dispensation any kind of bond between Orthodox Christians and heretics or heterodoxies. The explanation of the 72 canon of Trullo (553, 681, **692**) has some tinting, important for our assumptions. While other ecclesiastical regulations mostly overcome the apostolic vision over marriage – that nothing, under no circumstances, mustn't break the marital bond (cf. Matth. 19:5) – and come to the conclusion that marriage is after all under the Church's umbrella and it should be break if she considers so for different reasons, 72 Trullo has a particular point of view.

„An orthodox man is not permitted to marry a heretical woman, nor an orthodox woman to be joined to a heretical man ... But if any who up to this time are unbelievers and are not yet numbered in the flock of the orthodox have contracted lawful marriage between themselves, and if then, one choosing the right and coming to the light of truth and the other remaining still detained by the bond of error and not willing to

¹⁹ *Discourse on Virginity*, PG XXVIII, col. 251-282.

behold with steady eye the divine rays, the unbelieving woman is pleased to cohabit with the believing man ...”²⁰.

This view leave the burden of IFM in the hands of the orthodox partner if he/she considers that their partner can be attracted to the right belief, but *such is not to-day the practice of the Eastern church, which allows the marriage of its people with Lutherans and with Roman Catholics and never questions the validity of their marriages*²¹. So, if by benevolence and trust of Church that a heterodox could be considered as ‘not fully converted’ to Christ, than such arrangement can benefit from indulgence.

V. IFM in other Denominations’ Practice

“As regards marriage with an infidel, the early Church did not consider such unions invalid, especially when a person had been converted to the faith after such marriage. It was hoped that the converted wife or husband would be the means of bringing the other party to the knowledge of the true faith, or at least safeguarding the Catholic upbringing of the children of the union. This held even for Jews, though the Church was naturally more opposed to wedlock between them and Christians, even than with pagans, owing to the intense Jewish hatred for the sacred name of Christ”²².

Meanwhile, after few centuries of mission of evangelization among pagans and peoples with different religious beliefs, the objection to a marriage between a Catholic and an infidel grew stronger as the necessity for such unions decreased, and so in the course of time, more by custom than by positive enactment, the impediment of *disparitas cultus* making such marriages null and void

²⁰ Philip Schaff, *NPNF2-14. The Seven Ecumenical Councils: Canon LXXII of Trullo*, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf214.xiv.iii.lxxiii.html>.

²¹ *Ibidem*, Notes - *Ancient Epitome of Canon LXXII*.

²² *Mixed Marriage*, in: “The Catholic Encyclopedia: New Advent”. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09698a.htm>.

began to have force. Hence arose the impediments to a marriage with a heretic (*mixta religio*) and with an infidel (*disparitas cultus*). But this custom grew so strong and almost universal in the Church that for same reasons as Judaism erstwhile, that the interdiction took forms that previously were condemned. So, if in the beginning the interfaith engagement was an impediment to ...

From the time of *Decretum of Gratian*²³ forward, all marriages contracted between Catholics and infidels were held to be invalid unless a dispensation for such union had been obtained from the ecclesiastical authority. Marriages, however, between Catholics and heretics were not subject to the same impediment. They were held as valid, though illicit if a dispensation *mixtæ religionis* had not been obtained.

“Until recent decades, the idea of a Catholic marrying outside the faith was practically unheard of, if not taboo. Such weddings took place in private ceremonies in the parish rectory, not in a church sanctuary in front of hundreds of friends and family. These days, many people marry across religious lines. The rate of interfaith marriages varies by region. In areas of the U.S. with proportionately fewer Catholics, as many as 40% of married Catholics may be in interfaith marriages. A marriage can be regarded at two levels – whether it is valid in the eyes of the church and whether it is a sacrament. Both depend in part on whether the non-Catholic spouse is a baptized Christian or a non-baptized person, such as a Jew, Muslim or atheist. If the non-Catholic is a baptized Christian (not necessarily Catholic), the marriage is valid as long as the Catholic party obtains official permission from the diocese to enter into the marriage and follows all the stipulations for a Catholic wedding. A marriage between a Catholic and another Christian is also

²³ *The Decretum Gratiani*, also known as *the Concordia discordantium canonum* or *Concordantia discordantium canonum*, is a collection of Canon law compiled and written in the 12th century as a legal textbook by the jurist known as Gratian. It was used by canonists of the Roman Catholic Church until Pentecost (May 19) 1918, when a revised Code of Canon Law (Codex Iuris Canonici) promulgated by Pope Benedict XV on 27 May 1917 obtained legal force. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decretum_Gratiani

considered a sacrament. In fact, the Catholic Church regards all marriages between baptized Christians as sacramental, as long as there are no impediments, in that case the union between a Catholic and a non-baptized spouse is not considered sacramental²⁴.

However, Robert Hater says: *Though they do not participate in the grace of the sacrament of marriage, both partners benefit from God's love and help [grace] through their good lives and beliefs*²⁵. As a couple, they live the unity of their marriage, supporting each other, while participating in two separate traditions. Today more than 40 percent of Catholics enter into a mixed marriage.

Conservative Judaism sees only the marriage of two Jews as ... a sacred event, reported the USCCB's Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, which discussed Catholic-Jewish marriages at a conference in November 2004. The Reform branch of Judaism strongly discourages mixed marriages, but there is no legal prohibition against it as there is in the stricter branches²⁶. The majority of denominations that see IFM as a valid possibility, always aim for few outcomes²⁷:

- Religious formation of the children – the accepting party promises to raise the children in their belief, yet religious education is a serious responsibility of both parents;
- Extended family members – although much progress has been made in the feelings and attitudes of people concerning interfaith marriages, there are still many instances in which the parents or family members of the

²⁴ Emilie Lemmons, *Church Teachings Interfaith Marriages*, in: <http://www.foryourmarriage.org/catholic-marriage/church-teachings/interfaith-marriages/>

²⁵ Robert J. Hater, *When a Catholic Marries a Non-Catholic*. Ebook.

²⁶ Information took from <http://www.catholiccincinnati.org/ministries-offices/family-life/family/marriage/ecumenical-marriage/>

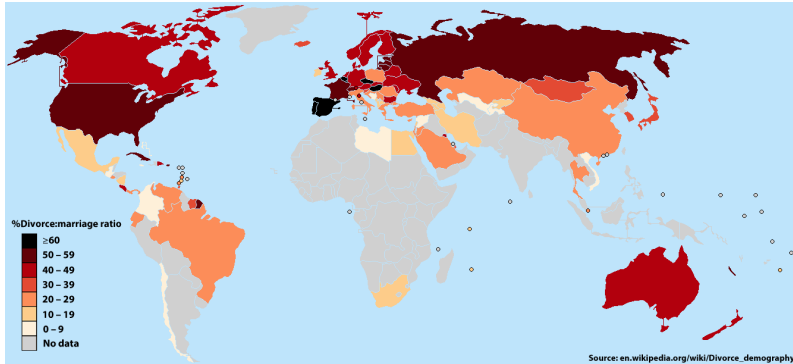
²⁷ *Ibidem*.

engaged couple may be offended by the fact that one party is not of the same faith tradition;

- Seek that eventually the counterparties become affiliated – by keeping the IFM couple under constant supervision they might reach the parties’ feeling and eventually encourage him to be baptized, and so gain a new member.

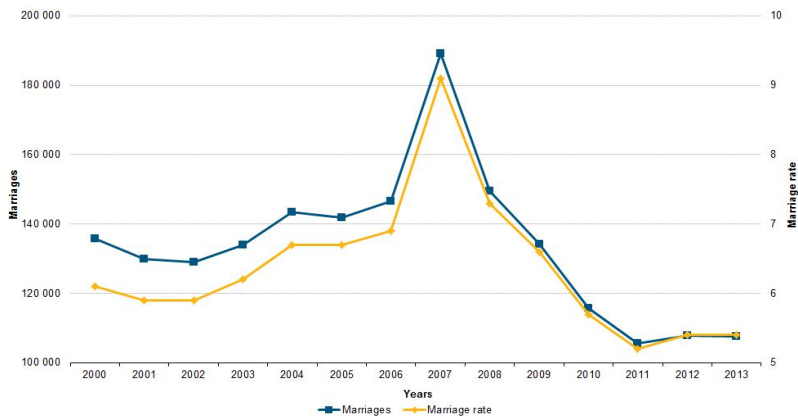
Hater emphasizes that when a Catholic marries a person validly baptized in another Christian community (for example, Lutheran, Methodist or Episcopalian) the marriage is rooted in Christ through baptism, and their bishop, or his delegate, approves a dispensation for the mixed marriage. However, when a Catholic marries a person who is not baptized, no sacramental union exists and the Church exercises more caution in granting a marriage dispensation²⁸.

²⁸ Tom Connolly, *The Mixed Match*, in: “Orange County Catholic”, 6/11/2015. <http://occatholic.com/the-mixed-match/>.



VI. IFM for the Romanian Orthodox Majority

“Because of the attitude of the Communist regime towards religion and the Orthodox Church, the faith was to be down-watering, the religious sentiment had to be completely vanished and churches were to be irremediably discredited by being transformed into obedient tools of the state. Instead, it was otherwise; there was faith and a strong belief in God. Some of the first acts of political attitude after December 1989 headed towards giving up the religious monopole that the Christian Orthodox Church had at that time. In April 1990, a new decree-law was issued by the head of the state, Iliescu Ion at that time, through which the Romanian Church United with Rome (the Greek-Catholic Church) was officially recognized; until than it did not have this public state”²⁹.



2 in

Fig. 1. Marriages and marriage rate in the 2000-2013 period in Romania. Source: *National Statistical Office of Romania*

It was a fact that the Romanian Orthodox majority and its belonging Church was unprepared for the religious pluralism that came along with the change of political leadership in '89 and for that reason, for many years, the orthodox population and Church denied that other Christian denominations have any right of coexisting in Romania, but no, after a long dispute and multiple communications pathways raised mostly by heterodoxies in order to receive a legal, rightful place of existence, the situation changed dramatically.

While the Orthodox Church didn't reconsider its strategy in the coexistence in a religious diversity environment, the Romanians have did it, readapted and refolded easier. The 'IFM strategy' of heterodoxies denominations gain numbers of many young people, using the 'inter-generation conflict' on their side for the errors and inconsistencies the mainline religion has done in Romania for the latest decades. That is why we can see in Romanian youth today not only a strong and increasing denial of engaging Orthodoxy, but even worse, they tend to deny any religious path for they are utterly confused about what is going on in the religious public scene. In a stage where every denomination fights not for convincing people of their rightness, but against all others, it is not surprisingly that youth – a social level age that has not gain a strong and unshakable belief in any social domain, political, religious, economical, etc. – is bewildered in placing into consignment their religious trust and path to anyone who doesn't show understanding to its followers over one of other aspects of life. That is why the percentage of legal marriage is continuous decreasing³⁰, and when they contract a matrimony, more youth back up from religious ceremonies.

³⁰ Radu Baetica, *Marriages and births in Romania. Romania between modernism and traditionalism.* June 2015, http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Marriages_and_births_in_Romania.

The children born in IFM families are another interesting and very important issue to be taken into consideration for they have social, psychological and religious problems that children from same-faith families do not have. They tend to embrace one of their parents religion, to mixt them and emerge another new one or to give up religious faith because of the contradictions discussed upon religious issue in their extended family.

“More and more children are being born out of marriage, which means that this decision no longer depends as much on the status of married person, on the opinion or disapproval of other people, but is mainly determined by other criteria: finding a suitable life partner, receiving an adequate income, having the material resources necessary for properly raising and educating children, special circumstances in the life of every individual, etc.”³¹.

One of the advantage our peers have is the consideration and opening towards interfaith-marriage. There is none that denies these couples their bond and expel them as the Orthodox Church still does. Of course, we can sit on our traditions and canons and make no compromise in this case, considering – again – that it is unlike us to accept it and that it will pass over time. It was the same case for so many other religions and confessions all over the world, but, for the same reasons we are now facing, they made up their mind and face the reality: we can sit behind our sufficiency and say that IFM is not our problem, and that couples have to decide prior coming to ask for Church’s blessings. But, if the rate of no-longer-getting-religious-marriage is not a considerable aspect yet, at least the tremendous rate of divorces coming from 20-29% of the legal-married couple should do. It proves, on the world divorces’ map, that population is no longer attached to traditional religious views and also that traditions and religiousness have less impact on people’s life.

³¹ *Ibidem.*

Fig. 2. Romania in the world divorces' map. Source: Business Insider

Conclusions

If we have been acting according to our traditional canons, we did this from a position of privileged faith in the eyes of our adepts, but this is no longer the position we enjoy. Until the December '89 Revolution, the whole country was under one, single and more or less efficient religious umbrella, that of the Orthodox Church. Consequently, with the opening borders came the wide range of confessions that had a single purpose, to gain the trust of Romanians and get their attention/conversion. Unprepared, the mainline of religiousness of Romanians, the Orthodox Church, saw that as a threat to its welfare and has acted in kind, but randomly, without a national strategy and a directive line. The superior line of leadership was 'in a state of denial'³² and has refused to see this menace as a real threat, therefore we are standing now, after 27 years, on the same self-sufficiency, considering that this will pass by itself. But, we all can see clearly now that time only makes the cracks get worse, unless we don't respond back with a concerted strategy.

“How did Romania receive the religious pluralism after the Revolution, as a pluralism within Christianity? In the beginning clumsily – like any beginning – with emotions, with opposition, with confrontations. But, in time, Romanians realized and accepted that everyone is entitled to be in this world as they are, even if these people seem to be different in some ways”³³.

³² See for more information in Cosmin T. Ciocan, *A psycho-sociological overview of religious life in Romania*, in: “Religious Pluralism in Global Perspective”, Proceedings of International Symposium, 15-16 July 2014, Santa Barbara, California: Religious Studies Department and funded by the U.S. State Department, p. 295-300.

³³ Cosmin T. Ciocan, *A Psycho-Sociological ...*, in: “Danubius”, p. 397.

Trust is the most important currency of our times. Destruction of trust immediately leads to destruction of social, emotional and financial values, as we can sadly witness in public scandals. One remedy to address this is to encourage and enable responsible leaders and responsible leadership. If we can show sympathy and care about our adepts and lean on their need to be understood and considered further as our primary target of the Pastoral Care and mission of our Church, then we maybe regain their trust and will to remain and declare themselves as Orthodox.

Here I placed some Motivation for a new approach to the situation of these IF marriages on the Orthodox Church's behalf:

1. If they still tend to seek the blessing of the Church for their marital union, the Church must see in this a favoring for the Orthodox Christian belief in their family and that cannot be but a cause for rejoicing in this historical period in which faith in G-d in general and the Orthodox one in particular are obsolete.

2. The Church was made to care for its spiritual children, whoever they might be: those already baptized and under its tutelage, but also those who, not yet baptized, are by extension under the guidance and care of Christ in the world, *I have other sheep*. In this regard, acceptance and afterwards hard advising the family members to embrace the Orthodox believe should be part of the new strategy of Church.

3. The current attitude – to categorical and irrevocable reject mixed marriages – does nothing but harm to both the teaching of the apostolic faith as I have presented in this paper, and also to the OC particularly. Because so, those rejected, along with all those close to them, lose confidence and thus the connection with OC, and then they are only prey to sectarianism. This probably in the best situation, because it often happens that, besides the cases of conversion to the confessions that accept IFM, to succumb to despair in any religious way, and become the militant atheists, both in their soul, and their descendants'.

4. In the meantime, the personal but still subjective implication on this matter of a bishop or another are not a way of dealing with the situation of IFM. We know that, due to the possibility of Hierarchical economy situations like this are left in hands of a religious leaders, who, by derogation, can accept a case of IFM. But I see this subjectivity in solving situations and not the real issue only as a counterproductive method of approach. In a society where most of issues are debated in public, through Media, the subjectivity of dealing with IFM – in the sense that some are tolerated and other denied – we can no longer use this rule quietly, without harming our adepts' feelings for the Church. They see their rejection vs others' acceptance as an affront and moreover as an act that the Orthodox Church is not a whole, a unity in which same rule is applied on the same situation and thus not a trustful denomination to lean on for religious counseling. Therefore, a new rule, generally applied with same reinterpretation of the Church iconomy over the IFM case has to be issued in a twinkle.

5. Another and probably the most important reason is the fact that, by expelling IFM couples from the blessings of the Church, we are only giving up on them in front of any other believe their peers might have. Deserted by their own Church they are condemned to follow the other religious path which is, for certain, more understandable and receivable, so it will take them under their umbrella without hesitation. Exposed in most cases to questions like 'if you believe in them, why they reject you?', they have no other answer but to follow another religious way that embrace them without questioning. They usually resist Orthodox for a couple of years, still trying and hoping, but in the end they give up hope and eventually their Church. For that reason only we have to reconsider our strategy with IFM for the simple, strong and consciousness-relief reason that, if such a couple come and ask for the Orthodox Church's blessing, than this has to represent a meaningful reason that they are incline to entrust their lives and believes into Orthodoxy. If an IF

couple came for our blessing then it is because the other heterodox half is not a strong practitioner or that he respect and maybe even incline to listen to our side of religious truth. I cannot find a more convincing reason for accepting IF couples to be kept on our behalf by a simple and meaningful blessing.

I believe that all these destructive consequences of the unity of the Church of Christ, as well as losing sight of the mission of the earthly Church [to gain every soul the benefit of redemption by any means as St Paul], entitle us to review the principles of the strategy that OC addresses the multiple cases of IFM, but mostly of those who ask for this blessing of Church, which should not reject anyone under any pretext, no matter how large the invoked canon/law would be, without forgetting that *there is not the law that puts us in front of Christ, but the love and grace. For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would inherit the world was not through the law, but through the righteousness that comes by faith* (Rom. 4:13).

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