



"I WANT MY KIDS TO BE BLOND" ***EXPLORING INTER-RACIAL MARRIAGES***

Fr. Pishoy Salama St. Mark church, Toronto, Canada

In a recent unofficial gathering for a group of university students and recent graduates at a home, a conversation was started on inter-racial marriages. The discussion went on for a lengthy period having everyone expressing their own personal views on the subject. Many of them expressed different reasons why someone would want to marry from outside their culture. Someone said that our culture is too strict and that it is really hard to get to know someone from inside the church. Parents usually expect that if a male calls their daughter it means that they will automatically get married. Others think that it's not always easy to find a match from the church youth since they had been brought together and they feel almost like siblings. Another opinion was that it is easier to associate with eastern youth since they are more compatible with in their views, culture, freedom and goals in life. Many had agreed that it's much better to find someone from inside the church looking towards the future of their kids, their involvement with the church and their family relationships. One of them plainly looked at me and jokingly said "well, I don't care about all of that, I just want my kids to be blond". Anyhow, I felt that this was an important topic to start discussing with our children and youth and knowing exactly how



they felt about the criteria they use for choosing their future partners.

Our beloved Coptic Orthodox church is no longer an immigrant church but rather a citizen church. We are now having second and third generation Copts attending church and enjoying a nourished spiritual life. Children and youth are being brought up in a liberal culture that knows no discrimination because of race, religion, color or ethnicity. They want to be a part of that culture, yet they feel that they are being held back because of discriminating views of their parents. Therefore, basically telling your children that they can't be friends or

get married to someone because of their ethnic background would not work today. You need other convincing arguments such as behavior, negative influence, or lack of spirituality to start up a discussion. Yet, before we start throwing out or losing all the values and morals which we brought from our home lands, it is important to note that God has installed an honest parental feeling in moms and dads towards their children. This feeling is not joined with anyone else and both children and youth should seriously consider the advice of their parents before rushing into any decisions in life.

Inter-racial marriages had been a phenomenon on the increase in the last few years. We have seen youth go



away from home to attain their university degrees in a city where there are small or no Coptic congregations. By the time they graduate, it is possible that they have developed a serious relationship which they want to pursue further. Also, it is possible that they met someone socially from outside the church or from work. Lastly we have seen some dangerous relationships which have developed over the computer in either chat rooms, MSN, AOL or through dating services. These relationships cause a great deal of danger on our youth both emotionally, spiritually and even physically. It is recommended that youth should stay away from the latter relationships of knowing or being introduced to someone over the internet.

Does God approve of inter-racial marriages?

God has no problem with inter-racial marriages as long as the couples maintain their faith in Him alone. When Moses the prophet married an Ethiopian woman, both Aaron and Miriam spoke against him harshly. So, God's anger was aroused and Mariam became Leprous. Moses later prayed for her that she may be healed (Numbers 12). God was angry at Solomon because the women he married made him turn away from believing in Him. **"But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; Of the nations concerning which the Lord said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: forsurely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love"(1Kgs11:1,2).**

In the New Testament, God never discriminated against anyone, but rather offered his salvation to anyone who believes in him and is baptized. **"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son, that who ever believes in him shall not perish but have ever lasting life". (John 3:16).**

We have seen many biblical characters who were not from the mainstream believers. Yet, when God's light

has shined upon them, they excelled in spirituality more than their contemporaries. Such examples are Rahab (Josh 2, Matt 1:5), Ruth (Ruth1, Matt 1:5) and Cornelius the Centurion (Acts 10). St. Paul has clarified the point that everyone is equal in the sight of Christ and that we are all one in Him. **"For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave or free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"** (Gal. 3: 27, 28). St. John the beloved has seen a beautiful vision of heaven where people from all nations, tribes and tongues are standing before the throne and before the lamb (Rev. 7:9).

Advice before getting married:

Marriage is the most important decision that anyone will make in his/her life. One can register in a university but later change careers. One may purchase some clothes and exchanged them later. The policy for marriage is "No exchange or refund", it is... "As is where is "and" what you see is what you get". You only get one shot at it in your life time, so it is better be the right decision. Our beloved Coptic Church believes in the rule which our Lord Jesus Christ has established **"They are no longer two but one flesh, therefore what God has joined together, let no man separate"** (Matt. 19: 6).

Therefore, it is not the issue of race but rather that of compatibility. A person must invest a lot of time and prayer to know that this is God's will for his/her life. Here are some thoughts which should be considered before choosing a future spouse:

1- Faith: Is he/she willing to be a part of the Coptic Church? It is crucial that both partners have the same faith and denomination before getting married. I can assure you that the Church will do its best to accommodate any converts as long as we follow the teaching of the Holy Bible and of the Coptic Church's Holy Synod. Believe me that it hurts Clergy and parents



the most to see one of our youth getting married outside the Church. It doesn't mean that we have lost only an individual, but rather, that we lost a whole generation.

2- Spiritual growth: will this person bring me closer or farther away from God? Will we have a little church at our home and raise our children in the love and fear of God? Is this person's faith genuine or is there a chance for him/her to change back?

3- Spiritual advice and prayer: It is very important to ensure the awareness of your father of confession with what you are thinking. Abouna will both give guidance and pray with you about the matter. Pre-marriage counseling is crucial before any serious step. Investing in prayer to seek God's guidance to your future is crucial.

4- Parents: It is very important to receive the parents' blessings. Try not to rush things against their will but pray that if it is God's will that He may change their heart. If the parents are refusing, make sure to listen to their concerns.

5- Maturity and compatibility: Be sure that you are physically, financially, emotionally, socially and spiritually ready. Some youth introduce to us individuals as prospective spouses while being far from becoming ready to begin a serious and lasting relationship. They are attempting to legitimize this relationship while knowing of its eminent failure. So be honest to yourself in making mature decisions.

Conflicts that may come up:

Indeed, everyone can witness that there are numerous people who have joined the Church and the faith from

outside our ethnic community who had been a blessing to the whole congregation. I can vow that there are many marriages that were truly made in heaven, but also we have to agree that not all inter-racial marriages were successful. There are many reasons which we can discuss on why an inter-racial marriage may not succeed.

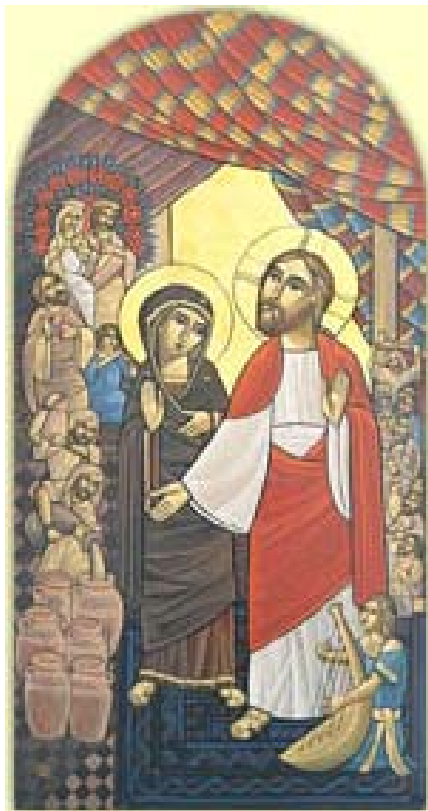
1- The inability of one partner to accept the other's cultural background and upbringing and finding common grounds to live by.

2- The inability to remain faithful to the spouse. This is usually a result of having multiple relationships before marriage and having no control over one's feelings after marriage.

3- The total neglect of one's feelings and the inability to express emotions and resolve problems in a constructive manner. **“Do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil” (Eph. 4:26, 27).**

4- The inability to agree on the faith and rituals which will govern their lives. One partner may change their mind about church after getting married, while church is an integral part of the other person's life.

5- The involvement of other people into the relationship which may harm and affect the couple's privacy. Such influences could be from Parents, friends, peers or other family members. It is recommended here that the only person that would be involved in any arguments or misunderstandings would be the





father confessor. This ensures the privacy of the matter and the sound spiritual guidance.

6- Focusing on one's career and forgetting family life and personal time together. The couple may spend innumerable hours working to establish their careers while forgetting to nourish their own relationship together. It is important to set some time off to spend together on a weekly basis and a long vacation yearly.

7- The influence of the Western culture on how easy it is to get divorced or out of a marriage. This is very dangerous and every one should not rush in or out of a marriage.

8- Intolerance to one's weaknesses. No one is perfect and a couple should be together for good or for worse, health or sickness, rich or poor.

It is important to note that some of these conflicts may occur in same race marriages also.

In writing this article, I was not advocating marrying from outside our culture, neither am I against marrying from within our Coptic Church. I believe that the majority of marriages has been and will continue to be from within the church community. I can not predict the future, but no one can deny that there has been a rise in inter-racial marriages within our community lately. We thank God that the majority of them have been embraced by the Church, while we have lost some. I believe that our Church will look different in the future, having accepted people from the four corners of the world, yet maintained its strong faith and spirituality. It is the responsibility of every Copt to open up their arms, hearts and homes to every new convert that walks into the Church. With embracing love and acceptance we should greet them and welcome them into our lives and churches. Will the Church ever look like heaven? What is my responsibility? What is your responsibility? Think...

Through the intercession and prayers of the holy **Theotokos Virgin Mary, St. Mark the apostle, the prayers of our beloved father H.H. Pope Shenouda III glory be to the Holy Trinity, One God. Amen.**

WHO AM I?



I WAS KNOWN AS "TEACHER OF THE KINGS"

I TAUGHT EMPEROR THEODOSIUS 2 CHILDREN

WHEN MY PARENTS DIED I GAVE ALL THEIR RICHES TO THE POOR AND

LIVED AN ASCETIC LIFE

I BECAME FAMOUS FOR MY RIGHTEOUSNESS AND WISDOM

AS A MONK I WOULD STAND OUTSIDE MY CELL AT NIGHT AND TURN MY BACK TO THE EVENING SUN, AND START PRAYING UNTIL THE SUN WOULD SHINE ON MY FACE THE NEXT MORNING

I LED A VERY QUIET AND SILENT LIFE, AND SAID "MANY TIMES I SPOKE AND AS A RESULT I FELT SORRY, BUT I NEVER REGRETTED MY SILENCE."

ST. ARSENIUS