



CATHOLIC OR NON-CATHOLIC, THAT IS THE QUESTION.

We interrupt our regularly scheduled Marriage Matters to bring you the long-lost 23rd Issue. Thank you to those who pointed out that it was missing, because I forgot to send it to the Communications Office in July. Sorry!

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While it may seem like it should be obvious, the question of whether someone is Catholic may not always be so simple. The issue becomes especially important when dealing with marriage and annulments because canon law generally only applies to Catholics. So, for example, in marriage, canon law requires Catholics to observe canonical form – to marry before a duly authorized Catholic minister and two witnesses. Non-Catholics are not bound by this requirement.

How does canon law define what it means to be Catholic? According to canon law, anyone who has been baptized in or, after baptism in another Christian tradition, has been received into the Catholic Church by a profession of

faith is considered Catholic. For canonical purposes, this is irrevocable: once a person is Catholic, he or she is always Catholic, regardless of any later choices or behavior.

So, for example, a man who was baptized Catholic could join a Protestant church, fall in love with a Catholic woman, and they could marry in the Catholic Church without permission for mixed marriage because, canonically, they are both Catholic.

Having said that, not all Catholics are the same. The Catholic “Church” is something of a misnomer because it is actually composed of numerous Churches, commonly, though mistakenly, referred to as rites. While all these Churches are united by our shared communion with the Roman Pontiff, each Church *sui iuris* is governed by its own law. This means that the Code of Canon Law of the Latin Church does not apply to Byzantine or other Eastern Catholics.

How does canon law determine to which Catholic Church a Catholic person belongs? Once again, it normally depends on which Church *sui iuris* a person is baptized in or received into by a profession of faith. There are some nuances to this, but that goes beyond the scope of

this issue of the newsletter. If, in your pastoral work, you find yourself ministering to an Eastern Catholic and you have questions, please feel free to contact us at the tribunal.

The canonical distinction between different Catholic Churches is important when dealing with marriage because the minister required for canonical form must be authorized to assist the couple at the celebration of marriage. Pastoral ministers are typically only authorized to assist at the marriages of Catholics of the same Church *sui iuris*. Therefore, if a Latin pastor is approached by a Catholic couple, one party being Latin and one Eastern, the pastor can celebrate the wedding due to the presence of the Latin party. However, if the same pastor is approached by two Eastern Catholics, or by an Eastern Catholic and a non-Catholic, the pastor cannot celebrate the wedding unless he first receives authorization (delegation) from the Eastern Catholics’ ordinary, which is requested through our tribunal office.

That’s it for this month. Until next time, keep the faith, love God’s people, and always honor the code!

