

separation and unquestionable sincerity, such an arrangement as suggested is utterly unacceptable under Jewish law and tradition.

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Converting a Married Woman

A Jewish man marries a Catholic girl in another country in a Catholic marriage ceremony. Later they come to the rabbi. The woman wants to be converted to Judaism and they want to be married as Jews and fledge to live as Jews. Is there any objection to the rabbi converting the wife and remarrying the couple who had been married previously by a Catholic marriage?

There is, of course, considerable Orthodox objection to converting to Judaism any non-Jewish woman who has lived with a Jewish man in marriage or common-law marriage or civil marriage, but this objection is not always heeded, and it is certainly the attitude of the Central Conference of American Rabbis to convert women married to Jews.

As for the status of the Catholic marriage, it is clear that

we consider Catholic marriage valid for Catholics, but whether it is valid for Jews is a complex question. The problem arose first with the Marranos, many of whom were married in churches and later escaped. Sometimes the woman escaped alone and the husband was killed. Is this woman a perpetual agunah, or was the church marriage not a marriage and she therefore free? There are two classic responsa on it. One is by Isaac Bar Sheshes. In his Responsum #6 he declares it is no marriage and that the woman is free to be remarried. His younger contemporary and rival in Algiers, Simon ben Zemach Duran, says (Vol. III, #47) that the church marriage is a marriage if there were valid Jewish witnesses present; otherwise it is not. In general, the weight of the authorities is that it is not a valid marriage if a Jew is involved. See the authorities quoted in Freimann, *Seder Kiddushin*, pp. 346 ff. For the whole discussion, see the "Report on Mixed Marriage and Intermarriage," *Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook*, Vol. 57 (1947).

Actually, the status of a couple's previous marriage is no concern of the rabbi. If a mixed-marriage couple comes before him with the request that the Gentile be converted, if he is convinced that they are both sincere, he certainly may convert a married woman as readily as he might a single woman even though, as mentioned above, some Orthodox authorities would oppose remarriage to a woman to a man to whom she had already been married; but on this the Conference is liberal, and many Orthodox rabbis are likewise liberal. Otherwise we would not be able to remarry people who had previously been married by civil authority because the same objection would apply, since they had lived together. It is for the rabbi to

satisfy himself that the pledge they make to raise their children as Jewish, to live a Jewish life, is a sincere one. If he is convinced of that, he certainly may convert and marry them. All this is understood as from our more liberal Reform point of view. This is the clear decision of the Conference; see "Report on Mixed Marriage and Inter-marriage," from which I quote:

If, however, the Christian member of the couple desires to convert, we should accept him or her, if sincere, as a candidate for proselytizing. In this regard our attitude would be consistent with that which we take in the case of a mixed civil marriage, in spite of the fact that under such circumstances traditional law would hesitate to accept the convert. Similarly, after conversion we would insist that the couple shall be remarried by a Jewish ceremony, (p. 12)

Conversion Without Marriage

May we convert, without consent of parents, a fifteen-year-old Christian girl who is voluntarily attending the congregation's Sunday school? (From Rabbi Meyer Heller, San Francisco, California)