

MARRIAGES IN CHURCH

P.F. JENSEN

"THE CHRISTIAN FAITH"

Recently released statistics show a marked drop in the number of people being married in church. In 1974, 82% of weddings were in church; now the figure is approximately 64%. The trend is bound to continue as civil celebrants find ways of making their ceremonies more attractive, and folk realise that they are no longer bound to the church on this important personal occasion.

Some people may think that the churches should be worried by this, but I, for one, have few regrets. The churches lose very little; and they actually gain some important ground. In the first place, it is becoming clearer and clearer that there is a distinction between Christians and the rest of society. I would be quite surprised if there were fewer Christians around these days, although there are certainly fewer people who use the church. It was undeniably true that the vast majority of those who were married in church had no real loyalty to it, or to the Lord. Their wedding service therefore involved them in a religious ceremony in which they did not believe. If this hypocrisy is on the decrease, then I think we should be very glad.

Furthermore, the decline of weddings gives the minister more time to do the essential work he was called to. It did sometimes happen, of course, that a marriage was an opportunity for Christian instruction; but more often than not it took up time and showed little return. Now the minister is more free to teach and evangelise; it also means more time to spend with his family on a Saturday -

no small gain if you work on Sundays.

As well, this means that those weddings that do take place in Church are all the more lovely. Bride and groom are not simply committed to themselves, they have a prior commitment to the Lord. There is something wonderfully joyful in a real Christian wedding, and when they are less frequent, people will begin to see this more clearly.

Of course, there is a loss. But the loss is not suffered by the Church as much as Society as a whole. For the mental and spiritual health of a nation depends upon the quality of its family life. Untold damage is wrought to adults and children when a marriage is unstable. Society as a whole then suffers - in a way which we are already seeing today - from people who bear the emotional and sometimes physical scars of bad upbringing. God's commandments are of fundamental importance for family life, and to flout them is to court disaster.

Naturally I am not saying that a civil marriage will go wrong and a Church marriage will succeed. That would be superstitious nonsense. But when we look at this whole trend, there are deeply disquieting consequences. At a vital point in their lives young people are not being encouraged to seek God's blessing and God's guidance. The total result must surely be disastrous.

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