



Omnem Sollicitudinem

On The Greek-Ruthenian Rite

Encyclical Of Pope Pius IX

May 13, 1874

To the Ruthenian Archbishops of Lwow, Halicz and Kamiensk and the other Bishops of the Same Rite in Friendship and Communion with the Apostolic See.

Venerable Brothers, Greetings and the Apostolic Blessing:

From the beginning years of Our lengthy Pontificate We have constantly striven to look after and foster the spiritual good of the Oriental Churches. We have solemnly declared, among other things, that their special Catholic liturgies, which Our Predecessors likewise held to be of the utmost importance, be scrupulously observed and kept in pristine condition.[1] In this regard, most clear indeed are the words of Clement VIII in His Constitution, *Magnus Dominus* (1595); Paul V in His Brief (10 December 1615); and especially, as well as others, Benedict XIV in His encyclical letters, *Demandatam* (1743) and *Allatae sunt* (1755).

2. Since, however, the closest possible link binds liturgical practice and dogmatic truths, the Apostolic See, as soon as it detected "any dangerous or unseemly rite creeping into the Oriental Church, has disapproved, condemned, and forbidden its use." [2]

3. On the other hand, this concern of preserving intact the ancient liturgies, has not prevented certain rites, borrowed from other Churches, from being admitted into the Oriental ritual. Gregory XVI of blessed memory wrote about these to the Armenian Catholics, "your ancestors, either admired them because they seemed more fitting and beautiful or, introduced them at various periods as a distinctive mark separating themselves from heretics and schismatics." [3] Therefore, as this same Supreme Pontiff declared, "that rule must be absolutely observed which states that, except for the most serious reasons and with the Apostolic See, no innovations are to be introduced into the holy rites of the liturgy, even under the pretext of restoring ceremonies which may seem to be more in conformity with liturgies approved by the same See." [4]

4. These principles were approved for the Churches of the Oriental rite as a whole. The liturgical practice of the Ruthenians, whom the Roman Pontiffs have always treated with singular signs of benevolence and special favors, is also governed by these principles, as has been frequently declared on appropriate occasions, especially in the earlier mentioned Brief of Paul V. Whenever their faith was endangered, the Apostolic See has immediately raised its voice to avert such an evil. Gregory XVI employed[5] solemn words when the Ruthenians became involved in the most painful situation in which 300,000 of them were lamentably torn from the bosom of the Church.

5. Likewise, the same Holy See helped the Ruthenians when long and grave controversies were stirred up in the ecclesiastical province of Lwow, not without detriment to Christian charity because of the diversity of discipline and rite and on account of the mutual relations existing between ecclesiastics of the Latin rite and those of the Greek, these controversies were happily settled and smoothed over by means of a convention or agreement proposed by the bishops of both rites and sanctioned by a decree of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda for Oriental Affairs (October 6, 1863).

6. Truly, the present wretched conditions in Lwow and, to an even greater degree, in the neighboring diocese of Chelm, again demand Our vigilance and solicitude. Indeed, We have recently learned that a very bitter controversy has been raised over liturgical matters among Catholics of the GrecoRuthenian rite, and that certain persons, even though invested with clerical orders, desirous of novelty, have attempted to change the rites to their own tastes. Some of these rites have been used from time immemorial, others solemnly confirmed by the sanction of the Synod of Zamosi, which had the approbation of the Apostolic See.[6]

7. But what pains Us even more is the wretched state of affairs now afflicting the diocese of Chelm. In effect, its bishop, whom We installed but a few years ago and who is still connected with that diocese by spiritual bonds, is gone and a certain pseudo-administrator, whom We long ago judged unworthy of episcopal dignity, has not feared to usurp ecclesiastical jurisdiction and overturn everything within that church. And beyond that he has even tampered with the canonically sanctioned liturgy on his own initiative.

8. To Our sorrow We have before Our eyes at this moment the circular letter published on 20 October 1873, in which the pseudo-administrator dares to make innovations in the exercise of divine worship and the sacred liturgy. No doubt his only purpose is to introduce the liturgy of the schismatics into the diocese of Chelm. In order to more easily deceive simple and uneducated people, he has unashamedly quoted certain constitutions of the Holy See and fraudulently interpreted them in his own way.

9. It is obvious to everyone that all the dispositions in the abovementioned letter are null and void; We, by Our apostolic authority, expressly declare it null and void.

To begin with, the previously mentioned pseudo-administrator totally lacks any ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Neither the legitimate bishop before his departure from the diocese nor subsequently the Apostolic See ever conferred any such authority on him. Thus he "has not entered the sheepfold by the door, but by some other way"[7] and should be considered an intruder, as is obvious to all.

10. Moreover the sacred canons of the Church prescribe that ancient Oriental rites legitimately introduced should be scrupulously retained. "Our Predecessors, the Roman Pontiffs, have frequently and purposefully agreed to approve or permit those rites insofar as they in no way oppose the Catholic faith nor cause danger to souls nor derogate from ecclesiastical dignity." [8] At the same time these canons have solemnly declared that no one whosoever, without consultation with this Holy See, may introduce even the slightest innovations into the liturgy. This is sufficiently and clearly indicated in the apostolic constitutions mentioned earlier.

11. Liturgical innovations of this nature proposed for the purpose of purifying the Oriental rites and restoring them to their pristine integrity are a pretext and therefore invalid. Indeed the liturgy of the Ruthenians can be no other than that which was either instituted by the holy fathers of the Church or ratified by the canons of synods or introduced by legitimate use, always with the express or tacit approval of the Apostolic See. If variations have occurred in this liturgy in the course of time, they have been instituted after consultation with the Roman Pontiffs and for the express purpose of freeing such rites from any taint of heresy or schism and expressing Catholic teaching more correctly and clearly for the preservation of the faith and the good of souls. Accordingly, nothing other is intended by the deceptive pretext of purifying rites and restoring them to their original condition than the preparation of pitfalls for the faith of the Ruthenians of Chelm, whom evil men are striving to tear from the bosom of the Church and to hand over to heresy and schism.

12. But among all our distressing difficulties, We are refreshed by the truly heroic display of bravery and constancy of spirit which the Ruthenians of the diocese of Chelm have recently offered before God, angels and men. They rejected the iniquitous orders of the pseudo-administrator, preferring to endure every ill, even extreme danger to their own lives, rather than to reject their ancestral faith and to give up the Catholic rites which they desire to preserve forever incorrupt and intact.

13. We, for Our part, will not cease to ask God that rich in mercy as He is, He kindly pour the light of His grace into the heart of those who unjustly trouble the diocese of Chelm. We will also ask that He likewise grant to the unhappy faithful there, destitute of all help and spiritual direction, His aid, and that He hasten the longed for relief of tranquillity.

14. Moreover, venerable brothers, We exhort you, also, who with such labor and singular zeal have undertaken the care of the Ruthenians entrusted to you, to

preserve scrupulously the liturgical practice approved by the Apostolic See or introduced with its knowledge and without its censure. Reject totally any innovation, and take care to instruct pastors and priests to observe most accurately, even under the strictest sanction of penalties, if need be, the sacred canons on these matters, especially those of the Synod of Zamosc. Indeed the question is a most grave one, that of the salvation of souls, since illegitimate innovations are causing the greatest peril to the Catholic Ruthenians in their faith and in their religious unity. Wherefore, no care is to be spared and nothing left untried so that all the disorder in liturgical matters excited there by evil men may be totally suppressed from its very beginning. We are confident, venerable brothers, that with God granting His grace, you will not fail to carry out these your duties both firmly and agreeably.

15. For this happy conclusion, venerable brothers, We lovingly in the Lord bestow the Apostolic Blessing on you and the flocks entrusted to your care.

1. Apostolic letter *In suprema*, 6 January 1848.
2. Benedict XIV, encyclical *Allatae sunt*, sect. 27, 26 July 1755.
3. Gregory XVI, letter *Studium paternae benevolentiae*, 2 May 1836.
4. Gregory XVI, letter *Inter gravissimas*, 3 February 1832.
5. An Allocation in Consistory, 22 November 1838.
6. Benedict XIII, brief *Apostolatus officium*, 19 July 1724.
7. Jn 10.1.
8. Benedict XIV, constitution *Etsi pastoralis*, 26 May 1742.