



Quas Vestro

On Mixed Marriages

Encyclical Of Pope Gregory XVI

April 30, 1841

To the Prelates of Hungary

Venerable Brothers, Greetings and Apostolic Blessing.

The letter from you and the bishops of your country which Joseph, the bishop of Csamad delivered has caused Us both sorrow and joy. Since We must diligently safeguard the integrity of sound doctrine and practice, We cannot help but be displeased with whatever might imperil them. And yet what the church has always thought about marriages between Catholics and non-Catholics is more than abundantly clear. Indeed she has always considered such marriages to be illicit and destructive both because of the disgraceful sharing in sacramental matters involved and because of the ever present danger of the Catholic spouse and improper upbringing of offspring. And this is the tenor of most ancient canons severely prohibiting such marriages and more recent sanctions of supreme pontiffs. What Benedict XIV says about such marriages in his encyclical to the bishops of Poland and in his well known work, *de Synodo dioecesana*, is more than sufficient. If, indeed, in certain places, because of difficulties of place and conditions, such marriages are tolerated, the reason is surely a sort of moderation. It is in no way to be considered approbation or approval, but merely a toleration, brought about not willingly but by necessity to avoid greater evils. The letter of Pius VII to the archbishop of Mainz, on 9 October 1803, in response to the bishops of Wroclaw, Roznava, and Spis, wisely states this. Moreover, if this Apostolic See, mitigating to some extent the full letter of the canons, has, on occasion, allowed such mixed marriages, it has done so only in serious cases and reluctantly. Moreover, it has done so only when precautions are taken to prevent the perversion of the Catholic spouse by the non-Catholic party. Also the Catholic party realized an obligation to work for the conversion of the other party; the Catholic party also realized that all offspring from such marriages be educated only in the sanctity of the Catholic religion. Such precautions are surely founded on divine law, against which, without any doubt, one seriously sins who rashly exposes himself or herself and future offspring to the danger of perversion.

2. Thus, from your letter We learn that in your dioceses an abuse has become common: namely, that marriages between Catholics and non-Catholics, without any previous dispensation from the Church and without necessary precautions, are dignified with priestly blessing and sacramental rites. It must be clear to you how deeply We are affected by this, especially since We perceive that once this license with regard to mixed marriages was introduced, it became widely disseminated. This in turn resulted in a rapidly spreading deadly indifference toward religion in your great kingdom, once so preeminent in the glory of the Catholic faith. Let us not be mistaken: We would scarcely have overlooked this practice if it had been known to Us earlier. This was the reason for Our silence. In the past the Apostolic See granted no dispensation whatsoever for entering such mixed marriages without the necessary preliminary conditions and without the customary regulations.

3. Nevertheless, it is no small consolation that at the same time as We were informed of this growing evil, We have likewise learned of your efforts and those of your colleagues to remedy it opportunely. We are joyful to learn with what zeal you are jointly inflamed to preserve intact the purity of the Catholic faith and with what reverence and devotion you support the Apostolic See, the leader and teacher of truth, which entrusted the exercise of the pastoral office to you. For when you realized that this practice, which had grown strong, was totally adverse to the laws and principles of the Church and therefore could no longer be tolerated without grave danger, you did not hesitate to insist on its removal and were fully prepared, if necessary, to endure danger for the sake of your eternal salvation and that of your flock. And completing Our joy are the abundant fruits which have emanated from your concern. Nor are we ignorant of how your pastors and other clergy have faithfully complied with your orders so that this illegitimate custom has been suppressed in many places out of regard for the ancient discipline of the sacred canons. And so we congratulate you all the more, venerable brothers, and render thanks to God who has endowed you with courage for the protection of the faith and its sacred teaching. We do not desist from exhorting you to continue to espouse the cause of the Church lest this evil usage ever revive, and that if any traces of it remain, it be totally eradicated.

4. Meanwhile We have not failed to pay careful attention to your letter in which you point out that sometimes a Catholic, despite his pastor's persuasion and exhortation to the contrary, persists in the intention of undertaking such a mixed marriage without the necessary precautions. You suggest that if the matter cannot be prevented without greater danger to the Catholic religion, the pastor be present at the marriage in a passive fashion only, abstaining completely from all religious rites and any other sign of approval. By way of precaution, you decided that such a serious matter should be brought to Our attention at once, in order to secure Our assent. And, indeed, We, who otherwise are intent on properly preserving intact the most holy doctrines and practices of the Catholic Church, will aid you in view of the calamitous circumstances of your region and the difficulties for you arising from them, by approving of the arrangement undertaken by your counsel and by

agreeing that your petition should be conceded.

5. We do this in keeping with what We permitted some time ago, following the example of Our predecessors, with regard to regions of other countries and with regard to what Pius VI declared on several occasions for one of the dioceses of Hungary itself. In a reply from Vienna to the bishop of Spis in 1782, which was repeated the following year after his return to Rome and in 1795 to that bishop's successor, he, in accord with the circumstances of the time, explained as follows: "Whatever be the laws regarding the matter, the bishop and pastors ought to see that marriages of this nature not take place. But if they do, all offspring should be educated in the Catholic faith. If these marriages do take place, they must always abstain from granting the nuptial blessing. Their presence, if necessity urges it, must be merely physical and not be joined with words or actions which would encourage or approve of the offspring being allowed to be raised other than in the Catholic religion."

6. Sometimes because of conditions of time, person, or place, the marriage of a non-Catholic to a Catholic without the precautions prescribed by the Church cannot be prevented without danger of greater evil or scandal to the detriment of religion. Pius VII in the above-mentioned letter to the archbishop of Mainz judged that it can tend to the benefit of the Church and the common good if marriages of this nature, although forbidden and illicit, be celebrated before a Catholic pastor rather than before a heretical minister to whom the parties could easily have recourse. On such occasions the Catholic pastor, or any other priest with his delegation, can be present at these marriages in a merely physical manner, without benefit of any sort of ecclesiastical rite. He could act merely as a qualified, as they say, or authorizing, witness; having heard the consent of both spouses, he may afterwards in accord with his office enter the act as valid in the matrimonial records.

7. Nevertheless, in these circumstances, as Our same predecessor aptly commends, bishops and pastors must zealously take precautions that the danger of perversion on the part of the Catholic party, as far as possible, be removed; that care be taken for the education of offspring of both sexes in the Catholic religion; and that the Catholic spouse be seriously admonished of the obligation by which he is bound to procure, as best as he can, the conversion of the non-Catholic spouse, which will be the best means for more easily obtaining pardon from God for the sins he has committed.

8. We grieve that this type of toleration is necessary in a kingdom so outstanding in the profession of the Catholic faith. We are compelled to this expedient to prevent more serious damage to the Catholic Church. Therefore, We beseech you and all your colleagues that in such a serious matter, having first implored that inspiration of the Holy Spirit, you strive to carry out what you truly judge to correspond to this end. Also see that such toleration towards mixed marriages does not extinguish the memory of the canons execrating such marriages as well as of the constant care of the Church to prevent her children from entering into

such marriages to the loss of their souls. It will be your task and that of your fellow bishops and pastors in educating these faithful either privately or publicly to zealously recount the teaching and laws pertaining to such marriages and to enjoin their strict observance. In the assurance that you will carry out all these instructions because of your proven observation, faith, and reverence for this chair of blessed Peter, We lovingly impart as a guarantee of heavenly aid and witness of Our paternal affection the apostolic blessing to you and all your colleagues to be communicated to the proper flocks of each.

Given in Rome at St. Peter's under the fisherman's ring on 30 April 1841, in the eleventh year of Our Pontificate.