



si si no no

"But let your speech be, 'Yes, yes,' 'No, no,' and whatever is beyond these comes from the evil one. (Mt. 5:37)"

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Okaying Mixed Marriages

A recent edition of *Famiglia Cristiana* [*The Christian Family*], an Italian magazine, published a "Letter of the Week" from a parish priest of "one of Rome's largest parishes." This priest wrote to say he did not agree with the reply of the magazine's house priest to a question sent in by a reader: "Does the Church allow a Catholic to be married in church to a [baptized] atheist who has not been confirmed?"...



The objecting priest would have preferred a straightforward "cut and dried answer: "Yes!" He went on to explain:

Yes, the Church allows this type of marriage because it *only* requires that both parties believe that marriage is once only, indissoluble, and open to life. So much has happened in this area. For instance, I have celebrated one such marriage - so beautiful - between a Catholic and a Jew. But in Milena's case, there is even an advantage. *Strictly speaking*, her marriage would not be treated as a *mixed marriage* because she is "non-believing but baptized, because marriage between the baptized is a sacrament anyhow" [emphasis ours].

Is this fellow really a priest? Is he even really a believer? Because, in fact, no one, least of all a parish priest, can erect a personal chair of authority that wars with the Church's unchangeable doctrine regarding marriage. Protestants do this, but not Catholics.

"Mixed" Marriage

Let's begin with "mixed" marriage. The objecting priest tries to pass off his examples as Church doctrine. He erroneously defines mixed marriage as being between a baptized and non-baptized person (e.g., a marriage between a Catholic and a Jew). More appropriately, "strictly speaking" such a marriage must be termed as being between parties of "different denominations." Without getting too technical, "strictly speaking," for "mixed" marriages, (i.e., between a Catholic and a heretic) the Church does not "only" require that the two entering into the marriage believe that marriage is once only, indissoluble, and that its main end is life. [Notice the subtlety of the language. The main end of marriage *is* life, not just that the couple be "*open*" to life," as if children were not the primary end but just a secondary appendix of matrimony.-Ed.] First of all, for such marriages, it is required that there be no

proximate danger to the faith of the Catholic spouse and, eventually, of the children.

In fact, such a marriage would be prohibited by divine, natural, and existing law. Moreover, both Canon Law and the Church would not be able to consent since God does not allow it. As Pius VII wrote to Napoleon, June 26, 1805: "If we usurp authority we do not have, we would be guilty of the most abominable abuse of our sacred ministry before the courts of God and the Church." Therefore, if proximate danger to faith exists, the Church has no power to grant a dispensation or license she does not have. This is because, up to the last "ecumenical" Council, the Church required that the non-Catholic give "guarantees" in order to insure that, as Pope Pius VIII wrote in *Litteris Altero*, "the natural and divine law is respected," thereby securing the marriage's validity.

It is true that the new "ecumenical" rule is mitigating. For instance, the "guarantees" are now called "conditions" and are gotten from the Catholic spouse and not the non-Catholic one. But the new ecumenical rule has not gone so far as wanting to destroy the principle of divine law as the objecting priest arrogates to himself. Also, the *1983 Code of Canon Law* (Chap. VI: Mixed Marriages) recognizes the prohibition (can. 1124). The marriage is *invalid* if the marriage is between a baptized and non-baptized person (can. 1086, §1) and the competent authority's license is subject to there being a "just and reasonable cause," and to three conditions. The first two concern the removal of "dangers" to the Catholic spouse's faith and the children's education (can. 1125, §§1,2).

The local Ordinary can grant this permission if there is a *just and reasonable cause*. He is not to grant it unless the following conditions are fulfilled.

§1) The Catholic party is to declare that he or she is prepared to remove dangers of defecting from the faith, and is to make a sincere promise to do all in his or her power in order that all the children be baptized and brought up in the Catholic Church;

§2) the other party is to be informed in good time of these promises to be made by the Catholic party, so that it is certain that he or she is truly aware of the promise and of the obligations of the Catholic party; . . . [emphasis added].

Only Paragraph 3 concerns marriage's ends and essential elements.

§3) Both parties are to be instructed about the purposes and essential properties of marriage, which are not to be excluded by either contractant.

Obviously, the objector considers this "ecumenical" mitigation of little importance. On his own initiative he has done away with the first two conditions, namely, those safeguarding divine law! His defense-minded statement in his letter to *Famiglia Cristiana* of, "So much has happened in this area," is not supported by the 1917 Code of Canon Law promulgated during the reign of Benedict XV (which reiterates the Church's constant law), nor is it in the 1983 Code despite all of its "ecumenical" openings. The objecting priest's doctrine is his own, and not the Church's.

A Parish Priest Who Does Not Think with the Church

So much, then, for thinking that a marriage between the baptized and non-baptized is "so beautiful," or as the parish priest says: "I have celebrated such a marriage between a Catholic and a Jew." We don't know how the priest is able to reconcile his thinking with the Church's consistent thinking.

Regarding mixed marriages between Catholics and non-Catholics [i.e., valid, but illicit without the required conditions-Ed.], Pope Clement XI wrote, "The Church abhors such marriages, which greatly endanger and deform the spirit" (June 25, 1706).

In *Matrimonia Quae in Locis* (Nov. 4, 1741) Benedict XIV spoke of "sacrilegious unions," of "detestable marriages, always...condemned and prohibited by Holy Mother Church." And Pope Pius VI wrote, "This type of conduct gives rise to the danger of perverting the Catholic party... We cannot abandon our position because we do not have the right to do so" (*Letter to the Archbishop of Malines*, July, 1782).

Pope Pius VII reiterated the tradition:

The Church has always abhorred marriages between Catholics and heretics and has always prohibited them with very severe laws because they always conceal the grave danger of perversion and estrangement from the faith of the Catholic spouse, and because the Catholic education of the children of both sexes is always doubtful and suspect. (*Letter to the Archbishop of Mayence*, Oct. 8, 1803)

In the aforementioned letter to Napoleon, Pope Pius VII wrote that the Church "abhors" such marriages. He also wrote that marriages between Catholics and Protestants are valid. And if the Church abhors an illicit but valid marriage between a Catholic and Protestant, how much more the Church abhors marriage between a Catholic and an unbaptized person. In such a marriage, if the required guarantees are not present, such marriages are not only illicit but also invalid.

As a symbol of Christ's union with His Church (Eph. 5:22,23), Christian marriage is a "social" sacrament. Its purpose is to give children to God, to adore Him, and to give new members to the Church and citizens to heaven (Leo XIII, *Ubi Arcanum*). Seeing this, one can understand why the Church, far from considering a mixed marriage "very beautiful," has always abhorred and reproved it. Keeping divine law safe through the "guarantees," the Church eventually tolerated it. The purpose of this tolerance was defined by Pope Pius VII in his above-quoted letter to the Archbishop of Mayence:

In no way can tolerance [of such marriages] be seen as their being approved and allowed. Rather, such marriages are only tolerated out of the need to avoid even greater evils, and permission is not given wholeheartedly.

The Church Fathers had already recognized that in such marriages there is no image of Christ's union with His Church, but rather an image of Christ's own being prostituted. (See Tertullian, *Ad uxorem*, 2, 3-4; St. Ambrose, *Ep.* 19,7; St. Jerome, *Adv. Lovin.* 1,10; St. Augustine, *De fide et oper.* 19,38).

The "Advantage" of Marrying a Baptized, Declared Atheist

The objecting parish priest writes that in the concrete case he is addressing, "...there is actually an advantage." Strictly speaking, her marriage would not be treated as a mixed marriage because she is "non-believing but baptized, because marriage between the baptized is a sacrament anyhow."

This parish priest forgets that a baptized person who has announced that he or she is "non-believing," is, without the euphemism, an atheist, and so, is an apostate.

Heresy is the obstinate denial or doubt, after baptism, of a truth which must be believed by divine and Catholic faith. *Apostasy is the total repudiation of the Christian faith* [emphasis added]. Schism is the withdrawal of submission to the Supreme Pontiff or from communion with the members of the Church subject to him (1983 *Code of Canon Law*, can.751).

Thus we are talking about a case of marriage with a person who is unworthy due to their public defection from the Faith of their very own baptism.

What is the Church's mind regarding such a marriage? The Church's mind is that the faithful must abstain from contracting such marriages and that pastors of souls, via their office's need for charity and piety, ought to dissuade the parents, friends, etc. Lanza-Palazzini writes:

The reason why the faithful should not enter into these marriages is easy to understand...also for the children's sake, and there is a great danger of perversion, even greater than in mixed marriages.¹

In fact, the Church has always treated these marriages with the same discipline as mixed marriages. Thus, the *1757 Code of Canon Law* which reiterates the Church's age-old positions prohibits the parish priest from celebrating these marriages without consulting the bishop, who could allow them only after having examined *1)* if there is a grave reason for contracting such a marriage; *2)* if there is sufficient provision for the eventual children's Catholic education, and also a provision for the removal of the danger of the believing spouse's faith being perverted. Again quoting Lanza-Palazzini: "If this is lacking, the Ordinary cannot allow the marriage, because divine law forbids it."² So, there is no reason for the objecting priest to rejoice that there is an "advantage" in marrying a baptized atheist.

It is not true that in such a case the marriage "is a sacrament *anyhow*." It is not enough to receive any sacrament "anyhow" because the necessary dispositions are lacking and a sacrament can be unworthily received and thus invalidly so.

The general rules for the reception of the sacraments apply for matrimony, taking into account that the spouses themselves are this sacrament's ministers. In the case in point, there is the risk that the sacrament would be invalid and the union null because the "non-believing" party only wants to *effect* the marriage contract, but wants to exclude the very *sacrament* by which Christ unites them. To validly receive a sacrament there must be the intention to habitually receive it. For the baptized, marriage is a sacrament or it is nothing.

Certainly, in the case in point, the atheist unworthily received the sacrament, but it *was* conferred on an unworthy person, i.e., the believer. The believer's cooperation on behalf of the non-believer's sacrilege by being only material has to be justified by a proportionately grave reason, which only the ecclesiastical authority, and not the interested parties, can decide. [Marriage is a sacrament of the living and the spouses must be in that state of grace. -Ed] Taking all of this into account, it is easy to see that ecumenical pastors are pushing their sheep into a huge abyss.

Repudiation of "Our Religion's Firmest Doctrine"

So, if we look for an answer to why, today, mixed marriages - whether broadly or strictly considered as does the objecting priest - are *encouraged*, if we note Pius VII's words that "the Church has always abhorred [such marriages]," we see that the sole cause is the ecumenism that Vatican II wished to set in motion.

On the subject of women who wish to enter into mixed marriages, Pope Pius VIII wrote that such women must remember "our religion's firmest doctrine is 'Outside the Catholic Church, no one can be saved'" (*Litteris Acerbo*, Mar. 25, 1830). Consequently, in the case of a woman entering into such a marriage, her conduct would be cruel and atrocious because she knows that her children's education depends entirely on what the non-Catholic father wants.

And in his May 27, 1832 encyclical, *Summo iugiter*, Gregory XVI deplored that in Bavaria,

...by every possible means some are attempting to spread the principle of absolute freedom to contract mixed marriages ... To treat this question, we must first concern ourselves with the faith, [for] without it, we cannot please God (Heb. 11: 6).. and as we have previously stated, this doctrine [i.e., outside the Church there is no salvation] is endangered by those who want to bring about a system that goes beyond certain limits in fostering liberty in mixed marriages....Whether men or women, Catholics who demonstrate recklessness by marrying non-Catholics, and who thus place their children in danger of being perverted, not only violate the sacred canons, but also seriously and directly sin against natural and divine law.

Have natural and divine law changed? Is it that the Catholic hierarchy don't care to give the faithful clear ideas about "mixed" marriages (in both the broad and strict sense), and, who, countering the Church's unchangeable teaching, favor and exalt such marriages? Evidently, our religion's "firmest doctrine" is not very firm in the shepherds themselves.

Ecumenical Folly

As against the duties of his office, the objector-priest only cares about the atheist's interests. In addition to the letter partially quoted at the beginning of this article, he says that in the marriage rite, there must "never be any violation of the sacrosanct rights of non-believers."

Obviously, there are no problems when consensus rules. With satisfaction he notes that, "God has no denomination." In the formula for exchanging rings there is one modification he says must be put into place. The objector-priest says, "It would suffice to omit the invocation to the Trinity." It is clear how the atheist must be respected due to the "sacrosanct rights" of the non-believer. With complete peace of mind, the *genuinely* sacrosanct rights of the Catholic party are ground underfoot! If this is not lunacy, we don't know what is.

Jancynthus

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1. Lanza-Palazzini, *Principi di teologia morale*, vol. III, *Sacramenti e vita sacramentale* (Principles of moral theology...Sacraments and Sacramental Life) (Rome: Studium), p.557.

2. Ibid., p.557.