

The Archbishop of Canterbury's  
COMMISSION ON ROMAN CATHOLIC RELATIONS

Copy of a letter from the Right Revd. Thomas Holland,  
Bishop of Salford, to the Clergy in his Diocese.

17/68

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Wardley Hall,  
Worsley,  
Manchester.

30th July, 1968.

TO THE CLERGY

My dear Father,

MIXED MARRIAGES

Christian Marriage, as a sign of the union between Christ and His Church, of itself implies that husband and wife are of one mind and heart as well as one flesh, and serve together to develop the new life of baptism in themselves and in their children. Though dispensations for mixed marriages are possible, and may vary in difficulty from time to time, our traditional opposition to mixed marriages remains unchanged at the deepest level.

There have been recent changes in the discipline concerning mixed marriages. Normally the usual promises must be made in writing. A number of couples are now demurring at making the usual promises. These notes are offered for your guidance in these cases.

1. Where the non-Catholic party refuses to give a written promise regarding the Catholic baptism and upbringing of the children: then the non-Catholic should be asked to make the promises verbally, either to the priest or to the Catholic party. The Catholic party will then sign a declaration that this promise has been made and the priest will countersign the document. The existing ordinary application form should be used, with any necessary alterations, and sent to the Curial Office. (It is hoped that soon new forms will be drawn up for use in all dioceses of England and Wales.)
2. Where the non-Catholic party refuses to promise even verbally that the children will be baptised and brought up as Catholics: then the Catholic party must be made aware of his/her solemn obligation in divine law to see that the children are baptised and brought up as Catholics and must be willing to undertake this to the best of his/her ability. The non-Catholic is to be made aware of this solemn obligation of the Catholic party and must promise at least not to interfere with his/her fulfilment of it. The alternative application form (cf. Ad Clerum 15/66, 11th May 1966) should be used, and the verbal promise made by the non-Catholic party not to hinder the Catholic in his/her practice of the Catholic religion and not to prevent the Catholic from keeping the promise that all the children of the marriage will be baptised and brought up in the Catholic religion must be witnessed by the signature of the Catholic party. The priest will then countersign the application form if he is morally certain that both parties will keep their undertakings.

contd./....

3. Where the non-Catholic party refuses on grounds of conscience to make even a verbal promise such as the one described overleaf (i.e. at least not to hinder the Catholic in his/her practice of the Catholic religion and not to prevent the Catholic from keeping the promise that all the children of the marriage will be baptised and brought up in the Catholic religion), then all relevant details should be sent to the Ordinary. If the unwillingness to make any such promise comes from other than conscientious grounds the application will not be further considered.

4. Where the non-Catholic party requests that the marriage take place in a non-Catholic church: then

a) the alternative may be offered by the priest of either going to the non-Catholic church for a simple service of prayers and blessing after the marriage has taken place in the Catholic church, or of inviting the non-Catholic minister to be present at the marriage in the Catholic church, where he may take his place within the sanctuary wearing whatever robes he considers suitable. He may say words of congratulation and encouragement at the end of the ceremony.

b) If neither of these alternatives is acceptable, application may be made to Rome through the Ordinary for a dispensation from canonical form, but such application will only be considered where the non-Catholic minister is a close relative of the non-Catholic party or where there are special compassionate grounds.

As far as possible such cases as the above should be dealt with at parochial level. Some couples, after initial difficulties, come to see that to begin a mixed marriage without clear regulations is to postpone trouble to a time when a solution may not be possible. In cases where the non-Catholic is adamant on conscientious grounds the solution is not usually to be found in seeking an interview with the Ordinary. Applications for dispensations should be made as usual. A covering letter giving all relevant details (cf. 3 above) should be sent. The couple should be warned that they are making an unusual request and that they cannot therefore expect an early answer.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

+ THOMAS

Bishop of Salford.