

Benedict XIV and His Sacramental Policy on the Eastern Churches (1740–1758)

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Abstract

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From the eighteenth century onward, as the Catholic Church continued to expand to include increasing numbers of Eastern Catholics, Pope Benedict XIV and other Roman authorities and theologians grappled with numerous ecumenical, ecclesiological, liturgical, and sacramental questions precipitated in part because of this increased liturgical diversity in the East, and increasing liturgical uniformity in the West in the aftermath of Trent. Papal interventions in this period may be divided into three types: regulatory norms for sacraments; pastoral letters from the pope; and “scholarly” interventions from the pope in his role as one theologian among many participating in an on-going debate. The main documents of this period (*Etsi Pastoralis*; *Demandatam*; and *Eo Quamvis*) are reviewed along with numerous others, and their implications for Melkite Greek Catholics, Coptic Catholics, Italo-Greeks, and others are analyzed.

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Introduction

In the course of his pontificate, Benedict XIV dealt with many questions connected with the Catholic rites and the juridical values of the sacraments in a systematic manner. He carried out this work by differentiating the related topics in which the various disciplines had to be applied. These included whether the neophytes lived in a mostly Catholic environment or whether the Catholics lived in a mostly Protestant setting, under a “heretic” ruler or under the “Turkish” domination; whether the Catholics of the Eastern rite were subject to a bishop of Latin rite or in contact with Eastern Orthodox Churches. His interventions that regulated the rites and sacraments on behalf of the Eastern Catholics are part and parcel of this comprehensive whole.

Pope Benedict XIV’s interventions on the topic of the sacraments can be divided into three typological parts. In first place we have the regulatory norms, which concern the individual aspects of the sacraments or deal with the solution of doubts about them and with specific cases of a regulatory nature. In second place, the Pope often coupled his legislations with interventions that we might call of an instructive nature, characterized by a distinctive pastoral concern, which was meant to explain and “clarify” the “simple letter” of the law. Finally, Prospero Lambertini, even as pope, was not afraid to intervene as a scholar in the open debate concerning the matter of the sacraments by way of his erudite writing.

The main documents dealing mostly with the sacraments for Eastern Catholics are the following: *Etsi Pastoralis* of May 2, 1742 dedicated to the sacraments of the Greeks in Italy; *Demandatam* of December 24, 1743 for the Greek-Melkites; and *Eo Quamvis* of May 4, 1745, addressed to the missionaries working for the conversion of the Copts of Egypt. To these documents we should add the decree concerning the doubts connected with the marriage of a deacon who had been given the sacrament of order as a child, *Anno Vertente*, of June 19, 1750.

Internal references dictate that we read the norms concerning Eastern Catholics alongside the apostolic constitutions

on the sacraments for neophytes and Catholics in their relationship with infidels and heretics due to their obvious and explicit connections between the two groups. Belonging to the second group are the important intervention *Inter Omnigenas*, of February 2, 1744 concerning the sacraments of the Catholics that were subject to Ottoman domination in Serbia and Albania; *Omnium Sollicitudinum*, of the year 1744, concerning the Chinese and Malabarese rites; *In Suprema*, of January 16, 1743, concerning the marriage of neophytes converted from Judaism; and *Cum Venerabilis*, of January 27, 1757, concerning the faculty of dispensation in the case of the marriage of neophytes. A separate group consists of various letters that deal with the problem of regulating the baptisms of Jewish children and adults and the marriages contracted while still living in the Jewish faith: *Postremo Mense* of February 28, 1747; *Apostolici Ministerii Munus* of September 16, 1747; *Singularis Nobis* of February 9, 1748 concerning the marriage of a Jewish neophyte and a converted Calvinist woman; *Probe Te Meminisse* of December 15, 1751. Finally we should add also *Magnae Nobis Admirationis* of June 29, 1751 concerning the marriages between Catholics and heretics.²

The task of regulating the matter of the sacraments for the Eastern Catholic Churches is undertaken by the Pope in the three most important apostolic constitutions already quoted, in the reformation of the *Euchologion* [=Sacramentary] for the Eastern Churches, in a treatise dedicated to the sacraments, originally conceived as part of the *De Synodo Dioecessana* [=Diocesan Synod], published only later as the letter *De Sacramentis* [=The Sacraments].³ Our study will concentrate on

² For the decisions of Pope Benedict XIV, we refer to the legislation published in the *Magnum Bullarium Benedicti Papae XIV*, vol. I–II, accurate reprint of Graz 1966 of vol. I–IV of the Collection of Bulls in the Roman edition respectively of the years 1746, 1749, 1753, 1757. The entire collection of this legislative activity concerning the sacraments is the subject of the contribution “*Sempre tenendo saldo il legame con la Chiesa madre e maestra: Sacramenti e alterità da Paolo III a Benedetto XIV. Spunti di riflessione*,” in *Atti in onore di Adriano Prosperi* (Pisa, 2010), to which I would like to refer.

³ The manuscripts of the letter *De Sacramentis* were kept in part in the Secret Vatican Archive (from now on referred to as ASV), later moved to the

this letter, by highlighting some specific contents and elements from an overall reading.

The interventions on the sacraments of the Eastern Catholics are part of an overall system, as is detailed by the attached table which collects the whole legislation of Benedict XIV on the sacraments contained in the first volume of bulls.⁴

The three apostolic constitutions addressed to the Eastern Catholics deal with the whole sacramental structure. All other papal interventions which deal with a single sacrament, or are about specific abuses that are connected with the situations of the old Christian world, deal mostly with the sacrament of orders, and with the pair Eucharist-penance.

This formulation has a definite foundation and continuity that goes back to the years that preceded Benedict's pontificate, as it emerges from the comparison with the decisions taken during the period when he was the archbishop of Bologna.⁵ The 107 notifications for the diocese, from the point of view of their contents, can be classified, with some repetitions, into a first group of regulations about the reform of the customs of the clergy or of the religious sisters; a second group of norms about the sacraments; and finally, a third group of instructions about rites and practices. The first are of a juri-

Apostolic Vatican Library, and in part in the Library of the University of Bologna (Mss. 268, vol. I–IV). Based on the ASV manuscripts, the *Benedicti XIV Papae Opera inedita, Primum publicavit Franciscus Heiner* (Freiburg of Brisgovia, 1904).

⁴ Our choice concerns only the first volume since it was published according to the index and the selection set down by the pope himself. See Ch. Lefebvre, *Le premier volume du Bullaire de Benoît XIV constitue-t-il une Collection Authentique?* in *L'Année canonique* 17 (1973): 615–621.

⁵ *Raccolta di alcune notificazioni, editti e istruzioni pubblicate dall'Eminentissimo e Reverendissimo signor Cardinale Prospero Lambertini, arcivescovo di Bologna e principe di S.R.E. per buon governo della sua diocesi*, I–V (Rome: Archiepiscopal Press, 1742); the diocesan publication was followed by a Roman edition and a Latin translation (*Institutiones Ecclesiasticae Prosperi Lambertini S.R.E. cardinalis archiepiscopi bononiensis, postea Benedicti decimiquarti Pontificis Optimi Maximi, quas latine reddidit Ildephonsus a Sancto Carolo Scholarum Piarum rector collegii Urbani de Propaganda Fide* (Rome, 1747). I have analyzed the documentation in Bologna in *Lambertini a Bologna 1731–1740* in *Rivista di storia della Chiesa in Italia* 2 (2007): 417–461, to which I will go back.

dical character and the last of pastoral nature, while the second group, dedicated to sacramental matters, act as a suture, so to say, connecting his interventions of a regulatory nature and those of a didactic one. Prescriptive texts are not lacking, and in some passages they tend to assume a more colloquial tone.

Just as was the case when he was head of the diocese of Bologna, the norms issued by Lambertini as pope were only in part prompted by concrete cases; most of the times they were meant to develop an overall and multifaceted plan of regulating the sacraments. If in fact some regulatory interventions are occasional in character, such as a reply to some concrete known abuses or a response to questions from missionaries, religious superiors or bishops, for most of the cases the apostolic constitutions reveal an intentionally devised plan that follows clear lines of interpretation of the Council of Trent. Above all, concerning the major post-conciliar questions (and indeed the administration of the sacraments belongs to this section), the plan of the pope, who was an expert in canon law, reveals itself to be well organized. During his episcopacy and papacy, he went back many times to the subject of benefits, the norms concerning pastoral visitation, the duty of residency of priests and the formation of seminarians, which is intimately connected with his idea of church government. All of this constitutes the selected topic of his first interventions in the beginning of his pontificate, and were collected in texts as a set program. A large sub-group of apostolic constitutions concerns the sacraments in a more direct manner.

	Baptism	Confirmation	Orders	Eucharist/Mass	Penance	Anointing of the sick	Marriage
<i>Ubi Primum</i>			X				
<i>Ad Apostolicæ</i>			X				
<i>Auget</i>						X	
<i>Matrimonia</i>							X
<i>Satis vobis compertum</i>							X
<i>Etsi Pastoralis</i>	X		X		X	X	X
<i>E Sublimi</i>			X				
<i>Eo Quamvis</i>	X		X	X		X	
<i>Ad Apostolicæ</i>			X				
<i>Cum Illud</i>			X				
<i>Cum ad infrascriptam</i>						X	
<i>Obsurdescit</i>						X	

	Baptism	Confirmation	Orders	Eucharist/Mass	Penance	Anointing of the sick	Marriage
<i>Demandatam</i>	X			X		X	
<i>Tam praeclaram</i>						X	
<i>Avendovi Noi</i>					X		
<i>Quanta Cura</i>				X			
<i>Pro eximia</i>				X			
<i>Exponi Nobis</i>				X			
<i>Certiores effecti</i>				X			
<i>Quaenamodum preces</i>							
<i>Inter omnigenas</i>	X				X		X
<i>Cum semper</i>				X			
<i>Dilectus filius</i>				X			
<i>Singularem</i>				X			
<i>Matrimonii</i>							X
<i>Nimiam licentia</i>							X
<i>Redditae Nobis</i>							X
<i>Laetiora</i>					X		
<i>Ad passionis</i>					X		
<i>Sacramentum</i>					X		
<i>Pastor bonus</i>					X		
<i>In Apostolicae</i>					X		
<i>Apostolica indulta</i>					X		
<i>In suprema</i>					X		
<i>Apostolici muneris</i>					X		
<i>Cum multorum</i>					X		
<i>Nullis verbis</i>							
<i>Suprema omnium</i>							
<i>Omnium sollicitudinum</i>	X				X	X	X

The pope carried out his interventions on specific aspects of the seven sacraments, which he analyzed, accepted or rejected in individual cases of the Latin Catholic tradition, through comparison and analysis which took into account the canons of the Eastern Catholic tradition as well as the debates with the Protestants, who had made of the sacraments and of the hierarchical structure, which was based on it, the object of a precise opposition. Finally, while going over the sources of the Eastern rites, the pope kept in mind also some cases that the Catholic Church had encountered during the course of her worldwide expansion.

Between 1753 and 1754, Benedict XIV wrote five volumes, whose preparatory materials were not published in the second edition of the *De Synodo* [=The Synod] that came out in 1755. On the basis of archival research and of the discovery