

EVERYDAY ECUMENISM

YOUR NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH
YOUR NON-CATHOLIC NEIGHBORS

M. Palmer

JACOBS, William J.
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YOUR NON-CATHOLIC NEIGHBORS

By William J. Jacobs



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NIHIL OBSTAT—John L. Reedy, C.S.C.
Censor Deputatus

IMPRIMATUR—✠ Most Rev. Leo A. Pursley, D.D.
Bishop of Fort Wayne-South Bend

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Introduction

One day Pope John XXIII started talking about an ecumenical council. What has happened within the Catholic Church and within the whole of Christianity, in fact, among all the religions of the world since, is almost beyond belief. All of this has great meaning for each Catholic and brings new responsibility into his life.

There have been great renewals in Scripture, liturgy and theology and vast changes in ideas about relations with non-Catholics. New outlooks have shaken old notions and produced startling questions: Whatever happened to the idea that there was only one, true Church? Do we believe all religions are equal now? We've been getting along fine, why all the changes? Are we replacing the Blessed Mother with Martin Luther? Such questions have led to confusion, misunderstanding and, in rare cases, a little shaking of the Faith itself.

It is a pretty general opinion that in spite of the questioning the tide cannot be turned back. The era of reform, renewal and quest for unity is upon us and must move forward. Unfortunately, many of the ideas of the ecumenical age are not clear to most Catholics. There are other Catholics who grasp the ideas, but fail to apply them in a practical, everyday manner. There are even some who oppose everything that has been going on.

It is not our purpose here to remove all opposition, for much of it is rooted in a stubbornness or ignorance which reason will do little to affect. Furthermore, the opposition is probably necessary as part of a complex of checks and balances within the Church. What we propose to accomplish in this booklet is to clarify the principal ideas of the ecumenical movement and to suggest ways in which they may be applied by ordinary Chris-

tians who are commissioned through Baptism and Confirmation to be apostles in their homes, in their work and in their social activities. We would also hope to answer as many basic questions as possible as to what the Church intends, what we may do and may not do, how much initiative we should take and what kind of immediate and long-range results we can expect.

Each Catholic has been told by the Council that he has a special role to play in the mission of the Church. But many ask: How can I work for unity with Protestants when all my life I've simply been taught that they were wrong? How can I know enough to defend, let alone spread the Faith in my office where there are Protestants, Jews and mostly people who couldn't care less about religion? If I start spouting about religion around the neighborhood won't people think I'm some kind of nut? There are answers to these and all the other questions raised in this period of reform and renewal, but the reform and renewal won't really be complete until each Catholic learns them and lives them.

Insofar as possible, the contents of this booklet will be based on formal teachings of the Second Vatican Council. However, ideas from recognized authorities on relations with non-Catholics will be included, along with some personal ideas and suggestions. Let it be understood plainly that the author and the authorities stand in complete obedience to the formal teaching of the Church and that if any teaching comes forth after this booklet is published which contradicts opinions stated here, these opinions are to be disregarded. Every attempt has been made to avoid approaches which are unacceptable.

It should be noted, too, that the actual practices relating to interfaith work in any given area are subject to regulation by a local Bishop and that we have no in-

tention of inferring in any way that such regulation should be disregarded. Again, we expect little actual conflict, but let it be understood that while the author cherishes intellectual freedom and the vital new climate of speculation within the Church, he is at all times its subject as well as its member and has no wish to be at variance with its teachings, policies and regulations.

That all sounds pretty frightening and, perhaps a little timid, but it is included for two reasons. First, for its literal meaning which we believe needs to be stated plainly, and secondly, because the author believes it determines a position each Catholic must be sure to maintain as he approaches relations with non-Catholics.

We want to love. We want unity. We are filled with hope and optimism. We recognize our own mistakes of the past. We advocate the greatest possible openness. At the same time, we would be unfair to ourselves, our fellow Catholics and all those with whom we seek unity, if we did not declare ourselves to be fully loyal to what we believe to be the one, true Church.

We will begin by examining the Decree on Ecumenism of Vatican II, explaining it as briefly and as simply as possible. Then we will move into the broader area of practical application. The first part may be somewhat technical, but we need to understand it so as to have a firm foundation for what follows.

The Council Speaks

The Decree on Ecumenism was given in Rome on November 21, 1964. Although not defined dogma or an infallible pronouncement, it is the statement of the highest teaching authority in the Church and as such commands the fullest respect of all Catholics.

The introduction notes a world-wide concern for Christian unity and says that this hoped-for unity is one of the principal concerns of the Council. It then defines the term "ecumenical movement."

It is not set up as a definition, but the text provides one: ". . . the movement, fostered by the grace of the Holy Spirit, for the restoration of unity among all Christians."

The text adds that "those belong to it [the ecumenical movement] who invoke the Triune God and confess Jesus as Lord and Savior, doing this not merely as individuals, but as corporate bodies." It notes a longing on the part of such persons, though expressed in different ways, for one visible Church of God, "a Church truly universal and sent forth into the world that the world may be converted to the Gospel, and so to the glory of God."

This very short introduction is filled with meaning and causes considerable reflection. "Ecumenical" means world-wide and our general tendency has been to see all efforts toward better relations with all men as part of the ecumenical movement. The Council teaches that it means the term to apply particularly to non-Catholic Churches within the broad scope of Christianity which hold to certain basic truths, the Trinity and salvation by and through the Lord Jesus.

We have a fuller understanding of the ecumenical movement from what the Council teaches in its *Constitution on the Church*. Unlike most former teaching, this document considers the "People of God," or the Church of Christ, to include more than what exists within the strict organizational limits of the Catholic Church.

It admits that both individuals and bodies can belong to Christ's Church in its broadest sense through Baptism. This does not deny any of the fundamental beliefs of

Catholics that theirs is the one, true Church. It means simply that, although they lack the fullness of doctrine and sacraments, separated Christians belong to Christ.

These ideas appear fairly simple, but they call for a major change in attitude by many Catholics. They challenge Catholics to help make their Church everyone's Church. Disunity among Christians is something we can neither ignore nor afford. If there is a God, and if Christ is divine, and if He founded a Church, it must of necessity be one.

This does not mean things within Christianity may not be expressed and interpreted differently by different persons or bodies. It does mean that until they all stem from the same basic truth we have a scandal on hand.

Principles of Ecumenism

In its first chapter, the decree sets forth the basics of Catholicism: the Incarnation, Christ's prayer "that all may be one," the establishment of the Eucharist as both sign and cause of this oneness, the new commandment to love one another, and the promise to send the Holy Spirit. It further stresses the apostolic teaching of unity and emphasizes the work of the Spirit in building up the Body of Christ.

Next, the Council stresses that Christ entrusted to the Apostles the task of teaching and ruling and sanctifying and placed Peter at the head. The Church's hierarchy today continues to carry on the Apostles' function. The text stresses that true Christianity must come from the Church as established by Christ and energized by the Holy Spirit.

Yet the Church is a realist. Noting that there were rifts even in the earliest Christian times and that even

more serious disputes developed over the centuries so that large bodies were cut off from full communion with the Church, the Council document states plainly that in many cases men on both sides were to blame. It asserts, however, that those who have grown up sincerely in separated bodies, that is schismatic or Protestant bodies, cannot be blamed for the separation. Such persons are to be embraced as brothers because they are in communion with the Church through Baptism, even though the communion is imperfect.

The Council teaches that things of great significance can exist outside the Church, that is to say outside its visible boundaries, which serve to build up and vitalize it. For example, Protestant devotion to Scripture and the genuinely Christian character of the lives of many Protestants help the cause of total Christianity and have a special value for the Catholic Church.

Another statement of great meaning in the Council decree is that liturgical actions outside the Catholic Church can engender the life of grace and give access to salvation. Although the Council states again and again that the fullness of Christianity was entrusted to the Catholic Church, non-Catholic Churches have a part in the mystery of salvation, and are a means of salvation, these things coming from the grace and truth of the Catholic Church itself.

Attitudes to be Adopted

The text laments the lack of unity which now exists, but rejoices in the great desire to achieve unity which is so apparent on all sides and which is so clearly the work of the Holy Spirit. It calls on all Catholics to "recognize the signs of the times and to take an active and intelligent

part in the work of ecumenism.”

Then the text gets right down to business. It says we should do the following to promote Christian unity:

1. Make every effort to avoid expressions, judgments and actions which do not represent the condition of our separated brethren in truth and fairness. In other words, unjust or uncharitable attitudes toward Protestants are out on more than purely moral grounds. They are seen by the Council as a hindrance to good relations in the interests of unity. A Catholic should be so overwhelmed by the great gift of his Faith that he would be forever humble in gratitude. That makes it hard to understand Catholics who look down on or ridicule Protestants. They are brothers. Most of us have a lot to learn about how to treat brothers.

2. Establish dialogue among various Churches and Communities. The Council notes that this dialogue requires competent experts from all sides. The purpose of dialogue is to help everyone understand everyone else better. In addition to understanding, the Council sees the dialogue as a means of developing cooperation among Christians for the common good of humanity. It stresses that a religious spirit should prevail when dialogue is engaged in and that there may be common prayer. The Council sees an added value in dialogue as a means of leading all involved to examine their own faithfulness to the will of Christ and of increased vigor in the task of reform and renewal. Now this dialogue, as referred to in the decree, is a formal kind of thing, led by experts. However, informal dialogue is inevitable for most American Catholics. We can approach it intelligently and with love. More on that later.

Certainly, we can also look for ways to work with Protestants on projects for the common good. One need

look no further than the community welfare and educational activities of the place he lives. Most especially, we can take a look at our own state of obedience to the will of Christ and our own share of reform and renewal.

3. All Catholics should pray for unity, keep non-Catholics informed about the Church and take the initiative in approaching them.

4. All Catholics must strive at all times for perfection. Any Catholic who does less than lead a fully Christian life hurts the ecumenical movement. We must show to the world the grace we tell the world we have. It is a sad truth that true fervor and truly Christian living are often observed easier outside the Church than in it.

5. Catholics must preserve unity in essentials, but seek freedom in spiritual life, discipline, liturgical rites and even expressions of theology. The Council teaches that such freedom exemplifies catholicity and apostolicity of the Church better than a suffocating uniformity. This refers to differences in practice between the Eastern and Western rites of the Catholic Church and differences in various cultures, but it has an added meaning in calling on Catholics to realize their freedom as children of God.

6. Catholics should readily recognize and acknowledge genuinely Christian endowments and accomplishments of non-Catholics some of whom give witness to Christ to the point of martyrdom, many of whom give testimony through really holy lives.

7. Catholics should be ready to learn from non-Catholics because the Holy Spirit can work wonders through them and "whatever is truly Christian is never contrary to what genuinely belongs to the Faith."

8. Interest of all Catholics in the cause of Christian unity must continue to grow. Bishops are called on by the decree to stimulate ecumenical work and guide it.

Ecumenical Practice

The second chapter deals with the practice of ecumenism. It repeats that every Catholic should be involved according to his state in life and his talents.

Prayer in common with non-Catholics for unity is endorsed and encouraged. However, unlimited, indiscriminate worship in common is not to be considered a valid means of seeking unity. The Council states its case logically and warmly in this respect. It teaches that there are two principles governing common worship, 1) a witness to unity of the Church and 2) sharing in the means of grace. Witness to a unity which does not yet exist is seen as a general obstacle to common worship. However, the decree says that common worship may sometimes be commended because of the grace involved. Decisions as to when, where and how this may be carried out are to be made by local Bishops unless a Bishops' Conference or the Holy See passes on a regulation effecting circumstances.

The point is, prayer for unity is encouraged in common and common worship is *not* forbidden. Common worship is, however, limited and must be approved.

The chapter then says that we must learn a great deal more about the religious ideas and ideals of non-Catholic Christians and that our teaching of theology and other subjects must be conducted with real regard for an ecumenical point of view. The Council practically states that teaching has been less than fully truthful in the past. Education of priests must be such that they will help guide laity and religious in a truly ecumenical spirit. That means getting away from theology which is structured and taught largely as a means of defense against attack and as proof of our superiority. Catholics working in the missions are advised to be aware of both the prob-

lems and the benefits of the ecumenical movement and to consider these carefully when they work in areas where other Christian Churches have missionaries.

The Council warns that the way in which our Faith is explained should never be allowed to be an obstacle to dialogue with separated brethren. At the same time, it warns against compromising fundamental Catholic positions, watering down our meaning or presenting our views vaguely in order to make them appear more acceptable. The decree says that real seeking of truth through interfaith dialogue which is conducted in charity and humility can lead to deeper understanding and better presentation of the Christian message for all concerned.

In concluding the chapter, the Council states its belief that all men who believe in God and especially Christians, should unite in efforts for what is good and just in the social order. Specific mention is made of efforts for peace, proper appreciation for human dignity, poverty, housing shortages and unequal distribution of wealth.

Regarding the Orthodox

Chapter three of the decree deals with the Churches separated from Catholicism. After a brief review of the breaking off of the Eastern Patriarchs from communion with Rome and the main events of the Reformation, it treats the Orthodox Churches and the Protestant Churches in two subsections.

In dealing with the Eastern Churches, great stress is placed on the doctrinal, liturgical, spiritual, and legal traditions of the East from which Rome has drawn. In effect, the text points out that while various things may be expressed differently in Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy, they still have strong historical bonds and many

things in common. So much is this the case, that the text proceeds to enumerate point after point where the West is indebted to the East.

Stating flatly that these Churches, though separated from us, have true sacraments, apostolic succession, the priesthood and the Eucharist, the Council says that worship in common with their members "is not only possible, but to be encouraged." Suitable circumstances and approval of Church authority are, however, required.

The Council expresses a particular willingness to take every possible step to bring about reunion with the East. It repeats a declaration of earlier councils and Popes that in effecting reunion Rome would wish "to impose no burden beyond what is essential."

Regarding Protestants

The Council notes that the problem of unity with Protestant bodies involves more difficulty than with the Orthodox because Protestants vary considerably "not only with us, but also among themselves." Plainly a number of different approaches to a variety of situations is needed regarding doctrine, spirituality, religious psychology and many other matters and the Council does not attempt to give detailed suggestions for the approaches.

However, it tries to set down basic points from which we can try to move toward unity. The confession of Jesus Christ as God and Lord and as the sole Mediator between God and men, along with the basic notion of the Trinity, is seen as a hopeful starting point, regardless of differences of belief or expression. Mainly, the fact that all of us see Christ as the "source and center of Church unity" and mutually long for Him, is interpreted as a most hopeful sign.

Protestants' love for Scripture is singled out for praise. The Council recognizes the differences in our scriptural ideas and those of most Protestants and the disagreement over the role of the authority of the Church as teacher, but still sees Scripture as a meeting ground, a source of dialogue and a mighty force toward unity.

The importance of our bond in Baptism is stated again. Then the Council teaches that while we hold that Protestant Churches lack fullness of sacraments, there is a special value in their commemoration of the Lord's Supper. Teaching about this, as well as about other sacraments, worship in general and the ministry of the Church, is cited as an important doorway to dialogue.

Again, the high order of spiritual life and devotion existing in separated Churches is praised. Then the variations in interpretation of Christian moral teaching are noted. However, since all Christians seek a morality which is true to the Gospel and in accordance with the teachings of Christ and the will of God, the Council suggests that dialogue concerning the application of the Gospel to moral conduct might be another good starting point.

A Warning and a Hope

The Decree on Ecumenism is concluded with a warning that superficiality in approach or imprudent zeal could harm the cause of Christian unity. It calls on us to be truly faithful to the Church both in holding to its apostolic and patristic traditions and teachings and in helping in its growth to greater fullness in Christ.

Then, the decree recognizes that the whole matter is really in the hands of God and expresses the wish that interfaith work will be conducted in such a way that no

obstacle in "the ways of divine Providence and no pre-conceived judgments impair the future inspirations of the Holy Spirit." It ends on a note of profound hope, reminding us: "And hope does not disappoint, because God's love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5).

Regarding Non-Christians

Although the Council has limited the term "ecumenical movement" to the quest of reunion with separated Christian Churches, the stated aim of the Council has been to achieve the best possible relations with all persons and religious bodies including Jews and Moslems.

As for those within other religions or outside any formal religious context, the Council teaches that they can be saved if through no fault of their own they do not know the Gospel or the Church. If such persons seek God, even vaguely, and try to do His will as recognized in their own consciences, God will aid them to salvation.

Persons who do not have knowledge of God, but are blameless in this, will receive the divine helps necessary to salvation if they lead good lives, which the Council sees as preparation for the Gospel.

In effect, the text says nothing more or less than that all men were made by God, and redeemed by Christ and that all men may be saved. The text does make mention of those whose reasoning has been affected by "the evil one" so that they "exchange the truth of God for a lie and serve the creature rather than the Creator."

Mention is made, too, of those who live and die without hope insofar as we can tell. The Church must consider all of these persons, remembering the Lord's mandate to "preach the Gospel to every creature." They are

related to us in their humanity if nothing else and must be the subject of loving concern. The people referred to would include agnostics, atheists and all others who reject God or are simply indifferent to Him.

It is important to keep in mind as we move closer to considering practical applications of the Council teachings that a true Christian cannot hate any man. Pope John made this especially clear in *Pacem in Terris*. We must oppose communism to the death, but we may not hate a single Communist. It's the old matter of "hate the sin, but love the sinner." It is unfortunate that hate can be observed rather easily among many Catholics . . . hatred of Negroes, of Jews, even of Catholics with whom they disagree.

If the goals of the Ecumenical Council are to be achieved, they will be achieved through love. This assumes a purging of hate. There is no room for it in the Mystical Body of Christ. Very often the hate springs from fear of persons or things we don't understand. The solution to that is knowledge.

The more one considers the teachings of the Council and modern theological ideas, the more it becomes plain that there is no room for the unlearned Catholic. Each must be informed as fully as his talents will allow.

Key to the Christian Apostolate

Just as in medicine, physics and so many other fields there has been a genuine explosion of knowledge in recent times, there has been one in religion and related fields. This, in addition to the fact that knowledge of Catholicism was never a very simple matter, leaves most ordinary Catholics feeling ill-equipped to be Christ in the midst of the world.

Still, the obligation remains. The Church is definitely missionary in nature and every member must have something of a missionary orientation to his life. It is impossible, even for Church scholars to know everything there is to know about the Church, and most clergy and religious have an awful time keeping up with new developments.

One solution for all concerned is to realize that no one of us can always have all of the latest information on the tip of his tongue. The next step is to adopt a fairly regular program, suited to one's needs, abilities and state in life, to learn as much as possible. This learning should go beyond the mere acquisition of specific knowledge. It should lead to a set of attitudes. Through these, one can often come up with the right answer even if he hasn't learned it formally. At the very least, he can handle situations in such a way that his lack of knowledge is not an extreme handicap. What are the attitudes and dispositions that will help the ordinary Catholic to help "preach the Gospel to every creature"?

Pre-Evangelization and Accommodation

We can learn a lot from some basic ideas of modern missionary work. Missioners have learned that in many societies it is impossible to march right in and start teaching the Gospel. Instead, they strive to gain acceptance by the people to whom they are sent on a basically human level. They work to be accepted as persons. This does not mean they neglect spiritual motivation and goals, but that they strive to be perfect Christians, knowing that this in itself will attract people to them, even though the Christian message is not directly preached at first.

If they succeed, they find acceptance and gain influence and can proceed to teach a little about Christian ideas, largely by demonstration in living situations. Eventually, a number of persons are prepared to hear the Word of God as such, and often whole communities can be converted instead of isolated individuals. At least that's the aim. Christ is hard to resist. If a Christian not only knows Christ and imitates Christ, but *is* Christ as fully as possible, he must draw people to him just as Christ did during His public ministry.

The idea of *accommodation* involves making concessions on nonessential matters so that Christianity is adapted as easily as possible to the culture in which the missionary works. In fact, some of the culture is absorbed into Christianity. We no longer try to Westernize or Americanize people in mission territories. We try to Christianize them, recognizing that this does not involve smashing existing cultures, only resisting things in them which may be evil or may lead to evil. The good things can be retained. This is a truly catholic outlook.

For instance, genuflecting in church has little or no meaning for the Japanese. Recognizing this, the Church approves the custom of bowing before the tabernacle, since this is the way the Japanese are accustomed to showing deep respect and reverence. Similarly, music, art, colors, even dances, which would mean little to an American may make Christianity acceptable to mission people who could not accept our ways any more than we could accept theirs without great difficulty.

The Ideas Applied

The ordinary Catholic can apply these ideas wherever he is. If he works and prays for increasing Chris-

tian perfection in his life, he is in effect preaching Christ to a society that isn't quite ready for Him or is prepared to resist Him or conditioned to be indifferent to Him.

We refer here to simple things like courtesy, kindness, good humor, sympathy, a willingness to help out. These things are sadly missing in our society and where they do exist it is often on a very superficial level. The Christian gives them added meaning and appeal because in him they are manifestations of the love of God, even though people may not know it at once.

To refrain from gossip, to stand up for justice, to be willing to be involved in important things even at the cost of considerable convenience, these things prepare one's environment for Christ, too. To be human in the best sense of the word, to respect others for themselves, to live a really good family life . . . all of these things attract, and by attracting preach at least indirectly.

Separated Christians will recognize things like these and feel greater warmth toward the Church. Many of them think of it as stiff and cold, and not without reason. Many persons we all know are not really anti-Christian, they are groping for God in their own way and are in a sense pre-Christian much the way members of many Oriental religions are. They might resist direct evangelization, but few can resist love.

As for accommodation, we can undo a lot of our own stiffness. We can learn to avoid offending through "holier than thou" attitudes, prudery and expressions of sentimental piety which appear and may even be superstitious and which are in no way essential to us.

At the same time, we must stand firm on essential matters, doing so in a reasonable, charitable way, but never compromising. This will teach a great deal about the Church, too.

We must be men of our time, truly competent, truly informed. We must never give the impression that being a Catholic means looking down on or withdrawing from the world or that it means a gloomy, joyless kind of life. We must fit what is good and acceptable of modern society into our Christian lives, but be just as quick to reject that which is truly evil. The message will get across. We may never know how well or to how many, but we can be sure that there will be results.

Explaining the Faith

If we are known as active Catholics and if our Christian lives are what they should be, it is almost inevitable that people with whom we work or neighbors or friends will eventually approach us with questions or seeking advice. It is almost never sufficient or advisable to simply "send them to see Father." If they wanted to see Father, they'd have done so. Eventually, that may be the right course, but an attitude of "let Father do it" will often mean it won't get done.

Most Protestants and non-Christians we may encounter will have a number of false ideas about the Church. Correcting even one such idea is of tremendous value. This involves knowing the answers, presenting them in a reasonable manner and being prepared to get more information if we need it. In cases where we are stumped, we can still make great gains by simply admitting we don't know and proceeding to find out. It's amazing how much interest in the Faith can be generated by clearing up one little question or problem.

There is great interest in religion in America today and even those who feign indifference are usually seeking truth and meaning, however vaguely. These people

can be reached and they are usually best reached by a fellow office worker, teacher, factory hand, farmer or neighbor.

We must not fear to move in this area. Oddly enough, we often know more about religion than we think we do. Further, we must never forget that the grace of God is in us and that God Himself will work through us if we really mean business. A warning, though, before we take some of the more common problems and try to provide approaches to solution. We must avoid the old mentality of "infiltrating secular society" or trying to "snare" converts. We want to transform secular society and we want millions of converts, but the surest way to lose out is to let the people around us get the idea that we're "out to get them." Many view Catholicism as a kind of conspiracy. The answer is for us to develop openness and to be careful not to let a zeal for souls cause us to use tactics like those of a relentless insurance man.

What Do You Do About . . .

Here are a few of the more common things Catholics are confronted with in daily life. Some of us learned to handle them through "apologetics." However, Scripture scholarship has weakened or destroyed many of the old apologetic techniques and the defensive, argumentative nature of our answers was more apt to drive people away than to draw them to us. Here are some of the general suggestions for dealing with troublesome areas of discussion:

1. The Blessed Virgin, Saints, Statues, Medals

Many people, especially Protestants, are kept from the Church by misunderstanding things which are of secon-

dary importance at best. If you can get them to start at zero and establish the existence of God, the Divinity of Christ and the consequent nature and authority of the Church, these things fall into place. However, this is not always possible.

Regarding Mary, a simple statement of the essential things the Church teaches about her is usually the best approach. She is worthy of great honor and veneration because she was chosen from all mankind to be Christ's mother. This is an awfully difficult thing to deny. An all-powerful God could certainly bring about a virgin birth. Mary's example of purity, humility, and submission to the will of God command respect by themselves. Sometimes it is necessary to explain that some Catholics go to extremes in Marian devotion. The Church does not encourage the extremes and the people involved are rarely guilty of anything more than misunderstanding. We must be careful to realize and explain that Mary was a creature, was in no way equal to Christ and needed redemption just like the rest of mankind.

Just as we honor national heroes, we honor the heroes of our Church, the saints. In addition, because of the nature of the Mystical Body, we believe they can assist us on our way to God and so we may call upon them in prayer.

Statues, medals and the like are meant as aids to devotion, reminders of the spiritual side of things. They are not essential. They have no magical powers.

These are deliberately simple answers, but their very simplicity will often do the trick when one is questioned by a person with grave misconceptions. We do not compromise. We deny nothing. We state essentials openly and briefly. In many cases, it works wonders.

2. Conflicts Between Religion and Science

Straightening out someone in this area can often bring dramatic results. In spite of undeniable disputes between churchmen and scientists in the past, there is a fundamental principle which states that science and theology cannot contradict each other. It is inconceivable that the study of God could be in conflict with the study of what God has made. If there appears to be a contradiction we have either overrated our scientific data or need to re-examine our theology which can be interpreted in terms of new knowledge without loss to the deposit of faith.

3. The Bible

Catholic regard for and use of Sacred Scripture has a firm historical basis and is growing daily. We do not interpret all of the Bible literally on the one hand. On the other, we do not regard it as a collection of folklore and pious belief. We hold that it contains the inspired word of God, but that it is unerring only in the language in which a given text was written and in the sense intended by the author. The author can even make human error without the divine message being weakened. Our knowledge in this field is growing daily and it is the proper field of experts. Still, we can read the Bible in a spirit of prayer, learn from it and be nourished by it. Isolated quotations taken in their literal English meaning are rarely worthy of serious consideration. Let a Protestant know that you have some knowledge of the Bible, a love for it and respect for his love for it and many walls of hostility crumble.

4. The Eucharist

A Catholic must hold that bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Jesus at the Consecration of the

Mass. The sensible appearances of bread and wine remain. It is not a mere representation or reminder. It is not bread and wine, Body and Blood at the same time.

A person trained in science and lacking a knowledge of metaphysics will have a difficult time understanding our teaching of Transubstantiation. He is used to identifying things by their properties. Recent attempts to explain the Eucharist in more modern terms are less than satisfying. We *can* say that the traditional explanations don't go far enough in explaining the greatness of the Christ encounter in the sacrament, but what could?

In most cases the best approach is to state our belief plainly, add that an all-powerful God could certainly bring about what we say is brought about and let it go at that. Scripture is pretty plain on the subject and this will help with some Protestants, but many are locked into interpretations which explain this away. Still, it's hard to condemn a man who simply says: "This is what I believe and my living experience of the Sacrament has reinforced my belief."

5. Birth Control and Abortion

We often find ourselves sympathizing with the human problems of those who wish to practice contraception, and, in very rare cases, with those who seek abortion. This is human sympathy and a good thing in its own way. Still, until the contraception issue is settled one way or another by the teaching Church, our obedience to the law of God according to our best understanding obliges us to hold to our present position. As for abortion, we can never condone deliberate killing of an innocent rational creature of God.

In both matters, a direct statement of position, an expression of human sympathy and an explanation that

we believe the will of God is more important than any human situation will at least clarify things a little. An added comment, made in charity, that life involves a certain amount of suffering no matter how hard we try to escape it, often helps. Most arguments in this area are emotionally tinged. The best approach seems to be one of openness, warmth and directness, along with a reminder that God's ways don't have to be man's ways. No one would deny that this is a difficult area and that men's minds are seldom changed quickly or easily. However, a combination of faith, reasonableness, conviction and flat statement of belief in the goodness of God will often bring respect even when it fails to bring agreement.

6. Divorce and Re-Marriage

Some non-Catholics do not realize that the Church allows separation of persons who cannot live together in peace for one of a number of reasons. This will defeat the argument that the Church forces people to live in agonizing situations. A general knowledge of cases in which the Church will annul or dissolve a marriage is helpful, too, since most people don't understand what is involved or what the possibilities are. Beyond that, it's pretty hard to argue with a sincere statement that one believes marriage to be of a very sacred nature, to be preserved if at all possible. It's a pretty good bet that many marriages would not have broken up if the parties involved believed in this sacredness enough to live up to the marriage contract until this was proved impossible. It's amazing how many divorced persons will agree.

A great point as regards marriage, birth control and similar discussions is that our present society tends to dehumanize and depersonalize. Along with obeying God, the Church is extremely concerned with preserving the

dignity and worth of every human being. This often rules out some of the handier solutions society uses.

7. Confession

Most non-Catholics have an almost morbid curiosity about the sacrament of Penance and many denounce it vigorously. The important idea to get across is that the priest forgives in the name of and by the power of God, as the representative of Christ. He does not absolve through purely human power of his own. A detailed explanation of the privacy of the confessional and the nature of the seal helps, too. As for the most common objection: "I could never confess my sins to a man," it is ironic that this is often said by men and women who think nothing of discussing the most intimate details of their lives with casual acquaintances over a cup of coffee. If they happen to be advocates of psychoanalysis, their position is a little strange, too.

8. Church Scandals

News stories or local gossip about priests in trouble, offenses of religious and falls from grace of well-known laymen often open conversations which can end on a positive note. It does little good to explain that priests are "only human" and it can be bad tactics to cite scandals in other religions, particularly since this does not justify any of our troubles. Most people, even those who oppose the Church, expect it to have a high moral tone and expect high standards from its leaders and members. Probably the best practice is to insist on establishing the accuracy of the stories, acknowledge whatever is true, express regret for it and point out that the Church and all within it are to strive for a perfection which is not entirely possible in this life. Finally, neurosis and psy-

chosis are better understood these days by most people and are worth mentioning, since one of these elements is very often present in cases of scandal. The main thing is, don't rationalize; don't deny what is obviously true; don't get emotionally defensive, and remind everyone involved of the scriptural admonition "judge not."

The Main Point

The examples given are not meant to cover every possible situation a Catholic may encounter, nor are they meant to provide a complete set of answers to the questions raised. They are presented in line with our earlier point of developing attitudes which will be profitable ecumenically.

The principal idea we would like to get across is that experience indicates that the best way to deal with questions presented by Protestants, Jews, agnostics or anyone else is to simply state what we believe in reasonably plain terms. This is done with the idea of aiding the questioner to understand our position, not necessarily with the idea of convincing him then and there.

This has a corollary. We must be willing to listen when the other party presents his views. By exposing beliefs rather than arguing them, we often find that we are much closer to agreement than might be supposed. It is a pretty good rule of thumb to avoid out and out argument, since the people who seek it are usually more interested in argument than in religion. When challenged by such people, the best bet seems to be to state our case directly, without dilution or compromise and let it go at that. Charity may force us to take a little abuse, but wisdom would seem to indicate that this is preferable to wrangling.

What Is the Outlook?

It seems that we always wind up sounding like middle-of-the-road extremists, but we think the general attitude of the Council Fathers and their theological advisers indicates that we should be hopeful meliorists, neither too optimistic nor too pessimistic about the chances for Christian reunion and the goals of relations with non-Catholics. God is directly involved in this, so we may be surprised at the speed with which great things come to pass. On the other hand, men are involved so obstacles and blocks and slowdowns are likely.

At first glance, reunion with the Churches of the East appears to be the step which may come first. However, the history of separation is such that there is a great deal of deep bitterness in some quarters and a flat refusal to consider reunion in others. Still, the independence of these Churches may lead to a situation where at least some of them agree to full unity with Rome.

When you discuss Christian reunion with Protestant clergy, you often meet initial resistance to what they call "organic unity," the idea of all Christians coming together within the Catholic Church. On the other hand, it is common to experience a lot of spiritual and intellectual unity in the midst of the same discussion. The author's experience has been that the laity, both Catholic and Protestant, are apt to be more conservative than the clergy.

Often interfaith discussions point up the great difficulties caused by terminology. When we get our terms straight, many apparent conflicts all but disappear. For instance, salvation, revelation, inspiration and many other apparently common terms mean different things to many Protestants than they do to us. They even mean

different things to different Protestants.

We can make every effort to understand each other's meanings, even if we cannot agree on definitions. Those of us who have a tendency to slip into the vocabulary of scholastic philosophy have an added problem. It is practically a necessity in ecumenical work to be able to state Catholic positions in everyday language. This is difficult and sometimes almost impossible since everyday language lacks precision. Then there is the problem of being objectionably precise on one hand and objectionably imprecise on the other. There is no simple solution, just hard work, study, prayer and a whole lot of charity.

There is another problem in that Protestants in some cases appear to have beliefs virtually identical with ours. At least that's the way it would appear from the wording. Then we find out they actually mean something else. The word "church" is a particularly troublesome term in this respect.

A complete union with Jews seems almost beyond possibility, but there have already been great advances in mutual understanding and we have generally understood Scripture to predict an eventual reconciliation of some of the Jewish People. There is every reason to hope for an era of cooperation and mutual aid.

Conversion of Moslems and members of various other non-Christian religions is not apt to be a short-term affair. However, there is great hope for the future of Christianity in the Orient, and every reason to expect that over-all relations with all non-Christians will improve steadily.

Perhaps the toughest element of humanity to reach is that of the indifferent, persons who are loosely agnostic and apparently unconcerned with religion. A personal observation is that a person without religion who

offers you fairly strong opposition is a fair candidate for eventual conversion. He cares or he wouldn't be so vehement. The truly indifferent are another matter, but certainly the situation is not hopeless.

The author has seen in his own lifetime how philosophies which once seemed in automatic opposition to the Church have actually led some people to the Church and have even enriched the Church. We refer principally to phenomenology and existentialism. Modern psychology once seemed an archenemy to Catholicism, too. Yet it has led at least a few to religion and has become a valuable aid within religion.

An idea expressed in modern philosophy, principally through the teachings of Teilhard de Chardin, is that man is largely capable of determining the future because he has largely conquered the forces of nature. We can choose between growth toward perfection of all things and annihilation. Individual man should not feel completely lost in the vastness of the universe and the mass of mankind.

You and I and everyone we know and everyone we meet can do a great deal to determine the course of things in the years to come. And here is one of those happy places where an apparently lofty philosophy can be reduced in considerable measure to brass tacks. Each of us is important in the decisions he makes and the action with which he applies the decisions.

To live in Christ and move with Christ toward the perfection of all things is our privilege and our challenge.

To Sum Up

There is something very special about our world in our time. Part of it is very frightening, part is magnifi-

cent beyond human description. That part is all that is happening that shows God's work among us so plainly, shows His intervention in human history as surely as did the Exodus and the making of the Covenant.

We are being impelled toward greatness in what may be the climactic age of Church history. Our chance to restore all things in Christ was never plainer. That's what the Ecumenical Council is all about. It has shown signs of human weakness, perhaps even suggestions of evil at times, but within it and through it the Spirit moves.

We are told now, very plainly, that God wills salvation for all men and that each of us has a role in carrying out His will. We are told to go all out to bring back unity with the Churches of the East, to somehow do away with the awful separation we have from other Christians, to do all we can to come closer to Jews, Moslems, pagans . . . to everyone. We are told to do this first, by converting ourselves to a new and greater fervor and quest of perfection. We are told to storm heaven with prayers for unity and the success of our attempts to "preach the Gospel to every creature." We are told to take an active part in accomplishing the ecumenical goals.

We have a fearsome but wonderful responsibility. We have a chance to do truly great things for God no matter who or where or what we are. We are told again and again that the force with which we must work is love. May we all have enough of it and may we all come to know that love grows as it is expended.

May the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the One True God of all men be with us on our way so that truly one day all may be one with, in and through Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. How can a Methodist be considered a member of the true Church of Christ?
2. How does the Council's teaching on membership in the Mystical Body elaborate on that of Pope Pius XII?
3. In general terms, what does the Church ask from the separated Eastern Churches as a condition of reunion?
4. What value is there in Protestant worship? Explain and elaborate.
5. When may Catholics worship jointly with Protestants? What is the basis for forbidding such worship on an unlimited scale?
6. What can a Catholic do to learn sufficient correct information about other Churches to equip himself for playing his role in the ecumenical movement?
7. What are the attitudes some Catholics have toward non-Catholics which could harm the ecumenical movement?
8. How could you lead a Catholic who has such attitudes to change them?
9. Why are ALL Catholics directly involved in the ecumenical movement?
10. What is the first step for all of us in participating in the movement?
11. What are some of the ways we can take this step?
12. How is our liturgical participation important to the ecumenical movement?
13. Why is our own holiness important to the ecumenical movement?
14. Why is our professional competence important to the ecumenical movement?
15. What are some projects in which we might work with non-Catholics for the good of the ecumenical movement?
16. In view of what the Council has to say about the good things in Protestantism, why should we remain Catholics?
17. Has the Council and recent theological thinking made any changes in our attitudes toward making converts? If so, what?
18. One modern writer says the truly religious person in our day is the agnostic. Discuss what he means, to what extent we might agree and what lessons we can learn from his statement.
19. Does the family have a special role in the ecumenical movement?
20. Isn't our faith endangered by all this openness to Protestant thought and increased association with non-Catholics?
21. In what ways has the pluralistic nature of our country aided the Catholic Church?
22. What is there in Catholic theology that may be more consistent with American traditions than the usual Protestant ideas on the same subject?

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