

## Jesuit Priest Describes Catholic Press Role In Ecumenical Era

(This feature on the ecumenical mission of the Catholic press was prepared as a special feature by Father Gustave Weigel, S.J., professor at Woodstock College, and leading U.S. Catholic participant in ecumenical programs. He was a "peritus expert" at the Vatican Council and served as translator for non-Catholic observers at the Council.)

By FATHER GUSTAVE WEIGEL, S.J. (N.C.W.C. News Service)

Within the Catholic Church at this moment there exists a general enthusiasm for ecumenical action. This has been decidedly so since the assumption of the papacy by Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI.

The Catholic press has played no small part in this development. Catholic papers have consistently given the ecumenical action of Catholics a sympathetic coverage.

Pope John has left no doubt that he embraces ecumenism generously. This was shown in his creation of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity which was a preparatory commission for the work of the Second Vatican Council and which early in the council was made a formal commission of the council itself.

In the Pontiff's initial address to the Council Fathers, the ecumenical approach was requested. This attitude was reaffirmed by his own frequent previous meetings with representatives of other Christian communities.

Not was the extremely friendly reception of delegate observers at the council meetings to be ignored. As the observers themselves testified, they were given every facility and courtesy to work closely and intimately the work of the council.

It can be surmised that for many of them it was surprising that so much warmth was shown to them in this new Catholic attitude to non-Catholic Christians.

The press of the world expressed dissatisfaction with the facilities available to their correspondents, but the delegate observers had only praise for the manner in which they were treated. They were neither proselytized nor patronizingly tolerated. They were helped to see and to hear; nor were they in any way hoodwinked.

Only 15 years ago, many Catholics looked with suspicion on ecumenism. Some still do, but they are not so outspoken in their criticisms today. The very wary guidance given by Rome at that time made Catholic communities somewhat timid. Under Pope John, that spirit has disappeared and there is now much forthright talk.

This quite radical change is in no small part due to the Catholic press. From the beginning, Catholic papers gave the ecumenical action of Catholics a sympathetic coverage. There was no sniping at it through a snide reporting of facts. By the recently founded Ecumenical Commission of the Archdiocese of Baltimore, it is the local Catholic press which is expected to do yeoman services, with the warm blessing of Archbishop Lawrence J. Shehan.

The ecumenical concern today is a stable feature of Roman Catholic life. It would, therefore, be impossible for the Catholic press to ignore it. However, the question is whether it has an obligation beyond the mere reporting of relevant facts.

It seems that the Catholic press must do something more. Ecumenism is a vibrant reality in Catholicism and if our journals are not in resonance with this vibrancy, they are hardly able to communicate its genuine reality to our Catholic readers.

This vibrancy is more than visible action; it is an inner unrest which urges all of us to action. What is important is not an isolated event which can be labeled ecumenical, but rather an inner dynamism which is manifesting itself in countless ways. The press must communicate to its readers the urgency which lies at the heart of ecumenism.

Secondly, the nature of ecumenism must be genuinely described. There are so many possibilities for error in this field that some types of ecumenical report may produce antiecumical results.

Many Catholics, who have not given the theme much thought, see in the meeting of non-Catholics with Catholics a movement of Protestants or Orthodox toward conversion to the Catholic Church. This is not true. There is the tendency in our Catholic press to see everything, including the fact that Willy McGinnis of St. Thelma's

High School made the All State Basketball team, a triumph of the Catholic Church.

The ecumenical movement is not an arena for the triumph of one church over another. It is a fraternal confrontation of divided but brother Christians. It is not a debate between Christian opponents, where one wins and the other loses.

In line with this thought, the Catholic press must stress in season and out that the absence of conversions from ecumenical conversation is no justification for dropping it.

It is not the purpose of the ecumenical dialogue to make conversions. It is an effort of Christian love to give and receive witness to the Gospel. Charity and witness are perpetual obligations of the Christian and they are not directed to other statistics, though by way of consequence good may be achieved. But even if such goods are not forthcoming, the initial enterprise remains its proper goal.

Thirdly, a word of warning, reasonable and without panic, must be opportunistically issued by the press. Because of the ecumenical movement, now operative in the whole Church, new approaches to non-Catholics are in vogue.

Some few of our Catholics, not accustomed to reflection, rashly come to the conclusion that the Catholic Church is changing her doctrine. For some of such people this is a welcome evolution, and others it is an abandonment of the perennial truth. Neither group has any ground for its reaction. The ecumenical conversation does not wish any of its participants to be deluged to the faith, which is in them.

If insincerity and a spirit of compromise work in the participants of the dialogue, there is no valid conversation of two or more churches who are officially, or more often, unofficially represented by the partners of the dialogue.

As a fruit of the meeting, both sides will study their own positions more deeply in the light of Christ's revelation communicated by Scripture and Tradition to achieve an ever deeper insight into truth.

Such study may revise certain formulas used in the past in favor of more apt ones in our moment. But there is no change in substance. What was true in the past does not now become false in the present, nor does error of the past suddenly become true now.

Nor must we think that changes in procedure, which is a practical thing and always subject to change when a more practical way is



## Memorial Mass For President

SOLEMN REQUIEM high Mass in memory of the late President John F. Kennedy will be held at 9:30 a.m. Sunday, Dec. 23 in St. Mary's Church. Arrangements are in charge of Auburn Assembly, Fourth Degree, Knights of Columbus and Auburn Council 207, Knights of Columbus. President Kennedy was a fourth degree knight. Seated are members of the committee: Charles Passarello, William D. Ganey, P.G.K., Edwin

W. Nolan, P.G.K., Joseph W. Janosko, deputy grand knight of the council; (standing): Francis J. Smith, immediate past faithful navigator of the 4th degree assembly, general chairman; E. Joseph Hassett, grand knight; Jeremiah W. McCarthy, faithful navigator; Laurence J. Fleckenstein, and John J. Schattinger and William L. Powers. (A. G. Tarby Photo)

## Viet Cong Harass Catholics

Sigew—(NC)—The attacks and campaign of false accusations against Catholics in the villages of some central Vietnam provinces have been instigated by the communist Viet Cong, according to well informed Catholics.

The communists have been inciting youth and Buddhists against Catholic converts and persons intending to become converts, according to these sources.

A VIET CONG document intercepted by a Vietnamese army officer in a rural area of Thua Thien province, of which Hue is the capital, supports this view. It contains instructions for Viet Cong agents to spur Buddhists of one village to attack the Catholics of another village nearby.

These instructions were apparently issued shortly before the recent coup d'etat that changed local as well as the national government. They show that the communists had already chosen these tactics for which the

coup suddenly presented an expectedly favorable situation. What had been ordered for one village seemingly became the plan for many villages before mid-November.

The communists' purpose in promoting this kind of "struggle" is to weaken village communities and their defense systems.

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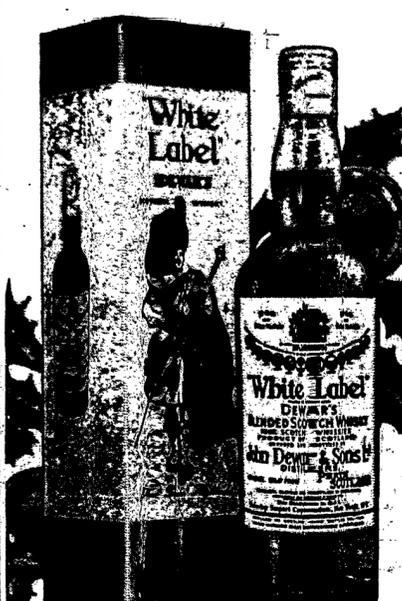
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