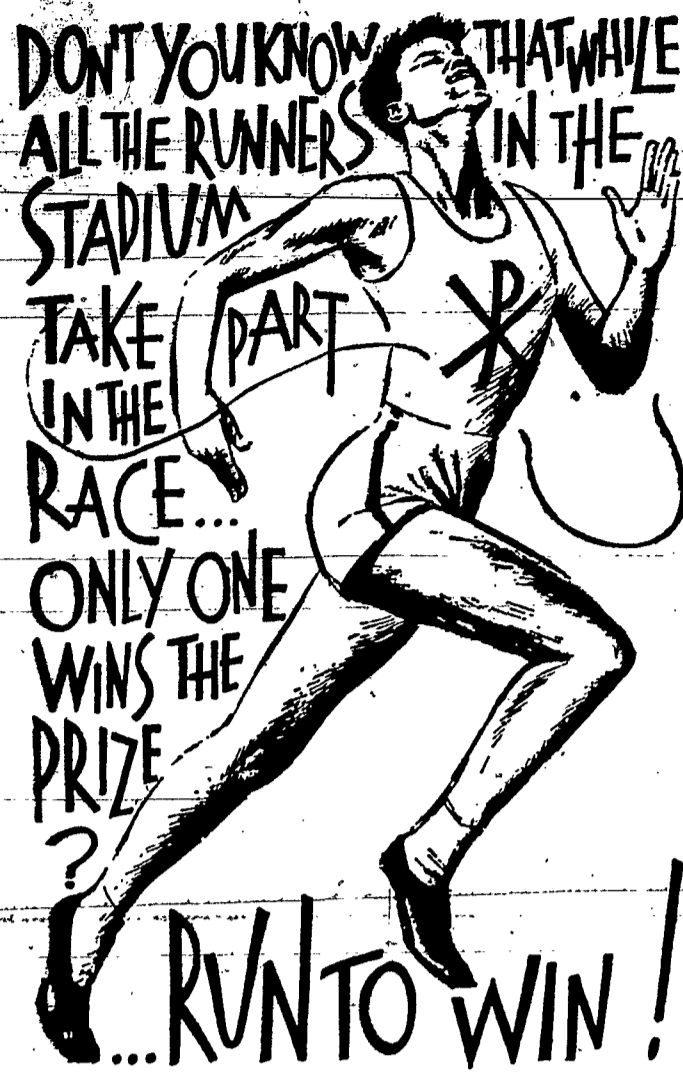


# What is Meant by the 'Ecumenical' Spirit?



Symbol and Text, Septuagesima Sunday

## Ten Centuries Of Anguish

Church programs are often criticized for not being "relevant" to the needs of practical, everyday life.

The world's Catholic bishops have a whole chapter on the agenda of this autumn's Vatican Council precisely on the topic, "The Church and the Modern World."

In Rochester, however, it seems the churches are now under fire for being a bit too relevant, a bit too practical.

Much criticism has been voiced about the decision of the Rochester Area Council of (Protestant and Orthodox) Churches to bring sociologist Saul Alinsky from Chicago to work in Rochester's inner city where last summer's riots took place. He has a reputation for stepping on toes of the comfortable establishment which resents any disturbance of its status quo.

The status of the Negro in the nation and in this area just isn't going to stay quo any longer. Those who think so are at best naive.

Too many white Americans, however, fail to understand why the Negro people can't be more "patient," can't "take it easy and everything will work out all right."

Bishop Kearney's statement of last spring still holds true, "Slow justice is no justice."

And oh how slow it's been!

For ten centuries, the heart of Africa was looted for human merchandise, taking a toll which ran into the scores of millions.

During the great days of the slave trade, according to an article by Fulbright author James Wellard in the current Horizon magazine, Africans were being brought out of the interior at the rate of at least 100,000 a year. And for every slave that survived the desert trek from his home to the coast, there were nine who died on the route, their skeletons marking the route for the next caravan to follow.

The Arab slave merchants knew every water hole from the center of Africa to Tripoli. The victims, used to the abundant water and cool comfort of luxuriant trees in their homeland, were terrified by the endless Sahara. There was no danger of their deserting the caravans — to run off in any direction meant certain death. The slave traders simply pointed the column to the next water hole and prodded them to step up their pace by whips and curses. Children, women, older men — exhausted, fell behind and became an avenue of bones.

And when was the last such shipment of slaves? In 1929.

The Arabs were of course not the only ones responsible for this thousand years of cruelty. The Christian nations took over the trade at the ports. Who else than the docile African Negro would work the sugar plantations in Barbados, the tobacco fields in Virginia, the mines and the factories in the British, French, Portuguese and Spanish colonies?

And what did the voices in the pulpits have to say about these slave children dying of starvation and thirst as they crawled across the desert, what about the husbands and wives sold ruthlessly to owners who cared nothing about the wreck of a marriage, what about the listing of men at prices less than a beast of burden or even a cat?

The clergy, both Catholic and Protestant, said slavery could be justified because that way Christians had the opportunity of saving Negro souls.

We've come to realize there are other aspects to religion.

But the Negro people still bear the scars of ten centuries of anguish. Little wonder they think it's time the scars began to heal.

—Father Henry Atwell

If you are an ordinary, average, fairly alert Catholic, you have heard or read quite a bit in recent years about "the ecumenical spirit."

Good Pope John XXIII made that spirit the outstanding mark of his short reign, and he bequeathed it as a legacy to the world.

One may define it as a refreshingly new spirit of charity, tolerance, willingness to discuss differences among people of varying religious viewpoints, toward the overall end of bring about greater unity among men.

For Catholics it means an updating, through the decisions of Vatican Council II, of much of the positive legislation of the Church and many of her official and not so official practices, together with an abandonment of the embattled defensiveness that for too long marked her approaches to the rest of the world.

How, you have no doubt asked yourself, can I in my daily life manifest something of this ecumenical spirit? Does it require that I make any changes in my attitude towards and approaches to those around me?

To provide a means of self-examination through which these questions can be honestly answered, we here give a number of rules that represent the true meaning of the ecumenical spirit. If you have been falling against these rules, you have some changes to make in yourself. If these rules express your normal or habitual way of thinking and acting, you have made the true ecumenical spirit your own.

1. Don't think or speak or act as if people outside the Catholic Church are deliberately or maliciously in error.

This rule is a simple application of the words of Christ: "Do not judge, that you may not be judged" (Matthew 7:1). Pope John XXIII spelled this out in precise terms when he said, in Paeem in Terris: "One must never confuse error and the person who errs, nor even when there is a question of error or inadequate knowledge of truth in the moral or religious field. The person who errs is always and above all a human person and retains in every case his dignity as a human person. And he must always be regarded and treated in accord with that lofty dignity."

This requires that Catholics will never use derogatory or sarcastic language in speaking of Protestants, Jews or any other kind of non-Catholics. It means that ridicule will never be considered a tool of truth.

This rule goes farther. It means that even when those who are not Catholic deem it necessary or expedient to revile the Catholic Church and Catholics, the latter will bear this with restraint and patience, and will not respond in kind. Simple presentations of truths that may have been distorted or garbled need never be accompanied by rancor or bitterness.

This rule has special application to those Catholics who are in a position to make speeches or publish writings on matters of religion. There is no denying that in the past it was too often thought lawful and effective to defend the truth by making slashing attacks on those who held opposite views. The ecumenical spirit admits of no attack on the integrity or good conscience of others.

2. Don't be afraid to admit that members of the Catholic Church, some in high places and many in low, have been



Orthodox and Protestant churchmen have developed extensive cooperative programs through the world Council of Churches organization with headquarters at Geneva, Switzerland. Russian Patriarch Alexei and Council secretary Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft are shown in photo. Both have assigned observers to the Vatican Council sessions at Rome.

guilty of sins and imprudent decisions and actions.

The infallibility of the Catholic Church, in which Catholics believe, has never meant impeccability (preservation from sin) on the part of her members, no matter how high or low the position they have held. Nor has it meant that every practical decision made by those in authority would be endowed with the highest wisdom and timeliness. Infallibility means only that the essential truth revealed by Christ and the moral law representing His will are preserved through the guidance of the Holy Spirit from change or error.

Publicly on the floor of Vatican Council II many speakers have confessed the sins of Catholic churchmen and the practical mistakes that were made. Indeed, the very charter of the Council, drawn up by Pope John XXIII, was based on the need of the human elements in the Catholic Church to change some of their ways and make amends for mistakes of the past. Pope Paul VI echoed this theme in his opening address to the second session.

The mood of the Council has constituted an invitation to all Catholics to enter into discussions of what changes are called for in order that the Church may best fulfill her great mission in the world.

This does not mean that the Council has done away with the eighth commandment and declared an open season for negative, destructive and harmful criticism of others. To gossip about the sins of others, whether they be clerics or fellow laymen, serves no purpose but to hurt not only the one

gossiped about, but the speaker and hearers as well.

Sometimes it is not easy to make the fine distinction between constructive and destructive criticism. While the ecumenical spirit favors open discussion of possible practical changes in the administration of the Church, each individual who takes part in such discussion must probe his motives, purify his intentions, and remain open-minded to views that clash with his own.

3. Don't think or speak of traditional Church laws as if changes in them would be unthinkable.

Some Catholics have a temperamental antagonism toward any kind of change in the positive laws and traditional regulations of their Church. It is usually these same Catholics who have only the vaguest ideas of the distinction between positive or ecclesiastical laws and the natural or divine law.

The Church has the authority from Christ to bind her subjects by positive laws, but she also has the authority to abrogate, dispense from, or change these positive laws. Such are the specific laws of fast and abstinence; the prescriptions of Latin to be used in the liturgy, such as that requiring Latin to be used in the western Church at Mass; even the law of celibacy in the western Church, while it is not likely to be changed, is an ecclesiastical law from which exceptions can and recently have been made.

It is a sign not merely of lack of the ecumenical spirit, but of gross ignorance for a Catholic to be heard saying: "If the fast before Communion can be changed, if the prayers at Mass can be changed, if married converts are allowed to be ordained priests, why cannot the Church change her teaching on contraception or divorce or even therapeutic abortion?" Updating the work of the Church will never mean attempting to change the unchangeable, which is the divine law written into the nature of man.

At the same time, there should be no undue fear of or scandal over changes in ecclesiastical law. The main purpose of Vatican Council II is to re-examine the practices, traditions, positive laws, administrative policies of the Church to see whether changes are not called for to meet the needs of the times.

4. Don't think that the ecumenical spirit, which encourages open discussion of measures and changes in positive law that will make the mission of the Church more effective, frees you from obedience to Church laws and regulations that are still in force.

It is not lawful to anticipate decisions that might possibly be made by Vatican Council II and to act as if they had already been made. It is not lawful to accept as a working guide suggestions for change in Church laws that are being made by forceful writers and propagandists, even though such writers are encouraged to present their views.

A good example of failure against this rule recently occurred. A prominent Catholic writer, Mrs. Mary Perkins Ryan, has written a book suggesting, and indeed attempting to prove, that it would be in accord with the ecumenical spirit of Vatican Council II to abandon the Catholic school system in the U.S. and have all Catholic children attend the public schools. No

one can deny the right of Mrs. Ryan to propose such a drastic measure; indeed, a bishop wrote a foreword to the book giving approval to a widespread discussion of the proposal.

But Mrs. Ryan's book, and all the arguments she musters, do not change the present law of the Church for Catholics. Still binding is the universal canon that forbids attendance of children at secular or lay schools, unless there is no Catholic school or no space in a Catholic school available, or unless an exception is made by lawful authority, in general or in particular, for certain children.

Despite this, we have heard of one pair of Catholic parents who read Mrs. Ryan's book, and on the sole authority of her proposal, immediately took all their children out of a parochial school and enrolled them in a public school. This is indefensible. These parents might have been induced to share Mrs. Ryan's opinion; they would have been well advised also to read arguments opposed to that opinion; but they certainly acted contrary to prudence and obedience when they acted on the opinion as if it were the authority of the Church changing her previous law.

5. Don't interpret the ecumenical spirit to mean that it no longer matters very much what a person believes.

The ecumenical spirit in no wise casts doubt on the propositions that truth is one, God is one, Christ is one, there is one destiny for all men — and one means to attain it ordained by God through Jesus Christ, His Son and man's Redeemer. Literally, Christ wants all men to be saved through the truth He made known to the world and confided to His Church.

### Caution Advised

Hanover — (NC) — Germany's Lutheran bishops have urged their people to take part in the ecumenical movement, but with caution.

The statement also announced that regional committees will be set up to discuss questions on relations with the Catholic Church and inform Lutheran clergymen and prominent laymen of their decisions.



Pope Paul has shown his strong desire for increased contacts with other Christian churches. He welcomed Protestant clergy to the Vatican Council II. Like Methodist Bishop Fred P. Corson of Philadelphia.

It is a fact of history, past and present, that there are essentially different interpretations of what Christ taught and what He demanded of His followers. No one should say about these essential differences that "they do not matter." But the approach of an ecumenical-minded Catholic to any Protestant should be 1) to recognize all that they have in common; 2) to discuss differences only in the light of a sincere effort to reach agreement in Christ.

Under this head it should be noted that the ecumenical spirit does not de-emphasize the importance of the virtue of zeal. It has been recorded by some astute commentators that there does seem to be a detectable inclination on the part of some Catholics to lessen their interest in and activity toward helping others to attain to the full truth revealed by Christ.

There are scores of ways in which this can be done without the slightest danger of giving offense or breaking the rules of charity and respect for the person of others. The true ecumenical spirit should be a spur to zeal, on the basis of these words of Pope John XXIII in his encyclical Paeem in Terris:

"In every human being there is a need that is congenial to his human nature and never becomes extinguished that compels him to break through the web of error and open his mind to the knowledge of truth. Meetings and agreements in the various sectors of daily life between believers and those who do not believe, or believe insufficiently because they adhere to error, can be occasions for discovering truth and paying homage to it."

6. Extend your personal charity as much as possible to those who are not of your faith as well as to those who are.

The ecumenical spirit, which is really only the true spirit of the Gospel of Christ, does not admit of reserving or limiting one's practice of the works of mercy, both temporal and spiritual, to the religious group to which one belongs. The parable of the Good Samaritan was Christ's own rebuke to such a course, even though it has often been forgotten over the years.

Thus a Catholic will be as quick to bring comfort and aid to a non-Catholic neighbor in sorrow as to one of his own faith. And Catholics are urged to join wholeheartedly with their non-Catholic fellow citizens in programs that are designed to meet some great human need of the community as a whole.

It is a duty to encourage all Christians to bring their hearts closer to Christ and His Church by 1) enlarging your knowledge of His will, 2) greater participation in the liturgy and the sacramental sources of grace; and 3) by intensifying your life of prayer.

The goal of the ecumenical spirit, as envisioned by Pope John XXIII, is greater unity of the human race in Christ. The means he set in motion to attain that end were a renewal or renovation or "bringing up to date" of the Church from within herself, principally through the general council he called, but also through an appeal to all Catholics everywhere in the world to "renew" themselves.

He was well aware that the whole organism of the Church can become more vibrantly effective in the world only if the individual members strengthen and revitalize themselves.

This means that the ordinary Catholic who wishes to glow with the ecumenical spirit will seek, by reading, study and meditation, to increase his knowledge of Christ's will for him. He will seek greater union with the living Christ by accepting the invitation to participate actively in the liturgy and the life given and developed by the sacraments. And he will try to develop, step by step, his conscious life of prayer. A Catholic who is doing these three things is an ecumenical Catholic, and both within and without the Catholic Church he will make Christ better known.

—From a pamphlet of The Liguorian Press.

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Orthodox prelates have been frequent visitors to the Vatican under Pope John and Pope Paul. One such recent visitor was the Greek Orthodox vicar general Jeroteos Tsanillis of Patras, Greece.