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Ecumenism: A Mission of Hope

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de Magallanes. The prize of 300 pesos was equally divided between the two: The portraits were to be hung at the session hall of the *Junta*. Subsequently, some thirty years later, Rocha was to become director of the school where he had studied the first principles of the fine art.

The royal decree of March 9, 1891, unhappily incorporated the school of fine arts into the School of Arts and Trades, and leading citizens like former Mayor Jacobo Zobel Zangroniz protested ineffectively—for how could the painting of portraits and landscapes be placed in the same category as the painting of houses and furniture, sculpture on the same level as carpentry?

But the school continued its peripatetic existence, until it was replaced at the beginning of this century by the School of Fine Arts at the University of the Philippines. For more than half a century it produced a notable group of Filipino painters, from Guerrero, Juan Arceo, José Lozano, Juan Nepomuceno and Simón Flores to Felix Resurreccion Hidalgo and Juan Luna Novicio who reaped honors for the country abroad.

CARLOS QUIRINO

Ecumenism: A Mission of Hope

Our everyday vocabulary is steadily enriched by a continuous flow of terms, some newly coined, others simply restored to circulation. One of the newest "ism's" to find its way into popular speech is "*ecumenism*". Actually this "ism" is a member of long-standing in the theological lexicon. Ecumenism includes all that pertains to the Christian population of the world as a whole; today, it refers especially to those activities and events designed to foster greater unity among the diverse elements of Christendom.¹

I have been asked to address you this morning on the subject of ecumenism. I do so with some apprehension for two reasons. In the first place, there is already a good deal of ecumenical activity in the Ateneo. This can mean that you probably know more about the subject than I can tell you in half an hour's talk.

In the second place, this is perhaps not the best time to talk about ecumenism. You are getting ready for the Civil Liberties Rally on Saturday, with its anti-Communist overtones. Now the spirit of such a rally is to fight—to fight for our rights, to fight against subversion.

¹ Cf. *First Steps in Grass-Roots Ecumenism*, National Council of Catholic Men, Washington, 1966, p. 57.

While the spirit of the ecumenical movement is precisely not to fight, but to be at peace with our neighbors and to work in harmony with them.

At first sight therefore, your anti-Communist rally and my talk this morning are two incompatible things.

But on a deeper level, they are really not incompatible. We must defend ourselves against the enemies of the Christian Faith, against those who try to destroy our civil rights. But in ecumenism, we try to work in harmony—not directly with the enemies of the Christian Faith, but with our fellow Christians, with those who—like us—believe in God and in Christ, but who do not belong to the Catholic Church. With them we do not fight. Rather, we seek to find things in common. And with the strength of our common Faith, we can fight together the enemies of God and of human rights.

This is an age of change. There is an urge—especially among the youth—for greater freedom. There is a desire for renewal, for reform, for new approaches to old problems.

Ecumenism is a new approach to an old problem. It is a challenge which the Church has accepted in the recent Vatican Council.

The old problem was the lack of unity among Christians. The old approach was to fight the non-Catholic Christians as if they were enemies—and in many ways they *were* enemies. They apparently and in good faith tried to destroy the Catholic Church, and we, in self-defense, had to fight back.

But thanks to the work of the Holy Spirit, that old spirit of enmity has died down, and instead a new spirit of friendship has come to life. This is a challenge to us Catholics, to work towards unity. And it is a challenge which must appeal, especially, to the young.

From the beginning, I must state in all honesty that the ideas or suggestions I am about to outline are neither new nor particularly personal.² But I hope that they may help in a modest way to foster in us a greater desire to pray and work for the restoration of unity among Christians.

Many teachers—perhaps most—honestly think that their subject is the most important or, at least, one of the most important in the cur-

² These notes have been compiled for a Convocation at the University of the Ateneo de Manila, coinciding with the opening of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, 18 January 1967. The speaker gives due credit to the authors when he can trace back where he got the ideas and at times even the expressions. Any omission of sources in the footnotes is thoroughly involuntary. The pressure to print the speech may have to take the blame for it.

riculum. I hope you will allow me to make that same naive judgment about the topic I am going to discuss with you this morning.

But whether it is 'most important' or 'just important', Ecumenism is definitely a vital and dynamic reality in the life of the Church today.

Ecumenism is an old word, but it has acquired a new meaning; it is an old movement, but it has gained a new impetus.

This movement may someday become almost a popular movement. Even secular papers write so often about Ecumenism, the Ecumenical Movement, ecumenical activities or dialogue. The result is that we are witnessing a kind of ecumenical inflation. Occasionally "Ecumenism" and "dialogue" appear so inflated that we seem close to an ecumenical explosion.

In ecumenical jargon we also find such terms as "metanoia", "re-discovery", "encounter", "dialogue", "ironing out of doctrinal divergencies", "separated brethren" and so forth. Under these and similar expressions which are already the patrimony of any moderately instructed Catholic, a reality is coming to life. It is the reality of a new situation, of an irreversible dynamism manifesting itself in various ways. This dynamism is bringing about the creation, within the Christian community, of conditions which will eventually lead to that supernatural unity in accordance with Christ's parting words: "That all men be one." Ecumenism is the great contemporary movement within Christianity that aims at mutual understanding, charity, cooperation, and ultimately union. "Ecumenism" carries overtones of universality and wholeness, pervading the whole Christian body.³

In this sense we may well speak of a new climate, an Ecumenical Climate. We must in fact become aware of a new situation, of new conditions affecting the drive for unity in the Church of Christ. Unfortunately, however, not everybody is as yet aware of this vital dimension of the Church. The *Civiltà Cattolica* could write not long ago:

"Some Catholics talk as if nothing had happened in the Church during the last few years, and their mentality still retains the anti-Protestant attitude of the past. But the real thinking of the Church about the problem of unity is expressed in the Vatican Council's Decree of Ecumenism. This document does not speak about the 'return' of 'heretics' and 'schismatics' but about a movement not only in the direction of separated Christians towards the Catholic Church, but also of the Catholic Church towards the other Christians. Unity will thus be a meeting in which the Catholic Church will give the separated Christians what they lost when they left it. But it will also receive the really Christian heritage which has been produced by the separated Chris-

³ *First Steps*, pp. 1-2.

tians during the centuries of separation, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit."⁴

F A C T S

The new ecumenical situation we live in is due, above all, to the Holy Spirit, the soul of the Church. As such He has always animated and inspired her, is animating and inspiring her now, and will continue to do so in the centuries to come. This century has witnessed some special manifestations of this animating force and of the vitality of the Church: among these dynamic movements that are lifting the Church to live up to God's plans for her, the missionary movement and the liturgical movement occupy a preeminent place.

In another supernatural movement, helped by subsidiary ones, like the Biblical renewal, we find ourselves already led by the impulse of the Spirit in what has already been known as the ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT. We are not in the jet age or in the atomic age, as if we were merely material beings; we are in the Ecumenical age.

But we should not consider the Ecumenical Movement, as we see it today, as a sudden invasion of supernatural powers in the Church; a kind of divine coup d'etat whose instrument has been John XXIII. This would be simply a caricature. The desire for the restoration of unity is as intrinsic and essential to the Church, as is the vital tendency in a living organism to heal a wound—even a self-inflicted wound. The organism craves and longs for the sealing of its bleeding lips. And if division among Christians has been termed "the sixth wound of Christ", we can say that this sixth wound neither belongs to the Crucifixion or the Redemption nor is in any way glorious in the risen Christ. The Mystical Body of Christ has always tended and will always tend to the healing of its sixth wound. This tendency is an inner ecumenical drive.

To use another comparison: When divisions occurred, they entailed a pain in the Church, the Body of Christ, similar to that of the amputation of a limb. "A person who has lost an arm, a leg or a hand not infrequently experiences sensations in the nerves at the end of the severed limb which he feels as though they were coming from the lost member. So the corporate mind of the Christian people experiences sensations of painful regret and wistful yearning, which seem to emanate from the lost members of their body—the fragmented Body of Christ".⁵ It yearns for unity. Attempts at union are, therefore, a supernatural reaction and need.

⁴ *La Civiltà Cattolica*, an. 116, 1965, Vol. I, n. 2, pp. 106-107. Editorial under the title: "Immobilismo cattolico nel dialogo ecumenico?" See *Herder Correspondence* Vol. 2, n. 4, p. 99.

⁵ J. A. O'Brien, *Steps to Christian Unity*, London, 1965, p. 20.

From the non-Catholic side the modern ecumenical movement had its beginnings in the concern of Protestant leaders, dismayed at the spectacle of more than 350 denominations, to heal Christianity's many wounds. In its modern shape it takes its start in 1910 with the conference of Edinburgh; it seemed to have reached its peak in Amsterdam in 1948, with the foundation of the World Council of Churches; but it has gone to further heights in the General Assembly in New Delhi, in 1961. The WCC embodies—though it does not monopolize—the Ecumenical Movement outside the Catholic Church.

The interest of Catholics in the modern ecumenical movement has had a slow but steady growth since the days of Leo XIII. It continued to grow under the following Popes, until it came to full blossoming under John XXIII and Paul VI. A few recent facts, taken at random, may serve to illustrate the Catholic commitment in the Ecumenical Movement.

On 25 January 1959, announcing his intention to call an ecumenical Council, John XXIII expressed his desire "to invite the separated communities to seek again that unity for which so many souls are longing in these days throughout the world."⁶

The establishment of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity by Pope John XXIII in June 1960, is a landmark in the history of Ecumenism within the Catholic Church and even in the whole Christian world.

In September 1963, Paul VI in his opening address to the Second Session of the Council said, speaking directly to the non-Catholic observers:

"If we are in any way to blame for that separation, we humbly beg God's forgiveness. And we ask pardon too of our brethren who feel themselves to have been injured by us. For our part, we willingly forgive the injuries which the Catholic Church has suffered, and forget the grief during the long series of dissensions and separations."⁷

These words received immediate confirmation in action when in January 1964 Pope Paul made an ecumenical journey to the Holy Land where he and the Orthodox Patriarch Athenagoras embraced each other as a sign of love and mutual forgiveness in the name of the Churches they represented.

On 4 December 1965, four days before the closing of the Council, Pope Paul set an interesting example of union in charity and common prayer together with the non-Catholic Christians. He participated with

⁶ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 1959, LI, 2, p. 69. See also Abbot-Gallagher, *The Documents of Vatican II*, New York, 1966, p. 336.

⁷ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 1963, LV, 15, p. 853. See also Th. Stransky, *The Decree on Ecumenism*, Glen Rock, N.J. 1965, p. 61.

the Council Fathers and the non-Catholic Observers in an inter-faith prayer service for unity at the Basilica of St. Paul-outside-the-Walls, with Protestant, Orthodox, and the Catholic faithful in attendance.

On 7 December 1965, a unique event took place. On that historic day a joint declaration signed by Pope Paul and the Orthodox Patriarch Athenagoras was simultaneously read in St. Peter's basilica in the presence of the Pope and the Council Fathers and Observers, and in the Church of St. George (Istanbul, Constantinople) in the presence of the Patriarch, his Synod, his clergy and his people. It was a declaration of regret for past mistakes, of esteem and charity for the present, and of hope for future reconciliation. The nine-century-old anathemas and condemnations from each side against official persons of the other were nullified, and the way dramatically opened for accepting the breath of the Holy Spirit:

"...Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I have not lost sight of the determination each then (when they met in Jerusalem) felt, to omit nothing thereafter which charity might inspire and which could facilitate the development of the fraternal relations thus taken up between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church of Constantinople. They are persuaded that in acting this way, they are responding to the call of that divine grace which today is leading the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, as well as all Christians, to overcome their differences in order to be again one as the Lord Jesus asked of His Father for them".⁸

As a touching corollary of this action, the Metropolitan Melito, who had headed the Patriarch's delegation, before leaving Rome, placed nine white roses at the tomb of Pope John as a symbol of the nine centuries of division which were now beginning to be undone.⁹

The very Decree on Ecumenism is itself a magnificent ecumenical act, committing the whole Church to the work of ecumenism.

Obviously we are in the ecumenical age. We are led by the Holy Spirit, in and through the Church, to a deep involvement in the ecumenical movement. As the Council puts it¹⁰ the "concern for restoring unity pertains to the whole church, faithful and clergy alike. It extends to everyone according to the potential (ability, talent) of each." This clearly means that the Council has made of the ecumenical spirit, one of the distinctive marks and one of the major concerns of the contemporary Church. In this new ecumenical climate the need of unity has made its full impact on the Christian conscience.

⁸ *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 1966, LVIII, 1, pp. 20-21. The original document is in French. See also Abbott-Gallagher *op. cit.* pp. 725-727, and p. XVIII.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

¹⁰ *Decree on Ecumenism*, 5, a.

Indeed, if a Christian who had died some years ago were to return to the earth today and witness the revolution which has taken place, he would scarcely believe his eyes. Imagine his astonishment at seeing Cardinal Cushing kneeling in prayer in an Episcopalian church in Boston together with its rector, or Cardinal Spellman attending for the first time a funeral service in a Presbyterian Church,¹¹ and nearer to us, on the 6th of November 1966 Bishop Hernando Antiporda, commissioned by His Eminence Cardinal Santos, conducting a service of common prayer in the auditorium of the YMCA of Manila on the occasion of the 55th anniversary of its foundation.

And in the field of research or scholarly activities we can see Pittsburgh's Catholic Duquesne University establishing a new *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, and the editors include the Presbyterian Theologian R. McAfee Brown, Catholic theologians Gregory Baum and Hans Kung, and Lutheran George Lindbeck. And again, nearer to us, we see Dr. Lukas Vischer, a Pastor of a Reformed Church and an official of the World Council of Churches, addressing the community and invited guests at Loyola House of Studies; or the Dean of Theology of Loyola House of Studies addressing the Faculty and members of the Union Theological Seminary in Cavite.

Definitely, the "iron curtain" among Christian denominations has been raised; we are realizing that the walls of separation do not reach to heaven. In fact the walls of Jericho are crumbling. The ecumenical climate has affected and transformed the life of the Church and of the Churches.

DIMENSIONS

We would elaborate at great length on the different aspects and exigencies of the EM developing its multiphasic dimensions. But we must confine ourselves to a few:

a) We must first stress its VITAL character: Ecumenism, being a real *elan vital*, cannot be expressed in geometric categories. It is precisely because of this vital character that it has developed gradually and that it has not been strictly defined in the Decree; it has been only described, leaving room for its vitally existential development under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Ecumenism is not, as it were, a special 'subject' or department to be left to a comparatively few specialists. It is a work of the whole Church.¹² The concern of everyone in the Church must be engaged. Ecumenism is now as much a part of the Church's work and life as is the spread of the faith to the non-Christians.

¹¹ J. A. O'Brien, *op. cit.* p. 307.

¹² B. Leeming, *The Vatican Council and Christian Unity*, New York 1966, p. 120.

b) Ecumenism has TRUTH as its basis: hence Ecumenism cannot be considered as a kind of confessional relativism. It "is not a vague sentimentalism which floats a perfumed pink fog over every issue between Catholics and other Christians, so that all sharp outlines become fuzzy and all differences are concealed. Far from it. Ecumenism is built on the solid foundation of clear theological truth", acknowledging all the realities in a situation and taking all of them into account.¹³

Hence, even if it is true that the WCC seems to be working on the more or less basic assumption of "coexistence", nevertheless there is something more than that to it. While not directly trying to suppress immediately the confessional differences, the WCC definitely strives to neutralize dangerous tendencies, emphasizing, as the Catholic Church does too, an absolute respect for revealed and also for historical truth.

Ecumenism cannot require from a Catholic to stop believing in the uniqueness of our Church and look instead for unity in some vague "super-church". This cannot be genuine Ecumenism. We can not sell out the Church at all cost in order to help other Christians. We cannot betray the truth. Truth matters supremely, just as much as love does. Union cannot be achieved on the basis of the "lowest denominator".

To proceed otherwise would be to indulge in that "false irenicism" which has been as strongly rejected by the Vatican Council as it has been rejected by the Protestants in the WCC. "False irenicism" in this connection means the opposite of polemics. "Raised as one of the dangers implicit in the Ecumenical Movement, 'false irenicism' alludes to an overconciliatory or accommodating attitude" by the member of one faith towards those of another. "The point here is that it is as absurd to pretend that there are no serious differences between religions, as to assume that there are nothing *but* serious differences between them".¹⁴

Any false irenicism that glosses over the genuine meaning of doctrine or ignores the real sources of division is obviously foreign to the spirit of true ecumenism. Superficial programs and imprudent attempts to obtain hasty results, or a too easy entrance of the unprepared into technical dialogue will only hinder real progress toward unity.

c) The Church is in itself—and is presented in the documents of the Council as—the pilgrim Church. The EM has as its goal the union of all Christians and all Christian churches in Christ. In fact, rather than a movement of the churches towards one another, it is a movement of all TOWARDS CHRIST. "Seeking Christian unity is not a return to something, but a going ahead towards greater fidelity

¹³ D. O. Hanlon, "Ecumenism and Conversion" in *Mary*, Jan.-Feb. 1966, p. 12.

¹⁴ J. A. O'Brien, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

to Christ."¹⁵ Hence to represent the Catholic Church—as it has been caricatured in its drive for unity—as putting herself in the “center of an ecumenical solar system”, is to grossly ignore the essence of Catholic thought on ecumenism. Christian unity will be achieved only by the growing Christianization of all Christians.

This very “Christwardness” is based in some real “In-Christ-ness”. In fact, a major factor in the changing Catholic attitude has been a growth in understanding of how non-Catholic Christians are related to Christ and to the Catholic Church. Every baptized person has by baptism been united with Christ and thus has a right to be called a Christian. This is not just a matter of name. For the Christian who has been incorporated into Christ is incorporated into His Body, which is the Church. Non-Catholic Christians are not full members of the Catholic Church, but they do have a real membership. As the Decree says: “...all who have been justified by faith in Baptism are members of Christ’s Body and have a right to be called Christian, and are correctly accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church.”¹⁶

d) The ecumenical drive is UNIVERSAL in scope. Hence Catholicity is an ecumenical concern as ecumenism is a Catholic concern. Ecumenism without Catholicity is superficial as Catholicity without ecumenism is narrow.¹⁷ Since “the unity of the Church is neither exclusive nor provocative...the Church doesn’t take her stand in opposition, but exists for self-offering and serving. Her unity is not enclosed and static, but dynamic and out-going; it is directed outwards from herself.”¹⁸

AIMS AND MEANS

A.—When John XXIII announced his intention to convene an Ecumenical Council, a large number of people interpreted his words as meaning the convocation of a Council of Unity. Some even went so far as to write that with this step the unity of Christians seemed to be in the offing. Even now some have the erroneous idea that ecumenism aims at instant unity: something like a recipe: ‘take Christians, add goodwill and dialogue, shake well, and—presto, reunion!’ Things are not so simple.¹⁹

The *ultimate* goal of ecumenism is the conversion of the world to Christ. Christ prayed that all those who believe in Him down through the centuries might be one, as intimately one as He and His Father

¹⁵ G. Baum, in L. Romeu, ed., *Ecumenical Experiences*, p. 14.

¹⁶ *Decree on Ecumenism*, 1, c.

¹⁷ See A. Dulles, *Ecumenism, A Catholic Concern*, Glen Rock, N.J.

¹⁸ Card. Felin, Pastoral Letter 1952.

¹⁹ The picturesque phrase is found in *First Steps*, p. 2

are one. And why? "That the world may believe that you have sent me"²⁰.

But the *immediate* goal of the ecumenical endeavor is to create the atmosphere and the situation in which all separated Christians, may be stimulated and inspired to open themselves to that conversion by the Holy Spirit which will lead step by step to the union of all Christians. "It aims to foster understanding, mutual respect, and charity. And it aims too at making Christians better Christians within their own traditions. Eventually, it is hoped, this will lead to unity. But the unity will not come about by conquest or one-sided admissions of error. Instead it will come from mutual growth in the understanding and practice of what it means to be a Christian."²¹

B.—In order to attain this goal some means are put into action:

1) The first and essential step in the right direction is called by the Decree itself "*spiritual ecumenism*", which comprises, above all, interior conversion of each individual, holiness of life, and prayer for unity. Anyone devoted to ecumenism must seek to become a better follower of Christ. There is no ecumenism without interior conversion.

Prayer both private and public is universally recognized as belonging to "the soul" of the movement. This is precisely the aspect particularly emphasized during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity—formerly called Church Unity Octave—which we start today, now, in a solemn manner.

This prayer of petition doesn't attempt, as it were, to inform God about our desires for unity, but will make them more cogent and obtain God's blessings upon them. Nor does the different concept of the unity of the Church among the separated Christians imply a different object of our common petition during this Week of Prayer. All Christians can—and should—pray for that unity which Christ wills for His Church, and for it to come about, in the way which Christ wills.

In the world of the spirit, prayer must be called a "cosmic force", making fruitful all the powers of human intellect and will.²² In this way, during the Week of Prayer, the whole enterprise of overcoming the division among Christians is projected into a manifestly "spiritual" dimension.

"Almost sixty years ago, Father Paul James Francis Wattson, an Anglican priest, conceived the idea of a special prayer for unity. He later became a Roman Catholic and the founder of the Graymoor Friars of the Atonement, whose principal work is fostering Christian

²⁰ John 17:21.

²¹ *First Steps*, p. 3.

²² B. Leeming, *op. cit.* pp. 137-138.

unity. The Chair of Unity Octave,—now the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity—originated by Father Paul prior to his conversion to Catholicism, has been celebrated in the Christian Churches each year from January 18 to January 25. Pope Pius X approved the celebration in 1909, and Benedict XV made it an official prayer and extended it to the whole Church in 1916. The Chair of Unity Octave was unique in that it was the only Roman Catholic devotion which originated within another Christian Communion.”²³ Each day of the Week of Prayer particular intentions are presented to God for different Christian denominations or Communions.

The celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity “represents, perhaps, the most opportune vehicle for involving large numbers of the community in the work of ecumenism.”²⁴

2) *Dialogue* is a beginning step to understanding. “For too long we have been as strangers shut off from one another by doors of ignorance. Dialogue can push open the doors. Dialogue with our neighbours demands respect for one another, an attitude of honesty and objectivity, an openness of mind, and a willingness to acknowledge one’s own ignorance and another’s wisdom. The late Father Gustave Weigel, S.J., a pioneer in ecumenism, put it very simply; “They are your brothers—speak to them.”²⁵

“Formal dialogue—high-level theological exchange between specialists—is by the nature of things pretty well limited to those who have the special training required to carry it on successfully. But less formal dialogues in which each side simply seeks to make clear its understanding of the Christian message to the other, are not only possible for laymen but are in fact their special responsibility.”²⁶ In fact, often the exchange of their daily lives—in education, occupation and recreation—have given them insights into the thinking of fellow Christians that a more limited environment necessarily denies the clergy.

Such dialogues will achieve three goals.²⁷ Both sides will gain a more accurate knowledge and appreciation of the doctrines and religious life of each other. The way is prepared for joint action in working for the common good of humanity. The examinations of faithfulness to Christ’s will, arising from conscientious participation in dialogue, will promote vigorous renewal and reform—in the life of the partici-

²³ *Blueprints for Action*, National Council of Catholic Men, Washington, 1966, p. 1.

²⁴ *Recommendations for Diocesan Commissions for Ecumenical Affairs*, Bishops’ Commission for Ecumenical Affairs, Washington, 1966, p. 22.

²⁵ *Blueprints*, p. 7.

²⁶ *First Steps*, p. 10.

²⁷ *Decree on Ecumenism*, 1, d.

pants themselves and their churches. Dialogue can be considered as the center of gravity in the Decree on Ecumenism.

3) *Mutual co-operation.* Ecumenism strives for organic unity, a vital, fruitful unity animated by mutual concern with the profoundest hopes and quests in life. Hence, "regardless of who proposes a given venture in interreligious cooperation, the very nature of ecumenism, of Christianity itself, dictates that the venture be one of organized co-operation." For this we must go to the grass-roots. It is only this mass approach that can succeed in breaking down the ramparts of division that have ossified over the centuries. The roots of division are too deep to be extirpated by the "happy-chance" encounters of amiable individuals with members of other faiths, on some question touching religious commitment. The roots are too deep in that individual—not just the bigot, but the person of faith and good will.²⁸

4) Finally, "the best thing Catholics can do at the present time to promote the ultimate goal of Christian unity, is to seek the *renewal and reform* of their own Church, so that it will reflect the will of Christ more clearly. Implementing institutional reform and renewal in the Church is mainly the responsibility of the Pope and the Bishops. Every layman, however, can—and must—have a share, a big share, in this process by accepting and working to put into practice the reforms outlined by the Council. Pope Paul recently cautioned Catholics against letting the momentum of the Council flag after its close. Its fate, he said, will depend "not upon the multiplicity of rules but upon the seriousness and commitment in putting the decisions coming from it into practice in the years to come."²⁹

Before closing, let me make a necessary remark. Ecumenism is not only for the specialists. "Indeed, there are those who say that, just as war is too important to be left to the generals, so ecumenism is too important to be left to the professionals. High-level talks at the national level are necessary, but by themselves they tend to leave ecumenism 'up there' somewhere in the stratosphere, out of reach of ordinary Christians and hence of limited practical value to lay people in the local congregation. It is the laymen who must live the ecumenical spirit if it is to leave the classroom and conference hall and enter the market place."³⁰ "The Laity is the world's ecumenical hope", says Fr. Stransky of the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity.

Practically all Christians are novices in this business called "Ecumenism".

The Ecumenical Movement is already strong and it is gaining momentum all the time: how the individual responds and cooperates with

²⁸ *Blueprints*, pp. V-VI.

²⁹ *First Steps*, p. 12.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

the movement will determine whether or not that momentum will be augmented or weakened. Sooner or later, some ecumenical activity will touch the life of every Christian. It is not enough to look upon Christian unity as a desirable goal; it is something to work for here and now.

As we have said in the beginning, this is an age of change, an age of new challenges. The challenge of ecumenism is one of the most important we must meet.

And it is also most difficult. For on the one hand, we must strive in the spirit of brotherly love, to be united with all our Christian brothers. And on the other, we cannot close our eyes to the fact that our non-Catholic brethren do not believe the things that we do.

How do we reconcile these things? It is here where we need the light and the strength of the Holy Spirit whom we will invoke during this week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

Ecumenism is a mission of hope. The primary reality in the ecumenical action is not that we are working for God but that God is working for us.

PEDRO S. DE ACHÚTEGUI, S.J.