

Conference on Ecumenism

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*“In front of an unbeliever, the last thing I have to do is try to convince him. Never. The last thing I have to do is speak...Never, never bring the gospel by proselytizing,” he said later. “If someone says they are a disciple of Jesus and comes to you with proselytism, they are not a disciple of Jesus.”*¹ (Pope Francis: Dec 2019)

I. Introduction

- a. **Why** do we need to speak about this topic?
 - i. Objective truth of the Catholic Faith – without recognizing this reality, we cannot do anything... (*If all religions are equally true, then there is no true religion*)
 - ii. There is a good and healthy Ecumenism – in fact, The Catholic Church, since the time of the Apostles, has practiced a true ecumenism...without it, none of us would be Catholic.
 1. Matthew 28:18-20 = “*And Jesus coming, spoke to them, saying: All power is given to me in heaven and in earth. Going therefore, **teach** ye all nations; **baptizing** them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.*”
 - a. **Teach** all persons the truths of Divine Revelation (contained in Sacred Scripture and Tradition)
 - b. **Baptize** them, bring them into the Church and give them the means to save their souls.
 - iii. Since the early 20th century (and during and after the 2nd Vatican Council) – especially with the document *Unitatis Redintegratio* ("Restoration of unity – the document of V2 on Ecumenism") – the definition and understanding of Ecumenism has been radically changed. We will see what Pope Pius XI taught in his encyclical *Mortalium Animos* of 1928 and then later what Pope John Paul 2nd taught nearly 70 years later in the Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*... it is a tragic distortion that strikes at the very heart of the Faith.
 1. Example -Short antidote - Story of a seminary here in Asia. Speaking with an elderly priest who was trained in a diocesan seminary in 1960's (it is the only one in the country). I asked

¹ <https://disrn.com/news/pope-says-christians-should-never-try-to-convert-unbelievers-anyone-who-proselytizes-is-not-a-disciple-of-jesus>

him what they taught regarding Ecumenism... He said that already they were embarrassed and minimizing the work of Catholic missionary priests of the previous generations...even the great and saintly missionaries – priests and saintly religious who actually converted Tens of Thousands of pagans into the true church – without these great missionaries, there would be no Catholicism here in Asia. What was the name of this seminary? St Francis Xavier Seminary!!!

2. Cardinal Ranjith in Sri Lanka – see short interview he gave on national media recently. (We do not want to convert Sri Lanka – see 40sec mark)

It is especially clear with the 2nd Vatican Council that there was a trilogy of errors= religious liberty, collegiality, ecumenism – It was summarised in the following way by Abp. Marcel Lefebvre in his book *Open Letter to Confused Catholics*, written in 1985:

*If we consider it well, it is with its own device that the Revolution entered the Church of God. **Liberty**, the religious liberty that we spoke about above... **Equality** is collegiality, with the destruction of personal authority, of the authority of God, of the Pope, of the bishops, the law of numbers. Lastly, **fraternity** is represented by ecumenism. By these three words, the revolutionary ideology of 1789 became the Law and the Prophets. The Modernists achieved what they were seeking.*

Therefore, after this short introduction, let us look at the definition of Ecumenism and when does it become false ecumenism – using the encyclicals of Pope Pius XI and Pope John Paul II.

What is True and False Ecumenism

In general, a dictionary might define ecumenism as “a **movement favourable to the reunion of all Christian churches into one church.**” Of course, there are many variations on this theme, even more recently with this “One Church” not being just composed of Christians alone, but of anyone who has any faith in any god or supreme being.

- **Original meaning of the word “Ecumenical”**– it comes from a word that meant “**the whole inhabited earth**”; thus, *councils* which gathered all of the bishops of the world were called **ecumenical**. Those were the general councils, while councils of a certain region were called particular councils. The word “ecumenical” is like the word “catholic”, since they both refer to universality.

- **Modern (false) meaning – Protestant hijacking of “ecumenism”** – now, the Protestants in the 19th century, 300 years after Luther’s revolt, realized that they were terribly divided, and they wanted to make efforts to unify themselves. **After all, their division looks very bad, and it leads many people to join the Catholic Faith.** But what would they call themselves when they were unified? Catholics!?! No way! That word had been taken for 1800 years. No, they would call themselves ecumenical.
- **Purpose and bond of the movement** – this *so-called* ecumenical movement, then, was directed “*to foster the reconciliation and collaboration of the various Christian confessions.*” But they obviously could not have the same unity as that possessed by Catholics, who all believe the same set of supernatural teachings. Rather, they would unite around “*mere Christianity*”, i.e. find the **lowest** common denominator of belief that held true for all of them.
- **World Council of Churches** – the WCC was founded in 1948 and it defined itself as “a community of churches that recognizes Christ as God and Savior”. All of the denominations who are members remain independent and the decisions of the Council **do not have to be accepted** by the members. They don’t even have to recognize the other denominational members as churches!

Having seen a little of the history of the word “Ecumenism” – let us see what Pope Pius XI wrote about it nearly 100 years ago.

Mortalium Animos

Firstly we can briefly look at the encyclical of Pope Pius XI from 1928 – *Mortalium Animos*. (title taken from first line of encyclical – “the minds of mortals/men”).

- Men today are keen for unity and peace, which is *understandable*, and the ecumenical movement seeks to use religion as a means for uniting men. (Remember, the horrors of The Great War were still fresh in their minds – less than 10 years before)
- The goal (of these new ecumenical persons) is to get the members of Christian religions to agree on fundamental points of doctrine, a bare minimum. But the Pope’s judgment on the movement: **disapproval**, because *it assumes that all religions are equally good*, in that all correspond to man’s religious sense; because it leads to naturalism and atheism; **because it rejects the religion revealed by God.**

Common Ecumenical Objection = BUT Christ commanded believers to be one and to be charitable to one another.

We will see that this objection is based upon an error, which overturns the foundations of Catholicism.

Principles countering the false ecumenism

1. God did not just give to men the natural law, written on the hearts of all. He also sent His Son, Who taught men the right way to serve God. **Thus, a religion cannot be true if it does not rest upon His revelation.** Christ founded a Church that men might follow His revelation and obey His direction.
2. **The Church is visible, consisting of one body of faithful, having one faith and one authority.** The Church is a **perfect** society, given by Christ to continue after His Ascension **until the end of time** in its role of leading all men to salvation, possessing all that she needs to perform this task, and remaining always the same.

What about the objection - The quote of Our Lord - "*That they all may be one*": this is a **false understanding** – **as if it expresses a wish for something which has still not been granted**, because the Church does not have unity of faith and government. (*Of course, in this quotation, Christ is really asking that all come into the one true Church*)

The following are errors about the Church of Christ:

- it is composed of many churches, which are all separate
- all of these churches have the same rights
- the Church remained one and undivided for a short time only (only up to the 1st Ecumenical Councils – either the Council of Jerusalem 50AD or Nicaea 4th Century) – common protestant error = “there was one Christian church for the first few centuries...”
- the Church is to be made one again by all believers rallying around a minimal residue of doctrines and a **minimalist common profession of faith**
- Rejection of Papal authority: The Catholic Church is accused of corrupting the original faith by adding papal primacy to it. This primacy is **not** needed...it only causes confusion and division. (ironic idea – since there is no one who has more splinter and break-away sects than the protestants)

Their false solution to this:

- Pope should at most be given a primacy of honor, with limited power and jurisdiction, **which will be conferred upon him by the consent of the faithful**, not by God. Democratic Will replaces the hierarchical nature of the Church.
- The Pope should preside over ecumenical assemblies.
- **The Pope should not expect to be obeyed nor expect non-Catholics to change their beliefs.**

Why the Pope and Catholics **cannot** participate in ecumenical gatherings:

- It would imply that the Catholic Church is not the true Church founded by Christ.

- It would imply that the Holy Ghost has left the Church.
- It would **imply that the Catholic Church is searching for the truth and unity** and has not yet found it.

Argument for ecumenism from Charity

Objection: *But* the ecumenical movement promotes charity among Christians.

Ans: True charity has **faith** for its foundation. This is why the *Apostle of Love (St John)* has us shun heretics. If you look in the 2nd Epistle of St John

2 John v10 = *If any man come to you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him **not** into the house **nor** say to him, “God speed you (or give him a greeting!).”*

Of course, we must be charitable to all men, and to persons in other religions, but not be “accepting” of a false religion or to pretend that their false religion is true – that would be the height of false charity...to not correct someone in a grave error, a **fatal** error would be most hateful!!

Faith is the true foundation for union among Christians. There cannot be true unity among those who **disagree** on such fundamental doctrines listed here below:

1. The **essential value** of Tradition (together with Scripture)
2. the Authority of the **Hierarchy** (as instituted by Our Lord)
3. the reality of **transubstantiation** –CLEAREST & Most OBVIOUS DIFFERENCE
4. the value of praying to **saints** and venerating images.
5. – of course, since this Encyclical of Pius XI was written – this list could be much longer...the Protestant Christians have changed so many more teachings of their faiths. (married clergy, divorce, contraception, other sins against nature etc)

This ecumenical movement does not strengthen unity but rather leads to:

- religious indifferentism: it does not matter what religion you choose, or if you choose any religion at all.
- relativism: dogma and truth change according to the needs of the time and the democratic will of the people.

Conclusion of Pope Pius XI: True ecumenism

True ecumenism is the fostering of non-Catholics to convert and return to the Church, because She is still just as Christ founded her. Whoever is not in the Church is not in

communion with Christ. Let non-Catholic Christians acknowledge the Pope as their head, returning to the fold which they left, where alone they will find salvation. We pray that all may return so that there may be part of the “One fold and one Shepherd”.

The attitude of the Catholic Church to the ecumenical movement

- **Pre-Vatican II** – the Church did not associate herself with the movement; in other words, she was not involved in the attempt to unite Protestant confessions one with another or unite herself with them. Rather, She attempted to convert them.
- **Vatican II** – there are two documents of the Council that deal with ecumenism: *Unitatis Redintegratio*, which is explicitly on ecumenism, and *Dignitatis Humanae*, which speaks of the relations of the Church with non-Christian religions
- **How did the Church foster this unity before Vatican II?** By inviting other religions to return back to the Catholic Church; the Eastern schismatics have been invited back by ecumenical councils. Pius IX invited Protestants to come back to the Church before the First Vatican Council, and Leo XIII made a similar appeal in 1894. And, it is not uncommon (or unheard of) for those in false religions to find their way back to a true unity – the annals of history (even recent history) have shown this to be true.

Summary of *Ut Unum Sint*

Here we can take a few moments to try to give a glimpse, a taste of the encyclical by Pope John Paul II in 1995. It is a long letter – more than 5x as long as Pope Pius XI’s encyclical! The footnotes are almost entirely from Vatican 2 documents or post-conciliar documents... as is to be expected. It is a real chore to read and one finds themselves more confused after reading...

This encyclical was written with a characteristic style (style seen with many documents in recent decades...both introducing some novelties and change of definitions – while just afterward “reaffirming” basic truths of the faith. It is that classic “We need to change everything and we also must not lose our respect and reverence for the perennial truths of the faith” – or – “We must only look at the good things and the truths we share with other religions – and “however, we must never change or compromise on essential matters of the faith.” This sort of language creates an understandable confusion.

Here I will give you some examples of the sort of confusion and error that is very common in this encyclical..

1. “I thank the Lord that he has led us to make progress along the path of unity and communion between Christians, a path difficult but so full of joy. **Interconfessional dialogues at the theological level have produced positive and tangible results:**

this encourages us to move forward. Nevertheless, *besides the doctrinal differences needing to be resolved*, Christians cannot underestimate the burden of long-standing misgivings inherited from the past, and of mutual misunderstandings and prejudices. (*paragraph 2*)”

2. Pope John Paul II felt personally felt Jesus' ardent desire and made it his own. Ecumenism became one of the priorities of his Pontificate, because the division of Christians is a scandal that affects the Jesus' work.
3. False Syllogism = (page 5)
 - a. All persons who believe in Christ are persons who are desiring unity
 - b. BUT – All persons who are desiring unity are persons who desire the true Church.
 - c. Therefore, All persons who believe in Christ are persons who desire the true Church.

Formal Logic (structure and rules) is fine. It sounds good. However, the Material Logic (actual truth of each premise) is not certain nor is it proven...

4. It is a path that can help us “discover the unfathomable riches of the truth” and the presence of elements of sanctification “beyond the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church” (page 7)
 - a. Then follows: “ ecumenism is not a matter of “altering the deposit of faith” and “changing the meaning of dogmas”. – **again with this contradiction...**
5. In ecumenism, the Pope explains, pride of place belongs to common prayer. Christians, praying together, can discover that what unites them is much stronger than what divides them.
6. **The liturgical renewal carried out by the Catholic Church** and other ecclesial communities has allowed for convergences on what is essential, and together, more and more, **they are able turn to the Father with one heart**. “At times it seems that we are closer to being able finally to seal this ‘real although not yet full’ communion”, the Pope observes. “A century ago who could even have imagined such a thing?”
7. Full unity has in Peter its visible point of reference, and John Paul II launches an appeal to the various Christian communities to help “find a way of exercising the [papal] primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation”, as “a service of love recognized all concerned”.

Archbishop Lefebvre = from his Biography (Bishop Tissier de Mallerais) – page 237

While the Archbishop was still working in Dakar (1950's) there was a large plane accident at the airport and 160 passengers died...a mixture of different peoples and religions. Since they could not separate who was who and distinguish between them, they could not hold separate burials.

Unfortunately, A.Lefebvre was away travelling. His Vicar General (Fr Bussard) was asked by Air France to do a joint ceremony with the Muslims and Protestants. The Vicar General decided that it would be okay as long as the Catholic Apostolic Nuncio was the first of the three, would perform the ceremony and then leave after he finished...

So the Nuncio (Bishop Maury) gave the absolution and blessings and departed. Then the Protestant pastor said some prayers/readings, then the marabout (Muslim religious leader).

The next day A.Lefebvre returned and he had heard the ceremony on the radio. He asked his Vicar General "did you give permission for that – it is *communicatio in sacris!!!!*"

His Vicar General said "no, it was not exactly that – we did our ceremonies separately...and the Apostolic Nuncio was okay with it."

Lefebvre disagreed...he thought that his priest (Fr Bussard) and the Apostolic Nuncio had compromised a little too far here...that they might seem to put the Catholic Faith on the same level as the other 2 false religions. It seemed like indifferentism or relativism...a false ecumenism

Conclusion:

In the **first** place, Catholics believe that the unity of the Church herself is already there and has always existed. For the true Church, the Catholic Church, has a perfect unity. So, Catholics do not assume that unity is yet to be established, much less that a new, one Church should be established; but Catholics believe that all Christians must be brought into that existing one Church, and only thus can the division end.

And so, they cannot cooperate with various attempts by non-Catholics to attain that unity, *because those efforts must end in the wrong kind of unity. (a false and empty unity)*

Then Catholics believe that there must be unity in all that Christ has willed and instituted: in **doctrine**, the **means of grace**, and **ecclesiastical organization**. In other words, three things converge to produce the unity of the Church:

The same **faith**, the same **sacraments** and the same **submission** to the Pope as Vicar of Christ. *A more or less vague unity of feeling is not enough.* So, Catholics do not believe

that unity can be achieved through some kind of compromise, through a give and take, by covering up serious differences. Christians can only truly become one if they all accept the truth of the Faith as contained in the deposit of the faith.

However, the Catholic Church maintains that for the sake of unity it can yield to everything that is established and arranged by custom, history, and local culture. Thus, for example, it leaves Eastern Christians free to preserve their own ancient rites and their traditional customs, which are not based on error but rooted in their acceptance of the Faith; but it cannot compromise with that which she regards as ordained and taught by God.

This new and false understanding of Ecumenism has tragic consequences:

1. Error on the Positive side = If other faiths are equally true, then why not seek out the one that is easier, the one that is more interesting to me, or the one that I like on an individual level. Why remain Catholic? Or Why convert to Catholicism?
2. Error on the Negative side = If we must simply dialogue and find all the “points of agreement” between the Catholic faith and other false religions – at what point does the Catholic try to convert the non-Catholic?

Think how much is not being done for the conversion of non-Catholics – no zeal, no missionary desire to bring the faith to the millions/billions of souls across the world who live and die in the darkness of error, idolatry, paganism, etc...