

Editorial

ECUMENISM AND THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

BY THE TIME this issue of the *Journal* appears the third session of Vatican Council II will be well under way. All the evidence seems to support the view that the current session will be the crucial one, perhaps determining the role of the Roman Catholic Church in the Ecumenical Movement for the remainder of the century.

In spite of the impressive commitment of the majority of the bishops to the cause of Ecumenism at the second session of the Council, two things in particular have caused very sober and qualified estimates of the chances of the third session contributing, through official decision and action, to the kind of reform in thought and attitude that would make genuine ecumenical involvement a real possibility. Both centre in the question where Pope Paul VI really stands in relation to Pope John's magnificent vision of reunion through reform and the progressive bishops' understanding of the kind of reform needed.

Roman Catholic representatives of the progressive wing have found it necessary to put as favourable an interpretation as possible on the actions, or the supposed actions or inactions, of the Pope at the second session of the Council in order that the Protestant reaction might be one of chastened optimism rather than of disillusionment. The recently published Papal encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam*, is causing even more concern. An editorial in a late-summer issue of the *Christian Century* speaks of it as *A Venture in Ambivalence* and finds it a most disturbing and disheartening document. Even if progressive Roman Catholics, such as the editors of *America*, are able to see it in a much more favourable light, the encyclical does give to the third session of the Council an even greater significance for showing where Pope Paul will actually take his stand with regard to those matters that both Protestants and many Roman Catholics believe necessary for ecumenical involvement and church reform.

Meantime we cannot but continue to believe that the entry of the Roman Catholic church into dialogue with itself and with separated brethren on the subject of reunion through reform is an event that has its source in the rule of Jesus Christ in his Church through Word and Spirit. And surely a hope based on this belief is not ill-founded that this creative and recreative activity of God in his Church will not soon come to an end. Our Lord has called into question those who seek "a sign" in order to believe in the reality of his person and work. But surely he approves of his people finding in special moments of their history occasions to rejoice in the signs of his presence with power. Surely those who have participated in one or more of

the ecumenical evenings, held in increasing numbers in local areas during the past two years between Protestants and Roman Catholics, are justified in attributing their surprised joy in encountering one another as Christian brethren to the presence of the Christ who is where two or three are gathered in his name and who ever seeks to work a work of reconciling love.

May we not find in such evenings of Christian encounter the answer to the question that has plagued the Ecumenical Movement from the beginning: how to get the Movement into the local levels of the Church's thought and life. The writer has yet to hear of any such gathering, arranged at the local level by representative clergy and laity, that has not enjoyed positive results. It would be faithless to ask whether such experiences can be sustained over a long period of time. In the economy of God any actualization of grace is of eternal significance and worth. We pray for positive results from Vatican II. We also pray that, whatever those results may be, nothing again will hinder Christian encounter between those who through union to a common Lord belong essentially together.

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