



# EUROPEAN ECUMENICAL ACTION

A free forum for the union of churches, founded in 1955 by  
CONSTANTIN DRAGAN

## Catholics and the ecumenical movement

The new attitude of Catholics in regard to the ecumenical movement has been discussed by Father Roberto Tucci, one of the Catholic personages invited by the Council of Churches to speak at the conference in Upsala.

Catholics, Father Tucci emphasized, no longer consider themselves uninvolved, indifferent or only "curious" spectators, and much less exacting judges, but participants in the common, fraternal, collective search for that unity which Christ wished for his Church.

This is an attitude of authentic, profound respect and of true spiritual participation, Father Tucci said, recalling how this "lucid" assumption of position, in a spirit of cooperation with a movement which has carried out a good part of its activity "outside" this cooperation, has constituted, for large sectors of the Catholic world, a true overturning of traditional values.

Whatever the attitude of the Catholic Church was in the past, in the last few years it has fully inserted itself in this collective search for unity, the director of "La Civiltà Cattolica" noted in an interview published by the great Jesuit journal.

Father Tucci then dealt with the problem of the 'spirit' and of the 'intentions' with which the Church participates in the ecumenical movement, that is, in relation to the "perplexities, doubts and suspicions" still existing among non-Catholics who fear that because of its cohesiveness and its numerical weight, the Catholic Church will one day be tempted to claim a central position in the ecumenical movement and then exploit such a position to the advantage of its own orientations, that is, on the basis of its own ecclesiology.

The Catholic Church, however, does not intend to impose its ecclesiology on anyone; at the most, it proposes it to the other Churches in the simple desire to have it considered, discussed and even contested in the light of the word of God, in the conviction that it is able to give an important and specific contribution to ecumenical dialogue.

The Catholic Church, Father Tucci said, agrees that ecumenical dialogue should be carried out on a perfectly equal footing between the Churches which confess the same God, without forcing the weight of its own ecclesiology on the conditions of the dialogue.

The Catholic conception, especially after the Ecumenical Council Vatican II, which put the accent on the "dynamism" of the common movement towards unity, as can be seen by its documents on ecumenism, can no longer be accused of "immobilism".

The documents of Vatican II do not limit themselves to the traditional benevolent "return to Rome" invitation extended separated brothers, but concerns itself in the first place with "re-establishing unity", with "restoring unity".

Emphasizing the necessity of intensifying Christian cooperation for a ready solution to several currently-dramatic problems—hunger, development, peace, racial conflicts, oppression, exploitation of the weak, violence "suffered or sought"—Father Tucci discussed the possibility of the Catholic Church one day becoming an effective member of the World Council of Churches.

For Father Tucci the most serious obstacles in the path towards unity are "more of

a psychological and practical nature than an ecclesiastical nature".

Therefore, the "fundamental criterion must be, on both sides, the most complete openness to everything that could constitute a step towards serving the ecumenical movement.

Whatever may be the future development of institutions called upon to promote collective seeking of unity, the fundamental requirement must remain that of continuing the common effort of doing together that which our consciences oblige us to do separately, creating an "ecumenical mentality" in the mass of believers through a more vast and more profound basic education and ensuring that ecumenism is not considered an activity reserved above all for the specialists or for the "bureaucratic summit", but a duty common to all, to which all, and in a particular way the young generations who are training to replace us, can and must give their contribution.



## Agreement between Paul VI and Athenagoras on birth control

The apprehensions of those who have seen in the Encyclical "Humanae Vitae" on the difficult problem of birth control a serious obstacle to the world ecumenical movement have turned out to be unfounded—at least as far as the attitude of the Greek Orthodox Church is concerned.

This Church, in perfect agreement with the Catholic Church, recently issued an Encyclical that calls upon the faithful to halt the tendency towards fewer births and to adhere to the traditional rules of Christian morality, that is, not make use of contraceptives.

The Orthodox of Athens are not the first to publicly declare their approval of the "Humanae Vitae" Encyclical. At the beginning of August, the Ecumenical Patriarch and spiritual head of Orthodoxy, Athenagoras I, sent a message to Paul VI in which he said: "You have done well to publish the Encyclical "Humanae Vitae". We are in agreement with you. We wish you God's every support".

The assent of Patriarch Athenagoras did not certainly bind the entire Orthodox Church to give its support to the Pope. As solely spiritual and not jurisdictional head of the Orthodox Churches, Athenagoras cannot make decisions or express judgments—except in his own name—until a pronouncement has been made by the Holy Synod, that is, the conference of Orthodox Bishops, each of whom is sovereign and independent in his own territory and, in many cases, head of a church defined, in fact, as being autocephalous.

With his message to the Pope, the Ecumenical Patriarch knew he was voicing the thought of all the Orthodox Church and the Greek Encyclical now confirms his certainty. Moreover, to give an official character to

his statement, immediately after the sending of his message, Patriarch Athenagoras made it known that preparations had begun to call a world Orthodox Synod which would pronounce itself on—among other things—the "Humanae Vitae".

What would be the probable results of such a Synod?

The Greek Church has already stated its position in the document of which we have spoken.

Also it is expected the heads of the Russian Church in exile will fully support the Pope's Encyclical. Before the Encyclical of the Greek Church was published, Archbishop Antonov, head of the Russian Orthodox who now resides in the western hemisphere, stated that it was "necessary to keep the rules intact".

Also the Russian Orthodox of America have lined up in favor of the Pontifical Encyclical, "though not holding it infallible", as the official newspaper of their community put it.

The Russian Communist Church has not yet stated its position. Bound to the regime as it is, it cannot manifest its support of the Pope, unless, out of political motives, it finds the Encyclical favorable to demographic increases which could be part of Russian expansionism.

But it is also well known that both Patriarch Alexei and his protege', the Metropolitan Nicodemus, consider demographic expansion a means of resistance to communism.

It is clear that if the number of Church followers were limited by birth control as by continuous persecutions and atheist teachings, this would be increasingly detrimental for the Christians.

The communists ask nothing else but that Christianity lessen and die a natural death.

## Soviet patriarch against world Orthodox synod

Soundings by Patriarch Athenagoras on the possibility of holding a world Orthodox synod were met with angry refusal by Patriarch Alexei « of all Russias. »

Such a synod, which would align the Orthodox Church on the positions of Rome, would inevitably have the effect of confirming Athenagoras in the Orthodox world, since it would be the Patriarch of Constantinople and not the Patriarch of Russia to call the world Orthodox meeting.

It is clear that such an event would be highly displeasing to Alexei as to Nicodemus and above all contrary to the designs of the Kremlin which controls orthodoxy to the point of annihilation.

But the arguments of Alexei, reflecting the designs of the Kremlin, do not stand up to a dispassionate examination of the facts for the following reasons:

1) Alexei, like his predecessor Sergius, was proclaimed Patriarch by questionable election. A member of the Soviet Union was present at the proclamation (which naturally seemed unanimous) of both. The decision, *proposed by the Soviet member and not by the ecclesiastic authorities*, was made not by proper election, but by a show of hands.

2) Almost 50 million clandestine Orthodox Josephites in Russia, do not accept Alexei as their head and many priests belonging to this community which is now suffering censure and persecution by the political police, have publicly accused him of protecting neither the faithful nor even his own clergy.

3) It would be intolerable for the Orthodox world if the Moscow Patriarch became head of the Orthodoxy because if there is anything the Orthodox world contests unanimously it is the spirituality of the Soviet Patriarch and his protege.

Though jealous of their religious autonomy, the Patriarch heads of the autocephalous Orthodox churches and above all the great mass of Orthodox faithful look upon Patriarch Athenagoras as representative of the unity of direction of all the Orthodox communities. They consider him the greatest of the Orthodox Patriarchs and have an affection for him which should not be underestimated in a church where sentiment has equal ranking, if not higher, with theology and the hierarchical structure.

They certainly have no sympathy for Alexei, Patriarch of all Russias who, strong in his pretense of representing 200 million Orthodox Russians—in comparison with which the 30,000 of Athenagoras are a mere fraction—aims at being recognized spiritual head and primate of the Orthodoxy of the entire world.

Such a pretense cannot be supported by the other Orthodox churches which cannot forget the irregularity of the naming of Alexei, « man of the Kremlin, » and who see in his pretenses an attempt to make the Russian Church the Church-Guide of the Orthodoxy of the entire world, a dangerous identification of Russian « religious » aims with political aims.



## A DOCUMENT OF THE ITALIAN EPISCOPATE ON THE ENCYCLICAL "HUMANÆ VITÆ,"

In a document approved at the end of the recent special session of the Council of the Presidency of the Italian Episcopal Conference, the bishops expressed their support of the Encyclical «*Humanæ Vitæ*.»

The document professes above all the «*full communion of faith of the Italian bishops with the Pope*» and gratitude for the decision pondered and clarified by Paul VI on the problem of birth control.

Such a decision, says the document, which in the pastoral constitution, «*Gaudium et Spes*» is reserved for the Pope, «*expresses the doctrine of the Vatican Council II on marriage.*» It must thus be «*received with the religious respect owed to authentic doctrine*» even though it has not been pronounced *ex-Cathedra*.

The seriousness of the problem dealt with by «*Humanæ Vitæ*» requires an «*adequate interpretation of the pontifical document, above all its pastoral effects.*»

Therefore, the Council of the Presidency of the Italian Episcopal Conference asks all the clergy and the faithful to take in consideration the following pastoral reflections and directives: 1) In the first place there is a «*moral content*» of the Encyclical and its «*significance in relation to the well-being of the family and society.*» The Encyclical interprets and applies the doctrine of the need to take into due consideration the Church on marriage, understood as «*communion of love and of generous and responsible fecundity between marriage partners and in all the processes connected with the transmission of life.*»

«*Defending conjugal morality and its integrity, the Church contributes to the establishment of a truly human society.*»

The document invited the faithful to see in the doctrine of the church on marriage, which casts light on the Christian concept of man and his responsibility, the «*expression of the maternal concern of the Church for the general and personal welfare of men.*»

Though severe, the document admits, the decision of the Pope is full of understanding and of humanity. It does not ignore the sociological conditions of the world nor the difficulties of married couples. The Encyclical «*Humanæ Vitæ*» is not contrary to a «*reasonable*» limitation of births and indicates «*the honest way*» and the therapeutic methods admitted by the Church for the control of birth, exhorting at the same time married couples to make recourse, «*with humble perseverance, to the sacraments of the confession and of penitence.*»

The Encyclical, continues the Episcopal document, does not reject *a priori* the future prospects of science for an honest regulation of procreation. On the contrary, it asks scientists to extend and widen research in this field in order to make surer and easier the methods indicated by science.

The document formulates thus several spiritual and pastoral directives, recommending close cooperation between theologians and bishops for the development of themes of moral doctrine and for greater clarification of the faithful on the significance of the message of this Encyclical.

It also recommends to priests «*the patience and the goodness of Christ*» in the evalua-

tion of errors and transgressions, particularly in regard to married couples who do not fulfill their duties not «*for egoistic refusal of fecundity,*» but «*for difficulty in conciliating the needs of responsible parenthood with those of mutual love.*»

Priests, however, would fall in most grave error if they encouraged «*mediocre conduct or solutions of easy accommodation,*» since, as in any other sector of moral life, Christians cannot subtract themselves from the obligation of seeking to carry out always the will of God, with the help of grace.

Finally, the document asks Christian cou-

ples to reflect attentively on the Encyclical, putting it in practice and valuing its directives and exhortations in regard to «*faith and to the fecundity of conjugal love and to the characteristics of responsible parenthood.*»

«*More concrete and more organic*» pastoral action, the document concludes, will facilitate and develop that which is necessary both inside and outside the family environment, to nourish that spirit which God, our Creator, wished to instil in the most intimate sanctuary of human life, forming «*almost a domestic Church designed for the salvation of parents and children.*»

## Romanians in Yugoslavia without priests and churches

A superficial glance at the religious situation of the Romanians in Yugoslavia is sufficient to make one realize the gravity of the consequences of such a policy, and of the dimensions of drama of the Romanian population south of the Danube. For the Romanians in the Yugoslav Republic are faced with the threat of soon being without churches and without priests of their own blood and language.



History teaches us that the Church has been throughout the centuries the protector and the continuator of the national languages and traditions of the peoples, and in particular of minority groups. Now the Romanians in Yugoslavia, concentrated in 49 centres, for the most part rural, have at their disposal at the present moment only 14 priests, almost all over sixty years of age. Hope of renewing the ranks of the clergy are at a minimum, since access to Orthodox seminaries in Yugoslavia by Romanian students is strictly limited. Moreover, to those few Romanians who succeed in taking orders, are assigned parishes speaking a language other than that spoken by their ancestors for centuries and transmitted, along with the Gospel, from generation to generation.

Once the present generation of veterans of the altar has passed from the scene, the Romanians will remain without priests of their own tongue, even though their priests try, at the cost of almost inconceivable sacrifices, to keep for Romanians those parishes which have become free owing to the death or the retirement of their respective incumbents, by celebrating Mass and carrying out all their religious functions in two or more villages.

This grave lack of clergy, which gets worse with every year that passes, is aggra-

vated by the pitiful physical state of most of the buildings devoted to the cult.

These churches, mostly all extremely old and in a state of frightful disrepair, cannot be restored for lack of funds. With very few exceptions, the localities inhabited by Romanians are found in extremely poor areas, where not only is there no profit accruing from their own work, but where in the majority of cases the people are obliged to buy elsewhere what is necessary to meet the production quotas fixed by the state. Private initiative is therefore inexistent, and of course the state has no interest in subsidizing the necessary work of restoration. In fact, the danger that these old churches might collapse at any moment is often invoked as a pretext for closing them.

Sometimes the churches of the Romanians are closed without any reason being given. This was the case with the Romanian parish churches of Bittolja and Skoplye, which are in a perfect state of conservation. They were closed some years back, and have remained closed ever since, in spite of innumerable appeals by the priests and the Romanian community to the Yugoslavia authorities and to the Metropolitan of Timisoara, whose jurisdiction covers all the Romanian parishes south of the Danube.



We wish that those who are so eager to denounce Italian "persecutions" would take a little trip to those zones of Yugoslavia inhabited by Romanians (which these gentlemen incidentally have seen fit to abandon, not, certainly, because they were living too high off the fat of the land!). Then perhaps they might find out just what it really means to live under a régime of persecution and de-nationalization of minorities.

# Reflections on the first Italian ecumenical congress

In the light of the renewal of the Church promoted by the Vatican Council II, the first national Congress of those Italian priests, theologians and laymen interested in ecumenical matters which was held during the summer in Ariccia in the Roman hills, has proven wrong the conviction in many circles—particularly in foreign circles that Italy is participating in the ecumenical movement more out of faithfulness to the Council than out of a sense of ecclesiastical responsibility, being not influenced by the world movement for the restoration of Christian unity.

Honestly speaking, such an impression is not totally without foundation. It is necessary therefore to keep in mind several local realities that justify this attitude of, if not reservation, at least extreme prudence in the Italian Church in regard to contemporary ecumenism.

And it is precisely to this "Italian reality" that the Congress of Ariccia turned its attention.

This would be, in short; 1) the traditional formation of the Italian Catholic community, founded on the principle of inherited authority and accepted by generation after generation, cannot be compatible with the freedoms of choice and of initiative that exist in other Christian communities, for example, the Protestant communities; 2) the rigidly didactic expression of the Italian catechism, acquired through manuals and without a personal participation that supposes reflection and personal choice, implies a tendency to leave up to the clergy and to the superior magistrature of the Church the task and the responsibility of reflecting on the truth of the faith; and this with a "dangerous" subtraction of the mass of believers from any co-responsibility in critical decisions and in formulations regarding the faith.

At the same time, however, contact with other Churches and ideological contaminations of a social-religious nature bring about reactions of protest that constitute an obstacle to a real dialogue in which all faithful participate.

These generally are the causes that explain the difficulty the Catholic Church of Italy has in inserting itself in the world ecumenical movement.

Sponsored by the Italian Episcopal Conference, the Congress of Ariccia sought to eliminate, first of all, these basic situations that are in opposition to an effective effort of the Church of Italy on the plane of that operant ecumenism to which the entire Church of Christ is called. Because ecumenism is not a "method of contestations", Prof. Sartori underlined in his speech, "but it is a situation of reform and an expression of faith in Christ".

Ecumenism is a phenomenon that begins inside the Church and follows the logic of that communion in Christ of all men which is the interior norm and style of life for the Church. To put ecumenism in dispute means to put the very law of the Church in dispute.

These, in summary, are the ideas gathered from the two basic speeches of the Congress ("The Lumen Gentium Constitution and the Unitatis Reintegratio Decree", read by Msgr. Sartori; and "Pluralism and Unity in the

Church", read by the Jesuit father, Jean de Vries).

The two speakers during their entire reports referred to a Church understood as communion. From the ecumenical point of view it was a surpassing of the sociological scheme of the church which had in the past impeded any availability for dialogue with non-Catholics who were asked—with the formula of "return" and "open arms"—to join an ecumenism all to the favor of the Catholic Church.

To oppose such a formula, the Congress of Ariccia presented the formula of an ecumenism founded on the ecclesiology of the Mystery and of the communion in virtue of which, all Christians—Catholic or not—must make of ecumenism a process of continuous conversion which must begin inside each single Church, then open out necessarily to the greater dimension of a dialogue with the other Churches.

Summing up, the Congress of Ariccia proposed: renunciation of the "paternalism" of the Catholic Church over the other churches; renunciation of the attitude of moral judgement on the other Churches and of mutual accusations; seeking the gifts of the Spirit that each Church possesses; the desire to give of oneself and receive generously; the spirit of penitence corroborated by a permanent suffering for the state of separation existing in the Church of Christ; the seeking of unity conceived of as a gift of God

and not as a simple common effort of the good will of Christians. And more: unity and not uniformity which creates tension and encloses the Church in an only-apparent order. And finally, a dialogue that brings about unanimous responsibility.

Only in this way can the Catholic Church present itself to the others without false irenics. This implies on its part to "listen to all the Churches, to know them as they are, renouncing the temptation to interpret them according to its own theological schemes, with the danger of diminishing richness and doctrine.

Echoing the discussion on the theme: "Ecclesiology of Communion," several speakers presented the Orthodox Church and the communities born of the Reform with a thematic in which the condition of the "Churches" of these communions was emphasized. Without this "certification of their ecclesial authenticity which today is sure and accepted, the speakers Fortino and Pattaro underlined, ecumenism would remain an exterior method and a simple cultural mode, an historical moment of the Church and not its real vocation. Naturally—it was pointed out in a speech on "The re-evaluation of Martin Luther"—ecumenism must not limit itself to a simple "theological effort", but must be translated into hypotheses of concrete labor, so that it becomes a "mental attitude, a norm of life, a possible realization".

## Ecumenism: effective instrument in dialogue between cultures

An international Congress on « Contemporary Civilization, » organized by the Nicolo Rezzara Center of Studies, recently concluded in Recoaro (Italy).

The large participation of the public at all the Congress sessions fully confirmed the topicalness of the theme around which the discussion centered and the interest in the problem of relations between cultures, not only at an « elite » intellectual level, but at the level of popular consciousness, particularly that of university students.

In the closing speech of the Congress, the president of the Rezzara Center stressed the « open » character of the cultures of our time, a tendency that defines the validity and the vitality of dialogue. « For many centuries, » said Hon. Dell'Armellina, « the only relations between the cultures were conflict and mutual exclusion. »

The ecumenical conscience, which inspired and animated the Ecumenical Council Vatican II, has made this meeting between peoples possible. Each culture, beginning with Western culture, must give to the other cultures and receive from them, in an atmosphere of freedom that respects each other's values.

Moreover, true dialogue between peoples appears today facilitated by the expansion of science and technology, as well as the decisive intervention of communications and information which constitutes the preliminary condition for the manifestation of a preparation to which all the cultures contribute through dynamic integration.

Such a dialogue, however, the orator emphasized, among the values present in the various cultures and incarnated in the various

religions which lie at the foundation of cultures, must be above all human: a meeting between religions appears thus one of the basic elements of cultural dialogue. Today, in the spirit of the Council, Catholics are more than ever disposed towards this meeting. They are aware that dialogue between cultures can obtain positive human and spiritual results only in the framework of a plenary vision of man and reality.

The President of the Rezzara Center proposed that the Center promote a series of initiatives of research and debate on matters of common interest for missionary and volunteer groups which carry out activity on an international level.

But the truest and the most fecund conclusion for us Catholics, Hon. Dell'Armellina said, must remain the will for an interior deepening of our conscience in relation to the responsibilities that derive for all of us from the very fact of having the privilege of belonging to a religion that has always had a clear vision of the problems of man.

The Congress in Recoaro pointed up the drama of our civilization that seems to increasingly lose its spirituality and, along with this, its *raison d'être*, the hope and the prospect for a new effort to favor the generations to come.

On the other hand, however, the Congress illustrated the possibility of enriching the western cultural heritage through the contribution of « pure and authentic » cultural traditions, possible if our cultural dialogue is extended over the cultures of other continents.