

Fatima and the ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

by John M. Haffert



An Ecumenical Council is the Church clothed in her most solemn teaching vestments. Decrees of such a Council are infallible. And there has been an average of only one such Council each century since the foundation of the Church.

It follows that the Ecumenical Council meeting about to convene in Rome towards the end of this year will be one of the greatest religious events of our time.

For the past three years (ever since Pope John XXIII announced the coming of the Council) there

have been millions upon millions of prayers said for the success of the Ecumenical meeting. And here are a few points of interest which may better aid each of us to grasp the nature and extent of what will take place:

Twenty-First

There have been twenty Ecumenical Councils.

During the first thousand years of the Church, all the councils were in the Middle East where Christian-

ity was born. During the second thousand years they have all been in the West (Italy, Switzerland and France), most being in Rome. Only one previous council was at the Vatican. This was the last until this year, and it took place in 1869-70.

An "ecumenical council" is a general council to which all Bishops of the world are invited, presided over by the Sovereign Pontiff.

It is not necessary that all Bishops be actually present. The important "elements" of an ecumenical council are that it be a *formal meet-*

ing which all Bishops have *the right* to attend, presided over *by the Holy Father*, to settle important matters of interest for the *Universal Church*.

Exciting Event

As this twenty-first Ecumenical Council begins to assemble from all corners of the world, the thrill or excitement that is already being felt in Rome will spread to all of us.

We recall those first meetings of the apostles . . . when they decided a successor for Judas, selected the first deacons, made decisions about customs of the old law being followed by Gentile converts, and finally the first Apostolic Council presided over by Saint Peter, the decisions of which were prefaced by the words: "*For the Holy Spirit and we have decided . . .*" (Acts of the Apostles, 15:28).

And we recall the many great turns of history that have been marked by the Ecumenical Councils . . .

For many of us who have little knowledge or care about history, there is a far greater sense of excitement in the simple realization that from every corner of the world the Bishops of all nations are converging upon Rome to work out, together, some of the great problems of our age.

Holy Spirit

These are not merely men of authority. They are usually men of great intellect, extensive experience, and of deep personal spirituality. They constitute perhaps the best informed, best educated, and most experienced body of men which could possibly be convened in the world today.

Now add to this the fact that the Holy Spirit will be there.

This is not just a meeting of great men. It is not just a meeting of Bishops. It is an *Ecumenical Council* . . . and the great legacy given to us at Pentecost raises this meeting to a dazzling level.

When the first Vatican Council was convened, Pope Pius IX gave

six reasons for the Council: ". . . they might providently and wisely decree what might be most conducive especially to the definition of dogmas of the faith, to the condemnation of aggressive errors, to the propagation, the explanation, and the more complete statement of Catholic doctrine, to the protection and the restoration of ecclesiastical discipline, and the correction of corrupt morals among the people." (Apostolic letter, June 29, 1868)

What May Happen?

It is perhaps the feeling that this Council will deal with the last two items (this was indicated by Cardinal Tardini, Jan. 20, 1960), and in particular to a healing of the East-West schism (which has persisted for a thousand years) which adds to the sense of expectancy and of excitement evoked by this twenty-first council soon to begin.

Certainly the Council will deal with the greatest problems of our time, among which are Communism, the threat of atomic war, Christian disunity in the face of atheistic Marxism, and the general question of world unity . . . not only on a level such as the United Nations but on a more profound ecumenical level. But whatever comes up in the Council . . . the fact is that here, in 1962, we will have most of the Bishops of the world meeting in solemn council, under the Holy Father, to help us face up to the problems of the hour.

Given at Fatima

At Fatima Our Lady told us two of the problems of our time which would lead to world war and the spread of Communism over the world: 1) Too many persons commit sins; 2) Too few persons pray for sinners.

We tend to think of the wars, and of the curtailment of freedom under Communism, as the prime evils of our time.

They are not.

They are merely the result of the basic evil of sin.

Since the world has to a great extent lost its sense of sin . . . God sent Our Lady to us at Fatima and permitted that she open the earth and reveal the horrors of hell.

As the angel foretold to Lazarus, few of us have cared to look. We don't even want to hear about that vision.

But it won't be surprising if this Ecumenical Council has something to say about the reality of hell . . . as Our Lord asserted it by telling the story of Lazarus.

And it won't be surprising if this Ecumenical Council sharpens the conscience of the world . . . calls its attention to the sins, the evil of which has become blurred or, even worse, sometimes accepted as not evil at all.

Conversion of Russia

Finally, there is the general feeling that this Ecumenical Council will face the question of the East-West schism. Shortly after Pope John announced this Council three years ago, the Patriarch of Constantinople (Orthodox) said that if Pope John succeeded in his intentions he would go down as one of the greatest Pontiffs of history.

At Fatima Our Lady promised that Russia will be converted . . . which can be taken to mean either that the atheistic leaders of Communism in Russia will become believers, or that the schismatic Orthodox will become uniate, or both.

In any event, Our Lady made the promise . . . provided only that a sufficient number of persons would heed Her requests.

If this Ecumenical Council does not turn out to be the actual moment of the fulfillment of Our Lady's promise, there can be no doubt that it will pave the way.

Your Father's House

It was in January of 1959 that Pope John announced the Council, and five months later issued his first encyclical (Ad Petri Cathedram, "To the Chair of Peter") in which he stressed the problem of Christian unity, especially with the dissident Orthodox churches (which

prevail in Russia). His Holiness wrote:

Note, we beg of you, that when we lovingly invite you to the unity of the Church we are inviting you, not to the home of a stranger, but to your own, to the Father's house which belongs to all. . . . All those, therefore, who are separated from us, we address as brothers, using the words of Saint Augustine: They are our brethren. They will cease to be our brethren only if they cease to say "Our Father."

Ten Committees

There are ten committees, the presidents of whom (under the ultimate Presidency of the Holy Father) form the central coordinating committee of the approaching Ecumenical Council. The committees cover: 1) Theology; 2) Diocesan Government; 3) Discipline of clergy and laity; 4) Religious; 5) the Sacraments; 6) Liturgy; 7) Universities and seminaries; 8) Eastern Churches; 9) Missions; 10) Lay Apostolate.

The language of the Council is likely to be Latin, but the Holy Father has suggested that the type of multi-lingual system used at the U.N. might be adaptable for use at the Council.

There are about 2,500 Bishops in the world and several hundred male religious superiors who are eligible to attend the Council . . . making the possible membership of the Council over three thousand.

Due to the iron and bamboo curtains, and due to advanced age and illness of many prelates, perhaps only half the possible number will be in attendance . . . but that will make this, in any event, by far the largest Ecumenical Council in history.

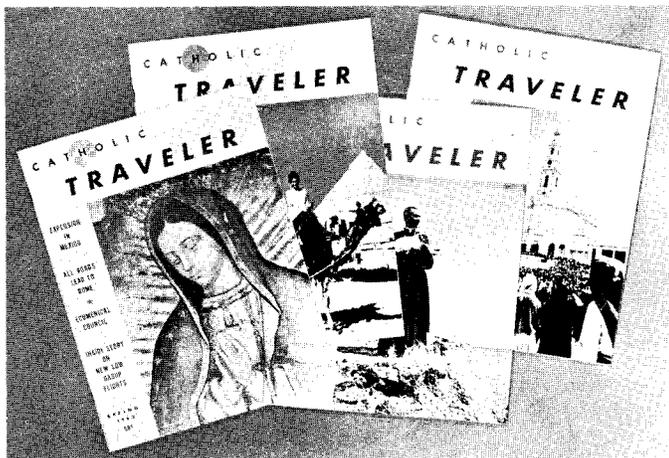
It is possible that many reading this article will get to Rome during this historical event. Indeed the annual (and quite famous) Ave Maria Grand Tour sponsored from America by the Blue Army will arrive in Europe this October just as the Council convenes.

In a future article we will de-

scribe what may be seen in Rome . . . where already the deep excitement of the forthcoming Congress has made itself felt from the Vatican to the Piazza Venetia, and from Piazza del Popolo to Ostia. But Father William Ryan puts it this way:

Another Pentecost

"The forthcoming Ecumenical Council will not be a sort of super, wide-screen spectacle, an object of mere curiosity, an occasion for taking pictures, a parade of celebrities in their fineries as on Hollywood Oscar night. . . . The Council will be the Church Herself making a spiritual retreat in the persons of Her leaders. It will be like the first Novena of Pentecost, when the Apostles and other disciples of Our Lord prayerfully waited in the Upper Room for the coming of the Holy Spirit to strengthen them and give them a profound grasp of revealed truth. . . . It will be the entire Church which will be called to this holy assembly"



ONLY \$1.00 a Year!

Why miss an Issue?

Save a dollar, and SUBSCRIBE

FREE TOUR to EUROPE

Have you sent in your subscription dollar for this wonderful magazine? Don't delay because the coming issue will bring the sensational contest for winning a free trip to Europe, Mexico and other valuable prizes.

Future issues will bring you the programs of all Major Shrines! Detailed sailing schedules of all ships. "Do You Know" Tips which . . . on your trip . . . will be worth the \$1.00 subscription price many times over!

To: **CATHOLIC TRAVELER**

475 Fifth Ave., New York 17

Enclosed is \$1.00. Send me CATHOLIC TRAVELER for one year. (Please print name and address).

Name.....

Address.....