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# Unity of the World of Men

by Rev. John A. Elbert, S.M., Ph.D.

The insights which guided Pope John XXIII and Paul VI in their outlook on the world of today and its manifold problems derived largely from an enriched *philosophy of man* and from a renewed *philosophy of history*. These new outlooks on man and on history emerged, as the Ecumenical Council moved ahead from a slow beginning in 1962 to a swift conclusion in 1965. They appeared most clearly in the Fourth Session of the Council and spectacularly in Schema thirteen, "The Church in the Modern World."

The point of departure for the philosophy of man assumes only that the ultimate end of man in the natural order is to achieve the full potentiality of his being as a rational creature and that this end points up man's deepest need: to be at one with himself, at one with his fellow beings, at one with the Source of his origin. Failing this, he suffers "the nature of an insurrection" in his own little kingdom and creates the climate of perpetual strife in the greater world of his external relationships.

Over thousands of years, man has sought to achieve the unity of an undivided self, in his relations to God, to his family, to his country, and to the world. Consciously or unconsciously, the pursuit of that end has been the most fundamental drive of the individual and of every social group, from the beginning. It furnishes the only sure point of departure for a philosophy of man that is built on his experience as an individual and for a philosophy of history that gives meaning to the tangled web of human events.

What the non-christian psychologist and the non-christian philosopher of history are unwilling to face is the fact that man's original unity was destroyed with the first sin, when man cut himself off from God in order to be like God; and by this break with the primordial Source of his origin he was divided in his own being, in his every operation as an individual and in his relations to his fellow beings.

But even after man had cut himself off from God by the original sin, God did not leave him in utter darkness, nor yet in complete helplessness. He provided man with a new light and with a new power; the light of faith for his mind, the gift of grace for his will. Light and Grace come from one and the same source, God in human form. It was the Incarnate Son of God, a light that was the glory of the people of Israel and which gave a new revelation to the Gentiles (Luke 2:32).

In his opening address at Vatican II, Pope John XXIII said, "We must devote ourselves with joy and without fear to the work of giving this ancient and eternal doctrine a relevancy corresponding to the conditions of our era."

There was never in the mind of Pope John or of his successor, Paul VI, the idea of seeking an alternative either to the body of revealed truths or to any individual truth of the Catholic faith.

From the very outset, Pope John XXIII invited the whole world to share in

the work of the Ecumenical Council, everyone who was actually or potentially a member of the kingdom of God on earth. He did not spurn even atheists, much less any believers, Jews, Mohammedans, Christians separated by schism, or Christians at variance with the Catholic Church in their teachings. He asked for their prayers and for their opinions. He listened and he called for dialogue with every man of good will.

For Catholics he opened the doors and windows more widely. He invited not only the hierarchy but competent clergy experts, representative men and women of the laity, each according to the gifts and talents and love which they would be willing to give to the work in hand.

Essentially, what was that work? and what goal did he set? It was a work of renewal, not a revolution. The goal was unity which has its basis in our common origin. The product to be achieved was order, the *tranquility* of order which is *peace*.

There were those who labelled Pope John's insight a dream. One should have no objection to the term. It places his achievement in the honorable company of Augustine who dreamed of "The City of God;" Thomas More who envisioned a "Utopia;" Pius XII who sought a "Better World;" in the secular order, the men who dreamed up the "United Nations" for the world, and President Johnson who envisages "The Great Society."

The dream which Pope John wished to see fulfilled eventually was with him on his deathbed when he repeated over and over the words of our Lord's prayer in his final discourse at the Last Supper: "That all may be one." THE UNITY OF THE WORLD IN CHRIST was the goal for which he worked and the hope in which he died. From the first beginnings of the Council to the final days of his life when he gave to the world his dream in outward form as the great encyclical *Peace on Earth*, Unity was both the theme and the challenge held up to all men of good will.

The original text of the schema on the Church in the Modern world was presented in the 1964 Session of the Ecumenical Council of Vatican II. That text was then given over to the same Commission that had sponsored the first draft, headed by Archbishop Gabriel Garrone of Toulouse, France, for further study during the period between the third and the fourth session.

The membership of the Commission was greatly increased by the addition of more bishops, in order to have a stronger and wider representation of the universal church; it was also bolstered by collaboration from the laity, both men and women.

The revised text differed somewhat from the original because the Commission sought to adapt it more closely to the minds of the Council Fathers as expressed in the discussions of the Third Plenary Session. As a result the final text was longer, including as it did as many as possible of the opinions and recommendations that had been expressed and approved in principle and substance in those discussions. The Commission also encountered difficulties in the subject matter which needed to be more clearly stated and expressed in language more readily accessible to the generality of men not schooled in strictly theological terminology.

The revised Schema as finally approved consists of a descriptive INTRODUCTION composed by a Subcommittee of the augmented Commission, and of two general SECTIONS which bring out respectively the basic PHILOSOPHY OF MAN and the renewed insight of Pope John XXIII on the PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY.

The Philosophy of Man, implicit in the first section of Schema thirteen, attempts to understand the individual as seen in a multi-dimensional framework from the perspective of the full scope of human knowledge.

This would include, as a point of departure, first *the scientific dimension* which rests on an understanding of human nature in terms of proximate cause-effect relationship.

Next the *philosophic dimension* which attempts to explain man in terms of his ultimate nature and his place in the scale of being, in the hierarchy of total reality.

Equally important is the *intuitive dimension* of man derived from direct experience of the unique position he holds as a person due to his individuality and his unsounded depth, deriving from his rationality, the awesome character of his freedom and the range of his creative power in the arts.

Finally, there is the *theological dimension* which attempts to inquire into the primordial cause of man's being and the ultimate end of his destiny. The theological dimension opens the horizon on the philosophy of man to which the Commission gives special attention and which constitutes the proper field of the Church.

All that the Church requires of the experts in the fields of human knowledge in their evaluation of man's place and rank in the natural order is that they not exclude the possibility of a further evolution of man's natural powers and destiny, in an order depending totally on the free will of God and which points the way to fulfillment beyond our present horizon of time and space.

The Schema, therefore, goes on to explain what the Church says of the condition of man and where man's salvation will come from. The procedure is strictly theological; its point of departure is divine revelation, that is, what the Holy Spirit has confided to the Church and what the Holy Spirit does by grace in the individual Christian and in the Church of which the individual Christian is a member.

TO SPEAK OF MAN IN THE THEOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF REVEALED TRUTH MEANS EVOKING CHRIST, THE ORIGIN AND FOUNTAIN-HEAD OF HUMAN PERFECTION AND THE SUPREME EXEMPLAR OF THE HUMAN RACE.

The second Section of the Schema on "The Church in the Modern World" goes into detail on human society. It is in the social group that the individual Christian must find his full development both in the natural and in the supernatural order. For this reason there is a clear enunciation of the basic principles applicable in the social order as derived from Christ's teaching which gives the only sure foundation for human solidarity and brotherhood.

The principal questions raised in Chapter three of this Section concern, 1) the mind of the Church on earthly things, 2) their value as recognized by the Church,

and 3) the autonomy of earthly things.

Briefly put, we ask: does the Church recognize earthly things as having their own proper and complete existence? Does the Church recognize the progressive evolution of the world and the achievements of which the world can legitimately be proud, particularly the advances in Science and Technology? Most importantly, what is the value of all this progress when viewed under the light of faith in the perspective of eternity?

It is on these issues that one touches some of the most difficult and most obscure points of the Christian revelation. As a starting point one must recall that faith does not create a new world but that it does add a new dimension to our present world by focussing a new light on the world and on all that the world contains, including man and his operations.

In Chapter Four the Commission is at pains to present the Church both as a *PRINCIPLE* and as a *TEACHER* of salvation to the world. As a consequence, the people of God which is the Church must manifest its communion with the world in which it has its being and its life. It is here that we must look for the philosophy of history which guided Pope John XXIII and Paul VI throughout the great encyclicals of the past four years, *Mother and Teacher*, *Peace on Earth*, *The Church*, and specifically in the Schema on *THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD*.

The general conclusion which follows is that Christian life cannot be separated from the world realities, nor can faith be restricted to a realm of realities existing apart from the world of men.

Special problems were encountered in the choice of language for the Schema. Terms had to be used which would be intelligible not only to Christians but to all men, believers and unbelievers and to varied levels of culture.

It is in this Document that the supreme intention and purpose of the entire Ecumenical Council emerges. That purpose and intention were clearly stated by Pope John XXIII when he affirmed that the world is not closed to the word of Jesus Christ and can be brought into contact with Him. The one condition for a meeting of minds is that both the Church and the World teach the truth. It matters not whether the truth is approached and reached through the *word of God* or *through the works of God*; whether it be attained by the theologian through faith and reason, by the philosopher and scientist through insight and reason, by the intuitive genius of the creative artist or by a team representing various insights and approaches to the truth.

Attempts were made to keep the text of the Schema living and dynamic instead of abstract and theoretical in order that it remain close to the human problems which it intends to study. The most difficult part of the task was, of course, to keep the text faithful to the teaching of revelation and, at the same time, faithful to the realities of human life and experience.

Implicitly the Schema repudiates the dogma of positivist and materialistic philosophy which assumes gratuitously that truth can be attained only through sense

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experience. As a consequence it also repudiates out of hand the assumption that science and technology can reach into all the facets of human life and come up with adequate solutions for all human problems.

The guiding principle of the Commission in drawing up this document was the admonition of Pope Paul VI in his Encyclical on the Church concerning the necessity and the conditions for fruitful dialogue.