

We are, all of us, firmly convinced that the theology of our time will be gloriously enriched by the inclusion in the manuals of the doctrinal treasures resident in the great papal encyclicals. Unfortunately, however, when there is mention of the encyclicals in our time, there is a widespread tendency to think merely or at least primarily of the great social documents, like the *Rerum novarum* and the *Quadragesimo anno*. Actually that tendency has done a great deal of harm to modern Catholic instruction. It is perfectly true that the men for whom Christ died need, and need badly, the social teachings of the Catholic Church. It is also true that our people and our priests must have the treasures of dogmatic truth, contained in encyclicals like the *Humanum genus*, the *singulari quadum*, and the *Mystici corporis*. Only when these documents are used more fully, and only when their content is brought into the theological manuals, will we find the type of adequate theological teaching on the Church about which Canon Leclercq has written and towards which he has contributed so effectively.

Joseph Clifford Fenton

*The Catholic University of America*  
Washington, D. C.

#### Adapting the Catholic Message

The principles on which the new opinions we have mentioned are based may be reduced to this: that, in order the more easily to bring over to Catholic doctrine those who dissent from it, the Church ought to adapt herself somewhat to our advanced civilization, and, relaxing her ancient rigor, show some indulgence to modern popular theories and methods. Many think that this is to be understood not only with regard to the rule of life, but also to the doctrines in which the deposit of faith is contained. For they contend that it is opportune, in order to work in a more attractive way upon the wills of those who are not in accord with us, to pass over certain heads of doctrines, as if of lesser moment, or so to soften them that they may not have the same meaning which the Church has invariably held. Now, Beloved Son, few words are needed to show how reprehensible is the plan that is thus conceived, if we but consider the character and origin of the doctrine which the Church hands down to us.

— Pope Leo XIII, in his encyclical *Testem benevolentiae*, issued on Jan. 22, 1899. In *The Great Encyclical Letters of Pope Leo XIII* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1903), p. 442.

## Answers to Questions

### A RECENT DECREE OF THE HOLY OFFICE

*Question:* What decree did the Holy See recently issue in reference to "interfaith" meetings? What bearings will this decree have on conditions prevailing in our country?

*Answer:* The questioner evidently refers to a *monitum* issued by the Holy Office on June 5, 1948, the translation of which is as follows:

Since it has been found out that in various places, against the prescriptions of the Sacred Canons and without previous permission of the Holy See, mixed gatherings of non-Catholics with Catholics have been held, in which matters of faith have been discussed, all are reminded that it is forbidden by Canon 1325, §3, for both lay persons and clerics, whether secular or religious, to take part in these gatherings without the aforesaid permission. Much less is it permitted for Catholics to convoke and establish such gatherings. Hence, let the Ordinaries insist that these prescriptions be exactly observed by all.

There is still more reason for observing these rulings when there is question of what are called "ecumenical" gatherings, in which Catholics, whether lay persons or clerics, may under no circumstances take part without the previous consent of the Holy See.

Since however, both in the aforesaid gatherings and outside of them, even acts of mixed cult have not infrequently been performed, all are again admonished that any communication in sacred rites is absolutely forbidden, according to the norm of Canons 1258 and 731, 52.

Given at Rome, from the Holy Office, June 5, 1948.

Peter Vigorita, Notary  
(*Osservatore Romano*, June 6, 1948)

This decree contains nothing that is strictly new; it merely repeats very emphatically certain prescriptions already laid down by the Code in the canons cited. However, this present decree makes explicit mention of a point which is contained only in a general way in the code—namely, that clerics as well as lay Catholics are forbidden to take part in religious discussions and conferences with non-Catholics unless they obtain due permission. Furthermore, this *monitum* speaks of the Holy See alone as the competent authority to grant this permission. It is true, Canon

1325, §3, states that in an urgent case the local Ordinary can grant permission for Catholics to participate in meetings with non-Catholics for the discussion of religious topics. The present decree is certainly not meant to eliminate this exception; nevertheless, its exclusive reference to the Holy See undoubtedly is intended to point out that an appeal to Rome must be regarded as the normal course of action by one who believes he has a reason to attend a religious discussion with persons of other beliefs. When therefore a priest or lay person in this situation has the time to refer to the Holy See (the Holy Office) before the meeting takes place, he is not justified in seeking permission from the bishop. Indeed, it is difficult to see how the bishop could validly grant permission in such circumstances. Some might question the obligation to use airmail in order to get in touch with the Holy See, on the score that this is an extraordinary means of communication (though personally I believe it to be an ordinary means nowadays). But at any rate, if the period before the meeting is to take place is so lengthy that the ordinary mails can get the petition to Rome and secure an answer in time, the appeal must be made to the Holy See. Certainly, priests or lay persons who regularly participate in the meetings in question can have no excuse for refraining from such an appeal.

It is not rash to assert that among the "various places" in which the meetings have taken place against the prescriptions of church law, the United States is included. In the course of the last five years the pages of *The American Ecclesiastical Review* have carried many warnings against the dangers of the "interfaith" meetings. These warnings now have the clear support and approval of the Holy See; and surely no Catholic should be indifferent to this solemn admonition.

The Conference of Christians and Jews is an organization that offers occasions to which the warning of the Holy See is applicable. For example, their "trio teams" and their local "round tables" can with difficulty abstain from the discussion of religious topics even though their avowed purpose is the promotion of civil good will and neighborliness. For example, in a sample "trialogue" published a few years ago, one of the speakers asserted: "We all have a right to worship, but we do not all have to worship the same way. My worship is different from yours, but my right to worship is the same as yours." Surely, a statement of this nature is concerned with religion, and from the Catholic standpoint it is a most objectionable

statement, embodying the fundamental idea of indifferentism. Again, in a pamphlet issued under the auspices of the Conference of Christians and Jews we read of an incident that took place in a New York High School, at an assembly in which "the speakers were a priest, a minister and a rabbi. Each of them spoke for about ten minutes on 'The Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man,' and stressed with eloquent simplicity and inspiring sincerity the common positive elements in all the faiths." This is an example of a meeting in which a Catholic could not take part without permission.

The second portion of the recent *monitum* of the Holy Office repeats the law of the Code forbidding all active participation of Catholics in non-Catholic worship, and permitting passive presence only for a grave reason. It also cites the canon forbidding the administration of the sacraments to heretics and schismatics. In this connection it is well to note that there is a tendency at the present time for Catholics to officiate as marriage attendants at non-Catholic weddings with little or no regard for the gravity of the reason required for such participation and cooperation. Priests charged with the care of souls could appropriately instruct and admonish their people on this matter.

It is sincerely to be hoped that this latest pronouncement of the Holy Office on a matter that is so pertinent to present-day American life will be seriously taken to heart both by priests and by lay people in our land. Loose thinking on religion has produced a large crop of sayings that are utterly at variance with Catholic principles—such as "Everyone has the right to practice any religion he chooses" . . . "It is not what one believes that counts but what he does." Catholic priests must vigorously oppose such false assertions, and unhesitatingly defend the basic truth that there can be only one true religion, and that is Catholicism.

#### THE PRIEST AND DIVORCED PERSONS

*Question:* In the April issue of *The American Ecclesiastical Review* certain norms were laid down to guide the Catholic laity in their associations with persons who have attempted marriage after a divorce. What norms could be proposed to guide priests in their relations with such persons? Let us take a concrete case. A Catholic woman has civilly married a divorced man. The couple subsequently come to reside in a distant parish, where their repre-