

ADVANTAGES OF THE ENGAGEMENT

1. I do well to encourage a Solemn Betrothal and dis-
pose, if possible, when:
service will separate the groom from his bride very
if not before, the marriage. An engagement in church
fidelity and a partner (to a degree at least) without
the inexorable and permanent effects produced by matrimony.

2. Pursuit of higher education is contemplated by one or both
of the contractants. Experience points to the hardships, material
and moral, accompanying student husbands, wives and parents.

3. Immaturity, emotional, physical and moral, present in either
or both parties. The engagement can serve as a useful period con-
ducive to the necessary growth of the still infantile and puerile
couple.

4. Uncertainty and vacillation experienced by either party in
regard to the choice of consort, the willingness to assume the bur-
dens of the married state here and now, or the like.

5. Well grounded fears harbored by any of the parties, the pastor
and parents included, about the outcome and success of the
marriage.

There is much to be gained and little to be lost by an engage-
ment—in church.

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THE VIRTUE OF PRUDENCE AND THE
SUCCESS OF THE SECOND ECUMENICAL
VATICAN COUNCIL

The Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, the twenty-
first Ecumenical Council in the history of the Catholic Church,
is scheduled to meet about the time that this issue of *The American
Ecclesiastical Review* is being delivered to its readers. Through-
out the course of the last couple of months, and particularly dur-
ing the few days immediately prior to the opening of the Council,
the faithful have been urged to pray most fervently for the success
of this gathering. But, as far as I have been able to see, there was
lacking the particular note of urgency that is required in these
prayers by the nature of the event itself.

Considering what has been said, and more importantly still,
what has been written, on the subject of the council since it was
first announced by Pope John XXIII on Septuagesima Sunday
in 1959, it might appear that many if not most of the members of
the Church, and very many indeed among the non-Catholics who
are not particularly hostile to the Church, imagine that the Council
will automatically be a success, and that, as a result, there is no
particular need of any prayers for the attainment of the ends for
which it was conceived and summoned. Many seem to have
imagined that the calling of an ecumenical council was like pushing
a magic button, which would automatically and painlessly do away
with all of the difficulties being faced by the true Church of Jesus
Christ during the second half of the twentieth century. And, as is
obvious from a study of the history of previous general councils,
and from the consideration of the very nature of the Catholic
Church, it is plain that there could be no more serious miscon-
ception.

The fact of the matter is that the success of the ecumenical
council really depends on the effectiveness and the ardor of the
prayers of the faithful. There is one factor which Our Lord has
clearly promised to the magisterium of the Catholic Church. The
supreme teaching power of the kingdom of God on earth will be
protected against the teaching of error as long as it speaks out on

a matter of faith or morals to the entire Church of God in this world, and speaks definitively. In other words, the indwelling Holy Ghost will teach and lead the ecclesiastical magisterium when it speaks definitively for the universal Church of God on earth, in such a way that this magisterium (either the Sovereign Pontiff speaking *ex cathedra*, or the same Sovereign Pontiff speaking with the residential bishops of the entire Church united to him, scattered in their dioceses throughout the world or gathered in an ecumenical council), it will teach and define the doctrine of the Church accurately.

Thus there need be no anxiety about the possibility of any doctrinal error emanating from the ecumenical council. It is absolutely beyond the bounds of possibility that the ecumenical council should proclaim, and that the Roman Pontiff should confirm and promulgate as the teaching of an ecumenical council, any doctrine at variance with the teaching of God which has been given to us through Jesus Christ Our Lord. There never will be a time when the doctrinal decrees of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican will have to be corrected, either negatively or positively. And, in precisely the same way, there is absolutely no possibility that the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican will set out to correct, or to put into better balance, any of the decrees of any of the previous ecumenical councils, or, for that matter, any of the *ex cathedra* pronouncements of the Roman Pontiff, whether these pronouncements have been made through the solemn or the ordinary teaching activity of the Bishop of Rome.

We are praying, however, that the forthcoming Council may be successful, and the success of the Ecumenical Council involves a great deal more than the infallible pronouncement of the salubrious message of Jesus Christ. It involves what we may call the adequate statement of the divine message. It calls for a pronouncement of those truths which form an integral part of the Catholic teaching, and which are subject to a particularly vicious attack in our own days. In order to be successful, in order to accomplish the purpose for which it has been called into being, the ecumenical council must speak out effectively and adequately against the doctrinal aberrations which are endangering the faith, and hence the entire spiritual life, of the faithful at the time the council is working. Furthermore, in the disciplinary field, it is impossible for an

ecumenical council to attain its purpose unless it sets forth regulations and directives which tend to achieve the following objectives. First, these disciplinary decrees must be such as to make it easier for the faithful in the state of friendship for God to advance in His love. Second, they must be so calculated as to make it easier for those who are members of the Church and who are not living the life of grace to return to the friendship of God. And finally, they must be such as to aid in the conversion of non-Catholics to the one and only true Church of Jesus Christ.

THE DOCTRINAL DECREES

In issuing these doctrinal decrees, that is, in defining doctrine on faith or morals which must be held as a matter of divine faith, or at least as certain, by all, under penalty of sin against God Himself, the ecumenical council must be guided by the norms of the virtue of prudence. The ecumenical council clearly is not and will not be called upon to issue a summary of the entire Christian faith. It is and it always has been obligated to stress those particular points of Christian teaching which are being most effectively questioned or denied at the time the council is being held. Furthermore, it must look to the future. It must try to envision the difficulties in the way of belief which will be, or at least which appear to be, the most powerful against the Christian life in the immediate future. And the council is definitely obligated to speak out on these points, to assert the divine teaching of the Church in a clear and powerful manner, if it is to accomplish the purpose for which it has been called into being. Very definitely a council is not a success from a doctrinal point of view if it contents itself with the assertion of portions of the Christian message which are not being called into question, and allows errors which trouble and threaten the faith of the members of the Church to go unchallenged.

Incidentally, it should be noted that it makes no difference whatsoever whether the doctrinal statements of the ecumenical council are set forth in a positive manner or negatively. A teaching is presented positively when the truth is asserted directly. It is presented negatively when the error or heresy contradictory to this truth is condemned. In either case the work is done. The people of God are made aware of the fact that this truth forms a part of the Christian message, and that any contradiction of this statement, or

even any hesitancy in accepting it with a perfectly certain assent, is definitely an offence against God.

In the great mass of material about the forthcoming council, appearing in Catholic books and periodicals, there have been occasional expressions of hope that the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican would refrain from condemning any doctrinal aberrations, but would content itself with a positive statement of Catholic belief. The authors of such expressions obviously did not advert to the fact that, in the final analysis, any positive statement of a truth by an authoritative teaching agency must definitely constitute a condemnation of any contradiction to that truth. The very same effect is produced whether the council speaks by asserting the salutary doctrine of Christ or by condemning the errors that are opposed to it.

Now the effective and the timely statement of Christ's salutary message in no way involves or implies a statement which will be pleasing to all Catholics, or even to all articulate Catholics. If we look back over the history of the Catholic Church to see what councils have been most successful in the past, we find that by all means the most important of these ecumenical gatherings, the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, was steadily resisted by the most important and the most powerful members of the Church for almost fifty years after the close of that assembly. Men like Saints Athanasius and Hilary were all too frequently regarded as heresy-hunters and as troublemakers when they insisted upon the acceptance of the teaching of the council. Other meetings, which would have had the status of ecumenical councils had they not lacked the confirmation of the Holy See, were always ready to offer some more or less plausible substitute for the teaching of Nicaea. The portion of the Catholic world which is always striving for conformity with the enemies of Christ was prepared to say almost anything about the Son of God, except to affirm that He is truly consubstantial with the Father.

The most successful of the councils was not aimed at, and certainly did not achieve, any immediate meeting of minds of all factions within the Christian world. This gathering was ultimately and tremendously successful as an ecumenical council precisely because, in the doctrinal field, it spoke out forcefully on the point then at issue within the Catholic Church. That point was one on

which the purity and the integrity of the Christian faith depended absolutely. No one could hold the teaching of God with an act of divine faith if he denied that the Son of God, the Word in which all creatures were brought into being, was consubstantial with the Father.

It would have been possible for the Fathers of the Council to pass over this question. They were perfectly well aware of the fact that within the Church there were highly respectable members to be found defending both sides. But the Council had the fortitude and above all the prudence to tackle this particular problem. It made its decision, setting forth, not some doctrine which the Council itself had just made up, but the meaning which from the very beginning had been contained formally in the deposit of divine public revelation committed to the Church militant of the New Testament. And the faith of the members of the Church was protected and preserved by that act of courage and prudence.

Much the same thing can be said of the activities of the First Ecumenical Council of the Vatican. In the troubled time in which it was called into being it might certainly have seemed more proper to some individuals to pass over the questions that were then dividing the Catholic people. But, in its prudence and its courage, it set out to teach the Catholic doctrine on faith and reason, and it gave us the matchless constitution *Dei Filius*. The basic teachings of the *Syllabus* were proposed formally and solemnly as the decree of a great ecumenical council.

Furthermore, there was every reason, from a point of view of false prudence, to avoid any mention of the burning question of papal infallibility. Certainly there were many very prominent Catholics who were most bitterly opposed to the definition of the dogma by the Council. Some of these individuals denied the doctrine itself. Others asserted that the definition by the Council would be completely inopportune. Surely, if the Sovereign Pontiff and the Council had followed the path of timidity, and had hoped for a council which would be successful merely in the sense of not offending the important people of this world, the question of papal infallibility would never have been taken up at all. And thus serious harm would have come to the people of God.

Had the First Vatican Council not defined the dogma of papal infallibility, unquestionably some theologically untalented, but still

influential, Catholic writers would have justified their rejection of teaching set forth *ex cathedra* by the Roman Pontiff with a statement to the effect that the infallibility of the Pope could not seriously be considered as *de fide* or as certain since there was talk of defining it in an ecumenical council, which council, as a matter of fact, refused to have anything to do with this teaching. The people of God would have been misled with reference to the place of the papacy in the doctrinal life of the Church. And, ultimately, the council would have failed to achieve the purpose for which it, and all the other ecumenical councils of the Catholic Church, have ultimately been called together.

We must not lose sight of the fact that, in each case, although obviously in a different way, the individual ecumenical council is summoned to help toward the attainment of the purpose of the Church itself. The purpose of the Church is the achievement of God's glory, through the attainment of the salvation and the sanctification of men. This purpose is not going to be obtained apart from the true life of supernatural faith. And, as a result, it is definitely the business of the council to see to it that, in so far as this is possible, the difficulties in the line of faith are reduced as much as possible through the teaching of the council. And, in a positive sense, the council is expected to act and to teach in such a way that, through its work, the people of God may come to believe the divine message ever more firmly and more forcefully and more explicitly. Furthermore, as a result of the activities of the council, the way towards conversion to the true faith and the true Church should be made clearer.

We may well wonder whether or not there are many doctrinal questions on which the Second Vatican Council will be expected to speak out. Primarily, of course, that is a question for the Roman Pontiff and the Council under his direction to decide. But it would certainly be somewhat astonishing if such were not the case. Pope Pius XII, and before him St. Pius X, were both called upon to indicate and to condemn very serious doctrinal aberrations which, in their times, threatened the purity and the integrity of the Catholic faith. It would be quite astonishing if in our own time there should be no such matters on which the Council would be compelled, in the interest of prudence, and for the spiritual well-

being of the Christian people, to issue definite and clear pronouncements.

Most certainly the press of the world will follow the doings of the council with great attention. Very probably the secular press, and the more liberal and uninformed portion of the Catholic press itself, will be quite ready to issue solemn judgments about what "world opinion" may conceive to be the success or the failure of the various pronouncements of the council. The loyal and educated Catholic people should be ready to take such evaluations for what they are worth.

Quite definitely the council will not be judged by what the secular press or the liberal and uninformed Catholic press has to say about it. Furthermore, it will not in any sense be a failure even if some of its decisions turn out to be quite at variance with the wishes and the tendencies of many powerful and articulate groups, within the Church as well as outside of it. Speaking now simply about activities within the doctrinal field, there is one and only one measure of success for the activities of this new council: it will have been successful for all time if and as it contributes towards the attainment of the purpose of the Catholic Church itself.

We must realize that the success of the council definitely will not depend upon the more or less immediate attainment of what have been called the ecumenicist purposes of this gathering. It is certainly to be hoped that, as a result of the clarification of Catholic teaching brought about in the doctrinal constitutions of the forthcoming council, many of those who are now non-members of the Catholic Church may be moved to seek membership within it. But most certainly the council is not going to strike a compromise with any of the non-Catholic doctrinal positions or with what might be called the average non-Catholic Christian doctrinal position, in order to unite itself with those who are not now included in its membership. It is not going to allow people to be members of the true Church if they refuse to profess their belief in the Immaculate Conception or in the Assumption of Our Lady, if they refuse to accept the Holy Father's primacy of jurisdiction or his doctrinal infallibility when he speaks *ex cathedra*, or if they hold the doctrines which St. Pius X condemned as the statements of the heresy of Modernism. The Catholic Church is not going to adopt a position

of non-doctrinal Christianity, even to bring those who are now non-Catholics into its membership.

What will definitely be called for on the part of the council will be an exercise of what St. Thomas Aquinas called "*prudencia regnativa*."¹ We must not lose sight of the fact that the teaching office within the Catholic Church is a part of its work of ruling the people of God and of directing them towards the end established for the Church by its divine Founder. When the Church teaches, as it will do in the course of this council, its doctrinal statements are declarations which the subjects of the Church are obligated to accept, at least as certain teaching. It will be the business of the Fathers of the council, and of the council taken as a whole, to teach in such a way as to bring to the attention of the people of God in a clear and adequate manner those doctrines of the faith which are most endangered by the activities of the enemies of Christ in our own times.

THE LAWS AND THE DIRECTIVES

If prudence is demanded for the success of the council in its doctrinal activities, it is all the more requisite for the considerably larger portion of the activities of the council which will have no direct relation to doctrine at all. We have heard many times that this council will aim to show forth within the Church the glory of its pristine purity and beauty. We know that it is hoped that, as a result of this gathering the holiness of the Church of Jesus Christ may shine forth more clearly and that, consequently, those who are not now favored with membership in the Church may be drawn more effectively towards the one and only true kingdom of God on earth.

Quite obviously the increase in the visible holiness of the Church, which it is hoped will come about as a result of the activities of the council, will consist in nothing more or less than the manifestation of an increased holiness among the members of the Church. Now it is quite clear that the council, which can do nothing more than teach and legislate for the people of God, cannot directly produce among the faithful any increase in holiness. The council cannot

directly bring it about that the faithful who are not in the state of grace will be reconciled to God. It cannot cause directly, by its own activity, any increase in the fervor or the intensity of the life of grace on the part of the faithful who are already living in the friendship of God. Hence, it is quite manifest that this result, which is in some way expected from the activities of the Second Vatican Council, cannot be brought about directly by any of the activities of this council.

All that the council can do is to teach, and especially to legislate and to direct in such a way that, as a result of its activities along this line, the faithful will be moved to work for a more intimate union with God, and those who are not favored with membership in the Church may be able to see even more clearly that the presently existing visible Catholic Church is really the one and only supernatural kingdom of God on earth. And it is quite obvious that legislative and directive activity of this kind will require, on the part of the Fathers of the council, and on the part of the council itself taken as a unit, a full measure of supernatural prudence.

What the council will have to say about morals will, of course, have to do with the teaching function of the Catholic Church. The properly legislative or directive activity of the council will have to do with the liturgical or the organized field. The council may be called upon to attain its objective by issuing new decrees about the liturgy of the Church, or about the place of the layman, the priest, and the bishop, in the organized work of the Mystical Body of Christ.

Within these areas the council will be free to decide on whatever does not run counter to the divine constitution and the divine message of the Catholic Church. Thus the council can change the content of the breviary. It can change much of the ritual of the Mass. And of course it can point out works which laymen, members of religious communities, members of secular institutes, and bishops, can and should perform in the future for the well being of the Catholic Church.

But, in drawing up these regulations, the Second Vatican Council will certainly need to employ the greatest measure of prudence. It will certainly have to avoid the attitude of those unfortunate Catholics who seem to imagine that any change in the liturgy or the organization of the Church would be desirable merely so that

¹ Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, II-II^a, q. 50, art. 1. The prudence of the *ecclesia docens*, praying for the success of the council, would fall under the heading of *prudencia politica*. Cf. *ibid.*, art. 2.

there could be change. And, by the same token, it will have to avoid giving in to the tastes of those people who want absolutely no change at all. Incidentally, we must admit that these latter are much fewer and much less articulate in the Church than the people who seem bent on change for its own sake.

In drawing up its legislation and in issuing its directives, the council will be doing the work of Christian prudence. Whatever action it takes will be adopted in the hope that it will aid the people of God to believe more firmly and forcefully in God, and to love Him more adequately and more effectively. It can only choose the means that it considers most apt for the attainment of this objective.

It is by no means automatically certain that the council will be successful, speaking from the point of view of this supernatural prudence. Of course it may be assumed that the people who are called upon to teach and to legislate in the council will definitely try to do as well as possible for the Church and for the glory of God. It is obvious that they will seek to present teaching and legislation which will aid the people of God to live the life of Christian holiness more effectively and more fully, and will call back to the life of grace those who have been unfortunate enough to live in a state of aversion from God. But it is by no means automatically certain that the prudent solution to the problem of what to teach and what to legislate, will be found by the council. At any rate it is perfectly clear that a tremendous amount of exacting work will necessarily go into the preparation of the doctrinal and the disciplinary constitutions which will eventually be set forth by the council. And it is just as certain that the success of the council will not be attained apart from the prayers of the faithful.

The people must be trained to see in the council an agency which stands in need of their prayers. Definitely it is something which is working for the good of the Church itself, and hence for the spiritual good of all the members of the Church. It is seeking the salvation of those who have not as yet been given the privilege of membership in the Church by influencing them to accept the truths of the Catholic faith and to enter into the one and only true Church. It is seeking to protect the faith of the people of God against the errors which threaten the purity and the integrity of that faith in our own time. But, in the last analysis, it is an agency which relies upon the

prayers and the prayers of the Christian people for the attainment of its objective.

It is imperative that the council face the problems of our age with all the firmness of supernatural prudence. There never has been a time in the history of the Church militant of the New Testament when it was so necessary for God's kingdom on earth to be in a position to control the forces of this world. It is quite obvious that there has been more change in the material culture of the world since the time of the First Vatican Council than at any other time during the lifetime of the human race. It is essential that the Catholic Church be able to face up to the challenges and the difficulties that this changed world of today manifests to the Christian faith and to the Mystical Body of Christ.

Above all, it is imperative that the misleading flood of writing about the council which represents this gathering as primarily concerned with a union of the Catholic Church with non-Catholic Christian religious bodies be successfully overcome. It must not be forgotten that the purpose of the council will be that of the priest at the altar: the faithful in the offering of the Mass. The first petition of the Canon of the Mass is a prayer to God to receive and bless the gifts which "in the first place we offer to Thee for Thy holy Catholic Church, that it may please Thee to grant it peace, and to protect, guide and govern it throughout the world." In the council the Church seeks the glory of God. But it seeks this objective, not by trying to find some ground for unity with the various non-Catholic Christian groups, but by the internal ordering of the Church and the more effective setting forth of its divine message.

Absolutely speaking, it is possible that the council might act more than with the fulness of supernatural prudence. It is possible that, seen in its perspective, it might not be completely successful. But, if it does (as God grant that it may) attain its objective, it will do this by reason of the constant and ardent prayers of the priests and the people, who will thus do their glorious part for the accomplishment of God's work in the council.

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