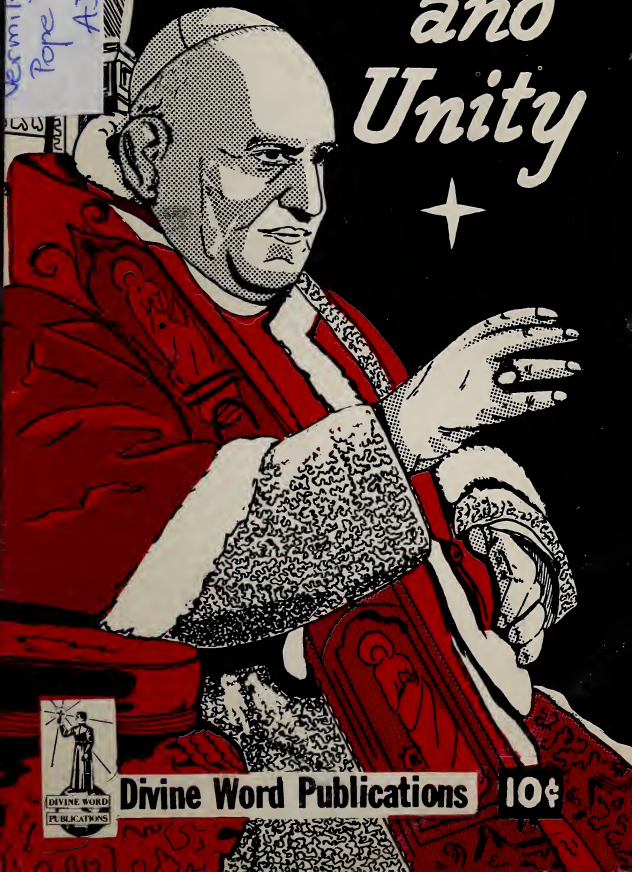


Pope JOHN XXIII

*and
Unity*



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POPE JOHN XXIII
AND UNITY



by Theodore C. P. Vermilye

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The interest and curiosity of the entire civilized world has been aroused by the recent announcement that Pope John XXIII intends to convene, in 1960 or 1961, a gathering known as an "Ecumenical Council" and that the all-important work assigned to this solemn assembly will be a supreme effort to reunite in one brotherhood every human being who wants to be called a Christian. The daily press has been filled with varying comments on the Papal intention, some of them displaying a profound ignorance of the nature of a General (or Ecumenical) Council. Just what does the term denote?

The Greek word "ecumenical" means "universal" or "world-wide." A Church Council is a gathering of Bishops and their advising experts, drawn from an area of greater or less size, entrusted with the framing of laws affecting the area represented, and the solemn publication of statements of faith. A council may be restricted to a single diocese or a single group of dioceses called a province. It may embrace a certain part of a given country or may be national in scope. Finally, it may be representative of every nation and country of the entire world, in which case it is called "ecumenical" or "general" and is attended by every Bishop of the Universal Church

who is in peace and communion with the Bishop of Rome (the Pope) who, as successor of Saint Peter in that jurisdiction, is the Chief Bishop of the Christian world, the Bishop of Bishops, the Ecumenical (or Universal) Bishop, the earthly Vicar of Jesus Christ, the Father of all Christians. (The word "Pope" means "Father").

The first General Council in the history of the Christian Church was a gathering of the Apostles in the city of Jerusalem, with the Bishop of that city, Saint James, acting as chairman but under the direction of Saint Peter, who, as Christ's earthly Vicar (i.e.: Representative) delivered his inspired judgement when the deliberations of the other Apostles were concluded. As chairman of the meeting, Saint James immediately announced the decision of the Council in conformity with the statement of Saint Peter, saying that this statement "seems good to the Holy Ghost and to us." This declaration well demonstrates the apostolic understanding of Saint Peter's position of final authority in the Universal Church; it has set the pattern for the many Ecumenical Councils which have been held through the centuries, all of which have legislated for the Universal Church, their decrees always having been subject to approval by the Pope. This very

clear scriptural witness to the juridical position of the Papacy should carry great weight with Orthodox and Protestant scholars in their consideration of the problems of Christian reunion.

To the Christian who is more than a nominal follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, whether he be a Catholic, a Protestant or a member of one of the Eastern Orthodox groups, the vision of a genuine, organic unity, embracing all professed Christians throughout the world, is most fascinating and compelling. Despite the many corrosive and divisive differences and animosities which have so racked Christendom through the centuries, there remains deep in the collective memory of Christianity this haunting recollection of what the Lord Christ willed for His people, what actually existed in the Apostolic Age and for centuries thereafter and what might now be true were it not for the perversity of contentious men. To one who accepts the supreme divine authority of Jesus Christ, His concept of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man must be the enduring guide of action; His will the norm of faith.

The rich documentary evidence furnished by the four Gospels, the Book of Acts and the Apostolic Epistles leaves no room for doubt as to the mind and intention of Christ with respect to the

nature of that unique group chosen by Him to form the nucleus of His One, Sanctified, Universal and Divinely-commissioned Church. And these same primitive documents inform us fully as to the collective mind of the Apostles and their faithful people during the first Christian century, at about the end of which Saint John, the last surviving Apostle, died. His favorite plea, addressed to those who assisted at his celebrations of the Eucharistic Liturgy, was: "Little children, love one another." This admonition could have had little or no effect if the "little children" had been given over to sectarian separation, acrimonious argument and ranting recrimination.

The towering figure of the great Apostle Paul, the Teacher of the Gentiles, dominates the New Testament record of first century standards of faith and morals, of doctrine, discipline and worship. Together with his acknowledged chief, Peter, the divinely-named foundation Rock of the Church and Prince of the Apostles, Paul guided the infant Christian Church in its first statements of doctrinal truth and firmly established the premier jurisdiction of Christian authority: the Holy Apostolic See of Rome. Sometimes alone and sometimes with the help of other dedicated missionaries, he evangelized vast areas

of the then known world, bringing the inhabitants into the organic unity of the one and only Universal (i.e.: Catholic) Church, which, in obedience to the command of Christ, was led, guided, protected and ruled by the College of Apostles, gathered in complete unanimity and agreement about the person of their chief, Peter, whose supreme office of Vicar of the risen and ascended Christ was known to be a part of the enduring Christian revelation.

In what terms did the divinely-begotten Son of God and the divinely-inspired Apostle of God express the divine will for the lasting solidarity of the sanctified people of God in all the earth? How did they define that supernatural oneness of the Christian Brotherhood of Man, in Christ and with Christ, which would render Christians valid claimants, through Christ, to the Fatherhood of God? Were their words so clear and convincing that "he who runs may read" or were they indefinite and open to contrary interpretations? The evidence is so plain that the historicity of the Catholic position with respect to Christian unity cannot be questioned by reasonable investigators. If one accepts (as all who call themselves "Christians" profess to do) the inspired and unique authority of New Testament teaching, the conclusion is completely convincing.

Let the record speak for itself. Let the voice of first century Christianity tell us of its own nature.

No more authoritative human witness to the nature and faith of the primitive Christian Church can be found than the Apostle Paul. Having devoted much thought to the consideration of our Lord's teaching, he was enabled to penetrate the Christian mystery and rightly interpret Christ's meaning. In his epistles to the newly-formed Christian communities in widely scattered parts of the ancient world he reverts, time and again, to the character of that sublime and supernatural oneness of Christians which was the result of the expressed will of Jesus Christ. The inspired reasoning of Saint Paul led him to state that Christian unity is of such a fundamental character that it elevates the Church of Christ above the status of an organization and constitutes it a living and functioning organism, vibrant with the very life of Christ. This organism, he tells us, is not human but rather divine because it is, in his words, the "Body of Christ." To his converts he says: "Ye are the Body of Christ" and he tells them that in this mystical, but real and actually living, body there can be no schism (i.e.: separation or contention or division) between members, because each has his or her own proper function

and depends upon the performance of others for the proper and fulfilling functioning of the entire body, and upon the life and welfare of the body for individual life and health. It follows, therefore, that any individuals cutting themselves off from the Mystical Body deprive themselves of the Christ-life which vivifies, empowers and activates that one and only Universal Church which is His Body.

The words of the Lord Christ likewise are crystal clear, leaving no uncertainty as to His will for all Christians and for all time. At one of the most solemn and meaningful moments of His earthly life, when He began that process of self-dedication, self-immolation and self-sacrifice which culminated the following day upon the altar of the Cross, our Lord bestowed the fullness of His Priesthood upon the Apostles, instituted the Eucharistic Sacrifice and commanded His priests to offer it until the end of time. In His magnificent High-priestly prayer He set forever the pattern of His Church. In this prayer He begged the Father that all Christians would remain forever so firmly united that they would be ONE, *even as He and the Father are one*. No higher or more perfect form of indivisible unity can be envisioned; no lesser or imperfect form of oneness, such as a so-called "federation" can implement

the divine will. We must remember that the prayer of Christ, unlike that of a mere man, is not a halting attempt to obtain a favor from divinity but is the equivalent of a divine fiat, or command, establishing and implementing that for which it asks. Thus, by divine mandate, Christ established and guaranteed the unbreakable unity of His true followers in all places throughout the ages.

If, as is evident, this organic, living and functioning unity of Christians is according to the expressed will of Jesus Christ, it follows that separation by individuals or groups from that supernatural unity is in flat contradiction to His will and for that reason is objectively sinful. Through the centuries, from apostolic days until the present, there have been many who have committed this serious sin of schism from the Mystical Body of Christ and have led thousands of unreasoning men and women into the same sin. We see all about us today many good and well-intentioned persons who have been born into this state of schism and heresy. The fault is not theirs but that of the perverse men who set up the many schismatic and heretical sects. Some of these groups (the so-called "Orthodox" of the East) date back a thousand years, some (the Western Protestants) about four hundred years, others are of recent origin

and are actually modern separations from already extant schisms. All exist in opposition to the will of Christ; all are objectively sinful simply because they oppose the divine will and obstruct the divinely-planned advancement of the Kingdom of God on earth. We must remember always to hate heresy and schism while loving heretics and schismatics, even as we, in imitation of Christ, must hate sin while loving sinners. We must remember that the charity of Christ is boundless and that He "died for all men" without distinction. As those who proudly bear His name, we must be ready meekly to "follow Him."

The devoted passion for unity of faith, organization and action among all Christians is seen to be of divine origin and in accord with the will of Christ. It is in agreement with the same passion displayed by the Apostles, the early Martyrs, the Bishops and theologians of the sub-apostolic age and the greatest figures of the Christian Church during the two thousand years which have elapsed since the Incarnation of the Son of God and His founding of the earthly Church. Purity of dogmatic belief and the preservation of organic unity throughout the world have been the principle aims of the many world-wide (or ecumenical) councils which have

been held since the time of the initial Council of Jerusalem. And all Christians well may rejoice in the knowledge that it will be the principle concern of the impending council.

Our Lord revealed His intention in constituting Saint Peter the "rock" or chief foundation stone of His one and universal Church. He knew that in so doing, and in gathering about Peter the other foundation stones (the other members of the Apostolic College) He was firmly establishing the lasting unity of all true and faithful Christians. He knew also that by this means He was establishing the certainty of a true faith in His Church because He had promised Peter that His own divine prayer (or mandate) would preserve the purity of Peter's faith, through which, and through the exercise of Peter's supreme authority, Peter would be able to "strengthen the brethren." Thus the Holy Apostolic See of Rome, of which Peter became the first Bishop and in which his Christ-given supreme authority has descended to his successors, has ever been the "Center of Unity" and the guarantee of a right faith. Through the centuries the Holy See has defined and enforced, throughout the Church, the orthodox norm of the true faith. The zeal and dedication of Peter, Paul and the other Apostles has descended to

their successors, the totality of the Episcopate in all the world; the promises and guarantees bestowed upon Peter have become the inheritance of his successors, the Popes. The present Supreme Pontiff, John XXIII, is the divinely-appointed means for recalling all nominal Christians to the organic and living unity of the One, Sanctified, Universal and Divinely-commissioned Church of Jesus Christ.

Barriers to the reunion of all professed Christians within the divine oneness of Christ's Mystical Body are many and great. It is a deplorable fact that the most serious of these barriers are those erected by prejudice, ignorance, fear, suspicion and the animosity which is the result of centuries of separation, leading to acceptance of conditions of disunity and mutual ill will, which, in the light of Christ's intention, the words of Scripture and the evidence of history, appear not only as illogical but seriously sinful. Only the action of God the Holy Ghost upon the hearts and minds of men can move mankind to desert the ways of separation and estrangement, realize again the compelling authority of the commands of Jesus Christ and return to that holy and Christian unity which He willed for all of His redeemed and sanctified people.

During the past fifty years the action of the Holy Ghost in the affairs of men

has become increasingly visible to those who have prayed and worked for the restoration of organic unity among all professed Christians. Men of all shades of Christian belief have become more firmly convinced of the sinfulness of separation and estrangement from those who should be their brothers in the faith. It has become increasingly evident that the present condition of the Christian world contradicts the will of Jesus Christ, who expressed that will in a solemn prayer-command. The material waste of rival organizations long ago was seen and deplored but the spiritual wrongness of schism from the Universal Brotherhood, and of perverted teaching as to the one true faith, has impressed itself upon men of good will only as the result of the enlightening action of the Holy Spirit of God.

It is indeed significant that during the same period of about fifty years many thousands of Christians; Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants, have observed the annual Chair of Unity Octave, founded in the United States by a Franciscan Friar. This week of supplication for world-wide Christian unity was at first observed by only a handful of dedicated men and women. It since has spread throughout the world, passed national boundaries, bridged religious divisions and obtained the support and endorse-

ment of a variety of religious leaders. For a number of years it has been observed by not a few of the clergy and laity of the Orthodox and Anglican groups and by other non-Catholics who deplore the shameful spectacle of Christian disunity and look forward hopefully to the day when, in obedience to the will of Christ, "all may be one." From the inception of this week of prayer, Catholics by the hundreds of thousands have prayed the Octave, knowing that it has the official endorsement of the Father of Christendom. It is evident that this widespread and united supplication for the restoration of Christian unity has so deeply influenced the thinking of professed Christians that they heard and long to obey the will of God rather than their own desires.

American Catholics well may be proud of the results accomplished through fifty years of the Chair of Unity Octave, one of the fruits of American Catholic devotion. They also may be permitted to take pride in the work done by the American provinces of the Society of Jesus in world-wide efforts toward the reunion of all Christians. At Fordham University in New York City, a group of Jesuits long have devoted themselves to the apostolate to the Eastern Orthodox. They have been ordained to the priesthood in the Eastern Rite, they cele-

brate the Divine Liturgy and the Divine Office in Greek, in Old Slavonic and in the other tongues (including English) used by the Orthodox and they strive in every way to conform to the customs and way of life used by the Eastern groups. These men have made wide contacts with the Orthodox in the United States and in South America and have been enabled to influence many dissident priests and laymen and to inspire them with a desire for reunion with the Holy See. They minister to several congregations of Byzantine Christians who are in communion with the See of Rome; they officiate at many celebrations of the Eastern Liturgy in Catholic parishes of the Roman Rite. Great things may be expected of their efforts. The hope of a return of the East to Catholic Unity shines with ever increasing brilliance.

To the thoughtful Catholic the pressing need of Christian unity is self-evident. His devotion to the See of Unity entails a profound sorrow for all those who are called "Christian" but fail to grasp the importance of solidarity in matters of doctrine, discipline and worship among all who accept the divine authority of Jesus Christ: the God-Man who commanded Christians to remain forever One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. The members of the Orthodox groups have retained a keen awareness

for the need of sanctity and apostolicity in the earthly structure of the Church but have lost sight of the equal need of unity and universality (i.e.: catholicity). In some sense the Anglican can be placed in somewhat the same bracket but the great majority of avowed Protestants seem to have abandoned all claim to a practical appreciation of these four "Marks of the Church." It is certain that the leaders of most non-Catholic bodies, as a result of prayer and study, rapidly are recovering a knowledge of their tremendous spiritual losses and a deep-seated longing for the recovery of those things which they have for so long lacked. Again, the solution of the many problems involved will lie with the inspiring and implementing action of the Holy Spirit of God. And our avenue of approach to God the Holy Ghost lies in determined, trusting and earnest prayer.

Soon after his announcement of the impending Ecumenical Council, and of the task with which it is to cope, the Holy Father issued a call to all Catholics to pray earnestly and constantly for the success of the gathering. All of us who are responsive to the voice of Peter's successor, in other words all loyal Catholics, will be eager to respond to the plea of the Supreme Pontiff. Catholic devotion to the mind of Holy Church stresses the great importance of the

widespread intercession for which the Pope asks; understanding of the imperative need for Christian reunion makes compelling the Papal summons to united and earnest supplication before the Divine Majesty. It is devoutly to be hoped that the faithful of the world will storm heaven from now until the conclusion of the Council; will implore the Holy Ghost to enlighten the minds of all concerned; will beseech God that the intention of Jesus Christ as to the unity of all Christians will be fulfilled.

“More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of.” Men of good will have, for many years, dreamed of and longed for the world-wide reunion of all Christians in one holy, universal brotherhood, in which the gospel precepts of faith, hope and charity would prevail in all nations, would banish sectarian misunderstanding from men’s minds, would bring about the reign of concord, charity and peace under the sway of Christ the King of Peace. Catholics know that such a happy solution of the present problem is possible only in the event of the return of our separated brethren to the unity of the divinely-ordained unity, sanctity, universality and apostolicity of the Mystical Body of Christ: the Catholic Church, under the leadership of the Vicar of Christ, designated by our Lord as the Center

of Unity and the enduring guarantee of Orthodoxy. Catholics know that such a return will be the work of God the Holy Ghost, our part in the great achievement being humble and persistent prayer for the enlightenment of all who are called "Christians," that they may be enabled to follow the declared will of Him whose name they bear.

Ever since the first decades of the Christian Church the firm unity of all of the followers of Christ has been a matter of prime importance to the Popes. Time and again they have deeply deplored the misunderstandings and divisions which have set up factions, given birth to sects and begotten heresies. Our Lord stressed the overwhelming importance of oneness of His people, praying the almighty Father that "they may be one, even as We are one." Saint Paul devoted much time to a development of the theme of unity among Christians, explaining that the faithful "in Christ" form with Him a veritable "body": His Mystical Body, of which He is the governing Head and they the functioning members, each with his or her proper usefulness. The faith of the world-wide Church, from before the days of schisms to the present time, is stated in the Nicene Creed, in which we declare our belief in ONE Church, even before we go on to a statement of the holiness,

universality and apostolic character of the only true Church.

Many of the Supreme Pontiffs have made valiant efforts to recall to Catholic unity the many thousands of persons throughout the world who have disregarded the mandate of Christ and the teaching of the Apostles by separating themselves from the Mystical Body. In some cases the efforts of the Popes have met with success, as when, in the Middle Ages, General Councils convened by the authority of Rome healed the schism between East and West and restored to unity the Eastern dissidents who call themselves the "Orthodox." This restoration of unity, twice accomplished, was not lasting and again the Hierarchy and people of the East departed from the divinely-ordained oneness with the Vicar of Christ.

Manifestly, the East, having true Orders and Sacraments, being faithful in the offering of the Eucharistic Sacrifice and having remained in possession of almost the entire cycle of the Catholic faith, may be regarded as a first cousin of Western Catholicism and as the Christian group most likely to desire reunion with Rome and to make practical moves in that direction. Our prayers for the homecoming of these millions should be constant and fervent. And we must not forget that in recent years

European Protestants, especially the Lutherans, have manifested an increasing awareness of the true nature of the Christian Church, of the bases of faith and of the overwhelming need for universal Christian unity. In the United States, while the various Protestant sects are drawing closer to each other, it cannot as yet be said that their attitude toward Catholicism has undergone any drastic change. Again, we should redouble our prayers for the enlightenment of these well-intentioned people.

In both the United States and in England there are thousands of Anglicans (Episcopalians) who entertain a feeling of warmest friendliness toward Catholics and Catholicism. This especially is true of those Anglicans who are called "High Church" and whose sacramental faith is identical with our own. These good people have but to be convinced of the scriptural and historic evidence for the truth of the Papal claims in order to return to that worldwide solidarity and oneness which their ancestors of four hundred years ago enjoyed and from which they (and their descendants) were torn by the evil civil and ecclesiastical politicians of that era. Catholics should be constant in their prayers that the Holy Ghost will flood the minds of these men and women with an understanding of the truth, that they

soon may "come home."

In summoning the approaching Ecumenical Council, Pope John has indicated that its prime purpose would be the attempted restoration of that brotherly unity of all Christians which was the object of the high-priestly prayer of Jesus Christ, of the efforts of the Apostles and of the policy of the long line of Roman Pontiffs. Thus he makes clear his devotion to the will of Him whose representative on earth he is. And he realizes, as did Saint Paul, that while he and his apostolic associates in the Hierarchy can sow the good seed of Christ in the minds of men, only God can insure the growth and development of that seed and bring it to fruition. For that reason the Papal announcement of the Council was promptly followed by the Papal call to the faithful of the world: the Papal bidding to universal and united prayer for the success of the Council in its labors for the restoration of universal unity.

In spite of the active opposition to Catholicism which some non-Catholic sects and individuals have maintained, a single generation has seen a great betterment in the religious atmosphere in these United States. In Europe the improvement began even earlier than in this country. Everywhere there has been a growing appreciation of Christ's

intentions for His followers and a growing desire on the part of many non-Catholic thinkers for the realization of our Lord's prayer for His followers: "that they all may be one." The action of the Holy Ghost has become increasingly visible. Men of all shades of Christian belief have become more firmly convinced of the sinfulness of estrangement and separation from those who should be their brothers. The sin of schism from the Universal Brotherhood has become apparent to men of good will as the result of the quickening influence of the Holy Spirit of God.

Realization of the animosities and divisions among professed Christians fills the mind of the average Catholic with sorrow and makes him long to engage in active efforts for the return of all peoples to that unity which they once enjoyed and most unhappily forsook through the false teaching of misguided men. The very vastness of the problem brings home the fact that its theoretical solution must be left to experts in various fields. This will be the difficult task of the Fathers in God who will compose the membership of the Ecumenical Council. But each one of us, clerical and lay, has a most important role to play in the eventual success of the official attempt to find a way to the restoration of Christian unity. Our role is the offering of many earnest and

trusting prayers, in obedience to the Papal summons.

During the years which have seen an increasing discontent with the present divided state of the Christian world, it is most significant that many thousands of people, Catholics and non-Catholics, have participated annually in a week of prayer for world-wide Christian unity. It also is significant that many non-Catholic scholars have spoken and written in no uncertain terms of the pressing need for reunion. Their statements have dealt not only with the practical aspects of the case but, more importantly, with the spiritual implications involved and with the basic nature of the Christian Church, its divine commission and the requirements for its perpetuation in compliance with the wishes of its divine-human founder.

No Christian can doubt the power of prayer. It is evident that trusting supplication for the restoration of Christian unity has been heard by God and has deeply influenced the thinking and acting of countless professed Christians. As Catholic Christians, whether we be simple or wise, powerful or weak, our immediate duty and privilege is to hear and heed the plea of the Holy Father, who bids us: "Pray brethren; pray for the reunion of all men within the universal brotherhood instituted by Jesus Christ."

The Chief Bishop of Christendom, standing at the tomb of the Chief of the Apostles, pleads with us to support his fatherly efforts with our petitions and intercessions. We best can respond in the words of one of the prayers of holy Mass: "O Lord Jesus Christ, Who saidst unto Thine Apostles 'peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you' regard not our sins but the faith of Thy Church, and deign to grant us peace and unity according to Thy will. Amen."

IMPRIMI POTEST

Nicholas Bisheimer, Provincial

NIHIL OBSTAT

J. Musinsky, S.V.D., Censor Deputatus

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✠ Albert G. Meyer, Archbishop of Chicago

DATE

December 7, 1959

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Pope John XXIII —and Unity



BY THEODORE C. P. VERMILYE

The re-union of all Christendom—of compelling interest to all—had very special meaning for the author of this booklet who was born and raised by Anglican parents. 'That all may be one' was a guiding light to him over the years, and he wrote quite a number of articles on the subject. Greatly interested in the possibility of re-union, he helped promote the Anglican observance of the Chair of Unity Octave. Deeply moved by the study of the Mystical Body of Christ, he was received into the Church in 1938. He died suddenly in Dec., 1959 shortly after finishing a booklet on Anglicanism.

This treatise on 'unity' by Mr. Vermilye is general and covers the topic quite completely. His approach is rather unique in that he too once searched for the one true Church. He gives us insight into public interest in the Ecumenical Council—and its prime purpose; he defines the word 'ecumenical,' gives an explanation of ecclesiastical councils, and a clearer understanding of the supernatural unity of the Church of Rome. He points out how separation from the Church deprives the separatist of the life of grace in the Mystical Body.

The Pope has urged all Christians to pray for the success of the forthcoming Ecumenical Council—particularly for re-union.

If the zeal of converts for the Faith were to be matched by those born in the Faith—it would put into action an abundance of grace imbued in all by the Holy Spirit, and could literally change the face of the earth.



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