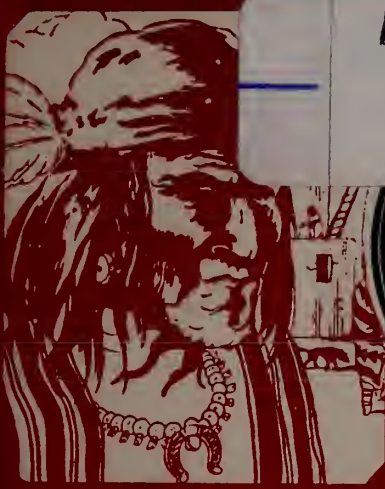


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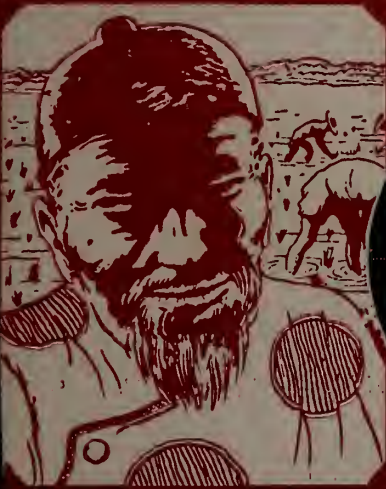


WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

T H E

ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

in Questions and Answers



*A QUEEN'S WORK
PAMPHLET*

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What You Should Know
about

**THE
ECUMENICAL
COUNCIL**

in Questions and Answers
with Discussion Topics

by

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THE QUEEN'S WORK

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What You Should Know
about
THE ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

by James J. McQuade, S.J.

POPE JOHN XXIII has called for an ecumenical council of the Catholic Church. The whole world is talking about it. Much more will be written and said about it as the time of its assembling draws near. Everywhere questions are being asked. These are sincere questions and Catholics should be preparing themselves to give intelligent answers.

Here are some answers to the more basic questions about the coming ecumenical council.

1. What is the name of the coming council?

The official name of the coming council is the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican. A council is known by the place in which it is held and this one is to be held in St. Peter's Basilica of the Vatican. It is called the "second" council of the Vatican because there was one previous council held there in 1869.

2. What is a council?

Webster's dictionary defines a council as "an assembly convened for consultation, advice or agreement." In this coming council it will be the bishops of the Catholic Church who assemble and they will devote themselves to consultation, advice and agreement about what is to be done for the welfare of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Encyclo-

pedia gives the technical definition of this type of council.

An ecumenical council is a legally convened meeting, of members of the worldwide hierarchy, for the purpose of carrying out their judicial, doctrinal, and legislative functions, by means of deliberation in common, resulting in regulations and decrees invested with the authority of the whole assembly.

3. What is the meaning of the word, "ecumenical"?

The word "ecumenical" means general or universal. It is derived from a Greek word of similar sound meaning "pertaining to the whole of the inhabited earth." An ecumenical council is, therefore, a gathering of people from all of the inhabited earth. In practice the word, ecumenical, is used only to designate world wide matters in the religious sphere.

4. Is an ecumenical council something new in the Catholic Church?

Apart from the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15, there have been twenty previous ecumenical councils: 1. Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D.; 2. First Council of Constantinople in 381; 3. Council of Ephesus in 431; 4. Council of Chalcedon in 451; 5. Second Council of Constantinople in 553; 6. Third Council of Constantinople in 680; 7. Second Council of Nicaea in 787; 8. Fourth Council of Constantinople in 869; 9. First Lateran Council in 1123; 10. Second Lateran Council in 1139; 11. Third Lateran Council in 1179; 12. Fourth Lateran Council in 1215; 13. First Council of Lyons in 1245; 14.

Second Council of Lyons in 1274; 15. Council of Vienne in 1311; 16. Council of Constance in 1414; 17. Council of Basle in 1431; 18. Fifth Council of the Lateran in 1512; 19. Council of Trent in 1545; 20. Vatican Council in 1869.

5. What authority does an ecumenical council have in the Catholic Church?

It has very great authority in the Catholic Church. To begin with it is infallible in faith and morals. Christ has given true jurisdiction to the Bishops of the Catholic Church and by reason of the power given them by Christ they have decisive vote in the defining of Catholic dogma, in matters of ecclesiastical discipline, in the making of laws, in handing down decisions and in inflicting penalties.

6. If the pope is infallible why does the Catholic Church have such councils?

The primacy and infallibility of the pope does not exclude the episcopate from the government of the Church. The bishops, together with the pope, govern the Church. At the divine mandate of Christ the bishops are to govern the Church together with and subordinate to the supreme pontiff. In such a council the bishops contribute a profound knowledge of the actual problems of the Catholic Church because of their continuous contact with the faithful scattered throughout the world.

The infallibility of the pope does not guarantee that he knows all that has been revealed by God. It does guarantee that he will not make a mistake in defining matters of faith and morals. The pope, like anyone

else, must seek knowledge of the truths of faith from all sources. The bishops are learned in matters of faith and morals. From the deliberations of these bishops in an ecumenical council the pope can learn much about the deposit of faith which Christ has entrusted to His Church. From their recommendations the pope can come to a decision as to what is to be defined. And when the council united to the pope, of course, does define some matter of faith and morals, it shares with the Holy Father the tremendous responsibility that is his.

There is also a great psychological advantage in having matters of faith and morals determined in an ecumenical council rather than by the pope alone. This psychological advantage lies in the effect which the agreement of so many learned and holy men has upon the minds of men. It gives them a kind of assurance that helps them to believe. The Church wants this because its mission is not only to teach the truth but also to persuade mankind to accept it. An ecumenical council is of no little advantage in this regard.

There are other very good reasons for having a council. The general publicity that is given to the council, its work, and its decrees, is a great aid to the Church in getting its message over to mankind generally. Such a council displays to the world the unity and charity of the universal or Catholic Church. It will provide the occasion for many to re-examine their own religious convictions and thus it will be for many the occasion of discovering and embracing the true faith.

But more important than all these reasons for holding a council of all the bishops in addition to the pope is the reason that a council is one of the ways in which the Catholic Church carries out its divine mission of teaching mankind. The teaching Church is infallible and all the bishops in union with and including the bishop of Rome compose the teaching Church. Scattered all over the world and all teaching the same thing, the bishops are corporately infallible, that is, not as individuals but as a whole body. Their task is to teach all men. That is the will of Christ. When they come together in a council they are but doing the thing that Christ wants them to do in this particular way. The basic reason therefore for holding a council is that Christ wills it so.

7. Are such councils necessary for the Catholic Church?

Ecumenical councils as such are not absolutely necessary for the Catholic Church to fulfill its essential functions. Christ imposed upon all the bishops corporately the duty of teaching mankind and endowed them with infallibility in doing it, but He did not prescribe this particular way of doing it. In a broader sense of the word, however, ecumenical councils certainly are necessary. In this sense the word has the meaning of "extremely useful" or "almost indispensable." A family car is not absolutely necessary but there are some things one cannot do unless one has such a family car. Similarly with the ecumenical councils. The Church could go on existing without them but there are certain things which cannot be done as well without them as, for in-

stance, the fruits of this close communication, an exchange of ideas, the sharing of the lessons of experience, the development of an understanding of world wide problems, and so on. Certainly one could never describe an ecumenical council as an unnecessary gathering.

8. What is the relation of the pope to an ecumenical council?

The pope is the head of the ecumenical council. No ecumenical council can be held unless the pope himself convokes it. In the council itself it is the pope or his representatives who preside over it. The pope prescribes and assigns the matter to be treated in the council. He determines the order in which it is to be taken up. The pope can transfer, suspend or dissolve an ecumenical council. The decrees of the council must be ratified by the pope before they become binding. The laws passed by the council must be promulgated by the pope and they have no force or binding power until he promulgates them.

9. What would happen if a pope should die while a council was going on?

Since a body cannot function without its head an ecumenical council is automatically suspended when the reigning pope either resigns or dies. It remains suspended until the newly elected pope orders its resumption and continuation. The Council of Trent which lasted from 1545 to 1563 was headed by three successive popes: Paul III, Julius III, and Pius IV who ratified and promulgated its decrees.

10. Where can one find the official rules and regulations which govern the procedure of an ecumenical council?

As in all matters of Church discipline, the regulations governing the conduct of an ecumenical council are found in the Code of Canon Law. The second chapter of the second book presents the matter in canons 222 to 229 inclusive. These canons contain the basic law. The papal curia provides more particular instructions to the participants in the council.

11. Could an ecumenical council overrule a pope?

The pope and an ecumenical council are intrinsically united. This is in the supreme teaching authority of the Church. An ecumenical council is unthinkable without its head. There just are not two things here. The question is not reasonable. It asks equivalently if the pope can overrule himself: Can the pope with the council overrule the pope without the council? That is why there can never be an appeal to a council from a ruling of the pope. It would be the equivalent of appealing a decision of a court to the same court which issued the decision in the first place.

12. Is it true that the pope is superior to a council or vice versa?

Since the pope and an ecumenical council are intrinsically united, make up one and the same teaching authority of the Church, there can be no possibility of anything being inferior or superior. The convocation of an ecumenical council is not the creation

of a new and distinct teaching authority. When there is no council in session the pope and the bishops compose the teaching authority of the Church. When a council is in session the pope and the bishops are physically together. It is one and the same essentially.

13. Who all are to come to this ecumenical council and have the right to vote in it?

First of all there are those who have the right to attend and to full deliberative vote by canon law. Canon 223 lists all Cardinals, even those who have not been consecrated bishops; second: Patriarchs, Primate, Archbishops, Bishops of dioceses, even those who are not yet consecrated; thirdly, those who are what is known in canon law as Prelates or Abbots "nullius" (i.e. one who presides over the clergy and the people of a certain territory which does not belong to any diocese); fourth, Abbot Primate, Abbots who are superiors of monastic congregations, Generals of exempt clerical orders, but not those of others unless the decree of convocation includes them expressly.

Then there are those who may be called to the council but are not provided for by the law automatically. These could be titular bishops. A titular bishop is one who is consecrated for some work other than being bishop of a diocese and he is given title to a diocese that actually no longer exists but had a bishop at one time. When such bishops attend they are to have full deliberative vote.

Finally, experts in theology and canon law can be especially invited. These are to

serve as consultors and advisers to those who have the power of decisive vote. To put it technically, they have "consultative" but not "deliberative" vote.

Those and those only who have full voting power are known as "Fathers of the Council" even though they be Cardinals or Archbishops.

14. Are not religious leaders as, for instance, the Anglican and Greek Schismatic Bishops being invited to attend?

It is to be noted that the Second Vatican Council is to be one of *the Catholic Church*. It is not to be, as was the impression given by the uninformed popular press, a general meeting of all religious leaders. Only the Catholic hierarchy can participate. Pope John, it is true, has extended a general invitation to others to come, but only as observers. While the council may well consider measures to be taken to bring about the union of all men in the Catholic Church, the council is not intended to be a summit conference of all Church leaders on an equal basis to negotiate a settlement of the problem of a pluralistic religious society. The council itself will be an internal affair of the Catholic Church.

15. What then is the purpose of the Second Vatican Council?

The purpose of the Second Vatican Council, as described by Pope John XXIII, is to promote the increase of the Catholic faith; to renew the morals of the Christian people; and to bring Church discipline up to date.

16. How often are ecumenical councils supposed to be held?

The pope is under no strict obligation, arising from either divine or ecclesiastical law, to convoke ecumenical councils. It is a matter of his own judgment whether he should do so and how often. In certain circumstances, especially in times of distress and spiritual calamities, the convocation of an ecumenical council may be morally or relatively necessary. The last ecumenical council, that of the First Vatican Council which began in 1869, was held almost 100 years ago. There have been tremendous changes in the way of life of the peoples of the earth in those 100 years. These changes have given rise to so many great, varied, and world-wide problems that in the judgment of Pope John it was time to call an ecumenical council.

17. Do Catholic laymen have any actual part in the deliberations of an ecumenical council?

While laymen will not take any direct part in the deliberations of the council, it is quite possible that the individual Fathers of the Council might consult laymen who have expert competence in specialized fields. Cardinal Tardini, in a press conference held on November 5, 1959, said that the topic of the place of the laity in the Church will be an important one for the council to consider in view of the importance the laity has assumed in the organized life of the Church. He said that the importance of the laity to bishops everywhere has become clear from the very first answers received from bishops on suggestions for subjects to be considered in the council.

18. Does the Holy See plan to invite non-Catholics to the council individually?

In answer to this Cardinal Tardini in his November press conference said, "The Pope is free to invite anyone he wants—even journalists to give it an element of color . . . We have nothing to hide. If anyone has sufficient reason to come as an observer, I believe the Pope will invite him. . . . We are letting them know that they are welcome and that they will be treated with due kindness and every possible regard. But there will be no direct invitation. We look on them as brothers because they are also the sons of God."

19. Will there be any representatives of governments present at the council as there were in some of the earlier councils?

When this question was put to Cardinal Tardini at the same press conference he answered with a sharp "no," and then went on to say, "This time we shall do it alone. Times have changed. At one time, communications also depended on princes. But today the Church can move freely. The participation of heads of states at a council today would create a somewhat comic effect."

20. When will the Second Council of the Vatican actually take place?

Because of the immense amount of preparatory work, it may not be for some time. Cardinal Tardini estimates it as probably late in 1962 or early in 1963.

21. In what does the preparation for the Vatican Council consist?

The Holy See requested all the prospective Fathers of the Council and others such as Catholic Universities to send in suggestions as to matters deserving the attention of the council. There are over 2000 bishops to respond. Already in November of 1959 some 1600 responses from bishops alone have been received. This was reported as 80% of all the bishops contacted. All these suggestions will have to be catalogued and classified. This is being done. This is called the "antepreparatory" work and there is a special commission to do it. When it is done, then actual preparatory commissions will be set up to prepare and do research for the agenda of the council. These commissions will be many and varied and will include groups to study moral, dogmatic and liturgical questions, and others studying technical problems.

22. What language will be used in the council?

The Latin language is the language of the Church. It is particularly adapted to express with precision and conciseness the concepts of Catholic doctrine and the norms of Catholic discipline. Special provision will be made if necessary for the Fathers of the Council who belong to other than the Roman rite, though for the most part these will be familiar with Latin as well as the language of their own rite. In his press conference Cardinal Tardini said that, as of the time he spoke, there was no plan for multiple translations with individual ear phones. It would be almost impossible, moreover, for translators to be sufficiently accurate in simultaneous translation to

reach the precision required by the subject matter being discussed at the council.

23. How long will the council last?

Among the points made by Cardinal Tardini at his press conference was that as a result of present technical facilities and intense preparation, it is expected that the time which bishops attending the council will have to spend in Rome away from their Sees will be kept to a minimum. An ecumenical council is not, however, scheduled as an ordinary convention which must meet and conduct its business according to a two, three or four day program. The council is convoked to do a job and it will continue till the job is done. The Council of Trent, for instance, lasted from 1545 to 1563. But its work was interrupted twice, once for four years and once for ten. The duration of most of the ecumenical councils is, however, counted in months rather than years and this will likely be true of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican.

24. Does the ecumenical council have anything to do with the Ecumenical Movement?

The Ecumenical Movement consists in a growing union of various non-Catholic churches to secure a larger combined influence in all matters concerning the moral and social condition of the people so as to promote the application of the law of Christ in every relation of human life.

It had its origin from three roots: 1. the Missionary Movement of the 19th Century — the problem of mutual relations between denominations in the same field suggested the possibility of common planning at home

to avoid sectarian competition by delimitation of territories to be evangelized and by preaching "the essentials of Christianity" and forgetting the "non-essentials of denominationalism"; 2. The Student Movement: the uniting of Christian student groups in an international organization for common action in the personal and missionary apostolate leading to the formation of the World Christian Student Federation in 1885; 3. The Social Gospel: a movement toward insistence on "applied" or "practical" Christianity, avoiding dogmatic differences and emphasizing Christ's teaching on human relations. This gave rise to the formation of the Federal Council of Churches in 1908. In 1913 the World Alliance for International Friendship through the Churches was formed. These movements, together with some others through a series of international meetings and conferences, evolved into the World Council of Churches in 1948 (See Duff, Edward, S.J., *The Social Thought of the World Council of Churches*, Association Press, New York).

The Ecumenical Movement, in the common usage of the term, is Protestant in origin and basically Protestant in its theology. The Second Vatican Council has, therefore, no particular relationship with the Ecumenical Movement.

25. What is the Catholic attitude toward the Ecumenical Movement?

The Catholic Church sees herself as the ecumenical (universal, catholic) Church. Itself is the "Ecumenical Movement" established by Christ. Nevertheless the Church looks with favor on the beginnings

which the Ecumenical Movement has made toward unity. It is the hope of the Church that the present unity in prayer and unity in charity will lead to unity in faith.

The Holy Office speaks of the intrinsic value of the Ecumenical Movement: "In several parts of the world, either on account of world events and a change in interior dispositions, or mainly because of the common prayer of the faithful, the desire has become daily more acute in the hearts of many men separated from the Catholic Church, under the inspiration of the grace of the Holy Spirit, that all who believe in Christ Our Lord should return to unity. This is for the children of the true Church a source of holy joy in the Lord and an invitation to help those who sincerely search for the truth by beseeching God through fervent prayers to grant them the necessary light and strength" (as quoted from G. H. Tavad, *Catholic Approach to Protestantism*. Harper, 1955).

Pope Pius XII called upon "all who, without belonging to the visible body of the Catholic Church, are near to us through Faith in God and Jesus Christ, and are in agreement with us as to the organization and aims of peace . . . The more and more frequent contacts and the disparate mixture of various religious confessions within one people have brought civil law courts to adopt the principle of tolerance and freedom of conscience. In this fact, furthermore, there is a political, civil and social tolerance concerning the faithful of other religions which is also for Catholics in those circumstances a moral duty" (Ad-

dress to the members of the Roman Rota, October 6, 1946).

26. What can Catholics do to foster the good tendencies of the Ecumenical Movement?

Dr. Julius Doepfner, Cardinal Archbishop of Berlin, when he was Bishop of Wuerzburg, outlined the following five ways in which Catholics could help establish Christian unity:

1. by developing a thorough love of the Catholic Church while rejecting any dogmating indifference which leads to the decay of Christianity and frustrates all genuine reunion efforts;

2. by prayer and penance to win God's grace;

3. by cultivating a "loving understanding for non-Catholics" as a prerequisite for establishing an honest contact with them;

4. by "clarifying talks" with non-Catholics, conducted in strict adherence to the instructions of the Holy See and the bishops, without "blurring the differences."

5. by "trustful cooperation" with non-Catholics in "the common tasks of our time" (Indiana Catholic Record).

27. What will the holding of the Second Vatican Council mean to the lay apostolate?

Throughout history the holding of an ecumenical council has always been the occasion of great grace for the whole Church. It will be the part of the laity in their apostolate to cooperate in the general renewal of spirit that will be

taking place throughout the world, to prepare for it and to foster its fervor.

It will be the part of the lay apostle through the various means at his disposal to bring himself and others to a willing receptivity and an intelligent docility to the determinations and decrees of the coming council. This will mean the intensification of awareness, in the minds of all, of the meaning of faith in all that the Church teaches and the increasing of devotion, or promptitude to do the divine Will as it is manifested to all in the teaching of the Church thus so formally presented in the decisions of an ecumenical council.

The very fact that this is to be an ecumenical council and that it will be concerned with the problems of all the world will direct the lay apostolate to the task of bringing fervent Christians everywhere up to the level required of them by the international needs of today. The lay apostolate will be devoting itself more and more to the education of Catholic leaders in spheres of modern world problems hitherto neglected. The meetings and conventions of the lay apostolate will be concerned more and more with clarifying the international issues on which guidance is sought from the council. Catholic Action generally will be concerned more and more with "coordinating in a supranational atmosphere all work as based in the fundamentals of morality" (See NC release on Archbishop Roberts, Oct. 30, 1959).

The lay apostolate will, moreover, seize the occasion of the ecumenical council to emphasize well all those doctrines of the Church which apply particularly to the

whole world of men: the supernatural brotherhood of all men with Christ and with each other under the Fatherhood of God and in the Holy Spirit of Love; the doctrine of the universal salvific will of God whereby He wills all men to be saved; the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ and the consequent doctrine of the urgency that all men become Its members; the doctrine of the Universal Kingship of Christ by right over the minds and hearts of men; the doctrine of social justice in the world order as applied to the international inequities of today; the doctrine of the natural law as a basis of universal cooperation for a better world in a pluralistic world society.

The preoccupation of the whole Church with things ecumenical during the council cannot help but be an opportunity for the lay apostle to use the occasion to make Catholics more aware of the Ecumenical Movement and to prepare them for intelligent and discreet participation in it.

The lay apostolate will not overlook the fact that the expenses for the council on the part of their respective bishops and on the part of the Holy See itself are going to be very great. In addition to maintaining the whole machinery of the council in Rome, His Holiness will be called upon to assist poor bishops to attend. The lay apostolate will be called upon as time goes on to organize financial support for this whole project.

28. What contribution toward Christian unity do Catholics expect as a result of this Vatican Council?

Treating of this matter editorially, *America* for February 7, 1959, said: "Previous ecumenical councils have wrestled in vain with the problem of Christian re-union. One should not look for certain or quick answers. But at the very least a marked clarification of points of unnecessary friction and misunderstanding can be achieved. In the meantime, there are other problems to which the Fathers of the Council will conceivably address themselves. Once again the Church is called upon to point out the spiritual and theological ills of our time and to probe those doctrinal and moral errors of modern society of which Communism is a mere surface symptom. It seems that many months, if not years, must be spent in preparation for this momentous council. Where all this will lead no one can say, except that the illumining and strengthening power of the Holy Spirit is at work guiding minds and hearts to peace and unity."

29. Where can one find more information along these same lines?

If you want a completely worked out book on Catholic ecumenism, send for Dumont, C. J., O.P., *Approach to Christian Unity*. It is available from the Catholic Book Club, Dept AJ, 70 East 45th St., New York 17, N. Y.

The book, *One Fold*, edited by Fathers Hanahoe and Cranny, both of the Society of Atonement, available from Chair of Unity Apostolate, Graymoor, Garrison, New York, will give you a series of excellent essays on various aspects of ecumenism as well as acquaintance with the

Franciscan Friars of the Atonement whose whole main apostolate is along this line.

For getting something of a friendly and courteous viewpoint of the Catholic Church by Protestants and Jews, there is the excellent *American Catholics*, edited by Philip Sharper, Sheed and Ward.

References

Most of the particulars of the coming council in this pamphlet were gleaned from the press reports of the formal press interview given by Cardinal Tardini in November of 1959. Matters of scientific theology were checked with the Latin of I. Salaverri, *De Ecclesia Christi* III, L.2, c.2, Art. 1 "De Infallibilitate Episcoporum." and from the Latin of A. Tanqueray's *Brevior Synopsis Theologiae Dogmaticae*, Nos. 266-268. Many of the answers were derived from or checked with the good old reliable *Catholic Encyclopedia*. The answers concerning Canon Law were checked with *Canon Law, a Text and Commentary* by Bouscaren and Ellis, and with *The Sacred Canons* by Abbo and Hannan.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. The marks of the Catholic Church are that it is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. How does the holding of an ecumenical council illustrate each of these marks? Which one of the four marks is most emphasized by the holding of such a council?

2. To some Protestants it may well seem that the holding of a council which leaves them out should not be called ecumenical, since it does not include all who believe in Christ. How would you explain this matter to them?

3. We speak of the infallibility of the Church, the infallibility of the pope, the infallibility of all the bishops, the infallibility of an ecumenical council. How are these related to each other and how would you show that they are all one and the same infallibility?

4. Of all the Christian virtues which are the most important two that Catholics will be called upon to practice in response to the decrees of the Vatican Council? What are the truths at the foundation of these virtues?

5. The holding of the ecumenical council and the repeated pleas at this time of our Holy Father for the unity of all who believe in Christ seem to indicate a greater association of Catholics with non-Catholics. On the one hand this closer association may win non-Catholics but on the other it may weaken the attachment of Catholics to the one true faith. What is to be said about this? What policy should be recommended to the lay apostolate to gain the good and avoid the evil?

6. The holding of an ecumenical council points up the supranational character of the Catholic Church and its deep interest in international problems. What are some of the Catholic supranational or international ideals? By its international ideals is the Catholic Church committed to a "One World Government"? How would the distinction between the spiritual and the temporal help answer the previous question?

7. In November of 1958 the bishops of the United States issued a statement entitled "Discrimination and the Christian Conscience." It was about race relations. Is this a world problem? Do you think it is of sufficient moment for consideration of an ecumenical council? Do you think that all Catholics or almost all have a correct viewpoint on this?

8. In the history of the Church we read that ecumenical councils were held against some false doctrine. The Council of Trent is said, for instance, to be against Protestantism, the Council of Ephesus was against Nestorianism and Pelagianism. Do you think this coming council will be said to be "against" some "ism"? What "ism" would that be? How would you characterize the most general false doctrine in the world today and the one which is causing most trouble. Some high bidders for top rating: Secularism, Naturalism, Racism, Liberalism, Statism, Socialism, Communism, Materialism. Can you name others?

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