

*Address of His Holiness Pope Paul VI at the opening of the Second Session of the Second Vatican Council, September 29, 1963*

Greetings to you, most beloved brothers in Christ whom we have called from every part of the world, from wherever the Holy Catholic Church has extended its hierarchical government. Greetings to you, who have accepted our invitation and hastened here to hold with us the second session of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, which we have the joy of inaugurating today, under the aegis of St. Michael the Archangel, heavenly protector of the people of God.

Truly it is fitting that this solemn and fraternal assembly, gathered together from the East and West, from the regions of the South and the North, should be designated by the prophetic name of "Ecclesia," that is, a coming together or a meeting. Here, truly, are realized in a new way those words which now come to our mind: "Their voice has gone forth into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world" (Rom. 10:18; Ps. 8:5).

Truly, one mystery of unity is joined to another mystery of catholicity; and this spectacle of universality recalls the apostolic origin, here so faithfully reflected and extolled, as well as the sanctifying purpose of our most beloved Church of God. Her characteristic notes shine forth: The countenance of the spouse of Christ is resplendent. Our spirits are elated by a most familiar, yet always secret, experience—that by which we perceive that we are the Mystical Body of Christ and by which we taste the incomparable joy, still unknown to the profane world, of "how good it is, and how pleasant, where brethren dwell at one!" (Ps. 132:1).

It is not futile to realize, right from this first moment, the human and divine phenomenon that we are bringing about. Here we are once more, as if in a new cenacle, which has become confined not by reasons of its vast dimensions but because of the multitude of those who are gathered together within it. Here certainly the Virgin Mother of Christ is helping us from heaven.

Here, around him who is last in time and merit, but identified with the first apostle in authority and mission, the successor of Peter, you are gathered. Venerable Brothers, you too apostles descended from the apostolic college and its authentic successors.

Here, praying together and united together by the same faith and the same charity; here, we shall rejoice in the unfailing grace of the Holy Spirit, who is present, vivifying, teaching, strengthening. Here all tongues will be only one voice and one voice alone will be the message to all the world.

Here, with bold step the Church militant has arrived, after almost 20 centuries of journeying. Here, the apostolic ranks, assembled all together from the world over, are refreshed at the fountain which quenches every thirst and reawakens every new thirst, and from here they will confidently resume their journey in the world and in time towards the goal which is beyond the earth and beyond the ages.

Greetings, Brothers! Thus you are welcomed by the least one among you, the Servant of the Servants of God, even though he bears the keys of supreme office consigned to Peter by Christ the Lord. Thus does he thank you for the proof of obedience and trust which your presence here brings to him. Thus he shows you in act that he wishes to pray with you, to speak with you, to deliberate with you, to work with you.

The Lord is our witness when, at this first moment of the second session of the great synod we declare to you that in our mind there is no intention of human predominance, no jealousy of exclusive power, but only the desire and the will to carry out the divine mandate which makes us, of you and among you, Brothers, the supreme shepherd, and which requires of you that you be his joy and glory, the "communion of saints," offering your fidelity, your loyalty, your collaboration. This same mandate confers on you that which pleases him most to give—his veneration, his esteem, his trust, his charity.

It had been our intention, as hallowed custom prescribes for us to send to all of you our first encyclical letter. But why, we ask ourself, entrust to writing that which, by a singular and happy opportunity—that is, by means of this ecumenical council—we are able to declare by word of mouth?

Certainly we cannot now say by word of mouth all that we

have in our heart and all that more easily could be poured forth in writing. But for this time let this present address be a prelude not only to the council, but also to our pontificate. Let the living word take the place of the encyclical letter, which, if it please God, we hope to address to you once these toilsome days are past.

And now that we have greeted you, we introduce ourself, to you. We are indeed new in the pontifical office which we are fulfilling, or rather, we should wish to say, inaugurating. You know indeed that the Sacred College of Cardinals, whom we here greet again with cordial veneration, in spite of our limitations and insufficiency, on the 21st of June, a day which this year happily coincided with the feast of the Most Sacred Heart of Christ, deigned to elect us to episcopal See of Rome and therefore to the supreme pontificate of the Universal Church.

We cannot recall this event without remembering our predecessor of happy and immortal memory, our most beloved John XXIII. To all of us who had the good fortune to see him seated in this same place, his name brings memories of his lovable and priestly presence as he opened the first session of this Second Vatican Council on October 11th of last year with that speech which to the Church and the world seemed like a prophetic voice for our century. That speech still echoes in our minds, pointing out to the council the path it has to take, thereby freeing us from all doubt and weariness which we may encounter along the difficult road we have undertaken.

O dear and venerated Pope John, may gratitude and praise be rendered to you for having resolved—doubtless under divine inspiration—to convoke this council in order to open to the Church new horizons, and to tap the fresh spring water of the doctrine and grace of Christ our Lord and let it flow over the earth.

Moved by no earthly motives or particular circumstances, but as if by divining heavenly counsels and penetrating into the dark and tormented needs of the modern age, you have picked up the broken thread of the First Vatican Council, and by that very fact you have banished the fear wrongly deduced from that council, as if the supreme powers conferred by Christ on the Roman

Pontiff to govern and vivify the Church, were sufficient, without the assistance of ecumenical councils.

You have summoned your brothers in the episcopate, the successors of the Apostles, not only to continue the interrupted study and suspended legislation, but to feel united with the Pope in a single body, to be comforted and directed by him "that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine be guarded and taught more effectively."

But to the principal aim of the council you added another which is more urgent and at this time more salutary—the pastoral aim—when you declared: "Nor is the primary purpose of our work to discuss one article or another of the fundamental doctrine of the Church," but rather, "to consider how to expound Church teaching in a manner demanded by the times."

You have awakened in the conscience of the teaching authority of the Church the conviction that Christian doctrine is not merely truth to be investigated by reason illumined by faith, but teaching that can generate life and action; and that the authority of the Church is not limited to condemning contrary errors, but extends to the communication of positive and vital doctrine, the source of its fecundity.

The teaching office of the Church, which is neither wholly theoretical nor wholly negative, must in the council manifest ever more the life-giving power of the message of Christ who said: ". . . The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (John VI: 64). Hence we shall ever keep in mind the norms which you, the first Father of this Council, have wisely laid down and which we may profitably repeat here:

"Our task is not merely to guard the precious treasure, namely our Faith, as if we were only concerned with antiquity, but to dedicate ourselves with an earnest will and without fear to that work which our era demands of us, pursuing thus the path which the Church has followed for nearly 20 centuries. Hence, that method of presenting the truth must be used which is more in conformity with a magisterium prevalently pastoral in character."

We shall have due regard for the great question of the unity in one flock of those who believe in Christ and wish to be members of the Church which, you, John, have called the paternal

home whose doors are open to all. The Council which you have promoted and inaugurated will proceed faithfully along the path you pointed out, so that with God's help reach the goal you have so ardently desired and hoped for.

Let us therefore go forward, Brothers. This clear determination brings to mind another thought. Although you are all well acquainted with it, because of its importance we nevertheless feel obliged to treat of it here.

From what point, dear Brethren, do we set out? Bearing in mind that we should pay attention rather to the divine directives than to the practical indications referred to above, what is the road we intend to follow? What is the goal we propose to ourselves? We have a goal which belongs to the realm of earthly history in that it concerns the time and mode of our present life, but we do not lose sight of the supreme and final end which, we know, must be the end of our pilgrimage.

These three very simple and at the same time very important questions have, as we well know, only one answer, namely that here and at this very hour we should proclaim Christ to ourselves and to the world around us; Christ our beginning, Christ our life and our guide, Christ our hope and our end.

O let this council have the full awareness of this relationship between ourselves and the blessed Jesus—a relationship which is at once multiple and unique, fixed and stimulating, mysterious and crystal clear, binding and beatifying—between this holy Church which we constitute and Christ from whom we come, by whom we live and towards whom we strive.

Let no other light be shed on this council, but Christ the light of the World! Let no other truth be of interest to our minds, but the words of the Lord, our only master! Let no other aspiration guide us, but the desire to be absolutely faithful to him! Let no other hope sustain us, but the one that, through the mediation of his word, strengthens our pitiful weakness: "And behold I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world" (Mt. 28:20).

Would that we were able at this moment to raise up to our Lord a voice that is worthy of him! We will say to him in the words of the sacred liturgy: "Thee, O Christ, alone we know.

Singing even in our woe, with pure hearts to Thee we go: On our senses shine!" (Hymn of Lauds for Wednesdays)

As we thus invoke him, he seems to present himself to our rapt gaze with the majesty proper to the "Pantocrator" [all mighty]—the glorious Christ of your basilicas—O Brothers of the Eastern Churches, as well as those of the West.

We recognize ourself in the figure of our predecessor, Honorius III, who is represented in the splendid mosaic in the apse of the Basilica of St. Paul as a humble worshiper, tiny and prostrate, kissing the feet of a Christ of gigantic dimensions, who as a kingly teacher dominates and blesses the people gathered in the basilica, which symbolizes the Church.

The scene, it seems to us, is reproduced here before us, not as a painted image, but as a historical human reality which acknowledges in Christ the source of redeemed humanity, his Church, as it were, his extension and continuation, both earthly and mysterious. This recalls to our mind the apocalyptic vision of St. John: "He showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming forth from the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Apoc. 22:1).

It seems to us opportune that this council should have as its starting point this vision, or mystical celebration, which acknowledges him, our Lord Jesus Christ, to be the Incarnate Word, the Son of God and the Son of Man, the Redeemer of the world, the Hope of humanity and its Supreme Master, the Good Shepherd, the Bread of Life, the High Priest and our Victim, the sole Mediator between God and men, the Saviour of the world, the eternal King of ages; and which declares that we are his chosen ones, his disciples, his apostles, his witnesses, his ministers, his representatives and his living members together with the whole company of the faithful, united in this immense and unique Mystical Body, his Church, which he is forming by means of faith and the sacraments, as generations of mankind succeed one another—a Church which is spiritual and visible, fraternal and hierarchical, temporal today and eternal tomorrow.

If we place before our minds, Venerable Brethren, this sovereign conception that Christ is our Founder, our Head, invisible, but real, and that we receive everything from him so as to constitute together with him that "full Christ" about whom St.

Augustine speaks and who pervades the entire theology of the Church, then we shall be able to understand better the main objectives of this council.

For reasons of brevity and better understanding we enumerate here those objectives in four points: the knowledge, or—if you prefer—the awareness of the Church; its reform; the bringing together of all Christians in unity; the dialogue of the Church with the contemporary world.

There can be no doubt whatever of the Church's desire and need and duty to give a more thorough definition of herself. We are all familiar with the magnificent images by which Holy Scripture describes the nature of the Church: the building raised up by Christ, the house of God, the temple and tabernacle of God, his peoples, his flock, his vine, his field, his city, the pillar of Truth and, finally, the Bride of Christ, his Mystical Body.

In mediating on these revealing images the Church has come to see herself as a historic, visible and hierarchically organized society, animated by a mysterious principle of life. The celebrated encyclical of Pope Pius XII, "Mystici Corporis," has in part answered the Church's longing to express her nature in a full doctrinal form, but has also served to spur her to give herself a more exhaustive definition.

The first Vatican Council treated of the subject and many external influences have caused it to receive attention from students, both within the Church and without. Among these influences are the intensification of social life in temporal matters, the development of communications, the need to judge the various Christian denominations according to the true and univocal conception found in divine Revelation.

It should not come as a surprise that, after 20 centuries in which both the Catholic Church and the other Christian bodies distinguished by the name of church have seen great geographical and historical development, there should still be need to enunciate a more precise definition of the true, profound and complete nature of the Church which Christ founded and the Apostles began to build.

The Church is a mystery; she is a reality imbued with the

divine presence and, for that reason, she is ever susceptible of new and deeper investigation.

Human thought moves forward. Man advances from empirically observed fact to scientific truth, from one truth he derives another by logical deduction, and, confronted by the complexity and permanence of reality, he bends his mind now to one of its aspects, now to another. It is thus that thought evolves. The course of its evolution can be traced in history.

The time has now come, we believe, when the truth regarding the Church of Christ should be examined, coordinated and expressed. The expression should not, perhaps, take the form of a solemn dogmatic definition, but of declarations making known by means of the Church's magisterium, in a more explicit and authoritative form, what the Church considers herself to be.

This self-awareness of the Church is clarified by faithful adherence to the words and thought of Christ, by respectful attention to the teaching of ecclesiastical tradition and by docility to the interior illumination of the Holy Spirit, who seems to be requiring of the Church today that she should do all she can to make known what she really is.

We believe, too, that in this ecumenical council the Spirit of Truth ignites in the teaching body of the Church a brighter light and suggests a more complete Doctrine of the nature of the Church, so that the Bride of Christ may be mirrored in her Lord and discerned in Him with most lively love—her own true likeness and the beauty that He wishes her to have.

For this reason, the principal concern of this session of the council will be to examine the intimate nature of the Church and to express in human language, so far as that is possible, a definition which will best reveal the Church's real, fundamental constitution and manifest its manifold mission of salvation. The theological doctrine has the possibility of magnificent developments which merit the attentive consideration of our separated brethren also and which, as we ardently hope, may make the path towards common agreement easier.

First among the various questions that this consideration will raise, Venerable Brothers, is one which affects all of you as bishops of the Church of God. We have no hesitation in saying that we look forward with great expectations and confidence to



this discussion which, taking for granted the dogmatic declarations of the First Vatican Council regarding the Roman pontiff, will go on to develop the doctrine regarding the episcopate, its function and its relationship with Peter.

For us personally it will provide doctrinal and practical standards by which our apostolic office, endowed though it is by Christ with the fulness and sufficiency of power, may receive more help and support, in ways to be determined, from a more effective and responsible collaboration with our beloved and venerable brothers in the episcopate.

Next it will be necessary to elucidate the teaching regarding the different components of the visible and mystical body, the pilgrim, militant Church on earth, that is, priests, religious, the faithful, and also the separated brethren who are also called to adhere to it more fully and completely.

The importance of this doctrinal aspect of the council's work will be obvious to all; from it the Church can draw an illuminating, uplifting and sanctifying self-knowledge.

The same hopes can also be entertained of another chief subject of the council's deliberations, that, namely, of the renewal of the Church. This too, in our opinion, must follow from our awareness of the relationship by which Christ is united to his Church.

We have just spoken of the Bride of Christ looking upon Christ to discern in Him her true likeness; if in doing so she were to discover some shadow, some defect, some stain upon her wedding garment, what should be her instinctive, courageous reaction? There can be no doubt that her primary duty would be to reform, correct and set herself aright in conformity with her divine Model.

Reflect upon the words Christ spoke in His priestly prayer as the hour of His Passion pressed close upon him: ". . . I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth" (John 17:19). To our way of thinking, this is the essential attitude, desired by Christ, which the Second Vatican Council must adopt.

It is only after this work of internal sanctification has been accomplished that the Church will be able to show herself to the whole world and say: "Who sees me, sees Christ," as Christ said of himself: "He who sees me sees also the Father" (John 14:9).

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In this sense the council is to be a new spring, a reawakening of the mighty spiritual and moral energies which at present lie dormant. The council is evidence of a determination to bring about a rejuvenation both of the interior forces of the Church and of the regulations by which her canonical structure and liturgical forms are governed. The council is striving, that is, to enhance in the Church that beauty of perfection and holiness which imitation of Christ and mystical union with Him in the Holy Spirit can alone confer.

Yes, the council aims at renewal. Note well, however, that in saying and desiring that, we do not imply that the Catholic Church of today can be accused of substantial infidelity to the mind of her Divine Founder. Rather it is the deeper realization of her substantial faithfulness that fills her with gratitude and humility and inspires her with the courage to correct those imperfections which are proper to human weakness.

The reform at which the council aims is not, therefore, a turning upside down of the Church's present way of life or a breaking with what is essential and worthy of veneration in her tradition. It is, rather, an honoring of tradition by stripping it of what is unworthy or defective so that it may be rendered firm and fruitful. Did not Jesus say to His disciples: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-dresser. Every branch in me that bears no fruit he will take away; and every branch that bears fruit he will cleanse, that it may bear more fruit?" (John 15:1-2).

This verse is a good summary of the perfecting process which the Church today desires, above all as regards her interior and exterior vitality. May the living Church be conformed to the living Christ. If faith and charity are the principles of her life, it is clear that no pains must be spared to make faith strong and joyful and to render Christian instruction and teaching methods more effective for the attaining of this vital end.

The first requirement of this reform will certainly be a more diligent study and a more intensive proclamation of the Word of God. Upon this foundation an education of charity will be built up, for we must give the place of honor to charity and strive to construct the "Ecclesia caritatis" if we would have a Church capable of renewing herself and renewing the world around her: there indeed is a tremendous undertaking.

Charity must be fostered because it is the chief and root of the other Christian virtues: humility, poverty, religion, the spirit of sacrifice, fearless truth, love of justice, and every other force by which the new man acts.

At this point the council's program broadens to take in immense fields, one of which, of special importance and fraught with charity, is the sacred liturgy. To this subject the first session of the Council devoted long discussions, which will, we hope, be brought to a happy conclusion in the second.

Other fields, too, will certainly receive the earnest attention of the Fathers of the council, though we fear that the shortness of the time at our disposal will not permit us to treat them all as fully as they deserve and that it will be necessary to deal with them in a future session.

The Council has a third object, one which may be called its spiritual drama. This too was put before us by Pope John XXIII. It is that which concerns "the other Christians"—those who believe in Christ but whom we have not the happiness of numbering among ourselves in the perfect unity of Christ, which only the Catholic Church can offer them.

This unity, objectively speaking, should be theirs by Baptism. It is something which, virtually at least, they already desire. For recent movements, at present in full development in bodies of Christians separated from us, show clearly two things. The first is that the Church of Christ is one alone and therefore must be unique. The second is that this mystic and visible union cannot be attained except in identity of faith and by participation in the same sacraments and in the organic harmony of a single ecclesiastical control, even though this allows for a great variety of verbal expressions, movements, lawful institutions, and preference with regard to modes of acting.

There can be no doubt about the attitude of the council with regard to the great numbers of the separated brethren and of the possibility of multiplicity in the unity of the Church. This too is one of the characteristics of the council.

The council aims at complete and universal ecumenicity—that is at least what it desires, what it prays and prepares for. Today it does so in hope that tomorrow it may see the reality. This council while calling and counting its own those sheep

who belong to the fold of Christ in the fullest and truest sense, opens the door and calls out, too, in anxious expectation to the many sheep of Christ who are not at present within the unique fold.

It is a council, therefore, of invitation, of expectation, of confidence, looking forward towards a more widespread, more fraternal participation in its authentic ecumenicity.

We speak now to the representatives of the Christian denominations separated from the Catholic Church, who have nevertheless been invited to take part as observers in this solemn assembly. We greet them from our heart. We thank them for their participation. We transmit through them our message—as father and brother—to the venerable Christian communities they represent.

Our voice trembles and our heart beats the faster both because of the inexpressible consolation and reasonable hope that their presence stirs up within us, as well as because of the deep sadness we feel at their prolonged separation.

If we are in any way to blame for that separation, we humbly beg God's forgiveness and ask pardon too of our brethren who feel themselves to have been injured by us. For our part, we willingly forgive the injuries which the Catholic Church has suffered, and forget the grief endured during the long series of dissensions and separations. May the heavenly Father deign to hear our prayers and grant us true brotherly peace.

We are aware that serious and complicated questions remain to be studied, treated and resolved. We would wish that this could be done immediately on account of the love of Christ that "urges us on." But we also realize that these problems require many conditions before satisfactory solutions can be reached—conditions which are as yet premature. Hence we are not afraid to await patiently the blessed hour of perfect reconciliation.

Meanwhile we wish to affirm before the observers here present some points in our attitude toward reunion with our separated brethren, with a view that they may communicate them with their respective Christian communities.

May our voice also reach those other venerable Christian communities separated from us, that did not accept the invitation

freely extended to them to attend the council. We believe these points are well known, but it is useful to repeat them here.

Our manner of speaking toward them is friendly, completely sincere and loyal. We lay no snares. We are not motivated by temporal interests. We owe our Faith—which we believe to be divine—the most candid and firm attachment.

But at the same time we are convinced that this does not constitute an obstacle to the desired understanding with our separated brethren, precisely because it is the truth of the Lord and therefore the principle of union, not of distinction or separation. At any rate we do not wish to make of our Faith an occasion for polemics.

Secondly we look with reverence upon the true religious patrimony we share in common, which has been preserved and in part even well developed among our separated brethren. We are pleased to note the study made by those who seek sincerely to make known and to honor the treasures of truth and of genuine spirituality, in order to improve our relations with them.

We hope that just as they are desirous to know more about our history and our religious life, so also they would wish to make a closer study of our doctrine and its logical derivation from the deposit of Divine Revelation.

Finally we wish to say that, aware of the enormous difficulties still in the way of the desired union, we humbly put our trust in God. We shall continue to pray. We shall try to give better proof of our efforts of leading genuine Christian lives and practicing fraternal charity. And should historical reality tend to weaken our hopes, we shall try to recall the comforting words of Christ: "Things that are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:27).

Finally the council will build a bridge toward the contemporary world. A singular phenomenon: While the Church seeks to revive her interior life in the Spirit of the Lord—thus distinguishing and separating herself from secular society in which she exists—at the same time she is signalized as the lifegiving ferment and the instrument of the salvation of the world, both revealing and strengthening her missionary vocation, which is to treat mankind, in whatever condition it may be, as the object

of her dedicated mission of communicating the teachings of the Gospels.

You yourselves, Venerable Brethren, have experienced this remarkable phenomenon. Indeed, you yourselves, when you were undertaking the labors of the first session, aglow with the opening words of Pope John XXIII, instantly felt the need of opening, as it were, the doors of this assembly, and of suddenly shouting to the world a message of greeting, of brotherhood, and of hope.

Singular and remarkable gesture this would be; it could be said that the prophetic gift of holy Church had suddenly burst into expression. And as Peter on the day of Pentecost felt the impulse at once to raise his voice and to speak to the people, so you also have unexpectedly determined to treat no longer of your own limited affairs but rather those of the world, no longer to conduct a dialogue among yourselves but rather to open one with the world.

This means, Venerable Brethren, that the present council is characterized by love, by the most comprehensive and compelling love, by a love which thinks of others even before it thinks of itself—by the universal love of Christ.

This love sustains us now because, as we turn our view to the scene of contemporary human life, we ought to be frightened rather than comforted; saddened rather than gladdened; anxious for defense and condemnation rather than for trust and friendship.

We ought to be realists, not hiding the savagery that from many areas reaches even into this universal synod. Can we be blind and not notice that many seats in this assembly are vacant? Where are our brethren from nations in which the Church is opposed? In what conditions does religion exist in these territories?

At such a reminder our thoughts are aggrieved because of what we know and even more because of what we cannot know about our sacred hierarchy, our men and women religious, our countless children subjected to fear, to persecutions, to privations, to oppression, because of their loyalty to Christ and to the Church.

What sadness we feel in the face of such sufferings! What dis-

pleasure to see that in certain countries religious liberty, like other fundamental rights of man, is being crushed by principles and methods of political, racial, or anti-religious intolerance! The heart grieves to have to observe that in the world there are still so many acts of injustice against goodness and the free profession of one's religious faith.

But, rather than in bitter words, our lament must be expressed in a frank and human exhortation to all who may be responsible for these evils to put aside with a noble heart their unjustified hostility toward the Catholic religion, whose followers ought to be considered neither as enemies nor as disloyal citizens, but rather as upright and hard-working members of that civil society to which they belong.

Finally, to the Catholics who are suffering for their Faith we send, also on this occasion, our affectionate greetings, and for them we invoke special divine assistance.

Nor does our sorrow end here. The view of the world fills us with crushing sadness because of so many other evils. Atheism is pervading part of the human race and is bringing in its wake the derangement of the intellectual, moral and social order, the true notion of which the world is losing. While the light of the science of God and in consequence over man's true science of nature is increasing, darkness is spreading over the science of God and in consequence over man's true science. While progress is perfecting in a wondrous way every kind of instrument that man uses, his heart is declining towards emptiness, sadness and despair.

We would have a hundred things to say on these complicated and, for many reasons, sad conditions of modern man. But not now. Now, as we were saying, love is filling our heart and the heart of the Church assembled in council.

We look upon our times and upon their varied and contrasting manifestations with immense tenderness and with an immense desire to offer to men of today the message of friendship, of salvation and of hope which Christ has brought into the world. "For God did not send his Son into the world in order to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:17).

Let the world know this: The Church looks at the world with

profound understanding, with sincere admiration and with the sincere intention not of conquering it, but of serving it; not of despising it, but of appreciating it; not of condemning it, but of strengthening and saving it.

From the window of the council, opened wide on the world, the Church looks towards some categories of persons with particular solicitude: It looks towards the poor, the needy, the afflicted, the hungry, the suffering and sorrowing. Humanity belongs to the Church, by the right which the Gospel gives her. She likes to repeat to all who make up the human race: "Come to me, all . . ." (Matt. 11:28).

She looks towards men of culture and learning, scientists, artists. For these also she has great esteem and a great desire to receive the fruit of their experiences, to strengthen their intellectual life, to defend their liberty, to provide a space in which their troubled spirits can expand joyously within the luminous sphere of the Divine Word and divine grace.

She looks towards the workers, towards the dignity of their person and their labors, toward the legitimacy of their hopes, towards the need—which still afflicts them so greatly—of social improvement and of interior elevation, to the mission which may be recognized as theirs—if it is good, if it is Christian—to create a new world, of free men and brothers. The Church, mother and teacher, is close to them.

And then the Catholic Church looks further still, beyond the confines of the Christian horizon. For how can she put limits to her love if she would make her own the love of God the Father, who rains down His grace on all men alike (Matt. V:46), and who so loved the world as to give for it His only-begotten Son (John 3:16)?

She looks, then, beyond her own sphere and sees those other religions which preserve the sense and notion of the one supreme, transcendent God, Creator and Sustainer, and which worship Him with acts of sincere piety and base their moral and social life on their beliefs and religious practices.

It is true that the Catholic Church sees in such religions omissions, insufficiencies and errors which cause her sadness. Yet she cannot exclude them from her thoughts and would have them



know that she esteems what they contain of truth and goodness and humanity.

For the Catholic Church is in the forefront of those who, as a necessary duty of true civilization, strive to preserve religion and the worship of God in modern society. She is the most vigorous upholder of God's rights over mankind.

Other vast fields of humanity fall under her gaze: the new generations of youth desirous of living and expressing themselves; the new peoples now coming to self-awareness, independence and civil organization; the innumerable men and women who feel isolated in a troubled society that has no message for their spirit. To all without exception she proclaims the good news of salvation and hope. To all she offers the light of truth and life and salvation. For God "wishes all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (I Tim. 2:4).

Venerable Brethren, our mission as ministers of salvation is vast and burdensome. We have come together in this solemn assembly so as to fulfill it better. May the deep, fraternal union of our spirits be to us a source of vigor and guidance.

May our union with the Church in heaven bring us support—the saints of our dioceses and religious orders, the angels and all the saints, especially Saints Peter and Paul, St. John the Baptist and, in a particular way, Saint Joseph, the patron of this council.

May Mary, whom we invoke from our hearts, assist us with her powerful motherly aid.

May Christ preside over us, and may all be to the glory of God in the Holy Trinity, whose blessing we now presume to bestow upon you all, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.