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Blast from the Past: A Courageous Bishop

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Distinctly Catholic

The council fathers also heard an example of the American pastoral approach to ecumenism from Stephen Levin, Auxiliary Bishop of San Antonio. There was need, he said, for "a dialogue not only with Protestants, but also among us bishops." So many opponents of collegiality and ecumenism, he continued, "preach to us and chastise us as if we were against Peter and his successors or as if we desired to steal away the faith of our flocks and promote indifferentism. They speak as if our Holy Father, John XXIII, had never cited in our day the expression of St. Augustine: "They are our brothers; they will not cease to be our brothers until they cease saying Our Father." They speak as if the whole doctrine of the freedom of conscience due every man, so clearly stated in *Pacem in Terris*, were offensive to pious ears. Again and again in this aula they continue to chastise us as if the prelate who feels compelled by clear evidence to acknowledge the gifts of the Holy Spirit in persons of other ecclesiastical bodies were denying the faith and giving grave scandal to the innocent. They prefer to blame non-Catholics whom, perhaps they have never seen rather than to instruct children in their parishes. Otherwise, why are they so afraid the effects of ecumenism would not be good? Why are their people not better instructed? Why are their people not visited in their homes? Why is there not an active and working Confraternity of Christian Doctrine in their parishes? It seems the dangers arising from ecumenism may be exaggerated. The prelates who seek a sincere and fruitful dialogue with non-Catholics are not the ones who show disaffection and disloyalty to the Holy Father. It is not our people who miss Mass on Sunday, refuse the sacraments and vote the Communist ticket? Our Catholics are good Catholics, loyal to us bishops, to holy Mother Church and to the Holy Father. We have not lost the working class. They are the foundation and the support of the Church." The speech was worthy of one of the American bishops of the previous century."

-From Gerald P. Fogarty's "The Vatican and the American Hierarchy From 1870 to 1965," describing the intervention of Bishop Levin at Vatican II. It was a moment of courage that came to mind when reading Bishop Dowling's remarks last week.

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