



ANDRZEJ CHOROMAŃSKI

Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, Poland

## *Quanta est nobis via?* Re-reading *Ut unum sint* Twenty-Five Years Later

**Abstract:** Published on 25 May 1995, *Ut unum sint* was the first ever and remains to the date the only papal encyclical entirely dedicated to ecumenism. Written thirty years after the Second Vatican Council, it was an important step on the way in the reception in the life of the Church of the principles and norms on ecumenism outlined in the conciliar decree *Unitatis redintegratio*. The article proposes a re-reading of the encyclical twenty-five years after its publication. It begins with an overview of the ecumenical engagement of John Paul II, for whom the search for Christian unity was one of the pastoral priorities of his pontificate. The article continues with a presentation of the ecumenical situation at the time of the publication of *Ut unum sint* marked by a growing skepticism towards ecumenism within denominations and a certain stagnation within the ecumenical movement. It then presents the vision of the Church and its unity which animates the encyclical, namely the concept of communion (*communio/koinonia*). The article then presents some characteristics of the ecumenical situation today and delineates the important challenges such as lack of a common vision of the goal of the ecumenical movement and a shift in the ecumenical paradigm from full visible unity to mutual recognition. It concludes with arguing that explored anew in the ecumenical dialogue against the background of the current condition of world Christianity, *Ut unum sint* may be a source of inspiration for the search for a fresh vision for the ecumenical movement in the 21st century.

**Keywords:** ecumenism, communion (*communio/koinonia*), John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*

## *Ut unum sint* and the ecumenical engagement of Saint John Paul II

John Paul II affirms in *Ut unum sint* that the ecumenical task is one of the “pastoral priorities” of his pontificate because the lack of unity is a “grave obstacle” for the proclamation of the Gospel (cf. UUS 99). He considers ecumenism not as an intra-Christian endeavour but primarily as a common Christian responsibility towards all of humanity. More than for the internal life of the Church, unity is needed for the credibility and efficiency of its mission to the world. Only when really one, can the Church be a radiant sign and an effective instrument of God’s love for the whole of humanity. Throughout his pontificate, John Paul II strongly supported and promoted an active participation of the Catholic Church in ecumenical initiatives of all kinds. He often repeated that the commitment of the Catholic Church to the ecumenical movement is “irrevocable” and “irreversible”.<sup>1</sup> For him ecumenism was not one of the programmes of the Church or “some sort of ‘appendix’ which is added to the Church’s traditional activity [but] an organic part of her life and work, and consequently must pervade all that she is and does” (UUS 20).<sup>2</sup> For John Paul II the way of ecumenism is “the way of the Church,” as affirms one of the subtitles of the first chapter of the encyclical. This ecumenical option was included in the paramount documents of his pontificate such as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (§§ 813—822), the Code of Canon Law for Latin Catholics (cf. can. 755 § 2) and the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (cann. 902—908).

In order to grasp correctly the particular ecumenical attitude of John Paul II and his outstanding contribution to the cause of Christian unity of which the encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* is a salient feature, it is crucial to look at his person and his ministry of bishop of Rome from the perspective of the Second Vatican Council. In his ecclesial sensitivity, theological thinking and pastoral action John Paul II was entirely a “child of the Council”. Through his personal participation in its work, he gained an unshaken conviction that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Council was a providential event for the Church at a time when, after the atrocities of the two world wars, it was looking for fresh energies and new direction while approaching the threshold of the new millennium,

---

<sup>1</sup> JOHN PAUL II: Address to the Cardinals and the Roman Curia (28 June 1985). AAS 77, n. 4 (1985), p. 1151.

<sup>2</sup> P. CROSS: “John Paul II and Ecumenism.” In: *John Paul II: Legacy and Witness*. Ed. R. GASCOIGNE. Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls, 2007, p. 121.

a “threshold of hope,” as he calls it in one of his books.<sup>3</sup> His twenty-seven year-long ministry of Bishop of Rome was guided by the spirit of the Council and focused on implementing its documents, including the Conciliar Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*. Published thirty years after the Council, *Ut unum sint* was a significant step forward in receiving the conciliar teachings in the life of the Catholic Church. It was the ever first and still is today the only encyclical ever written by a pope on the subject of ecumenism, and as such it has provided significant inspiration for the engagement of the Catholic Church in the ecumenical movement at the threshold of the third millennium of Christianity. It both connects back and at the same time continues the journey forward. It makes an assessment of the ecumenical situation at the end of the 20th century, and building on what had been achieved proposes some concrete ways for future progress.

Both Catholics and Christians from other ecclesial traditions generally agree that *Ut unum sint* was a landmark document which made a vital contribution to the modern ecumenical movement. Written in a tone of humility and not triumphalism, *Ut unum sint* rejects the so-called ecumenism of return and promotes an ecumenism of conversion, prayer, dialogue, practical cooperation, common service to the world, mutual learning and exchange of gifts among Christian traditions. Cardinal Edward I. Cassidy, the President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) at the time of the publication of the encyclical, qualified it as one of the “key texts of the twentieth-century ecumenical movement” which challenged all churches<sup>4</sup> to recover their ecumenical zeal at a time when there were many factors distracting Christians from the quest for visible unity, and when questions were being asked about the condition of the ecumenical movement.<sup>5</sup> In the same spirit, Cardinal Walter Kasper, who in 2001 succeeded Cardinal Cassidy as the President of the PCPCU, acknowledged *Ut unum sint* to be a “great, important and even prophetic ecumenical encyclical.”<sup>6</sup> William Henn, a renowned Catholic ecumenist, a deputy moderator of the Faith and Order Commission

<sup>3</sup> JOHN PAUL II: *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (1994). New York City: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994.

<sup>4</sup> For reasons of brevity and simplicity in this article I apply indistinctly the appellation “church” to Churches from the East and Churches and Ecclesial Communities from the West, following their own self-understanding and without making any judgment regarding their “ecclesiality”.

<sup>5</sup> E. I. CASSIDY: “*Ut Unum Sint* in Ecumenical Perspective.” In: *Church Unity and the Papal Office: An Ecumenical Dialogue on John Paul II’s Encyclical Ut Unum Sint*. Eds. C. E. BRAATEN, R. W. JENSON. Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 2001, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> W. KASPER: *That They May All Be One*. London—New York: Burns & Oates, 2004, p. 34.

of the WCC and member of several international ecumenical dialogues considers that it “is a historical encyclical with important implications for the Catholic Church’s involvement in the ecumenical movement.”<sup>7</sup> He argues that its importance is even better apprehended when comparing it to other papal encyclicals from the past addressing the issue of Christian unity such as *Satis Cognitum* of Leo XIII (1896) and *Mortalium Animos* of Pius XI (1928). Both condemned the ecumenical movement, seeing in it a thread of relativising Catholic faith and compromising the claim of the Catholic Church to be the only true Church of Jesus Christ on earth. Only the initiative of John XXIII to convoke an ecumenical council and what followed brought a real shift in the attitude of the Catholic Church from an utter rejection of the ecumenical movement towards an irrevocable engagement. The teachings of the Second Vatican Council that inspired the entire ministry of John Paul II provide a theological perspective for the encyclical.

### *Ut unum sint* and the ecumenical option of Vatican II

It is a commonly shared conviction, not only within the Catholic Church but within the wider ecumenical community, that “[f]or the ecumenical movement, the Second Vatican Council was a turning point that fundamentally changed the conditions for relationships between the churches.”<sup>8</sup> This epochal shift was made possible due to the promulgation of the first conciliar document, in the Catholic Church’s history, endorsing and promoting ecumenism. On 21 November 1964, in Saint Peter’s Basilica, the Fathers of the Council adopted the Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio* with an overwhelming majority of 2,137 “Yes” votes against only 11 “No” votes. One of those who voted “Yes” was forty-four year old Archbishop of Cracow Karol Wojtyła, who just a few months earlier had made his solemn ingress to the royal cathedral at Wawel, a historic hill of the first capital of Poland. The document was then promulgated by Pope Paul VI as an expression of a deep conviction of the conciliar Fathers that the ecumenical movement was an impulse of the Holy

<sup>7</sup> W. HENN: “*Ut Unum Sint* and the Catholic Involvement in Ecumenism.” *The Ecumenical Review* 52(2) (2000), p. 234.

<sup>8</sup> K. RAISER: “Fifty Years after the Second Vatican Council. Assessing Ecumenical Relations from the Perspective of the World Council of Churches.” *The Ecumenical Review* 67(2), July 2015, p. 285, at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/erev.12161>

Spirit at work in the Church who aroused in divided Christians remorse over their divisions and sparked in their midst a longing for unity. With the Council and its Decree the Catholic Church made the fundamental cause of the ecumenical movement its own, joining it officially and irrevocably.

In the opening sentence, the Decree affirms that, “[t]he restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council” (UR 1).<sup>9</sup> The ecumenical orientation of the Council was intimately connected with its original inspiration, namely the overall renewal — *aggiornamento*, as it was called during the Council — of the Catholic Church. In his speech at the promulgation of the Decree Pope Paul VI stated that it explained and completed the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, probably the conciliar text which had the most significant impact on the teaching and the life of the Catholic Church in the post-conciliar era.<sup>10</sup> The Decree for its part formulated the ecumenical consequences of the new articulation of the ecclesiological self-understanding of the Catholic Church as developed in *Lumen gentium*. The Constitution reaffirms that unity belongs to the nature of the Church and must always be an essential aspect of the Church’s life. However, in discontinuity with the previous Catholic Magisterium it offers a different understanding of this unity. The most significant change for the ecumenical movement has been a formal recognition that the Church of Jesus Christ on earth is a reality that transcends the visible limits of the Catholic Church.

As a result of conciliar ecclesiology, the Catholic Church radically changed its perception of other churches. This has opened the way to numerous encounters, reciprocal visits, theological dialogues, and practical cooperation which have made it possible to establish a network of ecumenical relations.<sup>11</sup> Through all these gestures and actions those who for

---

<sup>9</sup> W. KASPER: “Lasting significance and urgency of *Unitatis Redintegratio*. The Decree on Ecumenism Read Anew After Forty Years,” at: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/card-kasper-docs/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_20041111\\_kasper-ecumenism\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/card-kasper-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20041111_kasper-ecumenism_en.html)

<sup>10</sup> It is worthy of mention that during the same session was also promulgated the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* which constitutes the ecclesiological foundation of the Decree. See: PAOLO VI: Allocuzione per la conclusione della III sessione del Concilio Vaticano II (21 novembre 1964), in particular n. 17 which speaks about the Decree, at: [http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/speeches/1964/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_spe\\_19641121\\_conclusions-iii-sessions.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/speeches/1964/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19641121_conclusions-iii-sessions.html)

<sup>11</sup> K. KOCH: “Towards Full Communion: Hopes, Achievements, Obstacles and Challenges”. Lecture at the Major Catholic Speaker series at Aquinas Centre of Theology and Candler School of Theology at the Emory University in Atlanta. 4 September 2018, n.1, at: <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/it/cardinal-koch/2018/conferenze/lecture-at-the-major-catholic-speaker-series-at-aquinas-center-o.html>

centuries had qualified each other as “schismatics” or “heretics” started to acknowledge each other as “divided brothers,” still “divided,” but already “brothers”. As noted by John Paul II, the first and most important fruit of the ecumenical movement has been the “rediscovered brotherhood” among Christians and Christian communities (UUS 41 and 51). Without this rediscovery no progress of the ecumenical way could have been possible. As justly noted by Catholicos Aram I, a foremost Christian leader and ecumenist, the ecumenical movement has been from the beginning a “journey of confidence-building” among divided brothers belonging to different traditions that had decided to establish reciprocal relations despite ages’ long antagonisms and doctrinal controversies.<sup>12</sup>

Since the Council, the Catholic Church has conducted theological dialogues with almost all Christian world communions representing practically all traditions in the East and the West.<sup>13</sup> All these dialogues have produced an impressive number of texts, both bilateral and multilateral. They have given tangible fruits: many prejudices and misunderstandings of the past have been overcome, in some cases convergences and even consensus have been found, while the remaining differences have been better identified.<sup>14</sup> These dialogues have given and continue to give witness to the joint effort of Christians from all traditions to overcome the painful separations of the past, and have paved the way for the achievement of full visible unity.

In order to grasp the contribution of *Ut unum sint* to the ecumenical movement, the document needs to be considered in the light of the conciliar option for ecumenism and all the results that have been achieved since the publication of *Unitatis redintegratio*. The encyclical builds upon the conciliar teachings as well as upon the theological rapprochements, convergences and sometimes even consensus achieved in all bilateral and multilateral dialogues. John Paul II offered an updated re-reading of the conciliar documents against the background of the ecumenical achieve-

---

<sup>12</sup> ARAM I, CATHOLICOS of Cilicia: “From Reflection to Reception: Challenges Facing the Roman Catholic Church — WCC Collaboration.” *The Ecumenical Review* 57(4) (2005), p. 498.

<sup>13</sup> These have included the Orthodox Churches of the Byzantine and Slavic tradition, the Assyrian Church of the East and the Oriental Orthodox Churches such as the Armenians, Syrians and Copts, as well as Christian communions that emerged from the Reformation such as the Lutherans and the Reformed, the Anglican Communion and the Methodists, the Old Catholics, as well as Evangelical and Pentecostal communities that have been growing considerably during the first decades of the 21st century.

<sup>14</sup> In 2009, Cardinal Walter Kasper summarised the results of the Catholic Church’s official dialogues with main Western partners — Lutherans, Reformed, Anglicans, and Methodists — in his book *Harvesting the Fruits*. London—New York: Continuum Publishing, 2009.

ments of thirty years of continuing dialogue. From this perspective, the encyclical is an important step on the way of the ongoing reception of the conciliar teachings. By its publication John Paul II intended to reinvigorate and strengthen the ecumenical zeal not only within the Catholic community but in all churches which were approaching together the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

### *Ut unum sint* in the context of its time

In 1995, when *Ut unum sint* was published, there was a broadly shared conviction that the ecumenical movement was stagnating and turning around without achieving expected results. It is true that there were well established relations among Christian leaders, and in many parts of the world there was a growing cooperation between Christians in the areas of promoting social justice, human rights and care for creation, and sometimes in mission and evangelism. However, despite many ongoing theological dialogues there were persisting divergences on traditional doctrinal matters and new ethical questions which together with controversial pastoral practices had begun to create new tensions and even divisions not only between but also within churches. Many ecumenists who remembered the rapid ecumenical advancements of the two first decades after Vatican II were mourning the fact that progress had slowed down and new problems had surfaced. In a lecture delivered in 1992, Emilio Castro, then the Secretary General of the World Council of Churches (WCC), was asking whether after the decades of an “ecumenical spring” the churches were not entering into a time of an “ecumenical winter”.<sup>15</sup> This situation was sometimes attributed, at least partially, to John Paul II himself. At the beginning of the 1990s, he was accused of provoking a new crisis in the relations of the Catholic Church with the Orthodox Churches in the post-communist countries of Eastern Europe which were opposed to the erection of Catholic dioceses in what they called their “canonical territories”. Furthermore, some leaders of the ecumenical movement as well as non-Catholic and Catholic theologians criticised John Paul II for adopting a restrictive line of conduct regarding Christian ethics, which was considered to be impeding dialogue with the churches of the West, the majority of which generally followed a more liberal approach.

---

<sup>15</sup> E. CASTRO: “ ‘The Ecumenical Winter?’. Peter Ainslie Lecture on Christian Unity — San Diego 1992.” *Mid-Stream* 32(2) (1993), pp. 1—13.

In the Catholic Church of that time there was a growing polarisation, especially among the clergy, regarding ecumenical engagement. Many bishops were losing interest in ecumenism, arguing that it proved to be ineffective in achieving its goal due to the fact that global Christianity was undergoing an accelerating process of division. This new partitioning of global Christianity was primarily due to the rapid proliferation of Evangelical and Pentecostal movements often accused of practising what was called “sheep-stealing” from historical churches, the Catholic Church included. Others continued to be fundamentally opposed to the conciliar option for ecumenism, regarding it as contrary to Catholic faith. The founder of the traditionalist Society of Saint Pius X, Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, together with his followers finally split from the Catholic Church, openly rejecting many teachings of Vatican II, including the acceptance by the Church of religious freedom, the ecumenical movement, interreligious dialogue and openness towards the modern world. They considered the Council to be the reason underlying the Church’s gradual decay marked by the reduction of vocations to the priesthood and religious life, as well as by a considerable decline in religious practices among the faithful in many parts of the world especially in the northern hemisphere.<sup>16</sup>

In this historical context many were surprised by the publication of an encyclical on ecumenism, by its tone and content. The decision of John Paul II to publish it at a difficult time for global Christianity was due to his unshaken conviction that the search for Christian unity must continue in order to respond to the Lord’s prayer “that they may all be one” (John 17: 21). The text was a plea not to be discouraged in the face of results that were not meeting the expectations of the first years of dialogue, but to continue the ecumenical pilgrimage together at the dawn of a new millennium. In the face of new challenges, the encyclical confirmed a clear commitment of the Catholic Church to move forward together on the path of growing communion. It was a papal appeal first to the Catholic faithful and then to all Christians not to give way to despair but rather to intensify joint efforts on the way to full visible unity, in an awareness that only when walking together towards this goal can churches be able to grow in communion of faith, sacramental life, common witness and service to the world, as well as in mutually recognised ministry and shared church structures.

---

<sup>16</sup> The Archbishop and some other bishops uncanonically consecrated by him were excommunicated in 2009.



## The Church and its unity according to *Ut unum sint*

*Ut unum sint* is animated by a vision of the Church understood as communion (*communio/koinonia*). As noted by John Paul II, this concept lies “at the heart of the Church’s self-understanding.”<sup>17</sup> According to the letter *Communio notio* published by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the concept of communion is “very suitable for expressing the core of the Mystery of the Church.”<sup>18</sup> As argued in the *Relatio finalis* of the Second Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, communion is the central idea of the Council’s understanding of the Church and its unity (cf. LG 4, 8, 13–15, 18, 21, 24–25; DV 10; GS 32; UR 2–4, 14–15, 17–19, 22).<sup>19</sup>

The Church as communion is the mystery of the union of all the faithful with the divine Trinity and with each other initiated in faith and sacramentally rooted in Baptism. Such communion “always involves a double dimension: vertical and horizontal.”<sup>20</sup> In its vertical aspect it is fundamentally a communion with God through Jesus Christ, in the Holy Spirit. In its horizontal aspect it is an “intimate communion of all the faithful in the Body of Christ which is the Church (1 Cor 10:16).”<sup>21</sup> The concept of communion expresses the idea of the unity of the baptised which is rooted in their common sharing of the life of God and expressed in their communal life. The church as communion is a spiritual union of the baptised which in this world takes the visible form of a structured community (*societas*). All the faithful are parts of the single Body of Christ in which each member contributes to the good of all and shares in the welfare of the whole. There are many links that assure the ecclesial communion, but they may be summarised under three headings: the profession of faith, the celebration of worship and sacraments, and structural communion under the guidance of ordained ministers (cf. Acts 2:42; LG 14; UR 2).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup> JOHN PAUL II: Address to the Bishops of the United States of America, 16.09.1987, n.1, in: “Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II” X, 3 (1987) p. 553.

<sup>18</sup> CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH: *Communio notio*. Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion (28 May 1992), n 1, at: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_28051992\\_communio-notio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_28051992_communio-notio_en.html)

<sup>19</sup> SYNOD OF BISHOPS: Second Extraordinary Assembly (1985), *Relatio finalis*, II, C, 1, at: <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/final-report-of-the-1985-extraordinary-synod-2561>

<sup>20</sup> *Communio notio*, n. 3.

<sup>21</sup> *Relatio finalis*, II, C, 1.

<sup>22</sup> W. HENN: “*Ut Unum Sint* and Catholic Involvement in Ecumenism.” *The Ecumenical Review* 52(2) (2000), p. 246.

This communion also includes various charisms and ministries that serve the life and mission of any particular community. The Church's communion culminates in the common celebration of the Eucharist, the source and the summit of all Christian life (cf. LG 11). It is the foretaste of the eschatological communion of the whole of humanity of which the Church is called to be on earth an evocative sign and an efficient instrument (cf. LG 1). Understood this way, "the ecclesiology of communion cannot be reduced to purely organisational questions or to problems which simply relate to powers. Still, the ecclesiology of communion is also the foundation for ecclesial order, and especially for a correct relationship between unity and pluriformity in the Church."<sup>23</sup>

Considering the Church as a mystery of communion also sheds new light on the understanding of its limits and leads to a new perception of the relation of the Catholic Church to other churches and ecclesial communities. In the Catholic Magisterium until Vatican II the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church on earth was fully identified with the Roman Catholic institution governed by the Bishop of Rome and the bishops in communion with him. The belonging to this community was of the order of "everything" or "nothing": if one professed the same Catholic faith, celebrated the seven Catholic sacraments and accepted the Catholic structure of hierarchical government with the pope at its summit, one was considered to be belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ on earth. If just one of these elements was missing one was considered to be outside the Church either as a schismatic (deliberate breach of communion) or heretic (doctrinal error). This vision was corrected by Vatican II.

The conciliar dogmatic constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* affirms that the Church of Christ with the fullness (*plenitudo*) of its divine and earthly elements "constituted and organised in the world as a society (*societas*), subsists in (*subsistit in*) the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him, although many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure. These elements, as gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, are forces impelling toward catholic unity" (LG 8). This formulation, that purposely avoided the direct identification of the Catholic Church with the Church of Jesus Christ, opened the way to recognising the ecclesial consistency of non-Catholic churches and ecclesial communities. According to this vision, our common Christian discipleship is based in baptism which incorporates all believers, no matter which denomination, to the *koinonia* of the one and unique Body of Christ on earth, His Church. On this basis the Council recognises the existence of a real,

---

<sup>23</sup> *Relatio finalis*, II, C, 1.

though imperfect communion between the Catholic Church and other churches and ecclesial communities. “The real ecumenical breakthrough at the Council was the effect of this communion ecclesiology on the traditional Catholic understanding of Christian divisions.”<sup>24</sup>

*Ut unum sint* is permeated by the idea of communion. The first section of the chapter I (UUS 5—14) offers an exposition of the Catholic understanding of the ecclesiology of communion in continuity with conciliar teaching. One of the two main convictions of this chapter is that unity is God’s will for the Church and is intertwined with God’s plan of salvation for all of humanity. This will of the Lord as explicitly testified in the message of the New Testament is the deepest and innermost foundation of the quest for unity among Christians. The wrongness of the division within the Church’s communion can only be judged against this will of God. The same criterion helps to seize the importance of the ecumenical commitment of the churches. This commitment flows directly from their faithfulness to the Lord’s will. The second conviction that is emphasised in the first chapter is that the Church’s unity takes the visible form of a living communion of faith, sacraments and communal life under the guidance of ordained ministers.<sup>25</sup> Visible unity is described in the encyclical as “a living communion” (UUS 6). Not just “communion” but “living communion”. This implicates the existence of a network of relations between individuals and particular communities which enables all members to feel integrated into the same community of faith and life. Unity “does not merely consist in the gathering of people as a collection of individuals. It is a unity constituted by the bonds of the profession of faith, sacraments and hierarchical communion” (UUS 9). In God’s aspiration, this living communion is intended for the whole of humanity. The encyclical states that the Church “is sent to the world to announce and witness, to make present and spread the mystery of communion which is essential to her, and to gather all people and all things into Christ, so as to be for all an inseparable sacrament of unity” (UUS 5).

The “living communion” of the Church is organised in the world as a visible community (*societas*). The organic unity of this community is at the same time spiritual and visible. Such unity “can be attained only by the adherence of all to the content of revealed faith in its entirety. In matters of faith, compromise is in contradiction with God who is Truth” (UUS 18). This visible unity, however, does not entail the global uniformity of all Christian communities spread across the world and living in different cultural contexts. A legitimate diversity is an essential aspect of

---

<sup>24</sup> W. HENN: “*Ut Unum Sint* and Catholic Involvement...,” p. 246.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 245.

the Church's unity. The aim of ecumenism is described in the encyclical as "the visible unity which is required and sufficient" (UUS 78). This is a clear endorsement of a legitimate diversity in the one Church. Ecclesial communion exists alongside cultural diversity, different liturgical rites, different forms of piety, different doctrinal perspectives, different customs and laws. But in the same way as unity should not be confused with uniformity, so plurality should not be identified with contradictory pluralism or indifferentism in faith or practice. "Indifferentism can never be a solid basis to build upon."<sup>26</sup> All diversity must be complementary and not contradictory. The ultimate goal of the ecumenical movement is not a peaceful coexistence in division but full visible unity in faith, sacramental life, ministry, mission and Christian life. Unity in all these aspects is a necessary condition of the ecclesial *communio/koinonia* to be real and not only apparent.

For Catholics this unity also includes the recognition by all the faithful of the unique ministry of the Bishop of Rome in his capacity as the successor of Peter. Willed by Christ himself the Petrine ministry is "a perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity" (UUS 88). The main role of the pope is to be at the service of the whole Church which is expressed in the traditional title of *servus servorum Dei* attributed to Pope Gregory the Great (d.604), and cited by John Paul II in his encyclical (UUS 88). However, to be effective this service implicates also an appropriate authority and power, "without which such an office would be illusory" (UUS 94). At the end of the discussion on the ministry of Bishop of Rome, John Paul II asks "Church leaders and their theologians to engage with [him] in a patient and fraternal dialogue on this subject, a dialogue in which, leaving useless controversies behind, we could listen to one another, keeping before us only the will of Christ for his Church" (UUS 96). A specific aim of this dialogue is to seek together "the forms in which this ministry may accomplish a service of love recognised by all concerned" (UUS 95). He suggests that a breakthrough in the ecumenical search for a suitable and efficient form of the papal ministry could be found in the life of the Church of the first millennium (cf. UUS 55). During that period the Church still undivided incorporated various liturgical rites for the celebration of worship, customs and uses, disciplines and laws, ministries, and theological formulations of doctrine, while still recognising the primacy of the Bishop of Rome.

---

<sup>26</sup> W. KASPER: "The Ecumenical Movement in the 21st Century." *The Ecumenical Review* 57(4) (2005), p. 511.

## Ecumenical situation today

Those actively involved will agree in saying that since its beginnings, symbolically placed at the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh 1910, the ecumenical movement has achieved great results in promoting mutual understanding, discovering common ground, transforming attitudes, stimulating cooperation, and sometimes even establishing structural unions. These results have been assimilated into the life of the churches and it is only by looking back critically that one can appreciate the great progress that has been made. However, according to many experts, the ecumenical movement seems to have reached a critical moment today. In a book published in 2004, when referring to the state of the ecumenical dialogue at the beginning of the 21st century, Cardinal Walter Kasper, used such expressions as “ecumenical aporia” and “ecumenical crisis”.<sup>27</sup> While there is no reason to be discouraged, in the firm belief that the Holy Spirit who initiated the ecumenical movement still accompanies it, it is important nonetheless to discern its current state twenty-five years after the publication of *Ut unum sint*. According to Cardinal Kasper, since the last decade of the 20th century we have been observing a progressive reconfiguration of the ecumenical movement which in many respects “is today clearly in a transitional period.”<sup>28</sup> A critical outlook is needed on the current situation because without an honest self-evaluation churches will not be able to move forward constructively.

Some depict the present juncture of ecumenism as ambiguous, uncertain, and stagnant, accusing it of standing still and going nowhere. But not all share those convictions. In 2018, in a lecture at the Emory University in Atlanta, Cardinal Koch argued that the ecumenical movement was alive and moving ahead although facing new obstacles and challenges.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> W. KASPER: *That They May All Be One...* He also pointed out that for many Protestants one of the signs and also reasons of this situation was the publication on 6 August 2000 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith of the declaration *Dominus Iesus* on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church. In line with conciliar teaching (cf. LG 8) the document affirms that the Church of Jesus Christ subsists fully only in the Roman Catholic Church and that the post-Reformation communities cannot be called “churches” in a proper theological sense of this appellation because they lack a central element of the Church’s identity, namely, the valid sacramental Eucharist.

<sup>28</sup> W. KASPER: “The Ecumenical Movement in the 21st Century...,” p. 508.

<sup>29</sup> K. KOCH: “Towards Full Communion. Hopes, Achievements, Obstacles and Challenges.” Lecture at the Major Catholic Speaker series at Aquinas Centre of Theology and Candler School of Theology at the Emory University in Atlanta, 18 September 2018,

It is clear that the original enthusiasm has given way to a more realistic sobriety about the possibility of celebrating together Eucharist in the near future. Discouraged by the slowness of ecumenical progress a number of church leaders and theologians have lost interest in it. For others “ecumenism has become a negative term, equivalent to syncretism, doctrinal relativism and indifferentism.”<sup>30</sup> This is also true for the Catholic Church. After an initial enthusiasm that followed Vatican II, many, including clergy and theologians, are either indifferent to it or focused rather on protecting the Catholic identity in opposition to other traditions. Conservative tendencies with traditionalist and counter-ecumenical approaches to faith are to be found in the Catholic Church across the world.

There are those who believe that after the initial phase during which the theological dialogue was at the centre, the ecumenical movement has been acquiring new forms that are more focused on practical cooperation. During the last decades there has been a progressive evolution toward an ecumenism of praxis at the expense of theological dialogue. More and more churches, especially those gathered in global ecumenical bodies such as the WCC or Global Christian Forum, opt for building friendly relationships among the church leaders and promoting practical cooperation in the service of the human family rather than for promoting the theological dialogue. Especially a new generation of ecumenists seems to be more interested in a “life and work” type ecumenism than in a “faith and order” type ecumenism. They believe that doing things together can bring Christians closer to one another in a more effective way than by endlessly discussing doctrinal controversies which persist in spite of decades of dialogues and an increasing number of ecumenical documents. Ecumenical leaders in their public statements emphasise the necessary accountability of the churches to the world which seems to be experiencing an unprecedented peril due to ecological degradation and economic inequities rather than to the need for theological agreement. Without relinquishing theological dialogue, Pope Francis has also constantly encouraged an ecumenism of “walking, praying and working together” as a way of effectively meeting the challenges of the present time to which Christians should respond by rendering service together. Non-governmental church-based organisations, such as World Vision International<sup>31</sup> or ACT Alliance,<sup>32</sup> are

---

n.1, at: <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/it/cardinal-koch/2018/conferenze/lecture-at-the-major-catholic-speaker-series-at-aquinas-center-o.html>

<sup>30</sup> W. KASPER: “The Ecumenical Movement in the 21st Century...,” p. 508.

<sup>31</sup> World Vision International is an interdenominational Christian humanitarian aid, development, and advocacy organisation founded in 1950.

<sup>32</sup> ACT Alliance is a global alliance of more than 145 churches and related organisations working together in over 120 countries to create positive and sustainable change in

becoming increasingly ecumenically diversified by employing staff from the Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox traditions. There is also growing ecumenical collaboration on regional and local levels. The national and regional councils of churches have been gaining more importance in stimulating ecumenical relations. The Catholic Church also promotes this form of ecumenical involvement. Out of a total of 120 councils of churches around the world, the Catholic Church is member in at least 70 of these bodies.<sup>33</sup> “More and more we notice the tendency to concentrate on a more pragmatic approach that would limit the aims of those engaged in ecumenical searching to intermediate or short-term goals, leaving aside, if not renouncing, any attempt to aim at the ultimate goal of full visible unity.”<sup>34</sup> All this indicates that the ecumenical movement is really alive but it is looking for fresh inspiration as it is passing through a new phase of its maturation.

## Challenge of a common vision

Any significant progress on the way towards full visible unity cannot be achieved without a commonly shared agreement on the goal of ecumenism. This issue has been continually raised and it seems that in the course of time this goal has become increasingly unclear. Although the churches acknowledge that the ecumenical movement is one, they have different ways of doing ecumenism, different priorities and expectations and at the end of the day, different understandings of the goal they want to achieve. To know whether the partners involved together in the ecumenical dialogue look for the same objective is crucial for identifying common challenges and designing next steps to take. Without having a common goal we cannot join our efforts towards this goal and consequently we risk growing even further apart.

Generally, since the beginnings of the ecumenical movement till the recent decades the churches were in agreement that what they were aiming for together was a full visible unity. This vision is maintained in *Ut unum sint*, which states clearly that “[t]he ultimate goal of the ecumeni-

---

the lives of poor and marginalised people.

<sup>33</sup> *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (25 March 1993), allows the Bishop’s Conferences to join these councils whenever they judge it profitable for promoting Christian unity in their context (Directory, n. 166—171).

<sup>34</sup> E. I. CASSIDY: “*Ut Unum Sint* in Ecumenical Perspective...,” p. 12.

cal movement is to re-establish full visible unity among all the baptised” (UUS 77). From the Catholic perspective, full visible unity constitutes thus the *raison d'être* of the ecumenical movement as such. In the same paragraph John Paul II observes that “this demanding concept of the unity” which is “willed by God” is held not only by the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches but also by other churches within the ecumenical community. In particular, it is shared by the member churches of the World Council of Churches. The *Constitution and Rules* of the WCC includes the following statement: “The primary purpose of the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches is to call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe.”<sup>35</sup> However, as observed by Cardinal Cassidy, the encyclical came “at a time when, within the ecumenical movement, doubts have been expressed about the possibility of such a goal ever being reached.”<sup>36</sup> In fact, the vision of unity is always based on a particular ecclesiological self-understanding and for decades churches have carried on their ecumenical endeavour on the basis of different ecclesiological assumptions. Having different understandings of the Church they also have different understandings of visible unity, its necessary conditions and possible forms. Therefore, the ecumenical situation today is marked by two contrasting components. On the one hand, several important convergences and sometimes even consensus have been achieved through bilateral and multilateral dialogues. On the other hand, the churches have not yet arrived at formulating a shared definition of the unity they have been looking for. In fact, not only have they not changed their respective visions of the church’s unity but rather precisely and incongruously through ecumenical dialogue itself they have instead consolidated them, continuing to differ on what kind of “visible unity” they want to achieve. There is a fundamental paradox at the very heart of the ecumenical movement: all participants agree that they want unity, but they continue to disagree on what this unity means. The most significant challenge for ecumenism in the 21st century is to develop a shared vision of the Church’s unity able to integrate in a coherent way diversities of various denominational conceptions. As voiced by Cardinal Koch, “If the various partners in ecumenism understand very differently what constitutes the unity of the church, there is an imminent danger that the ecumenical partners stride ahead in different directions, only to discover

---

<sup>35</sup> Constitution and Rules, III: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/wcc-constitution-and-rules>

<sup>36</sup> E. I. CASSIDY: “*Ut Unum Sint* in Ecumenical Perspective...,” p. 12.



later that they have possibly distanced themselves from one another even more than they were before.”<sup>37</sup>

The danger of progressive estrangement between denominations is further reinforced by the fact that the search for unity takes place in a radically altered context in philosophical thinking. We live today in a world of general exaltation of the plural and the suspicion of anything singular. In the postmodern culture characterised by the dominant relativist spirit and the post-truth philosophical environment, plurality is seen as the only way in which the whole can be apprehended. This fundamental option for pluralism, with the priority given to personal emotion and belief over a communal consensus, has been highly influencing Christianity of our time and the ecumenical movement itself. We observe a “widespread ecclesiological pluralism, according to which the multiplicity and diversity of churches is considered a positive reality and any search for unity of the church seems suspicious.”<sup>38</sup> Many consider that the multiformity of global Christianity, even though it is the result of division, is an enrichment rather than a deterioration of the Church.

Those who advocate for multiformity rather than unity postulate also for a new method in ecumenical theological dialogue. The consensus-oriented method that has produced good results during the last decades is criticised as inadequate to the situation of global Christianity today and opposed to the dominant mentality of the faithful. These advocates want it to be replaced by a difference-oriented method. In this vision not only diversity but even divergent or opposed doctrinal conceptions should be recognised in principle as suitable differences in understanding of the Apostolic Faith that may legitimately coexist within a global multiform Christianity.

## “Mutual recognition” as a new ecumenical paradigm

More and more church leaders and theologians now call for a revision of the goal of the ecumenical movement in response to this new mentality and new situation of Christianity today. A call for a change of the ecumenical paradigm was expressed in several responses<sup>39</sup> from churches to

<sup>37</sup> K. KOCH: “Towards Full Communion...,” n. 2.

<sup>38</sup> Ibidem, n. 2a.

<sup>39</sup> As many as 78 responses from the churches, theology faculties, ecumenical groups and individuals had been sent to the Faith and Order Office in Geneva, Switzerland. They were published by the WCC Publications in 2021 in two volumes entitled *Churches*

the Faith and Order document published in 2013, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (hereafter: *TCTCV*).<sup>40</sup> According to these voices instead of looking for a common vision of the Church we should actively engage in a process of “mutual recognition” of existing confessional identities acknowledging them to be legitimate ways of being church.

The concept of “recognition”, accompanied by such qualifiers as “partial”, “full”, “mutual” has been part of the vocabulary of the modern ecumenical movement since its beginning.<sup>41</sup> It received some attention within the Faith and Order movement. The report of the first Faith and Order Conference held in Lausanne in 1927 states that “complete unity will require that the Churches be so transformed that there may be full recognition of one another by members of all communions.”<sup>42</sup> According to this vision, a deep transformation within each denomination was a necessary condition of mutual recognition. This requirement was stressed even more in the report of the Commission to the WCC Assembly in New Delhi 1961, which states, “[t]he achievement of unity will involve nothing less than a death and rebirth for many forms of church life as we have

---

*Respond to the Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Volume 1: Faith and Order Paper No. 231 (2021), at: [https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/Churches\\_Respond\\_Church\\_vol1\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/Churches_Respond_Church_vol1_WEB.pdf), and Volume 2: Faith and Order Paper No.232 (2021) at: [https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/Churches\\_Respond\\_Church\\_vol2\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/Churches_Respond_Church_vol2_WEB.pdf). Between 2015 and 2020, an ecumenical group of experts appointed by the Commission met often to read and analyse them. The results of this work were published in a report entitled *What Are the Churches Saying About the Church?*, Faith and Order Paper no. 236, WCC Publications, Geneva 2021. Published at: [https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/What\\_Are\\_Churches\\_Saying\\_Web.pdf](https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/What_Are_Churches_Saying_Web.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*. Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (2013). Published as a “convergence text”, the statement expresses what the Christian denominations of various traditions can say together about the church in order to grow in communion and to overcome persisting divisions. Produced by theologians from the widest range of traditions and cultures, *TCTCV* addresses such topics as the church’s nature, mission, unity, and its origin in the Trinitarian life of God. It also addresses the growth in communion among the denominations in apostolic faith, sacramental life, ministry and service to the world. Published at: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/the-church-towards-a-common-vision>

On 18 October 2019, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) presented the official Catholic Response to *TCTCV* statement. To be found at: <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/news/notizie-2019/2019-10-23-tctcv-catholic-response.html>

<sup>41</sup> On the development of this concept within the ecumenical movement see: M. HIETAMÄKI: “‘Ecumenical Recognition’ in the Faith and Order Movement.” *Open Theology* (1) 2015, pp. 204—219, at: <https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2015-0008>

<sup>42</sup> G. K. A. BELL: *The Unity of the Christendom*. Geneva 1927, p. 179.

known them. We believe that nothing less costly can finally suffice.”<sup>43</sup> What was the focus there was a deep self-critical examination of one’s own way of being church in order to make recognition possible for the others. An important role belonged to the ecumenical dialogues which were intended to define what in each church’s doctrine and practice could be accepted as a legitimate diversity and what would have to be abandoned as incompatible with the Apostolic Faith. In this discussion the idea of recognition was intrinsically linked with the necessity of profound transformations that each church had to undergo in order to make unity possible. Faith and Order has strongly emphasised the relevance of the mutual recognition of baptism for the full mutual recognition between churches as institutions. However, although most of the churches involved in the ecumenical movement would explicitly or implicitly recognise each other’s baptism, this would not immediately lead them to full mutual recognition as equal “expressions” of what each of them believed to be the true Church of Jesus Christ. As the churches involved in the dialogue were not much inclined to lose their identities in favour of mutual recognition, the concept had not received much attention in the theological debate until recently.

The responses to the *TCTCV* show that today the concept of recognition has resurfaced but with a new approach.<sup>44</sup> Several of them postulate to make of it a new ecumenical paradigm, an overall concept able to bring together in one community various ways of being church. No change in faith, practice or order seems any longer to be required for such recognition. Such recognition does not create the reality of “being a church” but only formally voices its presence in an already existing form of Christianity. While engaging together in the ecumenical movement, churches are called to recognise their respective traditions and ethos as expressions of a legitimate diversity. In this perspective, they should not focus on searching for consensus in doctrine, ethics or church structure but on a mutual acceptance of different beliefs, practices and structures of government as being legitimate expressions of the Church’s faith and order. Such oriented ecumenism could lead the churches to the recognition of legitimate difference in “models” or “types” of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. According to several responses, churches today are growing in conviction that mutual recognition in love is a more

---

<sup>43</sup> L. VISCHER (ed.): *A Documentary History of the Faith and Order Movement 1927-1963*. St. Louis, Missouri: The Bethany Press, 1963, p. 209.

<sup>44</sup> S. DURBER: “Visible Unity and Mutual Recognition.” In: *Common Threads*, Faith and Order Paper No. 233 (2013), Eds. E. EWONDRA, S. DIETRICH. WCC Publications, Geneva 2021, pp. 1—16, at: [https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/CommonThreads\\_web.pdf](https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/CommonThreads_web.pdf)

productive goal of ecumenism than the search for full visible unity based on doctrinal, moral, and structural criteria. While some responses retain that the unity of the Church calls for some kind of structural unity, others privilege rather a spiritual unity based on mutual recognition which considers various organisational patterns of churches as expressions of the legitimate multiformity of the Church.

There is a growing tendency in the ecumenical movement to reduce the goal of ecumenism from that of full visible unity to just a mutual recognition within a kind of a conciliar fellowship of global Christianity without the need for an organic unity in faith, worship, and structure. Those who promote this idea project that in the course of time a progressive mutual recognition among denominations would lead to a dissolution of their institutional boundaries and eventually culminate in their melting together in a kind of a non-denominational form of global Christianity.<sup>45</sup> No one knows, however, what would be the ecclesial reality if such a project were to be materialised. Would it still be possible to profess faith in the Church which is “one”? For John Paul II “[t]he ultimate goal of the ecumenical movement is to re-establish full visible unity among all the baptised” (UUS 77), and not an indiscriminate mutual recognition which would simply signify the definitive failure of the whole ecumenical project.

## Conclusions

Written at a time of the fast transformation of global Christianity, including the ecumenical movement itself, *Ut unum sint* reaffirms the fundamental convictions of the Second Vatican Council regarding the modern quest for Christian unity and the Catholic involvement in it. Approaching the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, John Paul II wanted to reassure the Catholic faithful and ecumenical partners that the conciliar option

---

<sup>45</sup> Under full control of the state the project of a non-denominational Christianity has been successively implemented within the Protestantism in China. Traditional Protestant denominations, such as the Methodist, Anglican, Baptist, and Presbyterian, were abolished in the 1950s. “Three Self Patriotic Movement” (TSPM) and the “China Christian Council” (CCC), the two organisations which lead the official Protestant Church in China, are officially “post-denominational”, meaning that they purposely seek to eliminate differences in belief and practice among the various traditions. Cf. AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT: “Protestants in China. Background Paper...,” p. 9, at: <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/51f27dcd4.pdf>

for ecumenism was irrevocable and that the ecumenical way would continue to be the way of the Church entering the third millennium. Drawing from the conciliar documents and the post-conciliar Magisterium as well as from the experience of three decades of the Catholic involvement in the ecumenical movement, the encyclical enhances the fundamental convictions and principles developed in the Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*. It harvests with appreciation many fruits already obtained which are the “seeds” sown in the soil of Christianity for growth in communion. It also puts forward for a common consideration some issues essential for the future of the ecumenical movement, in particular that of identifying together new ways of exercising the Petrine ministry that could be acceptable for all Christians. Written in a respectful tone and presenting an empathetic attitude towards other church traditions, it encourages the continuation of the dialogue.

Twenty-five years from its publication, *Ut unum sint* deserves to be explored anew in the ecumenical dialogue against the background of the current condition of world Christianity marked by the ecumenical aspiration for unity on the one hand and a progressive fragmentation on the other hand. Still read and discussed by church leaders, ecumenical practitioners and theologians, it may be a surprising source of inspiration for the search for a fresh vision for the ecumenical movement at the beginning of the third millennium of Christianity.

## Bibliography

- ARAM I: “From Reflection to Reception: Challenges Facing the Roman Catholic Church — WCC Collaboration.” *The Ecumenical Review* 57(4) (2005), pp. 498—505.
- AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT: “Protestants in China. Background Paper”, at: <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/51f27dcd4.pdf>
- BELL G. K. A.: *The Unity of the Christendom*. Geneva 1927.
- BRAATEN, C. E., JENSON, R. W. (eds.): *Church Unity and the Papal Office: An Ecumenical Dialogue on John Paul II's Encyclical Ut Unum Sint*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001.
- CASTRO E.: “The Ecumenical Winter?”. Peter Ainslie Lecture on Christian Unity — San Diego 1992.” *Mid-Stream* 32(2) (1993), pp. 1—13.
- CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH: *Communio in notio*. Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion (28 May 1992), at: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/con](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/con)

- gregations/cfaith/documents/rc\_con\_cfaith\_doc\_28051992\_communionis-notio\_en.html
- CROSS P.: “John Paul II and Ecumenism.” In: *John Paul II: Legacy and Witness*. Eds. Robert Gascoigne. Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls, 2007, pp. 115—130.
- DURBER S.: “Visible Unity and Mutual Recognition.” In: *Common Threads Key Themes from Responses to The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. Eds. E. WONDRA, S. DIETRICH, A. GHAZARYAN DRISSI. Faith and Order Paper No. 233 (2013), WCC Publications, Geneva 2021, pp. 1—16, at: [https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/CommonThreads\\_web.pdf](https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/CommonThreads_web.pdf)
- FAITH AND ORDER COMMISSION: *The Church: Towards a Common Vision (TCTCV)*. Faith and Order Paper No. 214 (2013), at: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/the-church-towards-a-common-vision>
- FAITH AND ORDER COMMISSION: *What Are the Churches Saying About the Church? Key Findings and Proposals from the Responses to The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Faith and Order Paper no. 236, WCC Publications, Geneva 2021, at: [https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/What\\_Are\\_Churches\\_Saying\\_Web.pdf](https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2021-06/What_Are_Churches_Saying_Web.pdf)
- HENN W.: “Catholic Ecclesiology and the Ecumenical Journey.” *The Ecumenical Review* 65(3) (2013), pp. 334—337.
- HENN W.: “*Ut Unum Sint* and the Catholic Involvement in Ecumenism.” *The Ecumenical Review* 52(2) (2000), pp. 234—245.
- HIETAMÄKI, M.: “‘Ecumenical Recognition’ in the Faith and Order Movement.” *Open Theology* (1) 2015, pp. 204—219, at: <https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2015-0008>
- JOHN PAUL II: Address to the Cardinals and the Roman Curia (28 June 1985): AAS 77 (1985), p. 1151.
- JOHN PAUL II: Address to the Bishops of the United States of America, 16.09.1987, in: “Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II” X, 3 (1987), pp. 553—554.
- JOHN PAUL II: *Ut unum sint*. Encyclical on Commitment to Ecumenism (25 May 1995), at: [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25051995\\_ut-unum-sint.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html)
- PAOLO VI: Allocuzione per la conclusione della III sessione del Concilio Vaticano II (21 novembre 1964), at: [http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/speeches/1964/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_spe\\_19641121\\_conclusions-iii-sessions.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/speeches/1964/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19641121_conclusions-iii-sessions.html)
- KASPER W.: *Harvesting the fruits*. London—New York: Continuum Publishing, 2009.
- KASPER W.: “Lasting significance and urgency of *Unitatis Redintegratio*. The Decree on Ecumenism Read Anew After Forty Years”. Intervention during a conference for the 40th anniversary of the Decree on Ecumenism, Rocca di Papa, 11 November 2004, at: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/card-kasper-docs/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_20041111\\_kasper-ecumenism\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/card-kasper-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20041111_kasper-ecumenism_en.html)
- KASPER W.: *That They May All Be One*. London—New York: Burns & Oates, 2004.

- KASPER W.: “The Ecumenical Movement in the 21st Century.” *The Ecumenical Review* 57(4) (2005), pp. 505—515.
- KOCH K.: “Towards Full Communion: Hopes, Achievements, Obstacles And Challenges.” Lecture at the Major Catholic Speaker series at Aquinas Centre of Theology and Candler School of Theology at the Emory University in Atlanta. 4 September 2018, at: <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/it/cardinal-koch/2018/conferenze/lecture-at-the-major-catholic-speaker-series-at-aquinas-center-o.html>
- PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY: Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism (25 March 1993), at: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_25031993\\_principles-and-norms-on-ecumenism\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_25031993_principles-and-norms-on-ecumenism_en.html)
- PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY: Official Catholic Response to TCTCV Statement, at: <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/news/notizie-2019/2019-10-23-tctcv-catholic-response.html>
- RAISER, K.: “Fifty Years after the Second Vatican Council. Assessing Ecumenical Relations from the Perspective of the World Council of Churches.” *The Ecumenical Review* 67 (2) (2015), pp. 285—294, at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/erev.12161>
- SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL: *Unitatis redintegratio*. Decree on Ecumenism (21 November 1964), at: [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19641121\\_unitatis-redintegratio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html)
- SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL: *Lumen gentium*. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (21 November 1964), at: [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html)
- SYNOD OF BISHOPS: Second Extraordinary Assembly (1985), *Relatio finalis*, at: <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/final-report-of-the-1985-extraordinary-synod-2561>
- VISCHER L. (ed.): *A Documentary History of the Faith and Order Movement 1927—1963*. St. Louis, Missouri: The Bethany Press, 1963.
- WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES: Constitution and Rules, at: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/wcc-constitution-and-rules>
- WONDRA E., DIETRICH S., GHAZARYAN DRISSI A., eds.: *Churches Respond To the Church: Towards a Common Vision*, Volume 1: Faith and Order Paper No. 231 (2021), at: [https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/Churches\\_Respond\\_Church\\_vol1\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/Churches_Respond_Church_vol1_WEB.pdf); Volume II: Faith and Order Paper No. 232 (2021), at: [https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/Churches\\_Respond\\_Church\\_vol2\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2021-02/Churches_Respond_Church_vol2_WEB.pdf).

ANDRZEJ CHOROMAŃSKI

*Quanta est nobis via?*  
Lire *Ut unum sint* vingt-cinq ans après

Résumé

Publiée le 25 mai 1995, *Ut unum sint* est la première et la seule encyclique papale entièrement consacrée à la question de l'œcuménisme. Rédigée trente ans après le Concile Vatican II, elle constituait une étape importante sur la voie de la mise en œuvre des principes et des normes sur l'œcuménisme contenus dans le décret conciliaire *Unitatis Redintegratio* dans la vie de l'Église. Le présent article propose une relecture de l'encyclique vingt-cinq ans après sa publication. L'article commence par une présentation de l'engagement œcuménique de Jean-Paul II qui avait fait de la recherche de l'unité des chrétiens l'une des priorités pastorale de tout son pontificat. L'article présente ensuite la situation œcuménique au moment de la publication d'*Ut unum sint*, marquée par un scepticisme croissant à l'égard de l'œcuménisme au sein des Églises et une certaine stagnation du mouvement œcuménique lui-même. Dans ce contexte, l'article parle de la vision de l'Église et de son unité, une vision qui imprègne toute l'encyclique et qui s'exprime dans le concept de communion (*communio/koinonia*). L'article dévoile ensuite les traits caractéristiques de la situation œcuménique actuelle et formule les principaux défis auxquels est confronté le mouvement œcuménique, à savoir l'absence d'une vision commune d'un objectif ultime et l'absence de propositions pour changer le paradigme œcuménique: de la recherche de la pleine unité visible à l'acceptation mutuelle malgré des différences fondamentales persistantes dans la manière d'être une église. En conclusion, l'article soutient que, lue à nouveau dans le contexte de la situation actuelle du christianisme, l'encyclique *Ut unum sint* peut être une source d'inspiration dans la recherche d'une nouvelle vision du mouvement œcuménique au XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle.

**Mots-clés:** œcuménisme, communion (*communio/koinonia*), Jean-Paul II, *Ut unum sint*

ANDRZEJ CHOROMAŃSKI

*Quanta est nobis via?*  
Leggere *Ut unum sint* venticinque anni dopo

Abstract

Publicata il 25 maggio 1995, *Ut unum sint* è stata la prima e l'unica enciclica papale interamente dedicata alla questione dell'ecumenismo. Scritta trent'anni dopo il Concilio Vaticano II è diventata, nella vita della Chiesa, una tappa importante nel cammino verso l'attuazione dei principi e delle norme sull'ecumenismo contenuti nel decreto conciliare *Unitatis Redintegratio*. Il presente articolo propone una rilettura dell'enciclica venticinque anni dopo la sua pubblicazione. Si inizia con una presentazione dell'impegno ecumenico di Giovanni Paolo II, per il quale la ricerca dell'unità dei cristiani è stata una delle priorità pastorali di tutto il suo pontificato. Si passa poi a presentare la situazione ecumenica al momento della pubblicazione di *Ut unum sint*, segnata da un crescente scetti-



cismo nei confronti dell'ecumenismo all'interno delle Chiese e da una certa stagnazione dello stesso movimento ecumenico. Su questo sfondo, si presenta la visione della Chiesa e della sua unità, che pervade l'intera enciclica, e che si esprime nel concetto di comunione (*communio/koinonia*). Si mostrano poi i tratti caratteristici della situazione ecumenica odierna e si formulano le principali sfide che il movimento ecumenico deve affrontare, vale a dire la mancanza di una visione comune del suo fine ultimo e delle proposte per cambiare il paradigma ecumenico: dalla ricerca della piena unità visibile fino all'accettazione reciproca nonostante la permanenza di differenze fondamentali nel modo di essere una chiesa. In conclusione, si sostiene che, riletta nel contesto della situazione attuale del cristianesimo, l'enciclica *Ut unum sint* può essere fonte di ispirazione nella ricerca di una nuova visione del movimento ecumenico nel XXI secolo.

**Parole chiave:** ecumenismo, comunione (*communio/koinonia*), Giovanni Paolo II, *Ut unum sint*