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Perception of the Encyclical *Ut unum sint* amongst Slovak Youth

Abstract: The presented sociological study emerges from the area of sociology of religion that would like to describe and explain religious reality. Its main goal is to present John Paul II's encyclical *Ut unum sint* and its reception among Slovak youth. The study is divided into two parts. The introduction includes a short outline of the main reflections that appear in the encyclical *Ut unum sint* and some experiences connected with ecumenism in Slovakia — strongly dependent on specific people, priests or parishes. The first part presents the main tasks of Christian churches from the point of view of studied young people (e.g. charity, humanity, education or ecumenism). The second part sheds light on the possible differences between the chosen categories of the analyzed representatives of youth, particularly with regard to ecumenism. To that end independent variables were chosen: sex, place of residence, number of siblings, performance at school, attitude to religious faith, religious practices, and religious affiliation. The study is based in particular on the author's own sociological research conducted at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century.

Keywords: ecumenism, encyclical *Ut unum sint*, Slovakia, youth

Introduction

Ut unum sint ("That they may be one") is an encyclical that was published by Pope John Paul II in 1995. It is one of fourteen encyclicals written by John Paul II. Like many encyclicals, also this one derives its title from its first few words. These words are taken from Jesus' prayer "at the hour of his Passion" in the Gospel according to John: "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me

through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (Jn 17,20-21). *Ut unum sint* was the first encyclical ever dedicated exclusively to the ecumenical imperative. John Paul II writes: “To believe in Christ means to desire unity; to desire unity means to desire the Church; to desire the Church means to desire the communion of grace which corresponds to the Father’s plan from all eternity. Such is the meaning of Christ’s prayer: ‘Ut Unum sint’”.¹

The issue of ecumenism can be contemplated from a great many points of view — in the scientific sense (e.g., theological, psychological or sociological), in the religious sense (e.g., Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant), in the national sense (e.g., French, Polish or Slovak), etc. This article describes the phenomenon of ecumenism from the point of view of sociology, which analyzes socio-religious phenomena using empirical research and logical analysis.² Specifically, it attempts at presenting the issue of the (greater) need for ecumenism in the opinion of Slovak youth. It is based primarily on author’s own sociological research of morality and religiosity of Slovak youth, conducted at the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century. The research included a questionnaire, in which one question was about the (greater) need for ecumenism, or more precisely — whether the Church should encourage closer relations between Catholics and other Christian denominations.³

Before presenting the mentioned empirical analysis against a slightly broader background of the tasks of the Church, I would like to say a few words about ecumenism from the point of view of Slovak experiences. First, let me emphasize that in this case it is not about scientific knowledge based on methodologically correct empirical research, but rather about the so-called common knowledge based on one’s own and other people’s observations or experiences. It is obvious that these observations or experiences are, in principle, always selective and do not necessarily accurately describe the reality.

Based on the so-called common knowledge, observations and experiences, I can say that Christian churches in Slovakia encourage their mem-

¹ JOHN PAUL II: *Ut unum sint. On commitment to Ecumenism*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995, p. 9.

² J. H. TURNER: *Socjologia. Koncepcje i ich zastosowanie*. Poznań: Zysk i S-ka Wydawnictwo, 1998, pp. 8—9.

³ It was quantitative research by the means of a survey. Field data collection took place in November 2011. The target group (a basic set) was the school-leaving youth in the Spis Diocese. From the basic set a sample (random set) was deliberately created, which consisted of 1,225 young people (45 grades of ten public schools and two church schools). The implemented set consists of 1,127 respondents, which constitutes 92.0% of the random set.

bers, especially priests, to undertake ecumenical actions in a moderate way. In many parishes, the ecumenical movement begins and ends with a week of prayer for Christian unity from 18 through 25 January each year. Such a week of prayer is quite often without any real contact with the representatives or believers of other Christian denominations. However, in some cities, towns or villages, in addition to the above-mentioned week of prayer for Christian unity, regular common prayer of the Way of the Cross on Good Friday, with the participation of representatives and believers of various Christian denominations, is organized. Finally, it should be said that in some cities, towns or villages we can also observe mutual participation in liturgical celebrations — for example, for the 100th anniversary of a Catholic parish, representatives of other Christian denominations are also invited and come, and vice versa. However, a lot of this depends on specific cities, towns, villages, parishes, parish priests, and believers.

Since I do not have scientific knowledge based on methodologically correct empirical research on the subject described above, I will move on to an analysis of the (greater) need for ecumenism in the opinion of Slovak youth. In my own research, mentioned above, I was interested, among other things, whether the analyzed young Slovak people are satisfied with the current ecumenical activities of Christian churches or would they like to see their intensification. The entire article is divided into two sections: 1. The need for ecumenism among other tasks that the Church should deal with; 2. The need for ecumenism in relation to selected independent variables.

1. The need for ecumenism among other tasks that the Church should deal with

Certainly, there are many areas of the Church's activity — for example liturgical, educational, moral, social, charity, to name just a few. Among them, at least since the Second Vatican Council, there is also the area of ecumenical activity.⁴ The Catholic Church is aware that it is of paramount importance to work on rapprochement between Catholics and other Christian denominations — above all for the good of a specific person who, for example, lives in a mixed marriage, was born in a mixed

⁴ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL: *Decree on Ecumenism "Unitatis redintegratio"*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1964.

family and, in seeking of the true God, meets with a lack of unity among Christians, etc. Before presenting an empirical analysis focused solely on the (greater) need for ecumenism, I would like to put it within a slightly wider context of the tasks of the Church. The respondents were particularly asked to do the following task: “Below there are some views related to the Catholic Church and its activity. We ask you to comment on the presented statements in accordance with your conviction.” The obtained empirical data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. What should the Church be concerned with? (in %)

Below there are some views related to the Catholic Church and its activity. We ask you to comment on the presented statements in accordance with your conviction:	A	B	C	D	E
1. The Church should be more concerned with people and less with politics.	46.5	35.9	4.1	1.6	11.9
2. The Church should put greater emphasis on educating the young generation.	28.9	41.9	13.1	5.5	10.6
3. The Church should do charity work and be less concerned with its material goods.	51.1	32.0	6.0	1.3	9.5
4. The Church should more firmly oppose the use of contraceptives.	10.7	17.4	29.1	28.2	14.6
5. The Church should not yield in the fight against abortion.	24.0	22.0	19.8	20.2	14.0
6. The Church should soften (liberalize) its stance in relation to divorce.	19.0	34.7	20.9	13.5	11.9
7. The Church should admit to the sacraments married persons who are not married in the Church.	22.4	31.1	18.5	8.5	19.5
8. The Church should put more effort into encouraging rapprochement between Catholics and other Christian denominations.	30.9	37.3	7.2	2.9	21.7

Explanation: A — “I definitely agree”; B — “I rather agree”; C — “I rather do not agree”; D — “I definitely do not agree”; E — No answer.

Taking into account the highest evaluations (“I definitely agree”) and moderate evaluations (“I rather agree”), the following hierarchy of tasks of the Catholic Church can be presented (on which, according to the respondents, it should work more): do charity work (83.1%), be more concerned with people (82.4%), put greater emphasis on educating young generation (70.8%), put more effort into encouraging rapprochement between Catholics and other Christian denominations (68.2%), soften

(liberalize) its stance in relation to divorce (53.7%), admit to the sacraments married persons who are not married in the Church (53.5%) and should not yield in the fight against abortion (46.0%). Regarding the use of contraceptives, more respondents claimed that the Church should not oppose their use (57.3%) than oppose it (28.1%).⁵

The surveyed young people to a large degree pointed towards the so-called human tasks of the Church — charity or social tasks. It is interesting that they also relatively often mention the educational and ecumenical tasks. As part of this comparison, we can also refer to the results of the Slovakia-wide representative sociological research from 2014, according to which — 67.3% of the surveyed young people agreed with the view that contraceptives should not be condemned by the Church; 53.6% — that the Church should soften (liberalize) its position on divorce; 50.0% — that the Church should admit to the sacraments married persons who are not married in the Church. In the same sociological research, as many as 92.6% of young Slovaks were convinced that people of different religious or non-religious beliefs could live together without major problems.⁶

Finally, it should be emphasized that the importance assigned by the respondents (Slovak youth) to the (greater) need for ecumenism was relatively high (68.2%). In the hierarchy of the analyzed Church's tasks, on the basis of author's own research, it ranked fourth or even third — in relation to the highest evaluations (“I definitely agree”). The (greater) need for ecumenism was more or less situated at the same level as the greater emphasis on educating young generation. More than two thirds of the respondents underlined these tasks of the Church. The obtained result is a certain signal not only for the Catholic Church in Slovakia, but for other Christian churches as well. The young generation of Slovaks to a large degree demands that the Church encourage and work more on rapprochement between Catholics and other Christian denominations — perhaps because of sometimes painful experiences in their own families, parishes, villages, towns or cities.

⁵ O. ŠTEFAŇAK: *Religijni i moralni?* Lublin: Norbertinum, 2014, pp. 86—92.

⁶ M. TÍŽIK, M. ZEMAN: *Religiozita obyvateľov Slovenska a postoje občanov k náboženstvu.* Bratislava: Sociologický ústav SAV, 2017, pp. 147—150, 184.

2. The need for ecumenism in relation to selected independent variables

After presenting the (greater) need for ecumenism within a slightly wider context of the tasks of the Church (according to the examined Slovak youth), I would like to bring our attention to an in-depth analysis of the issue considered herein in relation to the selected demographic, social or religious characteristics. It is obvious that the (greater) need for ecumenism can be viewed differently by young people from various locations, young people with a diverse attitudes to religious faith or young people from different Christian denominations. Table 2 presents possible differences in the views of the surveyed young people on the (greater) need for ecumenism in relation to sex, place of residence, number of siblings, and their school performance.

Table 2. The need for ecumenism in relation to selected demographic and social characteristics (in %)

Categories	A	B	C	D	E	Together
Sex						
Male	31.0	36.2	7.7	3.3	21.8	100.0
Female	30.9	38.7	6.7	2.5	21.3	100.0
Place of residence						
Village	32.8	38.7	8.6	2.2	17.7	100.0
Town up to 20,000 residents	27.5	37.1	6.1	4.6	24.6	100.0
City of over 20,000 residents	30.8	34.8	5.2	2.8	26.4	100.0
Number of siblings						
Family with 1 or 2 children	29.9	35.8	7.3	3.0	24.0	100.0
Family with 3 children	34.9	34.9	7.1	3.6	19.5	100.0
Family with 4 children or more	28.2	43.3	7.2	2.2	19.1	100.0
School results						
Very good	30.8	36.0	7.2	2.4	23.6	100.0
Good	30.8	39.8	6.5	2.9	20.0	100.0
Average or bad	31.3	34.2	8.4	3.5	22.6	100.0
Total (N = 1,127)	30.9	37.3	7.2	2.9	21.7	100.0

Explanation: A – “I definitely agree”; B – “I rather agree”; C – “I rather do not agree”; D – “I definitely do not agree”; E – No answer.

On the basis of the empirical data obtained, it may be highlighted that the view suggesting that the Church should encourage and work more on rapprochement between Catholics and other Christian denominations was “definitely” or “rather” agreed on by 68.2% of the respondents (respectively: 30.9% and 37.3%), as many as 10.1% of the respondents “rather” or “definitely” disagreed with the statement (respectively: 7.2% and 2.9%) and as many as 21.7% of the respondents were unable to clearly answer the posed question. At the same time, a relatively high degree of corrective responses (“I do not know”) proves, first of all, the ignorance of a significant part of the surveyed young people about the reflected topic. A large percentage of the surveyed young people simply do not know to what extent the Church encourages its members to be ecumenical or to what extent it is working on the rapprochement between different Christian denominations and, consequently, do not know if it should encourage or work more on the issue.

From the viewpoint of the selected demographic or social characteristics, the independent variable that significantly differentiated the surveyed Slovak youth, at the significance level of 0.05, was only the social characteristic “place of residence”. From the point of view of the demographic characteristic “sex” ($p = 0.810$) and the social characteristics “number of siblings” ($p = 0.271$) and “results at school” ($p = 0.784$), there were no significant statistical differences between the selected categories of young people. Therefore, it can be said that boys and girls, young people from families varying in the number of members and students with various school achievements, expressed more or less at the same degree the view that the Church should encourage and work more on rapprochement between different Christian denominations (approximately two thirds of the respondents).

In relation to the social characteristic “place of residence”, a statistically significant correlation can be confirmed only at the significance level of 0.05 and with a very weak statistical dependence ($p = 0.022$; $V = 0.089$). In any case, it can be stated that the (greater) need for ecumenism was indicated slightly more often by youth from villages (71.5%) than by youth from small towns (64.6%) or larger cities (65.6%). On the other hand, together with an increase in the number of residents, the percentage of corrective responses (“I do not know”) increased as well: village — 17.7%; town up to 20,000 residents — 24.6%; city of over 20,000 residents — 26.4%. All differences in the views of the surveyed young people on the (greater) need for ecumenism in relation to the selected religious characteristics (attitude to religious faith, religious practices, and religious affiliation) are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The need for ecumenism in relation to the selected religious characteristics (in %)

Categories	A	B	C	D	E	Together
Attitude to religious faith						
Firm believer	36.1	35.2	6.5	3.7	18.5	100.0
Believer	29.3	43.0	7.7	2.4	17.6	100.0
Undecided	38.2	34.1	8.1	0.6	19.1	100.0
Indifferent or non-believer	27.5	24.8	5.5	6.0	36.2	100.0
Religious practices						
Regularly	31.2	42.8	7.5	2.2	16.3	100.0
Irregularly	32.8	36.9	10.7	3.3	16.4	100.0
Rarely	31.6	37.8	6.6	2.8	21.2	100.0
Not at all	28.0	23.0	5.5	5.0	38.5	100.0
Religious affiliation						
Catholic Church	30.4	41.1	7.7	2.5	18.3	100.0
Protestant Church	44.3	31.1	6.6	–	17.9	100.0
Non-denominational	21.5	20.7	5.0	7.4	45.5	100.0
Total (N = 1,127)	30.9	37.3	7.2	2.9	21.7	100.0

Explanatory notes: A – “I definitely agree”; B – “I rather agree”; C – “I rather do not agree”; D – “I definitely do not agree”; E – No answer.

From the viewpoint of selected religious characteristics, it can be confirmed that statistically significant differences were noted in each of the three correlations presented: attitude to religious faith ($p < 0.0005$; $V = 0.133$), religious practices ($p < 0.0005$; $V = 0.131$) and religious affiliation ($p < 0.0005$; $V = 0.184$). In relation to the declared attitude to religious faith, a statistical correlation with a weak dependence was noted. It is interesting that strong believers (71.3%), believers (72.3%) and undecided, but connected to the religious tradition (72.3%), expressed the (greater) need for ecumenism more or less at the same, that is, relatively high, level. It is possible that each of the categories mentioned had slightly different motivations for it, but as a result, all three of them expressed the (greater) need for ecumenism in a significant degree. On the other hand, people who were religiously indifferent or who did not believe most often indicated a corrective response (“I do not know”) (36.2%).

A slightly different situation appeared in relation to the declared participation in religious practices, although also in this case a statistical correlation with a weak dependence was noted. In two sentences it can be said that the indicators of the (greater) need for ecumenism decreased together with the decline in participation in religious practices: regularly — 74.0%; irregularly — 69.7%; rarely — 69.4%; not at all — 51.0%.

On the other hand, together with the decline in participation in religious practices, the percentage of corrective responses (“I do not know”) increased: regularly — 16.3%; irregularly — 16.4%; rarely — 21.2%; not at all — 38.5%.

Finally, in relation to the declared religious affiliation, we observed a statistical correlation of almost average strength of dependence. As an aside, it should be said that for methodological reasons only the views of Catholics, Protestants and non-denominational were compared. As far as other religious groups are concerned (e.g. Orthodox or members of new Christian movements), the fact that they do not have many followers made it impossible to include them in the statistical analysis. In any case, it is interesting that although Catholic youth in a relatively high degree expressed the (greater) need for ecumenism (71.5%), Protestant youth voiced such a need even more often (75.4%), and above all more intensively (“I definitely agree”): Catholic Church — 30.4%; Protestant Church — 44.3%). On the other hand, people who did not belong to any religious denomination most often indicated a corrective response (“I do not know”/no answer) (45.5%).

To conclude the second part of the study, it should be emphasized that statistically significant differences when it comes to the issue of the (greater) need for ecumenism were, as a matter of fact, observed only in relation to religious characteristics — at least at the significance level of 0.01. It is indeed interesting that the (greater) need for ecumenism was largely indicated by strong believers, believers, and only connected to the religious tradition (except these who are religiously indifferent or non-believers), by people who regularly, irregularly or at least rarely participate in religious practices (except these who do not practice at all), and by Catholic or Protestant youth (except non-denominational). Therefore, it can be concluded that people who are more or less religious (apart from non-religious ones) largely demand that the Church should encourage and work more on rapprochement between Catholics and other Christian denominations — perhaps on the basis of sometimes painful experiences in their own families, parishes, villages, towns or cities.

Conclusions

After a short presentation of the so-called common knowledge about ecumenism from the point of view of Slovak experiences and a much longer presentation of scientific knowledge about the (greater) need for

ecumenism in the opinion of Slovak youth, we can say, following the well-known Polish sociologist of religion Janusz Mariański, that it is not enough just to look back (“to read the protocols from the last meeting”) and from there to draw models for the current situation. However, the adaptation of the Church to social changes has its limitations. Therefore, it is more about a dialogue with people of a new mentality than about adaptation or imitation. It is about understanding the problems of contemporary people and trying to solve them together. The Church should not call for the fight against modernity, but transform it within its evangelizing mission, through open discourse and dialogue with other people who put forward different proposals of solutions for human and religious problems.⁷

The presented views of the surveyed Slovak youth on the (greater) need for ecumenism should be read primarily in the context of a relatively low level of ecumenical engagement in the Slovak reality, and also in the context of sometimes painful experiences of young people in their own families, parishes, villages, towns, or cities, which quite often causes weakening of religious faith. The presented relatively strong desire of the young generation of Slovaks that the Church should encourage and work more on closing of the ties between Catholics and other Christian denominations is certainly also the desire of Jesus Christ himself, who before his Passion and Resurrection prayed: “Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one” (Jn 17,11b). Indeed, it is necessary to go further in the ecumenical work — above all for the good of a specific person who, for example, lives in a mixed marriage, was born in a mixed family or in seeking the true God, faces the lack of unity among Christians.

It is also the desire of the Second Vatican Council, which in its decree on ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio* emphasizes that: “The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council. Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only. However, many Christian communions present themselves to men as the true inheritors of Jesus Christ; all indeed profess to be followers of the Lord but differ in mind and go their different ways, as if Christ Himself were divided. Such division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages the holy cause of preaching the Gospel to every creature.”⁸ Finally, it is also the urging of John Paul II, who in his encyclical *Ut unum sint* underlines that: “To believe in Christ means

⁷ J. MARIAŃSKI: *Sekularyzacja i desekularyzacja w nowoczesnym świecie*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2006, pp. 189—193.

⁸ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL: *Decree on Ecumenism “Unitatis redintegratio”...*, p. 1.

to desire unity; to desire unity means to desire the Church; to desire the Church means to desire the communion of grace which corresponds to the Father's plan from all eternity. Such is the meaning of Christ's prayer: 'Ut unum sint'.⁹

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Perception de l'encyclique *Ut unum sint* par les jeunes slovaques

Résumé

L'étude sociologique présentée dans cet article trouve sa source dans le domaine de la sociologie de la religion qui aspire à décrire et à expliquer la réalité religieuse. Le but principal est de présenter l'encyclique *Ut unum sint* de Jean-Paul II et sa réception par les jeunes slovaques. L'étude se compose de deux parties. L'introduction comprend un bref aperçu des principales réflexions qui apparaissent dans l'encyclique *Ut unum sint* et des expériences liées à l'œcuménisme en Slovaquie, des expériences évidemment dépendantes des personnes qui les ont vécues qu'ils soient prêtres ou paroissiens. La première partie présente les principales tâches des églises chrétiennes du point de vue des jeunes (par exemple la charité, l'humanité, l'éducation ou l'œcuménisme). La deuxième partie met en lumière les différences possibles entre des représentants de la jeunesse, notamment au regard de l'œcuménisme. Pour ce faire, des variables indépendantes ont été choi-

⁹ JOHN PAUL II: *Ut unum sint. On commitment to Ecumenism*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995, p. 9.

sies: sexe, lieu de résidence, nombre de frères et sœurs, performances scolaires, attitude vis-à-vis de la foi religieuse, pratiques religieuses et appartenance religieuse. L'étude s'appuie notamment sur les propres recherches sociologiques que l'auteur a personnellement menées au début de la deuxième décennie du XXIème siècle.

Mots-clés: œcuménisme, encyclique *Ut unum sint*, Slovaquie, jeunesse

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Percezione dell'enciclica *Ut unum sint* da parte dei giovani slovacchi

Abstract

Lo studio sociologico presentato in questo articolo emerge dal campo della sociologia della religione che aspira a descrivere ed a spiegare la realtà religiosa. L'obiettivo principale è presentare l'enciclica *Ut unum sint* di Giovanni Paolo II e la sua ricezione da parte dei giovani slovacchi. Lo studio si compone di due parti. L'introduzione include una breve panoramica delle principali riflessioni che compaiono nell'enciclica *Ut unum sint* e alcune esperienze relative all'ecumenismo in Slovacchia, fortemente influenzate dalle esperienze delle persone che le hanno vissute siano essi sacerdoti o parrochiani. La prima parte presenta i principali compiti delle Chiese cristiane dal punto di vista dei giovani (per esempio la carità, l'umanità, l'educazione o l'ecumenismo). La seconda parte mette in luce le possibili differenze tra i rappresentanti dei giovani, in particolare per quanto riguarda l'ecumenismo. Perciò sono state scelte variabili indipendenti: sesso, luogo di residenza, numero di fratelli e sorelle, rendimento scolastico, atteggiamento nei confronti della fede religiosa, pratiche religiose e appartenenza religiosa. Lo studio si basa in particolare sulla ricerca sociologica che l'autore ha personalmente svolto all'inizio del secondo decennio del XXI secolo.

Parole chiave: ecumenismo, enciclica *Ut unum sint*, Slovacchia, gioventù