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Pope John Paul II's Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint* and Its Praiseworthy Contribution to the Cause of Christian Unity

Abstract: A careful examination of the text of Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Ut unum sint* allows us to see, first of all, the fact that His Holiness was closely acquainted with the ecclesiological doctrine of the Second Vatican Council, in which he, in fact, played an active part, including by drafting some synodal documents, such as the decree on ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*. Moreover, in his ecumenical approach, Pope John Paul II aptly advocated for the participation of the Catholic Church in the work of the Ecumenical Council of Churches and for the restoration of the unity of Christians, hence his full ecumenical commitment to engage in ecumenical dialogue with all the Churches, and particularly with the Eastern Church, which he suggestively called "sister Church". In fact, both his pastoral-practical activity of ecumenical commitment, as well as his encyclicals, abundantly confirm that the Supreme Pontiff has indeed made a praiseworthy contribution to the cause of Christian unity, which the Founder of the Church himself wanted (cf. John 17:21), and which must remain an example for us Christians of today and tomorrow.

Keywords: Christian unity, ecumenical unity, Second Vatican Council, Christian Churches

Preliminary remarks

In the Introduction to his encyclical *Ut unum sint* Pope John Paul II declared that he was driven by the exhortation of Christ, who called

“all his disciples to unity,”¹ and it was the pope’s “earnest desire [...] to renew this call today,”² as those who are “believers in Christ, united in following in the footsteps of the martyrs, cannot remain divided.”³

Obviously, Pope John Paul II could not have failed to make express mention also of “the call for Christian unity made by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council with such impassioned commitment is finding,”⁴ which His Holiness took on and actualised also in this encyclical, which is indeed a renewal of the exhortation of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council to the Christian world to join the path of ecumenism, hence the ecumenical commitment of the Catholic Church for the realisation of ecumenical unity.

According to the Holy Father, “taking part in this movement, which is called ecumenical, are those who invoke the Triune God and confess Jesus as Lord and Saviour. They join in not merely as individuals, but also as members of the corporate groups in which they have heard the Gospel, and which each regards as his Church and, indeed, God’s.”⁵

In *Ut unum sint*, the Supreme Pontiff also reiterated “the call for Christian unity”⁶ that the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council addressed to the Christian world. In fact, in his ecumenical endeavor, Pope John Paul II was sure that “every factor of division can be transcended and overcome in the total gift of self for the sake of the Gospel,”⁷ which indeed summons us to unity.

1. The teaching of the Eastern and Western Church of the first four centuries on the unity of Christians

According to the teaching of the ecumenical Church of the first four centuries, the Church is “One” given that “the Savior founded one Church (Matthew 16:18), not more, because the Church has one head, Jesus Christ, because it is portrayed as the only bride of Christ (Eph. 5:27),

¹ IOANNES PAULUS PP. II: *Ut unum sint. On commitment to Ecumenism*, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html [accessed 18.04.2022], n. 1.

² *Ibidem*, 1.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ *Ibidem*, I, 7.

⁶ *Ibidem*, 1.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

as a house of God and of Christ (Heb. 3:6; 10:21), as the one Body of Christ (Rom. 12:5), as one flock (John 10:16; 21:15),”⁸ and Christians are also “one body and one spirit [...] (Eph. 4:4-5),”⁹ as “no one can lay any other foundation than that which has been laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:9, 11).

About those who “invented heresies and schisms [...] to overthrow faith, to corrupt the truth, to tear apart the unity (of the Church),”¹⁰ the father of the doctrine of the ecclesiology of the unity of the universal (Catholic) Church, St. Cyprian of Carthage († 258), wrote that they “do not abide by the Gospel of Christ and His law, (but) call themselves Christians and, walking in the dark, count themselves to have light” (*De unitate Ecclesiae*).¹¹ Indeed, some of these have not known the “true Gospel,” namely, the true faith, which “was handed down from the Apostles (*ab Apostolis traditum*) through the bishops, whose beginning lies with the Holy Apostles (Tertullian, *Adv. Marcionem*, 4, 2; 4, 4; 4, 5).”¹²

This ecclesiological doctrine on the unity of the Church, of neo-testamentary origin, was invoked as the basis for the unity of the Church around its bishops not only by St. Cyprian of Carthage, but also by those who preceded and succeeded him in the centuries of the first millennium, and who in fact made up the basis of Eastern and Western Theology. For example, the Catechism of the Orthodox Church states that the Church is “one,” but “its visible part has many heads, in the person of the eparchial bishops, as they do not divide the Church according to the number of bishoprics, as they are only constituent parts of the Church,”¹³ and the bishops of these administrative territorial units of the Church are — as St. Paul specified — just “servants of Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 4:1).

According to the precepts of the same Apostolic teaching, “the bishops inherited the power they are holding today by way of Apostolic succession,”¹⁴ that is, teaching, sanctifying and ruling power, which in the language of canon law is called Apostolic succession, and which in the Early Church had been invoked — among others — by Hegesippus,

⁸ SFINTEI ARHIEPISCOPII A BUCUREȘTILOR: *Învățătura de credință creștină ortodoxă* [The teaching of Orthodox Christian Faith]. București 1952, p. 142.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 142.

¹⁰ ST. CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE: *Despre unitatea Bisericii universale. Despre condiția muritoare a omului* [On the Unity of the Universal Church. On the Mortal Condition of Man]. Trans. A. STAN, A. ROȘU. IMBOR, Bucharest 2013, p. 46.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 47.

¹² Quoted after: L. STAN: “Succesiunea apostolică” (Apostolic Succession). In: *Biserica și Dreptul. Studii de drept canonic ortodox*. Andreiana, Sibiu 2013, IV, p. 27.

¹³ SFINTEI ARHIEPISCOPII A BUCUREȘTILOR: *Învățătura de credință creștină ortodoxă...*, p. 143.

¹⁴ L. STAN: “Succesiunea apostolică...,” p. 13.

St. Cyprian of Carthage, St. Basil the Great and St. Augustine, as well as by numerous other church fathers and writers. In fact, we find this reality expressed also in the text of the canons attributed to the Holy Apostles (cf. can. 46, 47, 68 ap.), as well as in some canons of the Ecumenical Synods (cf. can. 8, 19 Syn. I ec.; 7 Syn. II ec.; 95 Trullan, etc.),¹⁵ which clearly state “the dependence of sacramental Apostolic succession on the Apostolic succession in faith,”¹⁶ so that no one can “imagine a sacramental succession without one in faith.”¹⁷

In the spirit of the same Apostolic and patristic teaching, the Orthodox Church affirmed in its Catechism that the Church is “One” as “it is a single spiritual body, having one head, i.e., Christ, and being enlivened by one Holy Spirit/Ghost.”¹⁸ This unity enlivened by the Holy Spirit (cf. Eph. 4:4—6) entails preserving and affirming “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3), while, in its visible form, expressing itself “through the unity of the confession of faith and the bond of prayer and the Holy Sacraments/Mysterics.”¹⁹

This was indeed the teaching of the Holy Apostles, according to whom “the unity of the faith” (Eph. 4:13) and “the unity of the Church” are achieved by preserving Christian unity in “the Spirit of God who gives this unity.”²⁰ Therefore, “the unity of the Church is protected as long as the unity of the Spirit is maintained,”²¹ which is diverse, because the works and gifts of the Holy Spirit are also diverse.

The Early Church Fathers also spoke of *unitas in diversitatis*, that is “unity in diversity,” which must preserve the “unity of the Spirit”. This is in fact the unity of the Church that we must preserve and affirm, and for which the One who founded the Church, that is, Christ the Son of God, prayed to His heavenly Father, so that all who believe in Him (cf. Jn 17:20) “may be one” (cf. Jn 17:21), since only in this way can we be “brought to complete unity” (Jn 17:23) or — according to the Vulgate text — *in unum*.²²

¹⁵ C. MITITELU: “Norme și rânduieli canonice privind modalitățile primirii eterodocșilor în Biserica Ortodoxă” (Canonical norms and ordinances regarding the ways of reception of the heterodox in the Orthodox Church). *Revista de Teologie Sfântul Apostol Andrei* 1 (2008), pp. 322—336.

¹⁶ L. STAN: “Succesiunea apostolică...,” p. 31.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 31.

¹⁸ ST. PHILARET METROPOLITAN OF MOSCOW: *Catehism ortodox* [Orthodox Catechism]. Trans. G. CIOCIOL. Sofia, Bucharest 2007, p. 96.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 97.

²⁰ I. MIRCEA: *Dicționar al Noului Testament* [Dictionary of the New Testament]. IBMBOR, Bucharest 1995, p. 543

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 543.

²² *Biblia sacra vulgata* [Sacred Bible Vulgate]. Bilingual edition (Latin and Romanian). Eds. A. MURARU et al. Vol. VII. Universității Al. I. Cuza din Iași, Iași 2015, p. 488.

Among other things, in his treatise suggestively titled *De unitate Ecclesiae*,²³ St. Cyprian of Carthage (210—258), the Primate of the Church of Proconsular Africa, stated that “the beginning starts from unity, so that the Church of Christ can appear as one,”²⁴ since even “the episcopate is one and indivisible.”²⁵ Therefore, the one who “leaves the Church of Christ, [...] can no longer have God as his Father”²⁶ and the “Church as Mother.”²⁷

In the spirit of the same apostolic teaching, the phrase “unity of the Church” was defined in Article IX of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Symbol of Faith, drawn up by the Constantinopolitan Synod of 381, according to which the Church founded by Christ on the cross and made visible at Pentecost (cf. Acts 20—28) is “One holy, (o)ecumenical (Catholic) and Apostolic Church.”

In fact, from the text of the encyclical *Ut unum sint*, one can see that it is precisely this ecclesiological doctrine on the unity of the primary Church to which Pope John Paul II made express reference. Indeed, we can say that in the encyclical *Ut unum sint* the Supreme Pontiff expressed himself in the spirit of the doctrine stated by the biblical, neo-testamentary text, by St. Cyprian of Carthage and by the Fathers of the Second Ecumenical Council, a doctrinal heritage which was, in fact, also used by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council.

On the occasion of the celebration of the Holy Liturgy, Christians of both Churches, Eastern and Western, always recite the words in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Symbol of Faith, namely “One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church,” which were included in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Symbol of Faith.²⁸ However, this Symbol of Faith of the ecumenical (universal) Church also affirms to us that “unity,” as an attribute of the Church, is both a gift from God,²⁹ and a constitutive element of the Church, hence the essential place of the unity of the Church “in theology and ecclesiology.”³⁰

²³ See the Latin text (and French translation) in the collection *Sources chrétiennes*, no. 500. Paris 2006.

²⁴ St. CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE: *Despre unitatea Bisericii...*, p. 50.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 51.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 53—54.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 54.

²⁸ N.V. DURĂ: “Legislația canonică a Sinodului II ecumenic și importanța sa pentru organizarea și disciplina Bisericii” (The Canonical Legislation of the Second Ecumenical Council and its Importance for the Organization and Discipline of the Church). *Glasul Bisericii* 6—8 (1981), pp. 630—671.

²⁹ A. BIRMELÉ: “Unité de l’Église.” In: *Dictionnaire critique de théologie*. Sous la direction de J.-Y. LACOSTE, O. RIAUDEL. Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1998, p. 1193.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 1193.

Ever since the Apostolic age, the unity of the Church has not been perceived and expressed — both in the East and in the West — as a monolithic unity of the Churches, but rather as a unity of the local Churches (cf. Acts 16), as confirmed by the decisions of the first Apostolic synod, the prototype and basis of the synodality regime.³¹ In fact, even some ecumenical theologians of today affirm that the “plurality” of these local Churches is nothing more than a manifestation or concretisation of “the one Church of Christ.”³²

The teaching on the unity of the Church, and its indivisible character, which we find expressed in the writings of St. Cyprian of Carthage, we also find reaffirmed in the catechisms of the local Churches, according to which heresies and schisms cannot bring with them “the breaking up of the unity of the Church, for this unity can never be broken up,”³³ given the fact that the Church “stands closely united with its Head, i.e., Jesus Christ. The unity of the Church is above everything and cannot be shaken by anyone.”³⁴

2. The Catholic Church’s doctrine on achieving the unity of all Churches

Within the works of the Ecumenical Council of Churches — an international ecclesial body established in 1948 as a “fellowship of Churches,”³⁵ and which currently is made up of 352 Churches³⁶ — “three models” were proposed for achieving the unity of all Christian Churches, regardless of their faith, organisational structure and theology.

The first model envisaged by the representatives of the member Churches within this international ecclesial body was to lay the foundations for “a form of organic union, [...] based on a common Confession

³¹ N.V. DURĂ: “Le Concile des Apôtres, prototype de tous les conciles, modèle de la synodalité orthodoxe.” *La Lumière du Thabor (Revue Internationale de Théologie Orthodoxe)* 49—50. Paris 2003, pp. 61—84.

³² A. BIRMELÉ: “Unité de l’Église ...,” p. 1193.

³³ SFINTEI ARHIEPISCOPII A BUCUREȘTILOR: *Învățătura de credință creștină ortodoxă...*, p. 144.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 144.

³⁵ A. BIRMELÉ: “Conseil Œcuménique de Églises.” In: *Dictionnaire critique de théologie...*, p. 262.

³⁶ *World Council of Churches*, after: <https://www.oikoumene.org/about-the-wcc> [accessed 19.02.2022].

of faith,”³⁷ on “an Agreement on the Sacraments and their servants”³⁸ and on “the adoption of a uniform organizational structure,”³⁹ which could only be accomplished through the decision of a “Universal Council”, as proposed by the “General Assembly of the Ecumenical Council of the Churches in Nairobi in 1975.”⁴⁰

The second model was proposed by “Anglicans and Catholics, who advocated for a corporatist union, in which particular identities would be mentioned, unity being achieved through a common episcopal constitution and the common exercise of Episcopal Ministry.”⁴¹

Finally, the third model — envisaged by the Ecumenical Council of Churches — intended to achieve “unity in the reconciled diversity, starting from the fact that almost all Churches are organised today in confessional families.”⁴² This form of organisation “proposes the reconciliation and mutual recognition between the different traditions.”⁴³

From the text of the decree on ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio* of 21 November 1964 — drawn up and promulgated by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, presided by His Holiness Pope Paul VI — we can also draw some guiding principles regarding the unity of the Church, which are, in fact, based on the doctrine of the ecumenical Church of the first millennium. Among these ecclesiological tenets are the following:

1. Our Lord Jesus Christ is the only principle of the unity of the Church.

According to the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, after His resurrection and ascension to heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ “called and gathered the people of the New Alliance, which is the Church, into a unity of the faith (*in unitatem fidei*).” The same synodals Fathers stated that it is the Holy Spirit who achieves “that wonderful communion of the faithful (*communio fidelium*),” and “brings them into intimate union with Christ, so that He is the principle of the Church’s unity.”⁴⁴

2. Jesus Christ is the “Holy Mystery of the unity of the Church.”

According to the text of this conciliar document on ecumenism, “the sacred mystery of the unity of the Church”⁴⁵ is only “in Christ

³⁷ A. BIRMELÉ: “Unité de l’Église ...,” p. 1194.

³⁸ Ibidem, p. 1194.

³⁹ Ibidem.

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

⁴¹ Ibidem.

⁴² Ibidem.

⁴³ Ibidem.

⁴⁴ Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html [accessed 12.03.2022], I, 2.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, I, 2.

and through Christ,”⁴⁶ and everything that is known to “come from Christ and lead back to Christ, belong by right to the one Church of Christ.”⁴⁷

3. Those separated from the Catholic Church do not enjoy the unity granted to the Christians by Jesus Christ.

The Second Vatican Council expressed itself in this sense in the *Decree on Ecumenism*, namely that “our separated brethren, whether considered as individuals or as Communities and Churches, are not blessed with that unity which Jesus Christ wished to bestow on all those who through Him were born again.”⁴⁸ It was indeed referring to the “unity which the Holy Scriptures and the ancient Tradition of the Church proclaim.”⁴⁹

4. The unity that Christ has given to his Church subsists only in the Catholic Church.

According to the statement of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, “this unity subsists in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose,”⁵⁰ and “it will continue to increase until the end of time.”⁵¹ Thus, in the view of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, the unity which Jesus Christ has given to his Church subsists only in the Catholic Church and it will never end.

5. We must preserve the unity of the Church through all that is necessary for its existence, including authentic Christian values, which are based on “our common heritage which are to be found among our separated brethren.”⁵² The same Synod Fathers considered that “it is right and salutary to recognize the riches of Christ and virtuous works in the lives of others who are bearing witness to Christ, sometimes even to the shedding of their blood.”⁵³

6. According to the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, the divisions between the Churches are the major obstacle in the path of achieving the full catholicity of the Church.

Indeed, one cannot speak of a full “ecumenicity” or “catholicity,” seen not only from a spatial (geographical) point of view, but also from the point of view of the Eucharistic communion, so long as

⁴⁶ Ibidem.

⁴⁷ Ibidem, I, 3.

⁴⁸ Ibidem.

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

⁵⁰ Ibidem, I, 4.

⁵¹ Ibidem.

⁵² Ibidem.

⁵³ Ibidem.

“the divisions among Christians prevent the Church from attaining the fullness of catholicity proper to her, in those of her sons who, though attached to her by Baptism, are yet separated from full communion with her.”⁵⁴

7. For the restauration and the maintenance of unity and communion with the Catholic Church, it is sufficient to have been truly baptised in communion with this Church.

According to the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, “this Sacred Council solemnly repeats the declaration of previous Councils and Roman Pontiffs, that for the restoration or the maintenance of unity and communion it is necessary “to impose no burden beyond what is essential.”⁵⁵

Consequently, the descendants of those who separated from the Catholic Church “cannot be accused of the sin involved in the separation, and the Catholic Church embraces upon them as brothers, with respect and affection. For men who believe in Christ and have been truly baptized are in communion with the Catholic Church even though this communion is imperfect.”⁵⁶

8. Prayer is a constitutive and indispensable element in the process of restoring Christian unity.

The *Decree on Ecumenism* of the Second Vatican Council also attests to the fact that the Synodals Fathers confessed “that human powers and capacities cannot achieve this holy objective — the reconciling of all Christians in the unity of the one and only Church of Christ. It is because of this that the Council rests all its hope on the prayer of Christ for the Church.”⁵⁷

We have mentioned some of the principles of ecclesiological doctrine stated by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council in their decree on ecumenism titled *Unitatis redintegratio*, given that we find them reiterated in the text of Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Ut unum sint*, which will provide the informed reader with an insight into the Catholic Church's doctrine on the achievement of ecumenical Christian unity.

This conciliar doctrine on the unity of the Church is also expressed in the *Catechisms of the Catholic Church* published after the Second Vatican Council. For example, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* — published by the Roman Catholic Archiepiscopacy/Archdiocese of Bucharest in 2003 — stated that the unity of the Church is

⁵⁴ Ibidem, I, 4.

⁵⁵ Ibidem, III, I, 18.

⁵⁶ Ibidem, I, 3.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, III, II, 24.

defined by “four inseparably interrelated attributes” which “the Church does not have from within itself; it is Christ who, through the Holy Spirit, gives them to His Church so as to be One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic, and it is also He who demands it to display each of these characteristics.”⁵⁸

From the text of the same Catechism, we note that “the visible bonds of communion”⁵⁹ are the following: a) “Confession of a single faith received from the apostles”⁶⁰; b) “Common celebration of divine worship, especially of the Sacraments”⁶¹; c) “Apostolic succession through the Sacrament of the priesthood.”⁶²

In the very same catechism we also find reiterated the words of the Second Vatican Council on the unity of the Church, according to which it “endures in the Catholic Church.”⁶³ We also note that the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reproduces texts from other Declarations of the Second Vatican Council, such as the Declaration on the “Ecumenical Formation of the Faithful, especially of the Priests.”⁶⁴

3. The encyclical *Ut unum sint*, an eloquent testimony to the contribution of Pope John Paul II to promoting the Christian unity cause

Pope John Paul II’s encyclical *Ut unum sint* has, indeed, remained the most eloquent and important document of the Catholic Church on its ecumenical commitment from the Second Vatican Council (1962—1965) up to the end of the 20th century, in which the late Supreme Pontiff promoted the process of restoring Christian unity also through ecumenical dialogue.

In the encyclical *Ut unum sint*, Pope John Paul II expressly stated that he wished “to encourage the efforts of all who work for the cause of unity,”⁶⁵ to which “all Christ’s disciples”⁶⁶ had been called by the Second Vatican Council.

⁵⁸ ARHIEPISCOPIA ROMANO-CATOLICĂ DE BUCUREȘTI: *Catehismul Bisericii Catolice* [The Catechism of the Catholic Church]. 3rd edn. Bucharest 2003, art. 9, p. 186.

⁵⁹ Ibidem, p. 187.

⁶⁰ Ibidem.

⁶¹ Ibidem.

⁶² Ibidem.

⁶³ Ibidem, p. 188.

⁶⁴ Ibidem, p. 189.

⁶⁵ IOANNES PAULUS PP. II: *Ut unum sint...*, 3.

⁶⁶ Ibidem, I, 5.

According to the same Roman Pontiff, promoting the cause of Christian unity “is a specific duty of the Bishop of Rome as the Successor of the Apostle Peter,”⁶⁷ however, “in order to carry out this special ministry in the Church, depends totally on the Lord’s grace and prayer.”⁶⁸

Therefore, in order to carry out his precise duty, for the promotion and materialization of the Christian unity cause, the Bishop of Rome, as successor of Apostle Peter, depends on the prayer⁶⁹ addressed to the Lord and the divine grace. Prayer has indeed been — ever since the Apostolic times — the “rule” of life⁷⁰ for those who claimed to be Christians, that is, confessors and experiencers of Christ’s teaching.

In his very first words in the text of the encyclical *Ut unum sint*, Pope John Paul II confessed that, via its text, he wished to renew the call to Christian unity made by the Second Vatican Council for the cause of unity (cf. *Ut unum sint* 1 and 3), and that “in our ecumenical age, marked by the Second Vatican Council, the mission of the Bishop of Rome is particularly directed to recalling the need for full communion among Christ’s disciples.”⁷¹

From the statements of Pope John Paul II, therefore, it can be noticed that His Holiness was aware of the fact that, as Bishop of the See of Rome,⁷² he was indeed meant to contribute to the affirmation and preservation of the unity of the Church, given that, although Christ bestowed “equal power on all the Apostles, still — St. Cyprian of Carthage specified — “He instituted one See,”⁷³ that is, the See of Rome, and “one” Church,

⁶⁷ Ibidem, 4.

⁶⁸ Ibidem.

⁶⁹ N.V. DURĂ: “‘Regula de credință’ și rugăciunea pentru unitatea creștină. O evaluare ecleziologică-canonică” (The “Rule of Faith” and prayer for Christian unity. An ecclesiological-canonical evaluation). *Ortodoxia* 3—4 (2004), pp. 7—25.

⁷⁰ IDEM: “Mărturii ale Tradiției liturgico-canonică apostolice privind rugăciunea” [Testimonies of the Liturgical-Canonical Apostolic Tradition on Prayer]. *Studii Teologice* 7—8 (1983), pp. 481—490.

⁷¹ IOANNES PAULUS PP. II: *Ut unum sint...*, 4.

⁷² N.V. DURĂ: “The ‘Petrine primacy’: the role of the Bishop of Rome according to the canonical legislation of the ecumenical councils of the first millennium, an ecclesiological-canonical evaluation.” In: *The Petrine ministry: Catholics and Orthodox in dialogue: academic symposium held at the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity*. Ed. W. KASPER. Newman Press, New York 2006, pp. 164—184; N.V. DURĂ: “Episcopul Romei și statutul său canonic. Scaunul apostolic al Romei și procesul de refacere a unității creștine ecumenice” [The Bishop of Rome and his canonical status. The Apostolic See of Rome and the process of restoring ecumenical Christian unity]. In: „*Ortodoxia românească și rolul ei în Mișcarea ecumenică*”. *De la New Delhi la Porto Alegre 1961-2006*. Vasiliana ’98, Iași 2006, pp. 89—118.

⁷³ ST. CYPRIAN OF CARTHAGE: *Despre unitatea Bisericii...*, p. 48.

that is, “the Church of Christ,”⁷⁴ based on the faith professed by Saint Peter the Apostle on behalf of his fellow apostles.

This confession of faith confirms to us that the Founder of the Church is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ, “the Son of God” (John 1:49), as Apostle Nathanael also called him, to which Apostle Peter added that our Redeemer is *Christus Filius Dei vivi* (Christ, the Son of the living God). Moreover, as Apostle Peter was told by the Saviour Jesus Christ Himself, “not flesh and blood have revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (Mt 16:17). Then the Lord said to him: *tu es Petrus, et super hanc petram aedificavo Ecclesiam meam...* (you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My Church) (Mt. 16:18), that is, on the faith confessed by the Coryphaeus of the Apostles under the inspiration of the Spirit of God.

As for “giving a new name to Simon,”⁷⁵ who was called Σίμων Ἰωάννου, that is, Simon of John (John 21:15—17), it should also be known that “the foundation of the Church and giving Simon a new name together with the entrustment of a mission from God bear similarities to the Old Testament: Abram receives the name Abraham (Gen. 17:1—8) and Jacob is called Israel (Gen. 32:22—32). The reference to the rock may also refer to Isaiah 51:1—2, where Abraham is thus called, as is Peter.”⁷⁶

According to St. Jerome, one of the leading Fathers of the early Church, the Gospel of Matthew was the first Gospel, but it was not written in Greek like the other three, but “in Hebrew,” that is “in Judea.”⁷⁷

Regarding the word “Church,” biblical theologians confirm the fact that the Gospel of Matthew “is the only Gospel in which the word *Ecclesia* / Ἐκκλησία, ‘Church’ appears” (Mt. 16—18), and that “the contemporary exegesis puts this Gospel in the interval between 80 and 90 AD”⁷⁸; however, according to the statement of some church fathers and writers, such as Clement of Alexandria, St. Irenaeus of Lugdunum, Eusebius of Caesarea, Epiphanius of Salamis, etc., “the Gospel must have been written earlier. That is why — the biblical theologian Wilhelm Tauwinkl stated — some believe that the text was written at the time when Apostle Matthew left Palestine on a mission (therefore, according to tradition, between 41 and 48 AD). According to St. Irenaeus (130—202), Matthew would have

⁷⁴ Ibidem, p. 50.

⁷⁵ W. TAUWINKL: “Evanghelia după Matei” [Gospel of Matthew]. In: *Biblia sacra vulgata...*, p. 126.

⁷⁶ Ibidem, p. 126.

⁷⁷ ST. JEROME: “‘Praefatio’ la Evanghelia Sf. Matei” [“Praefatio” to the Gospel of St. Matthew], after: *Biblia sacra vulgata...*, pp. 20—21.

⁷⁸ W. TAUWINKL: “Evanghelia după Matei...” p. 53.

written at the time when Apostles Peter and Paul were preaching in Rome (therefore, around the year 61).⁷⁹

Nevertheless, from what has been stated, there is only one thing we can be sure of, namely that in the second half of the first century of the Christian era — the era established by the Proto-Romanian Dionysius Exiguus⁸⁰ — those who affirmed their faith in Christ were aware that they could not call themselves Christians if they did not affirm their allegiance to the faith received by the Apostles from the Founder of the Church, and which — concisely — had been uttered on their behalf by their Coryphaeus, that is, the Holy Apostle Peter, who confessed his faith in “Christ the Son of the living God” (Mt. 16:16).

As today's Catholic theologians tell us, the text of the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 16, verse 18 “is one of the most controversial verses of the Scripture, for which there is a very rich literature. In Catholic theology, this verse, together with John 21:15—17, are considered the biblical basis of the teaching that Christ founded the Church on the ‘rock of Apostle Peter’, who was the first head of the Church, and that the popes are Peter's successors throughout the ages. Due to the fact that here Simon gets another name — Peter — the popes also choose another name when they are elected to office.”⁸¹

We wanted to provide these brief ecclesiological clarifications in order to also highlight the fact that Pope John Paul II promoted the Christian unity cause primarily in his capacity as bishop of the Church of Rome, a Church with a double apostolicity, as it was founded by the apostles' leaders, that is, Saint Peter and Paul. The former witnessed and confirmed — inspired by the Holy Spirit — the divinity of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the latter received the unique theophany on the road to Damascus. In fact, it is well known that both Apostles died a martyr's death in the city of Rome, which enabled the Episcopal See of Rome to claim a double apostolicity, to which the Roman Pontiff also made express reference in his encyclical *Ut unum sint*.

Among other things, Pope John Paul II also wanted to point out the fact that “the Gospel of Matthew gives a clear outline of the pastoral mission of Peter in the Church”⁸² and that “the weakness of Peter and of

⁷⁹ Ibidem, p. 53.

⁸⁰ N.V. DURĂ: “Un daco-roman, Dionisie Exiguul, părintele dreptului bisericesc apusean” (A daco-Roman, Dionysius Exiguus, the father of Western church law). *Studii Teologice* 5—6 (1991), pp. 84—90; IDEM: “Denis Exiguus (Le Petit) (465—545). Précisions et correctifs concernant sa vie et son oeuvre.” *Revista Española de Derecho Canonico* L (1993), pp. 279—290.

⁸¹ W. TAUWINKL: “Evangelia după Matei...,” p. 126, n. 18.

⁸² IOANNES PAULUS PP. II: *Ut unum sint...*, III, 91.

Paul clearly shows that the Church is founded upon the infinite power of grace.”⁸³ Hence, His Holiness’s conclusion that, “this whole lesson of the Gospel must be constantly read anew, so that the exercise of the Petrine ministry may lose nothing of its authenticity and transparency.”⁸⁴

The encyclical *Ut unum sint* shows that the contribution of the Second Vatican Council regarding the ecumenical commitment of the Catholic Church was strongly emphasised by Pope John Paul II. Moreover, the Supreme Pontiff made it clear that he carried out all his pastoral and canonical activity in the spirit of the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council, according to which “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.”⁸⁵

As regards Pope John Paul II’s contribution to promoting the process of restoring Christian unity, one can see that it was expressed and manifested both in his reaffirmation of the provisions of principle stated by the Second Vatican Council on the reconciliation of the Christians and the restoration of Christian unity, and in his pastoral-canonical activity, which materialized in his total commitment to the common effort of the Catholic Church and of the entire Christianity regarding the Christian unity cause.

In order to illustrate this ecclesiological reality, we will choose a few statements from the text of the encyclical *Ut unum sint*, in which the Supreme Pontiff stated the following:

1. That he renewed the Second Vatican Council’s urgent appeal for the reconciliation of all Christians, namely the members of Churches and ecclesial communities, so as to walk together on “the path of the ecumenical venture,”⁸⁶ on which the Catholic Church was also enlisted by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council.

It is also well known that it is precisely by promoting and supporting this process of Christian reconciliation — which is, in fact, specific to the ecumenical Church in the first millennium — that the Church has made a real contribution both to the building and shaping of Europe and to the affirmation of the cultural and spiritual unity of the states on our continent.⁸⁷

⁸³ Ibidem, III, 91.

⁸⁴ Ibidem, III, 93.

⁸⁵ Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio...*, 1.

⁸⁶ IOANNES PAULUS PP. II: *Ut unum sint...*, 3.

⁸⁷ N.V. DURĂ: “Statele Uniunii Europene și cultele religioase” [European Union countries and religious denominations]. *Ortodoxia* I, 2, 2009, pp. 49–72; IDEM: “The ‘Scythian Monks’ (Daco-Roman) and their Contribution to the European Christian Humanist Culture.” In: *Dialogue of Civilizations*. Ed. D. MUSKHELISHVILI. Nova Science Publishers, New York 2010, pp. 33–42.

2. According to Pope John Paul II, the Catholic Church “seeks nothing for herself but the freedom to proclaim the Gospel. Indeed, its authority is exercised in the service of truth and charity,”⁸⁸ hence his confession that — through his Encyclical — he intended to promote “every suitable initiative aimed at making the witness of the entire Catholic community understood in its full purity and consistency.”⁸⁹

As for the freedom to preach the Gospel in a world of globalisation, the Holy Father's statement was, clearly, also a demand on behalf of all Christians to be able to enjoy the “right to preach the Gospel to all ‘peoples.’”⁹⁰ Obviously, this right implies first of all the recognition and legal protection of the right to freedom of religion,⁹¹ which continues to be supported these days.

3. In his encyclical, the Holy Father tells us that the Church must ask “the Lord to increase the unity of all Christians until they reach full communion,”⁹² and that “the present Encyclical Letter is meant as a contribution to this most noble goal [...] (and) it seeks to encourage the efforts of all who work for the cause of unity.”⁹³

4. In Pope John Paul II's opinion, “the unity of all divided humanity is the will of God,”⁹⁴ since “on the eve of his sacrifice on the Cross, Jesus himself prayed to the Father for his disciples and for all those who believe in him, that they might be one, a living communion.”⁹⁵

5. The fact that the unity of Christians must be achieved in the spirit of the doctrine of the Apostles and must culminate in the Eucharistic

⁸⁸ IOANNES PAULUS PP. II: *Ut unum sint...*, 3.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, 3.

⁹⁰ C. MITITELU: “The ‘Globalization Era’ and the Right of the Church to Preach the Gospel to All Peoples. Canonical-Juridical Considerations and Assessments.” *Ecumeny and Law* 5 (2017), p. 138.

⁹¹ N.V. DURĂ, C. MITITELU: “The Right to Freedom of Religion in the Jurisprudence of the European Court.” *Journal of Danubius Studies and Research* 1 (2014), pp. 141—152; N.V. DURĂ: “The right to freedom of religion.” *Annales Canonici* 10 (2014), pp. 27—40; IDEM: “The Right to Religion: Some Consideration of the Principal International and European Juridical Instruments.” In: *Religion and Equality. Law in Conflict*. Eds. W.C. DURHAM JR., D. THAYER. Routledge, UK 2016, pp. 15—24; N.V. DURĂ: “The Right to the ‘Freedom of Conscience’, Legal Basis for the Educational and Missionary Activity of Religious Denominations.” *Ecumeny and Law* 5 (2017), pp. 147—170; IDEM: “About the Freedom of Religion and the Laicity. Some Considerations on the Juridical and Philosophical Doctrine.” *Bulletin of the Georgian National Academy of Sciences* 4 (2019), pp. 156—164.

⁹² IOANNES PAULUS PP. II: *Ut unum sint...*, 3.

⁹³ *Ibidem*, 3.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, I, 6.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*.

communion is expressly confirmed by Pope John Paul II in his encyclicals, in which he attests to the fact that he followed closely the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, which, among other things, also made express reference to the “universality of the one people of God,”⁹⁶ since “all men are called to belong to the new people of God. Wherefore this people, while remaining one and only one, is to be spread throughout the whole world and must exist in all ages, so that the decree of God’s will may be fulfilled. In the beginning God made human nature one and decreed that all His children, scattered as they were, would finally be gathered together as one. It was for this purpose that God sent His Son, whom He appointed [...] the head of the new and universal people of the sons of God. For this too God sent the Spirit of His Son as Lord and Life-giver. He it is who brings together the whole Church and each and every one of those who believe, and who is the well-spring of their unity in the teaching of the apostles and in fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers.”⁹⁷

This teaching of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council can also be found in the Encyclicals of Pope John Paul II. For example, from the text of his encyclical *Slavorum Apostoli* we note that the restoration of Christian unity — which was his life’s creed — can only be achieved in the context of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, that is “a traditional and at the same time extremely up-to-date vision of the catholicity of the Church.”⁹⁸

The Holy Father also expressed himself in the same terms in the encyclical *Ut unum sint*, in which he also made some additions and clarifications. For example, Pope John Paul II stated, among other things, that “this unity bestowed by the Holy Spirit 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, the sacraments and hierarchical communion.”⁹⁹

6. Christ’s prayer that “they all may be one” (John 17:21) must be understood in the sense of unity and communion in His Church.

⁹⁶ *Concile oecuménique Vatican II. Constitutions, décrets, déclarations, messages.* Du Centurion, Paris 1967, p. 33.

⁹⁷ *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church “Lumen gentium”, solemnly promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI (21.11.1964)*, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html [accessed 4.02.2022], 2, 13.

⁹⁸ JOHN PAUL II: *Slavorum Apostoli*, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_19850602_slavorum-apostoli.html [accessed 1.05.2022], 5, 17.

⁹⁹ IOANNES PAULUS PP. II: *Ut unum sint...*, I, 9.

Indeed, in this regard, Pope John Paul II stated that “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.*”¹⁰⁰

7. Ecumenical unity, an indispensable tool for the world to return to the Gospel.

According to the testimony left by Pope John Paul II, “taking part in this movement, which is called ecumenical, are those who invoke the Triune God and confess Jesus as Lord and Saviour. They join in not merely as individuals but also as members of the corporate groups in which they have heard the Gospel, and which each regards as his Church and, indeed, God’s. And yet almost everyone, though in different ways, longs that there may be one visible Church of God, a Church truly universal and sent forth to the whole world that the world may be converted to the Gospel.”¹⁰¹

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council also expressed themselves in this sense when they declared that any “division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages the holy cause of preaching the Gospel to every creature.”¹⁰²

8. Ecumenism in the conception of Pope John Paul II.

The decree on ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio* stated that “the term ‘ecumenical movement’ indicates the initiatives and activities planned and undertaken, according to the various needs of the Church and as opportunities offer, to promote Christian unity.”¹⁰³

However, according to the perception and definition of Pope John Paul II, ecumenism is not “only an internal question of the Christian Communities. It is a matter of the love which God has in Jesus Christ for all humanity.”¹⁰⁴

The same Supreme Pontiff wrote: “Ecumenism implies that the Christian communities should help one another so that there may be truly present in them the full content and all the requirements of ‘the heritage handed down by the Apostles’. Without this, full communion will never be possible. This mutual help in the search for truth is a sublime form of evangelical charity.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem, I, 9.

¹⁰¹ Ibidem, I, 7.

¹⁰² Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio...*, 1.

¹⁰³ Ibidem, I, 4.

¹⁰⁴ IOANNES PAULUS PP. II: *Ut unum sint...*, III, 99.

¹⁰⁵ Ibidem, III, 78.

Finally, His Holiness stated that “in the ecumenical movement, it is not only the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches which hold to this demanding concept of the unity willed by God. The orientation towards such unity is also expressed by others.”¹⁰⁶

9. The ecumenical dialogue, an indispensable tool for achieving Christian unity and the common good of human society.

Among other things, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council also pointed out the need for an ecumenical dialogue “between competent experts from different Churches and Communities,”¹⁰⁷ with the mission to restore the unity of the Church and to cooperate “for the common good of humanity.”¹⁰⁸

In his commentary on this text, Pope John Paul II added that “in the Council’s thinking, ecumenical dialogue is marked by a common quest for truth, particularly concerning the Church.”¹⁰⁹ This common search has been in fact the driving force behind the entire pontifical activity of Pope John Paul II.

In lieu of conclusions

Throughout the encyclical *Ut unum sint*, Pope John Paul II wished first of all to reaffirm the provisions of principle stated in the text of the decisions and declarations of the Second Vatican Council on the commitment of the Catholic Church to the ecumenical movement, orchestrated and supported by the Ecumenical Council of Churches, and to highlight the imperative need to engage the Christian world in the efforts towards the reconciliation of the Christians in order to restore their unity.

The fact that this was the obvious reality which guided His Holiness in his pontifical activity is confirmed also by the fact that the Supreme Pontiff often reproduced some texts from the documents of the Second Vatican Council, such as *Lumen gentium* and *Unitatis redintegratio*, that proves the fact that in his ecumenical approach Pope John Paul II followed with devotion and faithfulness the path handed down by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council.

¹⁰⁶ Ibidem, III, 78.

¹⁰⁷ Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio...*, I, 4.

¹⁰⁸ Ibidem, I, 4.

¹⁰⁹ IOANNES PAULUS PP. II: *Ut unum sint...*, I, 33.

The contribution of His Holiness to the promotion and affirmation of the Christian unity cause was also confirmed by the way in which the Supreme Pontiff was able to capitalise the fundamental principles of the doctrine of this Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church, hence his full commitment to the achievement of Christian unity.

Last but not least, it should be known and noted that Pope John Paul II was also the one who initiated not only a theological dialogue between the Catholics and the Orthodox, but also between the Catholic Church and the Oriental (Non-Chalcedonian) Churches, between the Catholics and the Anglicans, between the Catholics and the Protestants, etc., since it was in the theological dialogue between the different Churches and Christian communities that His Holiness found one of the sure ways that could lead to the restoration of Christian unity. And, it is known, from this noble goal Pope John Paul II made the creed of the pastoral and canonical activity of his pontificate, which remains in fact, an outstanding example for the Catholic Christians of today and tomorrow.

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Encyclique *Ut unum sint* de Jean-Paul II et sa glorieuse contribution dans l'œuvre de l'unité chrétienne

Résumé

Une étude attentive du texte de l'encyclique *Ut unum sint* de Jean-Paul II a permis de constater tout d'abord que Sa Sainteté connaissait bien la doctrine ecclésiologique du Concile Vatican II, dans laquelle il a joué un rôle actif, notamment en rédi-

geant quelques documents du Conseil, tels que le décret sur l'œcuménisme *Unitatis redintegration*.

Ensuite, on peut noter que dans sa démarche œcuménique, le pape Jean-Paul II a prôné à juste titre la participation de l'Église catholique aux travaux du Conseil œcuménique des Églises et la restauration de l'unité des chrétiens, d'où son engagement œcuménique total dans le dialogue œcuménique avec toutes les Églises, en particulier avec les Églises catholiques orientales, qu'il appelait de manière suggestive « Églises sœurs ». En effet, tant son activité pastorale et pratique d'engagement œcuménique que ses encycliques confirment abondamment que le Souverain-Pontife a effectivement apporté une contribution louable à la cause de l'unité des chrétiens, voulue par le Fondateur de l'Église lui-même (cf. Jn 17, 21), et qui doit rester un exemple pour les chrétiens d'aujourd'hui et de demain.

Mots-clés: unité chrétienne, unité œcuménique, Vatican II, Églises chrétiennes

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Enciclica di Giovanni Paolo II *Ut unum sint* e il suo glorioso contributo all'opera dell'unità dei cristiani

Sommario

Un attento studio del testo dell'enciclica *Ut unum sint* di Giovanni Paolo II ha permesso di constatare anzitutto che Sua Santità conosceva bene la dottrina ecclesiologicala del Concilio Vaticano II, nel quale aveva un ruolo attivo, anche redigendo alcuni Documenti conciliari, come il decreto sull'ecumenismo *Unitatis redintegration*. Si può poi notare che nel suo approccio ecumenico, Papa Giovanni Paolo II ha giustamente sostenuto la partecipazione della Chiesa cattolica ai lavori del Consiglio ecumenico delle Chiese e al ripristino dell'unità dei cristiani, ne derivava il suo pieno impegno ecumenico per il dialogo ecumenico con tutte le Chiese, in particolare con le Chiese orientali, da lui suggestivamente chiamate "Chiese sorelle". Infatti, sia la sua attività pastorale-pratica di impegno ecumenico sia le sue encicliche confermano abbondantemente che il Sommo Pontefice ha davvero offerto un encomiabile contributo alla questione dell'unità dei cristiani, voluta dallo stesso Fondatore della Chiesa (cfr. Gv 17,21) e che deve rimanere un esempio per i cristiani di oggi e di domani.

Parole chiave: unità dei cristiani, unità ecumenica, Concilio Vaticano II, Chiese cristiane