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The Requirements for an Ecumenical Dialogue according to Pope John Paul II's Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint*

Abstract: In the Christian theological language, the term “ecumenism” was put in circulation by the Ecumenical Movement initiated by the Christians after the First World War. But, in the language of the Catholic Church, the term “ecumenism,” used with the meaning of the “ecumenical movement,” was introduced by the renowned theologian Yves Congar in 1937. And, then, it was taken over by the Second Vatican Council for the text of the decree on ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*.

The Roman Catholic Church joined the Ecumenical Movement in 1961, when its delegates were presents at the Session — held in New Delhi — of the Ecumenical Council. Among other things, from the text of the Encyclical *Ut unum sint* published by Pope John Paul II in the year 1995, we could notice that His Holiness asserted that an ecumenical dialogue — that remains in fact one of the main instruments for the reestablishment of the ecumenical unity — has to fulfill the requirements stipulated by the Second Vatican Council, adopted however to the ecumenical realities of the present times.

Keywords: ecumenical dialogue, the Second Vatican Council, the Christian unity

Introduction

In the decree on ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*, it was stated that “the restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal

concerns of the Second Vatican Council.”¹ Moreover, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council declared that their “powers” and “capacities” (UR III, 24) are limited, and therefore they urged all Christians to pray to our Saviour Jesus Christ for the accomplishment of this goal, that is, for “the reconciling of all Christians in the unity of the one and only Church of Christ.”² So, the prayer was considered to be one of the main requirements for an ecumenical dialogue.

Referring to the Second Vatican Council’s “ecumenical doctrine and practice”³ regarding ecumenical dialogue, Pope John Paul II stated — in his Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, published on 25 May 1995 — that “dialogue has not only been undertaken; it has become an outright necessity, one of the Church’s priorities,”⁴ as “the division” of Christians is indeed “a stumbling block to the world, and inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the Good News to every creature.”⁵ Hence, his rightful observation that only by engaging Christians of different Churches or Christian communities in an ecumenical dialogue can we find ourselves on the path “by a common quest for truth, [...] concerning the Church,”⁶ since, in fact, only “truth forms consciences and directs efforts to promote unity.”⁷

In the words of Pope John Paul II, “public prayer” and “private prayer” are “the soul of the whole ecumenical movement,”⁸ that is, of that “spiritual ecumenism”⁹ to which the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council also expressly referred. That “the prayer” is “the ‘soul’ of ecumenical renewal and of the yearning for unity”¹⁰ is what prompted Pope John Paul II when he stated that “there is a close relationship between prayer and dialogue,”¹¹ and that “dialogue depends on prayer,”¹² hence

¹ “Décret sur l’œcuménisme *Unitatis redintegratio*.” In: *Concile oecuménique Vatican II. Constitutions, décrets, déclarations, messages*. Textes français et latin. Du Centurion, Paris 1967, p. 605.

² Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*, III, 24. https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html [accessed 19.02.2022].

³ IOANNES PAULUS PP. II: *Ut unum sint*, *On commitment to Ecumenism*, I, 28. https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html [accessed 8.03.2022].

⁴ *Ibidem*, I, 31.

⁵ *Ibidem*, I, 6 (cf. Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*..., 1).

⁶ *Ibidem*, I, 33.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ *Ibidem*, I, 21.

⁹ Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*..., II, 8.

¹⁰ IOANNES PAULUS PP. II: *Ut unum sint*..., I, 28.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, I, 33.

¹² *Ibidem*.

the intrinsic relationship between the “rule of faith” and the “prayer for Christian unity.”¹³

In order to fulfill the divine commandment, that is, “that we may all be One” (*Ut unum sint*), we indeed need the help of our Lord Jesus Christ, but also the prayers addressed to the Mother of God,¹⁴ in whom Catholic theologians see the “First Adorer of the Incarnate Word,”¹⁵ and according to the dogmatic tradition of the Ecumenical Church of the first millennium Saint Virgin Mary is a compassionate helper and an ardent intercessor before God. In fact, the Church has always prayed “Mary ever Virgin, whom the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus solemnly proclaimed to be the holy Mother of God.”¹⁶

As for the ecumenical dialogue, Pope John Paul II made it clear that it should not be understood as any inter-human dialogue, which is usually limited to “an exchange of ideas,”¹⁷ it — according to the Holy Father’s statement — should rather be understood that, “when undertaking dialogue, each side must presuppose in the other a desire for reconciliation, for unity in truth. For this to happen, any display of mutual opposition must disappear. Only thus will dialogue help to overcome division and lead us closer to unity.”¹⁸

The very same Synodal Decree of the Second Vatican Council, *Unitatis redintegratio*, urged the members of the Catholic Church to collaborate with the “separated brethren,”¹⁹ but to ask of them only “what is necessary” (Acts 15, 23), since in this regard also *haec Sacrosancta Synodus* (this Holy Synod), that is, the Second Vatican Council, “solemnly repeats the declaration of previous Councils and Roman Pontiffs.”²⁰

¹³ N.V. DURĂ: “‘Regula de credință’ și rugăciunea pentru unitatea creștină. O evaluare ecleziologică-canonică” (“The Rule of Faith” and the Prayer for Christian Unity. An ecclesiological-canonical evaluation). *Ortodoxia* 3—4 (2004), pp. 7—25.

¹⁴ C. MITITELU: “The Virgin Mary in the ‘Baptismal Symbols’ of the Pre-Nicene Church.” In: *The Tradition of the Adoration of the Theotokos in the Orthodox Church*. Ed. D. MUSKHELISHVILI. Nova Science Publishers, New York 2020, pp. 7—18; N.V. DURĂ: “The Mariology of the Pre-Nicene Church. The Testimonies of Some Fathers and Theologians in the Greek and Latin Languages.” In: *The Tradition of the Adoration of the Theotokos...*, pp. 55—65.

¹⁵ I. REDIU: “Sfânta Fecioară Maria-icoană de adoratoare” (The Saint Virgin Mary-icon of Adorers). In: *Ca toți să fim una. Studii și articole în onoarea PS Pentru Gherghel cu ocazia aniversării a 20 de ani de episcopat și 70 de ani de viață*. Coord. A. PERCĂ. Sapienția, Iași 2010, p. 129.

¹⁶ Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio...*, III, I, 15.

¹⁷ IOANNES PAULUS PP. II: *Ut unum sint...*, I, 28.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, I, 29.

¹⁹ Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio...*, III, II, 24.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, III, 18.

In the text of this “Decree on Ecumenism” (*De Oecumenismo*), we also find some ecclesiological-canonical considerations and assessments on the status quo of the different Churches and Christian communities with which the Catholic Church could enter into a coordinated ecumenical action *in solidum*.²¹ The Second Vatican Council, however, paid particular attention to the relations between the Eastern Churches and the Catholic Church, with the urgent plea for its members (the clergy and the faithful) to take into account both their specific canonical status and the richness of their theological patrimony (dogmatic, liturgical and canonical) (cf. *Lumen gentium* and *Unitatis redintegratio*),²² since this is a common heritage of the entire ecumenical Christianity, and it constitutes the main documentary source for the theologians of the *pars Orientis* and *pars Occidentis* Churches in their ecumenical theological dialogue, the final aim of which must lead to the restoration of Christian unity.²³

As for Pope John Paul II, he proved his commitment to the promotion of the Ecumenical Movement both through his numerous encyclicals, such as the *Ut unum sint*, and through the diverse and wide-ranging themes tackled in their texts, which has led to him being perceived as a *Magister Ecclesiae* also with regard to the ecumenical dialogue promoted through the Documents of the Second Vatican Council, of which an outstanding architect and exponent His Holiness was.²⁴

These remarkable and defining merits of the pastoral-canonical activity of Pope John Paul II are also amply confirmed in his Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, in the text of which — among other things — he also highlighted the urgent need for an active and effective engagement of the Catholic Church in the ecumenical process of restoring Christian unity in full compliance with the doctrine formulated by the Second Vatican Council. In fact, from a careful examination of the Encyclical *Ut unum sint* it is

²¹ “Décret sur l’œcuménisme *Unitatis redintegratio...*,” p. 623.

²² Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, solemnly promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI, on November 21, 1964, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html, 69 [accessed 23.04.2022]; Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio...*, III, I, 14 and 17.

²³ N.V. DURĂ: “Considerații asupra dialogurilor teologice ale Bisericii Ortodoxe cu Bisericile: Romano-Catolică, Anglicană, Veche-Catolică, Orientală (necalcedoniană) și Luterană” (Considerations on the theological dialogues of the Orthodox Church with the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Old Catholic, Oriental (non-Chalcedonian) and Lutheran Churches). *Ortodoxia* 3 (1985), pp. 390—449.

²⁴ As bishop, Archbishop of Kraków and Cardinal of Poland, Karol Józef Wojtyła participated in the works of the Second Vatican Council. For example, His Holiness was a member of the Commission for the drafting of the Constitution *Gaudium et spes* (1965) and a member of the Commission for the drafting of the Declaration *Dignitatis humanae* (1965).

easy to see that Pope John Paul II wished and managed to highlight and to reaffirm the teaching formulated by the Second Vatican Council also with regard to ecumenism, perceived and expressed as a common effort to restore Christian unity, this also being one of the main goals of the Council (cf. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *De Sacra liturgia*).²⁵

1. The principles of the Catholic Church on ecumenism and the affirmation and capitalisation of their content in the Encyclical *Ut unum sint*

The principles of the Catholic Church on ecumenism, stated in particular in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* and in the *Unitatis redintegratio* Decree, drawn up and published by the Second Vatican Council, were laboriously affirmed and explained — in their content — by Pope John Paul II in his *Ut unum sint* Encyclical, which the author himself tells us is represented by being “essential pastoral in character.”²⁶

Among other things, the following basic principles of ecumenism can be drawn from the text of the *Unitatis redintegratio* Decree, namely:

1. “The principle of the Church’s unity”²⁷ is our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. John 17:21), and the model for this unity is the communion and the unity of the persons of the Holy Trinity, hence the obligation and necessity to affirm and preserve the unity of the Church.

2. “The children” born in the communities which are deprived of “full communion with the Catholic Church [...], and who grow up believing in Christ cannot be accused of the sin involved in the separation, and the Catholic Church embraces upon them as brothers.”²⁸ And, even though it is only in an “imperfect communion” with them, the Catholic Church still accepts “them as brothers.”²⁹

3. All Catholic Christians must participate in the ecumenical work in order to promote Christian unity. Through this conciliar document

²⁵ Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum concilium* solemnly promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on December 4, 1963, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html, I [accessed 3.05.2022].

²⁶ IOANNES PAULUS PP. II: *Ut unum sint*..., 3.

²⁷ Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*..., I, 2.

²⁸ Ibidem, I, 3.

²⁹ Ibidem.

on ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council really urged “all the Catholic faithful to recognize the signs of the times and to take an active and intelligent part in the work of ecumenism.”³⁰

4. In the Catholic Church, both the clergy and the Christians — engaged in this ecumenical work — must enjoy appropriate freedom. Indeed, according to the text of *Unitatis redintegratio*, the members of the Catholic Church engaged in the “Ecumenical Movement” must “enjoy a proper freedom, in their various forms of spiritual life and discipline, in their different liturgical rites, and even in their theological elaborations of revealed truth.”³¹ Certainly, by guaranteeing the freedom, as an expression of a provision of principle of the Second Vatican Council, the person’s right to freedom, which today has European constitutional value,³² has been thus considered as one of the basic principle of ecumenism.

5. The Roman Catholic ecclesiological principle that the unity of the ecumenical Church “subsists in the Catholic Church,”³³ hence the various intense reactions from some Protestants and some Orthodox after the Second Vatican Council.

6. Mutual fraternal respect was stated by the Second Vatican Council as a basic principle of ecumenical dialogue, which must, however, also take into account the fact that doctrinal, disciplinary and organisational differences within the Church still constitute “obstacles, sometimes serious ones, to full ecclesiastical communion.”³⁴ However, these obstacles — no matter how many and how serious they may be — can be overcome through a sincere and constructive ecumenical dialogue, which the Second Vatican Council also perceived and defined as the only real possibility of overcoming this divide. This explains why the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council recognised that the actions and initiatives promoted and organised in favour of Christians unity by the “Ecumenical Movement,” including, in particular, the “theological dialogue,” have an effective

³⁰ Ibidem, I, 4.

³¹ Ibidem.

³² C. MITITELU: “The European Convention on Human Rights.” In: *10th Edition of International Conference The European Integration — Realities and Perspectives*. Danubius University Press, Galati 2015, pp. 243—252; C. MITITELU: “Provisions of Principle with European Constitutional Value on the ‘Person’s’ Right to Freedom and Security.” *Journal of Danubius Studies and Research* 2 (2016), pp. 158—165; 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), pp. 127—146; 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.

³³ Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio...*, I, 4.

³⁴ Ibidem, I, 3.

tive role to play in overcoming the obstacles which prevent the achievement of a “perfect ecclesiastical communion (*perfectam communionem ecclesiasticam*),”³⁵ which materialises through the participation of all Christians “in a common celebration of the Eucharist, [...] into the one and only Church in that unity which Christ bestowed on His Church from the beginning.”³⁶

7. According to the provisions of the Synodal Document *Unitatis red-integratio*, drawn up by the Second Vatican Council, “unity” is an attribute inherent only to the Catholic Church. Indeed, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council stated: “we believe that this unity subsists in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose.”³⁷ However, as it is well known, the Orthodox also struggles for a restoration of ecclesial unity in the spirit of the Scripture and of the unity of the Ecumenical Church of the first millennium, hence their conception that the restoration of the unity of the Church presupposes a kind of *restitutio in integrum*, that is, a restoration of the truth in the spirit of the teaching of the Sacred Scripture and of the Sacred Tradition, expressed by the Fathers of the Church and the Ecumenical Synods of the first millennium.

8. An ecumenical theological dialogue,³⁸ including between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church,³⁹ must carry out its work according to the golden rule of the authentic ecumenical Theology, that is, *in necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus caritas*, that is, “unity in necessary things, freedom in doubtful things, love in all things,”⁴⁰ so that the spirit of Christ’s love may prevail in our ecumenical work. Obviously, it should not be ignored or concealed that achieving unity through *communio in sacris*⁴¹ (eucharistic communion) — which is also possible and desirable for our Churches, that is, the Catholic Church and the Ortho-

³⁵ Ibidem, I, 4.

³⁶ Ibidem.

³⁷ Ibidem.

³⁸ N.V. DURĂ: “Documentul de la Lima (B.E.M.) și evaluarea sa teologică” (The Lima Document (B.E.M.) and its theological evaluation). *Mitropolia Moldovei și Sucevei* 1—2 (1986), pp. 46—58.

³⁹ See N.V. DURĂ: “Relațiile ecumenice actuale dintre Biserica Ortodoxă și Biserica Romano-Catolică și bazele lor ecleziologice” (The current ecumenical relations between the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church and their ecclesiological basis). *Glasul Bisericii* 9—12 (1983), pp. 625—633.

⁴⁰ N.V. DURĂ: “Dialogul teologic interreligios și regula sa de aur: *Libertas et in omnia Caritas*” (The interreligious theological dialogue and its golden rule: *Libertas et in omnia Caritas*). *Revista de Teologie Sfântul Apostol Andrei* 1 (2007), pp. 34—46.

⁴¹ N.V. DURĂ: “Intercomuniune sau comuniune sacramentală? Identitatea eclezială și unitatea în credință” (Intercommunion or sacramental communion? Ecclesial identity and unity in faith). *Ortodoxia* 4 (1988), pp. 15—58.

dox Church — needs above all the restoration of their canonical unity, which, in fact, remains a major obstacle to achieving the full communion between the two Churches, as confirmed by the results of the Balamant declaration.

9. The principle of practicing ecumenism. According to the statement in the *Unitatis redintegratio* Decree, the Second Vatican Council was not content merely to urge “the participation by the Catholic faithful in ecumenical work,”⁴² rather it also laid down the milestones by which “the whole Church, faithful and shepherds alike”⁴³ must be concretely involved in “the practice of ecumenism.” This ecumenical commitment of the Catholic Church would be expressed “both in daily life” and in “theological and historical research,”⁴⁴ and it would manifest in the “renewal of the Church,”⁴⁵ through a “change of heart,”⁴⁶ and “prayers in common.”⁴⁷ And both of them “prescribed prayers for unity,”⁴⁸ for “ecumenical gatherings”⁴⁹ and a knowledge of “their history, their spiritual and liturgical life, their religious psychology and general background.”⁵⁰

10. The common heritage from the first millennium, of the Western Church and of the Eastern Church, a clear basis for restoring their relations and for the instrumentalisation of the theological dialogue in order to achieve the unity lost in the year 1054. On the basis of this ecclesiological principle, stated by the Second Vatican Council concerning the “Churches and ecclesial communities separated from the Roman Apostolic See,”⁵¹ the Synod Fathers recognized that “it must not be forgotten that from the beginning the Churches of the East have had a treasury from which the Western Church has drawn extensively — in liturgical practice, spiritual tradition, and law. Nor must we undervalue the fact that it was the ecumenical councils held in the East that defined the basic dogmas of the Christian faith.”⁵²

Aware that a theological dialogue of the Catholic Church with the Orthodox Churches of the East presupposes knowledge of the entire theological patrimony (dogmatic, canonical, and liturgical) of these venerable

⁴² Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio...*, I, 4.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, II, 5.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, II, 6.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, II, 7.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, II, 8.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, II, 9.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, III.

⁵² *Ibidem*, III, 14.

Churches, whose origins go back to the “inheritance [*haereditas*] handed down by the Apostles [*ad Apostolis*],”⁵³ the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council requested that those “who intend to devote themselves to the restoration of full communion hoped for between the Churches of the East and the Catholic Church, to give due consideration to this special feature of the origin and growth of the Eastern Churches, and to the character of the relations which obtained between them and the Roman See before separation. They must take full account of all these factors and, where this is done, it will greatly contribute to the dialogue that is looked for.”⁵⁴

This “special consideration,”⁵⁵ that is, the special relationship with the Eastern Churches, which the Second Vatican Council demanded from the representatives of the Catholic Church in their dialogue with their Orthodox brethren, is constantly reiterated in the pages of the *Ut unum sint* Encyclical, which is further proof that Pope John Paul II took into account *ad litteram* the provisions of principle laid down by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, in the works of which he was an active participant. In fact, the Holy Father was one of those who drafted the text of the Document on Ecumenism, and then, throughout his ecumenical endeavors related to the work of regaining and restoring Christian unity with the Orthodox Churches, he was one of the main architects.

The “principles” of ecumenism — stated in the *Unitatis redintegratio* Decree — are also expressly stated in the text of Pope John Paul II’s *Ut unum sint* Encyclical. It should also be pointed out, however, that some of these provisions of principle — set out by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council in the text of their conciliar documents — were not only affirmed and developed in terms of their theological content, but were also adapted by the Supreme Pontiff to the reality of his times, that is, the end of the second millennium, which made this encyclical an ecumenical document of the first order, in which His Holiness addressed his paternal and fraternal exhortation to Christians throughout the world to join in the common effort to recover and restore Christian unity, a unity expressly instituted by divine command (cf. John 17:21).

From the text of his Encyclical *Ut unum sint* we indeed see that Pope John Paul II was keen to point out that the text of the *Unitatis redintegratio* Decree must be read “in the context of the complete teaching of the Second Vatican Council,”⁵⁶ and that “in indicating the Catholic principles of ecumenism, the Decree *Unitatis redintegratio* recalls above

⁵³ Ibidem.

⁵⁴ Ibidem.

⁵⁵ Ibidem.

⁵⁶ IOANNES PAULUS PP. II: *Ut unum sint...*, I, 8.

all the teaching on the Church set forth in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*,”⁵⁷ hence his frequent references to the text of this Constitution. Indeed, in the very first chapter of the Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, suggestively titled “Catholic principles on ecumenism,” we find reaffirmed the basic ecclesiological principles stated in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Constitutio Dogmatica de Ecclesia*), published by the Second Vatican Council also on 21 November 1964 (as well as the *Unitatis redintegratio* Decree), and from the text of which we also note the statement that the spirit awakens “in all of Christ’s disciples (*Christi discipulis*)”⁵⁸ the desire and the action to unite peacefully, as Christ spoke.

The fact that this spirit of Christ, which awakens in all Christians the desire to join in the common efforts to restore Christian unity, also abundantly animated the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, is clearly demonstrated in his Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, which actually made him known and loved in the Eastern Orthodox Christian world, including in Romania, where he had the opportunity to pray with the clergy and people of the Romanian Orthodox Church during an Eucharistic Liturgy. Fortunately, the signatory of these lines was also present at that historic moment. At the end of that Eucharistic Liturgy,⁵⁹ on a Sunday, His Holiness delivered a teaching address, which did not fail to include his strong exhortation for the joining of Catholics and Orthodox in the common ecumenical work to restore Christian unity. Moreover, all those fatherly and fraternal urgings were spoken in a spirit of humility and love of people, which, in fact, characterised the Holy Father throughout his ecumenical commitment, and made him an example — by word and deed — for all Christians.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, I, 8.

⁵⁸ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*..., II, 15.

⁵⁹ N.V. DURĂ: “Povățuiri’ și ‘Învățături’, cu conținut liturgico-canonice, privind Sfânta Euharistie. Considerații eclesiologico-canonice” (“Advice” and “Teachings”, with liturgical-canonice content, on the Holy Eucharist. Ecclesiological-canonice considerations). In: *Dimensiunea penitențială și euharistică a vieții creștine*. Coord. G. PETRARU, L. PETCU. Doxologia, Iași 2014, pp. 63—109; N.V. DURĂ: “Rânduiești și norme canonice privind administrarea Sfintei Euharistii” (Canonical ordinances and norms concerning the administration of the Holy Eucharist). In: *Spovedania și Euharistia izvoare ale vieții creștine*, II. Basilica, București 2014, pp. 465—484.

2. From the “principles” of ecumenism to the “practice of ecumenism”

In Chapter II of the Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*, the Second Vatican Council explicitly stated that “there can be no ecumenism worthy of the name without a change of heart. For it is from renewal of the inner life of our minds, from self-denial and an unstinted love that desires of unity take their rise and develop in a mature way. We should therefore pray to the Holy Spirit for the grace to be genuinely self-denying, humble, gentle in the service of others, and to have an attitude of brotherly generosity towards them.”⁶⁰

In other words, according to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, the very notion of ecumenism is meaningless if we do not know the state of *μετάνοια*, that is, that feeling of remorse, regret, and repentance, which the early Church considered one of the basic principles of penitential discipline.⁶¹ This feeling of remorse and penance must, however, be accompanied not only by our personal prayer, but also by the Eucharistic prayer⁶² of the Church, so that we may be endowed with all the gifts required for the accomplishment of our ecumenical endeavor, namely self-denial, humility and the service of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

In the same Decree on Ecumenism, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council declared that it is “allowable” and “desirable that Catholics should join in prayer with their separated brethren. Such prayers in common are certainly an effective means of obtaining the grace of unity, and they are a true expression of the ties which still bind Catholics to their separated brethren.”⁶³

Therefore, according to the statement of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, the prayers in common, which were specific to the apostolic Church,⁶⁴ are not only acceptable and desirable, but they are also an

⁶⁰ Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*..., II, 7.

⁶¹ C. MITITELU: “The application of Epitimias in the See of Confession according to the ‘Canonical Custom’ and the ‘Penitential Canons.’” *Teologia Młodych* 4 (2015), pp. 10—18; C. MITITELU: “The Oikonomia and its application in the See of the Confession.” *Analecta Cracoviensia* 51 (2019), pp. 313—341.

⁶² C. MITITELU: “Rânduiești și norme canonice privind Sfânta Euharistie. Considerații de doctrină canonică” (Canonical ordinances and norms concerning the Holy Eucharist. Considerations of canonical doctrine). In: *Dimensiunea penitențială și euharistică*..., pp. 271—293.

⁶³ Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*..., II, 8.

⁶⁴ N.V. DURĂ: “Mărturii ale Tradiției liturgico-canonice apostolice privind rugăciunea” (Testimonies of the Liturgical-Canonical Apostolic Tradition on Prayer). *Studii Teologice* 7—8 (1983), pp. 481—490.

effective way of obtaining the grace of unity, and, at the same time, a clear expression of the relationships Catholics can have with their Christian brethren.

The Second Vatican Council also made it clear that, with regard to *communicatio in sacris*, that is, the communion of all Christians — regardless of their confession — from the same eucharistic Chalice/Grail, “is not to be considered as a means to be used indiscriminately for the restoration of Christian unity.”⁶⁵ Indeed, it should not be perceived or practiced at the level of a form of inter-communion,⁶⁶ as the communion from the same Eucharistic Chalice⁶⁷ can only take place when we confess the same faith, we have the same ecclesial identity and live in the same dogmatic, canonical and liturgical unity of the ecumenical Church of the first millennium.⁶⁸ Hence the exhortation of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council: “Catholics [...] need to acquire a more adequate understanding of the respective doctrines of our separated brethren, their history, their spiritual and liturgical life, their religious psychology and general background.”⁶⁹

In order to achieve this goal, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council made it clear that “meetings of the two sides — especially for discussion of theological problems — where each can deal with the other on an equal footing”⁷⁰ are indispensable. However, this ecumenical dialogue presupposes that the priests and pastors of the Christian Churches — which are engaging in such an ecumenical dialogue — are in possession of a theology “that has been carefully worked out in this way and not polemically, especially with regard to those aspects which concern the relations of separated brethren with the Catholic Church.”⁷¹ Furthermore, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council demanded that “sacred theology and other branches of knowledge, especially of a historical nature, must be taught with due regard for the ecumenical point of view, so that they may correspond more exactly with the facts.”⁷² Therefore, accord-

⁶⁵ Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio...*, II, 8.

⁶⁶ N.V. DURĂ: “Considerații canonic-eceziologice privind Documentul de la Lima (B.E.M.)” (Canonical-ecclesiological considerations on the Lima Document (B.E.M.)). *Ortodoxia* 2 (1986), pp. 119–147.

⁶⁷ C. MITITELU: “The celebrant of the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist. Rules and canonical norms of the Orthodox Church.” *Annales Canonici* 10 (2014), pp. 135–148.

⁶⁸ N.V. DURĂ, C. MITITELU: *Legislația canonică și instituțiile juridico-canonicе, europene, din primul mileniu (Canon law and canonical legal institutions in Europe in the first millennium)*. Universitară, București 2014, pp. 93–124.

⁶⁹ Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio...*, II, 9.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, II, 9.

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, II, 10.

⁷² *Ibidem*.

ing to the statement of the Second Vatican Council, both Theology and Church History must take into account the historical truth and be part of the approach to “the ecumenical point of view.” Hence, the exhortation of the Synod Fathers that “the way and method in which the Catholic faith is expressed should never become an obstacle to dialogue with our brethren; [...] the doctrine should be clearly presented in its entirety,”⁷³ since — the Synod Fathers stated — “nothing is so foreign to the spirit of ecumenism as a false irenicism.”⁷⁴

As for how to involve the Catholic theologians in the ecumenical dialogue with their “separated brethren,” the same Synod Fathers asked them “to proceed with love for the truth, with charity, and with humility.”⁷⁵ At the same time, Catholic theologians were exhorted not to ignore the fact that “in Catholic doctrine there exists a ‘hierarchy’ of truths, since they vary in their relation to the fundamental Christian faith.”⁷⁶ The very same Fathers of the Second Vatican Council declared that — in the spirit of the ecumenical teaching of the Church of the first millennium — in order to truly live in the spirit of the unity of the apostolic and ecumenical Church “all Christians must confess their faith in the triune God, one and three in the incarnate Son of God, our Redeemer and Lord.”⁷⁷ In addition to this, the Second Vatican Council recommended that the efforts to bring about the unity of the Church should be accompanied by Christians’ cooperation in terms of the social problems that humanity is facing, so as to achieve “a just evaluation of the dignity of the human person, the establishment of the blessings of peace, the application of Gospel principles to social life...”⁷⁸ In fact, only the fulfilment of these requirements could enable us to carry out a fair assessment of the human person, and of the respect for his/her dignity, and to pave “the way to Christian unity.”⁷⁹

The text of Pope John Paul II’s Encyclical *Ut unum sint* will also make it abundantly clear that the Supreme Pontiff took into account all the requirements or conditions of the Second Vatican Council, and that he reaffirmed and capitalised all the “principles” on ecumenism stated both in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* and in the Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*, in which the Catholic Church officially expressed its obvious desire to restore the unity of the ecumenical Church.

⁷³ Ibidem, II, 11.

⁷⁴ Ibidem.

⁷⁵ Ibidem.

⁷⁶ Ibidem.

⁷⁷ Ibidem, II, 12.

⁷⁸ Ibidem.

⁷⁹ Ibidem.

The noun *redintegratio/-onis* — frequently used by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council — expresses primarily a process of “renewal,” “refreshment” and, finally, “restoration”⁸⁰ of the unity of the Christian Churches. Therefore, it is not astonishing the fact that in his Encyclical *Ut unum sint* Pope John Paul II also referred to the aspects of this “renewal” process, which must first go through the stage of *conversionis interioris*,⁸¹ as the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council had in fact demanded in their Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, where express reference was indeed made to “the renewal of the inner life of our minds.”⁸²

3. Pope John Paul II’s contribution to the commitment of the Roman Catholic Church to the ecumenical process initiated by the Second Vatican Council

From the text of Pope John Paul II’s encyclicals, as well as from his entire pastoral-canonical activity, it is easy to see that His Holiness sought to convey thoroughly and faithfully the teaching of his Church, as it had been expressed and formulated by the Second Vatican Council, which in fact set the Catholic Church on the path of ecumenism. Therefore, in order to highlight the major and decisive contribution of Pope John Paul II to the affirmation and promotion of the principles laid down by the Second Vatican Council with regard to ecumenism, *volens-nolens* we must make a few references also to some texts drawn up by the Fathers of this ecumenical Council.

According to Pope John Paul II, in his Encyclical *Ut unum sint*, it was the Second Vatican Council that committed the Catholic Church to the “the path of the ecumenical venture.”⁸³ The strengthening of the effort to travel this path of ecumenical search, however, lies primarily with the Bishop of Rome, whose mission must be — the Roman Pontiff stated — “particularly directed to recalling the need for full communion among Christ’s disciples,”⁸⁴ as the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council had in fact affirmed. Indeed, the Decree *Christus Dominus* — promulgated by the

⁸⁰ G. GUȚU: *Dicționar Latin-Român (Latin-Romanian Dictionary)*. Științifică și enciclopedică, Bucharest 1983, p. 1039.

⁸¹ IOANNES PAULUS PP. II: *Ut unum sint...*, I, 15.

⁸² Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio...*, II, 7.

⁸³ IOANNES PAULUS PP. II: *Ut unum sint...*, 3.

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, 4.

Second Vatican Council on 28 October 1965 — stated that “the Roman pontiff, as the successor of Peter [...] enjoys [...], by divine institution”⁸⁵ also the status of “pastor [...] of the universal Church” (*Christus Dominus* 2).⁸⁶ In fact, it is precisely this quality of shepherd of the entire Catholic Church that also gave Pope John Paul II the opportunity to preserve “the visible bond of the communion of the particular Churches,”⁸⁷ and, *ipso facto*, their adherence to the path of ecumenism in accordance with the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council.

The role of the Bishop of Rome in the involvement of all the particular (local) Churches in the Ecumenical Movement lies, of course, primarily in his canonical status and that of his See,⁸⁸ that is, that of *successor Petri* (successor of St. Peter the Apostle) (cf. can. 330 of the Code of Canon Law),⁸⁹ hence the obligation of the local Roman Catholic Churches to always be “in communion with and under the authority of the Supreme Pontiff [*una cum Summo Pontifice et sub Eiusdem auctoritate*]” (*Christus Dominus* 3).⁹⁰ For his part, Pope John Paul II pointed out that “the Bishop of Rome is the Bishop of the Church which preserves the mark of the martyrdom of Peter and of Paul,”⁹¹ and by virtue of this double apostolicity of the See of Rome,⁹² its bishop can address the exhortation of the Holy Apostle Paul, that we be “united in mind” (2 Cor. 13:11–13), not only with the members of the Catholic Church, but also with the “brothers and sisters of the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities.”⁹³

⁸⁵ “Décret sur la charge pastorale des évêques dans l’Église Christus Dominus.” In: *Concile oecuménique Vatican II...*, p. 351.

⁸⁶ Ibidem, p. 352.

⁸⁷ *Catehismul Bisericii Catolice (The Catechism of the Catholic Church)*, no. 1558. Libreria Editrice a Arhiepiscopiei Romano-Catolice din București, Bucharest 1993, p. 339.

⁸⁸ See 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.

⁸⁹ See the Commentary on Canon 330 of the *Code of Canon Law of the Latin Church*. In: Msgr. Pio VITO PINTO: *Commento al codice di diritto canonico*. Urbaniana University Press, 1985, p. 194.

⁹⁰ “Décret sur la charge pastorale des évêques dans l’Église Christus Dominus.” In: *Concile oecuménique Vatican II...*, p. 352.

⁹¹ IOANNES PAULUS PP. II: *Ut unum sint...*, III, 90.

⁹² 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 New York, Newman Press 2006, pp. 164—184.

⁹³ IOANNES PAULUS PP. II: *Ut unum sint...*, III, 103.

In the same encyclical, *Ut unum sint*, Pope John Paul II reaffirmed that “the Catholic Church, both in her praxis and in her solemn documents, holds that the communion of the particular Churches with the Church of Rome, and of their Bishops with the Bishop of Rome, is — in God’s plan — an essential requisite of full and visible communion.”⁹⁴

It should also be noted and pointed out that Pope John Paul II has also made a genuine and meritorious contribution to the development of the theology of ecumenism in the spirit of the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council, and, more specifically, of those stated in the document *Unitatis redintegratio* (cf. Chapter II, 10), as the text of the Encyclical *Ut unum sint* abundantly demonstrates, having contributed not only to the clarification of this theology, but also to the involvement of the Catholic Church in numerous ecumenical dialogues with the approval of His Holiness and under the responsibility of the Pontifical Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity.

With regard to the engagement of the Catholic Church in this ecumenical dialogue process — including during the pontificate of Pope John Paul II — some protestant theologians noted that some statements in the documents of the Second Vatican Council are not exactly suitable for affirming and promoting the ecumenical approach of our days. For example, one of these theologians believed that the statement in the *Lumen gentium* Constitution according to which “the one Church of Christ [...] subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter”⁹⁵ has meant that the perception and the definition of the Catholic Church “as the one Church, [...] do not allow it to recognize separate Churches and communities as equivalent partners. Moreover, this point remains an obstacle to the full participation (of the Catholic Church) in the Ecumenical Council.”⁹⁶

There was also no shortage of statements by some Orthodox theologians, according to whom “Orthodoxy does not accept the universal jurisdiction of the Pope, nor the idea of infallibility, as defined by the First Vatican Council.”⁹⁷ However, the same theologians welcomed the fact that the *Ut unum sint* Encyclical stated that “it is time to study how the universal presidency should be exercised within the Church, which the Faith and Order Commission of the Ecumenical Council of Churches

⁹⁴ Ibidem, III, 97.

⁹⁵ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium...*, I, 8.

⁹⁶ 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.

⁹⁷ N. LOSSKY: “Orthodoxie.” In: *Dictionnaire critique de théologie...*, p. 831.

(the Catholic Church is an equal member in this commission) has already begun to do, while remaining a member of the C.O.E.”⁹⁸

But, let us look deeper and go back to the testimonies of the history of the Church regarding the reasons that led to these ecclesial approaches. According to some Protestant theologians, “ecclesial political reasons and theological issues (Filioque, Trinity) led to the great Schism of 1054 between the East and the West.”⁹⁹ As for the “efforts to restore the unity of the Church at the Councils of Lyon (1274) and Florence (1438—1439),”¹⁰⁰ the same theologians consider that they failed precisely because of the issue of the “papal primacy,”¹⁰¹ which was and still is “the bone of contention between the Roman Catholics and the Orthodox,”¹⁰² as expressed in 1705 by the Patriarch Dositheus of Jerusalem¹⁰³ (1641—1707) in his book titled “The Tome of Reconciliation” (Τόμος καταλλαγής), printed in 1692 in the printing press of Cetățuia Monastery (Iași) by the printer Anthim the Iberian (Ivireanul),¹⁰⁴ future Archbishop of Wallachia (1708—1716).

However, the fact that “for more than a millennium the Catholics and the Orthodox formed a single Church,”¹⁰⁵ and that, even today, “the two Churches have many things in common, as the current Ecumenical Movement allows us to see,”¹⁰⁶ should not be ignored or concealed. In fact, not only the Ecumenical Movement, but also, we might add, both the Second Vatican Council, through its Documents (*Lumen gentium* and *Unitatis redintegratio*), and Pope John Paul II, through his Encyclicals.

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council also deserve credit for having initiated the process of making the Western Christian world become

⁹⁸ Ibidem, p. 831.

⁹⁹ A. BIRMELÉ: “Unité de l’Église...,” p. 1193.

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem, p. 1193.

¹⁰¹ Ibidem.

¹⁰² DOSITHEUS NOTARAS, ORTHODOX PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM: *The tome of reconciliation [Tomul împăcării]* (in Greek). Mănăstirii Cetățuia (Iași), 1692 (see E. G. FARRUGIA S.J.: *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Christian East [Dicționarul enciclopedic al Răsăritului creștin]*. Trans. D. POPESCU et al. Galaxia, Târgu Lăpuș 2003, pp. 236 ff.).

¹⁰³ On his life and relations with Romanian Countries/Wallachia, see I. DURĂ: *Dositheus of Jerusalem and his connections with the Romanian Countries and their Church* (in Greek), Athens 1977; I. DURĂ: *Recherches sur l’histoire des Pays roumains et leur Eglise (XVIIe - XIXe s.)*. Brussels 1985, pp. 15—57.

¹⁰⁴ See N.V. DURĂ: “‘Antimoz Iverieli’ (Anthim the Iberian). New Contributions on his Life and Printing Activity.” *Bulletin of the Georgian National Academy of Sciences* 2 (2016), pp. 153—162; C. MITITELU: “The Typographer and Hierarch Anthim the Iberian, Successor of his Predecessors in the Promotion of Romanian Language and Culture.” *Dionysiana* 1 (2017), pp. 95—113.

¹⁰⁵ N. LOSSKY: “Orthodoxie...,” p. 831.

¹⁰⁶ Ibidem, p. 831.

aware again of the obvious and urgent need to restore Christian unity. Another merit of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council lies in the fact that they did not think of and express the unity of the Church “separated from the other essential attributes of the Church,”¹⁰⁷ such as “its apostolicity (truth, authenticity and continuity of faith), its catholicity (fullness of communion, universality of its mission and testimony) and its holiness (service and responsibility for all humanity). These various aspects characterise — as theologian A. Birmelé concluded — the contemporary ecumenical research,”¹⁰⁸ to which Pope John Paul II was fully committed both by his ecumenical theological dialogue initiated with different Christian Churches and by his Pontifical Encyclicals.

4. Pope John Paul II, initiator and promoter of the bilateral theological dialogue between the Catholics and the Orthodox

In 1961, the Catholic Church for the first time took part in the works of the Ecumenical Council of Churches, and, under the impact of its affiliation to the “Ecumenical Movement,” the Second Vatican Council drew up and published a “Decree on Ecumenism,” which stated “the Catholic principles of ecumenism,”¹⁰⁹ while at the same time it publicly expressed “the Church’s decision to take up the ecumenical task of working for Christian unity.”¹¹⁰

In the text of the same Decree *Unitatis redintegratio* one can notice that the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council use the phrase “ecumenical dialogue” also in the sense of ecumenical theological dialogue, through which “Catholic theologians” are urged to investigate “the divine mysteries with the separated brethren,”¹¹¹ so that “all believers in Christ can [...], be led to acquire a better knowledge and appreciation of one another, and so pave the way to Christian unity.”¹¹²

In explaining this teaching of the Second Vatican Council on “ecumenical dialogue,” His Holiness Pope John Paul II stated — in his Encycli-

¹⁰⁷ A. BIRMELÉ: “Unité de l’Église..., » p. 1193.

¹⁰⁸ Ibidem, p. 1193.

¹⁰⁹ IOANNES PAULUS PP. II: *Ut unum sint...*, I, 8.

¹¹⁰ Ibidem, I, 8.

¹¹¹ Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio...*, II, 11.

¹¹² Ibidem, II, 12.

cal *Ut unum sint* — that this concept, circulated by the Council Fathers, “is rooted in the nature of the person and his dignity,”¹¹³ as this kind of dialogue has in itself “a global, existential dimension. It involves the human subject in his or her entirety; dialogue between communities involves in a particular way the subjectivity of each.”¹¹⁴

Thus, according to Pope John Paul II, the “ecumenical dialogue” — initiated and promoted by the Second Vatican Council — has its basis in the human being, that is, in the human person, who was considered by the Council Fathers within the global dimension of his/her existence, and not limited to the various Christian communities, with their own identity (ethnic, religious, cultural-spiritual, etc.). In fact, we can also notice this aspect in the text of the international and European (European Union) legislation on fundamental human rights and freedoms and their legal protection.¹¹⁵

According to Pope John Paul II’s statement, “in the Council’s thinking, ecumenical dialogue is marked by a common quest for truth,”¹¹⁶ which indeed does have the gift of shaping “consciences and directs efforts to promote unity.”¹¹⁷ With this statement, Pope John Paul II was in fact reaffirming another basic principle stated by the Second Vatican Council, namely that the ecumenical dialogue — also perceived as an examination of conscience — must have the character of a common search for truth. However, by conditioning the common search for truth, “particularly con-

¹¹³ IOANNES PAULUS PP. II: *Ut unum sint...*, I, 28.

¹¹⁴ Ibidem, I, 28.

¹¹⁵ N.V. DURĂ, C. MITITELU: “Human rights and their universality. From the rights of the ‘individual’ and of the ‘citizen’ to ‘human’ rights.” In: *Exploration, Education and Progress in the third Millennium*. Galati University Press, Galați 4 (2012), pp. 103—127; N.V. DURĂ, C. MITITELU: “The Treaty of Nice, European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights.” In: *8th Edition of International Conference The European Integration — Realities and Perspectives*. Danubius University Press, Galati 2013, pp. 123—129; N.V. DURĂ, C. MITITELU: “The human fundamental rights and liberties in the Text of some Declarations of the Council of Europe.” In: *Exploration, Education and Progress in the Third Millennium*. ProUniversitaria, București 5 (2015), pp. 7—22; N.V. DURĂ: “The Right to the Guarantee and Ensurance of Religious Freedom from ‘The Statute for Religious Freedom’ of 1786 to the ‘Declarations’ Issued during the UN Session of 2019.” *Bulletin of the Georgian National Academy of Sciences* 1 (2021), pp. 117—127; C. MITITELU: “The Service of the Romanian Orthodox Church to Migrants”. *Ecumeny and Law* 9 (1) (2021), pp. 45—66; C. MITITELU: “About the Right to the Freedom of Religion”. In: *Rethinking Social Action. Core Values*. Coord. A. SANDU et al. Medimond, Bologna 2015, pp. 833—838; C. MITITELU: “The Children’s Rights. Regulations and Rules of International Law.” *Ecumeny and Law* 3 (2015), pp. 151—169.

¹¹⁶ IOANNES PAULUS PP. II: *Ut unum sint...*, I, 33.

¹¹⁷ Ibidem, I, 33.

cerning the Church,”¹¹⁸ the Roman Pontiff wanted and managed to give to the ecumenical dialogue a “spirit [...] open, based on truth and respect for the opinion of the other, which Pope John Paul II himself had”¹¹⁹ — as confirmed by a Catholic theologian from Romania — and even more so in a “world of contradictions,”¹²⁰ in which he also succeeded in facing “the challenges of modernity, but not from outside, rather from within,”¹²¹ that is, from within the Catholic Church.

Pope John Paul II, however, associated ecumenical dialogue with prayer, given that, according to His Holiness, a “deeper and more conscious prayer makes dialogue more fruitful.”¹²²

Concerning the dialogue with the Eastern Orthodox Churches, Pope John Paul II was keen to point out that “our bonds with the Churches of the East, weakened in the course of the centuries, were strengthened through the Second Vatican Council,”¹²³ which — according to His statement — wanted “to base dialogue on the communion which already exists.”¹²⁴ A decisive role in the resumption of the relations between the “Church of Rome and the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople,” however, was played by the solemn act of 7 December 1965, through which the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council removed from the memory of the two Churches the mutual excommunications pronounced in 1054, which had indeed become “the symbol of the schism between Rome and Constantinople.”¹²⁵ This ecumenical gesture would be sealed by the *Tomos agapis* (Tomos of Love) signed by Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople.

The “theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and all the Orthodox Churches in canonical communion with the See of Constantinople”¹²⁶ was, however, initiated by Pope John Paul II, who, on the occasion of his visit “to the Phanar on 29 November 1979,”¹²⁷ decided — in agreement with Patriarch Dimitrios I of Constantinople — to start the theological dialogue between the Catholics and the Orthodox, and at the same time to set up a “Joint International Commission for

¹¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹¹⁹ W. DANCĂ: “Paradoxurile modernității. Papa Ioan Paul al II-lea și contradicțiile lumii moderne” (The paradoxes of modernity. Pope John Paul II and the contradictions of the modern world). In: *Ca toți să fim una...*, p. 48.

¹²⁰ Ibidem, p. 46.

¹²¹ Ibidem, p. 46.

¹²² IOANNES PAULUS PP. II: *Ut unum sint...*, I, 33.

¹²³ Ibidem, II, 50.

¹²⁴ Ibidem.

¹²⁵ Ibidem, II, 52.

¹²⁶ Ibidem.

¹²⁷ Ibidem.

the Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church.”¹²⁸ Moreover, as Pope John Paul II himself noted, “the Commission has laid the doctrinal foundations”¹²⁹ for finding a positive solution in terms “of the method to be followed in re-establishing full communion between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church.”¹³⁰

The same Roman Pontiff stated that, in order to achieve the full communion between the two Churches, the theological dialogue must be based first of all on “the doctrine of Sister Churches,”¹³¹ and the “method” to be followed is none other than “the dialogue of truth, fostered and sustained by the dialogue of love,”¹³² which therefore requires the “involvement of these Churches in the dialogue of charity and in theological dialogue.”¹³³

As it is well known, initially the results of this bilateral theological dialogue were promising, since their authors — Catholic and Orthodox theologians — were outspoken in promoting the full communion of our Churches, Catholic and Orthodox, that Pope John Paul II — as a pioneer in the efforts to achieve the full communion that these Churches had experienced until 1054 — also supported, calling for this bilateral theological dialogue to be based on “the doctrine of Sister Churches.”¹³⁴ Hence his testimony that “Catholic Church desires nothing less than full communion between East and West. She finds inspiration for this in the experience of the first millennium.”¹³⁵

Among the Orthodox theologians, animated by the desire to restore the unity of our Churches, and who followed with enthusiasm and hope the promising results of this bilateral theological dialogue,¹³⁶ was also the signatory of these lines. In fact, I must confess that in 1999, on the occasion of that historic visit of Pope John Paul II to Romania, I received from His Holiness — in the presence of the Apostolic Nuncio in Bucharest, His Excellency Jean-Claude Perisset — the honourable distinction *Ut unum sint*, which entitled and legitimized me to remain a *servus unitatis*, that is,

¹²⁸ Ibidem, II, 51.

¹²⁹ Ibidem, II, 60.

¹³⁰ Ibidem.

¹³¹ Ibidem.

¹³² Ibidem.

¹³³ Ibidem.

¹³⁴ Ibidem.

¹³⁵ Ibidem, II, 61.

¹³⁶ N.V. DURĂ: “Teologia ortodoxă și teologiile confesionale în ecumenismul contemporan” (The Orthodox theology and confessional theologies in contemporary ecumenism). *Ortodoxia* 3 (1986), pp. 61—88; N.V. DURĂ: “The Celebration of Holy Easter on the Same Date — an Eloquent Testimony to Our Unity in Diversity.” *Ecumeny and Law* 6 (2018), pp. 249—267.

a servant of the unity of our Churches, Orthodox and Catholic. In honour of the memory of the architects of this bilateral theological dialogue, whose initiator and promoter was the Holy Father himself, Pope John Paul II, we must therefore all support the resumption of our bilateral theological dialogue, so that obstacles of an ecclesiological nature, which have arisen over time, can be overcome in the spirit of the dialogue of truth and brotherly love, which must not remain merely a *pium desiderium* (pious desire), but the restoration of the unity of the two Churches must become a peremptory reality.

In lieu of conclusions

From the careful examination of the text of the *Ut unum sint* Encyclical, any informed reader can easily see that, both in his writings and in his pastoral-canonical activity, Pope John Paul II remained faithful to the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council, which he renewed in the spirit of the ecclesiastical reality of his time. This explains why, in the text of this Encyclical, we find affirmed and capitalised — in their content — all the principles stated in the main documents of the Second Vatican Council (the Constitution *Lumen gentium* and *Unitatis redintegratio*, etc.), the text of which we have examined carefully precisely in order to illustrate the fact that the Supreme Pontiff has in fact promoted and updated the principles of the doctrine of the Second Vatican Council on how to restore Christian unity.

One could also notice that the Supreme Pontiff proved to be a true example of a servant, and more so one who was fully entitled to call himself a *servus servorum Dei*, as Pope Gregory the Great († 604)¹³⁷ once called himself in retaliation to the title of “ecumenical patriarch” which the Patriarch of Constantinople John the Faster (582—595), “supported by Emperor Maurice,”¹³⁸ had firmly claimed.

¹³⁷ Pope Gregory the Great († 604), who is also inscribed in the Calendar of the Eastern Orthodox Church, is also the one who said that it is not enough to run “to meet one’s neighbor according to your powers,” but you must “be of service even beyond your powers” (*The 5th homily delivered before the people in the Church of the Blessed Apostle Andrew, on his feast day*, translated from Greek by I. STOIAN, in: *Martyria. Revistă de Teologie și Spiritualitate ortodoxă* 2 (2021), p. 109. Also see Migne, P.L., 76, 1092C-1095A).

¹³⁸ Ș. LUPU: “Imaginea păstorului Bisericii în Regula pastorală a Sfântului Papă Grigore cel Mare” (The image of the shepherd of the Church in the Pastoral Rule of Saint Pope Gregory the Great). In: *Ca toți să fim una...*, p. 80.

The Holy Father Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Ut unum sint*, like his entire pastoral-ecumenical activity — including his relations with the “venerable” Apostolic Churches of the East, which he called “sister Churches” — continues to be not only an edifying testimony to his total involvement in the ecumenical endeavor of the Catholic Church, but also an appeal for all of us Christians to make our contribution to the restoration of the ecumenical unity of the Church of Christ. And, undoubtedly, the ecumenical theological dialogue — with the requirements laid down by the Second Vatican Council and reaffirmed and highlighted by the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II — remains an indispensable instrument in the process of making the divine commandment, namely *Ut unum sint*, a reality (John 12:21).

The fact that the Encyclical *Ut unum sint* — published thirty years after the end of the Second Vatican Council, “can be read as an act of reception of the Council”¹³⁹ is a reality recognized not only by Catholic theologians, but also by those of other Christian denominations (Orthodox, Protestant, and neo-Protestant).

Among the factors which contributed to the reception of the text of this Encyclical, the theologians of the Catholic Church are mentioning — first and foremost — “the experience of bilateral dialogues and their achievements.”¹⁴⁰ However, according to an Anglican theologian, “an implicit question arising is whether the pursuit of Christian unity means quite the same in 2020 as it did in 1995,”¹⁴¹ that is, when Pope John Paul II published his Encyclical *Ut unum sint*. Nevertheless, the very fact that Pope John Paul II's Encyclical *Ut unum sint* is a permanent subject of study and research for different theologians (Catholics, Orthodox, Protestants, neo-Protestants), who see in its text a theological ecumenical key document, leads us to believe that the spirit of Christian unity today continues to be similar to the one during the year of its publication, that is, 1995, by the Holy Father Pope John Paul II, whose commendable ecumenical work will remain an example for today's and tomorrow's generations of the Christian world.

¹³⁹ G. KELLY: “Introduction to *Ut unum sint*.” In: *A Celebration of Ut unum sint. The 25th Anniversary*. Eds. D. COSTACHE, D. SPEED. Sydney 2020, p. 21.

¹⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 21.

¹⁴¹ D. SPEED: “Reflecting on *Ut unum sint*.” In: *A Celebration of Ut unum sint...*, pp. 53—54.

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NICOLAE V. DURĂ

Exigences envers le dialogue œcuménique dans l’encyclique
de Jean-Paul II
Ut unum sint

Résumé

Dans le langage théologique chrétien, le terme « œcuménisme » a été introduit par le mouvement œcuménique initié par les chrétiens après la Première Guerre mondiale. Or, dans le langage de l’Église catholique, le terme, utilisé dans le sens de « mouvement œcuménique », a été introduit par le célèbre théologien Yves Congar en 1937. Il a ensuite été repris par le Concile Vatican II dans le décret sur l’œcuménisme *Unitatis redintegratio*.

L’Église catholique romaine a rejoint le mouvement œcuménique en 1961 lorsque ses délégués ont assisté à une session du Conseil œcuménique tenue à New Delhi. C’est entre autres dans le texte de l’encyclique *Ut unum sint*, publiée en 1995, que Jean Paul II a affirmé que le dialogue œcuménique, demeurant en fait l’un des principaux instruments de restauration de l’unité œcuménique, doit répondre aux exigences présentées par le Concile Vatican II, mais adaptées aux réalités œcuméniques de notre temps.

Mots-clés : dialogue œcuménique, Concile Vatican II, unité des chrétiens

NICOLAE V. DURĂ

Requisiti per il dialogo ecumenico
nell’enciclica *Ut unum sint* di Giovanni Paolo II

Sommario

Nel linguaggio teologico cristiano, il termine “ecumenismo” è stato instaurato dal movimento ecumenico avviato dai cristiani dopo la prima guerra mondiale. Invece, nel linguaggio della Chiesa cattolica, il termine, usato nel senso di “movimento ecumenico”, è stato introdotto dal noto teologo, Yves Congar, nel 1937. Successivamente è stato incorporato dal Concilio Vaticano II nel testo del decreto sull’ecumenismo *Unitatis redintegratio*.

La Chiesa cattolica romana si è unita al movimento ecumenico nel 1961, quando i suoi delegati hanno partecipato a una sessione del Concilio ecumenico tenutosi a Nuova Delhi. Tra l'altro, nel testo dell'enciclica *Ut unum sint* pubblicata da Papa Giovanni Paolo II nel 1995, Sua Santità ha affermato che il dialogo ecumenico, che resta di fatto uno dei principali strumenti per il ripristino dell'unità ecumenica, deve soddisfare i requisiti posti dal Concilio Vaticano II, ma adattati alla realtà ecumenica dei nostri tempi.

Parole chiave: dialogo ecumenico, Concilio Vaticano II, unità cristiana