

## Pope John Paul II and His Ecumenical Legacy

### At the Service of Unity

Every pontificate bears its own specific stamp and, since Vatican II, every Pope has had his own characteristic approach to ecumenism. Regarding ecumenical involvement, Pope John Paul II, during one of the longest pontificates ever, gave a new shape to the papacy.

The year 2020 marks the centenary of the birth of John Paul II, but it is also a century-and-a-half since the First Vatican Council which, when it solemnly defined papal primacy, emphasised that such papal authority was to be exercised “in service of the unity of faith and communion.”<sup>1</sup> Vatican II stated this even more clearly.<sup>2</sup> John Paul II interpreted the “unity of faith and communion” in a broad, ecumenical sense. Therefore, he stated, early on in his pontificate, “I want to serve unity.”<sup>3</sup> For him the Petrine ministry constituted the principle of

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<sup>1</sup> First Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution, *Pastor aeternus*, Introduction, 20 July 1870: “in fidei et communionis unitate.” [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/i-vatican-council/documents/vat-i\\_const\\_18700718\\_pastor-aeternus\\_la.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/i-vatican-council/documents/vat-i_const_18700718_pastor-aeternus_la.html) (accessed 14 September 2019).

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* (21 November 1964), n.13. Hereafter, *LG*. [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html) (accessed 14 September 2019).

<sup>3</sup> In his farewell address at Munich airport on 19 November 1980, John Paul II said: “This prayer of the Lord (Jn 17) becomes for us all a source of a new life and a new longing. As Bishop of Rome and successor of St Peter, I put myself fully and completely in the stream of this longing; in it I

unity for all Christians and he attached the highest importance to ecumenical leadership to the papal job-description.

In this, John Paul II felt indebted to Pope John XXIII, who is remembered for his reform-oriented course in convoking Vatican II, as well as to Paul VI, who stands for a more tradition-oriented, deliberative attitude. Thus, the choice of his name was not only a tribute to his immediate predecessors, but also a programme. That John Paul II personally sought a balance between these two attitudes also becomes clear when on the 3 September 2000 he beatified John XXIII, the initiator of Vatican II, together with Pius IX, the Pope who convoked Vatican I.

John Paul II was convinced that it is his task to put the Second Vatican Council, which he himself had attended, into practice, in a prudent and considerate way that would be viable for the entire Catholic Church. If one compares John Paul II's 1995 encyclical *Ut unum sint*<sup>4</sup> to Pope Pius XI's *Mortalium animos* (1928),<sup>5</sup> one can make out how the papacy evolved regarding ecumenical involvement within the 67 years that passed between the publication of these two texts: within a few decades the papal ministry had developed from having been an (at best) indifferent observer of the Ecumenical Movement into an active participant. With John Paul II the papacy sees its role as being central to any future church unity.

This led to a boost of ecumenical dialogues. During his pontificate more than 35 bilateral international dialogues between the Catholic Church and almost all other Churches and Ecclesial communities were held.<sup>6</sup> Pope John Paul II

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recognise the language of the Holy Spirit and the will of Christ whom I wish to obey and be faithful to in everything. *I want to serve unity.* I want to walk all the ways in which, after the experience of the centuries and millennia, Christ is leading us to the unity of that flock where he alone is the only and credible Good Shepherd." As quoted in Richard L. Stewart, "I want to serve Unity": Pope John Paul II and Ecumenism," *One in Christ* 17/3 (1981): 271-290; 271 (*my emphasis*).

<sup>4</sup> Pope John Paul II, Encyclical on Commitment to Ecumenism *Ut unum sint* (25 May 1995). Hereafter, *UUS*. [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25051995\\_ut-unum-sint.html#-4A](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html#-4A) (accessed 14 September 2019).

<sup>5</sup> Pope Pius XI, Encyclical on Religious Unity *Mortalium animos* (6 January 1928). [http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xi\\_enc\\_19280106\\_mortalium-animos.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19280106_mortalium-animos.html) (accessed 14 September 2019). Pius XI saw unity and the healing of divisions in the line of 'return' to the Catholic fold. He thought the efforts of the young Ecumenical Movement insufficient as in his opinion it sought to establish ecclesial unity on the basis of a limited number of teachings acceptable to all sides. Such a 'lowest common denominator' approach would, of course, not be acceptable to any Catholic.

<sup>6</sup> See *Information Service* (hereafter, *IS*) of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity which serves as source for following the number and development of those dialogues (see

was assiduous in reaching common Christological declarations especially with leaders of Oriental Orthodox churches: with the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Mar Ignatius Zakka Iwas (June 1984),<sup>7</sup> with the Catholicos Karekin I of the Armenian Apostolic See of Etchmiadzin (December 1996),<sup>8</sup> reaffirmed by Catholicos Aram I of the Armenian Apostolic See of Cilicia (January 1997),<sup>9</sup> with the Catholicos Mar Baselius Marthoma Mathews I of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church (3 June 1990)<sup>10</sup> and also with the Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV of the Assyrian Church of the East (11 November 1994).<sup>11</sup> Moreover, Pope John Paul II tirelessly advocated ecumenical dialogue with the Eastern Orthodox. On the 30 November 1979, he and the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I announced together the beginning of a bilateral dialogue that was meant to “advance towards the re-establishment of full communion between the Catholic and Orthodox sister Churches ...”<sup>12</sup>

In the dialogue with the Lutheran World Federation a decisive breakthrough was reached in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999) and its *Official Common Statement*. It was the first ecumenical agreement canonically ratified by the Roman Catholic Church. It was signed in Augsburg, Germany, in 1999. Since then the World Methodist Council officially joined it in 2006 by adopting a statement which added related aspects of the theology of sanctification; the World Communion of Reformed Churches, signed it in 2017, adding its own statement with a strong emphasis on justice and justification; and the Anglican Consultative Council ‘welcomed and affirmed the substance’ of the *Joint Declaration* at a meeting in 2016 – a resolution, presented in October 2017, by the Archbishop of Canterbury to the General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation. The legacy of the ecumenical engagement of John Paul II thus continues to date.

The texts of this Pope on ecumenical questions are on the table and can be read at any time. Yet, ecumenical dialogue asks for more than just an exchange

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the online archive at <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/information-service/information-service.html> (accessed 1 March 2020).

<sup>7</sup> See “Common Declaration of Pope John Paul II and HH Mar Ignatius Zakka I Iwas,” *IS* 55 (1984): 62.

<sup>8</sup> See “Common Declaration of John Paul II and Catholicos Karekin I,” *IS* 94 (1997): 30.

<sup>9</sup> See “Common Declaration of the Pope and the Catholicos,” *IS* 95 (1997): 80.

<sup>10</sup> See “Statement of the Joint Commission,” *IS* 73 (1990): 39.

<sup>11</sup> See “Common Christological Declaration between the Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East,” *IS* 88 (1995): 2.

<sup>12</sup> E.J. Stormon, ed., *Towards the Healing of Schism: The Sees of Rome and Constantinople. Public Statements and Correspondence between the Holy See and the Ecumenical Patriarchate, 1958-1984* (New York: Paulist, 1987), 367.

of words. In what follows, the main focus will be on the legacy of John Paul II that he left by implementing and living his pontificate in the way he did. I shall highlight, above all, three traits which John Paul II imprinted on the papal office regarding its ecumenical coinage. These are an ecumenism of journeys, an ecumenism of gestures, and an ecumenism of martyrs. After looking at these, we also need to consider some points of critique, before we conclude.

### Ecumenism of Journeys

The image of Pope John Paul II kissing the ground<sup>13</sup> upon his first visit to a country has probably left a lasting imprint in the memories of many. This Pope was one of the most travelled world leaders in history. He visited 129 countries during his pontificate;<sup>14</sup> his pastoral journeys were a sort of inverted *ad limina* visits. Instead of the bishops of a certain country coming to see him in Rome, he came to visit the country, thus publicly affirming the unique gifts of the Church in each of those countries he went to. Such visits provided a chance for him to come to know the situation of a country's Church in its specific context and to foster dialogue – above all intra-ecclesial dialogue, yet in the course of time to an increasing degree also ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue.<sup>15</sup>

Already early into his papacy, John Paul II realised that *in oecumenicis* there is no substitute for personal contact and this set the trend for the ecumenical angle of all the journeys throughout his pontificate. “These meetings made it possible, with the help of experience, to carry out brotherly exchanges progressively and they permitted mutual listening and mutual understanding.”<sup>16</sup> Such ecumenical meetings were not just a formality but could become a real exchange. During his apostolic visit to France in May 1980, the Reformed spokesperson, Pastor Chevalier, when welcoming the Pope, frankly addressed some of the difficulties

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<sup>13</sup> According to some historians, this gesture had profound repercussions: see John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 193, on John Paul II's first visit to Poland in June 1979: “When Pope John Paul II kissed the ground at the Warsaw airport he began the process by which Communism in Poland – and ultimately elsewhere in Europe – would come to an end.”

<sup>14</sup> See Peter G. Maxwell-Stuart, *Chronicle of the Popes: Trying to Come Full Circle* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006), 234.

<sup>15</sup> See Josef Freitag, “‘Migration’ des Papstes: Die Pilgerreisen Johannes Pauls des II. und ihre Bedeutung für die Religionen, die Gesellschaften und die Kirchen,” in Claudia Kraft and Eberhard Tiefensee, eds., *Religion und Migration. Frömmigkeitsformen und kulturelle Deutungssysteme auf Wanderschaft* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2011), 97-114.

<sup>16</sup> Stewart, “I want to serve Unity,” 288.

the Reformed Churches encountered with the Catholic Church. The Pope spontaneously answered:

I would like to thank you very heartily for what you have said, the matter you have raised. In what you have said I recognise some very serious issues, but this I find fruitful [...] you have emphasised that it is the fruit of exchanges that have now gone on for some time [...] In thanking you for all that you have said, I am grateful to the Lord and to you that I have been able to be with you, and that I have been able to hear from you the words that I have heard, because I think: What does the word 'brothers' mean? It does not mean simply people, who constantly say to each other, 'Yes, yes; I agree with you.' It also means persons who often argue; but if they argue for a common and higher good, that is as it should be.<sup>17</sup>

Throughout his pontificate, John Paul II made it very clear that he travelled in order to hear such things and that he wanted to encourage national and local dialogues in order to pursue them. One of the most important stepping stones towards the *Joint Declaration on Justification* with the Lutherans were the results of the project "*Lehrverurteilungen – kirchentrennend?*"<sup>18</sup> – 'Do doctrinal condemnations still divide?'; initiated by John Paul II during his pastoral visit to Germany in 1980 and worked out by the Common Working Circle of Catholic and Protestant theologians in Germany between 1981 and 1985.

His many travels brought John Paul II into frequent contact with leaders and representatives of other Christian Churches and religious traditions. This was no one-way-street; he consequently also often welcomed them at the Vatican. "When the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, Mar Ignatius Yacoub II, visited the Pope on 14 May 1980, the Holy Father took him with him to the General Audience and asked him to address the assembled crowd."<sup>19</sup>

Sometimes these visits would even gain a symbolic meaning for ecumenical dialogue. In 1979, Pope John Paul II personally led the Catholic delegation that each year visits Constantinople for the feast of Saint Andrew at the end of November. At the Angelus of 18 November 1979, the Pope declared, "with this visit I wish to show the importance the Catholic Church attaches to this dialogue,"<sup>20</sup> referring to the bilateral dialogue with the Eastern Orthodox which

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<sup>17</sup> Pope John Paul II, Paris, 31 May 1980, as quoted according to the English translation by Stewart, "I want to serve Unity," 289.

<sup>18</sup> Karl Lehmann – Wolfhart Pannenberg, eds., *Lehrverurteilungen – kirchentrennend?* 4 vols. (Freiburg i.Br. and Göttingen: Herder and Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986-1994).

<sup>19</sup> Stewart, "I want to serve Unity," 286.

<sup>20</sup> Pope John Paul II, Angelus Address (18 November 1979). [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/angelus/1979/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_ang\\_19791118.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/angelus/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_ang_19791118.html) (accessed 16 March 2020). Quoted according to Stewart, "I want to serve Unity," 286.

he and the Ecumenical Patriarch had announced earlier that year. Of similar symbolic relevance was the fact that in 1982 he was the first Pope to visit the United Kingdom and to kneel next to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, at the very spot in Canterbury Cathedral where Thomas Beckett had been murdered.<sup>21</sup>

### Ecumenism of Gestures

As someone who had loved to act in his youth, the power of symbols and gestures was evident to John Paul II. In comparison to his youth, however, the effectiveness of such gestures had been magnified drastically in the age of contemporary media. This led to a series of compelling media images. In line with Pope Paul VI's *Ecclesiam suam*,<sup>22</sup> Pope John Paul II was convinced that "Dialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas. In some way it is always an 'exchange of gifts'."<sup>23</sup> In this context, the gestures of John Paul II are even more eloquent and speak louder than words.

Biographers of John Paul II recount many important gestures; for instance, Luigi Accattoli who underlines the Pope's concomitant theology of the body. In this, John Paul II was consistent. For him little gestures also mattered, like sitting on identical armchairs when receiving the Ecumenical Patriarch. During the already mentioned visit to Paris in May 1980, there were not enough chairs for everybody. Thus, the Pope remained standing and chatting, and only when a sufficient number of chairs had been brought in, he said, "Now we can sit down." As Richard Stewart states, "some of those present found this simple courtesy a message in itself."<sup>24</sup>

Some of his gestures were marks of respect and awakened feelings of gratitude and sympathy in their recipients. Some gestures had prophetic value and made sure that the relations with non-Catholic church leaders did not get buried in dialogue documents only. They tended to bring people closer to each other and bind them together. These gestures were a constant invitation to remove barriers and to cross thresholds. They opened new horizons and inspired further dialogue and encounter.

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<sup>21</sup> See "BBC on This Day | 29 | 1982: Pope makes historic visit to Canterbury." BBC News. 29 May 1982. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/may/29/newsid\\_4171000/4171657.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/may/29/newsid_4171000/4171657.stm) (accessed 14 September 2019).

<sup>22</sup> See Pope Paul VI, Encyclical Letter on the Church *Ecclesiam suam: Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 56 (1964): 609-659; 641.

<sup>23</sup> *UUS*, n.28.

<sup>24</sup> Stewart, "I want to serve Unity," 272.

Among the most impressive gestures of this Pope are those in connection with the repeated instances of his publicly asking for forgiveness on behalf of Catholics. Luigi Accattoli, in his book *When a Pope Asks Forgiveness*,<sup>25</sup> lists more than 90 instances when the Pope asked forgiveness for sins committed by Catholics, past and present. This public *Nostra culpa* is insofar important as “in almost all human conflicts both sides share, to a greater or lesser degree, the responsibility for the conflict. Consequently, no reconciliation is possible unless two steps are taken: first, an awareness by each side of their share in the guilt; second, a willingness to forgive and ask for forgiveness.”<sup>26</sup> John Paul II was prepared to take both of these initial steps. Most instances of asking forgiveness were premeditated and planned; but there were also spontaneous ones: he was the first Pope in 1291 years to visit Greece, in 2001. In Athens, the Pope met Archbishop Christodoulos who publicly read a list of thirteen offences perpetrated since the Great Schism by the Catholic Church against the Eastern Orthodox. This list included the sack of Constantinople by crusaders in 1204. John Paul II immediately responded: “For the occasions past and present, when sons and daughters of the Catholic Church have sinned by action or omission against their Orthodox brothers and sisters, may the Lord grant us the forgiveness we beg of him.”<sup>27</sup> After this, the two leaders could say the Lord’s Prayer together, breaking an Orthodox taboo against praying with Catholics.

Unfortunately, however, gestures show a certain weakness: since they are mere gestures, they are ambiguous. They can be misunderstood and misinterpreted, even if one thinks their meaning is unmistakable. Therefore, they are not canonically sturdy. We shall see that they could and in fact were contradicted by some Vatican documents at the time. Critics also pointed out that it was not enough to focus on bold public gestures instead of also including efforts towards new, genuinely ecumenical reformulations of Catholic doctrine. This objection was not new, but already voiced by Yves Congar (1904-1995) who, in connection with John XXIII and Paul VI, lamented their ‘gestures without theology.’ He even went so far as to say “that the Pope makes grand symbolical gestures but that behind these, there is neither the theology nor the practical understanding

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<sup>25</sup> Luigi Accattoli, *When a Pope asks Forgiveness* (New York: Alba House, 1998).

<sup>26</sup> Miguel A. Bernad, Book Review of *When A Pope Asks Forgiveness*, *Landas* 12/2 (1998): 104-110; 104.

<sup>27</sup> John Paul II, Address to His Beatitude Christodoulos, Archbishop of Athens and Primate of Greece, Athens (4 May 2001) [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2001/may/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_spe\\_20010504\\_archbishop-athens.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/2001/may/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20010504_archbishop-athens.html) (accessed 14 September 2019).

of what these gestures would bring about.<sup>28</sup> The question, however, is whether this tendency towards anticipation does not lie in the very nature of gestures.

In this direction, at least, regarding the interpretation of gestures, Pierre Duprey (1922-2007), at the time Undersecretary of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, pointed out, as Congar recalls:

We must, he said, let the Pope and Rome make gestures and address messages, even if the thinking is not yet up to their level. Because it will follow one day [...] The gestures will provide a period of acclimatisation at the end of which, one day, the formulas will be acceptable.<sup>29</sup>

For Duprey these gestures are prophetic and propaedeutic. At any rate, the strength of gestures is obvious: they are easily remembered and appeal not only to the intellectual side of human beings. They are engaging, inspiring, and encouraging.

### Ecumenism of Martyrs

Presumably no other century has seen as many Christian martyrs as the twentieth century, and this seems to continue in the twenty-first. Needless to say between 2000 and 2005, over 500,000 Christians were murdered for their faith, an average of about 109,000 each year. Karol Józef Wojtyła was someone who had lived a long period behind the Iron Curtain and became a Pope knowing the realities of concentration camps, gulags and extermination centres. In *Lumen gentium*, n.42, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council define the Christian understanding of martyrdom: “By martyrdom a disciple is transformed into an image of his Master by freely accepting death for the salvation of the world – as well as his conformity to Christ in the shedding of his blood.”

John Paul II chose what he called ‘ecumenism of martyrs’ as the guiding principle to lead the Church into the third millennium. At the end of the Way of the Cross in the Colosseum on Good Friday, 1 April 1994, he thanked the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I for preparing the meditation and added: “I thought of those other Colosseums, so numerous, of those other ‘Hills of Crosses’ that are on the other side, throughout European Russia, throughout

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<sup>28</sup> Yves Congar, *Mon journal du Concile* (19 November 1964), mss in Archives du Saulchoir, Paris and Fondazione per le scienze religiose, Bologna; trans. Alberto Melloni, “Ecumenical Gestures in Contemporary Catholicism,” *Concilium* 37 (2001): 121-135; 130f.

<sup>29</sup> Congar, *Mon journal du Concile* (14 September 1965); trans. Melloni, “Ecumenical Gestures,” 131.



Siberia, so many Hills of Crosses, so many Colosseums of modern times. [...] We are united against the background of these martyrs; we cannot fail to be united.”<sup>30</sup>

John Paul II was aware that those who do all these killings do not stop first and ask who is Protestant, who is Catholic, or who is Orthodox. For him martyrdom carried substantial theological and ecumenical weight, insofar as it likened the killed Christians to Christ himself who ultimately was persecuted in them – as in Acts 9:4, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” Regardless of their denomination, it bestowed on them a *Christiformitas* – a likeness with Christ, that was meant to remind all divided Christians that those who shed their blood in witness to Christ are united *in* and *with* him. For this reason, Tertullian once famously observed that “the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians;”<sup>31</sup> and for the same reason, the experience of martyrdom is conducive to unity.

In his announcement of the Jubilee Year 2000, likewise published in 1994, John Paul II stated: “Perhaps the most convincing form of ecumenism is *the ecumenism of the saints* and of the martyrs. The *communio sanctorum* speaks louder than the things which divide us.”<sup>32</sup> In 1995, John Paul II begins his Encyclical *Ut unum sint* by a reflection on ecumenical martyrs:

The courageous witness of so many martyrs of our century, including members of Churches and Ecclesial communities not in full communion with the Catholic Church, gives new vigour to the Council’s call and reminds us of our duty to listen to and put into practice its exhortation. These brothers and sisters of ours, united in the selfless offering of their lives for the Kingdom of God, are the most powerful proof that every factor of division can be transcended and overcome in the total gift of self for the sake of the Gospel.<sup>33</sup>

He refers back to his praying the Way of the Cross in 1994, when in response to the prayers written by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, he had stated,

that believers in Christ, united in following in the footsteps of the martyrs, cannot remain divided. If they wish, truly and effectively, to oppose the world’s tendency

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<sup>30</sup> Pope John Paul II, Address following the Way of the Cross, Rome (1 April 1994), *L’Osservatore Romano*, English weekly edition, April 14, 1994.

<sup>31</sup> Tertullian, *Apologeticum*, 50,13, ed. E. Dekkers, in *Quinti Septimi Florentis Tertulliani Opera*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, vol. 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954).

<sup>32</sup> Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente* (10 November 1994), n.37. [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_letters/1994/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_19941110\\_tertio-millennio-adveniente.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19941110_tertio-millennio-adveniente.html) (accessed 14 September 2019).

<sup>33</sup> *UUS*, n.1.

to reduce to powerlessness the Mystery of Redemption, they must *profess together the same truth about the Cross* (UUS, n.1).<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, the Pope proposed a common ecumenical martyrology of those who “are the proof of the power of grace,” and “are in communion with Christ in glory.”<sup>35</sup> To render this communion tangible, in 2000 Pope John Paul II dedicated San Bartolomeo on the Tiber island as the church where the martyrs of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are commemorated.<sup>36</sup> In its six side chapels, relics and memorabilia are exhibited, including a missal of Archbishop Oscar Romero (1917-1980), a letter by the beatified Austrian conscientious objector Franz Jägerstätter (1907-1943) to his family, written a few days before his death, a letter from the Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp by the German writer Heinrich Ruster (1884-1942) to his wife, a relic of Blessed Cardinal Clemens August Graf von Galen (1878-1946) and keepsakes of the resistance fighters Bishop Johannes Baptista Sproll (1870-1949), Eugen Bolz (1881-1945) and Maria Restituta Kafka (1894-1943). All of them were Catholics.

Yet, in order to especially link the Jubilee Year to the ecumenical angle of martyrdom, on 7 May 2000, the Pope invited other Church leaders to an ecumenical commemoration of the martyrs of the twentieth century at the Colosseum. In the presence of high representatives of different Churches and Christian World Communions,<sup>37</sup> the martyrs were remembered and their

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<sup>34</sup> See Pope John Paul II, Address following the Way of the Cross on Good Friday (1 April 1994), 3: *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 87 (1995): 88.

<sup>35</sup> UUS, n.84.

<sup>36</sup> Already in 1998 new sculptures representing ten ecumenical martyrs of the twentieth century had been put above the Great West Door of Westminster Abbey in London. They include Dr Martin Luther King Jr, St Maximilian Kolbe, St Oscar Romero, Dietrich Bonhöffer, and Wang Zhiming.

<sup>37</sup> In detail, there were present: HE Gennadios, Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Church in Italy and Malta; Rev. Dr Ismael Noko, Secretary General of the Lutheran World Federation; Bishop Jonas Jonson, Lutheran Bishop of Stängnas, Co-moderator of the Joint Working Group; Bishop Barnaba, General Bishop of the Coptic Orthodox Church in Italy; Metropolitan Petros of Aksum, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria, Egypt; Archbishop Josif from the Orthodox Patriarchate of Romania; Rev. Dr Cecil M. Robeck, representing Pentecostals; Archbishop Longin from the Patriarchate of Moscow; Metropolitan Jonafan of Kerson, Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Patriarchate of Moscow; Irina Costanza Lazarescu, Orthodox Church of Romania; Rev. Jani Trebisca, Orthodox Church of Albania; Miroslava Lazarova, Orthodox Church of Bulgaria; Rev. Dr Hans Beat Motel, Moravian Church; Piotr Nazaruk, Orthodox Church of Poland; Bishop Michael Charles Scott-Joynt, Bishop of Winchester, Anglican Communion; Bishop Norvan Zakarian, Armenian Apostolic Church; Dr Joe Hale, General Secretary of the World Methodist Council; Bishop Mar Bawai Soro, Bishop of Seattle,

testimonies read, in addition to the testimony of Father Maximilian Kolbe († 1941, Auschwitz), that of Pastor Paul Schneider († 1939, Buchenwald) and Metropolitan Serafim († 1937, Botovo). “At this celebration it became clear: martyrdom is ecumenical. It was possible to experience the deep community that connects the Churches beyond all differences”<sup>38</sup> – thus Cardinal Kasper summarised his experience of the event.

Yet, this ecumenism of the martyrs never meant for John Paul II to lean back and leave everything to the eschatological grace of unity that God will grant his Church. It inspired him to try and work tirelessly for unity *here and now*, promoting ecumenical dialogue. On the topic of dialogue, we read in *Ut unum sint*:

Dialogue cannot take place merely on a horizontal level, being restricted to meetings, exchanges of points of view or even the sharing of gifts proper to each Community. It has also a primarily vertical thrust, directed towards the One who, as the Redeemer of the world and the Lord of history, is himself our Reconciliation. This vertical aspect of dialogue lies in our acknowledgment, jointly and to each other, that we are men and women who have sinned. It is precisely this acknowledgment which creates in brothers and sisters living in Communities not in full communion with one another that interior space where Christ, the source of the Church's unity, can effectively act, with all the power of his Spirit, the Paraclete.<sup>39</sup>

If these insights are taken seriously, they have an immense impact on the practical side of ecumenical progress. Ecumenism is neither a matter of power nor of specific forms of doctrine, but of focusing on the Christological-pneumatological core that plays a decisive role in our Christian faith – or at least should play such a role. This core should be the leitmotiv of all genuine attempts at unity in ecumenical respect. Yet was John Paul II's encyclical, and indeed his whole pontificate, able to live up to its own criteria?

## Drawbacks of Intransigence?

Chapter I of *Ut unum sint*, “The Catholic Church's Commitment to Ecumenism,” reverts to conceiving of ecumenical unity as mainly doctrinal and proposes as a criterion the traditional comparative method to test this doctrinal

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Assyrian Church of the East; Bishop Panossian, Catholicosate of Cilicia of the Armenians (see *IS* 104 (2000): 112-132).

<sup>38</sup> Walter Kasper, *Ökumene der Märtyrer. Theologie und Spiritualität des Martyriums* (Norderstedt: Edition Schönblick, 2014), 33-34: “Bei dieser Feier wurde deutlich: Martyrium ist ökumenisch. Es wurde die tiefe Gemeinsamkeit erfahrbar, welche die Kirchen jenseits aller Unterschiede verbindet.”

<sup>39</sup> *UUS*, n.35.

unity: *the Catholic Church has the necessary doctrine in full*. There can be elements of truth elsewhere, yet they need to be compatible with and integrated into the Catholic doctrinal corpus. What follows in this first chapter of *Ut unum sint* – the ‘datedness’ of doctrinal formulae, the hierarchy of truths, the working of the Holy Spirit in non-Catholic communities – stands in a strange contrast to the model of elements of truths in the first part of the same chapter that rather seems to conceive mutual learning as a one-way-street, where the Catholic side sees no need for any self-critical scrutiny. The idea behind this approach is that content and language relate to each other like a body and its clothes. As one can clothe one’s body more attractively, one can also formulate a doctrine more elegantly, yet the doctrine intransigently remains the same. Consequently, the implied vision of ecumenical unity rather seems to correspond to what *Mortalium animos* argued for, namely, the unconditional return of the divided brothers and sisters to the Catholic fold. In a similar vein, the Declaration *Dominus Iesus*<sup>40</sup> could be trenchantly formulated by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and ratified and confirmed by the Pope in 2000 “with sure knowledge and by his apostolic authority.”<sup>41</sup>

The second chapter of *Ut unum sint* deals with “The Fruits of Dialogue.” It dwells on the metaphor of the Church breathing with both lungs but, in retrospect, it may have been too optimistic about relations with the Orthodox. In this chapter, John Paul II clearly opts for the model of communion of the first millennium<sup>42</sup> and, in consequence thereof, states, “in accordance with the hope expressed by Pope Paul VI, our declared purpose is to re-establish together full unity in legitimate diversity.”<sup>43</sup> Pope John Paul then continues to quote, verbatim, his predecessor:

For centuries we lived this life of ‘Sister Churches,’ and together held Ecumenical Councils which guarded the deposit of faith against all corruption. And now, after a long period of division and mutual misunderstanding, the Lord is enabling

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<sup>40</sup> See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration on the unicity and salvific universality of Jesus Christ and the Church *Dominus Iesus* (6 August 2000), n.16: “The Catholic faithful *are required to profess...*” [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000806\\_dominus-iesus\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html) (accessed 14 September 2019).

<sup>41</sup> *Dominus Iesus*, final paragraph.

<sup>42</sup> See *UUS*, n.55: “The structures of the Church in the East and in the West evolved in reference to that Apostolic heritage. Her unity during the first millennium was maintained within those same structures through the Bishops, Successors of the Apostles, in communion with the Bishop of Rome. If today at the end of the second millennium we are seeking to restore full communion, it is to that unity, thus structured, which we must look.”

<sup>43</sup> *UUS*, n.57.

us to discover ourselves as 'Sister Churches' once more, in spite of the obstacles which were once raised between us.<sup>44</sup>

Yet does this not lead to Catholic self-contradiction? Already, in *Communio notio* of 1992, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith had remarked – regarding the Eastern Churches – that, because they do not recognise the primacy of the Pope, “their existence as particular Churches is wounded.”<sup>45</sup> On 30 June 2000, the same Congregation added in its *Note on Sister Churches* that “it must always be clear, when the expression Sister Churches is used in this proper sense, that the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Universal Church is not sister but mother of all the particular Churches.”<sup>46</sup> If the term ‘mother church’ is applied to the Church of Rome instead of to the Church Universal, then the ecclesiology, poignantly formulated in *Lumen gentium*, n.23 as *ecclesia in et ex ecclesiis*, that the Universal Church exists in and out of the particular churches, gets out of balance. If this is further applied to the ecumenical model, any communion with Rome can only be *communio hierarchica*, a Latin phrase the Congregation used in 1992 which normally refers to the relation between Pope and bishops.

Chapter III asks “*Quanta Est Nobis Via*” – how long is the way we still need to travel? Like Paul VI,<sup>47</sup> John Paul II was well aware that in the minds of many Christians, the papacy was an obstacle to rather than an instrument for Christian unity. In this chapter, therefore, he tackled the real bone of contention,

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<sup>44</sup> Pope Paul VI, Apostolic Brief to Patriarch Athenagoras *Anno Ineunte* (25 July 1967): *Tomos Agapis, Vatican-Phanar 1958-1970* (Rome-Istanbul: Impr. Polyglotte Vaticane, 1971), 388-391.

<sup>45</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion *Communio notio* (28 May 1992), n.17: “Since, however, communion with the universal Church, represented by Peter’s Successor, is not an external complement to the particular Church, but one of its internal constituents, the situation of those venerable Christian communities also means that their existence as particular Churches is wounded. The wound is even deeper in those ecclesial communities which have not retained the apostolic succession and a valid Eucharist” [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_28051992\\_communio-notio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_28051992_communio-notio_en.html) (accessed 14 September 2019).

<sup>46</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Note on the Expression ‘Sister Churches’: A Letter to the Presidents of the Confernces of Bishops* (30 June 2000), n.10. [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000630\\_chiese-sorelle\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000630_chiese-sorelle_en.html) (accessed 14 September 2019).

<sup>47</sup> On 28 April 1967, Pope Paul VI addressed a meeting of the Secretariat for the Unity of Christians, asking: “And what shall we say about the difficulty which stems from the function which Christ assigned to us in the Church of God and which our tradition has hallowed with so much authority? The papacy, we know it well, is without doubt the gravest obstacle on the ecumenical road” (*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 59 (1967): 493-498; 498).

the “ministry of unity of the Bishop of Rome” (nn.88-96) and offered an unprecedented invitation to other Christian leaders to enter into dialogue with him regarding how the papacy, within the limits of received doctrine, might be refashioned to become a ministry of unity for all Christian churches.

In *Ut unum sint*, the Pope ecumenically extends the principle of collegial consultation, “heeding the request made of me to find a way of exercising the primacy which, while in no way renouncing what is essential to its mission, is nonetheless open to a new situation.”<sup>48</sup> For the first time in history, an incumbent Pope asks how to fulfil his task and actually invites other Church leaders to enter into dialogue with him about this:

Could not the real but imperfect communion existing between us persuade Church leaders and their theologians to engage with me in a patient and fraternal dialogue on this subject, a dialogue in which, leaving useless controversies behind, we could listen to one another, keeping before us only the will of Christ for his Church and allowing ourselves to be deeply moved by his plea “that they may all be one ... so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (Jn 17:21)?<sup>49</sup>

What is the essential to be preserved in this papal ministry? Again, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith soon presented an answer, actually the outcome of a symposium which the Congregation organised in response to *Ut unum sint*. Given the considerations expressed in the document on *The Primacy of the Successor of Peter in the Mystery of the Church*,<sup>50</sup> the leeway which was left for such a dialogue from 1998 onwards did no longer reach much beyond the boundaries put up by the First Vatican Council.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *UUS*, n.95.

<sup>49</sup> *UUS*, n.96.

<sup>50</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *The Primacy of the Successor of Peter in the Mystery of the Church* (31 October 1998). [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19981031\\_primato-successore-pietro\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19981031_primato-successore-pietro_en.html) (accessed 14 September 2019); also, *Origins* 28 (1999): 560-563.

<sup>51</sup> Paragraph 10 of the document cited in the previous footnote, for instance, tries to safeguard universal jurisdiction, to my knowledge not a desirable result for non-Catholics, if “the whole Church” is meant to comprise them too: “Together with the magisterial role of the primacy, the mission of Peter’s Successor for the whole Church entails the right to perform acts of ecclesiastical governance necessary or suited to promoting and defending the unity of faith and communion; one of these, for example, is to give the mandate for the ordination of new Bishops, requiring that they make the profession of Catholic faith; to help everyone continue in the faith professed. Obviously, there are many other possible ways, more or less contingent, of carrying out this service of unity: to issue laws for the whole Church, to establish pastoral structures to serve various particular Churches, to give binding force to the decisions of Particular Councils, to approve supra-diocesan religious institutes, etc. Since the power of the primacy is supreme, there

The pattern always seems the same – the *Joint Declaration on Justification* signed with the Lutheran World Federation being the exception that confirms the rule: the hard-won accomplishments of various ecumenical dialogues were often met with harsh Vatican criticism for not having articulated doctrinal and theological consensus in accordance with traditional Catholic formulations. Was this an intra-curial trial of strength between an open-minded Pope and a conservative Curia? Was it the antagonism of a reform-oriented and a deliberative-cautious attitude in the Pope's own person, as symbolised in the choice of name, leading to conflicting alignments?

On the one hand, [we observe] great openness and will to decisive steps, but then just as decided limitations or occupation of the announced leeway by issues of denominational patrimony, when it comes to the details of the matter, especially when one sees the denominational identity endangered.<sup>52</sup>

This is how Hans Jörg Urban of the Johann-Adam-Möhler-Institute in Paderborn, Germany, summarised the situation, thinking that it was grounded in a general, identity-driven Roman insecurity of what the fundamentals comprise, and which cannot be given up.

All this shows the near impossibility of squaring the ecumenical circle from a papal vantage point, yet it also confirms the immense importance of the conviction of Pope John Paul II that the papacy must be proactive in the cause of ecumenism. Every Pope refashions the papacy; it is a highly dynamic and ecumenically extremely relevant institution.

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is no other authority to which the Roman Pontiff must juridically answer for his exercise of the gift he has received: 'prima sedes a nemine iudicatur'.

<sup>52</sup> Hans Jörg Urban, "Ökumene an der Schwelle zum 21. Jahrhundert: Bestand, Probleme und realistische Erwartungen," *Catholica* 53/2 (1999): 109-121; 117: "Einerseits große Offenheit und Wille zu entscheidenden Schritten, aber dann genauso dezidierte Eingrenzungen bzw. Besetzung der angekündigten Freiräume durch das konfessionelle Eigengut, wenn es um die Details der Sache geht, und zwar insbesondere dann, wenn man die konfessionelle Identität angetastet sieht."