

John Paul II and Chiara Lubich: Converging Development of the Dynamic Principles of Ecumenism in the Wake of Vatican II

The Second Vatican Council also opens a new chapter in the Church's history concerning the journey toward the full visible unity of Jesus' disciples along the way of ecumenical dialogue. If the Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*, should be read on one hand in the theological framework outlined by the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, on the other hand it certainly concretely develops the implications by entrusting the process to the responsibility of Jesus' disciples. But this process is ultimately guided by the Holy Spirit in an unpredictable way — in accordance with the mysterious plan of God's love. That is what the Church has experienced in the fifty years that have passed since the Council.

In spite of the wounds that have plagued Christ's body, which is the Church, through the centuries, and which still disfigure its face today, the ecclesiological gain that Vatican II approves in this regard is the rediscovery of the fact that the disciples are "one in Christ Jesus" (see Gal 3:28) because of baptism and the faith, and that it is necessary to move with trust and hope from this solid foundation to recompose full, visible unity among Christians in the time and way that God wants. In the different expressions that dialogue takes on in this light —

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spiritual, life-related, theological, in service and in mission — it constitutes the event which brings dynamism in the Holy Spirit to the original gift of unity in Christ, to develop this gift and lead to its fulfillment, thereby giving new light and vigour to read and live in an increasingly deep authentic way, the actual meaning of being “one in Christ” Jesus, that is the Church.

In this framework it is possible to identify some dynamic principles for ecumenism which are drawn from the magisterium of Vatican II. The Church’s journey after the Council has progressively emphasised and confirmed these principles. In particular, we are dealing with principles that John Paul II’s magisterium examined and explained and which Chiara Lubich’s charism for unity stimulated and clarified. These two were linked by a deep harmony and friendship in Christ as witnesses and authoritative actors in the journey leading to Vatican II, impressing a new dynamism on the Church’s mission.¹ In fact, I think that five of these principles can be understood from John Paul II’s and Chiara Lubich’s converging testimony, along with a sixth principle which comprehends the others:

the first: keeping the “vertical” interior space open in the heart, where God can act with a constant conversion;

the second: dilating the “horizontal” interior space in reciprocal love, where Christ becomes present among brothers and sisters from different Churches;

the third: looking upon each ecclesial reality, each event in the Church’s history, each situation, starting from the living centre of faith;

the fourth: discovering, with ever new amazement and gratitude, the wealth of (the Churches’) diversity as an expression of (the Church’s) unity;

the fifth: concretely having an attitude of living faith to take the present in a positive way; adopting as our own “the pupil of God’s eye” upon the world, which is the paschal Christ, to remember the past; walking together and building the future together to be the creative prophecy of the Risen One;

and finally, the sixth which iconically sums up all of them: joining the school of Mary, the mother of unity.

¹ Allow me to refer to two writings in this regard. I presented Pope John Paul II’s ecumenical commitment in “Per una lettura dell’Enciclica *Ut unum sint*. Introduzione e analisi storica dell’enciclica,” in *Lettera Enciclica di S.S. Papa Giovanni Paolo II “Ut unum sint” sull’impegno ecumenico* (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1995), 5-22. With regard to Chiara Lubich’s ecumenical commitment, I refer readers to “Il carisma dell’unità di Chiara Lubich e la sua incidenza ecumenica. Alcune riflessioni teologiche,” *Nuova Umanità* 16/91 (1994): 17-44.

Keeping the Vertical Space Open

The first and fundamental dynamic principle for ecumenism lies in always keeping open the “vertical” space where God becomes present and acts in the heart and mind. In fact, authentic ecumenism is only born and develops if Christian existence is repeatedly based and nourished before anything else on the indispensable “vertical” vector of a living relationship with God, cognisant of the primacy of his grace. In fact, *Unitatis redintegratio* teaches that conversion of the heart and mind is the essential and permanent condition for ecumenism which cannot exist without this:

All the faithful should remember that the more effort they make to live holier lives according to the Gospel, the better will they further Christian unity and put it into practice. For the closer their union with the Father, the Word, and the Spirit, the more deeply and easily will they be able to grow in mutual brotherly love.²

The expression, “vertical dimension” (in the relationship with the Trinitarian God) referring to ecumenical dialogue, is from John Paul II who uses it in the encyclical letter, *Ut unum sint*, on ecumenical commitment:

[Ecumenical] 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.³ (n.35)

This is really the beginning and the form of the lived Christian experience in the framework of the charism of unity: believing in God’s love (see 1 Jn 4:16), believing that God is love (see 1 Jn 4:8.16).

² Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio* (21 November 1964), n.7.

³ Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter on the Commitment to Ecumenism *Ut unum sint* (25 May 1995), n.35.

During his visit to the Focolare Movement's Centre on 19 August 1984, John Paul II emphasised:

In the Church's history, there have been many radicalisms of love... There was St Francis's radicalism, St Ignatius of Loyola's, Charles de Foucauld's and many others up until today. There is your radicalism of love as well, Chiara's, that of the Focolarini — a radicalism which discovers the depth of love and its simplicity, all the demands of love in different situations. It always strives for this love to win out in every circumstance, in each difficulty... And you bear witness to God who is love with this certainty that love must always be stronger in every circumstance in front of each difficulty.⁴

Now believing in God's love means trusting him in such a way that he can become present himself and act in the "vertical" interior space opened up, because if we truly listen to his voice, then we behave in accordance to his will. In fact, ecumenical dialogue is the "dialogue of salvation," born from saving grace and producing saving grace, as Paul VI teaches in *Ecclesiam suam*. Inspired by the charism of unity, Klaus Hemmerle defined it as "thinking upside down" — not thinking to then act, but letting God act, and thinking (and acting as a consequence) on the basis of his action.⁵

This leads to an ecumenical method inspired by what the Spirit says to the Church, in discernment of his presence and action. This is why John Paul II made a lot of room for meetings, for times of prayer, for the eloquence of signs and experiences lived together, along with the doctrinal principles and the precious results achieved through theological dialogues. And Pope Francis follows him along this way today. In fact, events of faith and agape can end up being more effective and revealing than a theoretical affirmation. This is the reason for the appeal to prayer, to gift and to the commitment to personal and collective sanctity. John Paul II emphasised many times that this is where the decisive card for unity is ultimately played.

Broadening the Horizontal Interior Space

The second dynamic principle for ecumenism: based on the "vertical" interior space, Jesus' disciples are called to "horizontally" broaden the interior space in

⁴ Pope John Paul II, Discourse, Visit to Centro Internazionale Mariapoli, Rocca di Papa (19 August 1984). http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1984/august/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19840819_movimento-focolari.html (accessed 14 October 2020).

⁵ It is enough to refer to his last work, published posthumously, *Leben aus der Einheit: eine theologische Herausforderung*, ed. Peter Blättler (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder Verlag, 1995).

their reciprocal relationships. Pope Francis describes this incisively in *Evangelii gaudium*:

When we live out a spirituality of drawing nearer to others and seeking their welfare, our hearts are opened wide to the Lord's greatest and most beautiful gifts. Whenever we encounter another person in love, we learn something new about God. Whenever our eyes are opened to acknowledge the other, we grow in the light of faith and knowledge of God.⁶

If it is true that unity in Christ is the goal of dialogue from an ecumenical standpoint, it can be said, just as truly, that it is the starting point and the spiritual place for ecumenical dialogue. But that becomes effective if the unity that already exists comes to be lived and exercised in reciprocal love and love for everyone. John Paul II explains in *Ut unum sint*:

If we love one another, we strive to deepen our communion and make it perfect. Love is given to God as the perfect source of communion — the unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit — that we may draw from that source the strength to build communion between individuals and Communities, or to re-establish it between Christians still divided. Love is the great undercurrent which gives life and adds vigour to the movement towards unity.⁷

With this logic, John Paul II himself affirms that, “To believe in Christ means to desire unity; to desire unity means to desire the Church; to desire the Church means to desire the communion of grace which corresponds to the Father’s plan from all eternity.”⁸ The ecclesiology of communion delineated by Vatican II was presented and studied by all the Churches and ecclesial communities in ecumenical research. It offers the key to understand what already unites us in Christ, the statutes of the Catholic Church and the other Churches and ecclesial communions within this real but imperfect communion, as well as the initiatives to be undertaken to reach full unity. In fact, “By God’s grace, however, neither what belongs to the structure of the Church of Christ nor that communion which still exists with the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities has been destroyed.”⁹

Chiara Lubich’s charism for unity offers a specific key to interpret and achieve this vision, emphasizing that the presence of “Jesus in our midst” is welcomed

⁶ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World *Evangelii gaudium* (24 November 2013), n.272.

⁷ Pope John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, n.21.

⁸ *Ibid.*, n.9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, n.11.

and experienced there where Jesus' disciples live reciprocal love. In fact, he does not only manifest his presence in each person's interior dimension in the vertical space opened up to God, but also "where two or more are gathered in my name" (Mt 18:20), in accordance with his promise. To use the auspicious formula, it means living the Church not only as an "interior castle" but also as an "exterior" one.¹⁰

John Paul II also refers to this promise in *Ut unum sint*. For him, it is the soul of the Ecumenical Movement. The fact is that, "In the fellowship of prayer, Christ is truly present; he prays 'in us,' 'with us' and 'for us';"¹¹ for by it "we gather together in the name of Christ who is One. He is our unity" (n.23).¹² It is a unity which draws people freely into the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This is why believers, made "sons in the Son" (Eph 1:5), are enabled and called to live a union of truth and charity among themselves, similar to that of the divine persons,¹³ with reference to Jn 17:21 and *Gaudium et spes*, n.24.

John Paul II's affirmation is suggestive, stating that it is precisely dialogue 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."¹⁴ It is suggestive because it shows how the reciprocity of dialogue is the place where Christ's Spirit makes his voice heard within the interior dimension of each interlocutor.

One particularly significant example suffices. The Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras and Chiara Lubich lived this dilation of the interior space with each other in an extraordinary way. Precisely because they were two souls vertically immersed in God, they lived in total reciprocity with one another. This was so much the case that it was possible to perceive in their rapport just one soul in two Churches; or, as it is said to express the relationship between the Christian East and West, one single Church breathing with two lungs. As the Orthodox

¹⁰ Concerning the connection between the "interior castle," described by Teresa of Avila, and the "exterior castle" designating in Chiara Lubich's thought the presence of Christ among people, see Jesús Castellano Cervera, *Il castello esteriore. Il "nuovo" nella spiritualità di Chiara Lubich*, ed. Fabio Ciardi (Rome: Città Nuova, 2011); and the Proceedings of Sophia University Institute's theological seminar (12-13 June 2014) published in *Castello interiore e Castello esteriore. Per una grammatica dell'esperienza cristiana*, ed. Alessandro Clemenzia, Vincenzo Di Pilato and Julie Tremblay (Prato: Città Ideale, 2015).

¹¹ Pope John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, n.22.

¹² *Ibid.*, n.23.

¹³ *Ibid.*, n.26.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, n.35.

Metropolitan of Italy and Malta, Gennadios Zervos loves to repeat, a door is opened in heaven (see Rev 4:1) when this is lived in the relationship among disciples of the two sister Churches; he says this with reference to the encounter between Athenagoras and Chiara. And if the door is open, the heavenly breeze comes down among us and gives life to our journey.¹⁵

Seeing and Discerning Everything from the Living Centre of Revelation

The third principle: if as Christians from different Churches we are in this reality, that is, in the living heart of Revelation coming down from God and of the corresponding faith, since we are in Christ and are led by him in the Holy Spirit to the Father (see *Unitatis redintegratio*, n.15a), then we see, we understand and we act from that position. In other words, we have the benefit of a criterion of discernment emanating directly from this center. The principle of the “hierarchy of truths” thereby becomes actualised. Vatican II had emphasised this as a basis for ecumenical dialogue, particularly in *Unitatis redintegratio*:

Moreover, in ecumenical dialogue, Catholic theologians standing fast by the teaching of the Church and investigating the divine mysteries with the separated brethren [this is outdated terminology – *note by the author*] must proceed with love for the truth, with charity, and with humility. When comparing doctrines with one another, they should remember that in Catholic doctrine there exists a “hierarchy” of truths, since they vary in their relation to the fundamental Christian faith. Thus, the way will be opened by which through fraternal rivalry all will be stirred to a deeper understanding and a clearer presentation of the unfathomable riches of Christ.¹⁶

Starting from the foundation in what is lived and shared in addition to what is thought, makes another vision possible. It makes it evident that things which initially seemed to be essential end up as actually not being so important, because there is a whole series of realities in ecclesial traditions that also express the centre, without being the centre itself. So, it is a matter of not looking at what is derivative right away, but at what is central — the radiating heart of the faith from which the other truths shoot forth as if from a gushing spring. This heart is

¹⁵ On the significance and prospects stemming from the providential encounter between Patriarch Athenagoras and Chiara Lubich, see His All-Holiness Bartholomew I, *Per una cultura dell'unità nella diversità*, Le Cattedre di Sophia, 5 (Rome: Istituto Universitario Sophia – Città Nuova, 2016).

¹⁶ *Unitatis redintegratio*, n.11.

the faith in the Holy Trinity and in the Incarnation of the Word of God in Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit for the purpose of rendering human beings as participants in God's very life.¹⁷ The fact must also be borne in mind that many expressions of the faith had importance in the particular time and situation when they were proposed over the centuries, but they are neither essential nor permanent. This is the authentic concept of Tradition.

This criterion goes back to Pope John XXIII and was adopted by the Council concerning the way doctrine is presented. Doctrine is one and the same in substance; understanding of it grows under the impulse of the Holy Spirit who guides the Church "into all the truth" (Jn 16:13), whereas its formulation can vary depending on the historical moment and the culture. Consequently, "The expression of truth can take different forms,"¹⁸ and that constitutes a source of richness because the various complementary aspects of the one truth come to be illuminated this way. Therefore, "both the way of thinking and the actual historical experiences" of one's interlocutor must be borne in mind,¹⁹ ascertaining whether the different words do not imply the same content and welcoming what others offer to us that is original and in conformity with the faith. Sometimes then, "intolerant polemics and controversies have made incompatible assertions out of what was really the result of two different ways of looking at the same reality. Nowadays we need to find the formula which, by capturing the reality in its entirety, will enable us to move beyond partial readings and eliminate false interpretations."²⁰ Finally, if divergences touch upon the substance of the faith, every kind of reductionism or facile irenicism should be avoided.

Therefore, we are invited to look *from* the heart of Revelation. And this is a precious gift of the charism of unity.²¹ In fact, it offers a precise understanding-

¹⁷ See Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* (18 November 1965), n.2.

¹⁸ *Ut unum sint*, n.19.

¹⁹ See *ibid.*, n.36.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, n.38.

²¹ This is how it is for every authentic charism from the Spirit, designed to performatively illuminate the truth of Christ. H.U. von Balthasar writes, "Great charisms given by the Spirit like those of Augustine, Francis and Ignatius can receive a view into the center of revelation, a look that enriches the Church in a totally unexpected, but perennial way just the same. They are charisms in which understanding, love and imitation are inseparable each time. From this it is evident that the Spirit who explains all things is simultaneously divine wisdom and divine love; it is never pure theory, but always living practice. One last clue is typical of the Spirit; he spreads divine fullness into the infinite, but always and only in a way that unifies it more and more." [Translated into English by the translator of this article from: *Teo-logica*, vol. III: *Lo Spirito della verità* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1992), 22].

implementation of the mystery of God's unity since it is shared with the Church by the Father in Christ through the gift of the Holy Spirit. The key to interpreting and bringing about this charismatic penetration into the mystery of unity in its trinitarian and ecclesiological dimension lies in Jesus crucified and forsaken. By means of an image, Chiara Lubich describes the content of the message God entrusted to her as being contained in a coin which has the word of the cross (see 1 Cor 1:18) and of the abandonment (Mk 15:34; Mt 27:46) imprinted on one side; on the other side is Christ's supreme prayer to the Father, *ut unum sint* (Jn 17:21); the thickness of the coin is all of Scripture.

The meaning is evident: God's word converges and is concentrated in the affirmation of participation in the Holy Trinity's life of love by grace. This is not only accomplished by Jesus once and for all (*ephápax*) in the paschal mystery of his death, resurrection and the outpouring of the Spirit. But upon being incorporated into this mystery through baptism (see, for example, Rom 6:3), it unfolds in the life of the disciple and the Church through the practice of mutual love and love for everyone to the point of full unity in Christ. All this has an indivisible twofold value: a charismatic understanding of the essence itself of Christianity,²² and an existential *method* to translate this into life.

Recognising the Value of the Pluralism in which Unity is Expressed

A fourth principle will now be presented. How is the diversity of spiritual lifestyle, theology, sensitivities and practice which have developed within the different Churches to be looked at? Different, complementary, interpretations have developed legitimately, even providentially, of the deposit of faith in fidelity to what is essential according to this principle. When it expresses and tends toward unity, multiplicity is the wealth and beauty of harmony. As St Basil the Great teaches, pluralism and unity are a gift from the same Holy Spirit who colours the incarnation of the Gospel with thousands of nuances through personalities, cultures and charisms; and through this incarnation of the Gospel, he colours the transformation of human history. The Gospel law is not uniformity, but multiplicity in unity, harmony in pluralism, reconciliation of differences.

²² Klaus Hemmerle expresses it very well: "For a charism has come to light that makes the Church's origin and essence not only more visible but visible in new forms so that they become a possible way of life once more. This charism also casts its light into the whole area of theology." Foreword to Chiara Lubich, *Jesus in the Midst* (New York: New City Press, 1976), 9-10.

Amazement and gratitude are required to attain this outlook. So it is a matter of dwelling with the heart and mind in the centre of Christian experience to be able to welcome the wealth of diversity which is such if it preserves the gift of unity in what is essential, building it through the gifts of different cultures, and we could add, through the different ecclesial charisms. This undoubtedly also means discerning what can hide, or indeed contradict, the essential of the common faith in different historical traditions.

That is typical of the charism of unity: so much so that Chiara Lubich often described the (future) unity of the Church as a unity in pluralism, as an icon of the holy Trinity. Already in 1975, she wrote,

I am convinced that God did not abandon any of the Churches over these centuries of division. This way, each Church reunited with the others in the future reunification not only will maintain the particular characteristic that it developed over the centuries, but it will complete, straighten out and strengthen this characteristic by putting it in communion with all the other Churches, while mirroring God's unity as well. Thus, each Church will become, in a certain way, a "specialist" of that given element of the truth that it had developed over the centuries.²³

She was even more explicit on another occasion, referring to the Trinitarian model:

There will undoubtedly be unity along with variety: a variety of traditions, a variety of riches, a variety of history, but there will be unity. It will happen a bit like in the Holy Trinity which is one, because we have one God alone, and there are three divine persons. So, there will undoubtedly be unity, a single truth, but this single truth can also be expressed in different ways, seen in different ways. That is why there will be unity and variety.²⁴

The Present, Memory, the Future

The fifth principle: how will all this become operational concretely? How should the present, the memory of the past and the future be lived? These are the three dynamics that ecumenism has constantly put into focus in these decades after the Council. They indicate the three coordinates of what Chiara Lubich

²³ Chiara Lubich, "Dialogo aperto. Unità delle Chiese," *Città Nuova*, 19/12 (1975): 33.

²⁴ Chiara Lubich, Intervista alla televisione bavarese, Montet, 16 September 1988, published in *Notiziario Mariapoli*, 11-12 (November/December, 1988).

presented as the ecumenical spirituality springing from the charism of unity when she spoke at the Graz Ecumenical Assembly.²⁵

a) To live “the present moment” of ecumenism it is first of all necessary to be in a position of radical faith. It is the moment God gives us to live today. It is not just a matter of recognizing the Church’s permanent origin and ever new life and mission in Jesus’ Gospel, but the Gospel is also its form as a result, its *telos* and its completion. It is as Pope Francis said, almost as a commentary on his participation in the celebration in Lund on the fifth centenary of the start of the Reformation: “The Church is the Gospel.”²⁶ By the Gospel, he meant the power and wisdom of God’s Word pronounced once and for all in Jesus crucified and risen. It reaches us in the here and now of history with the breath of the Holy Spirit’s perennial, inexhaustible new things.

In this posture of faith today, Jesus’ disciples, each belonging to different Christian traditions, are called to welcome and experience the grace of unity communicated by the Father through his incarnate and risen Son in the Holy Spirit, in a true, substantial way, even if it is not yet full and perfect. In this position of faith in particular, they are called to rediscover and live with conviction and intensity the brotherhood and sisterhood which is the priceless, free gift of faith in Christ Jesus sealed and expressed by the one baptism as sons and daughters of the Abbà in one single Spirit.

b) Nevertheless, we are brothers and sisters with a painful recollection of the past marked by many deep wounds which heavily burden European and world history. How should a memory like this be lived? The key to a Gospel-inspired reading of the memory of the past full of division, conflict and mutual misunderstanding which we share as Christians must be the position of faith.

It is the Easter of the cross and resurrection, of death and new life, of shadows and light, of the Lord Jesus that becomes the decisive criterion in us, through the action of the Holy Spirit, to interpret the accomplishment of the divine design of salvation in the drama and contradictions of history, judged and conquered by God’s grace. Even if each one personally confessing his or her own faults at the foot of Christ’s cross, offering them to his grace and judgment, is the premise and indispensable starting point, it is also a matter of welcoming the paradoxical and

²⁵ Chiara Lubich, “Una spiritualità per la riconciliazione,” *Nuova Umanità*, 19/113 (1997): 543-556 [Address to the Second European Ecumenical Assembly, Graz, Austria, 23 June 1997].

²⁶ Pope Francis, Interview by Stefania Falasca in *L’Avvenire*, 17 November 2016. <https://www.avvenire.it/papa/pagine/giubileo-ecumenismo-concilio-intervista-esclusiva-del-papa-ad-avvenire> (accessed 15 September 2019).

even scandalous “yes” of God who acts mysteriously by means of the crucified and risen Son inside of the sinful “no” of human action.

Chiara Lubich extends an invitation to look with faith upon the world through the pupil of God’s eye which is Jesus crucified and forsaken. This means that the eye to look upon the past is a paschal eye, the eye of the crucified and risen one. There have been wounds; there are scars; but in him they are like those of the day of resurrection when Jesus appears in the Cenacle. Each wound is redeemed, transfigured, if we look at it with God’s grace. It remains because Jesus is contemplated with his wounds in Paradise and each of us will have our wounds in heaven, but they will be redeemed and transfigured. In fact, it will be from these very wounds that the light of the resurrection will shine forth, because God’s love will take them on and transform them into channels releasing Life.

In reading history concretely, it is necessary to be able to read the straight lines that God writes with his love on top of the crooked lines of humanity. In the logic of God’s love in Jesus crucified and forsaken, what is negative in itself is recovered not only to put things back the way they were before, but to make of them the paschal passage to build something bigger and more beautiful. John Paul II intuited this, in 1994, in the wake of the new, still timid and incipient clarity coming to light along the ecumenical path, referring to it again, a year later, in the encyclical *Ut unum sint*:

We can truly ask ourselves, “*Why did the Holy Spirit permit all these divisions?*” In general, the causes and historical development of these divisions are well known. It is legitimate however to wonder if there is perhaps a *meta-historical reason* as well.

There are two possible answers to this question. The more *negative* one would see in these divisions the bitter fruit of sins committed by Christians. The more *positive* answer is inspired by trust in the one who is capable of bringing forth good even from evil, from human weakness. Could it be that these divisions *have also been a path continually leading the Church to discover the untold wealth contained in Christ’s Gospel and in the redemption accomplished by Christ?* Perhaps all this wealth would not have come to light otherwise. [...]

It is necessary *for humanity to achieve unity through plurality, to learn to come together in the one Church even while presenting a plurality of ways of thinking and acting, of cultures and civilisations.* Would not such a way of looking at things be in a certain sense more consonant with the wisdom of God, with his goodness and providence?²⁷

²⁷ Pope John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 153; see Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint*, n.85.

With the convergence facilitated by the Holy Spirit's actions in hearts and minds, this is the only way that all of Jesus' disciples can look at the conflicting interpretations concerning the Church's history, welcoming and recognizing in the resulting dialectic what is believed to be a genuine expression of the Gospel in each of the interpretations and in their reciprocal relationship, while identifying and rejecting instead what is foreign and contrary to the Gospel. "While the past cannot be changed, what is remembered and how it is remembered can be transformed,"²⁸ according to the Joint Declaration for the fifth centenary of the Reformation.

The supreme, decisive criterion once more is that of Christ Jesus in his paschal mystery, in this common exercise of a "transformed" memory of the common history. This is so much the case that, *mutatis mutandis*, we could analogously apply to ourselves as Christians from different traditions, what was written in the Letter to the Ephesians concerning the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles among themselves and with God, taking place in the crucified and risen Christ:

For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it (Eph 2:14-16).

c) Finally, how is ecumenical prophecy to be carried out starting from this position of faith which is fraternity, from this outlook of Jesus crucified and forsaken which leads to the discovery of God's action inside of everything, even the negative? It is a matter of journeying together, opening up to the breath of the Spirit.

This is the first aspect. Pope Francis emphasises it with incisive effectiveness: "Unity is achieved by walking together."²⁹ Yes, because unity is grace from God in Christ. Thus, it is a seed of life sprouting now in history, and it can never be broken again by our divisions. Yes, again, because the unity that is already there

²⁸ Joint Statement on the Occasion of the Joint Catholic-Lutheran Commemoration of the Reformation, Lund, Sweden, 31 October 2016. http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20161031_omelia-svezia-lund.html (accessed 29 September 2019).

²⁹ Pope Francis, Address to Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 10 November 2016. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2016/november/documents/papa-francesco_20161110_plenaria-unita-cristiani.html (accessed 30 September 2019).

is experienced and tasted by us today in a new stage of its journey as brotherhood linking us in the love “poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit” (see Rom 5:5) and making us recognise one another as “members one of another” (see Rom 12:5) in Christ Jesus. Yes, finally, because it is this unity, containing the Son of God in itself, as Origen wrote, which we are enabled by grace and called to bear witness to responsibly with concrete works at the service of everyone, beginning with the poorest and most rejected in a tragically torn world like the one in which we live, without reliable footholds for hope.

Here is the second aspect. What this implies is the promise and effort to harmonise diversity in the docile quest to listen to the Spirit. It is not enough to intuit the precious pearl which can lie buried from time to time in the conflictual field of interpretations. Nor is it enough to simply point to a “reconciled diversity” like some kind of reciprocal recognition of diversities simply juxtaposed one next to the other. No, the lymph of the Holy Spirit must be welcomed wherever it is present. It flows and flourishes and bears fruit in the different branches of the one vine which is Christ. Rich in mercy (see Jn 15), the Father is its zealous vinedresser who never ceases to take care of the fruit of his saving work. This is the only way that unity in Christ is confessed and lived as the gift which indeed it is, in the breath of the Holy Spirit: not uniformity, but exchange of gifts.

No Church is so poor that it cannot offer its irreplaceable contribution to the wider Christian community. And no Church is so rich that it does not need to be enriched by the others, knowing that what the Holy Spirit has sown in other Christian communities can be harvested as something “which is also meant to be a gift for us.”³⁰

As Augustine of Hippo explains, though they are diverse (*quamvis diversi*), the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one, the same true God alone in the ineffable communion of love which is the Holy Trinity.³¹ And is not the Church in Christ the icon of this unity in diversity destined by grace to enlighten, reconcile and transfigure “the dispersed children of God” (Jn 11:52) as well? Unity is not something reached once and for all, nor is it the same for all situations, nor is it something we can manage ourselves... Unity occurs in

³⁰ Cardinal Kurt Koch, “Models for the Renewal of Church Unity,” Meeting of Catholic Eastern Bishops in Europe on the theme “The Ecumenical Mission of the Eastern Catholic Churches of Europe today,” Rome, 12 September 2019, in reference to Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 246. See <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/cardinal-koch/2019/conferences/il-ministero-pastorale-del-vescovo--al-servizio-dellunita-ecumen1.html> (accessed 30 September 2019).

³¹ See Augustine, *De Trinitate*, V.5.6.

specific ways with different people and realities according to each situation, time and place. It is a matter of walking together, bringing about as much true unity as possible, thus accomplishing together what God wants. Therefore, it is a journey together as the People of the Risen Lord. Where there is division, there is still death; where there is love among Jesus' disciples, there is already unity in the Risen Lord.

Mary, Mother of Unity

All five of the principles described thus far are iconically gathered together in Mary. That could be why John Paul II chose the words "*totus tuus*" addressed by St Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort to Mary, as the emblem of his pontificate. And the charism of unity generated the Work of Mary (*l'Opera di Maria*) which has been called, together with everyone, to reawaken the Marian face of the Church.

Vatican II was meant to illuminate Mary's presence and role, beginning with the primary title of grace — *Theotókos*, Mother of God — expressing her mission from the standpoint of the faith approved at the Council of Ephesus in 431. The aim is high and beautiful; it constitutes the culmination and the overall summary of the ecclesiology outlined in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*. Undoubtedly guided by the Holy Spirit, the Council's choice provoked a new outlook on Mary; she was to be contemplated from a new standpoint, putting her in a relevant relationship with the Trinitarian design of salvation and exalting her mission at the service of the accomplishment of Jesus' mission in the Church and for humanity, ever attentive to the Holy Spirit's voice. Pope Paul VI's proclamation of Mary as *Mater Ecclesiae*, on 21 November 1964 at the close of the Council's third session was undoubtedly very important in this framework. It is here that he drew the connection between Mary's divine maternity in relation to Christ the Head, with her maternity in relation to the members of his Mystical Body.³²

A twofold thrust appears after the Council in the perception of Mary's place in the plan of salvation and in the Church's mission. On one hand, Mary's unique relationship with the persons of the Trinity comes to be understood more intensely. Precisely because of this, on the other hand, the figure of Mary

³² See Pope Paul VI, Allocation at the Conclusion of the Third Session of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, 21 November 1964. http://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/speeches/1964/documents/hf_p-vi_spe_19641121_conclusions-iii-sessions.html (accessed 28 September 2019).

is utilised to bring out her objective importance to discern the *forma Ecclesiae* in conformity with the *forma Christi*.³³ To say it with von Balthasar,³⁴ in fact, Mary comes to be recognised in her role as “principle” and “profile” of the Church, along the line of ecclesial understanding later adopted by John Paul II, which can even be perceived in the ecclesial “style” implemented by Pope Francis with respect to the Church’s “reform.” “Principle” refers to Mary’s maternity in the Holy Spirit with respect to believers as an extension and fulfillment of her divine maternity in relation to Jesus, which defines her ongoing mission. On the other hand, “profile” indicates first of all the style, the tone, the peculiar quality taken on by the Church in its *sequela Christi*, based on the fact that it is borne in the Holy Spirit by a mother like Mary.

In fact, drawing from Augustine, Montfort explains that Mary is the form in which the Son of God was “formed” in the flesh by the work of the Holy Spirit.³⁵ Only by being received into Mary’s “form” therefore, and letting themselves be shaped by her through the Holy Spirit’s action, may Christians also be conformed to Christ. Mary’s “fiat,” from the Annunciation all the way to the Cross, becomes the ontological and existential principle for “Christification.”

The charism of unity makes the perception of this reality explicit in an ecclesial framework; that is why believers are called to live with a Marian attitude, not only so that Christ lives in each one to the point of fulfilling Paul’s “it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20), but also so that he lives among them as the God-with-his-people in accordance with his promise, “where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Mt 18:20). This is how we can be *Church*, the Mother Church which generates Christ in history, like Mary and in her, through the work of the Holy Spirit. Being the Mother of God in Christ, Mary is the Mother of the Church and therefore the mother of the unity of everyone in Christ.

³³ See Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* (21 November 1964), n.8.

³⁴ See Pope John Paul II, *Insegnamenti* V/3 (1982) (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983), 1671-1683 and *Insegnamenti* X/3 (1987) (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1988), 1483; about this topic, see Hans Urs von Balthasar, in Brendan Leahy, *The Marian Principle in the Church according to H.U. von Balthasar* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1996).

³⁵ See St Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort, *A Treatise on the True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin* (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2010), n.219.

I would like to conclude with something Chiara Lubich wrote in her mystical notes from the summer of 1949:

I love Love, and I no longer find myself on this earth. Today in our heavens, we are Mary, the Mother of Beautiful Love, and this is how I feel: I feel a very dense maternity, an infinite maternity in my heart and in all my being: I am Mother of Love, and therefore of God. Everything is in love within me, and each thing is in love outside of me.

I felt that I have been created as a gift for whomever is next to me, and whoever is next to me has been created by God as a gift for me. As the Father in the Trinity is everything for the Son and the Son is everything for the Father.

On earth, everything is in a relationship of love with everything: each thing with each thing. To find the golden thread among beings, it is necessary to be Love.³⁶

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N.B. The article (by Piero Coda) was translated from Italian by Bill Neu

³⁶ See Gérard Rossé, "Entry into the Paradise of '49 and Biblical Revelation," *Claritas. Journal of Dialogue & Culture* 1/2 (2012): 3-21. <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1019&context=claritas> (accessed 28 September 2019).