

Some Reflections on the Ecumenical Movement: 25 years after John Paul II's Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint*

The ministry of John Paul II at the see of Peter coincided with a decisive period for the reception and application of the Second Vatican Council, including the confirmation of the commitment of the Roman Catholic Church to the Ecumenical Movement. Fifteen years after the death of the Slav Pope, a prudential span of time has passed enabling us to evaluate his legacy with greater perspective and perceive the effects left on the life of the Church. In view of this, it would be necessary to review his gestures, teachings and ecumenical decisions, without neglecting other gestures, teachings and decisions that, if at first glance seem internal to the Catholic Church, have nevertheless exerted their influence in the ecumenical sphere. This is a clear sign that Churches and ecclesial communities can no longer claim to live in confessional isolation, even less if they have committed themselves to travel the joint path towards full unity.

Just as the work of a pontiff can normally be evaluated, the same can be done with the Ecumenical Movement. The difference is that, being an ongoing reality, all evaluation is limited; it can pretend to be global or limited to a particular

* Jorge Alejandro Scampini is Professor of Dogmatic Theology at the Centre of Studies of the Order of Preachers, Buenos Aires, and Ordinary Professor at the Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University, Buenos Aires, where he teaches Ecclesiology, Sacraments and Ecumenism. Currently member of the Baptist-Catholic and the Methodist-Catholic Dialogues, and Consultor to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

aspect or scope;¹ it focuses on a given moment, tests a diagnosis and, with the elements it acquires, outlines proposals for the future. And, in our case, it should not be forgotten that the Catholic Church does not exhaust the reality of the ‘only ecumenical movement,’ nor does it determine its work alone, since it forms part of a movement common to all Christians.

Our purpose in these pages is to highlight the value of certain contributions of John Paul II to the cause of Christian unity, in response to the current situation of the Ecumenical Movement, with its achievements, lack of achievements and blockages, and the challenges it presents to the reception of the results of the theological dialogues by the Churches. Some of these contributions were present throughout his pontificate and later included in his encyclical *Ut unum sint* (25 May 1995),² a text, which, in coincidence with the centenary of the birth of its author, is celebrating twenty-five years since its publication. I think that both anniversaries justify that we pause to reflect upon this encyclical, considering it a kind of point of arrival in a Catholic vision of the Ecumenical Movement and, at the same time, a fresh starting point for challenges and issues that are still open.

The Teaching of John Paul II on Ecumenism

As we know, and it was his clear intention, the Magisterium of John Paul II was based on the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, which offered the foundation for the ecumenical commitment. The latter was evident from the very beginning of his pontificate.³ Much of his Magisterium, beyond the specific issues that it addressed, brought to mind the conciliar teaching, drawing from it new conclusions on the road to full unity of Christians.⁴ Going back to the

¹ Recently there were at least two colloquiums, whose purpose has been to conduct evaluations: one in Paris, in the Institut supérieur d'études œcuméniques, see *Nouveaux territoires de l'œcuménisme: déplacements depuis 50 ans et appels pour l'avenir: actes du Colloque des facultés tenu à l'Institut catholique de Paris du 13 au 15 mars 2018*, Institut supérieur d'études œcuméniques (Paris: Cerf, 2019); and the last session of the Académie internationale des sciences religieuses: “L'avenir de l'œcuménisme,” Bologna, 6-8 March 2019, see various papers, published in *Istina* 64/2 (2019).

² See Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter on the Commitment to Ecumenism *Ut unum sint* (25 May 1995), *AAS* 87 (1995): 921-982 [hereafter, *UUS*].

³ See Pope John Paul II, Address to Delegations of other Christian Churches (22 October 1978). http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1978/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19781022_cristiani-non-cattolici.html (accessed 14 December 2019).

⁴ We limit ourselves to the most important texts by John Paul II: *Redemptor hominis*, nn.8, 11, 12, 15 and 16; *Catechesi tradendae*, nn.3, 32 and 33; *Familiaris consortio*, n.78; *Sapientiae christiana*, n.69; *Egregiae virtutis*, nn.3-4; *Redemptoris mater*, nn.29-34; *Redemptoris missio*,

texts of John Paul II, read systematically as a whole, would allow us to elaborate an entire ecumenical doctrine. But he himself saved us that work when, on the occasion of the twenty-five years of the creation of the Secretariat for Christian Unity, he developed an ecumenical 'programme' in his address to the College of Cardinals (28 June 1985).⁵

The ecumenical theme was resumed, with greater depth, ten years later in *Ut unum sint* (hereafter, *UUS*), a kind of theological and theological compendium, where the path taken by the Catholic Church since the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council is evaluated, with the purpose of reaffirming it and, prior to the celebration of the Great Jubilee of the year 2000, point out the path that remained to be undertaken. Many have expressed as a peculiarity that *UUS* has been the first and only time that a Pope has written an encyclical concerning the ecumenical endeavour and that, if it were not for the conciliar teaching on which it is founded, it could be seen as the reverse of the position of Pope Pius XI in the Encyclical Letter *Mortalium animos* (6 January 1928).⁶ The peculiarity of *UUS* is not limited to this, but also to the fact that it is implicitly addressed to all Christians, since no recipients are mentioned.

The literary style, of humble tone, translated into the vernacular languages in the first person singular, is a sign of the Pope's personal commitment to what he affirms. This is undoubtedly related to one of the most challenging aspects for the Catholic Church: the proposal to review the exercise of the Petrine ministry, hoping to receive the help of those responsible, as well as the contribution of theologians from other Churches and ecclesial communities.⁷ Some have pointed out that it is an invitation to a true 'conversion' of the Papacy, an object since then of extensive treatment in different areas, as evidenced by the vast literature on the subject. This is not our purpose in this article. More importantly, perhaps, in order to indicate the current challenge and continuity, is that Pope Francis

n.50; *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, nn.26, 32, 34 and 36; *Tertio millennio adveniente*, nn.16, 34 and 37. See also *Code of Canon Law* (cc. 205; 209; 216; 256, §2; 383, §3; 755; 825, § 2; 840; 844; 869; 874, § 2; 908; 1124; 1125; 1126; 1127; 1183, §3; 1184; 1366).

⁵ See Pope John Paul II, Address to the College of Cardinals (28 June 1985). http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/speeches/1985/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19850628_sacro-collegio.html (accessed 14 December 2019).

⁶ See Pope Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Mortalium animos* (6 January 1928), *AAS* 20 (1928): 5-16.

⁷ See Emmanuel Lanne, "L'Encyclique *Ut unum sint*. Une étape en œcuménisme", *Irénikon* 68 (1995): 214-215.

has endorsed this proposal, considering the little progress made in the direction indicated by his predecessor.⁸

In these pages, avoiding reiterating what was discussed on other occasions,⁹ I would like to dwell on four themes present in *UUS*, intimately related to each other: the language of gestures; the need for a ‘purification of memories;’ the dialogue as ‘conversion dialogue;’ and dialogue as an ‘exchange of gifts.’ I believe that these elements as a whole express a dynamism without which the Ecumenical Movement would not have the possibility of moving towards the achievement of its goal. This does not mean, in any way, underestimating other elements, such as ‘spiritual ecumenism’ and ‘ecumenism of the martyrs,’ which contribute to calibrate the theological itinerary in order to achieve the unity of Christians. We are reminded of those who are engaged in theological dialogue and that unity will not be achieved without serious theological service, since it is necessary to clarify and overcome doctrinal divergences. However, something else is necessary in the ecumenical endeavour that engages all the People of God.

The Unity of Christians and the Gestures of John Paul II

At a time when the media and new technologies have acquired such a great impact, generating a ‘culture,’ and having been assumed at the service of the ecclesial mission, the first announcement, with possibilities of an immediate global reach, is that generated through images. Hence, certain gestures, sometimes unpredictable, pass on a stronger message than the most precise and optimally chosen words. Now, this power of the image is not something new in media culture, since all cultures have known certain gestures bearing exemplary value, called to exercise a pedagogical, even a therapeutic, influence.¹⁰ This explains why gestures have played an important role at the time when the Catholic Church took its first steps in the ecumenical sphere. These gestures not only expressed ‘something new’ that was occurring, but they were bearers of true theological significance.¹¹

⁸ See Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, n.32.

⁹ See Jorge A. Scampini, “El legado ecuménico de Juan Pablo II”, *Revista del Centro de Investigación y Acción Social* 54/542-543 (2005): 85-102.

¹⁰ See Alberto Melloni, “Gestos ecuménicos en el catolicismo contemporáneo”, *Concilium* 291 (2001): 154.

¹¹ The DVD made on the occasion of the forty years of *Unitatis redintegratio*, which goes from the little sharp images, in black and white, of John XXIII and Paul VI, to the colour images, with high definition, of John Paul II, are a sign of the massive impact that the language of gestures was acquiring.

Indeed, when the Catholic Church still lacked an ecclesiology that would allow it to respond to the ecumenical challenge without denying its identity, the gestures eloquently pointed out the “thaw” produced in Rome, and that the era of mutual exclusions had reached its end. Pope John XXIII, who perhaps did not possess an ecclesiology different from that of his predecessors, was, in his own person, ‘the great gesture,’ due to his human warmth and capacity of welcoming others. The decisions would come later: the convocation of the Council with the purpose of promoting Christian unity; the creation of the Secretariat for Unity; the first visits of authorities of other Churches; and the presence of non-Catholic observers in the Council. This is an important legacy assumed by his successors.

Perhaps with less spontaneity, because of his personality, Pope Paul VI unmistakably expressed with certain gestures, the purpose that encouraged him: the request of pardon to the other Christians at the opening of the second conciliar session, because there could have been persons who had erred in the Catholic Church at the origin of the divisions; secondly, the meetings with authorities of other Churches and communities, among them, the most emotional perhaps, the encounter with Patriarch Athenagoras in Jerusalem, and the gift of his episcopal ring to Archbishop Michael Ramsey, the Primate of the Anglican Church; thirdly, the visit to the World Council of Churches, without downplaying their identity, but reformulating the meaning of their ministry; and, finally, on a long list, the scene that took place on the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul (1974), ten years after the lifting of reciprocal excommunication, kneeling to kiss the feet of Metropolitan Meliton of Hierapolis, and reversing, in a gesture of humility, a protocol sign, in force in the papal court until Pius XII. The Metropolitan captured the meaning of the fact by stating that Paul VI had “overcome the Papacy.”

The successor of those two Popes could not “pull back” in their commitment to promoting Christian unity, especially when his first gesture had been to choose a name that included that of both John XXIII and Paul VI. The meetings that had started in the previous pontificates continued with visits to Rome by the leaders of other Churches and ecclesial communities, or made by the Pope in Rome itself, or during his travels. John Paul II has revisited them in *UUS*;¹² however, he uses the word ‘gestures’ to highlight the meaning of two facts.

¹² For the relations with the Orthodox Churches, see *UUS*, nn.52-54; with the other Oriental churches, see *UUS*, n.62; with the Western Ecclesial communities, see *UUS*, n.72.

The first gesture mentioned, which is referred to twice, is the lifting of the excommunication between the Church of Rome and the Patriarchate of Constantinople (7 December 1965).¹³ A gesture which was “condemned to oblivion” and “removed from memory and from the midst of the Church’s excommunications of the past,” according to John Paul II, “was at once a healing of historical memories, a mutual forgiveness, and a firm commitment to strive for communion.” Due to its symbolic content, the act had a therapeutic and, at the same time, a pedagogical character for all Christians, while trying to erase the memory that hindered reconciliation.

Perhaps it was Joseph Ratzinger who, building upon words from the metropolitan Meliton, expressed more clearly the theological intention of the act and the consequences involved.¹⁴ No modification was made in the state of the doctrine, nor in the existing canonical order, nor in ecclesial life, but rather the affirmation of being on the path of the restoration of love between the two Churches, trusting in the mystery of love and of God’s economy. An ecclesial love that is not yet full ecclesial communion but, nevertheless, is the bearer of the dynamics that leads to it. Therefore, the “dialogue of charity” is not a phase prior to the “dialogue of truth,” but both are inseparable, because it is about Christian truth and about restoring unity, a dimension very present in the ecumenical vision of John Paul II. Indeed,

Love gives rise to the desire for unity, even in those who have never been aware of the need for it. Love builds communion between individuals and between Communities. 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.¹⁵

Hence, ecumenism is oriented “... precisely to making the partial communion existing between Christians grow towards full communion in truth and charity.”¹⁶

¹³ See *UUS*, nn.17 and 52.

¹⁴ See Joseph Ratzinger, *Teoría de los principios teológicos. Materiales para una teología fundamental* (Barcelona: Herder, 1985), 251-260. Regarding the meaning of the event, I refer to the research made by Hyacinthe Destivelle, see Id., “La signification ecclésiologique de la levée des anathèmes de 1054. Pour une théologie du dialogue de la charité,” *Cristianesimo nella storia* 38 (2017): 51-84 (published in Id., *Conduis-la vers l’unité parfaite. Œcumenisme et synodalité* [Paris: Cerf, 2018], 35-65).

¹⁵ *UUS*, n.21.

¹⁶ *UUS*, n.14.

Even more, "... love for the truth is the deepest dimension of any authentic quest for full communion between Christians. Without this love it would be impossible to face the objective theological, cultural, psychological and social difficulties which appear when disagreements are examined."¹⁷

The second gesture took place in another context and is of another nature, expressing real communion, although not yet full, between Catholics and Lutherans. It is the sign of love and hope, and also of suffering with which it may be necessary to live together during the time that separates us from the day in which we can fully embrace the gift of full unity in faith and express it sacramentally. Indeed, according to John Paul II, it has been about

... one demonstration dictated by fraternal charity and marked by deep clarity of faith which made a profound impression on me, [...] the Eucharistic celebrations at which I presided in Finland and Sweden during my journey to the Scandinavian and Nordic countries. At Communion time, the Lutheran Bishops approached the celebrant. They wished, by means of an agreed gesture, to demonstrate their desire for that time when we, Catholics and Lutherans, will be able to share the same Eucharist, and they wished to receive the celebrant's blessing. With love I blessed them. The same gesture, so rich in meaning, was repeated in Rome at the Mass at which I presided in Piazza Farnese, on the sixth centenary of the canonisation of Saint Brigid of Sweden, on 6 October 1991.¹⁸

Between the impossibility of celebrating a single Eucharist, which in the Catholic vision is the sign of fully realised unity, and the suffering and impatience so often manifested, especially in inter-confessional families, the challenge is to be a sign not of resignation but rather of a true blessing of one another, without 'appropriating' what is not yet fully available.

In the context of the Great Jubilee, John Paul II made other gestures full of meaning, which symbolically translated his statements: the opening of the Holy Door at St Paul Outside-the-Walls (25 January 2000), at the end of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, a hopeful sign of a time of grace open to Christians, a time which should find them, if not totally united, at least not so separate from each other;¹⁹ the penitential day of the First Sunday of Lent, recognising that the first step towards unity is an attitude of conversion that requires recognising one's own fault in the current divisions;²⁰ and, finally, the ecumenical celebration at the

¹⁷ *UUS*, n.36.

¹⁸ *UUS*, n.72.

¹⁹ See Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente* (10 November 1994), nn.33-34.

²⁰ See *UUS*, nn.15 and 34.

Colosseum commemorating the martyrs of the twentieth century, recognising that the communion of grace, which already exists among Christians, has reached its peak in the lives of so many witnesses of the faith, the only aspect capable of driving the path to full visible communion.²¹

We can affirm that John Paul II did not inaugurate the language of the 'ecumenical gestures', but gave them a scope in a way that those Catholics who still had difficulty with the conciliar opening, were now presented with an unequivocal word that the Catholic commitment to the Ecumenical Movement was irrevocable, engaging the whole Church and everyone in the Church.

The Purification of Memories

The Church, in a sacramental vision, is called to be as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race;²² therefore, she fully fulfils her vocation when she tackles those ruptures that, as an expression of conflictive ethnic, social, cultural and religious pluralities, "crucify humanity in their flesh and in their unity."²³ By vocation, Christians must be present, "in those same fractures with the mission of healing and reconciliation."²⁴ The great paradox is that they themselves need to be healed and reconciled in these fractures. Therefore, we could say that the road to travel from "conflict to communion,"²⁵ thus healing the wounds inflicted on the only Body of Christ, acquires a 'sacramental value' for humanity, always threatened as it is by fanaticism and persecution, attributable to some extent, justifiably or not, to the religious factor. This explains that, in an intimate relation with gestures such as the lifting of excommunication, there is the need for a 'purification of memories.'

In the Catholic sphere, this expression was used for the first time by Paul VI (14 December 1975), commemorating the tenth anniversary of the lifting

²¹ See *Tertio millennio adveniente*, n.37; *UUS*, nn.83-84.

²² See Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* (21 November 1964), n.1.

²³ According to the expression of Bishop Pierre Claverie: Id., *Lettre et messages d'Algerie* (Paris: Karthala, 1996), 151-154.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ In agreement with the title prepared by Catholics and Lutherans on the fifth centenary of the Reformation, see *From Conflict to Communion. Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*. Report of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/it/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/luterani/dialogo/documenti-di-dialogo/2013-dal-conflitto-alla-comunione/en.html> (accessed 5 December 2019).

of the excommunications of 1054.²⁶ John Paul II resorted to such a purification of memories from the beginning of his pontificate, albeit in different contexts, applying it to situations in need of reconciliation.²⁷ Perhaps the most significant mention of the need for purification of memories in ecumenical relations was the one that took place in Switzerland (1984), in the encounter with the Federation of Evangelical Churches. There, John Paul II held that for ecumenical progress a purification of memories is a fundamental element and that the division between Christians would only be overcome when Catholics and Reformed Christians were able to write together the history of divisions with the objectivity that gives deep fraternal charity.²⁸

In *UUS* the importance of purification of memories appears almost at the beginning of the text, and goes hand in hand with the clear awareness that other issues need to be resolved in addition to doctrinal divergences:

Nevertheless, besides the doctrinal differences needing to be resolved, Christians cannot underestimate the burden of *long-standing misgivings* inherited from the past, and of *mutual misunderstandings* and *prejudices*. *Complacency, indifference* and *insufficient knowledge of one another* often make this situation worse. Consequently, the commitment to ecumenism must be based upon the conversion of hearts and upon prayer, which will also lead to the necessary *purification of past memories*. With the grace of the Holy Spirit, the Lord's disciples, inspired by love, by the power of the truth and by a sincere desire for mutual forgiveness and reconciliation, are called to *re-examine together their painful past* and the hurt which that past regrettably continues to provoke even today. All together, they are invited by the ever-fresh power of the Gospel to acknowledge with sincere and total objectivity the mistakes made and the contingent factors at work at the

²⁶ See Rencontre œcuménique entre l'Église de Rome et l'Église de Constantinople. Homélie du Pape Paul VI, Dimanche 14 décembre 1975. http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/fr/homilies/1975/documents/hf_p-vi_hom_19751214.html (accessed 5 December 2019).

²⁷ See Hyacinthe Destivelle, "L'Œcuménisme entre l'histoire et la mémoire. La purification de la mémoire dans le magistère catholique récente," in Id., *Conduis-la vers l'unité parfaite. Œcuménisme et synodalité*, 159-173.

²⁸ See Discours du Pape Jean-Paul II au Conseil de la Fédération des Églises Évangéliques de Suisse, Kehrsatz (Berne), Jeudi 14 juin 1984. http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/fr/speeches/1984/june/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19840614_chiese-protestanti.html (accessed 5 December 2019). The proposal was translated in an academic work on the history of Christianity in Switzerland: see *Histoire du christianisme en Suisse: une perspective œcuménique*, Lukas Vischer et al., dir. (Geneve: Editions Labor et Fides, 1995). Surely, the process carried out in Ireland was more challenging and demanding from the Irish School of Ecumenics since 1980, where it not only had to purify the memories but also lead them to a true reconciliation, eradicating the fatality of the violence, and giving way to a different future; see *Reconciling Memories*, Alan Falconer and Joseph Liechty, ed., 2nd expanded ed. (Dublin: Columba Press, 1998).

origins of their deplorable divisions. *What is needed is a calm, clear-sighted and truthful vision of things*, a vision enlivened by divine mercy and capable of freeing people's minds and of inspiring in everyone a renewed willingness, precisely with a view to proclaiming the Gospel to the men and women of every people and nation.²⁹

It is worth remembering that when *UUS* was published, the dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches was experiencing a traumatic situation, since after a first decade of fruitful theological work, it was blocked by the situation in Eastern Europe, after the fall of the Communist regime and the subsequent reconfiguration of the Churches in the region. The Orthodox Churches considered that, without a solution to the "problem" caused by the Catholic presence, it was impossible to continue the doctrinal dialogue. The gestures of reconciliation, the orientations of the Pro Russia Commission and the apostolic journeys of John Paul II to some countries of the region were not a sufficient guarantee to remove distrust and tensions at the local level. This was a sign that gestures and teachings must be accompanied by actions, and that the gestures and teachings of the head do not exempt the rest of the ecclesial body from the process to live *in situ*. It was necessary that Orthodox and Eastern Catholics, who shared the same land and the same complex and traumatic history, lived their own process of purification of memories.

This need for purification occurs in different contexts and in different situations, not only as a result of violent conflicts, but also because of experiences of mutual exclusions that have damaged fraternal charity, due to mistrust and mutual suspicion, for example due to proselytising in a territory historically evangelised by another Church, by inherited stereotypes, by past condemnations, etc.³⁰ In the first decades of this millennium, in bilateral dialogues, the purification of memories has been considered an essential step towards full reconciliation. The Lutheran-Mennonite³¹ and Catholic-Mennonite³² dialogues have testified to this. This last dialogue has indicated that, in order to begin a process of 'memory

²⁹ *UUS*, n.2.

³⁰ *UUS*, n.15.

³¹ See *Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ*. Report of the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission, 2010. <https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/OEA-Lutheran-Mennonites-EN-full.pdf> (accessed 5 December 2019).

³² See *Called together to be Peacemakers*. Report of the International Dialogue between the Catholic Church and Mennonite World Conference 1998-2003. <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/it/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/conferenza-mennonita-mondiale/documenti-di-dialogo/2003-called-together-to-be-peacemakers/en.html> (accessed 30 November 2019).

healing,' it is necessary to begin with its purification. This requires a rigorous historical analysis and a renewed historical evaluation, which should not be underestimated or carried out lightly. A historical-critical investigation, oriented to use all the accessible information in view of the reconstruction of the historical context, the ways of thinking, the conditioning and the vital process in which the events and traumatic words of the past are located, is vital in order to ensure the veracity of the contents and the challenges that, precisely in their diversity, pose to the present. In this manner, a joint re-reading of history can help purify the understanding of the past as a preparatory step to heal the painful memories of Christian communities. This need for justice and charity among Christians, who rediscover themselves as brothers in Christ, should have a "sacramental" value in contexts, cultures and societies that call for reconciliation.³³

Dialogue as Conversion Dialogue

From the perspective offered by the previous themes, it is evident that the ecumenical path not only requires a serious theological dialogue, but also demands a deep spiritual and theological attitude; hence the importance of conversion understood in a global sense. When considering the contents of *Unitatis redintegratio*, John Paul II stated that: "In the teaching of the Second Vatican Council there is a clear connection between renewal, conversion and reform."³⁴ This affirmation offers an advancement in the interpretation of the conciliar text, since conversion was inscribed in the personal sphere, while renovation and reform engaged the whole Church. Now, according to John Paul II, there would be a kind of circular relationship between the three dimensions, which allows us to affirm that: "the Council calls for personal conversion as well as for communal conversion."³⁵ As is the case when interpreting any text, it is also important in this case to pay attention to the context of the statement, especially when pointing out where to find the momentum for that conversion. Indeed, in *UUS* it is argued that:

With regard to other Christians, the principal documents of the Commission on Faith and Order and the statements of numerous bilateral dialogues have already provided Christian Communities with useful tools for discerning what is necessary to the Ecumenical Movement and to the conversion which it must inspire.³⁶

³³ See *ibid.*, nn.192-197.

³⁴ *UUS*, n.16.

³⁵ *UUS*, n.15b.

³⁶ *UUS*, n.17a.

In view of the joint search for the truth about the Church, which is the ultimate purpose of dialogue, the results of this dialogue provide those instruments that allow us to discern what is necessary for the Ecumenical Movement and offer the communities the light to arrive at conversion. According to the meaning of this statement, the “communities” engaged in dialogue, with the help of theologians and experts, are none other than the Churches and the Ecclesial communities themselves. It is, therefore, a commitment that affects the Churches themselves, including the Catholic Church.

Conversion goes hand in hand with the sanctity of life, and dialogue occupies an indispensable place in it, as an obligatory step in the self-realisation of man, individually and communally considered. This dialogue not only implies the cognitive dimension, but also a global, existential one, since it cannot remain confined to doctrinal formulations, but rather “fostered and sustained by the dialogue of love,”³⁷ putting into play the confessional identity as a lived reality, the ‘subjectivity’ of each community, and what makes them ‘confessing subjects’ of the faith in Christ.

This dialogue is related to prayer, or even better, is *a condition* for dialogue. But, in addition, in the search for truth, dialogue becomes an examination of conscience, which leads to recognising the condition of sinners both in pastors and in the faithful. The recognition of this condition must convince all Christians of the need for conversion, including personal sins, “but also social sins, which is to say the sinful ‘structures’ themselves which have contributed and can still contribute to division and to the reinforcing of division.”³⁸ Thus, a new expression appears, sinful ‘structures’, followed by another: a “conversion dialogue.”³⁹

The dialogue is characterised, then, by its vertical dimension, oriented towards the Redeemer, and so, our reconciliation does not remain in the horizontal relationship of the encounter. The common awareness of our reality as sinners opens an interior space of a common and trusting search for Christ, to work with the power of his Spirit.⁴⁰ This dialogue also expresses the love of the truth, which demands inner attitudes of respect and humility, and an attitude of charity towards the interlocutor, but also humility towards the discovered truth, which may in turn require revisions of affirmations and behaviours. Without

³⁷ *UUS*, n.60; and also n.47: “Dialogue does not extend exclusively to matters of doctrine but engages the whole person; it is also a dialogue of love.”

³⁸ See *UUS*, n.34.

³⁹ See *UUS*, nn.35; 82 (twice); 83; 84.

⁴⁰ See *UUS*, n.35.

renouncing one's identity, these attitudes require the means for them to be understandable, and takes into account the mental categories and historical experience of the other.⁴¹ As soon as dialogue encourages the parties to question, understand and share thoughts and experiences with each other, unexpected discoveries are possible. One may learn to look for ways that express the reality in its entirety, overcoming partial readings and eliminating false interpretations; hence "authentic ecumenism is a gift at the service of truth."⁴²

Conceived in this way, conversion is an indispensable attitude for all Christians, even for the Pope himself who, like Peter, experiences that his confession of faith must be related to his conversion.⁴³ Therefore, almost at the end of the encyclical, the space is opened for a review of the way of exercising the Petrine ministry, specifically relating to each other's conversion, renewal and reform. It does not relate only to personal conversion, but to the renewal and, if necessary, a reformulation of the way in which the Petrine ministry is exercised, fulfilling more clearly the service entrusted to the Bishop of Rome.⁴⁴ This is a 'requirement' of faith that commits, first and foremost, the Bishop of Rome himself, since the evolution of ecclesial praxis and the formulation of doctrines and dogma, especially after the great ruptures, demand that this ministry becomes a more conspicuous 'gift' for all Christians on the road to full unity.

Dialogue as an "Exchange of Gifts"

The Council had indicated that, thanks to dialogue, each interlocutor "... gains a truer knowledge and more just appreciation of the teaching and religious life of both Communions;" and "... all are led to examine their own faithfulness to Christ's will for the Church and accordingly to undertake with vigour the task of renewal and reform."⁴⁵ Moreover,

It is right and salutary to recognise the riches of Christ and virtuous works in the lives of others who are bearing witness to Christ, sometimes even to the shedding of their blood. For God is always wonderful in his works and worthy of all praise. Nor should we forget that anything wrought by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of our separated brethren can be a help to our own edification. Whatever is

⁴¹ See *UUS*, n.36.

⁴² *UUS*, n.38.

⁴³ See *UUS*, nn.4 and 91.

⁴⁴ *UUS*, n.95.

⁴⁵ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio* (21 November 1964), n.4.

truly Christian is never contrary to what genuinely belongs to the faith; indeed, it can always bring a deeper realisation of the mystery of Christ and the Church.⁴⁶

This leads John Paul II to recognise that the “dialogue is not simply an exchange of ideas. In some way it is always an ‘exchange of gifts.’”⁴⁷ It is an expression that, just like the purification of memories, has been present in many occasions throughout the pontificate of Pope John Paul II,⁴⁸ and that appears in *UUS*, literally or implicitly, at least five times.⁴⁹ This statement is based on the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the reciprocal enrichment of the particular Churches within the Catholic Church;⁵⁰ and it is applied in the encyclical, for the first time, to ecumenical relations.⁵¹ This implies a recognition of the real communion that already exists between the different Churches, and that the gifts they hold in this imperfect communion, belong to the Church of Christ, who works in catholicity in view of their full eschatological consummation.⁵² In this perspective, each identity is valued above all in its positive dimension, in what it is able to offer in the search for the visible unity of Christians and the full realisation of the catholicity of the Church. This requires recognising the legitimate diversities between the Churches of the East and the West, whereby differences in doctrinal formulations, “are often to be considered as complementary rather than conflicting,” and as a consequence, “communion is made fruitful by the exchange of gifts between the Churches insofar as they complement each other;”⁵³ but also in the relations with the Ecclesial communities of the West, since “... their ‘diversities’, although significant as has been pointed out, do not therefore preclude mutual interaction and complementarity.”⁵⁴

The ecumenical path has already been an experience of mutual ‘exchange of gifts’ between the Churches as some theological endeavours have interpreted.⁵⁵

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ *UUS*, n.28.

⁴⁸ For a thorough presentation, see Michel Mallèvre, “L’œcuménisme comme ‘échange de dons’ selon Jean-Paul II,” *Istina* 53 (2008): 47-75.

⁴⁹ Apart from *UUS*, n.28, already quoted, see nn.35 (“sharing of gifts”); 41 (“to receive those gifts”); 57 and 87 (“process of mutual enrichment.”)

⁵⁰ See *Lumen gentium*, n.13.

⁵¹ See Emmanuel Lanne, “L’encyclique *Ut unum sint*, une étape en œcuménisme,” *Irénikon* 68 (1995): 219.

⁵² See *UUS*, n.87.

⁵³ See *UUS*, n.57.

⁵⁴ *UUS*, n.65.

⁵⁵ So, for example, for the Methodist-Catholic dialogue, see Geoffrey Wainwright, “Responsible theology and the ecumenism of life? The ‘Exchange of ideas’ and the ‘Exchange of

This exchange can take on different modalities, it means recognising the assets of other Christian communities as their own, and it presents itself as a requirement in view of the need to receive those same assets in the community of faith itself.⁵⁶ This always implies a learning process,⁵⁷ which continues presenting challenges, to the extent that Christians are aware of the shared responsibility they have in testifying to their faith in the present world.⁵⁸ The Catholic Church must not forget that Christ calls her “to continual reformation as she sojourns here on earth,” because she “is always in need of this, in so far as she is an institution of men here on earth.” Avoiding any temptation of confessional isolation, the ‘exchange of gifts’ with other Churches and Ecclesial communities, should lead the Church to rediscover herself more authentically as the Church of Christ and to realise more fully, through the path of conversion, renewal and reform, her own catholicity.⁵⁹

Conclusion

John Paul II did not give up his conviction that only in the Catholic Church “does the Church of Christ fully subsist,” since the fullness of the means of salvation is found only in it. Many would have liked this statement to be reviewed, taking into account the path journeyed until now. Not only was this not the case, but some positions of some Roman documents gave the impression of narrowing the open spirit of the Council. However, it is undeniable that, recreating an attitude of Peter (Gal 2:9), John Paul II made it clear to all, with his

gifts,” in *Ökumene des Lebens als Herausforderung der wissenschaftlichen Theologie, Tagungsbericht der 14. Wissenschaftlichen Konsultation der Societas Oecumenica* (Frankfurt am Main: Lembeck, 2008), 187-207 [200-203]; or on a wider perspective, see Margaret O’Gara, “Receiving Gifts in Ecumenical Dialogue,” in *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning. Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism*, Paul D. Murray, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 26-38.

⁵⁶ See O’Gara, “Receiving Gifts in Ecumenical Dialogue,” 33ss.

⁵⁷ According to the expression coined in the process that has had the Department of Theology and Religion at Durham University as its centre of dissemination, see Paul Murray, “Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning. Establishing the Agenda,” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 7 (2007): 279-301.

⁵⁸ See Hervé Legrand, “L’échange des dons: un défi spirituel entre chrétiens,” *Irenikon* 83 (2010): 264-271.

⁵⁹ This explains why the “exchange of gifts” has been assumed as a key to understanding what ecumenical dialogue already offers to the Catholic Church in the reform as proposed by Pope Francis; see *La Riforma e le Riforme nella Chiesa*, Antonio Spadaro – Carlos María Galli, eds., (Brescia: Queriniana, 2016), 367-455.

own gestures, that among the full means that the Catholic Church was endowed with is the “hand stretched out in favour of communion.”⁶⁰ That is why the ministry of unity is not limited, and cannot be limited, to waiting for the ‘return’ of other Christians, but rather it must be the service of the pilgrim who is always open to encounter others, while recognising that it is only the grace of the Spirit of God who acts beyond the visible limits of the Catholic Church, in which we encounter elements that share in holiness and truth, which are “forces impelling toward catholic unity.”⁶¹

Rev. Prof. Jorge Alejandro Scampini O.P.
 Convento Santo Domingo
 Defensa 422
 C 1065 AAH – Buenos Aires
 Argentina

jorgeascampiniop@gmail.com

N.B. The article (by Jorge Scampini) was translated from Spanish by Rev. Mark J. Zammit

⁶⁰ According to the expression of Jean-M. R. Tillard, see id., “Préparer l’unité. Pour une pastorale œcuménique,” *Nouvelle revue théologique* 102 (1980): 165.

⁶¹ *Lumen gentium*, n.8.