

UNITATIS REDINTEGRATIO DECREE ON ECUMENISM – THE CORNERSTONE OF CONTEMPORARY ECUMENISM

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Riassunto: Lo studio è strutturato in due parti: la prima, basata sul testo del decreto *Unitatis redintegratio*, e la seconda, che tratta di alcuni personaggi ecumenici che hanno lasciato la loro impronta sulla storia religiosa della Romania. Nella prima parte sono presentate le cause della separazione tra la Chiesa di Occidente e quella di Oriente, ma anche le proposte fatte dal suddetto decreto in vista di un ecumenismo efficace. Poi sono presi in considerazione gli importanti gesti ecumenici fatti da tre papi: Paolo VI, Giovanni Paolo II e Francesco. La seconda parte tratta di tre persone che, mediante il loro lavoro ecumenico, hanno aiutato moltissimo al progresso ecumenico in Romania. Prima di tutto viene ricordato il vescovo di Jassy, Mons. Domenico Jaquet (1895-1903), il quale, essendo svizzero, aveva un'orizzonte largo dell'ecumenismo. Un secondo personaggio è il Beato Vladimiro Ghika (1973-1954), il quale ha lavorato per tutta la vita per l'unione delle due Chiese separate nel 1054. L'ultimo momento della seconda parte tratta della visita che il Papa Giovanni Paolo II ha fatto in Romania nel periodo 7-9 maggio 1999.

Parole chiave: Concilio Vaticano II, *Unitatis redintegratio*, ecumenismo, Domenico Jaquet, Vladimiro Ghika, Paolo VI, Giovanni Paolo II, Papa Francesco, ortodossia, cattolicesimo.

Introduction

Ut omnes unum sint (*That all of them may be one*). This wish of Jesus is still present in the life of the Universal Church, given that the *Unitatis redintegratio* decree states, “the restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council”. But this desideratum of Jesus is also found in the life of the Diocese of Iasi, as the coat of arms of the current bishop bears the very inscription.

The *Unitatis redintegratio* (UR) decree, promulgated in the Vatican 50 years and 5 days ago (November 21, 1964), is divided into three chapters, together comprising 24 articles. The first chapter focuses on the Catholic principles on ecumenism (articles 2-4), the second is about the practice of ecumenism (paragraphs 5-12), while the last chapter analyses the relation between the Catholic Church and other Churches and ecclesial communities separated from the Roman Apostolic See (with special consideration of the Eastern and Protestant Churches) – articles 13-23.

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In the first part of our intervention we shall try to briefly analyse, as shown in the decree mentioned, the main causes that led to the rupture of Church unity, but also the proposals that the Second Vatican Council makes for an effective ecumenism. Moreover, we shall consider the example given by Popes Paul VI, John Paul II and Francis to mankind through their direct involvement in restoring the relations between Catholics and other Christian denominations.

The second part of our presentation will present three moments very significant in terms of history and ecumenism that the Romanian people lived in the past century: the second bishop of Iasi, Mons. Dominic Jaquet (1895-1903); the Blessed Vladimir Ghika (1873-1954) and the visit of St. John Paul II, pope, to Romania (May 7 to 9, 1999).

1. Christ's shirt torn into three pieces: the Catholic, the Orthodox and the Protestant

1.1. Causes of the division

Regarding the separation of the Eastern Church from the Western one, the decree *Unitatis redintegratio* states, "the heritage handed down by the apostles was received with differences of form and manner, so that from the earliest times of the Church it was explained variously in different places, owing to diversities of genius and conditions of life. All this, quite apart from external causes, prepared the way for decisions arising also from a lack of charity and mutual understanding". It is worth noting that the words of the *Unitatis redintegratio* decree represents an eloquent summary of the contexts and reasons that led to the slow separation of the two Churches, the climax being reached in 1054 with the Great Eastern Schism.

As for the causes that led to the separation of the Protestant churches from the Catholic Church, the *Unitatis redintegratio* decree does not mention anything at all, passing directly to "setting down some considerations which can, and indeed should, serve as a basis and encouragement for such dialogue". These considerations are: our faith in Christ; the study of the Sacred Scripture; sacramental life and life in Christ. Of all Protestant churches, the one mentioned using its own name is the Anglican Communion, as one "among those in which Catholic traditions and institutions in part continue to exist".

1.2. Attempts to restore the unity up to the Second Vatican Council

Before reviewing the main moments during which Christians attempted to restore unity of the Church, we believe it necessary to make an observation as regards the perception that people had in Antiquity and the Middle

Ages about a schism or an excommunication. Contemporary historians and theologians believe that if the schisms protagonists of 1054 and those of the sixteenth century had known about the negative consequences on the Christian world following the break with the Church of Rome, they would not have rushed to separate from the Catholic Church. But they considered these events as temporary ones and without major importance for the Universal Church, just as the tensions often appearing during Antiquity.

Up to the twentieth century, the main moments during which Eastern Church tried to get closer to the Western one in order to restore unity were: the Second Council of Lyon (1274) and the Council of Florence in 1439 that, with the *Laetentur coeli* bubble, had managed to achieve unity with the Eastern Churches. Despite the fact that only one bishop of the Eastern delegation did not sign this bubble (Mark of Ephesus), this unity was not successful among Eastern Christians, so that participants to the Council of Florence, after returning from Constantinople, were forced to retract all that had been signed during the council.

Another important moment of powerful empathy between West and East was the great victory of Stephen the Great (canonized by the Romanian Orthodox Church in 1992) over the Turks in Vaslui. On that occasion, Pope Sixtus IV (1471-1484) named the prince of Moldavia *Athleta Christi*, precisely because it succeeded in stopping the Ottoman army on its way to Western Europe.

If the Eastern Church tried over the second millennium to accomplish unity with Rome, the same cannot be said about the Protestant Churches that, following the rupture, were divided into many communities. However, we mention here that the Universal Conference of Protestant Missions was held in Edinburgh in 1910, considered as the starting point for ecumenism that will lead to the establishment of the World Council of Churches in 1948. In addition to this initiative, it is also worth mentioning the idea implemented by 2 Anglican priests (Paul James Wattson and Spencer Jones) who, in 1908, called for a week of prayer for Christian unity, between January 18 and 25.

1.3. The proposals of the Second Vatican Council for a fruitful ecumenism

In its first chapter, the *Unitatis redintegratio* decree presents the Catholic principles on ecumenism. Starting from the institution of the Eucharist in the Church, the decree concludes that “the highest exemplar and principle of the sacred mystery of the unity of the Church is the unity of the Persons of the Trinity: the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit, one God”.

In the second chapter (“The practice of ecumenism”), the decree provides to all Christians a few certain ways to reach an intense experience of ecumenism in order to restore the unity of the Church, which is undergoing constant renewal. These ways are: a change of heart; unity of Christians in prayer; mutual knowledge; ecumenical formation; how to express and expose the doctrine of faith; cooperation among Christians. The basis of the movement toward unity is the renewal of the Church, which “is essentially grounded in an increase of fidelity to her own calling”.

The decree calls on all Christians not to confuse authentic ecumenism, which must take place with the approval of ecclesiastical authority, with the simple irenicism: “It is essential that the doctrine should be clearly presented in its entirety. Nothing is so foreign to the spirit of ecumenism as a false irenicism, in which the purity of Catholic doctrine suffers loss and its genuine and certain meaning is clouded”.

1.4. The relationship between Catholics and other Christian denominations during post-conciliar times

1.4.1. The examples of Popes Paul VI, John Paul II and Francis

The one who set the tone in applying the *Unitatis Redintegratio* decree was the Blessed Pope Paul VI (1963-1978) himself, who by getting closer to the Oriental Church showed the mankind that the mistakes of the past can be overcome through a thorough examination of conscience and recognition of sins against unity. We mention here two important ecumenical moments during which Pope Paul VI had the role of protagonist: the historic meeting of January 5, 1964 in Jerusalem, with the Patriarch of Constantinople, Athenagoras I and the event on December 7, 1965, when the two heads of Churches cancelled the excommunications dating back to 1054. We will quote here a short excerpt from the statement that the two have signed on the eve of the closing ceremony of the Second Vatican Council:

Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I with his synod, convinced that they express the common wish for justice and the unanimous feeling of love of their faithful, (...) in common agreement, declare that:

a) they regret the offensive words, the reproaches without foundation, and the reprehensible gestures which, on both sides, have marked or accompanied the sad events of this period;

b) they likewise regret and remove both from memory and from the midst of the Church the sentences of excommunication that followed these events, the memory of which has influenced actions up to our day and has hindered closer relations in charity; and they commit these excommunications to oblivion;

c) finally, they deplore the preceding and later vexing events which, under the influence of various factors – among which, lack of understanding and mutual trust – eventually led to the effective rupture of ecclesiastical communion.

Man of broad vision and heart wide open, Pope John Paul II continued the ecumenical ministry begun by the Blessed Paul VI. A very important event was the meeting of the representatives of Christian confessions and other religions in Assisi on October 27, 1986. On that occasion the Pope said:

For the first time in history, we have come together from every where, Christian Churches and Ecclesial Communities, and World Religions, in this sacred place dedicated to Saint Francis, to witness before the world, each according to his own conviction, about the transcendent quality of peace. (...)

Prayer, fasting, pilgrimage. This day in Assisi has helped us become more aware of our religious commitments, but it has also made the world (...) more aware of the responsibility of each religion regarding problems of war and peace. More perhaps than ever before in history, the intrinsic link between an authentic religious attitude and the great good of peace has become evident to all.

The same pope promulgated the encyclical letter *Ut unum sint* on May 25, 1995, on commitment to Ecumenism, starting from the *Unitatis redintegratio* document. Particular attention is paid to the analysis of the relations between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox one. Regarding the latter, the Pope says:

Speaking of the Churches of the East, the Council acknowledged their great liturgical and spiritual tradition, the specific nature of their historical development, the disciplines coming from the earliest times and approved by the Holy Fathers and Ecumenical Councils, and their own particular way of expressing their teaching. The Council made this acknowledgement in the conviction that legitimate diversity is in no way opposed to the Church's unity, but rather enhances her splendour and contributes greatly to the fulfilment of her mission.

The current pope, Francis, walks in the footsteps of his predecessors, seeking particularly closeness to the Eastern Church. His visit to the Holy Land this year remains memorable, where on May 25 in Jerusalem, he met the Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I. On this occasion, the two signed a joint statement expressing their hope that the moment of unity was not too far away.

In two days the Holy Father will begin his visit to Turkey, where he will attend the celebration of the Solemnity of St. Andrew, together with the Patriarch Bartholomew I, next Sunday in Istanbul.

1.5. Daily ecumenism

With this syntagm we wish to define the relations that exist between the various Christian denominations in Romania on a daily basis.

It is common knowledge that in the last election held in Romania, country with an Orthodox majority, those who expressed their vote chose a Lutheran (Klaus Werner Iohannis) as president, who is married to a Greek Catholic. This is perhaps the best example of socio-political unity. As far as the religious-doctrinal one is concerned, we still have, all of us, a lot of work to do to fully achieve it.

A second concrete fact, worth mentioning here, is the celebration of many mixed marriages in our country. We all know so many nice families, in which the spouses are from different Christian denominations. Therefore, authentic ecumenism is possible, at least at the level of ordinary believers. Things get complicated when theologians treat the ecumenical issues or those who think they are good at dogmatic.

2. Reference points for ecumenism in Romania

2.1. The Bishop Dominic Jaquet (1895-1903)

The Swiss Bishop Dominic Jaquet administered the Diocese of Iasi between 1895 and 1903. He was appointed as bishop on January 8, 1895, and following the invitation of the Holy Office, resigned on July 5, 1903.

A fundamental cause of Bishop Jaquet's resignation was his attitude towards the issue of religious education. He, who was formed in the tolerant religious environment of Fribourg, was a broad-minded person, welcoming also Orthodox, Protestant and Jewish children in the Catholic schools. But Franciscans and diocesan priests from Moldova did not agree that Catholic schools be attended by children of another religion or Christian denomination, which represented, in their opinion, a serious danger to the Catholic faith. Some priests in Moldova have brought these issues to the attention of the Holy Office. Consequently, in early 1903, bishop Jaquet was called to Rome by the Cardinals of the Holy Office to give explanations for the methods used in the Catholic schools in the diocese. In reality, the situation was much more serious, as, according to a note of the Holy Office, Bishop Jaquet was "delato de provis moribus et de prova doctrinae".

The cardinals of the Holy Office, who agreed with the priests who criticized the "anti-Roman" attitude, that is the great tolerance that their bishop demonstrated towards the Orthodox and Jewish, requested the resignation, which Bishop Jaquet presented to the Holy See for the first time on March 31, 1903.

On July 1, 1903 the cardinals of the Holy Office decided for Bishop Dominic Jaquet to leave Moldavia:

Return to your diocese at once and send your resignation from there immediately (mere formality, as it has already been accepted), written in the way you see fit; and you are to leave that place at the soonest, but in any case no later than August this year. The answer of acceptance will be sent to you either by the *Propaganda* or by the State Secretary with a few words of praise.

Obedient to his superiors, the bishop sent his resignation to Rome on July 5, 1903. The letter is addressed to the Prefect of the *De Propaganda Fide* Congregation, Cardinal Antonio Giovanni Benedetto Gotti (1902-1916):

Your Holiness,

After eight years of torturous labour dedicated to spreading the Kingdom of God in the Mission in Moldavia, I prostrate myself at the feet of Your Eminence and humbly ask You to accept my resignation as bishop of Iasi.

Leaving my dear diocese, of which I will keep a happy memory in my heart, I will not remain insensitive to its fate and I will ceaselessly pray to the Lord for the growth of faith and Christian virtues of Moldavian Catholics and the achievement of your Holiness's great project [unity of the two Churches – *n.n.*].

With filial love I prostrate myself at the feet of Your Eminence and humbly ask for the grace and apostolic blessing.

By the telegram of July 29, 1903, Msgr. Jaquet informed Prefect Gotti of his departure from Romania on the last day of that very month. On August 20, 1903 the bishop wrote to an acquaintance in Switzerland, Elizabeth of Weck, that “a malicious priest” defamed him, orally and in writing, for many years, both in Iasi and Rome. The main reason of the gossip was the great tolerance that the bishop was demonstrating in his pastoral work. He resigned because he could not find peace in a highly tense environment.

On February 26, 1904 the former bishop of Iași was appointed Titular Archbishop of Salamina.

2.2. *The Blessed Vladimir Ghika (1873-1954)*

He was born on the very day of Christmas of 1873, in Constantinople, the grandson of the last ruler of Moldavia, Prince Gregory V. Ghika (1849-1856). The Ghika family gave ten rulers to the two Romanian principalities, Moldavia and the Romanian Country. His father held several important functions in the administration of the new Romanian modern state, formed by the union of 1859: Minister of War and Foreign Affairs, representative in Constantinople, Vienna, Rome and Petersburg, the city where he died in 1881.

Vladimir Ghika was baptized in Constantinople into the Orthodox faith of his parents. At age of five he was sent to France, to Toulouse, to attend primary school. Then he went to Paris, where he attended the Faculty of Political Sciences.

In 1902, in Rome, Vladimir Ghika made his profession of Catholic faith. He explained everyone that he passed over to Catholicism “to be a better Orthodox”. He then studied theology, obtaining a doctorate degree, and asking to become a priest. But after a visit of his mother, practican Orthodox Christian, to Pope Pius X (1903-1914), the Sovereign Pontiff advises Vladimir to give up the idea of becoming a priest for now and for the sake of his mother. He made this step only in 1923 in Paris, being ordained priest at the age of 50. Until that time, Vladimir cared for the poor and ignorant, being present – as Jacques Maritain says – “at all crossroads of charity”.

Both before converting to Catholicism and after 1902, Vladimir Ghika was “the friend of the unfortunate” helping all the poor that he met in the cities he visited.

The academician Constantin Bălăceanu-Stolnici gave the following testimony about Vladimir Ghika:

He would often come to our house as our families were vaguely related and belonged to that aristocracy destroyed by the communism. With his Byzantine ascetic look, with his gentle but penetrating eyes, his quiet and soothing voice, the Monsignor reminded me of the Christian scholars of the patristic age...

Certainly, I found it difficult to understand – at the time – his conversion to Catholicism, like those who have been raised in the Orthodox tradition. But his speech – even when addressing delicate issues of theology – was like a remarkable ecumenism, far from those fundamentalisms unknown to Christian teaching, in the name of which we are witnessing so many bloodshed, destruction and mourning even nowadays.

The most concrete sign of ecumenism that invigorated Blessed Ghika is the fact that he asked to be a bi-ritual priest.

As for the relationship with the Orthodox Church, Msgr. Ghika held monthly meetings attended by both lay people and Orthodox priests and prayed together to find the most appropriate approaches to closeness. Vladimir Ghika called these meetings “attempts to become one single flock and one shepherd”.

In addition to these ecumenical efforts seeking unity between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, we must mention that Vladimir Ghika was also deeply involved in the attempt of the Church to restore unity with the Anglican Church.

“By deciding to stay in Romania when he could have left, Vladimir Ghika voluntarily headed towards martyrdom”, having understood that

God asked him to take care of his Church, threatened in relation to what it has crucial: unity around Peter’s Successor. Therefore, Monsignor Ghika mobilized all energies and intelligence to help the legitimate hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Bucharest to maintain communion with the Holy See. For this he was arrested, tried, sentenced and died in a communist prison,

on May 16, 1954.

All the Romanians, regardless of the Christian confession, should be proud to have such a prince, apostle, martyr and blessed, as a French publisher told Mrs. Doina Cornea, great admirer of Vladimir Ghika: “Blessed are you, Romanians, for you have Mons. Ghika”.

2.3. The visit of Saint John Paul II, pope, to Romania (May 7-9, 1999)

Pope John Paul II was the first Pontiff who stepped on Romanian soil.

To come to Romania, country with an Orthodox majority, the Pontiff needed not only the invitation of the President, but also a letter from His Beatitude Teoctist, Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church. At first glance, it seemed something quite easy to achieve. However, the preparation of this historic visit has encountered many difficulties, especially because of all the tensions between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Greek Catholic one. The issue of the restitution of Greek Catholics properties seized by the communist regime in 1948 was at the origin of this dispute.

The tensions between the Orthodox and Greek Catholics also had serious consequences on the decision on the pope’s itinerary in Romania. The Romanian Orthodox Church asked for the “Transylvanian stage” as well as the one in Moldavia to be removed from the program.

Once all the obstacles and tensions overcame, Romania became the first country with an Orthodox majority visited by a pope after the schism of 1054.

On the eve of his arrival in Romania, the pope sent the Romanian people the following message:

I come, not to propose empty and short-lived illusions, utopias that cannot endure or sterile arguments about earthly power, but only Him who is God’s Truth, Jesus Christ our Lord, who died and rose again for the salvation of the world.

Pope John Paul II arrived in Bucharest on Baneasa airport at 12am, on Friday, May 7, 1999, and after kissing the Romanian soil, gave the first speech in Romanian. It was a moment of great emotional significance,

which made all the people who came to greet him, representatives of Churches, the state president, government and parliament members, as well as ordinary people applaud him for minutes on end.

His Holiness expressed a beautiful appreciation for the Romanian people, appreciation that was received with cheers and confidence in a future unity between the two churches. Interrupted several times by applause, he said that his coming in Romania was a wish come true. The Holy Father then emphasized that his visit confirms the close connection between Romania and the Holy See, one that carries a deep significance for the history of Christianity in this region. Furthermore, he recalled that Andrew himself, St. Peter's brother, was the one who brought Christianity to these lands. Romania, His Holiness said, is the bridge between East and West, traditionally called by the beautiful title: "*Garden of Mary*".

In response, His Beatitude Teoctist Patriarch said that his ecumenical visit is the most eloquent sign of the desire for Christian unity and brotherly love. And, as if to reinforce his words with a sign that would forever mark the fraternity of the two Churches, the two hierarchs stepped into the Popemobile blessing the crowds gathered on the streets to greet them all the way between the airport and the Patriarchal Palace.

After a joint prayer in the Patriarchal Cathedral, the pope and patriarch went out, being surrounded by representatives of churches, political personalities, believers and curious people coming from all over the country, and hugged each other openly, repeating exhortations to peace, unity and love.

The itinerary and schedule of the visit of His Holiness during May 7-9, 1999 were agreed by the secretariats in Bucharest and Vatican.

The joy and light on the faces of Orthodox and Catholics believers in Romania during those days, the words that echoed the chests of everyone at the Catholic Mass of May 9, 1999: *Unity! Unity!* profoundly impressed Pope John Paul II. This was a clear sign that the Holy Spirit calls our Churches to an intense and fruitful ecumenism, to restore unity.

Pope John Paul II made a step forward on the path opened by *Unitatis redintegratio* decree, his speeches during the visit to Bucharest being sprinkled with distinctive praises for the beauty and richness of Orthodoxy, which is a faithful guardian of Christian truths.

We quote here an excerpt from the Holy Father's Address at his departure from Romania:

These have been days of deep emotion, which I have intensely felt and which will be cherished in my heart....

Your country has a unique ecumenical vocation stemming from its very roots. Because of its geographical location and long history, its culture and tradition, Romania in a way is a house where East and West meet in natural dialogue.

The Church too breathes here with her two lungs in a particularly visible way, as we have seen in these days. Side by side, as were Peter, Andrew and the other Apostles gathered in prayer with the Mother of God in the first Upper Room, we have experienced a new spiritual Pentecost. The wind of the Holy Spirit has blown powerfully over this land and has spurred us to be firmer in communion and bolder in proclaiming the Gospel. We have practised the new language given to us, the language of fraternal communion, and have tasted its sweetness and beauty, its power and effectiveness...

In these days the Spirit is entrusting God's "dream" to you, young people: may all men and women belong to his family; may all Christians be one. Enter the new millennium with this dream!

You, who have been freed from the nightmare of communist dictatorship, do not let yourselves be deceived by the false and dangerous dreams of consumerism. They also destroy the future. Jesus enables you to dream of a new Romania, a land where East and West can meet in brotherhood.

This Romania is entrusted to your hands. Boldly build it together.

Conclusion

From the above said, we can say that until the promulgation of the *Unitatis Redintegratio* decree, the ecumenism moments initiated within the Catholic world were sporadic and did not have, generally, the consensus of the Holy See.

After the Second Vatican Council, the ecumenical movement has taken a definite shape, its limits being imposed by the *Unitatis Redintegratio* decree, the first promoters being the very popes who pontificated after the council.

Ecumenism is a long journey, a continuous initiative of the international religious community, which must find its roots in the echo of the words said by Jesus in the sacerdotal prayer: *Ut omnes unum sint*.