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ECCLESIASTICAL/ECUMENICAL DIPLOMACY
DURING AND AFTER SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL
OLD AND NEW ORTHODOX NOTES AND COMMENTS

A b s t r a c t. Despite the optimism following the announcement of an ecumenical council by Pope John XXIII, as well as the visit of Pope John Paul II to Bucharest, the first such visit by a Pope to a majority Orthodox country, Orthodox-Roman Catholic relations have not improved to the degree that was originally hoped. The author argues that this is largely due to a dichotomy between Roman Catholic ecumenical diplomacy, tracing the manner in which Pope John Paul II's actions in Romania made huge strides towards the reconciliation of both of these Christian traditions, and the language issuing from the Vatican, which would seem to preclude any such reconciliation. This involves the Vatican's use of terminology which is unacceptable to the Orthodox world, such as restrictions of the use of the term "sister Church." Thus the Catholic Church argues that it should be regarded as the mother Church: only the local Church of Rome can be considered the sister Church of private Churches. This suggests that the Vatican's approach to ecumenism is to encourage Orthodox Churches to follow the example of the Greek Catholic Churches, i.e. union with Rome. In fact the Uniate Churches could be considered more of a barrier, rather than a bridge, to ecumenism, since they are typically regarded with great circumspection by Orthodoxy. This type of attitude is also expressed in *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, which damaged faith in the partnership with Rome, and the nature of the ecumenism promoted by it. It is to be hoped that not only the Catholic Church, but also other Christian confessions, will employ ecumenical flexibility, which can only be done in a spirit of reconciliation, not of confrontation.

Key words: ecumenism, Second Vatican Council, ecclesiastical diplomacy, Church, ecclesiology.

1. INTRODUCTION

For the Orthodox world, ecumenism is a huge challenge that was consciously undertaken, hoping to rediscover a common way of all Christians

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toward visible unity of the Church. 65 years after the official foundation of the World Ecumenical Council of Churches; and more than 165 years since the first attempts to organize actions destined to put on the agenda of the Churches the same theme of unity, this enthusiasm has weakened, and the “targets” fixed by the WCC leadership today are significantly changed. Unfortunately, the “formula” of the ecumenical movement was missed precisely the Roman Catholic Church, which preferred to take only an observer role because ecumenism was regarded with great caution, as it spoke of Christian unity in diversity, which contravened its ecclesiastical centralism.

However, after more than a decade, specifically on January 25, 1959, just three months after his enthronement as Bishop of Rome, Pope John XXIII announced, somewhat surprisingly, the convocation of an ecumenical Council, or rather ecumenical type,¹ which will remain in history under the name of Vatican II, with the main theme being the internal renewal of the Catholic Church, known as *aggiornamento*. His intention was considered by some people with trust, by others with distrust and suspicion, but the evolution of the Church relations, of the society itself, has proved that it was a visionary project, with serious consequences in the religious life of Christians everywhere.

Due to the sudden death of its originator, just three weeks after the official opening of the Council, October 11, 1962, in St. Peter’s Basilica, the work was carried out under the authority and guidance of his successor, Pope Paul VI, between the years 1962–1965. It was the largest Council ever held by the Catholic Church, both in terms of the number of participants and duration of the talks, and especially in terms of the highly complex topics addressed within the workshops, as well as the long-term consequences that were generated.

After all work was completed by the Council, an interesting period began for theologians, historians and researchers from various fields as well as journalists, that of the reception and assimilation of the decisions, trans-

¹ For a Council to be considered as *ecumenical*, from the Orthodox point of view, it must have as participants all representatives of Christian Churches from all over the world, regardless of denomination, not only the representatives of the Catholic Church. Therefore, the term *ecumenical* is more appropriate in this case, since it refers to the convening of a Council which involves the participation of the Catholic clergy of all dioceses of the Catholic Church, the main theme being its internal renewal, the other Churches having only observers. Cf. Ioan Ică Jr., “Council of Vatican II, the reform of the Church and the dilemmas of the post-conciliar era. Reflections of an Orthodox theologian,” in *Perspectives on Vatican II*, ed. Robert Lazu and Alin Tat (Targu Lăpuș: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2004), 65.

formations and changes that have taken place not only within the Catholic Church, but also in its external policy.

Orthodox theologians were quite hesitant regarding the opening of the Catholic Church to real dialogue with the other Churches because of certain ecclesiological ambiguities present in the Council's documents themselves, which led in time to the occurrence of some tension and internal polarization caused by "the growing opposition between the Roman standardizing centre, conservative and hierarchical and local Churches who want a more rigorous application of the principles of diversity, autonomy and communion."²

Therefore the post-conciliar documents and statements were viewed with great circumspection in the Orthodox world. Their interpretation was done in a flexible manner, in the hope of discovering a change in the Catholic ecclesiology that could aid in the *recovery of real dialogue, on the principles of equality and mutual respect*, between the two great Christian Churches. Hope still exists, but the facts show that despite many positive signs coming from the Church of Rome, especially during the pontificate of Pope John Paul II, the situation has remained much the same.

The intention of this short report is to present, through some concrete examples, that from time to time we witness a redefinition of Catholic ecclesiology in its main parts, in notes and different shades, keeping, however, broadly, the same recognized rigor or stiffness. What has really changed a lot in Catholic Church policy is undoubtedly the means of communication. In other words, the diplomacy of the Catholic Church, which I will also call here ecumenical diplomacy—was been developed and modernized, in an impressive manner, becoming one of the most powerful in the world. Pope John Paul II was undoubtedly not only the most charismatic Pope seen by the Orthodox world, at least in the last century, but also the best communicator, an outstanding personality, who has raised ecumenical diplomacy to the rank of an art; the most obvious example is his visit to Romania.

2. RELIGIOUS AND/OR ECUMENICAL DIPLOMACY

In 1999 we experienced a huge emotional few days, when for the first time in history, the Bishop of Rome came in a fraternal visit of friendship to an Orthodox Patriarch, in a majority Orthodox country, Romania. To be

² Ică Jr., *Council of Vatican II*, 71.

more convincing, I will recount some of the highlights of this visit, in order to better understand its historical and religious significance, yet also my disappointment and perplexity at the appearance of the statements from the Church of Rome in the years subsequent.³ I know that the diplomacy of the church is one of the most advanced in the world, but as servants of the same God, I have the faith that it is carried out following some honest and fair principles, under the protection and blessing of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, before I refer to what happened in Bucharest, I will describe, briefly, a sample of the kind of ecclesiastical diplomacy which began at the Council Vatican II. And because it took into account the establishing and developing of some ecumenical relations which will lead to the unity of the Church, I will call it ecumenical diplomacy.

In his inaugural speech at the beginning of the second session of the Council, Pope Paul VI, after calling the Orthodox Churches “holy and venerable,” saying that he does not want their “absorbing or dissolving,” but on the contrary, that they “should be centred again, on the single tree of the unity of Christ,” he returns to the old Catholic phrase according to which the Church’ unity is achieved through “the return of the separated brothers” to the Catholic Church, of course under the single leadership of the Pope who is “the solid and stable foundation of the whole divine-human edifice that Jesus wanted to build, and which he called the Church.”⁴

Moreover, he said that the Catholic Church is the only church able to provide “the perfect unity” for “other Christians,” and movements within the separate Christian communities, indicating that there is a unique Church and that the *mysterious and visible* unity can be achieved only by the unity of faith, through participation in the same sacraments and through the organic harmony of a single Church leadership. Although he recognizes the diversity of the liturgical expressions, the historical traditions, the local powers, or the spiritual trends present within the other Churches, he ends in the same tone of “the father of all,” who calls his “deceived” or “separated” sons, the same as

³ Teoctist Patriarch was surprised by the new position of the Vatican, given that, in the time of Pope John Paul II, the theological dialogue had made obvious progress. He hopes that the Catholic Church will return on their claims that “it is the only and true Church of Christ” in order not to compromise the relations between the two Churches and not to cause disturbances within all the Churches. Otherwise, there are no possibilities for collaboration, but, unfortunately, for stopping and reanalysis of the facts, which would be a great loss to the entire Christian world. In: <http://theologia.wordpress.com/2007/07/14/declaratie-de-presa-a-prea-fericitului-parinte-patriarh-teoctist-in-legatura-cu-documentul-de-la-vatican-29-iunie-2007/> [accessed 29.07.2013].

⁴ *L'Osservatore Romano*, 27.09.1963.

the hen gathers her chickens under her wings (Luke 13: 34), when he says that he is looking for the many sheep of Christ which are not found in the *only stable*, and that, although the time has not yet arrived, he is sure that if the theologians of the other Churches will study the Catholic doctrine they will discover its logic in the deposit of the divine Revelation.⁵

It is easy to see that Pope Paul VI addresses the ecumenical themes in an at least questionable way. He is friendly and open when he speaks about the “status” of the Orthodox Churches, but rather concise and firm when he refers to the papal primacy and the unique role of the Catholic Church in restoring the viewed unity of the Church of Christ. This manner of presentation of the proposals for ecumenical dialogue that the Catholic Church makes to the other Churches seems slightly ambiguous and can be interpreted either as a sign of a deliberate inconsistency of the ecclesiological policy of the Vatican (which is not the case) or as a classic example of ecumenical diplomacy.

In support of my claim sits the comment of one of the most able journalists of religious Church politics in that time, *Jacques Ferrier*, who thought at the time, that the speech of the Pope was as an “expression of a high diplomacy” because in it we find the “categorical assertion of the Catholic doctrine points in a very polite language,” supported by the fact that he once called the non-Catholic Christians as being “the other Christians” and not “the separated Christians,” as was the custom of the Catholic Church.⁶

Probably more delighted by the language than by the content (he was not a theologian by profession) he goes further and says that the Pope’s speech “creates a new climate, almost revolutionary” on the road to the Christian unity, also finding supporting points for his statements. He says for example, that Pope Paul VI, repeats in his opening speech most issues already announced by his predecessor, but his style is of an extraordinary precision, continuously alternating “impulses of the heart” with doctrinal rigor. There is not a word to many or few, every statement of his is accompanied by an argument, so that no one could interpret the text itself differently than it is done by the Pope.⁷ Of course, the comment of the journalist is more extensive and it concludes with the statement that the speech of the Pope is the work of a master of diplomacy.

⁵ *L'Osservatore Romano*, 29.09.1963.

⁶ Jacques Ferrier, “At the Ecumenical Council, Paul VI creates a new climate, almost revolutionary,” *Le Journal de Genève*, September 30, 1963.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Now, 50 years after the Council, as it can be seen easily, despite the real progress made in the field of inter-church relations worldwide, the ecumenical movement is in a state of impasse. The enthusiasm of the period prior to major political movements in Central and Eastern Europe, from the 90s, has been replaced by a kind of skepticism and even distrust regarding the future of ecumenism and its purpose.

Instead, the capacity for dialogue and mutual cooperation between the Catholic Church and other Churches has developed in many aspects, in a manner sometimes impressive. And this is the result of a skilfull policy carried out over the last decades by the representatives of different Christian denominations, which fits perfectly into what we can call today the concept of ecclesiastical diplomacy, or more appropriate, ecumenical diplomacy.

And now I return to the historic moment that took place in Bucharest on May 7 to 9, 1999.⁸ Being invited both by the President of Romania and by the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, it is understood that it was a *state visit with an ecumenical feature*, not pastoral. From the very moment he stepped off the plane, Pope John Paul II had a little speech that toured worldwide. The Pope made some statements that ought to be considered a huge step towards reconciliation and restoration of the fellowship of the two great Churches, which were separated by a hasty act in 1054, which was with unimaginable consequences.

It is with great joy that I come today in Romania, a very dear nation to me and which I had longed to visit for a long time. I kissed its land with deep emotion, grateful first of all to Almighty God, who in His provident goodwill granted me the opportunity to see this thought achieved... It is for the first time when the Divine Providence offers me the possibility to dedicate an apostolic travel to a nation of an orthodox majority... My visit intends to confirm the link between Romania and the Holy See, a link that bears a great significance for the history of Christianity in the region. As it is well known, according to tradition, the faith was brought to these parts by Peter's brother, apostle Andrew.... Romania, bridge-country between East and West, crossroads between the Western and Eastern Europe, called by tradition with the beautiful name of Garden of Holy Virgin, I come to you in the name of Jesus Christ, Son of God and of All-holy Virgin Mary...⁹

⁸ For the visit of His Holiness Pope John Paul II in Romania see: Niku Dumitrașcu, *The Mission of the Romanian Orthodox Church and its challenges* (Cluj Napoca: Napoca Star Publishing House, 2001), 41-56.

⁹ *Adevărul* (The Truth) newspaper, no. 2774, 8-9 May, 1999: 3.

The three days in Romania of Pope John Paul II were marked by many events, meetings, statements, promises and hopes, all in an atmosphere of peace, joy and brotherhood. Sunday, at the end of the Holy Mass officiated by the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, His Beatitude Teoctist, on the site where the construction of a large Orthodox cathedral will begin, Pope John Paul II expressed his confidence in the full cooperation between Orthodox and Catholics in all aspects of the church and social life, in their power and determination to find together the best and most direct way to communion.

May a unique hymn of praise of the name of God break out from the Orthodox and Catholic Church! May it form a symphony of voices expressing the cordial fraternity of the mutual relationships and imploring the thoroughly communion of all believers. Based on the apostolic succession, the Romanian Orthodox Church and the Catholic one have the same Word of God, preserved from the Holy Scriptures, and the same Mysteries or Sacraments ... safeguard the same priesthood and celebrate the only Sacrifice of Jesus, through which He builds up and multiplies His Church.¹⁰

Then they embraced each other in front of the crowd, which was acclaiming them, and gave each other a *golden chalice*, sharing the hope that, in the near future, they will be able to receive the Eucharist from them together. The wish to reach, as soon as possible, the complete communion of all brothers into Christ, from East to West, was repeated, as well as it was in all speeches.

The same optimistic and confident atmosphere reigned within the Holy Liturgy (Catholic Mass) celebrated later in the day by the Pope who added the following at the end:

Until not long time ago, nobody could have imagined that the bishop of Rome could visit his brothers in faith in Romania. That is why we should all live now orientated toward unity—no matter of ethnical affiliation or religious denomination—preoccupied to respond to Christ's commandments, which could be resumed in a single one: *Love your neighbour as you love yourself*.¹¹

Each word of the Pope was received with cheers and applause by the over half a million people. The Holy Father, undoubtedly extremely moved, was pausing from time to time as if he wanted to assure himself that what he was

¹⁰ *Adevărul*, 3

¹¹ Dumitrașcu, *The Mission*, 48.

living was not just a dream but reality itself. The crowd was in ecstasy. And for the first time, after July 1054, the Orthodox and Catholics shouted at unison: UNITY, and VIVAT POPE and UNITY.¹²

For a moment, the Pope was taken by surprise. Perhaps this was the real beginning of the two churches' reunion. He looked to Patriarch Teoctist and uttered in French a single sentence that bears in it the entire splendor of this moment: "*Shoud we really hurry?*"¹³

Here is proof of *ecumenical diplomacy* brought to the highest degree of perfection, because otherwise it might not be explained how, just a year after this visit filled with excitement and hope, on 9 June 2000, Pope John Paul II approves a note of the Congregation presided by the Cardinal Ratzinger regarding the meaning of the expression "*Sister-Churches,*" with the obvious intention of making some "clarifications" about the possible relationship between the Catholic Church and other Churches.¹⁴

Specifically, in this document it states, disappointing for some, natural for others, that the expression *Sister Churches*, while accepted and publicized in the Catholic society, has to be used in a strict sense. *Sister Churches* can be called in the true sense only the *private* Churches, while the Catholic Church, in which remains the unique and universal Church of Christ, can not be sister of a private Church, because she is the mother of all Churches. Only *the local* Church of Rome can be considered *sister* of a *private* Church.

I will not return to the unacceptable terminology for the Orthodox Church, that clearly distinguish between *private* and *local*, between *universality* and *catholicity*, but I would just like to mention, in this example, that the steps taken to a real dialogue, which will also have a possible purpose, are extremely petty. Because exactly the same problems were also reported by Nikos Nissiotis¹⁵ in his commentary on the scheme "*De œcumenismo*" of the Council of Vatican II, when he said that, unfortunately, the Council did not

¹² *Ibid.*.48.

¹³ *Ibid.* 49.

¹⁴ http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000630_chiese-sorelle_en.html [accessed 29.07.2013].

¹⁵ Nikos Nissiotis (1924-1986) was a Greek philosopher of religion and a key figure in the 20th century ecumenical movement. He was leading person at the Ecumenical Institute and Graduate School in Bossey near Geneva (1956-1974), associate general secretary of WCC (1968-1974), and moderator of the Commission on Faith and Order (1977-1982). See *Ecumenical Pilgrims. Profiles of Pioneers in Christian Reconciliation*, ed. Ion Bria and Dagmar Heller (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1995), 172-174.

understand the reality of the autocephalous Orthodox Churches, because no document speaks *in the singular way* about the Orthodox Church.¹⁶ They are regarded as separate Churches because of some small communities which were separated from their bodies and recognized the papal primacy, as are the Greek Catholic Churches or those united with Rome. The causes of their appearance in history are very well known. Furthermore, they do not distinguish between the Orthodox Church and non-Chalcedonian Churches (separated at the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon).¹⁷ To start a *real ecumenical* dialogue between Catholics and Orthodox believers, it was necessary that the Church of Rome recognize at least for one Orthodox Church which is not in communion with it—perhaps that of Constantinople—the status of the Church in the full sense of the word, thus detaching from its centrality and alleged primacy. Unfortunately, he said, “the intent” of the Council is not to seek a way for a real communion with the Orthodox Churches in the internal springs of the Catholic Church (to maintain the plural used by the Catholics), but rather to invite them to follow the example of the Greek Catholic Churches, which of course, is unacceptable.¹⁸

Another Orthodox participant in the works of the Council of Vatican II, Alexander Schmemmann, was also situated on the same coordinates.¹⁹ He said that it is difficult to comment on the role of the Churches united with Rome in the dialogue between the Catholic and the Orthodox Church, because they were considered early in their existence rather a barrier than a bridge between Catholics and Orthodox. Uniatism was always regarded by the Orthodox with great circumspection. Therefore the event of a so-called “mediation” that the united Church could practice in the framework of such a dialogue is at least an ambiguous proposal, or even a utopia, to be taken into account effectively. However, if it is desired such a discussion it should appear on the agenda of future ecumenical consultations.²⁰

¹⁶ Nikos Nissiotis, “Orthodox Reflections on the Decree on Ecumenism,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 3 (1966): 329.

¹⁷ Dumitru Stăniloae, “Holy Ghost and the sobornicity of the Church,” *Ortodoxia* 1 (1967): 33.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Alexander Schmemmann (1921-1983) was a prominent professor of 20th century Orthodoxy. He taught at the Orthodox Theological Institute of St. Sergius in Paris, and at the Faculty of Saint Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, Columbia University, New York University. He was an Orthodox observer for the Second Vatican Council from 1962 to 1965. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexander_Schmemmann [accessed 29.07.2013].

²⁰ *The Documents of Vatican II with notes and comments by Catholic, Protestants, and Orthodox Authorities*, ed. Walter M. Abbott and Joseph Gallagher (London: Geoffrey Chapman 1967), 382–383.

On the other hand, continues Schmemmann, no one can deny the efforts made so far and the positive and *irene* intentions of the developed documents within the works of the Council, if they are viewed on the whole. It is a big step forward, perhaps decisive, regarding the recognition of eastern tradition as “*equal in dignity to that of the West*,” but to achieve this goal the ecclesiological approach of the Church of Rome needs to be changed.²¹

Unfortunately this hope manifested by the Orthodox observers during and after the Council Vatican II did not take place and the document issued in 2007 demonstrates the intentions of the Roman Catholic Church to not change anything, but simply to express and deepen the previous Catholic doctrine about the Church, with a clear emphasis on continuity, not on discontinuity.

3. TYPOLOGY OF A CATHOLIC ECUMENICAL ECCLESIOLOGY

The document that I bring into question is *Responses to some questions regarding certain aspects of the doctrine of the Church*, issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on June 29 and released by the Vatican on 12 July 2007.²²

Although it seems to have created a series of discussions especially in the religious media, some more fervent than others, especially within the Orthodox Church, *it is not a novelty*, but rather a *continuity*. There is nothing spectacular in that text, but a reformulation and an update of the position of the Catholic Church after the Vatican II Council, regarding ecumenism in general and in a greater extent, the ecumenical relations with the Orthodox Church to particular.

Ioan Ică Jr.,²³ a keen observer of the evolution of Catholic theology in the last decades, rightly notes that, throughout this document, the Roman Catholic Church reiterates in the main points its ecclesiology related to the other denominations and Christian Churches, namely: the Roman Catholic

²¹ *Ibid.*, 382.

²² http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070629_responsa-quaestiones_en.html [accessed 29.07.2013].

²³ Ioan Ică Jr. is Professor of the Faculty of Orthodox Theology “Andrei Saguna,” University “Lucian Blaga” of Sibiu, and member of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church (since 1997).

Church is the Church of Christ, a Church which subsists by excellence within the Roman Catholic Church, around the Bishop of Rome, the Pontiff. Besides the Catholic Church there are two types of Christian communities understood differently:

- *Eastern Churches or Orthodox*, which are understood and treated as complete Churches, or absolute, from the dogmatic and sacramental point of view, but not also canonical, because they are not in full communion with the Bishop of Rome.
- *Protestant communities*, which are not understood and treated as complete Churches, but as simple ecclesial communities. In other words they are communities where only certain elements of sanctification subsist.

Consequently the document itself merely reiterates the ecumenical—ecclesiological doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, occasionally with maybe more radical forms, sometimes in a more nuanced manner, but always within the parameters of the Vatican’s official theology.²⁴

It suffices to mention just four other famous subsequent statements made by the Bishops of Rome, along the time, namely: *Mysterium Ecclesiae* (June 24, 1973), *Communio notio* (May 29, 1992), *Ut unum sint* (May 25, 1995), and *Dominus Iesus* (August 6, 2000).

4. ECUMENISM BETWEEN UNCERTAINTY AND REALITY

On June 24, 1973, Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has published one of the most disputed documents on ecumenical policy of Rome, under the title *Mysterium Ecclesiae. Declaration in Defense of the Catholic Doctrine on the Church against Certain Errors of the Present Day*.²⁵ Here are reproduced very precisely the theses of the Vatican II Council, in a manner that leaves no room for interpretation. The statements are clear, concise and unambiguous. The Church of Christ “subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the Successor of Peter and the bishops in union with That Successor” (§ 3) and “it is through Christ’s Catholic Church alone, which is the general means of salvation, that the fullness of

²⁴ <http://theologia.wordpress.com/2007/07/14/interviu-cu-ioan-ica-jr-in-legatura-cu-documentul-congregatiei-pentru-doctrina-credintei> [accessed 29.07.2013].

²⁵ http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19730705_mysterium-ecclesiae_en.html [accessed 29.07.2013].

the means of salvation can be obtained” (§ 4). The other Churches or ecclesial communities (as they are called) are in *an imperfect communion* with the Catholic Church. The only “concession” made for them, is that also inside them can be found certain “elements of sanctification,” which are seen also as gifts of the Catholic Church in order to be guided in an union with it (§ 7).

Metropolitan Anthony of Transylvania, the most prominent representative of the Romanian Orthodox Church in the ecumenical meetings of the 70s and 80s, said that, through this document, the ecumenical climate is strongly shaken. Despite some encouraging signs emerged after Vatican II Council, now, the Churches once again meet a Rome which returns, whenever desired, to old theses, existing before the official appearance of the ecumenical movement. The reactions of the other Churches came, as expected, immediately, but the worst thing is, no doubt, the loss of faith in the Roman Catholic partnership.²⁶ However, he maintained the optimism about the ecumenical general policy of the Catholic Church hoping that *Mysterium Ecclesiae* will remain as a simple unfortunate intervention, forgotten and ranked in an archival document. As it can be seen, however, similar statements have appeared that have brought a sense of uncertainty and suspicion about the true intentions of ecumenism promoted by Rome. The same bishop rightfully wonders, “which of the Orthodox or Protestant theologians will not fear that one day, Rome will say that, since entering into dialogue with it, it means that he recognized in it the true Church, the only, according to the teaching of this Church, for which ecumenism means returning to Roman—Catholicism.”²⁷

5. PARTICULAR AND/OR LOCAL CHURCHES

Three decades after the debut of Vatican II Council, on May 29, 1992, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published an official document entitled *Communio nis notio. Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion*,²⁸ which shows that

²⁶ Antonie Plămădeală, *Ca toți să fie una (May they all be one)* (Bucharest: Institutul Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române Publishing House, 1979), 266.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_28051992_communio nis-notio_en.html [accessed 29.07.2013].

the Catholic Church's position on ecumenism remains equally inflexible. Thus, in this official document with the value of a law, a type of inclusive papal "Eucharistic" ecclesiology is advanced based on a severe criticism of the Orthodox Eucharistic ecclesiology which is considered limited, unilateral and completely incapable of fully understanding the concept of communion (§ 8).

In the Orthodox theology the identity of the local Churches is emphasized, in the sense that each local Church is regarded as a subject in itself (*subject complete in itself*) and therefore, the universal Church would be defined as a communion of local or particular Churches (*communion of particular Churches*) in visible form and at a strict institutional level, through mutual recognition. In Catholic theology the universal Church is the mother and not the result or the amount of the particular Churches, or the federation of particular Churches (*sum of particular Churches, or as a federation of particular Churches*) because it precedes both *ontologically* and *temporally*, the particular Churches, that ecclesologically claim themselves inside and from the universal Church (§ 9). More specifically, the universal Church is understood as a body of Churches (*Body of the Churches*) led by the Church of Rome, together with the College of Bishops (*Body or College of Bishops*), the principle of their unity (both of the only Church and of the bishops everywhere) being the Pontiff, Pope (§ 12).

Consequently, as it is noted by the Romanian theologian Ioan Ica Jr.:

the primacy of the Bishop of Rome and the united College of Bishops *cum Petro et sub Petro*, are the particular elements of the universal Church non-derivative from the particularity of the Churches, but intimate to any particular Church.²⁹

In this universalist view which is also complete, he who is baptized immediately becomes a member of the universal Church, not through an affiliate in advance to a particular Church. Petrine Priesthood would be connected by the very Eucharistic structure of the Church, and therefore "any valid celebration of the Eucharist is made in union not only with the own bishop but also with the Pope," which implies a universal communion with Peter and the whole Church as a required expression of the mutual interiority between the universal Church and the particular Churches.³⁰

Particular Churches *separated from Rome* are affected by a "wound," because of their inability to enter into communion with the universal Church

²⁹ Ică Jr., *Council of Vatican II*, 74.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

and the Roman Catholic Church itself feels “hurt” because it is prevented to achieve its full universality (§17). Consequently, the aim of ecumenism, in the opinion of this document, is that all Christians, regardless of denomination, through a renewed conversion to the Lord, must understand and accept that the primacy of Peter remains in its successors, the bishops of Rome, and the unity and universality of the Church is achieved by showing the Petrine ministry, as being the apostolic ministry from inside, in all the Churches, whether they are called “separated” or just “Christian groups.”

6. PARTIAL AND / OR FULL ECUMENICAL COMMUNION

On May 25, 1995, Pope John Paul II published his encyclical *Ut unus sint*,³¹ a document expected by everyone because it was to show to what extent (and in what form) the Catholic Church decided to continue their efforts to strengthen the ecumenical relations with the other Churches. Although it seems that this document reaffirms the desire of the Catholics to engage more openly in the ecumenical movement, abandoning its specific inflexibility, it is easy to see that the initial excitement has no clear correspondent in practice. In other words, (and maybe using a less diplomatic language!) the ecumenical dimension of the Catholic theology is almost invisible, the desire of some being rather a continuous desideratum than a historical fact.

It does not show a substantial change of attitude. For example, the document further states that the Church of Christ exists (remains) in its fullness only in the Catholic Church, led by the Pontiff in communion (not in collegial consensus!) with the bishops, but shades a bit the “situation” of the other Churches. More specifically, it says that also outside the Catholic Church there is an element of holiness, where the unique Church of Christ is present, but not at the same height and depth. For example *BEM document from Lima* can be the basis of a kind of communion between the Roman – Catholic Church and other Churches, although the latter are assigned a different status.³² The Church term is reserved only for Orthodox Churches

³¹ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint_en.html [accessed 29.07.2013].

³² For Lima document see: Ioan Sauca, “Orthodox Considerations on BEM ecumenical document (Lima-1982),” *Studii Teologice* 7-8 (1983): 527-542; Lucian Turcescu, “Eastern Orthodox Reactions to the ministry section of the Lima document,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 33 (1996), 3: 330-343.

(their plural is still emphasized and the concept of *unity in diversity* given by Orthodoxy is not understood), while those which have roots in the Reformation are called “ecclesiastical communities;” but both suffer from certain shortcomings, although they are recognized in some degree in their role as “instruments of salvation.”³³ Faithful to its own teachings about unity and truth (recorded differently in the Vatican II Council), the Catholic Church reaffirms her position on ecumenism in a little more open manner, but in the same traditionalist terms. Ecumenism is, in the vision of this document, an “increase from partial communion to full communion in truth and love” that do not come from adding the items of holiness recognized within the communities which are separate from Rome, whether they are called Orthodox or Protestant, because it (the communion) is already in its full (or fullness) within the Roman—Catholic Church—and without fullness in other Churches.³⁴

We also note, however, some progress noted by the document, namely: the recovery of the fraternity, solidarity in the service of humanity, some cult convergence, or mutual recognition of the good things that were done by all Churches, which are undoubtedly, also a step towards reconciliation and communion.

7. UNIQUENESS AND UNIVERSALITY

The fourth document cited in this debate, the declaration *Dominus Iesus. On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus and the Church*,³⁵ published on August 6, 2000, not only repeats the doctrine promulgated at the Vatican II Council that we already know, but other notes or subsequent official statements as well. Consequently it is reaffirmed that the Catholic Church is the only church where the Church of Christ exists and subsists, indicating that the expression “subsists” does not mean that it could also exist within the other Churches or ecclesial communities, which, because of the gifts derived from the Catholic Church will need, ultimately, to return to its bosom.³⁶ Therefore, *nothing new under the sun*, only that a further statement is made designed to explain the terminological and attributive difference

³³ Icã Jr., *Council of Vatican II*, 75.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html [accessed 29.07.2013].

³⁶ Icã Jr., *Council of Vatican II*, 77.

between the latter. Specifically, it is said that because of the validity of the Holy Eucharist and of the sacramental Priesthood, Orthodox Churches, although separated from the Church of Rome, are true particular Churches (!), while the ecclesial communities (Protestant Churches) are not Churches in the proper sense, because they have not kept the valid episcopate and the aerial meaning of the Eucharist. Here a “concession” is made, in the sense that if it is not taken into account the fact that the valid baptism involves a certain degree of communion, even if it is imperfect, of the “ecclesial communities” with the Catholic Church, the lack of the unity of Christians does not simultaneously mean the lack of the unity of Christ's Church, but only its failure or incompleteness in history (§ 17).³⁷

Therefore, it would only be surprising if the specific enthusiasm of the contemporary open society in which we live together, Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant, were also to be transferred to the interconfessional Christian relations. It was also for this reason that the appearance of this document bore so many polemics. It was believed that certain stages in the dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, if we refer directly to our theme, surpassed certain moments of the “cold war of religion,” if I may be permitted to make such a statement. This permanent suspicion blocked any bridge of dialogue for a long time.

To summarize, as far as possible, we can say that the content of the message from the cited document blocks the ardour of the most enthusiastic partners of the idea of ecumenism, rather than open a new horizon of expectation into a positive development of relations between the Catholic Church and all the other Churches.

More specifically, in this document the Eastern Churches which do not recognize the Pope as the legitimate descendant of Saint Peter and the Pontiff are called particular Churches. Or in other words, the Orthodox Churches are considered particular Churches to the Universal Church, which is the Catholic Church.

The Church of Rome arrogates to itself two classifications which are rather in conflict than in harmony. It simultaneously considers itself a particular Church, from a well-defined territory, and the universal Church. In other words, the Church of Rome is the local Church of Rome, but at the same time, the universal Church to all other Churches, called “particular” in the Catholic conception, and ‘local’ in the Orthodox conception.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 77.

Or, precisely this ecclesiological unilateral interpretation, although apparently slightly open to cooperation, is the greatest difficulty in the dialogue between the two great historic Churches, the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. Because in the Orthodox tradition we do not have the expression of particular Church, we say that the universal Church “exists and subsists” precisely in the diversity of the local Churches. When we talk about the universal Church, we have in mind, in fact, the term of *catholicity* in the sense from the meaning of the symbol of faith from Constantinople (381). In the Orthodox world, the universality of the Church is given by its subsistence within the diversity of the local Churches, the Patriarchates, Metropolitans, and of the autocephalous Churches. The notion of a *particular* Church is foreign to the Orthodox tradition, as—it can be said, it is also the one which refers to the universal Church. They are placed in relation to each other by the Roman Catholic Church. The Orthodox Church speaks about *sobornicity* in relation to the local Church.³⁸ This is the major ecclesiological difference between the two traditions, Eastern and Western, which substantiates the organization of the Church both in institutional and canonical terms.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The Church in its ecumenical unity should be understood as a communion structured in diversity, not as a medieval uniform centralism.

In other words, the Roman Catholic Church should assume a reinstitutionalization process in an open and inventive manner which will lead to a redefinition of its own Christian identity and of a new ecclesiological appearance, truly ecumenical. The true Church is the one that manages to maintain the balance between keeping in touch with the past, strengthening of the present relations within it and the hope for a positive development of them (*of the relationships within it*) in its eschatological future. Because, as *Ică Jr.* said:

Absolutization of the exigency of the unity with the past degrades into conservatism, ritual or doctrinal, *absolutization* of the exigency of the present unity of the Churches leads to hypertrophied centralism and institutionalism, and *the exaltation* of the eschatological slightly fails into apocalyptic carismatism.³⁹

³⁸ For the *sobornicity* of Church see: Dumitru Stăniloae, “The Open Sobornicity,” *Orthodoxia* 23 (1971), 2: 165-180.

³⁹ *Ică Jr.*, *Council of Vatican II*, 82.

Consequently, not only should the Catholic Church rethink its ecumenical position through a ecclesiological “flexibility,” but the other Christian confessions also should, no matter how they are labelled by the Church of Rome, because “a unity *between* Churches can not be done without an institutional reform and of the mentalities *within* the Churches who want to join.”⁴⁰ This process, however, can not take place in a climate of confrontation and suspicion, but within one of reconciliation and cordiality. Brotherly love is the soul of the dialogue and the only way to overcome the obstacles and difficulties that still exist between Catholics and Orthodox on their way to the full unity in Christ. Because, as Pope John Paul II said “this longing for fraternal cooperation, supported by prayer and inspired by reverence and mutual respect must be supported and promoted, because only peace builds, while discord destroys.”⁴¹

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⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

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KOŚCIELNA EKUMENICZNA DYPLOMACJA
W CZASIE I PO SOBORZE WATYKAŃSKIM II
STARE I NOWE UWAGI I KOMENTARZE PRAWOSŁAWNE

Streszczenie

Pomimo optymizmu, który nastąpił po ogłoszeniu przez Jana XXIII Soboru Watykańskiego II, jak i potem po wizycie Jana Pawła II w Bukareszcie, pierwszej takiej wizycie papieża w kraju prawosławnym, relacje prawosławno-rzymskokatolickie nie poprawiły się w takim stopniu, na jaki miano nadzieję. Autor dowodzi, że jest to w znacznej mierze spowodowane rozdźwiękiem między ekumeniczną dyplomacją rzymskokatolicką, funkcjonującą tak, jak pokazał Jan Paweł II w Rumunii, podejmując kroki ku pojednaniu obu chrześcijańskich tradycji, a językiem używanym przez Watykan, zdającym się uniemożliwiać takie pojednanie. Dotyczy to używanej przez Watykan terminologii, nie do zaakceptowania przez świat prawosławny. Przykładem może być stosowanie terminu „Kościoły siostrzane”, jak i powiązane z katolickim rozumieniem tej koncepcji zagadnienie uniatyzmu. Konkludując, autor podkreśla znaczenie ekumenicznej elastyczności i ducha pojednania, do których powołane są wszystkie wyznania chrześcijańskie.

Słowa kluczowe: ekumenizm, Sobór Watykański II, dyplomacja kościelna, Kościół, eklezjologia.

