

Roman Catholic Understanding of Christian Unity and Fellowship

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Abstract *With regard to the question of unity and fellowship, Roman Catholics, like members of other Christian churches, find themselves between two extremes: on the one side is phobia and exclusivity, and on the other all differences are relative making all questions related to unity and fellowship actually already resolved and therefore irrelevant. The Catholic position is that foundational unity among Christians already exists, but that lacerations in the body of unity also exist; lacerations, blows, indentations and wounds which mar the wholeness and completeness of that unity. Rather than talking about a schism, alienated brethren and the absence of unity, it is more appropriate to speak of the state of incomplete and/or imperfect unity. Since that which connects Christians is greater than that which divides them, it is not only more appropriate but also more correct to describe other Christians and designate them by that which is greater (unity) rather than by that which is lesser (dividedness). This must become reality and enter into general practice at all levels. With regard to ecumenism as an effort towards complete or sufficient unity and fellowship, its goal is not to establish unity which is at present an absolute non-entity, but to achieve several aims related to the still and already existing unity: 1) That it lives and actualizes itself through appropriate degrees of inter-Christian unity; 2) That it becomes more complete and more perfect to the degree that it also enables the visible fellowship of the altar (Eucharist and communion) and the pulpit (proclamation). Christianity is either ecumenical or it is not Christianity. The Church of Christ is either una sancta, "one holy," or it stands in serious opposition to Christ's will expressed in the Holy Scripture. Unity exists – it has to be recognized. Unity is not complete – it has to be fulfil-*

lled. Incomplete unity is here and it results in incomplete fellowship "in sacris," in the sacraments, in the holy. Growth in unity causes an almost proportional increase in attainable and lived unity. Unity that is lived provides genuine witness to the world for Christ and the God of unity and love, and enables a more effective (re)Christianization of the world and its penetration and saturation with the Good News (new evangelization). However, the presupposition without which complete unity will not be accomplished is "spiritual ecumenism," an ecumenism of a spiritual experience and true clinging of all Christians to Christ. Only the realization of ecumenism as the true experiential fellowship can make the discovery of other brothers and sisters in Christ possible, as well as our fellowship with them. The way of ecumenism thus emerges as the way to healing and a renewal of global Christianity.

Key words: *unity, fellowship, inter-confession, the criteria of being a church, "communion in sacris," "intercommunion"*

Introduction

In order to emphasize the importance and ecclesiological contribution of the Second Vatican Council within the wider context of the Catholic notion of Christian unity, the Council's approach to ecumenism is sometimes presented as something revolutionary, something that has changed, something that was one thing yesterday and is something quite other and different today.

It is indubitable that the "Catholic" (as well as "Orthodox" and "Protestant") notion of Christian unity and fellowship has, in certain historical periods, had specific traits, nuances and emphases. In this way, it is possible to speak both of the "past" and of the "modern" notion of unity of a church, but the churches teach that this does not imply the changeability of the revealed basic truths of faith. The impression that they can be easily or artificially changed, that something can be one thing today and completely different tomorrow, according to someone's liking or because one has been able to impose, for whatever reason, his own understanding on others, in the long run, may result in the relativization, or denigration even, of the foundational teaching of the churches, or else the loss of trust in the truthfulness of this teaching. Without entering the discussion about what in different churches' teachings really is and should be changeable and what should be unchangeable, I simply want to note the Catholic understanding of Christian unity and fellowship and underline within it the co-existence of something that is, may and ought to be changeable and something which is, may and ought to be unchangeable. This certainly does not guarantee that it will always

be easy to discern in practice what ought to be changeable or unchangeable, nor that today something changeable will be claimed as unchangeable and something unchangeable treated as changeable.

In the document produced by the Congregation for the Teaching of Faith entitled *Answers to Questions About Certain Aspects with Regard to the Teaching About the Church* in June 2007, the first question is: "Has the Second Vatican Council changed the previous teaching about the Church?" The answer is: "The Second Vatican Council did not seek to change nor did it change that teaching, but sought indeed to develop, deepen and elaborate it more extensively."¹ The Congregation corroborates this answer by quoting the words of Pope Paul VI spoken at the promulgation of the constitution *Lumen gentium*: "Nothing has changed concerning the teaching which has been handed down. What Christ wanted, we also want. What was, has remained. What the Church has taught for centuries, that we also teach. It is only that that, which was previously contained only in the Church's practice, has now been publicly expressed as teaching. That which was the object of consideration, discussion and partly of dispute, has now been enunciated in the securely formulated teaching."²

From what has been said so far, it follows that, whether we speak about the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church or any other Church, we need to use terms such as "previous", "pre-council", "post-council", "new", "modern" and similar words, in a sensitive, nuanced and scientifically correct way.

In this article, I will attempt to outline the Catholic understanding of Christian unity and fellowship as it really is, fully aware that, however hard I try to make my presentation an authentic interpretation and outline of that Catholic understanding, to some degree, it will unavoidably remain a subjective view of the author and will actually outline a Catholic understanding of Christian unity and fellowship as I perceive it.

With regard to the question of unity and fellowship, Roman Catholics, like members of other Christian churches, situate themselves between two extremes: from phobia and exclusivity on the one side to the relativism of all differences on the other such that all questions related to unity and fellowship are actually already resolved and therefore made irrelevant.

¹ Comp. Kongregation für die Glaubenslehre, *Antworten auf Fragen zu einigen Aspekten bezüglich der Lehre über die Kirche*, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070629_responsa-quaestiones_ge.html.

² Comp. *ibid.*

“Una sancta”

What then is the Catholic teaching about unity and fellowship?

There is only one Church of Christ, *una sancta* (according to the confession from Nicea and Constantinople). However, in the concrete world which is both complex and plural, this one Church must constantly realize itself in the plurality of local churches, local Christian congregations with all their specific traits such as cultural ambiance, language, terminological equipment, administrative and managerial structures, number of believers, ordinances, etc. This multiplicity and variation are naturally complementary and positive, and in themselves they do not undermine the unity of the Church. It is a matter of the richness in variety which exists in harmony and is reconciled one with the other. Unity (*unitas*) is not undermined. The problem usually emerges only when individual local churches, despite the existence of unity (*unitas*) among them, for various reasons which often have nothing to do with ecclesial matters but with disputes (e.g. political, strategic, ethnic or national, economic, etc.), break their mutual unity and communication (*unitas* and *communicatio*). What happens in such cases is clearly the disfiguration of Christian identity because the eternal and primary belonging in Christ is subjected to the temporal and selfish interests of individuals or groups, whereby the existing unity (*unitas*) is usually overlooked, and the legitimate differences and particularities are (mis)used as the elements of alienation and division and as arguments used to claim that the other side is wrong.³

In time, the absence of lived fellowship and the disruption of communication gradually and increasingly reflect on the foundational doctrinal unity of faith and the Church and on the overall “contemporary appearance” of individual Christian Churches. Every evaluation must make sure to keep in mind the danger of overlooking or diminishing actual and existing doctrinal and theological differences, as well as the danger of exaggerating them.

The Catholic teaching proceeds from the premise that all Christians and their local Christian congregations share a certain basic unity, primarily due to the connection with Christ through his grace by the sacrament of baptism, by the confession of the foundational truths of faith, (such as those contained in the creeds of the ancient Church, Apostolic, Nicene and Nicene-Constantinople and other creeds), and through the living out of these foundational truths of faith. Nevertheless, The degree of preserved or achieved unity among different com-

³ Here I refer to my own words published from the interview under the title “The Yearning for the Unity of the Church is an Indication of Following Christ” published in the Catholic magazine *Glas koncila* 13, the 20th of January 2008, pp. 8-9.

munities is different, greater or smaller, and this degree is then reflected on the nature and the extent of the unity among individual Christian communities, particularly on the nature and the extent of the legitimate and sacramental unity and communication therein. Greater unity makes greater fellowship and communication possible.

In dealing with “Churches and church communities alienated from the Roman Apostolic Seed” (Nos. 13-23) with regard to separated Eastern Christians, the basic document of Catholic teaching about ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio* (Decree II of the Vatican council on ecumenism) uses the term “Church”, and with regard to the separated Western Christians it uses the term “Churches and Church communities.” *Unitatis redintegratio* underlines the “special position of Eastern Churches” and treats them under a separate heading (III, I, Nos. 14-18) while it deals with the “separated Churches and church communities in the West” in the next unit (III, I, Nos. 19-23) although it does not specify precisely which separated communities in the West are “Churches” and which are “Church communities”.⁴ Instead, the document outlines criteria for differentiating between them. In contrast to Churches, the Decree emphasizes that church communities in the West (and by analogy also elsewhere), “due to the absence of the sacraments of order, have not preserved the genuine and complete essence of the Eucharistic mystery (No. 22).”⁵

In order to understand vocal reactions and disputes caused by the expression of the Catholic Ecclesiastical teaching through the Declaration *Dominus Iesus* (August 6, 2000) and last year’s document produced by the Congregation for the teaching of faith entitled “Answers to Questions About Certain Aspects with Regard to the Teaching about the Church” (29th June 2007),⁶ stating that Christian communities in the West, which have not preserved the Holy Order (Episcopacy, Presbytery, Diaconate), are “Christian communities” and that they are not in the

⁴ Here I refer to my own statements which were a part of my contribution to the work of the 13th Study group for ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue which were published as such in the Worksheet No. 2 during the preparation of the Second Synod of the Zagreb Bishopic.

⁵ “Though the ecclesial Communities which are separated from us lack the fullness of unity with us flowing from Baptism, and though we believe they have not retained the proper reality of the eucharistic mystery in its fullness, especially because of the absence of the sacrament of Orders, nevertheless when they commemorate His death and resurrection in the Lord’s Supper, they profess that it signifies life in communion with Christ and look forward to His coming in glory. Therefore the teaching concerning the Lord’s Supper, the other sacraments, worship, the ministry of the Church, must be the subject of the dialogue.” (*Unitatis redintegratio*, 22).

⁶ Comp. Kongregation für die Glaubenslehre, *Antworten auf Fragen zu einigen Aspekten bezüglich der Lehre über die Kirche*, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070629_responsa-quaestiones_ge.html.

same and complete sense of the word “Churches” in the same sense as the Catholic Church and the Eastern Churches (which also accept the principle “ubi episcopus ibi ecclesia” – “Where there is a bishop (thus: where the Episcopal order of the holy order is realized) there is also the Church,” it is important to note that the Second Vatican Council the Catholic teaching already connected the essence of the Eucharistic mystery, as well as the essence of other sacraments, with the “sacrament of the order”, the validity of which is guaranteed by the continuity of the “apostolic succession” understood in the Catholic sense. According to this teaching, without the sacrament of order it is not possible to realize the “genuine and complete essence” of the Eucharist, which is – for the Catholic side – the primary reason for the present non-existence of “intercommunion”, that is, the mutual “Eucharistic hospitality” and fellowship between the Catholic Church and Protestant Churches. In spite of that, it should not be overlooked that the same Catholic teaching explicitly recognizes a certain validity in the Eucharistic celebration of the Protestant churches: “However, when at the Holy Supper they commemorate the death and the resurrection of the Lord, they confess that life means to be in the fellowship of Christ, and expect Christ’s glorious return.”⁷ In the context of further dialogue about a potential mutual “Eucharistic hospitality” this may present a worthy starting point for drawing closer. This insight has not yet been sufficiently utilized and has not sufficiently reflected on the level of practical fellowship.

Since the dialogue between the Catholics and the Reformation churches and churches of the Reformation heritage about the apostolic succession and the holy order, and consequently about sacraments and the Eucharist has not progressed nor has it achieved results which would enable the Catholic ecclesiastical teaching to recognize, according to the Catholic criteria of ecclesiality, and explicitly accept the ecclesiality of the Christian communities in question (i.e. that they are essentially the “Church” rather than “only” a “Christian community”, i.e. a community with more or fewer elements of being a church), in the most recent documents the teaching and terminology of the Second Vatican Council continue to be used. In many Protestant circles, this has caused disappointment and complaint because it was believed that there had been more progress made in the past forty years. Well-meaning criticism cannot be taken as groundless inasmuch as it was indeed possible to choose milder formulations and avoid the use of terms which Protestants consider “irritating”, but the real difficulty is really not in the way thoughts are expressed but in the fact that the criteria for determining ecclesiality have different contents. Even certain Protestant theologians emphasize that it is intellectually more honest and, for the cause of ecumenism, ultimately better if these criteria, whatever they may be, are clearly and precisely

⁷ Comp. *ibid.*

determined rather than wrapping up the same criteria in some diplomatic, veiled, euphemistic and “milder”, yet ultimately ambivalent rhetoric which will in turn require further clarifications and “sobering”.

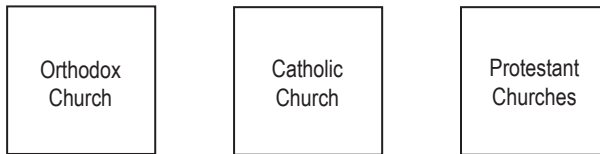
The vigorous and emotional reactions to and critiques of the aforementioned statements often overlook the fact that respective changes cannot come about through unilateral acts of the Catholic teaching, but only through serious efforts towards the clarification of controversial theological, and particularly ecclesiological, issues. Therefore, as one who entertains true love towards Christian unity and fellowship, instead of severe, and occasionally insulting, rhetoric, I consider it a much more desirable, ecumenically appropriate, promising and effective reaction to engage in a more intensive and deepening mutual theological dialogue about controversial terms, about the criteria of ecclesiality and ecclesial evaluations, similar, for example, to the earlier dialogue about the teaching on justification which, after a long theological dialogue of the highest quality, eventually resulted in a joint statement.⁸

Unfortunately, both parties in the heated debate tend to overlook, fail to value and therefore fail to adequately use in practice, the fact that the same Catholic teaching clearly and explicitly recognizes, in the case of communities which do not have the apostolic succession in the Catholic sense, expressed also through the Holy order and episcopacy, numerous other elements of being a church, which makes possible the realization of a certain degree of unity between them and the Catholics, which in turn makes possible a certain fellowship and communication, and that not only in common undertakings of a general, social, academic, cultural, humanitarian or charity-based nature. The same Catholic teaching also recognizes, for instance, that precisely that degree of unity also makes the united confession of belonging to Christ through common prayer, the reading of the Word of God, etc. possible.⁹

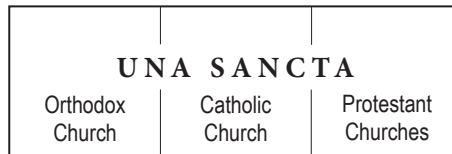
⁸ “The Common declaration about the teaching on justification” (“Gemeinsame Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre”) between the Catholic Church (The Council for the promotion of Christian unity) and the Lutheran World Council was signed in the church of Saint Anne in Augsburg on 31 October 1999.

⁹ On the one hand, Protestant Christians may at first glance experience the term “church communities”, as opposed to the term “Church”, as insulting and frustrating, and in this regard I wish to repeat the words which Cardinal Casper spoke at the Third European Ecumenical gathering in Sibiu, Romania, in September 2007, when he said that the pain of my friend’s is also my pain, but on the other hand Catholic Christians find it unjust and painful if the Catholic Church is denied the right which all other Churches and Christian communities have, that is the right to the teaching and expression of their own criteria with regards to the question about what constitutes a church. We should not engage in dissatisfaction and hyper-critical reactions and protest when any one Church expresses its teaching, but when any Church inappropriately, exclusively and aggressively tries to impose on others, without any respect to their right to otherness and faithfulness, its own conscience.

In practice, Catholic believers and clergy often entertain inadequate notions about the unity and fellowship between the Catholic Church and other Churches and Christian denominations. The starting point is usually the impression that at present there is (absolutely) no unity and that ecumenism seeks to establish it (from scratch). According to this impression, the current situation looks like this:



and the situation after the hypothetical future “establishment of unity”:



However, if this impression were to be extended to the issues of ecumenism, unity and fellowship in general, it proves inadequate and causes us, as Christians belonging to different Churches and church communities, to view each other in this present state as members of other, in some mentalities even opposing, not to say “hostile”, churches and camps, against whom we should perhaps even wage a war!¹⁰ The Catholic Church requires an explicitly ecumenical attitude and effort, but even believers belonging to the Catholic Church in various situations, statements and sermons, often “drop” comments about other Christian communities, comments which are on one or the other side of jest and intolerance and which reveal that we are people who do not have sufficient love or respect towards Christian brothers and sisters who differ from us. These comments also demonstrate that we have not yet truly made the Catholic teaching about other churches our own.

In any case, with regard to the issue of the unity of faith, unity of teaching, doctrine among Churches and church communities, the more appropriate graph

¹⁰ Here I deliberately exaggerate, caricature and simplify in order to achieve a clearer expression of the basic premise! For example, although the Orthodox and Catholic Church and the Protestant Churches comprise the majority within Christianity, faithfulness to reality would demand a much more detailed classification. However, my goal here is not so much detailed inclusiveness but the clarity of argument.

or representation is as follows:



Therefore, foundational unity among Churches already exists, but lacerations in the body of unity also exist; lacerations, blows, indentations and wounds which mar the wholeness and completeness of that unity. With regard to ecumenism as an effort towards complete or sufficient unity and fellowship, its goal is not to establish unity which is at present an absolute non-entity, but to achieve several aims related to the still¹¹ and already¹² existing unity:

- 1) That it lives and actualizes itself through appropriate degrees of inter-Christian unity;
- 2) That it becomes more complete and more perfect to the degree that it enables also the visible fellowship of the altar (Eucharist and communion) and the pulpit (proclamation).¹³

The orthodoxy and “catholicity” of such an approach can be corroborated not only by the words of the highest theologian, but also by the teachings and hierarchical authorities in the Catholic Church such as, for example, the popes of the period after the Second Vatican Council who reiterated that that which connects us is greater than that which divides us, or, for instance, and in this case in regard to the Orthodox, that we are almost completely one with the orthodox brothers of the Christian east.

The first graph above, showing separated squares, is perhaps somewhat more appropriate as a presentation of only one, but certainly not the most significant nor the most representative inter-church relation or aspect, that is juridical. This is so, first, because the present inter-church reality in the juridical area is characterized by the application of the (still not absolute) “principle of autocephaly,”

¹¹ The foundational unity of Christ’s disciples which never really ceased to exist.

¹² The unity which is achieved and strengthened through ecumenical efforts.

¹³ Speaking about the past and future unity Father Sergei Bulgakov correctly said: “Unity is something that was given to us and something which we have to achieve.” Comp. Timothy Ware, *Pravoslavna Crkva*, Zagreb, 2005, p. 239. This statement, however, still does not express the awareness of a certain degree of unity in the present.

the (almost) fully independent governance of any individual Church. Second, the graph is relatively appropriate because on the inter-confessional level containing the three already mentioned constituent parts of Christianity, which are also most numerous, there exist no elements of universal or all-Christian jurisdiction which would include and unite all Churches, the one overall jurisdiction acceptable to all Churches which is in the context of dialogue usually thought of in terms of Peter's service as the Roman bishop (pope).

When speaking about ecumenism, unity and fellowship, one has to bear in mind that according to the Catholic teaching, unity never really and fully ceased to exist, but that it is more or less marred, damaged (by the cuts into the tissue of unity!), depending on each separate case, that is, on the quality and quantity of elements of ecclesiality which individual churches and church communities have retained. THEY (from another square or "camp") are actually already to a large degree US! Considered from the qualitative, human and Christian point of view, that is a large spiritual step forward which enables us not to clamp down in fear before other Christians, not to regard them as aliens, rather to accept them more readily. These and similar characteristics are attributes of any mature Christian. They are not in opposition to one's identity, whether personal, confessional, national or any other identity. Identity is in no way an obstacle but precisely the opposite: an inevitable presupposition of a meeting, dialogue and mutual enrichment.

Rather than talking about a schism, alienated brethren and the absence of unity, it is more appropriate to speak of the state of incomplete and/or imperfect unity. Since the popes of the period after the Second Vatican Council explicitly state that that which connects Christians is greater than that which divides them, then it is not only more appropriate but also more correct to describe other Christians and designate them by that which is greater (unity) than by that which is lesser (division). That has to become reality and enter into general practice at all levels.

At the same time, Christians should still not be satisfied with the existing degree of inter-church unity. From the early times (from 325 and 381), the Catholics, like other Christians, have been professing the Nicea-Constantinople confession (creed) in which they state that they believe "in one, holy, Catholic,¹⁴ and apostolic Church." "Oneness", that is the unity of the Church, is not accidentally mentioned first out of the four essential characteristics of the common Christian Creed! If, despite that verbal profession of faith in "one" Church, Christians do not recognize each other, if they do not live in a visible reconciled fellowship, particularly in sacramental fellowship and communication (communication in *sacris*), then the world will consider them all together incomprehensible and un-

¹⁴ In the Christian Churches in Croatia and its wider context the word "Catholic" is translated by several terms: "sveopća", "vaseljenska", "saborna", "vesoljna" etc.

authentic, and they will find themselves in an “unnatural state”, in which they do not fulfill the will of Christ and are not what they ought to be. It is thus necessary that all Christians, each in their appropriate manner, through prayer and deeds, conscientiously and seriously seek to “heal” the existing state of incomplete and marred unity and fellowship.

It must also be clear that the establishment of full doctrinal unity and sacramental fellowship cannot be resolved on any regional or local level. It is settled by those who bear that responsibility for churches on a general, worldwide, global level. Therefore, if the walk towards Christian unity progresses more slowly than what we would wish, then the causes should not be sought, for example, in the Catholic Church or in other churches in Croatia, or in their “good will” because they belong to wider, worldwide confessional “families”, so that ecumenical unity and fellowship is realized, as we said, on that level and not on the regional or national levels. However, we cannot lightly assign responsibility for the present non-existence of full unity and fellowship to the Church authorities on the global level because the reasons for it lie primarily in the truly difficult and complex nature of these multi-layered issues which must be dealt with thoroughly, responsibly and in a multi-disciplinary way since, for many Christians, it is a matter of conscience and fidelity to the truth. It is true, though, that more can and must be done about ecumenism both worldwide and in Croatia.

Conclusion

The Catholic understanding of Christian unity and fellowship can be summarized in the following statements. Christianity is either ecumenical or it is not Christianity. The Church of Christ is either *una sancta*, “one holy,” or it stands in serious opposition to Christ’s will expressed in the Holy Scripture. Unity exists – it has to be recognized. Unity is not complete – it has to be fulfilled. Incomplete unity is here and it results in incomplete fellowship “in sacris,” in the sacraments, in the holy. The growth in unity causes an almost proportional increase in attainable and lived unity. The unity that is lived provides genuine witness to the world about Christ and the God of unity and love, and enables a more effective (re)Christianization of the world and its penetration and saturation with the Good News (new evangelization). However, the presupposition without which complete unity will not be accomplished is “spiritual ecumenism,”¹⁵ an ecumenism of a spiritual experience

¹⁵ Metropolitan Eulogius of Paris, the exarch of Western Europe, reminds: “Didn’t the saints at the peak of their spiritual life jump over the walls which divide us and which, according to the famous words of the Metropolitan Plato of Kiev, do not reach the sky?” Comp. Timothy Ware, *Pravoslavna Crkva*, Zagreb, 2005, p. 239.

and true clinging of all Christians to Christ. Only the reality of ecumenism as the true experiential fellowship makes the discovery of other brothers and sisters in Christ possible, as well as our fellowship with them. The way of ecumenism thus emerges as the way to healing and renewal of global Christianity.

Sažetak *Katolici se, kao i pripadnici drugih crkava, prema pitanju jedinstva i zajedništva postavljaju između dvije krajnosti: od fobičnosti i isključivosti na jednoj strani, do relativizacije svih razlika na drugoj strani, kao da bi sva pitanja s obzirom na jedinstvo i zajedništvo bila zapravo već riješena i utoliko irelevantna. Katolički nauk je da temeljno jedinstvo među crkvama već postoji, ali postoje i zasjekline u to jedinstvo, zasjeci, udarci, uleknuća i rane, koje narušavaju cjelovitost i potpunost toga jedinstva. Umjesto o raskolu, o odijeljenoj braći i nepostojanju jedinstva primjerenije je govoriti o stanju nepotpunog i(li) nesavršenog jedinstva. Budući da je ono što kršćane povezuje veće od onoga što ih razdvaja, onda je ne samo primjerenije nego i točnije druge kršćane opisivati i nazivati po onome što je veće (jedinstvo), nego li po onome što je manje (razdvojenost) i to treba zaživjeti i u praksi na svim razinama. Kod ekumenizma kao nastojanja oko punog ili dostatnog jedinstva i zajedništva ne radi se o tome da se uspostavi sada potpuno nepostojeće jedinstvo, nego o tome da se još i već postojeće jedinstvo: 1. živi i ostvaruje kroz primjerene stupnjeve međukršćanskog zajedništva i 2. upotpuni, usavrši do te mjere da među crkvama bude moguće i vidljivo zajedništvo oltara (Euharistije i pričesti) i propovjedaonice (navještaja). Kršćanstvo ili je ekumensko ili nije kršćanstvo. Crkva Kristova ili je "una sancta", "jedna sveta", ili je u ozbiljnom kršenju Kristove u Svetom Pismu izražene volje. Jedinstvo postoji - treba ga prepoznavati. Jedinstvo nije potpuno - treba ga upotpunjavati. Nepotpuno jedinstvo je tu i ono omogućuje nepotpuno zajedništvo "in sacris", u sakramentima, u svetome. Rast jedinstva gotovo proporcionalno omogućuje rast ostvarivanoga i življenoga zajedništva. Življeno zajedništvo daje vjerodostojno svjedočanstvo svijetu o Kristu i o Bogu jedinstva i ljubavi i omogućuje učinkovitiju (re)kristijanizaciju svijeta i njegovo prožimanje radosnom viješću (nova evangelizacija). No preduvjet bez kojega puno jedinstvo neće biti ostvarivo jest "duhovni ekumenizam", ekumenizam duhovnog iskustva i istinskog prijanjanja svih kršćana uz Krista. Tek ekumenizam stvarnog iskustvenog zajedništvovanja s Njime omogućuje nalaženje i kršćanske braće i sestara u Njemu i zajedništvovanje i s njima. Ekumenski se put na taj način ukazuje kao put ozdravljanja i obnove svjetskog kršćanstva.*

Translated by Davorin Peterlin