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“UNITY — THE CHALLENGE OF YOUR HISTORY”:
JOHN PAUL II AND CZECH ECUMENISM*

Abstract. The present text focuses on the appeals of John Paul II regarding Czech Ecumenism. It does so in three steps: first, it offers general characteristics of Wojtyła’s understanding of ecumenism; then it outlines the social and ecclesiastic context in which the Pope’s calls for Christian unity in the Czech Republic were received during the 1990s; and, finally, it presents three topics of the Pope’s most important ecumenical appeals. The chosen method allows us to see how the universally-applicable principles of John Paul II’s ecumenical efforts were manifested in his specific pastoral concerns about the local Church and Christian unity in Bohemia and Moravia.

Key words: Catholic Church; John Paul II; ecumenism; Czech lands; healing of memory; ecclesiology; New Evangelization; Reformation; Jan Hus; Cyril and Methodius.

INTRODUCTION

One of the characteristic traits of John Paul II’s ecumenism was the pastoral nature of his quest for Christian unity. The Pope himself said that ecumenical efforts were one of the “pastoral priorities” of his pontificate,¹ during which he confirmed the irreversibility of the Catholic Church’s decisions concerning ecumenism that were made during the Second Vatican Council.² The Council’s teachings on ecumenism—as formulated primarily in

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¹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Ut Unum Sint*, 99.

² Cf. *ibid.*, 3.

the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, the Decree on Ecumenism and the Declaration on Religious Freedom—represented not only the obvious basis for the Pope’s overall understanding of ecumenism but also became a criterion for the various steps he took in order to contribute to Christian unity.

“Encouraging every useful step” that would reinforce the fundamental option of the Catholic Church regarding ecumenism and encourage the efforts of all those who work in the service of unity was one of the main goals of the very first “ecumenical Encyclical” which was published by the Bishop of Rome and stood out due to its “fundamentally pastoral” nature.³ The Pope’s desire to contribute to the renewal of relations between the Christian churches and Christ’s disciples was perhaps most noticeable during his many personal meetings with non-Catholics, not only in Rome but also during his pastoral visits abroad, a significant portion of which he regularly devoted to the development of Christian unity. As he himself confirmed, some of these visits had purely ecumenical “priorities”.⁴

In the following part of the article, I will focus on the issue of ecumenical impulses that John Paul II entrusted into the hands of the local Catholic Church and the Czech ecumenical fellowship during his pontificate and especially during his three pastoral visits to the Czech Republic. I will do so in three steps: first, I will offer general characteristics of Wojtyła’s ecumenism, then I will outline the social and ecclesiastic context that formed the background of the Apostolic Journeys, and finally I will introduce the three topics of the Pope’s appeals for Christian unity in the Czech Republic, which I consider to be the most important. The chosen method allows us to see how John Paul II’s ecumenical efforts were manifested in his specific pastoral concerns about the local Church and Christian unity in the Czech Republic.

THE MAIN FEATURES OF JOHN PAUL II’S EFFORTS TO RESTORE CHRISTIAN UNITY

As I mentioned in the introduction, the ecumenical efforts of the Polish Pope drew their inspiration from the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, considered by John Paul II (one of the Council Fathers) to be a great gift of the Holy Spirit⁵ and a “great grace which the Church received in the 20th

³ Cf. *ibid.*

⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 71.

⁵ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Tertio Millenio Adveniente*, 36

century”⁶. Due to Wojtyła’s efforts, the Council ecclesiology, which became the basis of Catholic principles of ecumenism, was “translated into canonical language”⁷ and found its expression in both Codes of Canon Law—Western and Eastern—which contained, among other things, important ecclesiastic norms concerning Christian unity and the associated relationships and coexistence with non-Catholics. Deeply in accordance with the Council, John Paul II viewed the division among Christians as disgraceful and an obstacle to the spreading of the Gospel. Evangelisation, unity, and ecumenism were inseparably linked together. Just like the Council, John Paul II also urged ecumenical conversation among theologians, which he believed was bringing the people of God to an increasingly fuller knowledge of Christ’s riches. At the same time, he was aware that the core of all ecumenism lay in the change of the heart, the pursuit of holiness life and prayer for the unity, as was so aptly described in the decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*.

Since the beginning of his pontificate, John Paul II’s ecumenical efforts were directed in both directions set by the most recent Ecumenical Council: both to the Christian Churches of the East and the Christian societies of the West.⁸ The peculiar solidarity of the Slavic Pope towards the Christian East became apparent soon after his accession to office when he declared Saints Cyril and Methodius co-patron saints of Europe. Thanks to his initiative, not only was the official world dialogue with the Orthodox Church initiated, but we also witnessed a rapprochement with the pre-Chalcedonian Churches and

⁶ IDEM, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 57.

⁷ Cf. IDEM, *Sacrae Disciplinaes Leges*, in *Kodex kanonického práva* (Praha: Zvon, 1994), XVII.

⁸ To learn more about the Pope’s understanding of ecumenism and the overall assessment of his contribution to Christian unity, see Andrew Michael MAZIKU, *The Contribution of the Pontificate of John Paul II on Ecumenism and Christian Unity* (Roma: Pontificia Università Urbaniana, 2003); Jan Paweł II: *Encyklopedia dialogu i ekumenizmu*, ed. Eugeniusz Sakowicz (Radom: Polskie Wydawnictwo Encyklopedyczne, 2006); Mitzi Jarrett BUDDE, “John Paul II and Ecumenism: The Man, the Documents, and the Dialogues,” *Ecumenical Trends* 35 (2006): 8–15; Kevin M. P. McDONALD, “The Legacy of Pope John Paul II: Ecumenical dialogue,” in *The Legacy of John Paul II*, ed. Michael A. Hayes and Gerald O’Collins (New York, London: Burns and Oates, 2008), 110–128. As for ecumenism with the East, cf. Łukasz DONAJ and Justyna CYWONIUK, “Jan Paweł II i Benedykt XVI a dialog katolicko-prawosławny: Przyczynek do dyskusji,” *Środkowoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne* 4 (2010): 61–84; Jarosław MOSKAŁYK, “Jana Pawła II otwartość na chrześcijański Wschód,” *Teologia Praktyczna* 10 (2009): 159–170; Wojciech ZYZAK, “Święty Jan Paweł II o duchowości chrześcijańskiego Wschodu,” *Polonia Sacra* 21 (2017), 1: 165–182. To learn more about John Paul II’s contribution to the rapprochement with Lutheranism, see Jarred WICKS, “Pope John Paul II and Lutherans: Actions and Reactions,” in HAYES and O’COLLINS, *The Legacy of John Paul II*, 132–202; Kurt KOCH, “Die persönliche Beiträge von Johannes Paulus II. und Benedikt XVI. im Dialog mit dem Luthertum,” in Kurt KOCH, *Erneuerung und Einheit: Ein Plädoyer für mehr Ökumene* (Ostfildern: Patmos Verlag, 2018), 65–91.

pre-Ephesian Orthodoxy during Wojtyła's pontificate. The theological and spiritual wealth of the East was welcomed by John Paul II as a part of the apostolic tradition in a particular Apostolic letter entitled *Orientalis Lumen*. Regarding the ecclesiastical community emerging from the Reformation movement, Pope Wojtyła opened doors not only to a fairer evaluation of the person and works of Martin Luther in the Catholic environment, but also directly prompted the emergence of a mixed Ecumenical Commission that examined the importance of the 16th-century anathemas delivered by the Protestant confessions and the Council of Trident. As we know, this resulted in the adoption of the Joint Declaration of the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation on the teachings on justification referred to by Pope John Paul II as a milestone on the road to restoring full unity.

The approaching Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 significantly impacted the Pope's understanding of ecumenism and determined the direction of specific steps taken by John Paul II with the intention of promoting Christian unity.⁹ The Pope considered the anniversary of Christ's incarnation to be an opportune time for ecumenism since the preparation of the jubilee was to be intensely imbued with the spirit of repentance for sins against unity and acts of violence committed by the Catholic Church against other Christians. In the 1990s, in addition to emphasising the need to heal from the consequences of past wrongdoings, the Pope's vision of the ecumenism of saints and the common heritage of the undivided church of the martyrs grew ever stronger.

This brief summary of the main characteristics of Wojtyła's ecumenism should be taken into account before we delve further into the specific appeals that have led to the support of Christian unity in the Czech Republic.

THE CONTEXT OF PAPAL VISITS TO THE CZECH REPUBLIC: SOCIETY AND CHURCH IN TIMES OF TRANSFORMATION

Ecumenical appeals to Czech Christians were vigorously addressed by John Paul II during the numerous apostolic journeys he made to our country in 1990, 1995 and 1997. All these journeys took place in an atmosphere of fundamental changes that influenced the political, economic, cultural and ecclesiastical landscapes not only in our country but throughout the whole of Europe. Each papal visit took place under particular circumstances and

⁹ Cf. JAN PAVEL II., *Překročit práh naděje* (Praha: Tok, 1995), 138.

evoked an once-in-a-lifetime feeling. What was the purpose and the circumstances of these visits?

The nature of the first visit which took place in April 1990—only a few months after the Velvet Revolution that overthrew the communist regime in Czechoslovakia—was to express gratitude; it carried a feeling of extraordinariness. The Slavic Pope with whole of society and all Christians in the Czech lands and Slovakia stood on the threshold of a new phase in our history.¹⁰ The purpose of the Pope's visit, who came as a "pilgrim of freedom,"¹¹ was to "encourage the believers in this country to deal with the pain and problems of society by using the strength of their faith in order to move forward on the path of a free life."¹² The aim of John Paul II's visit was to strengthen and encourage his brothers in the Church that does not have riches or political power, but is "mighty due to its faith, tried and deepened by years of persecution."¹³ The Pope's first visit to the Czech Republic and Slovakia had a symbolic nature for one more reason: Velehrad, the centre of Cyril and Methodius' mission, was the first place John Paul II wanted to visit during his papal visit in order to express deep spiritual unity between the West and the East.

In 1995, our country welcomed the Pope under circumstances that in many ways differed from those from five years earlier: the distinguished guest stood for the first time on the soil of the independent state of the Czech Republic in which a democratic establishment guaranteeing civil liberties was restored and the process of economic transformation was launched. While, during the previous visit, the Church in our country was barely "out of the catacombs,"¹⁴ the open freedom now placed entirely new demands on Christians and their communities and called for pastoral wisdom to distinguish the paths of the New Evangelisation. The key to understanding the meaning of the Pope's visit was, according to the words of the Pontiff himself, the context of the preparations for the celebrations of the jubilee year 2000, whose first phase (1994–1996)

¹⁰ Cf. "John Paul II's address at New Rudolph's Gallery at Prague Castle during the meeting with representatives of cultural and intellectual circles (from 21 April 1990)," in *Návštěvy Jana Pavla II. u nás* (Kostelní Vydří: Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 2007), 23.

¹¹ "Welcoming of the Holy Father by the President of Italy, Francesco Cossiga, at an airport in Rome (from 22 April 1990)," in *Jan Pavel II. v Československu 21.–22. dubna 1990: Projevy. Promluvy. Poselství* (Praha: Zvon, 1990), 121.

¹² "John Paul II's address at Prague's Ruzyně International Airport (from 21 April 1990)," in *Návštěvy Jana Pavla II. u nás*, 11.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ "John Paul II's address at Prague's Ruzyně International Airport (from 20 May 1995)," in *Návštěvy Jana Pavla II. u nás*, 44.

was supposed to focus in a significant way on the subject of repentance and reconciliation.¹⁵ The main reason for the Apostolic Journey of the Pope, i.e. the canonisation of the priest Jan Sarkander whose martyrdom was caused also by religious intolerance, so very common in the first half of the 17th Century, falls within this context.

During the seven years that followed the fall of the Iron Curtain, John Paul II visited our country three times, which made us the most visited country by a pope in Central and Eastern Europe since the collapse of the communist regime (not including his native Poland). The very reason for his visit to the Czech Republic in 1997 was the thousandth anniversary of the martyrdom of St. Adalbert, the patron saint of the Czech lands and Poland. The local Church considered this to be the culmination of the Decade of Spiritual Renewal, an initiative announced by Cardinal František Tomášek during the communist totalitarian regime. Connecting these two events and putting them in context with the approaching Great Jubilee was a specific challenge to the local Catholic Church, according to John Paul II.¹⁶

THE HEART OF JOHN PAUL II'S LEGACY REGARDING CZECH ECUMENISM

Due to the shortness of his first visit, the Pope did not have time to meet with the representatives of the Czech ecumenical fellowship. Nonetheless, during the visit John Paul II uttered words that committed Czech Christians to nurturing the spirit of unity and ecumenism. It can even be said that he entrusted a necessary task into their hands. According to the Pope, talking about the desire for Christian unity “is one of the great signs of our time” and “carries a particular weight”, especially in the Czech Republic. Ecumenism carries a purpose for Christians of this country that—according to the Pope—is the basis of a justified hope that “important steps will be taken on the road towards brotherly reconciliation and Christian unity”¹⁷. When Pope Wojtyła described ecumenism as a “challenge of our history”¹⁸

¹⁵ “I think the importance of this visit can be understood in the light of the document *Tertio millennio adveniente*.” John Paul II’s address at the general audience on 24 May 1995 in Rome,” in *Návštěvy Jana Pavla II. u nás*, 71; cf. JOHN PAUL II. *Tertio Millenio Adveniente*, 35.

¹⁶ Cf. “The Pope’s address upon arrival (from 25 April 1997),” in *Návštěvy Jana Pavla II. u nás*, 80.

¹⁷ “John Paul II’s address at New Rudolph’s Gallery at Prague Castle during a meeting with representatives of cultural and intellectual circles,” 25.

¹⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 26.

during his first visit to Prague, he did so not only because of the memories “of the events that foreshadowed the painful split of Western Christianity and caused much suffering in the following centuries,”¹⁹ but also because he knew that the joint experience of suffering during the totalitarian regime brought Christians of different confessions closer together. These experiences that Christ’s Church has undergone in the Czech Republic are a call for a change in the mindset and for efforts to strive for a profound change in the quality of relationships among Jesus’ disciples.

In order to strengthen the seriousness and authenticity of his words, the Bishop of Rome presented several suggestions to the Catholic Church and the entire Christian ecumenical fellowship in the Czech Republic in the 1990s, the core of which I have tried to summarise in three ways: healing of the historical memory, presentation of the ecclesiology of *communio*, and the associated emphasis on the testimony of Christians in society and in the world.

HEALING OF HISTORICAL MEMORY AS THE FIRST STEP ON THE ROAD TOWARDS RECONCILIATION

The subject of memory is at the centre of John Paul II’s thinking. Invoking the thoughts of Paul Ricœur, a French philosopher, the Roman Pontiff realised the visceral connection between memory and identity. “Memory is the faculty which models the identity of human beings at both personal and collective level,”²⁰ wrote the Pope. The memory that stores memories of human history represents a constitutive element of the nation and the Church precisely because it determines their identity. It is a sign of mature freedom to immerse oneself in the course of history and once again experience the events that form the string of victories and defeats. According to the Polish Pope, the knowledge of human history is predominantly eschatological in nature and results in the realisation that personal lives and the entire history of the human race have purpose. The eschatological vocation of people is echoed throughout the nations’ histories. According to the words of the poet and theologian Karol Wojtyła, “the great clockface of history” is a “liturgy of life” that culminates in the Eucharistic sacrifice.²¹

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 25.

²⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *Memory and Identity: Personal Reflections* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), 162.

²¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 85.

The Eucharist—the commemoration of Christ’s mystery that ensures the redemption and deification of men—is the key to understanding humans, their roots and goals of humanity, the source that enables people to understand the communities they belong to and comprehend the meaning of history.²² The Church, which guards the living mystery of Christ in the same way it was guarded by Mary, “treasures in her heart the history of her children, making all their problems her own.”²³ This is the reason for the Church’s concern about the historical memory, which is associated with the desire to cure everything in this memory that still hurts like an open wound.

Pope John Paul II viewed the history of the Czech nation and the Church in the Czech Republic from a theological and spiritual perspective and understood the particularly-urgent need for a reconciliation between the Catholic Church and the nation, but also between the Christians of different confessions and traditions whose presence characterises the past and the present of this country. The goal of the very first trip to our country that the Pope undertook was to reconcile the relationships between the country and the Apostolic See that were repeatedly heavily tested throughout history. The first Pope to ever enter our country and bring the salute of brotherhood, peace and reconciliation is due to the intervention of divine providence a Slav who, in his introductory speech upon kissing the ground at the Czech airport, expressed a desire that his visit helps “heal the scars of the past and remove the ancient feelings of distrust standing between the Czech lands and Rome.”²⁴

The Pope consequently expressed his interest in contributing to the “brotherly cooperation in building mutual respect and trust”²⁵ among Czech Christians. The dual character of the appeal towards reconciliation—i.e. between the Catholic Church and the Czech nation, and between Catholics and non-Catholics—zeroed in on the church reformer Jan Hus and the events connected with the violent recatholisation of the Czech lands. This dual direction was set by the Archbishop of Prague, Cardinal Beran, during the debates about the upcoming declaration on religious freedom at the Second Vatican Council.²⁶ Following up on his words (witnessed by Karol Wojtyła, Archbishop of Kraków at the time), John Paul II expressed a desire during

²² Cf. *ibid.*, 162–163.

²³ *Ibid.*, 170.

²⁴ “John Paul II’s address at Prague’s Ruzyně International Airport,” 11.

²⁵ “John Paul II’s address at New Rudolph’s Gallery at Prague Castle during a meeting with representatives of cultural and intellectual circles,” 25.

²⁶ *Acta synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, vol. IV: *Periodus quarta. Pars I* (Romae: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1976), 393.

his first visit for Czech theologians to define precisely the place which Jan Hus takes among the reformers of the Church, alongside other famous medieval reformers in Bohemia.²⁷ Notwithstanding the priest's theological convictions, we cannot deny either "the integrity of his personal life, nor his efforts for education and moral uplifting of the nation."²⁸ On the basis of the Pope's initiative, a joint commission was created, which from 1993 to 1999 examined the person, life and works of the preacher of Prague and martyr of Constance. At the threshold of the new millennium, the Roman Pontiff praised the work of the ecumenical committee when, during a special symposium that took place in Rome, he summarised the benefits of studying Hus' person and work with the purpose of learning the truth without any prejudices, stereotypes or ideological, political or economic pressures. "The wounds of the past centuries must be cured through a new attitude and completely renewed relationships,"²⁹ said the Pope, whose stance towards Jan Hus culminated in the following statement:

Today, on the eve of the Great Jubilee, I feel the need to express deep regret for the cruel death inflicted on John Hus, and for the consequent wound of conflict and division which was thus imposed on the minds and hearts of the Bohemian people.³⁰

According to Cardinal Beran, in addition to the Hus' unfavourable fate, there were also certain practices used in the 17th Century by the Catholic

²⁷ At this point it is opportune to mention John Paul II's involvement in the matters of Jan Hus which took place in the 1980s when Wojtyła supported the suggestion of Stefan Świeżawski, his friend and professor at the University of Lublin, to reexamine the orthodoxy and legitimacy of Hus' sentencing. In an article written by a Polish historian and published in 1986 in the weekly magazine *Tygodnik Powszechny*, which was met with wide acceptance of Czech Catholic dissidents, it is considered a "requirement of justice for the Holy Father to initiate the revision of the process that condemned Hus at the Council of Constance and thus clear this martyr from the accusations that were unjustly attributed to him." Stefan ŚWIEŻAWSKI, "Jan Hus — heretik nebo předchůdce Druhého vatikánského koncilu," *Studie* 5 (1986), 107: 353. In May 1988 the Polish Episcopate took the initiative to organize a special study day dedicated to Jan Hus; cf. Iwona ŁOŻNA, "Diskuse o Husovi. Inicjativa polského episkopátu," *Teologické texty. Časopis pro teoretické a praktické otázky teologie* (samizdat) 1988, No. 16: 30.

²⁸ "John Paul II's address at New Rudolph's Gallery at Prague Castle during a meeting with representatives of cultural and intellectual circles," 26.

²⁹ John Paul II's address to the participants of the Symposium on Jan Hus held in Rome (The Pontifical Lateran University, 15–18 December 1999) during an audience in Sala del Consistoro at the Vatican on Friday 17 December 1999. *Jan Hus ve Vatikánu: Mezinárodní rozprava o českém reformátoru 15. století a o jeho recepci na prahu třetího tisíciletí*, ed. Jaroslav Pánek and Miloslav Polívka (Praha: Historický ústav AV, 2000), 111.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Church in cooperation with the political authorities in order to persuade Czechs to return to the old faith of their fathers which caused a “permanent hidden wound at the core of the nation.”³¹ John Paul II wanted to address these pressing events during his visit to the Czech Republic in 1995 when he canonised Moravian priest and martyr Jan Sarkander who was sentenced in 1620 by members of the Protestant nobility. Unlike the Pope’s engagement in the issue of Jan Hus, which sparked sympathy across the Czech ecumenical fellowship, the motif of Sarkander aroused a strong wave of criticism and rejection in the non-Catholic environment. They claim the act of canonisation was a gross misrepresentation of history because Czech Protestants more often view the new saint—who is to be honoured as an example of faithfulness in the fulfilment of priestly obligations—as an embodiment of the efforts to violently wipe out the Protestant faith and suppress the freedom of conscience.³² Despite the protests of Protestant theologians, historians, and Church representatives, the Pope did not waver in his determination to canonise the new saint. In addition, he used this occasion to criticise religious wars that resulted in the deaths of Protestants as well as Catholics. The memory of these sad historical events in the context of preparations for the jubilee year was supposed to become a “strong incentive to try to never commit similar sins against the commandment of Christian love.”³³ On the day of the canonisation in Olomouc, the Pope uttered words that can be understood as the core of his ecumenical legacy to Christians in the Czech Republic:

Today I, the Pope of the Church of Rome, in the name of all Catholics, ask forgiveness for the wrongs inflicted on non-Catholics during the turbulent history of these peoples. At the same time, I pledge the Catholic Church’s forgiveness for whatever harm her sons and daughters have suffered.³⁴

³¹ *Acta synodalia Sacrosancti Concilii Oecumenici Vaticani II*, vol. IV: *Periodus quarta. Pars I*, 393.

³² Cf. AA. VV., *Evangelíci o Janu Sarkandrovi: Sborník ke kanonizaci nového katolického svätce*, Heršpice: EMAN, 1995.

³³ “John Paul II’s address at the general audience on 24 May 1995 in Rome,” 73; cf. “A letter by Pope John Paul II to Pavel Smetana, the Synodal Senior of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren and the President of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in the Czech Republic (2 May 1995),” *Protestant* 6 (1995), 6: 2–3.

³⁴ “Homily by John Paul II during the Mass on the occasion of the canonization of Jan Sarkander and Zdislava of Lemberk at Neředín airport in Olomouc (21 May 1995),” in *Návštěvy Jana Pavla II. u nás*, 59–60.

CHURCH AS A *COMMUNIO*:
THE ECUMENICALLY-OPEN ECCLESIOLOGY OF *COMMUNIO*

John Paul II linked the dynamics of the approaching end of the millennium not only to the examination of conscience for the sins of the past and the Church's apathy towards the evils of today's world but also to the question of to what extent the Church has embraced the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. In this regard, he raised the question of whether the ecclesiology of *communio* contained in the dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium* is being strengthened in the universal Church and local churches.³⁵ According to the Pope, the very development of this "central and fundamental idea of conciliar documents"³⁶ was supposed to be an antidote to various forms of populism and sociology that reflect neither the Catholic view of the Church nor the spirit of the most recent Catholic Church council.³⁷ It is not surprising, therefore, that during his apostolic visits to the Czech Republic, the visitor from Rome kept returning to the subject of the Church as a communion. The Pope's thoughts on the subject at hand include their ecumenical importance and can be, therefore, understood as a call for a deeper Christian unity in the Czech lands.

It is very fitting that the Pope used Christ's High Priestly Prayer—which can be considered Jesus' testament of unity—to clarify what the Church is as a communion. The Pope points out that the Church as a *communio* arises from the community of love between the Son and the Father, from God's holiness to which a man is invited through the truth revealed by Christ, the Eternal Word. When Christ sent his disciples into the world, he prayed to the Father: "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17–19). John Paul II reminds us that this is, of course, only the beginning of the Church's life, because the Lord prays not only "for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word" (John 17:20), i.e. for the Church travelling through centuries and the history of nations, including the history of the nations of Bohemia and Moravia: "This prayer encompasses

³⁵ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Tertio Millenio Adveniente*, 38.

³⁶ SYNODUS EPISCOPORUM, "Relatio finalis: Ecclesia sub verbo Dei mysteria Christi celebrant pro salute mundi (7 December 1985)," in *Enchiridion vaticanum 9: Documenti ufficiali della santa sede 25.1.1983–14.12.1985*, ed. Bruno Testacci and Guido Mocellin (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane), 1991, Art. 1800. Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Christifideles Laici*, 19.

³⁷ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Tertio Millenio Adveniente*, 38. Sławomir NOWOSAD, "John Paul II's Ecclesiology of communion as a Gift to the World," *Roczniki Teologii Dogmatycznej* 4/59 (2012): 167–189.

all generations and centuries, which are filled with love and care by the Redeemer of the World.”³⁸ Christ’s prayer in the upper room continues to guide the Church and humanity waiting to be guided into the truth and salvation that is brought by the Son of God. Looking at the crowds of those who have not yet entered with faith into the vitalising communion with God, a question arises with new urgency regarding what kind of witness was given to the world by Christ’s disciples. After all, it is their perfect unity that enables the world to “believe that you have sent me” (John 17:21). The unity of the communion hidden in the depth of a loving relationship between the Father and the Son is presented to Jesus’ disciples in our country as an obligation because, according to the Pope, it represents “one of the particular tasks we as believers [...] are obliged to participate in with God’s help.”³⁹

John Paul II instructs local Christians to experience the Church first and foremost as a *communio sanctorum*, i.e. a mystery “that widens the hearts of believers and allows them to give praise to the Trinitarian God and breathe in the atmosphere of faith, hope, and love.”⁴⁰ The very community of Saints, i.e. the fellowship of those who belong to God, shows that the Church is born out of truth and love, which causes one person to spiritually reside inside another. We thus understand why the Son promises to reside inside the ones who love him, i.e. the ones who received the gift of an uncreated love, the gift of the Holy Spirit.⁴¹ It is the Spirit of the Truth who creates a community when he ensures that “the Word, in one Deity with the Father, may continue to unite men from one generation to another with the same truth and love he [the Son] revealed by His coming to the world.”⁴²

According to the Slavic Pope, the core of Christ’s Church in the Czech Republic is comprised of “saints and blessed of the past eras and all the devotees of faith of the past years.”⁴³ The multitude of Czech saints—which was dubbed by John Paul II “precious examples of Christian trueness”⁴⁴ —is being expanded to this day, especially from during the struggles of the

³⁸ “John Paul II’s speech during a prayer meeting at Prague’s Strahov stadium (20 May 1995),” in *Návštěvy Jana Pavla II. u nás*, 52.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁴¹ Cf. “Homily of John Paul II during the Mass on the occasion of the canonization of Jan Sarkander and Zdislava of Lemberk at Nefedín airport in Olomouc,” 56.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴³ “John Paul II’s speech during a prayer meeting at Prague’s Strahov stadium,” 51.

⁴⁴ “John Paul II’s address at New Rudolph’s Gallery at Prague Castle during a meeting with representatives of cultural and intellectual circles,” 26.

nation in the periods of Nazi and communist oppression when the “clergy and believers of all confessions in their vast majority stood on the side of the nation.”⁴⁵ The Church as a communion of witnesses who have remained faithful even to the shedding of blood: *communio martyrum*. The intensity of Pope Wojtyła’s awareness of the ecumenical reach of the community of saints and martyrs is common knowledge. He said so himself: “The ecumenism of the saints and martyrs is probably the most convincing.”⁴⁶ He considers saints and martyrs to be “the first intercessors in ecumenical efforts”⁴⁷ because they stay close to Christ who prayed for unity during his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. This context allows us to better understand the significance of the aforementioned canonisation of Sarkander with which the Pope recalled one of the most dramatic and painful moments of the history of churches in Bohemia and Moravia—its division.

John Paul II considered the testimony of martyrs to be a common treasure of Christians of various denominations and, in his understanding, it was significant because the suffering of these witnesses to the faith increases and deepens the memory of the Church, at the heart of which is the mystery of Christ. In the Pope’s appeal for Christians to keep remembering the witness of those who shed their blood for Christ can be seen particular care for the unity of the memory that accompanies Church communities through all generations.⁴⁸ From there, a strong Christological and pneumatological emphasis is evident, which is a strong feature of the ecclesiology of the communion, the core of which is the *communio sanctorum*. The constant presence of our country’s patrons that have been the “home of saints”⁴⁹ since the dawn of its history, becomes a call for all Christians to walk on the path to holiness. This holiness—considered by John Paul II to be an everyday cultivation and exercise of the truth of our faith, the truth that in Christ, the Son of God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we have become the children of the Heavenly Father—is “in fact the only thing that matters in life.”⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ JOHN PAUL II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 37; cf. IDEM, *Ut Unum Sint*, 83–84.

⁴⁷ “John Paul II’s speech during a prayer meeting at Prague’s Strahov stadium,” 53.

⁴⁸ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Memory and Identity*, 169–170.

⁴⁹ “John Paul II’s speech right before the prayer Regina Coeli at Neředín airport in Olomouc (21 May 1995),” in *Návštěvy Jana Pavla II. u nás*, 62.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

NEW EVANGELISATION AS AN IMPERATIVE
TOWARDS A COMMON TESTIMONY OF CHRISTIANS
IN A SOCIETY

There is no doubt that one of the keys to understanding John Paul II's pontificate is the concept of "New Evangelisation" which developed in a particular way the impulses of the Second Vatican Council and Pope Paul VI. The upcoming turn of the millennium, when the lands of the ancient Christian tradition become alienated from Christ and his legacy, brought about the hour of the New Evangelisation, which invited the entire Church to re-introduce Jesus' joyful message in an appropriate manner to the nations that have already received Christ's message in the past. The Polish Pope understood this New Evangelisation first and foremost as an answer that takes seriously the "signs of the times" and the needs of the people and nations at the end of the second Christian millennium. The preaching of the Gospel—which is used by the Church to fulfil Christ's missionary command—in the Pope's understanding becomes a service to men and mankind and poses a demand for a profound and substantial transformation of society and its culture. John Paul II believed that evangelisation and inculturation went hand in hand.⁵¹

It is no surprise, therefore, that during his visits the Pope entrusted the task of the New Evangelisation into the hands of the local Church in Bohemia and Moravia. This task needed to be developed in the context of the social transformation in our countries and in the process of European integration and was formulated by Pope Wojtyła with a particular ecumenical perceptiveness. According to John Paul II, after 1989 the local Church was presented with the obligation to integrate the past—which brought about specific historical existential experiences—into new perspectives, which require Christians and society to be renewed.⁵² Through this profound moral and spiritual renewal, which needs to have an ecumenical dimension,⁵³

⁵¹ Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Christifideles Laici*, 34; *Redemptoris Missio*, 3; Avery DULLES, "John Paul II and the New Evangelization," in Avery DULLES, *Church and Society: The Laurence J. McGinley Lectures, 1988–2007* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 87–102.

⁵² Cf. Pavel AMBROS, *Kam směřuje česká katolická církev?: Teologie obnovy místní církve v Čechách a na Moravě, její základní pastorační postoje a orientace pro třetí tisíciletí* (Velehrad: Refugium, 1999), 139.

⁵³ Cf. GIOVANNI PAOLO II. *Udienza generale* (Mercoledì, 25 aprile 1990), Giovanni Paolo II Udienze 1990, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/audiences/1990/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_19900425.html.

Christians are to maintain and deepen their solidarity with the nation, which they have shown in the past, and, therefore, will be able to stand up to the temptation to become “a self-contained group.”⁵⁴ In the radically-transformed social situation Christians are presented with a sequence of questions that can be answered only within a dialogue and “in mutual fraternal unity”⁵⁵ that will not spread uniformity (based on compromises) around itself, but will introduce to society the value of mutual respect and responsibility for the roots of the nation and its culture. Above all, John Paul II considered moral honesty, a call for conversion and transformation of mind and heart, to be the unifying motif present in the history of Czech Christianity from the “first Czech European” Adalbert to the witnesses of the Gospel in the Communist era.⁵⁶

The Pope’s call for the restoration of the Church, which would then bear appropriate fruit in society and contribute to the renewal of the nation and its culture, is anchored in his vision of a united Europe. According to the Pope, the old continent, which in the early 1990s stood on the threshold of a new stage of its history, faced the question of finding and formulating its own cultural identity. Standing on Czech soil, John Paul II emphasised the idea that what gives Europe its specific face is precisely its cultural unity, which is at the same time the “fruit of cultural diversity.”⁵⁷ In the integration process, which cannot stand on the idea of Enlightenment alone, we, as Europeans, are thus invited to re-discover the phenomenon of Christianity in the foundations of our culture. Without the living awareness of the spiritual and religious dimension as a key to the understanding and fruitful reading of the European tradition, there is a risk we will become “foreigners in our own culture.”⁵⁸

The Polish Pope considered the missionary work of the saint brothers Cyril and Methodius, which is connected to Moravian Velehrad, to be an inspiring example for the New Evangelisation of Europe and an exceptional model of fruitful dialogue between the Gospel and the culture.⁵⁹ On the eve

⁵⁴ “John Paul II’s speech at St. Vitus Cathedral while meeting with clergy, monks and the disabled (21 April 1990),” in *Návštěvy Jana Pavla II. u nás*, 16.

⁵⁵ “John Paul II’s address at New Rudolph’s Gallery at Prague Castle during a meeting with representatives of cultural and intellectual circles,” 27.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 28

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ JOHN PAUL II, *Slavorum Apostoli*, 21–22. For this reason, we understand that it was not a coincidence when, at the end of his visit to the place of pilgrimage in Velehrad, the Pope pu-

of the trip to Velehrad, John Paul II reminded us that the Czech “nation and its culture were since the beginning connected to the light of Christ’s Gospel and to the work of the spreaders of Christianity”⁶⁰ who had travelled to this country long before they travelled to other Slavic nations. For the Pope, the venerable Velehrad meant first and foremost “the beginning of Slavs joining the Church and the beginning of this part of European culture,”⁶¹ it meant a place from where these “Apostles of the Slavs” began the work of evangelisation,⁶² when they comprehensibly passed down onto our ancestors the message of a new life founded in Christ. The Pope particularly emphasised the role of Velehrad as a place where we find the “cornerstone of European unity.”⁶³ Similarly to how St. Benedict laid the foundations of “Latin Europe” on Monte Cassino, Cyril and Methodius “permanently instilled Greek and Byzantine tradition in Europe’s history,”⁶⁴ reminded the Pope. Both of these immense streams of tradition, however different their features may be, refer to one another and together they imprint their characteristic features into the face of Christian Europe. In addition to these aspects, the life story of the Slavic missionaries entails a call for the unity of the Church, which — according to Wojtyła’s favourite saying — needs to start breathing with both lungs, the Eastern and the Western.⁶⁵

The Pope’s call for the “New Evangelisation” that he repeatedly presented to the local Catholic Church and the Czech ecumenical fellowship is ultimately aimed at appreciating the spiritual resources of the Christian identity. It remains mainly a call for spiritual renewal in the life of faith, seeing as the Church is obliged to bring the Spirit of God to each time period. The Spirit alone has the power to heal, cleanse, sanctify and thus renew the face of the earth (cf. Psalm 104:30).⁶⁶ Courage and the ability to undergo deep cultural transformations and changes in the mindset via the spirit of the Gospel cannot be understood otherwise than as the fruit of the

blicly announced his desire to convene a special Synod of Bishops on Europe dedicated to the new evangelisation of the old continent.

⁶⁰ “John Paul II’s speech during the celebration of the Eucharist at Letna Plain in Prague (21 April 1990),” 19.

⁶¹ GIOVANNI PAOLO II, *Udienza generale* (Mercoledì, 25 aprile 1990).

⁶² Cf. “John Paul II’s speech during the celebration of the Eucharist in Velehrad,” in *Návštěvy Jana Pavla II. u nás*, 32–33.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Cf. *ibid.*

⁶⁶ Cf. “Homily of John Paul II during the Mass for the Youth at Hradec Králové,” in *Návštěvy Jana Pavla II. u nás*, 95–97.

intense experience of a Christian with the Paschal mystery and his personal encounter with Christ.⁶⁷ After all, it is only through the mystery of the Incarnate Word that the Mystery of Man takes on light.⁶⁸

CONCLUSION

In the introductory part of the article, it was mentioned that John Paul II's idea of ecumenism bears the seal of pastoral care, which is based on the Pope's internal determination to do everything in his power to ensure Christian unity. However, his ecumenical efforts cannot be reduced to unbound activism. An essential character of the pastoral nature of John Paul II's ecumenism was first and foremost the effort to evaluate the "signs of the times" and interpret them in the light of faith and the Gospel.⁶⁹ I dare say that if Pope Wojtyła's ecumenical engagement conceals something prophetic, it stems from his determination to understand God's purpose for the Church. Making the Church aware of God's plan of unity with humankind in a certain historical moment and in a certain place (in the *here* and *now* of the salvation)—this is one way of expressing the ultimate motif of the "pastoral ecumenism" of the Polish Pope.

From this exact way of thinking emerge specific impulses addressed by John Paul II to the Czech ecumenical fellowship, which were summarised into three areas: healing of the historical memory, presentation of the ecclesiology of *communio* and the New Evangelisation. These three key topics of Wojtyła's pontificate that were developed with perceptiveness towards the Czech ecumenical context testify to the Pope's efforts to connect care for the universal Church with the life and history of the local church and continue to remain a call for deepening the steps towards full and visible Christian unity in the Czech lands.

⁶⁷ Cf. "The Holy Father's speech during a meeting with the sick and the members of religious communities at the Church of St. Margaret (26 April 1997)," in *Návštěvy Jana Pavla II. u nás*, 101.

⁶⁸ Cf. JAN PAVEL II, *Redemptor Hominis*, 8.

⁶⁹ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 4.

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„JEDNOŚĆ — WYZWANIE DLA WASZEJ HISTORII”.
JAN PAWEŁ II I CZESKI EKUMENIZM

Streszczenie

Artykuł koncentruje się na wezwaniach Jana Pawła II dotyczących czeskiego ekumenizmu. Omawia je w trzech punktach: po pierwsze, poprzez prezentację charakterystyki ekumenizmu przez Karola Wojtyłę, następnie naświetla eklezjalny i społeczny kontekst, w którym były odbierane wezwania Jana Pawła II o jedność chrześcijan w Czechach w latach dziewięćdziesiątych, wreszcie, przedstawia trzy najważniejsze tematy ekumeniczne w nauczaniu papieża. Zastosowana metoda pozwala nam dostrzec, jak ogólne zasady Jana Pawła II dotyczące wysiłków ekumenicznych były manifestowane w jego pastoralnej trosce o Kościół lokalny i jedność chrześcijan w Czechach i na Morawach.

Słowa kluczowe: Kościół katolicki; Jan Paweł II; ekumenizm; Czechy; uzdrowienie pamięci; eklezjologia; Nowa Ewangelizacja; Reformacja; Jan Hus; Cyryl i Metody.