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Ecumenical formation program. A proposal of the Roman Catholic Church in the context of the assumptions of the Second Vatican Council and post-conciliar documents

Abstract

The Second Vatican Council ushered in a profound breakthrough in the Roman Catholic Church's thinking about the Church and the implementation of its mission in the world. It made ecumenism one of the fundamental paradigms of evangelization, and considered permanent ecumenical formation an essential commitment of all churches. The Council's Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio* gives ecumenical formation a proper ethical framework: It demands an effective renunciation of the logic of subjugating others in favour of the logic of respect and fraternity. Thus, a program of ecumenical formation has been implemented. It covered all forms of Church teaching and life. Its fundamental goals are: breaking down negative stereotypes in mutual references between Christians and Churches, discovering what is common to different Christianities, seeking opportunities to overcome all that divides them, and above all, forming positive sensitivity in mutual relations. The program for the ecumenical formation of the Roman Catholic Church outlined in the Second Vatican Council's Decree on Ecumenism is constantly updated in post-conciliar documents. This paper will present its basic assumptions and pastoral references at various levels of church activity.

Keywords: Holy Spirit, Church, Second Vatican Council, ecumenism, ecumenical formation.

Program ekumenicznej formacji. Propozycja Kościoła rzymskokatolickiego w kontekście założeń Soboru Watykańskiego II oraz dokumentów posoborowych

Abstrakt

Sobór Watykański II zapoczątkował w Kościele rzymskokatolickim głęboki przełom w myśleniu o Kościele i o realizacji jego posłannictwa w świecie. Uczynił ekumenizm jednym z zasadniczych paradygmatów ewangelizacyjnych, a permanentną ekumeniczną formację uznał za istotne zobowiązanie wszystkich Kościołów. Soborowy Dekret o ekumenizmie *Unitatis redintegratio* nadaje ekumenicznej formacji właściwe ramy etyczne: domaga się skutecznego wyrzeczenia się logiki podporządkowywania sobie innych na rzecz logiki szacunku i brater-

stwa. Wdrożono więc w życie program ekumenicznej formacji. Objęto nim wszystkie formy nauczania i życia Kościoła. Jego zasadnicze cele to: przełamywanie negatywnych stereotypów we wzajemnych odniesieniach między chrześcijanami i Kościołami, odkrywanie tego, co wspólne dla różnych Kościołów chrześcijańskich, poszukiwanie możliwości przezwyciężania tego wszystkiego, co je dzieli, a nade wszystko kształtowanie pozytywnej wrażliwości we wzajemnych relacjach. Program ekumenicznej formacji Kościoła rzymskokatolickiego zarysowany w Dekrecie o ekumenizmie Soboru Watykańskiego II jest stale aktualizowany w dokumentach posoborowych. W niniejszym opracowaniu zaprezentowane zostaną jego zasadnicze założenia oraz pastoralne odniesienia na różnych poziomach aktywności kościelnej.

Słowa kluczowe: Duch Święty, Kościół, Sobór Watykański II, ekumenizm, ekumeniczna formacja.

1. Introduction

The Second Vatican Council initiated a profound breakthrough in the awareness of the Roman Catholic Church regarding the understanding of the realization of its mission in the world. It recognized ecumenism as one of its essential paradigms, emphasizing that “the lack of unity is in open opposition to the will of Christ.”¹ The Council thus made Christians aware that the “renewal of unity is to be cared for by the whole Church, both the faithful and their shepherds, each according to their own strength, whether in daily Christian life or in theological and historical research.”²

The Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio* includes an ecumenical program for the Roman Catholic Church, which concentrates particularly on the need for “ecumenical” practice of theology and the need for ecumenical formation.³ This program has become mandatory for the entire Church and has been consistently implemented in her life. It has been confirmed repeatedly in post-conciliar documents, especially in the ecumenical directories, where the need for ecumenical formation has been recognized as a priority.⁴ A definitive ecumenical program for the Roman Catholic Church for the next centuries was outlined and sealed by Pope John Paul II in the first encyclical in the history of the Church entirely dedicated to ecumenism under the significant title *Ut unum sint*. John Paul II’s unequivocal declaration that “the way of the Church is the way of ecumenism”⁵ and that ecumenism is “the imperative of a Christian conscience enlightened by faith and guided by love”⁶ should

¹ UR *Introduction*.

² UR, no. 5.

³ Cf. UR, no. 10.

⁴ Cf. Directory 1970; Directory 1993, no. 55–91; EF; *Vademecum*.

⁵ UUS, no. 7.

⁶ UUS, no. 8.

be regarded as guiding the way of the Church for centuries to come, since any division in the Church is in opposition to the will of Christ⁷ and consequently directed against the Church. Christ, therefore, calls all his disciples to unity. In the face of the above, these who believe in Christ “united in following the example of the martyrs, cannot remain divided,”⁸ since “the sin of our division is very grave.”⁹ Therefore, ecumenical formation has become a special challenge and task for the Roman Catholic Church. In the era of globalization, the effect of which is, among other things, the possibility of unfettered movement of people, which involves many of them making important life decisions (for example, about entering into mixed marriages), ecumenical formation has become one of the priority tasks for the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁰ In this paper, attention will be focused on the analysis of the essential elements of the ecumenical formation program set forth in the documents of the Roman Catholic Church. Conclusions and postulates regarding the post-conciliar program of ecumenical formation in the Roman Catholic Church will also be presented.

2. Assumptions of the ecumenical formation program according to the documents of the Roman Catholic Church

In the Decree on Ecumenism, we find a clear indication that “the study of sacred theology and other fields of knowledge, especially historical” should be practiced in an ecumenical manner, “so that it can correspond more and more accurately to the actual state of affairs. For it is very important that future ministers and priests become acquainted with theology that has been developed correctly in this regard, and not polemically, and are able to make use of it, especially in matters concerning the relationship of separated brethren to the Catholic Church. For on the formation of priests depends, to the highest degree, the necessary education and spiritual formation of the faithful (...).”¹¹ The message of the Decree represents, so to speak, the first and fundamental stage in the Roman Catholic Church’s construction of an ecumenical formation program. It

⁷ See: UR, no. 1.

⁸ TMA, no. 1.

⁹ OL, no. 17.

¹⁰ Cf. Johannes Oeldemann. 2023. “Ecumenical Formation in Theological Education: A Precondition for Ecumenical Encounter and a Tool for Ecumenical Reception.” *Religions* 14 (12): 1461. (12.01.2024) <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/14/12/1461>; Dietrich Werner. 2024. “Religious Education and Ecumenical Formation in Post-confessional Settings – Essentials for the Theological Education of Pastors and Teachers of Religion.” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 28 (1): 135–157.

¹¹ UR, no. 10.

was developed especially in the ecumenical directories¹² and other post-conciliar documents.¹³ It assumes a fundamental change as to how we view Christians who ecclesially think and believe differently from ourselves.

2.1. Ethical framework for ecumenical formation according to the Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*

The Decree on Ecumenism sets forth the proper ethical framework for ecumenical formation.¹⁴ The Council Fathers, therefore, appealed to their fellow bishops and to all members of the Church and people of good will to abandon the logic of subjugating others in favor of a logic of respect and brotherhood toward them.¹⁵ The Roman Catholic Church, while encouraging a better knowledge of other than Roman Christian traditions and a dialogue with them, accepts the diversity of forms of spiritual life, Church discipline, liturgical rites or even theological interpretations of revealed truth. This diversity is not only a manifestation of the Church's universality, but also indicates towards its apostolicity.¹⁶

The second chapter of the Decree on Ecumenism¹⁷ presents a number of specific indications for the realization of ecumenism in the life and pastoral activity of the Roman Catholic Church. The prelude here is the statement that ecumenism concerns the entire Church, both the faithful and shepherds, both in daily life and in the practice of theology.¹⁸ Therefore, the Council encourages the faithful of the Catholic Church, recognizing the signs of the times, to participate diligently in ecumenical work.¹⁹ Indeed, ecumenism is a very important part of the spiritual, intellectual, pastoral and liturgical life of the entire Church.²⁰ Therefore, ecumenical formation is considered a special challenge that churches and Christians face. It is of a permanent nature, since it sets the course for the renewal of the Church, which requires a permanent reformation, that is, a return to its original purity and an effort to maintain absolute fidelity to Christ and His Gospel. According to the Council, a return to the original purity of evangelical life is the right

¹² Cf. Directory 1967; Directory 1970; Directory 1993.

¹³ Cf. UUS; EF; Vademecum.

¹⁴ Cf. Zygfried Glaeser. 2019. "Ekumena wartości." *Studia Oecumenica* 19.

¹⁵ Glaeser. 2019. *Ekumena wartości*, 35.

¹⁶ Cf. Władysław Miziołek. 1986. *Wprowadzenie do zagadnień ekumenicznych*. Warszawa: Instytut Prasy i Wydawnictw Novum, 33; Jerzy Kostorz. 2010. "Wychowanie do postawy ekumenizmu w nauczaniu religii – doświadczenia katolickie." *Pedagogia Christiana* 2 (26): 236-237.

¹⁷ Cf. DE, no. 5–12.

¹⁸ Cf. DE, no. 5.

¹⁹ Cf. DE, no. 4.

²⁰ Cf. Józef Budniak. 2002. *Ekumenizm jutra na przykładzie Śląska Cieszyńskiego: Studium historyczno-pastoralne*. Katowice: Uniwersytet Śląski, 33–34.

way to reconciliation between Churches and Christians, leading to the realization of a full visible unity in Christ's Church.²¹ What is necessary, then, is the inner transformation of Christians, which calls for ongoing formation "toward Christ", and thus "toward ecclesial unity." The Council Fathers state that "real ecumenism does not exist without an inner transformation. After all, from newness of spirit, from self-denial and from the free outpouring of love come and mature desires for unity. Therefore, with the Holy Spirit we must ask the grace of sincere self-mortification, humility and meekness in ministry, and generosity of spirit toward others."²² They base their ecumenical formation program, therefore, on entrusting ourselves to the Holy Spirit and the permanent invocation of Him by Christians and Churches. They call these activities "spiritual ecumenism," which consists of conversion of heart, holiness of life and prayer.²³ They constitute "the soul of the entire ecumenical movement."²⁴

The Council Fathers recognized as an important element of the Roman Catholic Church's ecumenical formation program the undertaking of cooperation between Christians and Churches in the social field. This includes such matters as world peace, helping developing countries, combating hunger and illiteracy, poverty, striving for social justice and arranging social relations in the spirit of the Gospel.²⁵ Cooperation among Christians in social matters provides a convenient opportunity to get to know each other better, which is indispensable for constructive and fruitful interchurch dialogues at various levels and on various topics.²⁶

2.2. Embodiment of the ecumenical formation program in ecumenical directories

The essential elements that embody the ecumenical formation program of the Roman Catholic Church are presented in the ecumenical directories published by the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity/Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.²⁷ It emphasized that for the renewal of Christian unity it is not enough to practice mutual brotherhood love in daily life, but there is also a need for sharing in spiritual things that are common to different Christian denominations. These include praying together and sharing in sacred acts (*communicatio*

²¹ See: DE, no. 6.

²² DE, no. 7.

²³ See: Zygfryd Glaeser. 2000. *Ku eklezjologii „Kościołów siostrzanych”*. *Studium ekumeniczne*. Opole: Wydział Teologiczny Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, 224–236.

²⁴ DE, no. 8.

²⁵ Cf. DE, no. 12.

²⁶ Cf. DE, no. 13–24.

²⁷ Cf. Directory 1967; Directory 1970; Directory 1993.

in sacris). It is desirable for Christians to unite in prayer on various occasions and thus contribute to building peace, social justice, mutual love among people, the dignity of the family, etc. This prayer should also have a votive character. Meanwhile, the main purpose of ecumenical prayer is to restore full visible unity among Christians.²⁸ The authors of the document also recommend sharing – as much as is possible and permitted by the Churches – in the sacred acts with Christians of Eastern traditions and with Christians of other ecclesiastical traditions.²⁹ All indications addressing the issue of spiritual and practical ecumenism explicitly draw attention to the need to form a kind of ecumenical spirituality, the center of which is common prayer.³⁰

In principle, Part II of the 1970 Ecumenical Directory is entirely dedicated to ecumenical formation.³¹ The first chapter presents “General Principles and Aids for Ecumenical Formation,” and thus also the goal of ecumenical endeavor,³² as well as the assisting means for achieving the goal.³³ Detailed provisions for religious and theological formation in an ecumenical context are presented in Chapter Three of the Directory.³⁴ The final chapter of the document in question sets forth rules for interaction between Catholics and other Christians. These apply to both individuals and institutions.³⁵ It was emphasized that all the theological teaching of the churches should be ecumenical in nature and should be guided by ecumenical sensitivity.³⁶ The authors of the document recognized dialogue as one of the fundamental elements of the formation process. It depends on many factors, including sincere fidelity to one’s own denominational tradition and an open mind, ready to base one’s life more deeply on the faith in Jesus Christ.³⁷

New impulses for the Roman Catholic Church’s ecumenical formation program are found in the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* approved by Pope John Paul II on March 25, 1993.³⁸ The authors

²⁸ Cf. Directory 1967, no. 21–24.

²⁹ Cf. Directory 1967, no. 25–31; Stanisław Nagy. 1985. *Kościół na drogach jedności*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Wrocławskiej Księgarni Archidiecezjalnej, 251–256.

³⁰ Cf. Directory 1970, no. II.1.

³¹ Cf. Directory 1970.

³² Cf. Directory 1970, no. I.1.

³³ Cf. Directory 1970, no. I.2.

³⁴ Cf. Directory 1970, no. III.

³⁵ Cf. Directory 1970, no. IV.

³⁶ Cf. Wojciech Hanc. 1996. Ekumeniczny wymiar całej teologii. In *Ku chrześcijaństwu jutra. Wprowadzenie do ekumenizmu*. Eds. Waław Hryniewicz, Jan Sergiusz Gajek, Stanisław Józef Koza, 581–586. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Towarzystwa Naukowego KUL.

³⁷ Cf. Directory 1970, no. III.1.

³⁸ Directory 1993.

of the document, based on the provisions of the Decree on Ecumenism and the earlier two-part Ecumenical Directory,³⁹ reiterated the basic premise of the ecumenical formation program, that all the baptized are called to engage in the search for unity, since “communion” in baptism is attributed to full ecclesial communion.⁴⁰ Therefore, they encourage ecumenical activity, especially where it has not existed before.⁴¹ They attribute particular importance in this matter to permanent and multifaceted ecumenical formation. Detailed indications in this matter are presented in the third chapter of the document.⁴² Among them, special attention was paid to: “The necessity and purpose of ecumenical formation”⁴³ and the need to “adapt formation to the specific situations of the persons concerned.”⁴⁴ The essential elements of a formation program for “all the faithful” are outlined first.⁴⁵ The “means of formation” were outlined,⁴⁶ among which the most important were considered to be: “listening to and studying the Word of God,”⁴⁷ “preaching,”⁴⁸ “catechesis,”⁴⁹ “liturgy,”⁵⁰ “spiritual life,”⁵¹ and “other initiatives.”⁵² What was also identified were the “environments conducive to formation.”⁵³ Listed here are: family,⁵⁴ parish,⁵⁵ school⁵⁶ and “church groups, associations and movements.”⁵⁷ They are described in detail and the areas of their tasks in the process of ecumenical formation were indicated.

The authors of the 1993 Directory detailed the ecumenical formation program in the areas of: “formation of those who work in pastoral ministry,”⁵⁸ “specialized

³⁹ Directory 1967; Directory 1970.

⁴⁰ Directory 1993, no. 22.

⁴¹ Cf. Directory 1993, no. 23.

⁴² Directory 1993, no. 55–91.

⁴³ Cf. Directory 1993, no. 55.

⁴⁴ Cf. Directory 1993, no. 56–57.

⁴⁵ Cf. Directory 1993, no. 58–69.

⁴⁶ Cf. Directory 1993, no. 59–64.

⁴⁷ Cf. Directory 1993, no. 59.

⁴⁸ Cf. Directory 1993, no. 60.

⁴⁹ Cf. Directory 1993, no. 61.

⁵⁰ Cf. Directory 1993, no. 62.

⁵¹ Cf. Directory 1993, no. 63.

⁵² Cf. Directory 1993, no. 64.

⁵³ Cf. Directory 1993, no. 65–69.

⁵⁴ Cf. Directory 1993, no. 66.

⁵⁵ Cf. Directory 1993, no. 67.

⁵⁶ Cf. Directory 1993, no. 68.

⁵⁷ Cf. Directory 1993, no. 69.

⁵⁸ Cf. Directory 1993, no. 70–86.

formation”⁵⁹ and “permanent formation.”⁶⁰ In the first area, special attention was given to the ecumenical formation of “ordained ministers”⁶¹ and “non-ordained ministers and associates.”⁶² It was emphasized that the bishop is always responsible for ecumenical formation in a particular Church.⁶³ Thus, an obligation was placed on the bishops to take special care to include an ecumenical aspect in the study of theological sciences, and that the *Ratio studiorum* should not lack a place for the study of ecumenism.⁶⁴ As for the formation of “ordained ministers,” it consists of permanently forming in them an attitude of openness to every person based on the principle of dialogicity, “which will allow [in them, Z. G.] to form in this way an authentically ecumenical attitude.”⁶⁵ It applies to both doctrinal formation⁶⁶ and practical ecumenism.⁶⁷ Likewise, with regard to “special ministers and non-ordained associates,” important tasks have been specified in connection with their doctrinal formation,⁶⁸ as well as those relating directly to the implementation of common practical tasks.⁶⁹

The Roman Catholic Church attaches special responsibilities and tasks in the implementation of the ecumenical formation program to academic units, especially those called to study and teach theology. The 1993 Directory clearly states that “ecclesiastical faculties and other higher academic institutes have a special role to play in the preparation for ecumenical dialogue, in its development and in the very advancement of Christian unity that this dialogue helps to achieve.”⁷⁰ Specific requirements for “pedagogical preparation for dialogue” are thus indicated.⁷¹ These are:

- (a) “personal and sincere commitment, lived in faith, without which dialogue is no longer dialogue between brothers and sisters, but only a mere academic exercise;
- (b) the search for new ways and means to bring about reciprocal relations and to restore unity based on greater fidelity to the Gospel and on the authentic profession of the Christian faith in truth and love;

⁵⁹ Cf. Directory 1993, no. 87–90.

⁶⁰ Cf. Directory 1993, no. 91.

⁶¹ Cf. Directory 1993, no. 70–82.

⁶² Cf. Directory 1993, no. 83–86.

⁶³ Cf. Directory 1993, no. 70.

⁶⁴ Cf. Directory 1993, no. 72.

⁶⁵ Directory 1993, no. 70.

⁶⁶ Cf. Directory 1993, no. 72–81.

⁶⁷ Cf. Directory 1993, no. 82.

⁶⁸ Cf. Directory 1993, no. 83–84.

⁶⁹ Cf. Directory 1993, no. 85–86.

⁷⁰ Directory 1993, no. 87.

⁷¹ Directory 1993, no. 87.

- (c) an awareness that ecumenical dialogue is not of a purely private nature between individuals or particular groups, but falls within the commitment of the entire Church and should consequently be conducted in a manner consistent with the teachings and directives of its Shepherds;
- (d) readiness to recognize that members of different churches and ecclesial communities can help us to better understand and more accurately present the doctrine and life of their own communities;
- (e) respect for the conscience and personal conviction of anyone who presents an aspect or doctrine of their own church, or a particular way of their own understanding of God's revelation;
- (f) recognition of the fact that not everyone has had the chance to benefit from the same preparation to participate in dialogue, as levels of education, spiritual maturity and spiritual progress vary.⁷²

In the above context, the role of church faculties,⁷³ Catholic universities⁷⁴ and specialized ecumenical institutes⁷⁵ in implementing the ecumenical formation program was detailed. Regarding the first two areas, the importance of their ecumenical-formation involvement in undertaking scientific research, in teaching theology, in developing spiritual ecumenism and in the ecumenical implementation of the churches' practical social tasks was emphasized.

It was underlined that "in order to fulfill (...) the ecumenical task, the Church needs an adequate number of experts in this field: clergy, monks, laity, men and women. They are also necessary in regions with a Catholic majority."⁷⁶ Their proper preparation in particular is entrusted, as their own tasks, to "specialized ecumenical institutes." The authors of the 1993 Directory identified important internal and external requirements to guarantee the smooth and fruitful functioning of specialized ecumenical institutes. These concern:

- (a) Adequate preparations of specialized institutes:
 - "adequate documentation on ecumenism, especially on ongoing dialogues and programs for the future;
 - a professorial body, capable and well prepared in both Catholic doctrine and ecumenism.
- (b) Institutions should engage primarily in ecumenical research in cooperation, as far as possible, with experts from other theological traditions and

⁷² Directory 1993, no. 87.

⁷³ Cf. Directory 1993, no. 88.

⁷⁴ Cf. Directory 1993, no. 89.

⁷⁵ Cf. Directory 1993, no. 90.

⁷⁶ Directory 1993, no. 90.

with their faithful; they should organize ecumenical meetings such as conferences and congresses; and they should remain in constant contact with national ecumenical commissions and with the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, in order to know the current state of inter-faith dialogues and the progress already achieved.

- (c) Experts thus formed can enrich the members of the ecumenical movement in the Catholic Church as members or leaders of responsible diocesan, national or international organisms, as professors of an ecumenical course in institutes or ecclesiastical centers, or as animators of authentic ecumenical spirit and activity in their surroundings.”⁷⁷

As for ongoing formation, it was emphasized, among other things, that “it requires ordained ministers and those working in pastoral ministry to be constantly updated as the ecumenical movement continues to grow.”⁷⁸ Bishops and religious order superiors were also reminded that they “should pay great attention to ecumenism, based on the following indications:

- a) Systematic instruction of priests, deacons, religious order priest, nuns and laity on the current ecumenical status, in such a way that they know how to integrate the ecumenical dimension into preaching, catechesis, prayer and Christian life in general. Should this prove possible and advisable, a minister from another Church should sometimes be invited to discuss their own tradition or pastoral problems that are often common to all.
- b) When the opportunity arises, and with the approval of the diocesan bishop, Catholic clergy and those involved in pastoral care in the diocese will be able to participate in interfaith conventions aimed at improving mutual relations and solving, with the cooperation of all, common pastoral problems. The realization of these initiatives is often facilitated by the creation, for clergy, of local and regional councils or associations, etc., or by their joining similar associations already in existence.
- c) Theological faculties, institutes of higher studies, seminaries and other formative institutes can contribute greatly to permanent formation, either by organizing courses of study for those who work in pastoral ministry, or by contributing their own teaching staff and material necessary for disciplines and courses taught by others.
- d) Moreover, the following measures are extremely useful: accurate information by means of the local Church’s media and, if possible, the state media; exchange of information with media personnel in other Churches

⁷⁷ Directory 1993, no. 90.

⁷⁸ Directory 1993, no. 91.

and ecclesial communities; systematic and ongoing relations with ecumenical commissions: diocesan or national, so that all Catholics involved in pastoral ministry have access to accurate documentation on the development of the ecumenical movement.

- e) In addition, various forms of spiritual meetings should be used to deepen the common and special (own) elements of spirituality. Such meetings will provide an opportunity to reflect on unity and to pray for the reconciliation of all Christians. With such meetings, the participation of members of different Churches and Ecclesial Communities can contribute to mutual understanding and the growth of spiritual communion.
- f) Finally, it is desirable to periodically evaluate ecumenical activities.”⁷⁹

2.3. New impetus for ecumenical formation program

New impetus for the ecumenical formation program was brought by John Paul II's encyclical *Ut unum sint*. It is the first document of this stature in the history of the Church entirely dedicated to ecumenism. The Pope unequivocally identified ecumenism as a fundamental commitment of the Church.⁸⁰ It stems from the conviction that “ecclesial vacuum does not extend beyond the boundaries of the Catholic community,” since elements of great value are “in the Catholic Church integrally included in the fullness of the means of salvation and the gifts of grace that make up the Church, are also found in other Christian Communities.”⁸¹ In turn, all of the listed and unlisted elements, taken together, contain within themselves a call to unity and in it find their fullness.⁸² John Paul II thus recognizes the need for permanent ecumenical formation, and calls and urges for it, especially “in theological institutes where future clergy undergo formation.”⁸³

2.4. Ecumenical orientation of pastoral formation

The directions for ecumenical formation indicated within the ecumenical directories, dynamically affirmed by John Paul II, were presented in a modern way, corresponding to contemporary pastoral challenges, in a document entitled *The Ecumenical Dimension in the Formation of those Engaged in Pastoral Work* published in 1997 by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian

⁷⁹ Directory 1993, no. 91.

⁸⁰ Cf. UUS, no. 7–8.

⁸¹ UUS, no. 13.

⁸² Cf. UUS, no. 14; Wojciech Hanc. 2015. “Dialogiczny wymiar formacji ekumenicznej w wychowawczym procesie – postulatory i sugestie ekumeniczne.” *Studia Oecumenica* 15: 440.

⁸³ UUS, no. 45.

Unity.⁸⁴ Using the methods of pedagogical science and ecumenical experience, an interdisciplinary program was created to put into practice the formative-ecumenical principles of Vatican II.⁸⁵ The authors of the document, following the 1993 Directory, stated unequivocally that ecumenical formation is fundamental to overall Christian formation. It was considered even necessary “that those who have important tasks in the formation of certain attitudes should themselves receive in-depth ecumenical formation.”⁸⁶ In a special way, however, “ecumenism should be ... incorporated into the theological formation of those engaged in pastoral work. In this way, they will be helped to achieve ‘an authentically ecumenical attitude’.”⁸⁷ In the study of theology, it is therefore indispensable to ensure that the ecumenical dimension is taken into account in all subjects taught.⁸⁸ This means taking measures that serve to shape the minds and spirit of believers, their human and religious attitudes in such a way that the search for unity among Christians is facilitated. Thus, the objective of formation is not only to deepen knowledge, but it is also to lead to conversion and ecumenical commitment in those who undergo it and to strengthen their spirit of faith.⁸⁹ Indispensable in the process of ecumenical formation is openness to the Holy Spirit, who breaks through the resistance of human hearts and leads toward the fullness of truth and unity.⁹⁰

Hermeneutics, the hierarchy of truths, and the embodiment in scientific research and theological transmission of what is the fruit of ecumenical dialogues have been identified as key elements to guarantee a proper space for the practice and teaching of theology with its ecumenical dimension.⁹¹

Hermeneutics is understood as the art of interpreting and properly communicating the truths contained in the Bible and in Church documents such as liturgical texts, conciliar rulings, the writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church and other documents containing authorized Church teaching and ecumenical texts.⁹² Hermeneutics teaches to distinguish between the “deposit of faith” and the way a given truth is formulated. It also makes it possible to distinguish the essence of the truth proclaimed from the way it is interpret-

⁸⁴ Cf. Krystian Muszalik. 2020. Istotne założenia ekumenicznej formacji w świetle dokumentu Papieskiej Rady do Spraw Popierania Jedności Chrześcijan „Ekumeniczny wymiar formacji pastoralnej.” *Rocznik Teologiczny* 62 (3): 1061–1076.

⁸⁵ Cf. EF, *Preface*.

⁸⁶ EF, no. 3.

⁸⁷ EF, no. 9.

⁸⁸ Cf. EF, no. 9.

⁸⁹ Cf. EF, no. 7a.

⁹⁰ Cf. EF, no. 10.

⁹¹ Cf. EF, no. 10–15.

⁹² Cf. EF, no. 11.

ed and transmitted, which consequently leads to a proper distinction between Apostolic Tradition and strictly ecclesiastical traditions. Theological diversity, which has its source in the diversity of methods and mode of transmission of content in the exploration of the mysteries of God, can show that specific theological formulations, although differentiated among themselves, do not have to exclude each other, but can complement each other, which is to lead to formulations as to the understanding of the truths of faith common to various Christian theological traditions. Such an assumption serves to shape and develop an “ecumenical language,”⁹³ which is of vital importance for the overall ecumenical processes taking place in Christianity.

An important element to guarantee space for the ecumenical practice and teaching of theology is respect for the principle of the “hierarchy of truths.”⁹⁴ While all doctrinal truths proclaimed by the Church are to be accepted in obedience to faith, they do not all occupy the same central place in the mystery revealed in Jesus Christ.⁹⁵ The principle of the “hierarchy of truths” has also received attention because it is the subject of ecumenical dialogue; it can also be applied as one of the essential criteria for doctrinal formation in the Church and implemented in such areas as internal life and popular piety.⁹⁶ Thus, the hierarchy of truths is to pave the way that will stimulate Christians to a deeper knowledge and clearer presentation of the truth of Christ.

The third key element to be considered in an ecumenical formation program is the reception of the fruits that are the aftermath of ecumenical dialogues. This consequently means critically evaluating them and putting the recommendations and dialogical findings into practice.⁹⁷

The document *The Ecumenical Dimension in the Formation of those Engaged in Pastoral Work* sets forth assumptions for the application of the ecumenical method in the practice of the various theological disciplines.⁹⁸ Some important practical indications for theologians and for those directing theological research and teaching units have also been formulated.⁹⁹

The last part of the document presents detailed programs defining the formal and substantive scope of areas in which it is obligatory to include the ecumenical aspect in the practice of the various theological disciplines and in the teach-

⁹³ Cf. EF, no. 11.

⁹⁴ Cf. EF, no. 12.

⁹⁵ Cf. UUS, no. 37.

⁹⁶ Cf. EF, no. 12.

⁹⁷ Cf. EF, no. 13.

⁹⁸ Cf. EF, no. 16–19.

⁹⁹ Cf. EF, no. 20–21.

ing of theology.¹⁰⁰ Also included are “notes on ecumenical texts and textbooks”¹⁰¹ and specific indications as to the implementation of the program of ecumenical pastoral formation.¹⁰²

2.5. Ecumenical Vademecum for Bishops

To make bishops aware anew of the importance of their responsibility for the work of ecumenism, and especially for the ecumenical formation of all the baptized, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity published a document in 2020 with the telling title, *The Bishop and Christian Unity: An Ecumenical Vademecum*.¹⁰³ Bishops were reminded that “serving unity is not just one of the many tasks of episcopal ministry, but its foundation.”¹⁰⁴ Hence, every bishop “should feel the urgency of promoting ecumenism.”¹⁰⁵ The *Vademecum*, by design, provides “encouragement and guidance” in the bishops’ implementation of their “ecumenical responsibility.”¹⁰⁶ Among the specific tasks and responsibilities of the bishops in fostering ecumenism and thus implementing the Roman Catholic Church’s ecumenical formation program are:

- “fostering and guiding the ecumenical movement among Catholics;”¹⁰⁷
- “fostering of ... ‘dialogue of love’ ... and ‘dialogue of truth’;”¹⁰⁸
- “personal willingness to engage in dialogue;”¹⁰⁹
- “developing and issuing norms as to ecumenical practices, taking into account the regulations issued by the highest ecclesiastical authority on the matter;”¹¹⁰
- “appointing a diocesan delegate [specialist] for ecumenism, who would be ... a close collaborator and advisor [to the bishop, Z. G.] in ecumenical matters” and establishing a diocesan commission for ecumenism;¹¹¹

¹⁰⁰ Cf. EF, no. 22–26.

¹⁰¹ Cf. EF, no. 27.

¹⁰² Cf. EF, no. 28–30.

¹⁰³ Cf. Paweł Rabczyński. 2021. “Vademecum ekumeniczne dla biskupów nowym impulsem na drodze ku jedności chrześcijan.” *Studia Warmińskie* 58: 353–369.

¹⁰⁴ *Vademecum*, no. 4.

¹⁰⁵ *Vademecum*, no. 4.

¹⁰⁶ *Vademecum*, no. 5.

¹⁰⁷ *Vademecum*, no. 8.

¹⁰⁸ *Vademecum*, no. 7.

¹⁰⁹ *Vademecum*, no. 8.

¹¹⁰ *Vademecum*, no. 8.

¹¹¹ *Vademecum*, no. 9.

- “creating conditions and conducting permanent ecumenical formation of the faithful.”¹¹²

The authors of the *Vademecum* stressed that bishops, by undertaking ecumenical formation at the level of particular churches, ensure that the faithful entrusted to their pastoral care are properly prepared “to engage in relationships with other Christians.”¹¹³ Thus, they identified “three fundamental instructions that constitute the core of the ecumenical formation of the entire People of God.”

- “First, ecumenism is not based on compromise, as if unity were to be achieved at the expense of truth. On the contrary, the search for unity leads to a fuller understanding of God’s revealed truth. The basis of ecumenical formation is to explain the Catholic faith more deeply and simply, in such a way and in such language that the separated brethren can also understand it properly.”¹¹⁴ These explanations must lead to a conviction “of the existence of an order or ‘hierarchy’ of the truths of Catholic doctrine, since their relationship to the foundations of the Christian faith varies.”¹¹⁵ Although all revealed truths are believed in thanks to same divine faith, their significance depends on how they relate to the redemptive mysteries of the Trinity and salvation in Christ, the source of all Christian doctrines. By examining the importance of the truths, rather than simply listing them, Catholics can more accurately understand the unity that exists among Christians.”¹¹⁶
- “Secondly, the virtue of charity requires Catholics to avoid polemical presentations of Christian history and theology, and especially to avoid misrepresenting the positions of other Christians (See: UR no. 4; no. 10). Rather, guided by an attitude of love, formators will always try to emphasize the faith held with other Christians and present the theological differences that divide us with balance and accuracy. In this way, formation work helps remove obstacles to dialogue among Christians (See: UR no. 11).”¹¹⁷
- Thirdly, as “the Second Vatican Council stressed: genuine ecumenism does not exist without inner transformation (UR no. 7). An appropriately humble attitude allows Catholics to appreciate ‘what God is doing in those who belong to other Churches and Ecclesial Communities’ (UUS

¹¹² Cf. *Vademecum*, no. 11.

¹¹³ *Vademecum*, no. 11.

¹¹⁴ UR, no. 11.

¹¹⁵ UR, no. 11.

¹¹⁶ *Vademecum*, no. 11.

¹¹⁷ *Vademecum*, no. 11.

no. 48), which in turn opens ... the way to learn and receive gifts from these brothers and sisters. Humility is again needed when, through an encounter with them, the truth comes to light, which ‘may demand a change in views and attitudes’ (UUS no. 36).¹¹⁸

The *Vademecum* includes a “Brief Guide to the *Ecumenical Directory’s* Guidelines on Formation” on the specialized formation of laity, seminarians and clergy.¹¹⁹ Rules for the ecumenical use of the media and diocesan websites are also set forth.¹²⁰ The first part of the *Vademecum* is summarized in *Practical Recommendations* for the Implementation of the Ecumenical Formation Program in the Roman Catholic Church.

The second part of the *Vademecum* presents the most important principles in the formation of the Roman Catholic Church’s relations with other Churches and Christian Communities.¹²¹ It recommended that:

- “In dialogue with other Christian superiors, identify areas of need for Christian service.
- Talk with other Christian superiors and the diocesan delegate for ecumenism about what Christians are currently doing separately but could do together.
- Encourage priests to work with ecumenical partners in serving the local community.
- Ask diocesan institutions and Catholics involved in social activities in the diocese on behalf of the Church about past and present cooperation with other Christian communities and how it could be expanded.
- Talk to other Christian leaders about their relationship with existing religious traditions in the region. Find out what difficulties exist and what the Christian communities could do together in this regard.”¹²²

In conclusion, the *Vademecum’s* authors stressed that the practical recommendations and initiatives in the *Vademecum* “are the means by which the Church, and especially the bishop, can strive to realize Christ’s victory over the division of Christians. Opening to God’s grace leads to the renewal of the Church, and it ... is always the first and indispensable step toward unity.”¹²³

¹¹⁸ *Vademecum*, no. 11.

¹¹⁹ Cf. *Vademecum*, no. 12.

¹²⁰ Cf. *Vademecum*, no. 13–14.

¹²¹ Cf. *Vademecum*, no. 15–24.

¹²² *Vademecum*, Part 2: *Practical Recommendations*.

¹²³ *Vademecum*, no. 42.

3. Summary

Ecumenical formation has become a special challenge for churches and Christian communities, which at the turn of the millennium, as a “sign of the times,” discovered Christ’s commitment “that they be one.”¹²⁴ After the Second Vatican Council, structures responsible for the formation of ecumenism at various levels were created in the Roman Catholic Church.¹²⁵ A program of ecumenical formation has been developed, which is constantly being deepened and modified in accordance with pastoral considerations. It has been consistently supported by conciliar and post-conciliar popes.¹²⁶ It applies to all environments in which Christians live and are formed: family, parish, school, movements, groups and associations, and above all universities and theological faculties.¹²⁷ It aims “to shape the hearts and spirit of the young, their human and religious attitudes in such a way that the search for unity among Christians is facilitated”¹²⁸ and the sister-fraternal relations between the churches become more fruitful. Its task is not only to impart an adequate body of knowledge on a given subject, but also to lead to conversion and ecumenical commitment in those who use it, and to strengthen the spirit of faith,¹²⁹ “which professes that ecumenism ‘transcends human strength and capacity’.”¹³⁰ Indispensable, then, is trust in the Holy Spirit, who breaks the resistance of human hearts and leads Christians toward the fullness of truth.¹³¹ Thus, ecumenical commitment should be seen in terms of the imperative of Christian consciences enlightened by faith and formed in a spirit of love.¹³² The objective of ecumenical formation should be “that all Christians

¹²⁴ Cf. Glaeser, Zygfryd. 2020. “Ekumeniczna formacja wyzwaniem i zadaniem Kościołów.” *Rocznik Teologiczny* 62 (3): 1013–1031.

¹²⁵ Cf. Zygfryd Glaeser, Karol Karski, Zdzisław J. Kijas. 2016. Aktualne struktury ekumeniczne w Polsce. In *Encyklopedia ekumenizmu w Polsce (1964–2014)*. Eds. Józef Budniak, Zygfryd Glaeser, Tadeusz Kałużny, Zdzisław J. Kijas, 49–61. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Papieskiego Jana Pawła II.

¹²⁶ Cf. Zygfryd Glaeser. 2017. *Ekumenizm w nauczaniu papieży po Soborze Watykańskim II*. Kamień Śląski – Opole: Instytut Ekumenizmu i Badań nad Integracją Wydziału Teologicznego Uniwersytetu Opolskiego; Zygfryd Glaeser. 2023. *W szkole pedagogii tolerancji Karola Wojtyły / Jana Pawła II*. Opole: Redakcja Wydawnictw Wydziału Teologicznego Uniwersytetu Opolskiego.

¹²⁷ Cf. Kostorz. 2010. “Wychowanie do postawy ekumenizmu w nauczaniu religii – doświadczenia katolickie,” 233–249; Jerzy Kostorz. 2011. “Ekumeniczny wymiar duszpasterstwa katechetycznego w parafii.” *Ateneum Kapłańskie* 156 (3): 449–479; Jerzy Kostorz. 2012. Rola doświadczenia ludzkiego w kształtowaniu postaw ekumenicznych na katechezie. In *Ku doświadczeniu wiary*. Eds. Krzysztof Karnowski, Wojciech Lechów, 109–120. Szczecin: Wydział Teologiczny Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego.

¹²⁸ Directory 1993, no. 58; EF, no. 5.

¹²⁹ Cf. EF, no. 7a.

¹³⁰ UR, no. 12.

¹³¹ Cf. EF, no. 10.

¹³² Cf. UUS, no. 8, 6–9, 15–16.

are animated by an ecumenical spirit, whatever their mission and specific function in the world and in society.”¹³³

Ecumenism teaches us first and foremost that building unity among states, nations, cultures and churches, and among individual people, must begin by tearing down the walls that have grown up over many years in people’s minds and in people’s hearts.¹³⁴ It is necessary to rebuild interpersonal ties based on trust and mutual respect. A special task here falls to churches, Christians and religious communities in general, but also to educational institutions, science and culture. In doing so, it should be constantly kept in mind that reconciliation leading to greater integration in the Church and in the world is not an end in itself, but is a means to enable the integral development of each person and human communities. It is a great challenge that the churches today have to face and it cannot be achieved without permanent ecumenical formation.

Abbreviations

Vademecum – Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. 2020. *The Bishop and Christian Unity: An Ecumenical Vademecum*.

Directory 1967 – *Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity*. 1967. *Directory for the application of the decisions of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican concerning ecumenical matters*. Part 1.

Directory 1970 – *Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity*. 1970. *Directory for the Application of the Decisions of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican Concerning Ecumenical Matters*. Part 2: *Ecumenism in higher education*.

Directory 1993 – Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. 1993. *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*.

EF – Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. 1997. *The Ecumenical Dimension in the Formation of those Engaged in Pastoral Work*.

UR – Second Vatican Council. 1964. *Decree on ecumenism Unitatis redintegratio*.

TMA – Pope John Paul II. 1994. *Tertio millennio adveniente*. Apostolic Letter.

UUS – Pope John Paul II. 1995. *Ut unum sint* [On commitment to Ecumenism]. Encyclical Letter.

OL – Pope John Paul II. 1995. *Oriente lumen*. Apostolic Letter.

¹³³ Directory 1993, no. 58; EF, no. 2.

¹³⁴ Cf. Dietrich Werner, David Esterline, Namsoon Kang, Joshva Raja. Eds. 2010. *Handbook of Theological Education in World Christianity. Theological Perspectives – Regional Surveys – Ecumenical Trends*. Oxford: Regnum; Dietrich Werner. “Religious Education and Ecumenical Formation in Post-confessional Settings – Essentials for the Theological Education of Pastors and Teachers of Religion,” 135–157.

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