
APOSTOLIC LETTER OF THE HOLY FATHER

POPE JOHN PAUL II

FOR THE MILLENNIUM

OF

BAPTISM OF THE KIEVAN RUS'

EUNTES IN MUNDUM

25 JANUARY 1988

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EUNTES IN MUNDUM
Apostolic Letter of Pope John Paul II
for the Millennium of Baptism of the Kievan Rus'

I. United In Sacramental Grace

1. Go into all the world, make disciples of all nations, *baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* (cf. Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15).

From the tombs of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul in Rome, the Catholic Church desires to express to the One and Triune God her own profound gratitude because these words of the Saviour were fulfilled one thousand years ago on the banks of the Dnieper, at Kiev, capital of Rus', the inhabitants of which — in the footsteps of Princess Olga and of Prince Vladimir — were "grafted" on to Christ through the Sacrament of Baptism.

Following my Predecessor of venerated memory, Pius XII, who wished to celebrate solemnly the 950th Anniversary of the Baptism of Rus', ¹ I desire with this Letter to offer *praise and gratitude* to the ineffable God — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — *for having called to faith and to grace the sons and daughters of many peoples and nations*, who accepted *the Christian heritage* of the Baptism administered at Kiev. They belong first of all to the Russian, Ukrainian and Byelorussian nations in the eastern regions of the continent of Europe. Through the Church's service, which was begun in the Baptism at Kiev, this heritage reached, beyond the Urals, many peoples of northern Asia, as far as the coasts of the Pacific and even beyond. Truly, their voice has gone out to all the earth (cf. Ps 19:4; Rom 10:18).

Giving thanks to the Spirit of Pentecost for this extension of a Christian heritage, beginning in the year of the Lord 988, we wish first of all to concentrate our attention upon the saving mystery of Baptism itself. This is — as Christ the Lord teaches — the sacrament of rebirth "of water and the Spirit" (Jn 3:5), which introduces man, made an adopted child of God, into the eternal Kingdom. Saint Paul speaks of "burial into the death" of the Redeemer in order to "rise again" together with him to a new life in God (cf. Rom 6:4). Thus the Eastern Slav peoples who lived in the great principality of Kievan Rus', descending into the water of Holy Baptism, entrusted themselves — when the fullness of time came for them (cf. Gal 4:4) — to the saving plan of God. In this way the news of the "great works of God" reached them and, just as once at Jerusalem, Pentecost happened for them too (cf. Acts 2:37-39): immersing themselves in the water of Baptism, they experienced "the washing of rebirth" (cf. Tit 3:5).

How eloquent, in the Byzantine rite, is the ancient prayer for the blessing of the baptismal water, which Oriental Theology likes to identify with the waters of the Jordan, in which the Redeemer of man entered, in order to receive the baptism of repentance, in the same way as the people of Judea and Jerusalem (cf. Mk 1:5): "Grant to it. . . the blessing of the Jordan; make it a spring of incorruptibility, the gift of holiness, absolution of sins. . .

You, Lord of all things, show it to be the water of redemption, the water of sanctification, purification of the body and of the spirit, liberation from bonds, remission of faults, enlightenment of souls, the washing of regeneration, renewal in the Spirit, the grace of adoption, the garment of incorruptibility, the fount of life. . . Show yourself, O Lord, also in this water and transform him who is to be baptized in it, that he may put aside the old man. . . and put on the new man, renewed according to the image of him who created him; so that, made completely one with him through baptism in the likeness of his death he may become a sharer in his Resurrection, and having preserved the gift of your Holy Spirit. . . he may be enabled to receive the reward of the heavenly calling and may be included among the firstborn who are recorded in heaven." ²

Those who were far away have found themselves immersed, through Baptism, into that cycle of life, in which the Most Holy Trinity — Father, Son and Holy Spirit — gives itself to man and creates in him a new heart, freed from sin and capable of filial obedience to the eternal design of love. At the same time those peoples and their individual members entered into the great family of the Church, in which they can celebrate the Holy Eucharist, listen to the word of God and bear witness to it, live in brotherly love and share in the mutual exchange of spiritual goods. This was symbolically expressed by the ancient rites of holy Baptism when the newly baptized, clad in white robes, went in procession from the baptistry to the assembly of the faithful gathered in the cathedral. This procession was both the liturgical initiation and the symbol of their entry into the Eucharistic community of the Church, the Body of Christ. ³

2. In this spirit and with such sentiments we desire to take part in the celebrations and in the joy of the Millennium of the Baptism of Kievan Rus'. We recall that event in the manner proper to the Church of Christ, namely *in a spirit of faith*. That event was one of enormous importance. The words of Jeremiah: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you" (Jer 31:3), were completely fulfilled in relation to those new peoples and their lands. Kievan Rus' entered into the context of salvation and itself became such a context. Its Baptism began a new wave of holiness. It became a significant moment of the Church's missionary commitment, a new and important stage in the development of Christianity; the whole Catholic Church turns its gaze to that event and shares spiritually in the joy of the heirs of that Baptism.

We give thanks to God who is merciful, God who is One in the Most Blessed Trinity, the living God, the God of our fathers; we give thanks to God, the Father of Jesus Christ, and to Christ himself, who in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism gives the Holy Spirit to the human spirit. We give thanks to God for his saving plan of love, we thank him for the *obedience which has been given to him* by the peoples, nations, lands and continents. It is natural that this obedience should have had historical, geographical and human conditionings. It is the task of scholars to examine and study all the aspects of the acceptance of the Christian faith: political, social, cultural and economic. Yes, we know and we emphasize that when we receive Christ through faith and when we experience his presence in the community and in the life of the individual, fruits are produced in all the fields of human existence, for the life-giving link with Christ is not an extra element of life, nor an unnecessary ornament, but its definitive truth.

Every man, by the very fact of being a man, is called to share in the fruits of Christ's Redemption and in his very life.

After these thousand years, with the greatest reverence we bow before this mystery and we meditate upon its depth and power, first in those who were the "protagonists" of the Baptism of Rus' and successively in each and every person who has followed in their footsteps, receiving in Baptism the sanctifying power of the Paraclete.

II. "When The Time Had Fully Come..."

3. "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman" (Gal 4:4).

The *fullness of time* comes from God, but people prepare it and it comes for people and through people. This is true for the "fullness of time" in the general economy of salvation, which itself has its own human conditioning and concrete history. But it is true also for the moment of the entrance of the individual peoples into the haven of saving faith: for their "fullness of time". The Millennium of the Baptism and of the conversion of Rus' has its own history too. The process of the Christianization of the individual peoples and nations is a complex phenomenon and requires much time. In the territory of Rus' it was prepared through the attempts made during the ninth century by the Church of Constantinople. ⁴ Subsequently, in the course of the tenth century, the Christian faith began *to* penetrate the region thanks to the missionaries who came not only from Byzantium but also from the neighbouring lands of the Western Slavs — who celebrated the liturgy in Slavonic according to the rite instituted by Saints Cyril and Methodius — and from the lands of the Latin West. As is attested by the ancient Chronicle called that of Nestor ("Povest' Vremennykh Let"), in 944 there existed at Kiev a Christian church dedicated to the prophet Elijah. ⁵ In this setting, Princess Olga freely and publicly had herself baptized about the year 955, and afterwards remained ever faithful to her baptismal promises. During her visit to Constantinople in 957 the Patriarch Polyeuctus is said to have addressed to her a greeting, which was in a way prophetic: "Blessed are you among Russian women, because you loved the light and drove away the darkness. For this Russian children will bless you unto the last generation". ⁶ But Olga did not have the joy of seeing her son Svyatoslav a Christian. Her spiritual heritage was taken up again by her grandson Vladimir, the protagonist of the Baptism in 988, who accepted the Christian faith and brought about the permanent and definitive conversion of the people of Rus'. Vladimir and the new converts experienced the beauty of the liturgy and religious life of the Church of Constantinople. ⁷ And so it happened that the new Church of Rus' drew from Constantinople the entire patrimony of the Christian East and all the treasures peculiar to it in the fields of theology, liturgy, spirituality, ecclesial life and art.

The Byzantine character of this heritage was nevertheless from the very outset transferred *into a new dimension*. The Slav language and culture became a new setting for what until then had found its own Byzantine expression in the capital of the Eastern Empire and also throughout the territory linked with it down the centuries.

Thus the word of God and the grace flowing from it reached the Eastern Slavs in a form culturally and geographically closer to them. Those Slavs, accepting the Word with total obedience of faith, desired at the same time to express it in their own forms of thought and in their own language. There thus took place that particular "Slav inculturation" of the Gospel and of Christianity, which is connected with the great work of Saints Cyril and Methodius, who from Constantinople brought Christianity, in the Slav version, into Greater Moravia and, thanks to their disciples, to the peoples of the Balkan Peninsula.

Thus it was that Saint Vladimir and the inhabitants of Kievan Rus' received Baptism from Constantinople, the greatest centre of the Christian East, and thanks to this the young Church first entered the world of the very rich Byzantine patrimony with its heritage of faith, ecclesial life and culture. This patrimony became immediately accessible to the vast multitudes of Eastern Slavs and was able to be assimilated more easily, since from the outset its transmission was favoured by the work of the two holy Brothers from Thessalonica. The Scriptures and the liturgical books came from the religious cultural centres of the Slavs, who had received the liturgical language introduced by the two saints.

Thanks to his wisdom and intuition, and moved by solicitude for the good of the Church and of his people, Vladimir accepted into the liturgy, in the place of Greek, the Old Slavonic language, "making it into an effective instrument for bringing the divine truths to those who spoke it".⁸ As I wrote in the Encyclical Epistle *Slavorum Apostoll*,⁹ Saints Cyril and Methodius, even though they were aware of the cultural and theological superiority of the Greco-Byzantine heritage which they brought with them, nevertheless had the courage, for the good of the Slav peoples, to make use of another language and also another culture for the proclamation of the faith.

In this way the Old Slavonic language became an important instrument in the Baptism of Rus', in the first place for evangelization, and subsequently also for the original development of the future cultural patrimony of those peoples, a development which became in many areas a treasure of the life and culture of the whole human race.

For it must be emphasized quite firmly, in fidelity to historical truth, that in the eyes of the two holy Brothers from Thessalonica there was introduced into Rus' with the Slav language the style of the Byzantine Church, which at that time was still in full communion with Rome. This tradition was subsequently developed in an original and perhaps unrepeatable way, on the basis of its indigenous culture, and also thanks to contacts with the neighbouring peoples of the West.

4. The fullness of time for the Baptism of the people of Rus' thus came at the end of the first millennium, when *the Church was undivided*. We ought to thank the Lord together for this fact, which today represents a good omen and a hope. God willed that *Mother Church, visibly united*, should welcome into her bosom, already rich with nations and peoples and at a moment of missionary expansion both in the West and in the East, this new daughter, born on the banks of the Dnieper. There was the Church of the East and there was the Church of the West, each of which had developed according to its own theological, disciplinary and liturgical traditions, with even notable differences, but *there existed full commun-*

ion with reciprocal relations between the East and West, between Constantinople and Rome. It was the undivided Church of the East and West, which received and helped the Church in Kiev. Princess Olga had already requested of the Emperor Otto I, and obtained in 961, a Bishop "qui ostenderet eis viam veritatis", the monk Adalbert of Trier. He actually went to Kiev, but the still flourishing paganism there prevented him from carrying out his mission. ¹⁰ Prince Vladimir noticed that there existed this unity between the Church and Europe, and he therefore maintained relations not only with Constantinople but also with the West and specifically with Rome, whose Bishop was recognized as the one who presided over the communion of the whole Church. According to the "Chronicle of Nikon", legations were exchanged between Vladimir and the Popes of the time: John XV (who is said to have sent to him as a gift, precisely in the year 988, some relics of Pope Saint Clement, as a clear reference to the mission of Saints Cyril and Methodius who from Kherson had brought these relics to Rome) and Sylvester II. ¹¹ Bruno of Querfurt, sent by the latter to preach with the title of *archiepiscopus gentium*, in about 1007 visited Vladimir, called *rex Russorum*. ¹² Later, Pope Saint Gregory VII gave the royal title to the Princes of Kiev, in his letter of 17 April 1075 addressed to "*Demetrio (Isyaslav) regi Ruscorum et regime uxori eius*" who had sent their son, Yaropolk, on pilgrimage *ad limina Apostolorum*, and had secured the placing of the kingdom under the protection of Saint Peter. ¹³ It is fitting to emphasize this recognition by a Roman Pontiff of the *sovereignty* acquired by the principality of Vladimir, who because of the Baptism in 988 had consolidated his State politically, favouring its development and the integration of the peoples living within its boundaries both at that time and in the following centuries. This prophetic act of entering the Church and of bringing his principality within the orbit of the Christian nations gained for him the praiseworthy, title of Saint and of Father of the Nations which took their origin from that principality.

Thus Kiev, through Baptism, became a privileged crossroads of different cultures, a place of religious penetration also into the West, as shown by the cult granted to certain saints by the Latin Church. With the passage of time Kiev also became an important centre of ecclesial life and of missionary expansion with a vast field of influence: towards the West as far as the Carpathians, from the southern banks of the Dnieper as far as Novgorod, and from the northern banks of the Volga — as has already been said — as far as the shores of the Pacific Ocean and beyond. In short, through the new centre of ecclesial life which Kiev became from the moment of its Baptism, the Gospel and the grace of the faith reached those populations and those lands which today are linked, as regards the Orthodox Church, with the Patriarchate of Moscow, and with the Ukrainian Catholic Church, whose full communion with the See of Rome was renewed at Brest.

III. Faith And Culture

5. The Baptism of Kievan Rus' thus marks the beginning of a long historical process, in which there develops and expands *the original Byzantine-Slav form of Christianity*, in the life of the Church, of society and of the nations, which down the centuries have found in that form and still find in it today the foundation of their own spiritual identity.

In the course of subsequent history, when turbulent events time and again severely battered this identity, it was precisely this Baptism and Christian culture — drawn from the universal Church and developed on the basis of its innate spiritual treasures — which were decisive for its survival.

Vladimir received Baptism and together with his people opened himself to the saving power of Christ, in conformity with Peter's words in the Acts of the Apostles: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (4:12). In accepting this name "which is above every name" and in inviting the Church's missionaries to inscribe this name on the hearts of the Slavs of Kievan Rus', so that "every tongue (should) confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:9, 11), Vladimir also saw in this a decisive element for the civil and human progress which is so important for the existence and development of every nation and State. And so he associated himself with the decision of his grandmother, Saint Olga, and gave definitive and stable form to her work.

The Baptism of Vladimir the Great and of his country had great importance for the whole spiritual development of this part of Europe and the Church, as well as for the whole of *Byzantine-Slav culture and civilization*.

The acceptance of the Gospel not only amounted to the introduction of a new and precious element into the structure of that particular culture. It was in fact the sowing of a seed destined to germinate and grow on the earth where it had been cast and to transform that culture in its own development, making it capable of bringing forth *new fruits*. Such are the dynamics of the Kingdom of Heaven; it is like "a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches" (Mt 13:31-32).

In such a way the spiritual patrimony of the Byzantine Church, introduced into Kievan Rus' through the Slavonic language (which had become a liturgical language), was gradually enriched on the basis of the local cultural patrimony, thanks to contacts with the neighbouring Christian countries, and came to meet the needs and the mentality of the peoples living in that great principality.

6. The use of the Slavonic language as a means for the transmission of Christ's message and for mutual comprehension had *positive influences on its own spread and development*. It drew from this fact the impetus for transformation from within and for a progressive ennoblement; it became a literary language, and thus one of the most important and decisive factors for a nation's culture, identity and spiritual strength. In the territory of Rus' this process has proved to be most enduring, and has brought forth abundant fruits. In this way Christianity met people's aspirations for the truth, for knowledge and for autonomous development based upon the inspiration of the Gospel and the dynamism of revelation.

Thanks to the inheritance left by Cyril and Methodius, there took place in that territory a meeting between East and West, between inherited values and new ones. The elements of the Christian heritage have imbued the life and culture of those nations. They have provided inspiration for literary, philosophical, theological and artistic creativity, making room for a totally original form of European culture, indeed of human culture itself. Even today the universal dimension of the problems of individuals and societies that is presented in the literature and art of these nations evokes in the world unceasing admiration. It springs and grows from the Christian view of life and finds in this view of life a solid point of reference for thinking and speaking about man, his problems and his destiny.

The Eastern Slavs down the centuries have made *their own original contribution* to this common patrimony, this common treasure, especially with regard to their own spiritual life and devotion. On the part of the Church of Rome, this contribution is the object of the same respect and love, which she has for the rich patrimony of all the Christian East. The Eastern Slavs have developed a history, spirituality, liturgical traditions and disciplinary customs proper to themselves, in harmony with the tradition of the Eastern Churches, as well as certain forms of theological reflection on revealed truth which, while differing from those used in the West, are at the same time a complement to the latter.

7. This fact was carefully considered by the Second Vatican Council. Among the affirmations of the Decree on Ecumenism is the following: "It is. . . worthy of note that from their very origins the Churches of the East have had a treasury from which the Church of the West has amply drawn for its liturgy, spiritual tradition, and jurisprudence".¹⁴ Stimulating points for reflection are also offered by what this Conciliar Decree says about the richness of the liturgy and spiritual tradition of the Eastern Church: "Everyone also knows with what love the Eastern Christians celebrate the sacred liturgy, especially the Eucharist, which is the source of the Church's life and the pledge of future glory. In this celebration the faithful, united with their bishop and endowed with an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, gain access to God the Father through the Son, the Word made flesh, who suffered and was glorified. And so, made 'partakers of the divine nature' (2 Pt 1:4), they enter into communion with the Most Holy Trinity. Hence, through the celebration of the Eucharist of the Lord in each of these Churches, the Church of God is built up and grows in stature, while through the rite of con-celebration their bond with one another is made manifest".¹⁵

Furthermore, the theological traditions of the Christians of the East are "admirably rooted in Sacred Scripture, fostered and given expression in liturgical life, and nourished by the living tradition of the Apostles and by the writings of the Fathers and spiritual authors of the East; they are directed towards a right ordering of life, indeed, towards a full contemplation of Christian truth".¹⁶

The spirituality of the Eastern Slavs, which bears special witness to the *fruitfulness of the meeting of the human spirit with the Christian mysteries*, continues to exercise a salutary influence on the mind of the whole Church. Worthy of special mention is their characteristic devotion to Christ's Passion, their sensitivity to the mystery of suffering linked with the redemptive efficacy of the Cross.

Perhaps not unrelated to the growth of this kind of spirituality was the memory of the innocent death of Boris and Gleb, Vladimir's sons, killed by their brother Svyatopolk.¹⁷

This spirituality finds its fullest expression in the praise given to our "sweetest" (*sladchaishiy*) Lord Jesus Christ in the mystery of the suffering and "kenosis" which he took upon himself in the Incarnation and in his Death on the Cross (cf. Phil 2:5-8). At the same time, however, it is illuminated in the liturgy by the light of the Risen Christ, anticipated to some degree by the splendour of the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor, fully manifested in the glory of the day of Resurrection (*voskresenie*), and revealed to the world by the Spirit when he came down upon the Apostles in the form of tongues of fire at Pentecost. Such an experience continues to be the portion of those who receive Baptism. In this context, how could one fail to mention the Christians who have lived and are living in all those regions and who, so often during the past thousand years, have found in Christ's Death and Resurrection the strength and support they needed in order to bear fruitful witness to the Gospel, not only by the integrity of their daily lives but also by sufferings bravely faced, not infrequently unto the *supreme test of blood*? This form of Christ's "kenosis", as conceived by the Church of Kiev, has become deeply inscribed in the hearts of the Eastern Slavs. It was and is for them a source of great strength amid the many different adversities, which have arisen on their journey.

8. In the work of consolidating the Church and of "inculturating" Christianity among the Eastern Slavs, and for that matter in the whole of the Eastern Church, *inestimable influence has been exercised by the monastic life*. Kiev became famous at a relatively early time for the renowned "Pecherskaya Lavra" (Monastery of the Caves), founded by Saints Anthony (+1073) and Theodosius (+1074).

Thus it was not by chance that the monk, especially the so-called "starets" (elder), was considered a spiritual guide by both the great Russian writers and simple country folk. The monasteries became centres of liturgical, spiritual, social and even economic life. The sovereigns sought out the monks as counsellors, judges, diplomats and teachers.

The words "cult" and "culture" have the same root. The Christian cult generated also among the Slavs of the East an extraordinary development of culture in all its forms.

Religious art is seen to be pervaded by a deep spirituality and by a high level of mystical inspiration. In the world today, who is unaware of the famous and venerated icons of the Eastern Churches, the magnificent cathedrals of Holy Wisdom at Kiev and Novgorod dating from the eleventh century, the churches and monasteries so characteristic of the landscape in those countries? The literature of Kiev is for the most part religious. The new hymns and ecclesiastical chants are like an emanation of the native forms of the musical tradition. Nor must it be forgotten that the first schools in Rus' were begun precisely in the eleventh century. All of this, even though so briefly mentioned, constitutes an indelible witness to the extraordinary religious and cultural flowering generated by the Baptism of Kievan Rus'. How pertinent therefore is the observation of the Second Vatican Council: "The Church. . . takes nothing away from the temporal welfare of any people. . .

Rather does she foster and take to herself, in so far as they are good, the ability, resources and customs of each people. Taking them to herself she purifies, strengthens, and ennobles them." ¹⁸

IV. Towards Full Communion

9. The Baptism of Rus' took place, as I have already pointed out, *at a time when the two forms of Christianity had already developed: the Eastern form, linked with Byzantium, and the Western, linked with Rome, while the Church continued to remain one and undivided.* This consideration, as we celebrate the Millennium of the Baptism received by the Eastern Slav peoples at Kiev, cannot fail to enkindle in us an even greater desire for full communion in Christ with these sister Churches, and to impel us to undertake fresh studies and take new steps to favour it. This anniversary is not merely an historical remembrance and an occasion for preparing scientific explanations and evaluations, but it is also, and above all, an incentive to turn our pastoral and ecumenical sensibilities from the past towards the future, to strengthen our longing for unity and to intensify our prayer.

Yes, both Churches, the Catholic and the Orthodox, despite the difficulties born of age-old misunderstandings, today more than ever are determined to rediscover communion around the Eucharistic Table and are looking with particular attention and hope, in this Millennium, to all the spiritual sons and daughters of Saint Vladimir.

Moreover, the gradual return to harmony between Rome and Constantinople, and likewise among the Churches, which remain in full communion with these centres, cannot fail, especially today, to exercise a positive influence on the Orthodox and Catholic heirs of the Baptism of Kiev. (How can we not think of the many bilateral meetings so rich in promise for an abundant exchange of our respective spiritual gifts — gifts, which are nourished by such diverse and fruitful traditions?). Perhaps the remembrance of that event which is at the origin of their new life in the Holy Spirit, will serve to hasten, with God's help, the hour of their full reconciliation, the hour of the "kiss of peace" mutually exchanged as the result of a mature decision, a decision born in freedom and good will of the original spirit which animated the undivided Church, marked by the Christian genius of Saints Cyril and Methodius. What an advantage this would be for the whole People of God, if the Orthodox and Catholic heirs of the Baptism of Kiev, stirred by a renewed awareness of their original communion, would take up its challenge and repeat for the Christians of our time the ecumenical message which *flows there from, urging them to hasten their steps* towards the goal of the full unity willed by Christ! More than anything else, this would have a beneficial influence also in that process of detente in the civil sphere, which is evoking such great hopes in those working for peaceful coexistence in the world.

10. The universal dimension and the particular dimension constitute two essential sources in the life of the Church: communion and diversity, tradition and new times, the ancient Christian lands and new peoples coming to the faith. The Church has succeeded in being one and at the same time differentiated. Accepting unity as the first principle, she has taken on different forms in the individual parts of the world.

This is true in a particular way for the Western Church and for the Eastern Church before their progressive estrangement from each other. With reference to that period, the Second Vatican Council observes: "For many centuries, the Churches of the East and of the West went their own ways, though a brotherly communion of faith and sacramental life bound them together. If disagreements of belief and discipline arose among them, the Roman See acted by common consent as moderator".¹⁹

Even when full communion was broken, both Churches preserved fundamentally intact the deposit of Apostolic faith. Despite the existing tension, universality and differentiation have not ceased to exchange inestimable gifts.

Conscious of this fact, the Second Vatican Council opened *a new phase* in the matter of Ecumenism, and this is producing promising results. The Council's Decree on Ecumenism, already quoted here more than once, is an expression of the Catholic Church's esteem and love for the rich heritage of the Christian East, the originality, diversity and at the same time the legitimacy of which the Decree illustrates. Among its statements is the following: "From the earliest times, moreover, the Eastern Churches followed their own disciplines, sanctioned by the Holy Fathers, by Synods, even Ecumenical Councils. Far from being an obstacle to the Church's unity, such diversity of customs and observances only adds to her comeliness, and contributes greatly to carrying out her mission, as has already been recalled. To remove any shadow of doubt, then, this Sacred Synod solemnly declares that the Churches of the East, while keeping in mind the necessary unity of the whole Church, have the power to govern themselves according to their own disciplines, since these are better suited to the temperament of their faithful and better adapted to foster the good of souls".²⁰

From the Decree there clearly emerges the characteristic disciplinary autonomy, which the Eastern Churches enjoy; this is not the result of privileges granted by the Church of Rome, but of the law itself which those Churches have possessed since Apostolic times.

11. In the hour of dialogue between the Churches and the Ecclesial Communities, which is developing and making constant progress, against the background of the solemn Millennium of the Baptism of Rus' — a fact that takes us back with such nostalgia to the undivided Church, comprising all the particular Churches of both the East and the West, and back to the fervent prayer of Christ in the Upper Room for the unity of all believers (cf. Jn 17:20 ff.) — we must remember that *full communion is a gift* and will not be solely the result of purely human efforts and desires, even though these latter are indispensable and condition many things.

Sin entered the world because of man, but "the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many" (cf. Rom 5:12, 15). Devotion "to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42) is a gift of God because it is a new manner of human existence. It is a full "being together" in the Most Holy Trinity. The first source of this communion is the grace of Baptism.

Through Baptism we enter into the unity of the Church existing throughout the world, into the unity willed and founded by Christ and which remained substantially in force, despite differences and difficulties, during the first ten centuries. We enter into that unity of which the Baptism of Rus' speaks to us today. May all Christians return to it and become one community of men and women who, remaining in full communion with Christ, offer this treasure of theirs to all the members of the human race. This we ask of the Holy Spirit, the Giver of the innumerable gifts thanks to which individuals and human communities enter into communion with Christ. In him, in the Holy Spirit, the life of the Church reaches unexpected depths and dimensions. Feeling and living the presence of the Paraclete and his gifts is a peculiar characteristic of the Oriental tradition, the profound pneumatological doctrine of which constitutes a precious treasure for the whole Church.

It is in this light that we see developing the varied, diversified and fruitful contacts in which, in this post-conciliar period, our common commitment of active obedience to the will of God perceived in his Spirit has found expression.

May the rich experience of the full communion lived in the first millennium but forgotten for so many centuries by both sides be for us and for our ecumenical efforts a light, an encouragement and a constant point of reference.

V. The Unity Of The Church And The Unity Of The European Continent

12. As she travels the path of Ecumenism, the Catholic Church fixes her gaze *on the mission of the holy Brothers of Thessalonica*, as I said in my Encyclical Epistle *Slavorum Apostoli*.

Of significance in their mission is a particular "ecumenical prophetism", although they worked in the period when Christianity was undivided. Their mission had its beginning in the East, but its developments made it possible to highlight the link and unity with Rome, with the See of Peter. Their apostolic intuition of *koinonia* in the Church is becoming ever more profoundly understood today, in this epoch of increased longing for the unity of all Christians and for ecumenical dialogue. They foresaw that the new Churches — in the face of ever more marked differences and disputes — had to safeguard and strengthen the full and visible communion of the one Church of Christ. These Churches came to birth within the original nature proper to the various peoples and the respective cultural areas, but at the same time they were bound to preserve essential unity among themselves, in conformity with the will of the divine Founder. For this reason, the Church, begotten through the mission of Saints Cyril and Methodius, would bear within her a special seal of that ecumenical vocation which the two holy Brothers so intensely lived. In the same spirit was also born — as I have already said — the Church of Kiev. Not long after the beginning of my pontificate, in 1980, I had the joy of proclaiming *Saints Cyril and Methodius Patrons of Europe*, side by side with Saint Benedict.

Europe is Christian in its very roots. The two forms of the great tradition of the Church, the Eastern and the Western, the two forms of culture, complement each other like the two "lungs" of a single body. ²¹

Such is the eloquence of the past. Such is the inheritance of the peoples who live in this Continent. It could be said that the two currents, Eastern and Western, have become simultaneously the first great forms of inculturation of the faith, within which the one and undivided fullness entrusted by Christ to the Church has found its historical expression. In the differing cultures of the nations of Europe, both in the East and in the West, in music, literature, the visual arts and architecture, as also in modes of thought, there runs a common life-blood drawn from a single source.

13. At the same time *this inheritance*, in this last part of the twentieth century, becomes a particularly pressing *challenge* to the unity of Christians. A sincere aspiration to unity is present among people today, as a presupposition of that peaceful coexistence between the peoples in which lies the good of all. It is an aspiration, which moves the conscience of citizens, and imbues politics and economics. Christians must be aware of the religious and moral sources of this challenge: Christ "is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph 2:14). Through Christ, God "reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:18). This reality, this work of Christ, has a particular reflection today in the powerful longing of humanity for unity and universal fraternity. The desire for unity and peace, the desire that barriers should be broken down and opposition removed — as also the reminder of Europe's past — is becoming an impelling sign of our times.

True peace can exist only on the basis of a process of unification in which each people is able to choose, in freedom and truth, the paths of its own development. Moreover, such a process is impossible if there is no agreement on the original and fundamental unity, which is manifested in different forms, not opposed but complementary, which need one another and seek one another. For this reason we are profoundly convinced that the path of true peace can, in an incomparable way, be made straight in people's minds, hearts and consciences through the presence and service of that sign of peace which is, by her nature, the Church as she is obedient to Christ and faithful to her vocation.

We express complete confidence in all human efforts, which aim at removing occasions of tension and conflict through the peaceful path of patient dialogue, agreements, mutual understanding and respect.

It is the vocation of Europe, born upon Christian foundations, to exercise particular care for peace *in the whole world*. In many parts of the world peace is lacking, or is gravely threatened. What is needed therefore is a constant and harmonious cooperation on the part of the European continent with all nations, which are in favour of the peace and well-being to which every person and each human community has a sacrosanct right.

VI. United In The Joy Of The Millennium With Mary The Mother Of Jesus

14. The mysteries and events briefly recalled in the present Letter and seen and meditated upon in the light of the indications of the Second Vatican Council and in the historical perspective of the Millennium become for us a source of joy and consolation in the Holy Spirit.

In view of the importance of the Baptism of Kievan Rus' in the history of evangelization and of human culture, it will be easily understood why I have wished to bring this event to the attention of the whole Catholic Church and why I am inviting all the faithful to common prayer; The Church of Rome, built on the foundation of the apostolic faith of Peter and Paul, rejoices in this Millennium and in all the fruits harvested down the generations: the fruits of faith and life, union and witness even to the point of persecution and martyrdom, in conformity with the proclamation of Christ himself. Our spiritual sharing in the solemnity of the Millennium involves the whole People of God: faithful and Pastors, who live and work in those lands made holy a thousand years ago by the waters of Baptism. In the joy of this feast we join with all those who in the Baptism received by their ancestors recognize the source of their own religious, cultural and national identity; we join with all the heirs of this Baptism, whatever their religious confession, nationality or dwelling place; we join with all our Orthodox and Catholic brothers and sisters. In particular, we join with all the beloved sons and daughters of the Russian, Ukrainian and Byelorussian nations: with those who live in their homeland, as also with those who dwell in America, Western Europe and other parts of the world.

15. In a special way of course this is the feast of the Russian Orthodox Church, which has its centre in Moscow and which we call with joy "Sister Church". It is precisely she who has received in great part the inheritance of ancient Christian Rus', linking herself with, and remaining faithful to, the Church of Constantinople. This Church, like the other Orthodox Churches, has true sacraments, particularly — by virtue of the Apostolic succession — the Eucharist and the Priesthood, whereby she remains united to the Catholic Church with very close links. ²² Together with the Churches mentioned she makes intense efforts "to perpetuate in a communion of faith and charity those family ties which ought to thrive between" local Churches, as between sisters". (23)

At this solemn moment in history the Catholic community prays and meditates upon "the mighty works of God" (cf. Acts 2:11), and sends to her thousand-year-old sister Church, through the Bishop of Rome, the kiss of peace, as a manifestation of the ardent desire for that perfect communion which is willed by Christ and inscribed in the nature of the Church.

I am fully convinced that the Millennium celebrations of all the heirs of the Baptism of Vladimir, and our heartfelt sharing in their joy and thanksgiving, will bring to all a new light able to pierce the darkness of the difficult centuries now past: the same light which ever anew is born and reaches us from the Paschal Mystery, from the morning of Easter and Pentecost.

16. A special expression of our union and sharing in the Millennium of the Baptism of Rus', as also an expression of the ardent desire to attain full and perfect communion with the sister Churches of the East, is constituted by the very proclamation of the Marian Year, as is explicitly stated in the Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*: "Even though we are still experiencing the painful effects of the separation which took place. . . , we can say that in the presence of the Mother of Christ we feel that we are true brothers and sisters within that messianic People, which is called to be the one family of God on earth". (24)

The Incarnate Word whom Mary brought into the world remains forever in her Heart, as is well shown by the famous icon *Znamenie*, which portrays the Virgin at prayer with the Word of God engraved upon her Heart. Mary's prayer in a unique way draws from the very power of God. It is a help and a power of a higher order for the salvation of Christians. "Therefore, why should we not all together look to her as our common Mother, who prays for the unity of God's family and who 'precedes' us all at the head of the long line of witnesses of faith in the one Lord, the Son of God, who was conceived in her virginal womb by the power of the Holy Spirit?"²⁵

To our Brothers and Sisters in the faith *we express the hope that the thousand-year-old patrimony of the Gospel, the Cross, the Resurrection and Pentecost will not cease to be "the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6) for all generations to come.*

For this intention we raise our heartfelt prayer to the Most Holy Trinity — Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 25 January, the Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, in the year 1988, the tenth of my Pontificate.

Notes

1 Cf. Letter to Cardinal Eugene Tisserant, Secretary of the Sacred Congregation for the Oriental Churches (12 May 1939): *AAS* 31 (1939), pp. 258-259.

2 Prayer of the blessing of baptismal water, the most ancient testimony of which is found in the Codex Vaticanus Barberini Greek 336, f. 201. See also in the *Trebnik* (Synod edition, Moscow 1906, part two, fol. 209v.-220, cf. fol. 216) the solemn blessing of baptismal water on the Epiphany.

3 Cf. the "Typicon of the Great Church", ed. J. Mateos in "Orientalia Christiana Analecta" 116, Rome 1963, pp. 86-88. No less was the splendour of the Rite of Baptism at Rome, as can be seen in the *Ordines Romani* of the High Middle Ages.

4 Cf. The Encyclical Letter in which the Patriarch Photius in 867 announces that the people called *Rhos* had accepted a Bishop: Ep. 1, 13: *PG* 102, 736-737; cf. also *Les registes des actes du patriarcat de Constantinople* I, II (Les registes de 715 a 1043) published by V. Grumel, Paris 1936, No. 481, pp. 88-89.

5 *Povest' Vremennykh Let*, ed. D.C. Likhachev, Moscow-Leningrad 1950, pp. 235 ff.

6 Cf. Filaret Gumilevskiy, *Lives of the Saints*, vol. July, Saint Petersburg 1900, p. 106 (in Russian).

7 See in this regard the account in *Povest' Vremennykh Let*, cited above.

8 Encyclical Epistle *Slavorum Apostoli*, 12: *AAS* 77 (1985), p. 793.

9 Cf. *ibid.*, Nos. 11-13: *AAS* 77 (1985), pp. 791-796.

10 The information is given by some German sources: thus *Lamperti Monachi Hersfeldensis Opera*, ed. O. Holder-Egger 1894, p. 38.

11 Cf. The *Nikonovskaya Letopis ad 6494*, in "Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei", IX, Saint Petersburg 1862, p. 57.

12 Cf. *Petri Damiani Vita beati Romualdi*, c. XXVII, *PL* 144, 978 (critical edition by G. Tabacco, in "Fonti per la storia d'Italia", 94, Roma 1957, p. 58).

- 13 Cf. *Gregorii VII registrum*. II, 74, ed. E. Caspar, in "Epistulae selectae in usum scholarum ex Monumentis Germaniae Historicis separatim editae", t. II, reprint 1955, pp. 236-237.
- 14 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 14.
- 15 Ibid., 15.
- 16 Ibid., 17.
- 17 Cf. *Acta Sanctorum*, Septembris 2, Venice (1756), pp. 633-644.
- 18 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 13.
- 19 Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 14.
- 20 Ibid., 16.
- 21 Cf. Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, 34: AAS 79 (1987), p. 406.
- 22 Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 15.
- 23 Ibid., 14.
- 24 Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, 34; AAS 79 (1987), p. 429.
- 25 Ibid., 30: AAS 79 (1987), p. 402.

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