



## SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

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### DECREE ON ECUMENISM

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# The Decree on Ecumenism

**T**HIS is an unofficial translation of the Second Vatican Council's Decree, *Unitatis redintegratio*, promulgated on November 21, 1964. It had been approved by 2,137 votes against 11. (The subtitles which appear in our translation have been omitted in the final official text of the document.)

## Introduction

1. THE RESTORATION OF UNITY among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council. Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only. However, many Christian Communions present themselves to men as the true inheritors of Jesus Christ; all indeed profess to be disciples of the Lord, but they differ in doctrine and follow different roads, as if Christ himself were divided.<sup>1</sup> Such division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages the holy cause of preaching the Gospel to every creature.

But the Lord of Ages wisely and patiently carries out the plan of grace on our behalf, sinners that we are. In recent times more than ever before, He has been rousing divided Christians to remorse over their divisions and to a longing for unity. Everywhere large numbers have felt the impulse of this grace, and among our separated brethren also there has arisen a movement, fostered by the grace of the Holy Spirit, for the restoration of unity among all Christians. This movement towards unity, which is increasing from day to day, is called 'ecumenical'. Those belong to it who invoke the Triune God and confess Jesus as Lord and Saviour, doing this not merely as individuals but also as corporate bodies. For, while everyone regards the body in which he has heard the Gospel as his Church and, indeed, God's Church, yet nearly all, in different ways, long for the one visible Church of God, a Church truly universal and sent forth into the whole world that the world may be converted to the Gospel and so be saved, to the glory of God.

The sacred Council gladly notes all this. It has already declared its teaching on the Church, and now, moved by a desire for the restoration of unity among all the followers of Christ, it wishes to set before all Catholics the ways and means by which they can respond to this grace and to this divine call.

## Chapter I

### Catholic Principles on Ecumenism

#### *The Oneness of the Church*

2. What has revealed the love of God among us is that the Father has sent into the world His only-begotten Son, so that,

1. Cf. 1 Cor 1, 13.



being made man, he might by his redemption give new life to the entire human race and gather it together into one.<sup>2</sup> Before offering himself up as a spotless victim upon the altar of the cross, Christ prayed to his Father for all who believe in him: "that they all may be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, so that the world may believe that thou has sent me" (Jn 17, 21). In his Church he instituted the wonderful sacrament of the Eucharist by which the unity of his Church is both signified and realized. He gave his followers a new commandment to love one another,<sup>3</sup> and promised the Spirit, their Advocate,<sup>4</sup> who, as Lord and life-giver, should remain with them forever.

After being lifted up on the cross and glorified, the Lord Jesus poured forth his Spirit as he had promised, and through the Spirit he called and gathered together the people of the New Covenant, which is the Church, into a unity of faith, hope and charity, as the Apostle teaches us: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one Baptism" (Eph 4, 4-5). For "all you who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ... for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3, 27-28). The Holy Spirit, dwelling in the faithful and pervading and guiding the whole Church, brings about that wonderful communion of the faithful and their intimate union in Christ, so that He is the principle of the Church's unity. He also effects the diversity of graces and ministries,<sup>5</sup> thereby enriching the Church of Jesus Christ with a variety of functions, "equipping the saints for the exercise of the ministry for the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph 4, 12).

In order to establish this his holy Church everywhere in the world till the end of time, Christ entrusted to the College of the Twelve the task of teaching, ruling and sanctifying.<sup>6</sup> Among their number he selected Peter, and after his confession of faith determined that on him he would build his Church; to Peter he promised the keys of the kingdom of heaven,<sup>7</sup> and after his profession of love, entrusted all his sheep to him to be confirmed in faith<sup>8</sup> and shepherd-ed in perfect unity,<sup>9</sup> while Christ Jesus himself was forever to remain the chief cornerstone<sup>10</sup> and shepherd of our souls.<sup>11</sup>

Jesus Christ, then, willed that the Apostles and their successors — the bishops with Peter's successor at their head — should faithfully preach the Gospel and administer the sacraments, and rule the

2. Cf. 1 Io 4, 9; Col 1, 18-20; Io 11, 52.

3. Cf. Io 13, 34.

4. Cf. Io 16, 7.

5. Cf. 1 Cor 12, 4-11.

6. Cf. Mt 28, 18-20, collato Io 20, 21-23.

7. Cf. Mt 16, 18, collato Mt 18, 18.

8. Cf. Lc 22, 32.

9. Cf. Io 21, 15-18.

10. Cf. Eph 2, 20.

11. Cf. 1 Petr 2, 25; CONC. VATICANUM I, Sess. IV (1870), *Constitutio Pastor Aeternus*: Coll Lac 7, 482a.





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