

How much further?

Letter to friends - Qiqajon di Bose n. 79 - Christmas 2025

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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

These lines, intended to revive our communion with you, come to you at the end of the year in which we commemorated the First Ecumenical Council, held in Nicaea 1700 years ago. And this month of December marks the anniversary of another ecumenical council, Vatican II, which ended 60 years ago. Thus, Pope Leo XIV, the patriarchs and leaders of other Christian churches will return from their meeting of prayer and thanksgiving in Nicaea, a few days before commemorating another historic event: the lifting of mutual excommunications between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, dating back to 1054, ratified by Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras on 7 December 1965, the day before the closing of Vatican II. Thirty years have also passed since the publication of the encyclical "Ut unum sint", addressed not only to Catholics but to all Christians by John Paul II, confirming and relaunching the ecumenical commitment. Added to this overlap of dates is another event of similar significance, albeit limited in scope to Europe: the Charta Oecumenica drawn up by the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (CCEE), signed in 2001, whose thorough revision was signed and made public on 5 November.

Events, commemorations, anniversaries and documents all converge in making ever more relevant a question that preoccupies those who have embarked on the ecumenical journey, an unavoidable question already highlighted in the title and content of the third part of the aforementioned encyclical Ut unum sint: 'Quanta est nobis via?'. How far do we still have to go, what path lies ahead of us now to achieve visible Christian unity, to make manifest and credible 'the great love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God – and therefore brothers and sisters in Christ – and truly be so!' (cf. 1 Jn 3:1).

It is precisely this increasingly pressing question that stimulates us to seek and find an answer to a further, complementary question: in order to complete the journey that lies ahead, has the time not come to change our pace rather than our direction, our ways of proceeding rather than the goals to be achieved? It is a bit like when we decide to wade across a stream and venture out, dragging our feet laboriously along the riverbed, which becomes deeper and deeper, until we realise that in order to go further, we must start swimming.

-Perhaps this is what the ecumenical journey needs today: to gather the wisdom, discernment, knowledge and esteem for others, refined and matured over decades of dialogue and encounters, and to dive forward, driven by the primacy of care for people, moved by pastoral zeal that treasures theological reflection, but takes into account above all the concrete needs of communities that are increasingly small and scattered or, rather, immersed in realities greater than themselves, like the first churches in the diaspora in the mare magnum of the Roman Empire.

The precious heritage of spiritual ecumenism, enriched over the decades, must also be translated into ecumenism lived in community: theological agreements and convergences, shared celebrations in particular circumstances, and solemn commitments should provide the mastery and practice necessary to swim with broad strokes towards a visible, concrete, daily unity. Is it not contradictory to reaffirm that we have dropped excommunications and then not be able to return to communicating with the one body and blood of the Lord, as was the case before the excommunications? Is it not reductive to commit ourselves to praying together and then have to divide at the moment of the 'prayer of prayers', separating ourselves precisely when we celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, the very reason why we are together as Christians? Is it not incongruous that spouses and communities who have become one body and one soul separate when they have to communicate with the body of Christ? Could we not dare to savour together some of the fruits cultivated by communities in which brothers and sisters from different churches have been walking together for years? Is it not a little absurd that those who are strangers to the Christian faith consider – for better or for worse – all Christians, of whatever denomination, as a single reality, while we linger over differences that we ourselves sometimes struggle to explain? And when we see the lack of interest that younger generations have in ecumenism, do we ask ourselves questions about how we transmit the faith, about the still essentially denominational dimension of catechesis, about whether or not it corresponds to the daily lives of young people in a now de-Christianised society?

Perhaps the time has really come to have the courage to venture into deep waters: let each person begin to swim in their own style, let each community, each church set sail and navigate confidently towards the Lord who comes to meet us walking on the waters.

The brothers and sisters of Bose

Bose, 7 December 2025

60th anniversary of the lifting of excommunications
between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church

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