

*Euntes in mundum.*  
Pope John Paul II's  
Millennium of the Baptism  
of Rus' (Between Political  
Theology, Historiography,  
and the Theology of History)<sup>1</sup>

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ABSTRACT

The focus of the article is an attempt to understand the vision of history presented by John Paul II in his apostolic letter *Euntes in mundum*, published for the millennium of baptism of Kievan Rus' (25 January 1988). The author intends to demonstrate that the Pope's meditations about the past have a multi-level interpretation structure, support John Paul II's theological and political teachings, and crystallise them in his reflections about political theology and the theology of history.

**KEY WORDS:** John Paul II, *Euntes in mundum*, baptism of Rus', Orthodox Church, church unity

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** Jan Paweł II, *Euntes in mundum*, chrzest Rusi, Kościół prawosławny, jedność kościelna



Il Battesimo della Rus' di Kiev segna, dunque, l'inizio di un lungo processo storico, in cui si sviluppa e si espande l'originale profilo bizantino-slavo del cristianesimo nella vita sia della Chiesa sia della società e delle Nazioni, che trovano in esso, lungo i secoli ed anche oggi, il fondamento della propria identità spirituale. Nel corso successivo della storia, quando tempestose vicende colpirono ripetutamente e profondamente questa identità, proprio il Battesimo e la cultura cristiana – attinta dalla Chiesa universale e sviluppata in base alle innate ricchezze spirituali – divennero le forze che decisero della sua sopravvivenza.

*Lettera Apostolica Euntes in mundum  
Giovanni Paolo II<sup>2</sup>*

## I. Introduction

The one thousand years anniversary of the baptism of Rus' was celebrated in 1988. Today, 30 years later, it is worth remembering the millennium celebrations and analyse their course and significance for the nations who see the baptism of Vladimir as an important component of their heritage (Ukrainians, Russians, Belarusians)<sup>3</sup>. It is also

<sup>1</sup> This paper is an expanded and updated version of the author's article: "Euntes in mundum": Jana Pawła II millennium chrztu Rusi (między teologią polityczną, historiografią a teologią historii) [in:] *Polacy i Ukraińcy. Komunikacja – dialog – pojednanie*, M. Melnyk (red.), Rzym–Kraków 2020, pp. 157–180.

<sup>2</sup> *Lettera Apostolica. Euntes in mundum. Del sommo pontefice Giovanni Paolo II per il millennio del "Battesimo" della Rus' di Kiev 25 gennaio 1988 (Atti e documenti dei sommi pontefici) di Giovanni Paolo II*, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/apost\\_letters/1988/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_19880125\\_euntes-in-mundum-universum.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/apost_letters/1988/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19880125_euntes-in-mundum-universum.html) [access: 3.01.2022].

<sup>3</sup> R. Terszak, *Chrzest Włodzimierza a jasnogórskie obchody 1000-lecia Chrztu Rusi (na łamach miesięcznika "Jasna Góra")*, "Niepodległość i Pamięć" 2020, t. 27, nr 1 (69), pp. 175–201.

4 See more broadly in: J.T. Andrews, *Studies on Russian Orthodoxy for the Celebration of Its Millennium*, "Russian History" 1988, vol. 15, no. 2–4, pp. 131–154.

5 On conducting a dialogue between religions is a fundamental thesis in John Paul II's evangelical and ecumenical methodology, see: M. Żmudziński, *Jan Paweł II – Pontifex Maximus dialogu międzyreligijnego*, "Studia Gdańskie" 2012, t. 30, p. 179.

6 Cf.: A.M. Schlesinger, Jr., *On Leadership* [in:] E. Renehan, *Pope John Paul II*, New York 2006, pp. 6–7.

worth mentioning, however, that an international and interdenominational historiographic reflection, of a particular cultural background, arose around the millennium. It seems investigating all millennial articulations should be an essential task, as they perfectly represent the political, social, and denominational reality of the late 1980s and, simultaneously, constitute a crucial component of the social doctrine of the Orthodox and Catholic Churches<sup>4</sup>. The focus of the article shall be an attempt to understand the vision of history presented by John Paul II in his apostolic letter *Euntes in mundum*, published for the millennium of baptism of Kievan Rus' on 25 January 1988 (further referred to as "the Letter"). Still, before beginning the studies, it is worth underlining the research perspective used by the author. The Letter – while linked to the Pope's mission of evangelization and ecumenism<sup>5</sup> – refers to specific historical events. History was integrated into a theological meditation (they can be analysed in the context of the theology of history), while being an important message for politicians, church activists (both Orthodox and Catholic), and scientists. Even more so, it is a part of the historiographic discourse about church unity, which dates back to the Middle Ages. It all makes history worth analysing, which is not an easy endeavour. A substantial number of scientific papers have been devoted to the life and activities of the Polish Pope. He was shown from various methodological and interpretative perspectives, e.g. as the head of the Catholic Church, an eminent intellectual, theologian, or a leader in world politics. The researchers wanted to understand the historical, political, and theological aspect of his deeds<sup>6</sup>, while simultaneously to study the layers of history (and historiography), politics, and theology which he (co-)constructed himself. It could not be done, however, without meditating upon the political, social, and denominational reality of the 1980s, besides the reflection on the transformations of world politics, the relationship between the Orthodox Church and

the Communist state, on the place of the Eastern Catholic Churches in the ecumenical discourse between Catholicism and Orthodoxy, and the development of the historical science (since history – included in God’s economy of salvation – played a key role in it). As it is not possible to feature such a broad approach in a short academic paper, the author’s reflections may only serve as a starting point for more comprehensive studies of the presented topic.

## II. The End and the Beginning

Ecumenical issues constituted an important part of the intellectual work of the Polish Pope<sup>7</sup> and corresponded with the legacy of the Second Vatican Council<sup>8</sup> The Pope emphasized the importance of the “Christian East” and developed the idea of a peculiar “Christian Pan-Slavism” in parallel with that of a “Christian Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals”<sup>9</sup>. The researchers wondered about the addressee or addressees of the Letter (since they are not indicated directly), propounding mainly the Russian Orthodox hierarchs. However, after an in-depth analysis of the Letter, they noticed its specific, multi-level message. Therefore, it could have been addressed to: (1) Communist decision-makers (in view of the new geopolitical conditions of the time); (2) Greek Catholics (since the Letter contains elements announcing the future Millennium Message *Magnum Baptismi donum* addressed to them); (3) (in general) the Orthodox (since there are elements referring to the Apostolic letter *Duodecimum saeculum* promulgated earlier, in December 1987); (4) Christians (in general, since, as the author already stated, the Letter was of ecumenical significance)<sup>10</sup>. It should be remembered that the Letter was issued during the period characterized by considerable activity in the interdenominational ecumenical dialogue, as well as by the activation of the Vatican–Moscow talks. Namely, a new socio-political situation occurred in the latter half of the 1980s: the reformist Mikhail Gorbachev revised Russia’s state

7 More in: P. Jaskóła, *Jana Pawła II ekumeniczna wizja Kościoła*, “Studia Oecumenica” 2016, nr 16, pp. 49–61; also in: *Pontyfikat ekumenicznej nadziei. Z Janem Pawłem II na drogach ekumenii*, Z. Glaeser (red.), Opole 2008; *Jan Paweł II – Encyklopedia dialogu i ekumenizmu*, E. Sakowicz (red.), Radom 2006.

8 P. Kantyka, *Ecumenical epoch of the blessed Pope John Paul II*, “Roczniki Teologii Ekumenicznej” 2011, vol. 3 (58), pp. 5–6. More in: M.A. Fahey, *Current theology orthodox ecumenism and theology: 1978–83*, “Theological Studies” 1983, vol. 44, pp. 625–692; W. Zyzak, *Święty Jan Paweł II o duchowości chrześcijańskiego Wschodu*, “Polonia Sacra” 2017, t. 21, nr 1 (46), pp. 165–182.

9 T. Kopyś, *Polityka Jana Pawła II wobec Kościołów za żelazną kurtyną w drugiej połowie lat osiemdziesiątych XX wieku*, “Folia Historica Cracoviensia” 2012, t. 18, p. 272.

10 More in: M.A. De Trana, *Letters of Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II Concerning the Veneration of the Virgin Mary: A Study in Ecumenical Development. A Thesis submitted in the Department of Theology for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of Durham*, Durham 1991, pp. 121–146.

11 More in: T. Kuzio, *Gorbachev, Dis-sent and the New Opposition (1987–8)* [in:] *idem, Ukraine: Perestroika to Independence*, London 2000, pp. 64–82.

12 V. Fedorov, *Barriers to Ecumenism: an Orthodox View from Russia*, “Religion, State & Society” 1998. vol. 26, no. 2, p. 131; also in: M. Martin, *Keys of This Blood: Pope John Paul II Versus Russia and the West for Control of the New World Order*, New York 1990, p. 28.

13 T. Kopyś, *op.cit.*, p. 273; Ł. Donaj, J. Cywoniuk, *Jan Paweł II i Benedykt XVI a dialog katolicko-prawosławny. Przyczynek do dyskusji*, “Środkowoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne” 2010, nr 4, pp. 67–68.

14 A. Trochanowski, *Perspektywa ekumeniczna ukraińskiego Kościoła greckokatolickiego*, “Studia Koszalińsko-Koło-brzeskie” 2016, nr 23, p. 203.

15 M. Melnyk, *Ukraińcy i Polacy. Pojednani Ewangelią*, “Edukacja Humanistyczna” 2017, nr 2 (37), p. 24.

16 I. Kabzińska, *Utopijna idea słowiańskiej jedności w świetle podziałów w łonie katolicyzmu i prawosławia oraz konfliktów między “siostrzanymi Kościołami”*, “Etnografia Polska” 2001, t. 45, nr 1–2, pp. 108–109; More in: S. Nabywaniac, *Antykatolicka i antypolska argumentacja uczestników synodu lwowskiego w 1946 r.*, “Resovia Sacra. Studia Teologiczno-Filozoficzne Diecezji Rzeszowskiej” 2005, nr 12, pp. 181–190; I. Pojizdnyk, *Kościół katolicki a Cerkiew greckokatolicka w USRR po II wojnie światowej – droga do współpracy*, “Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość” 2010, t. 9, nr 1 (15), pp. 299–307; J. Dziwoki, *Z dziejów organizacji i struktury Kościoła greckokatolickiego w Polsce po 1945 roku*, “Історичний архів. Наукові студії” 2011, t. 6, pp. 18–26.

17 P. Kowal, *Misja na wschodzie. Wizyty kard. Józefa Glempa w ZSRR w 1988 roku oraz ich polityczno-międzynarodowy kontekst*, “Dzieje Najnowsze” 2016,

policy on nationality<sup>11</sup>, softened its attitude towards the Orthodox Church and, in order to open the country to the West, initiated informal and later formal diplomatic relations with the Vatican<sup>12</sup>. The Pope set his mind on negotiating significant allowances for Catholics in the USSR (including Lithuania) and on setting up a chaplaincy among the Polish Diaspora; he also hoped for permission to finally make an apostolic pilgrimage to Russia<sup>13</sup>. Greek Catholics were duly discussed, too. The Pope was a great advocate for the Eastern Catholic Churches and emphasized the ecumenical importance of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. He believed that this church – which recognized the sovereignty of the bishop of Rome and shared the roots of its Christian spirituality (liturgy, theology, and monastic life) with the Orthodox Church – should be the binder linking the Catholic and Orthodox Churches in Ukraine<sup>14</sup>. Undoubtedly, the Pope’s actions contributed to the reconciliation between Poles and Ukrainians declared by the Church hierarchs of both rites (1987)<sup>15</sup>. Such views and actions were extremely controversial, with the Soviet doctrine still strong at the time. The Greek Catholic Church of Ukraine had no established subjectivity: after the Lviv Council of 1846, it went underground and was continuously persecuted by the communist authorities<sup>16</sup>. By operating illegally in Poland, it received a semblance of legality, being acknowledged by the Holy See and the Primates of Poland Stefan Wyszyński and Józef Glemp<sup>17</sup>. However, the Russian Orthodox Church regarded support for Greek Catholics as an obstacle to the Catholic–Orthodox dialogue, which spurred its immediate reaction, curtailing the opportunities to help Roman Catholics in the USSR, e.g. through the Catholic Church of Poland<sup>18</sup>. A kind of rivalry commenced between the different agendas or visions of the different blocks (Gorbachev, state/clerical Russian officials, John Paul II, Vatican diplomats, Polish hierarchs). Each of them saw different methods of solving the problems that had arisen<sup>19</sup>. According to

Paweł Kowal, the Russian government hoped that the Polish Catholic Church would not support Ukrainian Greek Catholics, e.g. because of the difficult historical issues between the two countries<sup>20</sup>. The Orthodox hierarchs, on the other hand, hoped to agree on the issue by using a specific interpretation, which they developed with some Vatican diplomats: the Vatican and Moscow could incorporate Greek Catholics into the Catholic or Orthodox community, respectively, depending on the ecclesiastical affiliation of the territory they inhabited<sup>21</sup>. Thus, the approaching Millennium of the Baptism of Rus' in 1988 became an important date for both the Catholic and the Orthodox side. In Russia it became an opportunity to organize state and church celebrations<sup>22</sup>, while the Vatican diplomacy, together with the Polish episcopate, forced the then decision-makers of the Polish state to agree to the organization of the millennial celebrations in Jasna Góra monastery<sup>23</sup>. In anticipation of the jubilee celebrations, the Pope published two important documents: the Apostolic letter *Euntes in mundum* addressed to the entire Catholic Church, and the Millennium Message *Magnum Baptismi donum* addressed specifically to the Ukrainian Greek Catholics.

### III. Euntes in mundum

John Paul II opened his meditations with Christ's message, "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)"<sup>24</sup>. He wanted to include the act of Christianization of Rus' in it, which made that act a crucial component of the economy of salvation given by Providence. Simultaneously, the Pope indicated that every process of Christianization of peoples and nations is a complex phenomenon, which takes a long time. "The Millennium of the Baptism and of the conversion of Rus'" was rather a historical process than a single event too. What paved the way for it were

t. XLVIII, nr 1, p. 196. Aso in: *idem*, *Między pielgrzymkami. Jan Paweł II i Stolica Apostolska wobec przemian w Polsce (1987–1991)*, "Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość" 2019, nr 1 (33), pp. 150–180.

18 R.G. Roberson, *The Catholic Church and Reconciliation with the Orthodox in Eastern and Central Europe*, "Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe" 1998, vol. 18, no. 3. On the Russian Orthodox-Catholic relations, see: C. Caridi, *Ideology or Isolationism? Russian Identity and its Influence on Orthodox-Catholic Relations*, part I: *Orthodoxy and the Russian Identity*, "Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe" 2007, vol. 27, no. 1, pp. 1–19.

19 On the changing opinions of the Pope and some Vatican diplomats on this issue, see: J. Moskałyk, *Rola wschodniego katolicyzmu w optyce zjednoczenia chrześcijańskiego*, "Teologia w Polsce" 2016, t. 10, nr 1, p. 35.

20 P. Kowal, *Misja na wschodzie...*, p. 196.

21 J. Loya, *Interchurch Relations in Post-Perestroika Eastern Europe: A Short History on an Ecumenical Meltdown*, "Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe" 1994, vol. 14, no. 1.

22 Л.А. Королева, О.В. Мельниченко, *Празднование Тысячелетия Крещения Руси: церковное мероприятие или общественное событие?*, "Исторические, философские, политические и юридические науки, культурология и искусствоведение. Вопросы теории и практики" 2011, № 8 (14), pp. 107–109.

23 More in: I. Hałagida, *Raport Departamentu IV MSW dotyczący katolickich obchodów milenium chrztu Rusi*, "Aparat Represji w Polsce Ludowej 1944–1989" 2008, nr 1 (6), pp. 407–437.

24 *Lettera Apostolica. Euntes in mundum...*; Polish translation: *Euntes in*

*mundum. List apostolski Jana Pawła II z okazji tysiąclecia chrztu Rusi Kijowskiej (25 stycznia 1988), „eKai” 25.01.1988, <https://ekai.pl/euntes-in-mundum/> [access: 3.01.2022]; English translation: “Euntes in Mundum”, *Apostolic Letter of the Holy Father Pope John Paul II for the Millennium of Baptism of the Kievan Rus’*, 25 January 1988, <https://www.cmvic.net/documents/2014/0/EUNTES%20IN%20MUNDUM.pdf> [access: 3.01.2022].*

<sup>25</sup> *Lettera Apostolica. Euntes in mundum...*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem.*

the evangelization attempts undertaken by the Church of Constantinople in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Their work was carried on by missionaries coming from various centres in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, Byzantine clergymen came to Rus’, so did Slavic ones – who conducted the liturgy in Slavonic, according to the rite established by Saints Cyril and Methodius – as well as representatives of the Latin West. Referring to the “Chronicle”, called that of Nestor (“Povest’ Vremennykh Let”), the Pope stated that there was a Christian church in Kiev, dedicated to the prophet Elijah, already in 944<sup>25</sup>.

In such a well prepared “environment”, Princess Olga was “publicly” baptized in 955. Her son Sviatoslav, however, did not become a Christian. It was only her grandson Vladimir who pursued her “spiritual heritage”, adopting the Christian faith in 988 and beginning the work leading to “the permanent and definitive conversion of the people of Rus’”. Vladimir and his entourage “experienced the beauty of the liturgy and religious life of the Church of Constantinople”, while the “new Church of Rus’ drew from [that centre] 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”. Yet it was not a mere copy, as the Byzantine nature of the “new Church” was “transferred into a new dimension” from the very beginning, while the Slav language and culture became a “new” context of evangelization<sup>26</sup>. Such a “meeting and dialogue of cultures” led to the creation of a “new” peculiar spirituality and the introduction of “different liturgical traditions, church discipline, as well as forms of theology and monastic life different from those in Roman Christianity”. The Pope underlined the role of monasteries for the development of Christianity in Rus’ and of the institution of elder monks (*starsy*), who served as “spiritual guides” for both individuals (rulers, writers) and the broad community of the faithful. A significant development of artistic life was associated with that “meeting and dialogue of cultures”. It was revealed in

the richness of iconography and the creation of magnificent works of architecture (such as the 11<sup>th</sup>-century Saint Sophia Cathedrals in Kiev and Novgorod). The Pope also pointed out the wealth of the Kievan religious writings, hymns, religious songs – developed from the local musical tradition – as well as the first schools, founded in Rus’ already in the 11<sup>th</sup> century<sup>27</sup>.

However, the most important factor in the formation of the Ruthenian dimension of Christianity – according to John Paul II – was the relationship between the Churches of the East and West. In the period of the Baptism of Rus’, each of them “developed according to its own theological, disciplinary and liturgical traditions”. While there were obviously notable differences between them, “there existed full communion with reciprocal relations between the East and West, between Constantinople and Rome”<sup>28</sup>. Thus, the newly created Church of Kiev “received and helped” the still “undivided Church of the East and West”. Yet, from the very beginning, the West had a substantial impact on the formation of the Ruthenian spirituality: Princess Olga sent a request to the Emperor Otto I that a bishop “who would show them the way of the truth” should come to her state. Thus, in 961, the monk Adalbert of Trier came to Rus’, “but the still flourishing paganism prevented him from carrying out his mission”<sup>29</sup>. Likewise Prince Vladimir, fully aware of the Church unity, maintained relations with both Constantinople and Rome, “whose Bishop was recognized as the one who presided over the communion of the whole Church”. As reported by the “Chronicle of Nikon”, diplomatic missions were exchanged between Vladimir and the Popes of the period<sup>30</sup>.

Therefore, from its Christianization, Rus’ became the ground where cultures met, and the Churches of the West and East permeated each other. Over time Kiev – as an important component of Church life – became a missionary centre of great importance: “towards the West as far as the Carpathians, from the southern banks of

27 *Ibidem*.

28 *Ibidem*.

29 *Ibidem*.

30 The Pope mentioned the missions sent to Prince Vladimir by 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 Khereson had brought these relics to Rome) and Sylvester II”. He further named Bruno of Querfurt who, “sent by [Pope Sylvester II] to preach with the title of *archiepiscopus gentium*, in about 1007 visited Vladimir, called *rex Ruscorum*. 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 reginae 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”. *Ibidem*.

31 *Ibidem.*

32 *Ibidem.*

the Dnieper as far as Novgorod, and from the northern banks of the Volga [...] as far as the shores of the Pacific Ocean and beyond”<sup>31</sup>. Moreover, the Pope linked the legacy of the new ecclesial centre in Kiev with the Orthodox Patriarchate of Moscow “and with the Ukrainian Catholic Church, whose full communion with the See of Rome was renewed at Brest”. The Baptism of Rus’ marked therefore the beginning of a long historical process, within which an original, Byzantine and Slavic profile of Christianity was developing, on which the spiritual identity of Churches (Orthodox and Catholic), societies and nations was based. That multitude, however, was not unique. The Pope explained that “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”. He was thus convinced that the Church can be both one and diverse. In spite of adopting unity as its fundamental principle, it is actually pluralistic, different in individual parts of the world. Such was the dimension of the universal Church, uniform and simultaneously divided into the Churches of the East and West “before their progressive estrangement”. For this reason, the “gradual return” to that unity in diversity is the primary need of the contemporary Church. The return to the harmony between Rome and Constantinople will be achieved through manifold bilateral meetings, yet “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’”. The “remembrance” of the Baptism of Kiev, which has renewed the awareness of their original communion, will urge its “Orthodox and Catholic heirs [...] to hasten their steps towards the goal of the full unity willed by Christ!”<sup>32</sup>.

The Christian unity had a broader dimension for the Pope, also in the social and political context. The aspiration of the Christians of today to unity is a premise of

peaceful coexistence between peoples. Even more so, it “moves the conscience of citizens, and imbues politics and economics”. Therefore, the contemporary ecumenism is not merely a search for the ways to return to the unity of the Churches but also to ensure peaceful coexistence of the faithful, so that “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”<sup>33</sup>. The Pope said:

33 *Ibidem.*

34 *Ibidem.*

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.

Then, summarizing his consideration, he made the following appeal: “What is needed [...] 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”<sup>34</sup>.

In conclusion of his considerations, the Pope noticed that a “special expression of [the] union and sharing in the Millennium of the Baptism of Rus” and “perfect communion with the sister Churches of the East” was constituted by the proclamation of the Marian Year, and

35 *Ibidem*; John Paul II, *Encyclical "Redemptoris Mater"*, 30. AAS 79, p. 402.

36 More in: И.В. Лобанова, *Иерархия Русской Православной Церкви и синодальная система (конец XIX – начало XX вв.)* [in:] *Церковь в истории России*, т. 6, Е.В. Белякова (ред.), Москва 2005, pp. 197–207.

pointed out the Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, in which he showed the crucial role of the Mother of Christ in the work of the unity of Christians. According to the Polish Pope, “in the presence of the Mother of Christ”, Christians should feel that they are “true brothers and sisters within that messianic People, which is called to be the one family of God on earth”. He asked: “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?”<sup>35</sup>.

#### IV. Between politics and political theology

To begin the analysis, let us look at the Letter as a component of Vatican’s political expectations. Addressed to the Christians of Central and Eastern Europe, it was meant to demonstrate the spiritual wealth of early medieval Rus’ as part of the Orthodox, Byzantine, and also Slavic Christianity. This heritage contributed to the formation of both the Kievan and Muscovite Orthodoxy. It should be noted that the Pope pointed out the role of elder monks as the “spiritual guides” of rulers and even writers. Particularly in Russia, *starsy* were respected for their spirituality, teaching of the faithful, and contribution to Russian culture, while their heritage was referred to by “scholarly monks”, or synodal monastic hierarchs<sup>36</sup>. The narration of the Letter, constructed so, was beyond doubt addressed to the Russian Orthodox hierarchy. It should be remembered that – due to the Soviet realities – it did not have a strong position yet in that period, or even a regular legal status. Whereas the Pope pointed out its both pastoral and culture-forming significance for the formation of Russian culture. What is more, by indicating it as an important component of the interdenominational ecumenical dialogue, he wanted to be seen as its protector abroad as well as a mediator in its discourse

with secular decision-makers. On the other hand – by treating Russian culture as part of the European civilization – he acknowledged the secular decision-makers: in a way, he opened the Iron Curtain, contradicted the policy of isolation of Russia, made fulfilling Gorbachev’s mission – opening his country to the West – possible. In the Pope’s meditations, however, Rus’ was not necessarily synonymous with Russia, nor was the baptism of Vladimir solely Russian heritage. In his narration, John Paul II divided this heritage between Ukrainians and Russians, but also between the Orthodox and the Catholics. One should remember that this interpretation gave ecclesial subjectivity to the Greek Catholic Church, theoretically non-existent in Russia, as well as state subjectivity to Ukraine, which then belonged to the Soviet system. Even more so, Ukrainian Greek Catholics were not only the “bridge” between the East and West: it was thanks to Kyiv that Christianity and the Christian civilisation reached “the shores of the Pacific Ocean and beyond”. It is not surprising, therefore, that his position had to invoke negative reactions of Russian Soviet authorities and the Orthodox Church as well<sup>37</sup>. As Kowal noticed, clear political allusions can be found in the letter itself: “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”<sup>38</sup>. Thus, Ukraine as a nation has the right to pursue “freedom” and choose by itself “the paths of its own development”. However, a fear of Russian reaction can also be found in the Letter. This is why – diplomatically – the words which were a form of support to Gorbachev’s reforms were added: “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”<sup>39</sup>. One might wonder if this interpretation could satisfy the Ukrainian Greek Catholics. Not necessarily: they ceased to be the only heirs to the legacy of Vladimir’s baptism (which was for

37 I. Hvat, *The Ukrainian Catholic Church, the Vatican and the Soviet Union during the Pontificate of Pope John Paul II*, “Religion in Communist Lands” 1993, vol. 11, no. 3, p. 269.

38 *Lettera Apostolica. Euntes in mundum...*, quoted after: P. Kowal, *Misja na wschodzie...*, p. 197.

39 *Lettera Apostolica. Euntes in mundum...*, quoted after: P. Kowal, *Misja na wschodzie...*, p. 197.

40 According to the bishop, the Eastern rite was meant to become an “organic component of modernized Catholicism [...] eradicating the negative effect of Orthodox dissent” as well as the resultant interdenominational enmity. У. Безпалько, *Деякі аспекти унійної діяльності митрополита Андрія Шептицького на початку ХХ ст.*, “Наукові записки Тернопільського національного педагогічного університету імені Володимира Гнатюка” 2013, p. 105.

41 P. Kowal, *Misja na wschodzie...*, p. 197.

42 Ł. Donaj, J. Cywoniuk, *op.cit.*, p. 67. Also in: T. Kopyś, *op.cit.*, p. 283.

43 G. Przebinda, *Większa Europa. Papież wobec Rosji i Ukrainy*, Kraków 2001, p. 189.

44 G. Weigel, *Świadek nadziei. Biografia papieża Jana Pawła II*, Kraków 2002, pp. 762, 767.

what they strove during their centuries-long polemic with the Orthodox), the letter also failed to accentuate their guiding role in the ecumenical mission in the East (so dear to the former Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytsky, 1865–1944)<sup>40</sup>.

Kowal compared the Letter analysed here to another apostolic letter of John Paul II, *Sescentesima Anniversaria*, devoted to the six hundredth anniversary of the baptism of Lithuania. In the researcher’s opinion, both letters “attest, among other things, to the attempt to reconcile sometimes three contradictory reasons: the defence of Catholics, including those of Greek Catholic rite, a wish to improve relations with the Russian Orthodox Church, and a nod to the USSR authorities”. Looking at the Letter in the political context, it is worth adding it was published before the delegation of the Vatican City State left for the celebrations in Moscow. Thus, the text had to be something of a road sign for the other side, which at the same time revealed Vatican’s concrete expectations as well as the kinds of concessions it could make<sup>41</sup>. It was during their stay in Russia that the delegation was invited to an official dinner. The then Cardinal Secretary of State Agostino Casaroli (1914–1998) met Gorbachev, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Many contemporary observers believed it was a historical moment of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Russian and Vatican<sup>42</sup>. During his talk with Gorbachev, the Vatican diplomat conveyed the personal message of John Paul II, in which the Pope hoped that the Millennium celebrations “will fill all faithful of both Churches with an ecumenical breath” and wished that “two Churches, Catholic and Orthodox [...] would find in Ukraine the ancient historical bonds and engaged in the effort for unity with a new zeal”<sup>43</sup>. Due to this audience, one more question was addressed. Along with the establishment of the diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the USSR, the possibility of legalizing the Greek Catholic Church in Ukraine was discussed<sup>44</sup>.

It is also worth looking at the work of John Paul II from a broader perspective of political theology. It is known that the Pope's meditations were influenced by Vatican II. It emphasized the Christian unity, but also stated that the vocation of the Church is to be "the sign of unity of humankind", even though it is often divided by ethnic, political, cultural, and linguistic rivalries and experiences multiple tensions<sup>45</sup>. Fulfilling its mission, the Church must experience that mystery of unity in itself, at the same time becoming the model of general societal and political activities. Aware of the political aspect of his meditations, the Pope wanted to indicate methods with which the peaceful coexistence of the European community could be ensured<sup>46</sup>. One should remember that, in the late 1980s, it was lost in the tangle of processes and transformations which marked the fall of Communism, and torn on the inside as well, axiologically rather than ideologically. Thus, John Paul II showed it a spiritual dimension of the methods of every-day activities and a certain outlook on its future. It was to be defined by "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"<sup>47</sup>. That very Church unity was to be the necessary condition of maintaining the peace which guaranteed the development of all European societies. Whereas the "methods of every-day activities", of shaping that unity in diversity were shown perfectly in the past, in the Christianization and culture-forming work of the pioneers of inculturation<sup>48</sup>, patrons of the equal rights of all nations and of the universal unity of the Church, Saints Cyril and Methodius<sup>49</sup>. A unique component of the Pope's political theology can be seen here: the unity of the Churches becomes synonymous with the unity of Europe. It is doubtful, however, if the European unity was meant, in the Pope's reflection, to be associated with the creation of some European "monolith". The Pope believed that the European community – like the Church – can be homogeneous and, at the same

45 E. Kasjaniuk, *Maryjna rekapitulacja służebna w ujęciu błogosławionego Jana Pawła II*, "Teologia w Polsce" 2013, t. 7, nr 1, p. 54.

46 More in: T.P. Terlikowski, *Jan Paweł II wobec Rosji*, "Teologia Polityczna" 2005–2006, t. 3, pp. 113–122.

47 *Lettera Apostolica. Euntes in mundum...*, see: A. Kochan, *Ekumeniczne spotkanie kultur w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II i Benedykta X*, "Studia Oecumenica" 2010, nr 10, p. 48.

48 Grzegorz Przebinda, analysing the encyclical *Slavorum Apostoli*, wrote: „the Pope strongly emphasizes that both the Brothers from Salonika were 'not only heirs of the faith but also heirs of the culture of Ancient Greece, continued by Byzantium', which made them not only pioneers of inculturation, i.e. on the one hand 'the incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures' and on the other 'the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church'". G. Przebinda, *The Rus and their Saints in the Slavic Teaching of John Paul II. Between History and the Present Day*, "Przegląd Rusycystyczny" 2016, no. 2 (154), pp. 8–9.

49 On the subject of "patronage", see: J. Moskałyk, *Cyryla i Metodego dzieło chrystianizacji Słowian*, "Teologia w Polsce" 2011, t. 5, nr 2, p. 258.

50 More in: P. Rojek, *John Paul II and the Polish Messianism. Introduction to the Liturgy of History*, "Theological Research Volume" 2019, no. 7, pp. 9–27.

51 *Lettera Apostolica. Euntes in mundum...*

52 W. Lipscher, *Teologia polityczna Jana Pawła II*, "Teologia Polityczna" 2005–2006, nr 3, p. 126.

53 Cf. M.A. De Trana, *op.cit.*

54 F.M. Jelly, *Ecumenical Aspects of "Redemptoris Mater"*, "Marian Studies" 1988, vol. 39, p. 116. Also: C.S. Bartnik, *Dogmatyka katolicka*, t. 2, Lublin 2003, p. 392.

time, divided, diverse, and different in its individual parts. It can be seen, for one thing, in his teachings about the destinies, ideas, and missions, which are different for each nation (see the vision of Poland as the Christ of Nations, which, in the meditations of the Slavic Pope, had its origins in Romanticism)<sup>50</sup>. Simultaneously, as the head of the Church, he believed that the road to "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"<sup>51</sup>.

There is one more component of the political theology, fundamental to the spirituality of both the Pope himself and Polish Catholics: the Marian spirit. The fates of the nation have always been related to Mary. As observed by Winfried Lipscher, who examined the history of Poland, "the nation who elected Mary to be their queen also burdens her with duties, expecting aid"<sup>52</sup>. It is for this reason that Mary became the subject of the Pope's political expectations incorporated in his theology.

## V. Between theology and the theology of history

When seeking the theological dimension of the Letter, it is worth to refer it to the broader, and particularly active in that period, output of the Pope<sup>53</sup>. The sixth encyclical of John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, was released a year earlier (25 March 1987). Referring to the teachings of Vatican II, the Pope showed Mary from the perspective of the mystery of Christ and the Church; simultaneously, engaging in a dialogue (with the Protestants in particular) regarding the controversial Marian dogmas, he wanted to present her ecumenical role in "the pilgrim church as the model of faith and [...] her maternal mediation"<sup>54</sup>. In 1987, the Church also celebrated the 1,200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Nicea II. On which occasion, John

Paul II wrote the apostolic letter *Duodecimum Saeculum* (4 December 1987). Within, he presented the traditional Church teaching about the worship of images<sup>55</sup> but also stressed the ecumenical value of the decisions of the Council and encouraged both the Catholics and the Orthodox “to travel again together the road of the undivided Church, [...] in order to rediscover that for which Jesus prayed to the Father (cf. John 17, 11; 20–21), full communion in visible unity”<sup>56</sup>. Then, on 14 February 1988, John Paul II published the message *Magnum Baptismi donum* to Catholics in Ukraine, in which he described the work of Olga and Vladimir, explained the theological correctness of the 1596 Act of Brest, stressed the historicity of the ecumenical mission of the Uniate (Greek Catholic) Church, and praised the faithfulness of its members in the face of persecution. He incorporated it all in the spiritual pilgrimage “to the feet of Our Lady of Vladimir”, who “continually accompanied the pilgrimage of faith of the peoples of ancient Rus”<sup>57</sup>. Similar reflections can be found in subsequent teachings of the Pope as well. In the speech he gave during the 1991 pilgrimage to Poland to the faithful of the Byzantine Ukrainian Church (Przemyśl, 2 June 1991), the Pope referred to his earlier teachings, recalled the heritage of the Baptism of Rus’, the Union of Brest, and the Uniate Church, and wanted to “thank God that the Church in Ukraine could leave the catacombs”. At the same time, he wrote: “By opening wholeheartedly to all followers of Christ, marked by the grace of baptism – we open ourselves in a unique way to our sister Orthodox Churches of the Christian East. I hope that, opening to historical reasons, whose roots date back to the still undivided Church, and to the moral reasons for the existence of your Church, they will join this joy of ours. I also hope that you can rejoice in your freedom in such a way that it will not disturb or disrupt the ecumenical peace, so priceless, with the Orthodox Church”. And immediately added: “During the Visitation Elizabeth said to Mary: ‘And blessed is she who believed

55 P. Bijak, *Jan Paweł II jako Conservator Patrimonium Ecclesiae*, “Studia Gdańskie” 2012, vol. 30, pp. 191–192. More in: B. Kochaniewicz, *Znaczenie ikony w kontekście kultury współczesnej według Jana Pawła II*, “Salvatoris Mater” 2008, nr 10/1, pp. 244–256, also in: *idem*, *Alcuni elementi della teologia dell’icona nell’insegnamento di Giovanni Paolo II*, “Angelicum” 2006, vol. 83, no. 2, pp. 299–313.

56 Jan Paweł II, *List apostolski “Duodecimum saeculum”*, “Vox Patrum” 1990, t. 10, nr 19, p. 560.

57 Cf. W. Mokry, *Obraz Przenajświętszej Bogarodzicy jako Matki Miłosierdzia w życiu duchowym Ukrainy XI–XX w. i w papieskich posłaniach Jana Pawła II do Ukraińców* [in:] *Chrześcijańskie święta i święci w życiu duchowym Ukraińców*, W. Mokry (red.), Kraków 2001, pp. 84–85.

58 Jan Paweł II, *Przemówienie do wiernych kościoła bizantyńsko-ukraińskiego*, "eKai" 1991, <https://ekai.pl/dokumenty/przemowienie-do-wiernych-kosciola-bizantynsko-ukrainskiego> [access: 3.01.2022].

59 J.A. Little, *Redemptoris Mater: The Significance of Mary for Women*, "Marian Studies" 1988, vol. 39, p. 137.

60 J. Stala, J. Vodičar, *The Lay Person and his Christian Vocation in the Teaching of Pope John Paul II*, "The Person and the Challenges" 2019, vol. 9, no. 1, p. 52.

that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord' (Lk 1,45). Let our faith find inspiration in the faith of the Mother of Christ"<sup>58</sup>.

Therefore, referring to the "living Magisterium of the Church" in the interpretation of Scripture, seeing the Church as the depositary – developing in time and space – of Tradition, John Paul II defended the work of the Churches of the East, in particular the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, and wanted to investigate the ecumenical "foundation", the study of which should be the mandatory route of ecumenical dialogue and its associated theological reflection. The Pope put a special stress on the role of Mary, her "journey of faith" which was said to "precede" the Church's apostolic witness and be shared by everyone responding to this witness. He also accentuated the significance of the act of baptism since, as written by Joyce A. Little, "those sent out to baptize all nations do so for the purpose of drawing all of humanity back in to the heart, that is, the faith, of the Church, which is, in reality, a share in Mary's faith"<sup>59</sup>.

It should be stressed that the Polish Pope's meditation on the theological significance of baptism has been the subject of many studies. He believed – as highlighted by researchers – that baptism renews man and restores him to God, that man has the opportunity to become a "new being", becomes more like Christ. This unique "bond with Christ, which stems from faith and the sacraments, gives the relation between man and God a new form"<sup>60</sup>. Reverend Antoni Nadbrzeźny pointed out the Pope's understanding of the act of baptism as a sacrament. In the Letter analysed here, John Paul II understood this sacrament not only in its unitarian but also its community dimension "as a salvation-history and social event of the baptism of a nation". Thus, for the Pope, the Baptism of Rus' was not just a political event, it was rather a "sacramental reality par excellence, which involved introducing people into the intra-Trinitarian life of God". Simultaneously, he stressed the fact that Prince

Vladimir accepted baptism from Constantinople in 988, in the period when the Church was still undivided<sup>61</sup>. The primary goal, therefore, should be the return to full unity of the Church of the East and West. This unity, however, should not be understood as a “fusion, but a dialectic integration of unity in diversity”. As Nadbrzeźny argued, “The universal and particular dimensions are the two main sources of the Church’s life. Unity and diversity, as well as tradition and modernity are among the factors which enable the Church to be one and diverse at the same time”<sup>62</sup>.

Finally – while examining the theological meditations of the Pope found in the Letter – one can easily see that they are permeated with history. As Rev. Tomasz Jelonek stated, John Paul II was not a theoretician of the theology of history. He believed that history – as the implementation of the Providential plan – has a meaning, that – with appropriate methods – the human history must be deciphered. However, cognizing this “meaning of history” is linked with an attitude toward concrete action<sup>63</sup>. Since this “meaning”, discussed in the eschatological context, always has a soteriological dimension, the cognition is utterly pragmatic in nature<sup>64</sup>. The Pope includes “baptism” in God’s economy of salvation, which has a history of its own. As observed by Agnieszka Kurnik, that act was for him an “incorporation into the mystical Body of Christ”, it was “the sign of belonging to the Church as the community of the faithful”. Hence, for John Paul II, all historical thinking should be seen as “transilluminated” by the baptism<sup>65</sup>. Without that act, “the history of individual peoples and nations would merely be a permanent consent to death”. It is in the broader understanding of history – included in that economy of salvation – the actual meanings of facts and historical processes can be recognized<sup>66</sup>.

Obviously, attempts to achieve Christian unity were an important historical component of the Providential economy of salvation. For God indicated – through the

61 A. Nadbrzeźny, *Papież Słowianin do braci Słowian. Fenomen słów i spotkań*, “Teologia w Polsce” 2012, t. 6, nr 1, p. 107.

62 *Ibidem*, p. 109.

63 T. Jelonek, *Teologia historii w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II*, 1980, “Ruch Biblijny i Liturgiczny” 1980, t. 33, nr 1 (15), p. 16.

64 As explained by Rev. Roman Kuligowski: “God’s design is realized in time, in history [...] It does not mean, however, that the history of the world in itself is the source of salvation. Salvation is the matter of grace. In any way, the correct interpretation of history is impossible if one does not sufficiently know the facts and omits their theological aspect. It is facts, not conjectures or unreliable, incomplete explanations, which should find their place in the examination of conscience”. R. Kuligowski, “Oczyszczenie pamięci” a nowy humanizm w myśli Jana Pawła II, “Studia Pastoralne” 2006, nr 2, p. 225.

65 A. Kurnik, *Jana Pawła II teologia historii* [in:] *Jan Paweł II. Posługa myślenia*, t. 2, B. Kastelik, A. Krupka, R. Woźniak (red.), Kraków 2015, pp. 198–199.

66 The Pope indicated that, “seen only as the passage of generations in time, deprived of the dimensions of redemption and salvation, history is but an empty sequence of temporal events, a witness of a linear, horizontal existence towards death. Only the willingness to go beyond history in the experience of being baptized transcends our love of the land where we live by contributing to it the truth of the events taking place in the Holy Land. At the same time, it conveys a signal to go beyond time, space, and death, and to include our history in the sacral time. This inclusion stems from the correct recognition of the relation of ‘essential contingency’ of man on God, which is expressed in the first three chapters of Genesis”. *Ibidem*, p. 206.

67 J. Kopania, *Nieosiągalna jedność, czyli dwa wzorce ekumenizmu*, “Fenomen Dobra. Zeszyty Naukowe Centrum Badań im. Edyty Stein” 2015, nr 13/14, p. 402.

68 The Pope believed – as Rev. Moskałyk explained – that this meditation obliged one “to draw conclusions from the period of consent to mutual estrangement”. It is because of the past coexistence that “both sides have, above all, just reasons to benefit from the fruit of having been present together at the source of unity”. To show to the contemporary Christians of the Western and Eastern traditions the belief that – in the historical dimension – “unity is incomparably stronger than the historical division” is an “invaluable gift brought to them regardless of the actual capability of maintaining a complete fidelity towards it”. J. Moskałyk, *Jana Pawła II otwartość na chrześcijański Wschód*, “Teologia Praktyczna” 2009, t. 10, p. 164.

subsequent stages of the Christianization of Rus’, i.e. the work of Cyril and Methodius, Olga, Vladimir, papal missions to Rus’, the Unions of Florence and Brest – possible ways of action which would lead to unity. Even if they did not bring about the intended outcomes, they were important elements of the Providential plan. It would be a mistake, however, to show these stages in the context of linear time progressing towards the future. The Union of Brest became a bridge, the creator of the Uniate, or Greek Catholic Church, but it was merely a reference to the Union of Florence, papal missions, and the history of Vladimir, Olga, Cyril and Methodius. Even more so, the lack of Church unity was a component of the Providential economy as well, resulting from human fallibility, which still tells him to oppose the existing belief systems, which then leads to constant division<sup>67</sup>. It must, therefore, be combined with the deep meditation of the Church and the faithful on their own sinfulness, forcing them to reflect on the current methods of ecumenical activities. Reverend Jarosław Moskałyk, who analysed the Letter in the context of “looking back” on ecclesial, Catholic–Orthodox misunderstandings, indicated that the Pope believed that a critical evaluation “of what was despicable can only help to shake off the accursed yoke of egotistical intolerance”. Whereas all reflections on the history of “unity” and the reasons of its rejection and “the loss of the original meaning of self-realization in faith” should be the most important component of Christian meditation<sup>68</sup>.

“Unity” – as can be read in the Letter – is inherently tied to the unity of Europe. Without that unity, the peaceful existence of the population could not be ensured. It is an element of political theology as well as of the theology of the Pope. Reverend Jelonek underlined the words of the Pope’s message – based on the teaching of Christ – “blessed are those who introduce peace”. This message also involved calling for “teaching the love of peace”, as peace was to be “the last word of History”. As Jelonek

argued analysing the Pope's words, "this vision is a certain theological vision of history, meant to realize 'the great Plan of Peace revealed by God in Jesus Christ [...] Peace is our work: it calls for our courageous and united action. But it is inseparably and above all a gift of God'"<sup>69</sup>. Most interestingly, in the Letter analysed here, "peace" is included in the context of unification. The Pope was convinced that efforts towards achieving peace had to take the same course as the process of inter-ecclesial dialogue. Churches unified, or engaged in a unification dialogue, cease to generate ethnic, national, or denominational problems and, at the same time, teach this dialogicality to societies and enforce using its methods in the political life.

One more issue: one cannot analyse the Letter and its understanding of God's economy of salvation without the Pope's Mariology (or the link to the typically Polish Marian spirit)<sup>70</sup>. The relation of Christ towards Mary, perceived by the Pope, is the key to understanding his theology of history. This meditation, which ensued from the Mariology of Vatican II<sup>71</sup>, launched a new dimension of Mariological study (also in the context of the dialogue with Protestants), pursued by subsequent popes<sup>72</sup>. John Paul II, however, added a new component to it. As explained by Rev. Stanisław Rabiej, it involved the question of the mediation of Mary between man and God. Both in the thought of Paul VI and in the conciliar teachings – on the grounds of ecumenical dialogue (particularly related to Protestant Mariology) – the role of mediator was reserved solely for the person of Jesus Christ. Whereas *Redemptoris Mater* contains a clear mention of the mediation of Mary. As Rev. Rabiej explained, "The Pope underlines that Mary mediates as the Mother. Her mediation is intercessory, i.e. prayerful, supplicatory, and does not diminish the sole mediation of Jesus since it is entirely dependent on Him, reveals His power, because Jesus Christ is one mediator between God and human-kind (cf. 1 Tim. 2, 5–6)"<sup>73</sup>. In the context of the above

69 T. Jelonek, *op.cit.*, pp. 16–17; parts of English translation after: John Paul II, *Message of His Holiness John Paul II for the Celebration of the Day of Peace*, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_19781221\\_xii-world-day-for-peace.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19781221_xii-world-day-for-peace.html) [access: 3.01.2022].

70 In the words of Rev. Jelonek, "the woman from Genesis and the Apocalypse, clothed with the sun, a great portent in heaven, combines in John Paul II's theological vision with that which is extremely important to him and is the sense of his life expressed in his short episcopal motto: Totus Tuus. He calls himself a man of trust and considers this attitude towards the Mother of Christ, whom in his encyclical *Redemptor hominis* he called 'the Mother in whom we trust', as the attitude consistently resultant from the deciphered meaning of history". *Encyclical Redemptor hominis*, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 9in., quoted after T. Jelonek, *op.cit.*, p. 19.

71 For the main currents in the Mariology of the Second Vatican Council, see: L. Szewczyk, *Recepcja mariologii Vaticanum II w polskiej teorii i praktyce homiletycznej*, "Salvatoris Mater" 2014, t. 16, nr 1–4, pp. 276–279. More in: P. McPartlan, *John Paul II and Vatican II* [in:] *The Vision of John Paul II: Assessing His Thought and Influence*, G. Mannion (ed.), Chicago 1979, pp. 45–61.

72 L. Balter, *Sobór watykański II w nauce Jana Pawła II*, "Łódzkie Studia Teologiczne" 2005, nr 14, p. 16.

73 S. Rabiej, *Ekumeniczny wymiar mariologii*, "Studia Oecumenica" 2017, nr 17, p. 387.

74 Czesław Stanisław Bartnik wrote: "As long as Jesus Christ is the kernel, the key, and the meaning of world history, Mary creates a certain auxiliary, central environment which joins Christ directly with history, so to say a womb of history, from which the Main Event is born. [...] As a representative of humankind, she was the work of the Father, the Person-creatin Word, and the Holy Spirit, who supplies humans with all goods (Gen. 1, 2)", C.S. Bartnik, *Matka Boża*, Lublin 2012, p. 237.

75 Still as Karol Wojtyła, the Pope explained: "The Church, the People of God, senses ever more profoundly that she is being called to this unity. The Church, the People of God, is at the same time the Mystical Body of Christ. St Paul likened the Church to the human body in order to describe more clearly its life and its unity. The human body is given its life and its unity by the mother. Mary, by the working of the Holy Spirit [cf. Lk 1, 35], gave unity to the human body of Christ. And that is why our hope today turns in a special way towards her, in these times of ours when the Mystical Body of Christ is being more fully reconstituted in unity". K. Wojtyła, *Znak sprzeciwu*, Paris 1980, pp. 188–189; english translation: K. Wojtyła, *Sign of contradiction*, New York 1979, p. 206.

76 *Petri Damiani Vita Beati Romualdi*, Roma 1957.

77 *Lamperti Monachi Hersfeldensis Opera (Scriptores rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum ex Monumentis Germaniae historicis separatim editi)*, Hannover 1894; *Gregorii VII registrum*. II, 74 [in:] *Epistulae selectae in usum scholarum ex Monumentis Germaniae Historicis separatim editae*, vol. II, E. Caspar (ed.), Berlin 1955, pp. 236–237.

78 *Повесть временных лет*, Д.С. Лихачев (ред.), Москва–Ленинград 1950.

analyses, it should be stressed that the Pope's Mariology determined his theology of history. In the encyclical letter *Redemptoris Mater* one can find not only the statement that the "Mother of the Redeemer has a precise place in the plan of salvation" but also witnesses of her mediation and unique presence in the "mystery of Christ and his Church"<sup>74</sup>.

It is worth to stress, however, that the Marian meditation, the unique relationship between Christ and Mary not only allows one to understand God's plan of salvation but also the process of the unification of Churches, which is part of this plan<sup>75</sup>. Browsing the encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, one can notice how much the Pope was focused on the unifying role of Mary. The Mother of Christ, by becoming "our Mother", is also the Mother of Church unity. It is only through her that the Churches of the East and West can achieve unity, only through her Person the ecumenical dimension of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church can be understood. No wonder then that the Millennium celebrations in Poland were held in Jasna Góra, in front of the icon of Our Lady of Częstochowa, which has its roots in Byzantium and Rome, Orthodoxy and Catholicism, Poland and Ukraine.

## VI. Between the theology of history, historiography, and the theology of history

The Letter analysed here has one more component: the footnotes with references to theological and historical literature. For this reason, besides its political-scientific and theological dimensions, it gains a historiographical one. Most interestingly, the Pope referred to the literature created in Catholic (lives of the saints<sup>76</sup> and collections of Church sources<sup>77</sup>), Ruthenian Orthodox (*Povest' vremennykh let*<sup>78</sup> and its compilation, the *Nikon Chronicle*<sup>79</sup>), and Russian environment (*Lives of saints* by Filaret Gumilevsky<sup>80</sup>). It is worth to underline – as

already pointed out in the introduction to this paper – that the Letter has a certain vision of history, based on specific historical studies, and was written in view of the polemic – important to Central–Eastern Europe – for the heritage of St Vladimir. It should be recalled that John Paul II considered Greek Catholics, Orthodox Christians in Ukraine, as well as Orthodox Russians and Belarusians as the heirs of the tradition of St Vladimir and later of the Kievan Rus’<sup>81</sup>. This view was foreign to the intellectuals of the time. For the Catholic Church, as the Baptism took place in the period of Church unity, albeit under the Eastern rite, it could be argued that, since there was a unity in the past, it should be cultivated at present. Greek Catholics claimed that the baptism of Rus’ was actually the baptism of Ukraine only, therefore Orthodox Russians should not celebrate the millennium of Christianity in 1988. Whereas Russians, particularly the Orthodox hierarchs, pointed out that Greek Catholics – as the heirs of the Union of Brest – were traitors to the Orthodoxy and so had no authority to organize the Millennium celebrations. This dispute, however, did not originate in present times. Individual interpretations were repeated when historical Catholic–Orthodox relations were discussed, concerning among other things the Church schism, Union of Florence, Union of Brest, history of the Uniate Church in the Commonwealth and after its fall, the so-called unifications of Uniates with Orthodoxy (1839, 1875, 1946). So, references to the analysed topics can be found in Catholic historiography, but also in homiletics and polemical writings, deeply infused with a certain theology of history. It can be found, therefore, in the works by Stanisław Orzechowski, Piotr Warszewicki, Jerzy Radziwiłł, Benedykt Herbst, and Piotr Skarga, the icon of the Union movement in the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Commonwealth. In his work entitled “On the unity of God’s Church under one shepherd and on the Greek and Ruthenian departure from this unity”<sup>82</sup>, he proposed a theological and historical, “unification” interpretation

79 Полное собрание русских летописей, т. 9: Никоновская летопись, А.Ф. Бычкова (ред.), Санкт Петербург 1862.

80 Филарет (Гумилевский), *Жития святых, чтимых Православной Церковью, с сведениями о праздниках Господских и Богородичных и о явленных чудотворных иконах*, Санкт Петербург 1900 (1-е издание 1885, 2-е издание 1892).

81 G. Przebinda, *The Rus...*, p. 11.

82 P. Skarga, *O jedności Kościoła Bożego pod jednym pasterzem i o greckiem i ruskiem od tej jedności odstąpieniu*, wydanie 6 oraz Synod Brzeski i Obrona Synodu Brzeskiego przez tegoż autora, Kraków 1885.

83 *Ibidem*, p. 124, and the analyses in В. Шевченко, *Православно-католицька полеміка та проблеми унійності в житті Русь-України доберестьєвського періоду*, Київ 2001, pp. 233–234.

84 P. Skarga, *Synod Brzeski i Obrona Synodu Brzeskiego przez tegoż autora*, Kraków 1885, p. 285.

85 Л. Тимошенко, *Інтриги і конфлікти в історії укладення Берестейської унії у світлі документальних джерел та полемічної літератури*, “Соціум. Альманах соціальної історії” 2015, т. 11–12, pp. 185–209.

86 More in: J. Stradomski, *Idea unii kościelnej czy jedności Kościoła? O polise-mantyczności dyskursu w polsko-ruskiej polemice religijnej w dawnej Rzeczypospolitej (2. poł. XVI–XVII w.)*, “Kultura Słowian. Rocznik Komisji Kultury Słowian PAU” 2021, t. 17, pp. 9–31.

87 В. Бондарчук, *Дискусія щодо перебування Берестейського собору 1596 р. у полемічних творах “Апокрисис” та “Антиризис”: порівняльний аналіз*, “Наукові записки Національного університету Острозька академія. Сер.: Історичне релігієзнавство” 2012, т. 6, pp. 76–88.

of Catholic–Orthodox relations, extremely important to understand the topics discussed in this article. He wanted to demonstrate that the 988 Baptism of Rus’ took place in the time of Church unity, and the “Greeks” deceived the Ruthenian nation by explaining that the holy unity was torn apart by the dignitaries at Rome, not the patriarchs<sup>83</sup>. Yet neither the Orthodox nor the Catholics had ever forgotten that unity. It is worth noting that Skarga referred in his narration to the Union of Florence, rejected by the Orthodox, which necessarily led to the fall of Constantinople and the subjugation of the Orthodox Church to the Tsars in Moscow. Whereas the list of unifications and schisms was meant to show that the announced union would not be anything new or unknown; rather, it would be the continuation of unification traditions, the return of the Ruthenians baptized under Catholicism to Roman sources<sup>84</sup>.

The obvious result of the union confirmed in 1596 in Brest was the creation of the Uniate Church. It also led to the creation of Uniate historiography, written by Basilian intellectuals. The theological and historiographical polemic which occurred between the Orthodox and the Uniates produced a certain vision of history. The proponents of the act of union intended it to regulate all the issues of the Orthodox in the Commonwealth. It was quickly politicized, however, mired in the network of personal manoeuvrings, in which both secular magnates and hierarchs participated<sup>85</sup>. These manoeuvrings led to the crystallization of two blocks – Uniate and Orthodox – which differed in political goals, social following, and the perceptions of their own past<sup>86</sup>. It affected the Commonwealth itself, which suffered from denomination-based reciprocal troubles (Cossacks) and witnessed the multi-faceted Brest-related polemic, in which both the Orthodox and the Catholics competed to produce motives to smear the other party<sup>87</sup>. This polemic – which turned around the questions of faith and salvation – not only separated the Uniates from the Orthodox

“with an impenetrable wall of injury and incomprehension”, of adopting the language of the Catholic theology as well as the historiosophy found in the Catholic historiography<sup>88</sup>. The Orthodox wanted to show that the union was imposed by the king and Jesuits, that it was a case unprecedented in Rus'. Whereas the Uniates claimed that the unity with the Catholic Church was not established in Brest but rather recalled, as it existed in the past and only referred to such earlier acts as the Union of Florence and the Baptism of Vladimir<sup>89</sup>. The Ruthenians accepted Christianity under the Eastern rite, yet during the period of Church unity (Hipacy Pocij, Leon Kreuza-Rzewuski, Joachim Morochowski, Ignacy Kulczyński)<sup>90</sup>. Whereas in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, due to the development of historical science, were subjected to “scientification”. Still – in my opinion – even though researchers competed to create various narrations, sought new sources, and changed research methods, the main interpretation current stayed unchanged (Ignacy Stebelski, Augustin Theiner, Edward Likowski)<sup>91</sup>, while the historiography perceived in this way also inspired the “historical” contexts of Catholic theological deliberations (Andrzej Szeptycki, Josyf Slipyj, Józef Glemp, Lubomyr Huzar)<sup>92</sup>.

No wonder then that the Orthodox side was bound to reject such a constructed view of history. Even more so, it had to create a historiosophical counterproposal, which could also support all possible theological arguments. Attempts of historical counter-interpretations can be found in the works of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>-century Orthodox writers (Christopher Filaleta, Zachariasz Kopystyński, Grigori Konisski)<sup>93</sup>. For the Orthodox, the Union was the tool of brutal, supra-historical, and Rome-controlled Latinization and Polonization of Ruthenian lands, reinforced by “Lachian lords” and Roman Catholic clergy. Through their narrations, Orthodox Ruthenians tried to show that the baptism of Vladimir took place in the period of not Church unity but rather reciprocal, interdenominational accusations and enmity. Even more so,

88 M. Melnyk, *Łacińskie tradycje we Wschodnich Kościołach katolickich*, “Acta Polono-Ruthenica” 2001, nr 6, p. 204.

89 A. Brückner, *Spory o unię w dawnej literaturze*, “Kwartalnik Historyczny: Organ Towarzystwa Historycznego” 1896, t. 10, nr 3, pp. 578–644.

90 M. Czech, *Chryścianizacja Rusi a literatura polemiczna unicko-prawosławna (do połowy XVII wieku)*, “Chrześcijanin w Świecie” 1988, nr 8/9, pp. 176–189.

91 В.В. Старостенко, *Проблема Брестской церковной унии в белорусской общественно-философской мысли конца XVI в. – начала XVII в.* [in:] *750 определений религии: история символизаций и интерпретаций*, Е.И. Аринина (ред.), Владимир 2014, p. 429. Also in: N. Morawiec, *Ks. Edward Likowski jako historyk Unii Brzeskiej* [in:] *Wokół archeologii słów i ich funkcjonowania. Księga jubileuszowa ofiarowana Profesorowi Andrzejowi Bańkowskiemu*, S. Podobiński, M. Lesz-Duk (red.), Częstochowa 2001, pp. 767–785.

92 Cf. С. Кляк, *Ідентичність Української католицької церкви візантійського обряду в контексті її вселенськості*, “Українське релігієзнавство” 2002, № 24, pp. 75–85.

93 Cf. N. Morawiec, *Konstrukcja/dekonstrukcja jedności. Jan Długosz w polemice prawosławno-katolickiej (na przykładzie twórczości historycznej Jerzego Koniskiego)* [in:] *Recepcja twórczości Jana Długosza w historiografii krajów europejskich*, M. Antoniewicz, N. Morawiec (red.), Częstochowa 2019, pp. 139–160.

94 More in: Н.О. Синкевич, *Поэтическое Крещение Руси: становление и развитие сюжета в православных сочинениях первой половины XVII в.*, “Труды Киевской Духовной Академии” 2013, № 19, pp. 43–60.

95 N. Morawiec, *Unionizacja i latynizacja w myśli historycznej rosyjskiego prawosławia (1805–1917)* [in: *Dziedzictwo chrześcijańskiego Wschodu i Zachodu*, U. Cierniak, J. Grabowski (red.), Częstochowa 2006, pp. 459–468. Also in: Ю. Кораблёв, *Брестская уния в Российской историографии* [in: *Государства Центральной и Восточной Европы в исторической перспективе: сб. научн. ст по мат. II Междунар. научн. конф., Пинск 30 ноября – 1 декабря 2018 г.*, т. 3, Р.Б. Гагуа (ред.), Пинск 2018, pp. 84–88.

96 Н.Ю. Сухова, *Крещение святого князя Владимира и Русской земли: научно-критическое осмысление русским “школьным” богословием (1880–1910-е гг.)* [in: *Древняя Русь: во времени, в личностях, в идеях*, т. 3, Санкт-Петербург 2015, pp. 209–230. Also in: В.И. Стариков, *Православная Россия путь возрождения (к 1025 – летию Крещения Руси)*, “Вестник Брестского государственного технического университета” 2013, № 6, pp. 83–87.

97 A. Sorokowski, *The Millennium. A Ukrainian Perspective*, “Religion in Communist Lands” 1987, т. 15, № 3, pp. 258–259.

multiple acts of Christianization were produced, and attempts were made to show that they, too, arose in the periods of Church fragmentation (in Cyril and Methodius, Askold and Dir, or Olga’s times)<sup>94</sup>. Such an interpretation became binding in Orthodox historiography: it was inherited by first Church then secular Russian intellectuals (Filaret Gumilevsky, Macarius Bulgakov, Mikhail Koyalovich, Anton Kartashev)<sup>95</sup>. Simultaneously, however, a feedback relationship was taking place: historiographic visions impregnated theological works referring to history (Philaret Drozdov, Pavel Florensky, Kirill I Gundyayev)<sup>96</sup>.

It should be noted that the prevalence of two visions of history (Orthodox and Catholic) has been the cause of all differences found in both old and modern intellectual output. It also applies to the newest works – considered as eminently scientific – since their authors (often distant from the faith and Church) genetically copy the interpretations of their “masters” and unknowingly adopt the dislike of their “enemies”.

Let us return to the Letter analysed here. Coincidentally, Orthodox Russians in particular have always considered the topic of unification in a historical context. Therefore, all accounts of the Pope about the baptism of Rus’ performed in the period of Church unity, the Union of Brest referring to the Act of Florence, or the work of Vladimir, must have raised protests. It was particularly visible in the Millennial period, where the Soviet decision-makers themselves – opponents of religion – supported the Russian–Orthodox interpretation of history (and the union). Raising the historical prestige of the Orthodox Church, they assumed that other, non-Russian yet Orthodox nations (particularly Belarusians and Ukrainians) belonged to it<sup>97</sup>. The Pope, therefore – by inserting his reflections in a certain historical pattern – risked unfavourable reception by Russian and Orthodox readers. The reaction was, indeed, immediate. On 6 June, the second day of the celebrations of the Millennium

of the Baptism of Rus' (5–21 June 1988), in the cathedral of the Trinity Lavra of St Sergius in Zagorsk, during the session of the Local Council, Metropolitan Filaret of Kyiv held the lecture entitled “The Millennium of the Baptism of Rus’” in which he recounted the history of the Orthodoxy in Rus', from the baptism of Vladimir to present times<sup>98</sup>. In the same year, Philaret (Vakhromeyev), Metropolitan of Minsk and all Belarus, wrote on this subject in a similar tone<sup>99</sup>. Their views were based on the Orthodox understanding of history, highly contrary to the Pope and the Catholics. Such an interpretation – in the face of further support for Greek Catholics, also in independent Ukraine<sup>100</sup> – prevailed in the following years. Scholars (even Russian ones) were surprised that the hierarchs entirely omitted their contemporary studies of secular historians devoted to the history of Rus' and its Christianization<sup>101</sup>. It is easy to explain: when preparing their materials, because they wanted to skip the interpretations contaminated – in their opinion – by the atheist and Marxist approach, they based their accounts on 19<sup>th</sup>-century narrations.

## VII. Conclusion

To summarize the considerations, let us return to the research perspective suggested by the author. An attempt was made to interpret the Pope's vision of history in the analysed Letter by referring to the studies in political theology, theology of history, and history of historiography. It seems that the Letter (and particularly the passage about history it contains) constitutes a multi-level interpretation structure, supports the political, theological, and historiosophical meditations of John Paul II, and crystallizes them in his reflections on political theology and the theology of history. For the Pope, Church unity was inherently linked with the unity of Europe. Without that unity, it was not possible to ensure the peaceful (co-)existence of the European

98 M. Muszyński, *Rosyjski Kościół prawosławny w epoce patriarchy Pimena*, “Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne” 2004, t. 17, p. 215.

99 Филарет (митрополит Минский и Белорусский), *1000-летие крещения Руси – выдающееся событие отечественной и мировой истории*, “Вопросы истории” 1988, № 5, pp. 102–110.

100 More in: P. Kowal, *Kwestia ukraińska podczas IV pielgrzymki Jana Pawła II do Polski*, “Przegląd Religioznawczy” 2018, nr 3 (269), pp. 119–141. Also in: A. Kulczycki, *Rola Kościoła rzymskokatolickiego i greckokatolickiego na Ukrainie w stosunkach polsko-ukraińskich w latach 1989–2014*, “Rzeszowskie Studia Socjologiczne” 2015, nr 5, pp. 78–92. Also in: K. Jędraszczyk, *Cerkiew w życiu społeczno-politycznym Ukrainy w latach 1991–2010*, “Studia Europaea Gnesnensia” 2011, nr 3, pp. 55–77.

101 Н.И. Солнцев, “Крещение Руси”: история юбилеев и мемориальная политика, “Вестник Нижегородского университета им. Н.И. Лобачевского” 2012, № 6, p. 38.

community. The Pope believed that failing to regulate the question of the Churches of the East, particularly the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, could lead to not only denominational but also national conflicts in the future. It was a message directed primarily to the Kremlin, since the future fates of Catholics, especially Greek Catholics, depended on the relations with Gorbachev. Simultaneously, this meditation was an important component of the Pope's theology of history. John Paul II incorporated the baptism of Vladimir and other acts of the Christianization of Rus' (Cyril and Methodius, Olga) and the subsequent events (Union of Florence, Union of Brest) in the Providential economy of salvation and the unifying mediation of Mary. It was an extremely important message, in particular to the Russian Orthodox hierarchy. The Pope argued that Greek Catholics, as the heirs of the Unions of Brest and Florence, the baptism of Vladimir, and the work of Cyril and Methodius, are part of the Providential plan. It is known that, due to the dialogue held with the Orthodox Church at the time, the question was raised if the existence of the Greek Catholic Church was justified. Whereas the Pope based his account in the tradition of Catholic historiography – in spite, let us underline, of the Orthodox historiography – indicating the act of the Union of Brest as the continuation of past unity. Therefore, the Greek Catholics – as an important subject of the historical process – could not be divided based on their belonging to the Catholic or Orthodox Church territory. Even more so, for the author of the Letter, recalling the tradition of the thousand years of Christianity in Rus' should be important for both the Ukrainians and the Russians because it constructed in both nations a sense of common Christian identity, belonging to a civilisation, and the importance of carrying out the mission of evangelization to “the shores of the Pacific Ocean and beyond”. The importance of this message can be understood if one realizes that it was articulated before

the official talks the Vatican delegation with Gorbachev and the hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church had begun, before the Millennium celebrations in the USSR and in Poland (Jasna Góra).

Such an interpretation – as indicated above – not only provoked Orthodox Russians to scientific polemics but also inflamed the denominational discourse. It was analysed in the context of the Russian–Orthodox historical interpretation, which perceived the relation between Catholicism and Orthodoxy differently and provided a different role of Ukraine in relation to Russia. Yet this narration could not satisfy the Ukrainian Greek Catholics either. The opening of Vatican to Moscow, the establishment of the dialogue between Roman Catholicism and Russian Orthodoxy suggested revising the view of Uniates (Greek Catholics) as the only heirs of the baptism of Vladimir and the ecumenical “bridge” to the so-called East. However, the narration predicted their national and denominational subjective independence and a significant role in the future unified Europe.

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