

# Ecumenism encyclical discusses pope's role

By Cindy Wooden  
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — As a concrete sign of his commitment to Christian unity, Pope John Paul II called for a new discussion of one of the thorniest issues dividing Christians: the authority and ministry of the pope.

In an encyclical letter on ecumenism released May 30 at the Vatican, Pope John Paul said the unity of all Christians is God's will and is at the heart of the mission Christ entrusted to his followers.

The encyclical, "Ut Unum Sint" ("That They May Be One"), ends with a call to "everyone to renew their commitment to work for full and visible communion" and with a specific exhortation to the world's Catholic bishops "to be especially mindful" of their mission and duty to work for Christian unity.

The pope apologized for times when Catholics have contributed to the divisions among Christians and for ways in which Catholics have contributed to other Christians' difficulty in accepting the ministry of the bishop of Rome.

"The Catholic Church's conviction that in the ministry of the bishop of Rome she has preserved, in fidelity to the apostolic tradition and the faith of the Fathers, the visible sign and guarantor of unity constitutes a difficulty for most other Christians, whose memory is marked by certain painful recollections," he wrote.

"To the extent that we are responsible for these, I join my predecessor Paul VI in asking forgiveness," the pope said. When Christians enter into a dialogue

with one another, he said, both sides must make an examination of conscience because division "is an evil from which we need to be healed."

"All the sins of the world were gathered up in the saving sacrifice of Christ, including the sins committed against the church's unity: the sins of Christians, those of the pastors no less than those of the lay faithful," he said.

Christians must enter into dialogue motivated by love and with a humble awareness that mistakes and offenses were made by both sides, the pope said.

In that spirit, he said, legitimate differences will be seen as sources of enrichment for the entire Christian community rather than as obstacles to unity or even sources of tension and conflict.

"Legitimate diversity is in no way opposed to the church's unity, but rather enhances her splendor and contributes greatly to the fulfillment of her mission," the pope said.

At the same time, the search for Christian unity must be a search for the truth about Christ and his will for the community of believers, the pope said.

"To uphold a vision of unity which takes account of all the demands of revealed truth does not mean to put a brake on the ecumenical movement," he said. "On the contrary, it means preventing it from settling for apparent solutions which would lead to no firm and solid results."

True Christian unity must include a common understanding of the profession of faith and the sacraments as well as bonds of communion between members of the hierarchy, he said.



Reuters/RNS  
At the Vatican May 29, Pope John Paul II puts his signature on his latest encyclical, 'Ut Unum Sint' ('That They May Be One').

## Plea for Christian unity marks 12th major letter over 16 years

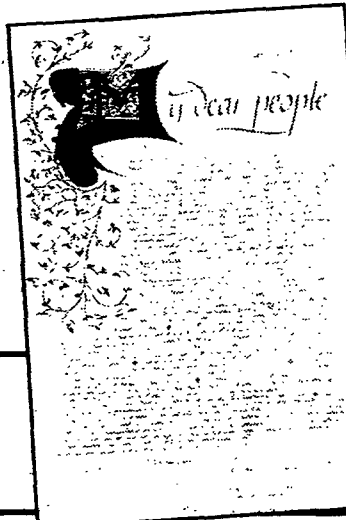
WASHINGTON (CNS) — "Ut Unum Sint" is Pope John Paul II's 12th encyclical in his 16 years and seven months as pope. Here is a chronological list of all his encyclicals.

1. "Redemptor Hominis" ("The Redeemer of Man"), 1979: On Jesus Christ and the dignity his redemption brings to the human race.
2. "Dives in Misericordia" ("Rich in Mercy"), 1980: On God the Father and the meaning of God's mercy.
3. "Laborem Exercens" ("On Human Work"), 1981: Social encyclical on workers' rights and dignity marking the 90th anniversary of Pope Leo XII's "Rerum Novarum."
4. "Slavorum Apostoli" ("The Apostles of the Slavs"), 1985: Affirming Eastern Europe's Christian culture in a commemoration of Sts. Cyril and Methodius on the 1,100th anniversary of St. Methodius' death.
5. "Dominum et Vivificantem" ("Lord and Giver of Life"), 1986: On the living presence of the Holy Spirit in the church and the world.
6. "Redemptoris Mater" ("Mother of the Redeemer"), 1987: On Mary's role

in the mystery of Christ and in the church.

7. "Sollicitudo Rei Socialis" ("On Social Concerns"), 1987: Second social encyclical, marking 20th anniversary of Pope Paul VI's social encyclical "Populorum Progressio."
8. "Redemptoris Missio" ("The Mission of the Redeemer"), 1988: On spreading the Gospel as the central and permanent mandate of the church.
9. "Centesimus Annus" ("The Hundredth Year"), 1991: Third social encyclical, analyzing the social situation in the light of communism's collapse on the 100th anniversary of "Rerum Novarum."
10. "Veritatis Splendor" ("The Splendor of Truth"), 1993: First papal encyclical in history on the foundations of moral theology.
11. "Evangelium Vitae" ("The Gospel of Life"), 1995: On abortion, euthanasia, embryonic experiments and other threats to human life, its sacredness and dignity.
12. "Ut Unum Sint" ("That They May Be One"), 1995: On the importance of striving for Christian unity.

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