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Declaration

I hereby attest that Saretta Marotta is co-author with me of the contribution "The References to the Council of Florence at Vatican II", which has been published in: B. Hallensleben, A. Arjakovsky (ed.), *Le Concile de Florence (1438/39): une relecture oecuménique / The Council of Florence (1438/39): an Ecumenical Rereading*, (Studia Oecumenica Friburgensia, 99) Münster, Aschendorff 2021, pp. 270-285 (ISBN: 978-3-402-12249-5).

In particular Saretta Marotta is the unique author of paragraphs 1, 2, 4 and 5.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Dr. Peter De Mey

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The References to the Council of Florence at Vatican II

Saretta Marotta – Peter De Mey

1. The references in the Catholic debate before Vatican II

By January 25th, 1959, when John XXIII announced an “ecumenical” Council for the universal Church, inevitably the hope for a “Council of Union” evoked the example of the Council of Florence. Nonetheless, the historical interest in that event dated already back to some years before Roncalli’s announcement. Thanks indeed to the studies of notable Catholic scholars, such as the Jesuits Georg Hofmann¹ and Joseph Gill², both professors at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome, in the 1940s and 1950s an authentic revival of the debate on the event of Florence took place in Catholic theology. These studies, stimulated also by the echo of the first congress of Orthodox theology held in Athens in 1936³, were the origin of a new reflection on Florence, giving perspectives and suggestions for the current ecumenical debate.

In an article published in *Irénikon* in 1949, Dom Olivier Rousseau, Benedictine of Chevetogne, the Belgian monastery since 1926 devoted to the mission to pray and work for the unity of the Church⁴, put the focus on the fact that the decree *Pro Graecis* established the separation between the Catholic and Byzantine rites as canonical. By determining that the Eucharistic sacrifice could be celebrated both with fermented or not fermented bread, and that every priest should consecrate the Eucharistic bread in one of the two forms according to their own rite, the Council, in Rousseau’s opinion, had canonised the separation, given that such “permission” implied as corollary the impossi-

bility of concelebration or, for a Latin priest, to celebrate in the Byzantine rite and, for a Greek priest, to celebrate in the Catholic one:

Le décret de Florence marque donc, dans les relations de Rome avec l’Église orientale, un changement de politique dans la question rituelle; on ne chercha plus à imposer aux Grecs le rite latin. D’autre part, le même décret énonçait le principe d’une cloison étanche entre les rites: l’obligation pour chacun de célébrer l’Eucharistie ou en azyme ou en pain fermenté suivant l’usage de son Église, entraînant la défense du contraire, et en conséquence supprimait toute possibilité de célébrer dans un autre rite que le sien. [...] Il faudrait recourir au Saint-Siège et demander soit autorisation soit dispense.⁵

This assessment of Rousseau was later developed by the Dominican Yves Congar, who, in 1954, insisted attributing to the Council of Florence the responsibility of the canonical separation of the rites, which marked the end of the “healthy pluralism” which characterised the Catholic Church in the previous centuries. The thesis of Congar was that from Florence onwards, the word “rite” was no longer synonymous to a liturgical *consuetudo*, but became an abstract reality, implying distinction and separation. The consequence was the loss of the “espèce de liberté spirituelle, toute respectueuse d’ailleurs, avec laquelle on traitait la diversité des célébrations concrètes” and, most importantly, the fact that the distinction of the rites progressively became the evident sign of the separation of the Churches:

Jusque dans la seconde moitié du VI^e siècle, au-delà encore jusqu’au début du XIII^e siècle, on passait facilement de l’Orient à l’Occident et vice versa, en célébrant avec ceux d’ici et de là selon leur façon de célébrer et leur langue. Au VI^e siècle à Rome, lorsqu’on amenait un enfant au baptistère, l’acolyte demandait: Dans quelle langue confesse-t-il Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ? Suivant la réponse, il récitait le symbole en grec ou en latin. Sain pluralisme. [...] *Ritus* a désigné, avant l’époque moderne, un rite concret, une façon de célébrer, l’expression concrète de la foi. Le concile de Florence dit, en ce même sens, *consuetudo*. Depuis lors [Florence] - depuis quand au juste? - le rite est devenu une réalité abstraite, une chose en soi; on l’a réifié, on en a fait une entité: il y a le rite oriental. Sans doute ce changement est-il venu à cause, précisément, de la séparation. [...] La question de rite s’est identifiée à la question même de l’Église. [...] Dans l’état présent de séparation, on absolutise exagérément des choses, certes très importantes, pas absolues cependant; ici l’organisation, avec ce qu’elle engage d’administratif et de juridique, là le rite [...] A

1 The many essays published by Georg Hofmann (1885-1956) around the Council of Florence are listed in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 21 (1955) pp. 7-14.

2 J. Gill SJ, *The Council of Florence*, Cambridge 1959. The studies of Joseph Gill were quite influential at the eve of Vatican II: he was also invited to give a lecture at the *Journées œcuméniques* of Chevetogne in 1960 and even the votum sent by the bishop of Paderborn Lorenz Jaeger to the antepreparatory commission of the Council referred to his work, so that Gill’s book is now quoted in the *Acta et Documenta* (AD 1.2.1, p. 641).

3 H.S. Alivisatos (ed.), *Procès-verbaux du premier congrès de théologie orthodoxe à Athènes (29 Novembre – 6 Décembre 1936)*, Athènes 1939.

4 J. Mortiau, R. Loonbeek, *Dom Lambert Beauduin. Visionnaire et précurseur (1873-1960). Un moine au cœur libre*, Paris 2005.

5 O. Rousseau, *La question des rites entre Grecs et Latins des premiers siècles au concile de Florence*, in: *Irénikon* 22 (1949) pp. 233-269, here p. 268.

notre avis, seul le rétablissement de l'unité et de la communion pourrait rendre aux chrétiens cette espèce de liberté dans le respect qui semble bien avoir régné dans les six ou huit premiers siècles.⁶

Congar used the expression "estrangement" to describe the disaffection and alienation which had taken place between the Greek and the Latin theology and which the Council of Florence tried to overcome. This expression was several years later directly quoted by the Orthodox theologian of the St. Serge Institute in Paris Jean Meyendorff, who stressed the lack in Florence of a common theological language and namely the lack of a "critère ecclésiologique commun", that is a shared scale of priority of ecclesiological themes which could have permitted them to understand each other. That was, according to Meyendorff, the unique "condition for a true union":

L'"estrangement", si bien défini par le P. Congar, privait Grecs et Latins d'un langage commun qui leur aurait permis de s'entendre. Mais c'était là la condition d'une vraie union. [...] Le rejet final du concile de Florence par l'Église d'Orient montre clairement l'absence, alors comme aujourd'hui, d'un critère ecclésiologique commun entre les deux Églises. Notre époque voit s'engager sur ce point le vrai dialogue, dont les éléments divers peuvent être aujourd'hui traités dans une meilleure perspective historique et en dehors de la malsaine atmosphère de pressions politiques qui régnait à Florence. Sachons profiter des leçons du passé.⁷

It thus becomes clear that the historical debate on the significance of the Council of Florence was a means to define the future agenda of the ecumenical efforts, during years characterised by the "grâce œcuménique faite à notre siècle".⁸ Florence however could also refer to a particular method. According indeed to the studies of Joseph Gill, it was the weight of the patristic argumentation, which led, after long disputes, to the agreement between the Greeks and the Latins about the question of the *Filioque*. Underlining the crucial role of Patristics as responsible for the success of the theological discussion in Florence, the Jesuit Gill was obviously encouraging the *Ressourcement* of his time

6 Y. Congar op, *Neuf cents ans après. Notes sur le « Schisme oriental »*, in: 1054-1954. *L'Église et les Églises. Neuf siècles de douloureuse séparation entre l'Orient et l'Occident. Études et travaux sur l'Unité chrétienne offerts à Dom Lambert Beauduin*, Chevetogne 1954, pp. 3-95, here pp. 39-41.

7 J. Meyendorff, *Byzance et Rome: les tentatives d'union*, in: *Découverte de l'œcuménisme*, Paris 1961, pp. 324-334, here pp. 333-334.

8 So Congar in his preface to Y.-M. Congar, *Chrétiens en dialogue. Contributions catholiques à l'œcuménisme*, Paris 1964, p. XXXVI.

as a way for overcoming the "estrangement".⁹ Another interesting point in Gill's analysis is his thesis according to which the Council of Florence constituted not only the last chance to close the gap separating Eastern from Western Christendom, but also the last (and failed) chance for the Catholic Church to reform itself, in consequence of the fact that the Council "secured the victory for the popes in the struggle of papacy versus council". Suggesting indirectly the binding between ecumenism and synodality, Gill affirmed indeed in his book:

The Council of Florence made the Reformation inevitable. [...] Before it, the cry heard on all sides was "Reform in head and members", to be achieved by a General Council that as regards faith, heresy and reform was superior to a pope. After it, though the need for reform was no less great, the demand for it was less vocal, and the definition of Florence about the primacy of the papacy had dealt a death-blow to conciliarism.¹⁰

2. The references to Florence in the Antepreparatory and Preparatory Phases of Vatican II

After the announcement of Vatican II, as already said, Florence was inevitably evoked as a term of comparison for the ecumenical aim prefigured by pope John XXIII, in particular concerning the matter about the presence of non-Catholics at the Council. In an article published for the bulletin of the Russian movement of Christian students, the Orthodox theologian of the St. Serge Institute in Paris Georges Florovsky affirmed that the hypothesis of the invitation of non-Catholics to the Council, when not preceded by "a long 'molecular' preparation at different levels of life and religious practice", would have damaged the rapprochement of the Western and the Eastern Church, who were spiritually not ready for such an encounter:

Pour un "concile d'union", en tout cas, il n'y a actuellement ni fondement, ni place. Une invitation d'évêques des "Églises schismatiques" – "schismatiques", naturellement, du point de vue romain – à un concile de l'Église romaine, même en qualité de simples "observateurs", ne pourrait que nuire au rapprochement de l'Occident et de l'Orient. Cela ne ferait que rappeler le pénible précédent du concile de Florence et conduirait aux mêmes conséquences, peut-être même à des pires. Une "rencontre" formelle des Églises doit être précédée d'une longue préparation "moléculaire" aux différents niveaux de la vie et de

9 G. Flynn, P. Murray (ed.), *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*, Oxford 2011.

10 Gill SJ, *The Council of Florence*, p. VII.

la pratique religieuse. Pour le moment, ni l'Orient, ni l'Occident ne sont prêts, spirituellement, à une telle rencontre "formelle".¹¹

Florovsky's pessimism concerning Vatican II was a common position among the protagonists of the ecumenical movement, even shared for example by the Secretary of the WCC, Wilhelm Visser 't Hooft.¹² Replying to this kind of observations, many Catholics tried to affirm that Vatican II could really change the *status quo*. For instance, the Jesuit Bernhard Schultze wrote, in an article published for *Stimmen der Zeit* in response to Florovsky, that Florence was still a sign of hope also for the Churches of today, since "the fact that the Greeks in the years 1438-1439 came together with the Latins in a common ecumenical Council [...] shows that the strain was not so deep as after 500 years".¹³ The real problem, for Schultze, was to define the characteristics of an ecumenical Council, in order to determine if the Council of Florence, and implicitly Vatican II also, could be called "ecumenical". The solution, according to him, would be a real membership, and not a merely formal participation, of the Greek bishops to the council.¹⁴

The problem of the invitation of non-catholic observers to Vatican II was of course the main reason for referring to the Council of Florence in the antepreparatory *vota* of many Catholic bishops. Among them, very interesting was the position of the Ukrainian Archbishop Maxim Hermaniuk, who underlined, as suggested by Schultze, that the non-Catholics invited should have secured the possibility to take "partem activam simul cum Episcopis Catholicis", as already happened at the Council of Florence: according to him, this measure would have met the "requirements of modern psychology".¹⁵ In the synthesis of the *vota* used by the preparatory commissions, Hermaniuk's

11 G. Florowski, *Une opinion orthodoxe sur le prochain concile*, in: *Vers l'unité chrétienne* 12 (1959) 5 (N° 113), pp. 33-36, here p. 35. The text is the translation of Florovsky's article published for the bulletin of the Russian movement of christian students (Nr. 52, 1).

12 P. Chenaux, *Le Conseil œcuménique des Églises et la convocation du Concile*, in: M. Lambrechts, C. Soetens (ed.), *À la veille du Concile Vatican II. Vota et réactions en Europe et dans le catholicisme oriental*, Leuven 1992, pp. 200-213.

13 B. Schultze, *Das Unionskonzil von Florenz*, in: *Stimmen der Zeit* 164 (1958-59) pp. 427-439.

14 "Das Problematische des Konzils scheint sein ökumenischer Charakter zu sein. War das Konzil bereits von Anfang an für beide Seiten, für die Lateiner und die Griechen, ökumenisch oder nicht? Und insbesondere: konnten die Griechen schon von Anfang an volle und gleichberechtigte Mitglieder des Konzils sein?": *ibid.* p. 430.

15 "Talis modus agendi in his quaestionibus videtur maxime conformis requisitis psychologiae modernae", *Votum* 18.8.1959: AD 1.2.6, p. 132.

votum was summarised as a suggestion to establish "a commission of theologians from Catholic and Orthodox Churches in order to facilitate the union of Oriental Christian dissidents with the Catholic Church", following "the example of the Council of Florence".¹⁶ Also the *votum* of the bishop of Smirne, Joseph Descuffi, advocated a similar method, suggesting that *all* the non-catholic bishops should be invited to Vatican II and that, in order to avoid a failure like after Florence, they should be prepared and consult their own people, through a complicated system of local assemblies and consultations:

Omnes hi Patriarchae et Praesules in propria ditione Metropolitae, Episcopus et Clerum consulere velint de oppositionibus hic et nunc adhuc vigentibus in fide. Ipsi opiniones accurate colligere, excutere, definire coram membris Sanctae Synodi et breviter argumenta tractanda et discutienda statuere velint. Cum idoneis delegatis a Sancta Sede missis, de his colloquia privata habeant coram S. Synodo et simul textum argumentorum definitive con scribant. Postea Congressus regionalis aut nationalis adunabitur coram Patriarchis et membris S. Synodi et coram delegatis a Sancta Sede ut per modum "quaestionis et responsi" breviter exaretur textus definitivus ad Concilium proponendus, super quo oratores ab eis designati sermonem et postea, si opus erit, controversiam habebunt. Si post liberam discussionem, duae partes consentiunt, textus ab omnibus subscribendus est nec amplius abiurationibus aut anathematismis opus est [...] Hae cautela ad vitandas defectiones et disertiones quae post Unionem Concilii Ludgunensis II et Florentini repente evenerunt.¹⁷

The risk of bringing back the failure of Florence was evoked even by the *Memorandum on the Restoration of Christian Unity*, sent in June 1959 to Rome by the board of the Catholic Conference for Ecumenical Questions and which, due to its informal nature, was not published in the *Acta et Documenta*.¹⁸ The Memorandum, written mainly by Christophe-Jean Dumont, director of the *Istina* centre in Paris, warned against the risk of reaching an ephemeral union between the Churches only for political reasons, as already happened in Florence: the concern to present a united front of Christians against communism

16 *Analyticus conspectus Consiliorum et Votorum quae ab episcopis et praelatis data sunt, pars II*: AD 1.2. app. 2, p. 676.

17 *Votum* 14.8.1959: AD 1.2.4, p. 630.

18 This note was also sent to many bishops and theologians and later to all the Council fathers. Cf. P. De Mey, *Johannes Willebrands and the Catholic Conference for Ecumenical Questions (1952-1963)*, in: A. Denaux, P. De Mey (ed.), *The Ecumenical Legacy of Johannes Cardinal Willebrands (1909-2006)*, Leuven 2012, pp. 49-77, here pp. 56-68.

would be indeed a motivation very similar to the concern of the Muslim threat.¹⁹ Furthermore, the Note identified uniatism and the existence of “uniate” Churches as a problematic and ambivalent reality, showing a position shared even by the patriarch of the Melkite Church Maximos IV Saigh, who, at the eve of the Council, openly wondered “si, pour la cause de l’union globale, la constitution de ces Églises uniates a été un bien ou un mal”:

Ces unions partielles qui suivirent l’échec du concile de Florence donnèrent lieu à des Communautés catholiques de rite oriental. En les recevant dans l’unité catholique, le Saint-Siège romain s’engagea, par les promesses les plus solennelles, à respecter tout leur patrimoine spirituel [...] De fait, malheureusement, ces Communautés catholiques de rite oriental ne furent pas toujours à même de réaliser leur mission. D’une part, il faut bien le dire, elles ne furent jamais pleinement admises par l’ensemble des catholiques d’Occident, qui continuèrent à les ignorer, à les soupçonner, à les brimer, certains allant jusqu’à les combattre ouvertement sur leur propre territoire. Leur admission dans l’unité catholique ne fut presque jamais dépourvue d’arrière-pensées, du moins de la part des autorités inférieures. Elles-mêmes, par ailleurs, ne surent pas toujours se défendre contre l’envahissement des façons de faire de l’Occident, si bien qu’elles finirent trop souvent par ne plus représenter, aux yeux de l’Orient, aucune forme acceptable d’union dans la vérité et la dignité, mais une absorption voilée, une latinisation manquée.²⁰

Nonetheless, opinions like the one of Maximos IV were very rare among the 2,150 *vota* sent to the antepreparatory commission after the announcement of the Council by bishops, universities and congregations. Restricting the analysis only to the explicit mention of the Council of Florence or of the decree *pro Graecis*, in most cases the ecumenical matter, when not passed in silence out of fear for the Roman authorities or for reason of mere disinterest, was dealt with

19 § 40: “It seems to us important to point out that the attempt to arrive at an understanding between Churches based solely upon a common opposition to the Communist danger, however real or imminent that danger may be, cannot possibly give lasting results in the domain of unity; for any union so realised would not long survive the disappearance of the danger at its origin. Certain elements in the situation today recall that of the epoch of the Council of Florence; the application of similar methods runs the risk of producing the same consequences”, *Memorandum of the Executive Committee of the Catholic Conference for Ecumenical Questions concerning the Restoration of Christian Unity on the Occasion of the Forthcoming Ecumenical Council*, in: Kardinaal Willebrands Archief, Dossier 34.

20 Maximos IV, *Situation des Églises d’Orient unies à Rome*, in: *Découverte de l’œcuménisme*, Paris 1961, pp. 112-131.

from a very conservative vision. Many proposals used Florence to say what would be the maximum of compromises and negotiations that one might expect from Vatican II. For instance, Dionisio Casaroli, bishop of Gaeta, wrote that the pre-condition for the dialogue between the churches would be the integrity of the Nicene Creed, the *Filioque* and the acceptance of the primacy of the Pope, as stated by the Council of Florence.²¹ Also Grégoire Jarjour, auxiliary bishop of Antioch, said that the dialogue with non-Catholics should be based on the recognition of the first eight councils plus Florence.²² More sharper the Cardinal Francis Spellman, archbishop of New York, who stated firmly that the controversy between the Churches had already been solved at Florence, so there was no need of further discussions.²³ This approach minimising the necessity of dialogue between the Churches and not recognising that unity cannot be reached merely through a return of the other communities to the Catholic one, but rather through a *common* effort among the Churches to split the differences, was actually the perspective of the association *Unitas* directed by the Jesuit Charles Boyer. The latter wrote by 1960 that Florence demonstrated to the Greeks “the force of the arguments” of the Catholic doctrine, so “all that in 1454 had been understood and admitted, could be yet understood and admitted today”.²⁴

Probably because of this majority interpretation of Florence, many bishops most active in Catholic ecumenism avoided in their *vota* to make reference to Florence, keeping in this way distance from the model of uniatism inevitably linked to the memory of that Council. Also the members of the Secretariat for Christian Unity, during the preparatory work undertaken by its twelve sub-commissions, never mentioned Florence, except on two occasions: the first relating to the question of equalising the dignity of the patriarchs of Oriental Catholic Churches to that of the cardinals of the Roman Church (evoking the *querelle* of the seats at the Council), the second one about the problem of determining the “*membra ecclesiae*”, citing the beginning of the decree *Pro Armenis* affirming that baptism attributes to all Christians the membership of the body of the Christ.²⁵ As is evident, we are dealing with marginal citations,

21 *Votum* 24.8.1959: AD I/2.3, p. 299.

22 *Votum* 28.8.1959: AD I/2.4, p. 420.

23 *Votum* 11.2.1960: AD I/2.6, p. 393.

24 C. Boyer, *Leçon du Concile de Florence*, in: *Unitas* (ed. fr.) 13 (1960), pp. 291-293, here p. 292.

25 M. Velati, *Dialogo e rinnovamento. Verbali e testi del Segretariato per l’unità dei cristiani nella preparazione del Concilio Vaticano II (1960-1962)*, Bologna 2011, p. 203 and 349.

which express an impressive and intentional silence by the protagonists of the ecumenical renewal about the Council of Florence, which was perceived as a comparison too ambiguous and not so much interesting. When the most progressive bishops referred to Florence in their *vota*, they did so in order to request that some doctrines established by that Council would be revised. For instance the theological faculty of Toulouse openly attacked the definition of the primacy of the Pope established in Florence, defending instead the role of the episcopate for the government of the universal Church: “although the Pope can make alone all that the bishops’ collegium can do with him, he does not substitute it”.²⁶ Other references to Florence, even if not strictly related to the ecumenical aim, were made in the *vota* and *animadversiones* of many bishops asking for a definition of the question of the hope of salvation for infants who die without baptism. The scheme *De deposito fidei custodiendo* and later the scheme *De Ecclesia* too, however, did not reflect any intention to reform the Catholic Church’s teaching on that matter.²⁷

3. The references to Florence in the discussion of *Unitatis Redintegratio*

During the preparatory Phase of the Council, three drafts for a decree on ecumenism were submitted to the Central Preparatory Commission: the scheme *De Ecclesiae unitate* written by the Commission for the Oriental Churches, a draft prepared by the Secretariat for Christian Unity and a chapter of the scheme *De Ecclesia* submitted by the Theological Commission. Among the two longer reflections on ecumenism only the contribution of the Oriental Commission was approved for the discussion in the aula and presented to the conciliar Fathers. The scheme, pervaded by a sensitivity closer to unionism than ecumenism, referred to Florence in relation to the question of the Orien-

Many bishops referred to the decree *Pro Armenis* relating to the theme of the church membership during the debate on the scheme *De Ecclesia*: cf. AS II/1, p. 747; 2.2, p. 11, 150, 178.

26 Votum 18.4.1960: AD 1.4.2, p. 583.

27 See the *vota* of the universities of Salamanca, Naples, Fribourg and of the Theresianum, AD 1.4.2, p. 545, 705, 781 and 384. See also the *votum* of L. Rubio, 13.3.1960: AD 1.2.8, p. 85. When it became clear that the scheme *De deposito fidei puro custodiendo* would not reform this point (AD 2.2.2, pp. 389-394), other interventions in the Preparatory Commission and at the Eve of the Council insisted on that: for instance, the bishop of Liège G.M. Van Zuylen (AS app.1, p. 328). See A. Indelicato, *Difendere la dottrina o annunciare l’Evangelo. Il dibattito nella Commissione centrale preparatoria del Vaticano II*, Genova 1992, pp. 119-131.

tal liturgical *consuetudines*²⁸ that the Catholic Church should maintain in the case of union with the Orthodox Church, taking up a traditional vision which saw Florence as a model to promote the distinctiveness of the Byzantine rite.

In the discussion which took place during the first session, in November 1962, the Melkite bishop Augustin Farah referred to the solutions reached by the Council of Florence and properly about the different *consuetudines*, but in a very different way from the scheme of the Oriental Commission. He recalled indeed to the memory of the conciliar aula how the Florentine Fathers stated that in the divergence about the *Filioque* no substantial theological division was revealed, but merely a difference of *consuetudo*, so that this “different way to express the same truth” would be not an obstacle for unity.²⁹ Thanks to other similar interventions, when on 30 November 1962 the bishops voted this scheme, they decided that it needed a revision which should integrate the document presented *in aula* with the other two texts and in particular the one prepared by the Secretariat for Christian Unity.

A new draft *De oecumenismo* was prepared during the intersession and sent to the bishops in the spring of 1963 and the tone of this one was very different from the first, inspired indeed by a vision which saw the way toward Christian unity as a common effort of all the Churches to reach it meeting each other halfway: this effort should imply as corollary the willingness of the Catholic Church to reform and criticise itself. Although also the new text referred to Florence, the aim and the style of the quotation were very different from those of the previous text:

The wall separating the Eastern and the Western Churches, which the Council of Florence declared was entirely removed, is again set up between the two; and today, with all our heart and soul, and with the help of God’s grace, we intend to remove that wall, so that there may be but one dwelling place, whose cornerstone is Christ Jesus, who will make both one.³⁰

28 “§ 23. Propterea eadem ratione et modo quod in Concilio Florentino declaratum est, etiam haec Sancta Synodus declarat ritus et caeremonias Orientalium, quae fidei catholicae integritatem et mutuam coniunctionem nequaquam impediunt, esse retinendas et maxima diligentia colendas”: AS I/3, p. 535.

29 AS I/3, p. 782. One year later, the Ukrainian Catholic Metropolitan of Winnipeg Maxim Hermaniuk will develop a similar argumentation about the Great Schism itself during the discussion on the new *De Oecumenismo*: “Ut hodie clare probat historia, in quaestionibus agitates inter illos revera nulla fuit veritas fidei, seu dogmam, in dubium revocata. Et tamen, propter variam mentalitatem, varias ecclesiasticas traditions et variam disciplinam, separatio fuit officialiter, et quidem, etsi erronee, declarata et consummata”. Cf. AS II/6, p. 352.

30 “§ 18: [...] Paries enim occidentalem orientalemque dividens Ecclesiam, quem Concilium

As a whole these lines constitute the conclusion of the first part of chapter three, the section dealing with the Eastern churches and declaring that their theological, spiritual, canonical and liturgical peculiarities constitute a legitimate diversity which is in no way harmful to the catholicity of the Church. By referring to Florence the mixed commission responsible for the drafting of the text probably wanted to reassure the Council fathers that the ecumenical efforts of the Council were in great continuity with the previous efforts of the Council of Florence. However, it was a quotation multi-interpretable and open to misunderstanding.

During the second session of Vatican II, many bishops indeed paid attention to this sentence. Among them, the apostolic vicar of Panama, José Serrano Pastor, stepped in saying that the scheme was contradictory: in chapter II (§12) was attributed to the Orthodox Church the same position towards the Catholic Church as to the other “christianis ab Ecclesia catholica seiunctis”, insinuating that “Ecclesiam orthodoxam esse, sicut et ceterae communitates, communitatem quandam christianorum in quae plura elementa Ecclesiae conservantur”; meanwhile the reference to the wall of separation being removed at the Council of Florence (§18) supposed instead “that the Orthodox is a true and genuine Church, or a part of the Church of Christ, even if deprived, against the will of Christ, of the visible communion with the See of Peter”.³¹ In the same way also other bishops intervened.³²

Florentinum de medio sublatum declaravit, denuo interponitur; eundem auferre hodierna die toto corde et animo, opitulante gratia Dei, intendimus, ut unica diat mansio, angulari lapide Christo Iesu, qui faciet utraque unum”: AS II/5, p. 427. In a footnote there was the reference to the definition *Laetentur caeli*: “sublatus est enim de medio paries qui occidentalem orientalemque dividebat Ecclesiam”.

- 31 “[...] cum nomen Ecclesiae orthodoxis unice tribuat, cumque affertur textus ille Florentini de pariete medio auferendo quae occidentalem orientalemque dividit Ecclesiam, schema insinuat orthodoxam vere et proprie Ecclesiam esse, seu partem Ecclesiae Christi, etsi contra Christi voluntatem communiione visibili cum sede Petri, capitis episcopatus, orbatam. [...] Quenam conceptio verior est et ideo in schemate adhibenda? Conceptio illa tantummodo iuxta quam Ecclesia orthodoxa est vere et proprie partem unius Ecclesiae Christi in statu separationis contra Christi voluntatem, a Sede Petri, est conceptio traditionalis in Ecclesia et theologice fundata. [...] Ecclesia enim catholica naturam ecclesialem Ecclesiae orientalis separatae semper recognovit. Recognovit, cum eorum episcopi una cum nostris etiam ante unionem in Concilio Florentino sederunt”: AS II/5, p. 818.
- 32 See the interventions of Souto Vizoso (AS II/5, pp. 822-823), Nicodemo (AS II/6, pp. 320-322) and Kandela (AS II/6, pp. 388-390).

Probably for this reason the non-Catholic observers also were unsatisfied with this mention of Florence, which reinforced the traditional approach to the question of the christian unity typical of unionism, seeing the Catholic Church at the centre of concentric circles where the aim of the union should be targeted first at the Orthodox, then at the Anglicans and so on, according to a criterion of progressive distance of each Christian community from the true doctrine. One of the observers, Nikos Nissiotis, a Greek Orthodox theologian and representative of the WWC, during the second intersession sharply commented indeed: “Such a mention of this Council cannot have any good effect on future negotiations”.³³ In the meanwhile, the *Animadversiones* sent in May 1964 by the assessor of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, bishop Giovanni Battista Scapinelli claimed for the opposite reasons: “It would be better to remove the phrase ‘sublato pariete occidentalem orientemque Ecclesiam dividente’, because it does not reflect reality, as the existence of the Eastern Rite Catholic Churches proves”.³⁴ When the third session began, the Council discussed a modified text, where the metaphor of the wall survived, but the direct reference of Florence was transferred to the footnote.³⁵ The working documents of the Secretariat of Christian Unity seem to admit implicitly that the decision to remove the reference to the Council of Florence (§18) took place in direct response to the critique formulated by the observers.³⁶

However, during the third session of Vatican II, many amendments asked again to totally remove the metaphor of the wall, with argumentations similar to those of Scapinelli, like those expressed in the *expensio modorum*: “Remove the whole sentence [...] Reason: it confers equal status to the two Churches, Western and Eastern one, and that is false, because only one is the true Church, the other is wrong”.³⁷ Those amendments, all similar, were all rejected

- 33 N. Nissiotis, *Ecclesiology and Ecumenism of the Second Session of the Vatican Council II*, in: *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 10 (1964) 1, p. 32.
- 34 AS App I, p. 493 (20.05.1964).
- 35 “Quod si hoc opus toto animo promoveatur, Sacrosancta Synodus sperat fore ut, sublato pariete occidentalem orientalemque Ecclesiam dividente, unica tandem fiat mansio angulari firmata lapide, Christo Iesu, qui faciet utraque unum”: AS III.2, p. 313.
- 36 See the *Relatio supra emendationes a Patribus Conciliaribus de Capite III ‘De oecumenismo’* proposed by John Long, p. 13: “Because of the mistrust of the separated Orientals against the Council of Florence, the allusion to this Council has been eliminated. But the idea remains the same”. Long’s *Relatio* is in Archivio Apostolico Vaticano, Conc. Vat. II, busta 1433.
- 37 See the *Modi* in AS III/7, pp. 688-689, nn. 6-7-8. See also the *Animadversiones scriptae de*

by the Secretariat for Christian Unity with the following motivation: “The sentence remains, because it is taken up from the Decree of Union of the Ecumenical Council of Florence”.³⁸ It appears therefore how the reference to the Council of Florence was finally instrumentally used as a compromise by the most conservative Council fathers, who insisted the wall was still there, and by the most progressive ones, who wanted to foster unity with the Orthodox churches because the differences are now perceived as legitimate and enriching at the most.

Finally, the intervention of the Ukrainian Catholic bishop Volodymyr Malančzuk, apostolic exarch of France, is worth mentioning. He brought into play the Cold war, comparing the wall dividing the churches of the East and the West “*tamquam murus dividens duas partes urbis Berolini*”.³⁹ According to him, in order to be ecumenically helpful, the scheme should mention indeed the reasons for this separation, namely the political unwillingness of the Orthodox to establish relations with the Holy See, as well as the “religious particularism” whereby autocephalous Orthodox churches identify themselves with a particular nation. As example of this behaviour, Malančzuk mentioned the insistence to consider the particular so-called ‘uniate’ Churches as an obstacle to future global unity and to demand the abolition of these churches from the Roman Church “as a necessary condition for any further negotiations with the Church of Rome; as if the ‘uniate’ particular Churches are false and are not genuine Eastern Churches. *Because of this prejudice – concluded Malančzuk – our Church suffers heavily in our homeland*”.⁴⁰ Malančzuk’s intervention had a real impact on the next draft: few lines were added to UR 14 in order to express the awareness of the Council that the long process of separation of East and West was due to a plurality of causes: “The inheritance handed on by the apostles was received with differences of form and manner, and from the earliest times of the church it was explained variously in different places, owing to diversities of character and condition of life. All this, next to external causes, prepared the way for divisions arising also from a lack of mutual understanding and charity” (UR 14).⁴¹

oecumenismo by Vuccino, archbishop of Zante, Corfù and Cefalonia, in AS III/3, pp. 758-760.

38 “R. [ad 6]: *Textus maneat quia e Decreto unionis Florentinae oecumenicae synodi de promptus est*”: AS III/7, p. 688.

39 AS II/6, p. 236.

40 “*Et propter hoc praeiudicium Ecclesia nostra in patria nunc multum patitur*”: *ibid.*, p. 237.

41 Under reference to Malančzuk and others the following *relatio* was added: “*Ex se, diver-*

4. The references to Florence in *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* and *Lumen Gentium*

In the third session of the Council, in the same days during which the final text of *Unitatis Redintegratio* was discussed and voted, the same happened with the document prepared by the Commission for the Oriental Churches which would be approved with the title *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*. This document referred to Florence only in two footnotes of the section speaking of the dignity of the patriarchs⁴² (§§7-11) and also the interventions of the conciliar fathers during the debate focused on this theme, saying that the Council of Florence in its decrees and its practice already equalised the dignity of the patriarchs to that of the cardinals of the Roman Church.⁴³

The question of the dignity of the patriarchs was, as mentioned above, already raised by the Secretariat for Christian Unity during the preparatory phase of the Council: together with the quotation of the decree *pro Armenis* about the relationship between baptism and Church membership they constitute the two only references to the Council of Florence used by the Secretariat at that time.⁴⁴ The second quotation, about the decree *pro Armenis*, was however more interesting and was also repeated during the Council during the debate on the scheme *De Ecclesia*. The archbishop of Bologna Lercaro, for instance, defended the juridical line from Florence to *Mystici Corporis* stating that baptism implies membership in the Church⁴⁵, whereas the archbishop of Santa Fé Lamy consequentially asked for a revision of n. 5 of the revised scheme *De Ecclesia*, since it suggested almost that incorporation in the body of Christ and membership in the Church are identical, whereas Florence clearly stipulated it were two subsequent realities.⁴⁶ Finally Malančzuk praised instead the document for having abandoned a juridical approach just as the Council of

sitates non debent separationem provocare. De facto autem, propter comprehensionis defectum diversitatis legitima ansam praebuit separationibus”. Cf. Hellin, *Unitatis redintegratio Synopsis*, Città del Vaticano 2005, p. 116. Cf. P. De Mey, *Metropolitan Hermaniuk and the Conciliar Work on Unitatis Redintegratio and Orientalium Ecclesiarum: A Comparative Study*, in: J.Z. Skira, P. De Mey (eds.), *Metropolitan Maxim Hermaniuk, Vatican II and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church*, Leuven 2020, pp. 99-142.

42 AS III/8, pp. 839-841.

43 AS III/4, p. 491, 492, 505; III/5, p. 30, 33, 66, 73, 75, 242, 250, 255, 752, 784, 794, 825, 883.

44 Velati, *Dialogo e rinnovamento*, cit., p. 203 and 349.

45 AS II/2, p. 11.

46 AS II/2, p. 150.

Florence had done.⁴⁷ The definitive version of *Lumen Gentium* 14 would indeed completely abandon the membership terminology of *Mystici Corporis*. It would be useful to study the references to the Council of Florence during the debate on the scheme *De Ecclesia* in greater detail, but this extends the limitations of this paper, which focuses on the “ecumenical use” of referring to Florence. It has to be mentioned, however, that many bishops also found support in the decree *Pro Graecis* of the Council of Florence to defend the doctrine of collegiality as supplementing the primacy of the popes.⁴⁸

5. Conclusion

It is now possible to draw some conclusions. At Vatican II, the Council of Florence was quoted in two different ways. The progressive majority of conciliar fathers preferred not to refer too often to that Council, since such references could be easily linked to a traditional view of the problem of Christian unity, which saw “return” as the only solution. Florence remains for them too much ambiguous and when they inserted an explicit reference to that Council or to the decree *pro Graecis*, they were only marginal quotations that were dealt with rather instrumentally. Such references only served to give reassurance of continuity with the Tradition of the Church.

The other way of referring to Florence was the way which the Commission for the Oriental Churches preferred, seeing the problem of Christian union as a problem regarding mainly Rome and Constantinople, in their time well as 500 years before. According to that vision, the other Christian confessions were not worthy of the status given to the Orthodox, but also the Orthodox Church had to overcome more than a tiny wall of separation before being able to be considered part of the true Church.

In both cases, there is also a difference between referring to the *documents* of Florence (that are the decrees) and referring to the Council as *event*: it seems indeed that the event was for the conciliar Fathers more significant than its documents. Evoking the Council of Florence for the bishops closer to the position of the Congregation of the Oriental Church (for example the bishops of the Eastern Catholic churches) signified to indicate the way of uniatism, the way of the return of the East to the “true” Church and the way of a unity already reached, although political reasons made it impossible. For the bishops who shared the views introduced by the Secretariat for Christian Unity, to

47 AS II/2, p. 178.

48 AS II/2, p. 418, 422, 425, 427, 485, 515, 516; II/4, p. 457.

evoke the event of Florence mainly meant to recall two aspects: the participation of the Greek delegates with the same rights of the Latins (to say the equality of the Churches in front of the unique Church of Christ, which does not consist but *subsist in* the Catholic Church) and the final failure of the projects of union, not as a result of the pressure by political (communist or Turkish) enemies, but due to a lack of preparation within the people of God. As an example of this position and as a conclusive quotation for this paper, we point to the intervention of the Slovenian archbishop of Ljubljana, Joze Pogacnik, who intervened during the discussion of *De Oecumenismo* in the Second Session:

The practice of ecumenism, dear Fathers, is urgent for us. The circumstances to hope for union today must be considered with more hope and optimism than at the time of the Councils Lyon II and Florence. At that time populations did not enjoy a spiritual preparation for the union at all, a preparation that is a necessary *conditio sine qua non* and an absolute prerequisite; there was indeed an aversion in the people. The people of God did not sufficiently participate to the preparation and efforts of union. This was one of the primary reasons why the union concluded at that time was not and could not be durable. Today however the minds and the spirits are already prepared to a certain degree with both sides, among the Catholics and among the non-Catholics.⁴⁹

49 “Oecumenismi exercitium, fratres, urget nos. Condiciones sperandae unionis hodieum maiori cum spe et optimismo considerandae sunt, quam non tempore Concilii Lugdunensis II et Concilii Florentini. Tunc nulla fere habebatur populi praeparatio spiritualis ad unionem, quae est conditio sine qua non et praesuppositum absolute necessarium; immo potius aliqua aversio in populo aderat. Populus non sufficienter participabat in unionis praeparatione et conatibus. Haec una ex praecipuis causis est, quare unio tunc conclusa non erat neque poterat esse duratura. Hodie autem animi mentesque iam quadamtenus praeparati sunt, sive in parte catholica sive in illa non catholica”: AS II/6, p. 290.