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## ORTHODOX AND CATHOLICS IN DIALOGUE: THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

I would like to begin by thanking Professor Hryniewicz and the other members of the Ecumenical Institute for inviting me to speak to you this morning. It is a great honor for me to be here, where you are doing so much to help overcome centuries-old divisions among Christians that have left their mark on the history of your country and that of your neighbors. I come from a distant country that has a very different history. But in speaking to you about the work of our Orthodox-Catholic dialogue in America, I hope that something of our experience will be useful to you here in Poland.

In my brief presentation this morning, I would like to describe first of all the general context of our Catholic and Orthodox Churches in North America and the composition and status of our dialogue. Then I will briefly describe the three stages of our dialogue's work, with special emphasis on its more recent achievements. And finally, I would like to offer some thoughts on why our dialogue continues to make progress at a time when the international dialogue seems to have reached an impasse.

### THE CONTEXT

At present there are just over sixty million Catholics in the United States. They make up the single largest Church in the United States, but only 23% of the country's population. There are 176 Latin dioceses in the United States, and we also have a significant presence of Eastern Catholics. There are

15 Eastern Catholic eparchies, representing the Melkite, Ukrainian, Ruthenian, Romanian, Armenian, Syrian, and Maronite Catholic Churches. All the bishops of the country are members of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, and it is one of the NCCB committees – the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs – that sponsors our dialogue with the Orthodox.

The Orthodox in the United States are divided into a number of jurisdictions, most of which are dependent on their mother Churches overseas. The largest is the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, which is directly dependent on the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul. There are several smaller groups of Albanian, Belorussian, Ukrainian and Carpatho-Russian Orthodox that are also dependent on Constantinople. The other larger Churches include the Antiochian Archdiocese, mostly Orthodox faithful of Arab ethnicity from the Patriarchate of Antioch in the Middle East, and the Orthodox Church in America (OCA), the Russian Orthodox Church in the United States that was granted autocephaly by the Moscow Patriarchate in 1970. This status has not been recognized by Constantinople and most other Orthodox Churches. Other smaller jurisdictions depend on the Serbian, Bulgarian and Romanian Patriarchates. Altogether it is estimated that there are about six million Orthodox faithful in the United States. All of these canonical Orthodox Churches (including the OCA) belong to the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of America, known as SCOBA. It is SCOBA that sponsors our dialogue from the Orthodox side.

The official title of our dialogue is "The North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation." The title was changed from "United States" to "North American" in 1997 when the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops joined us as an official sponsor of the dialogue. The Consultation ordinarily meets twice each year and is composed of theologians and other specialists under the co-presidency of a Catholic bishop and an Orthodox bishop, currently Archbishop Rembert Weakland of Milwaukee and Metropolitan Maximos of the Greek Orthodox diocese of Pittsburgh. I should also mention that since 1981 there has been an official "Joint Committee of Orthodox and Catholic Bishops" that meets once each year. While the theological consultation deals mostly with theological questions, the joint committee of bishops has taken up themes of a more pastoral nature. The Joint Committee has put out a number of statements but we will not be able to deal with those here.

## THE ORIGINS

Contacts between Orthodox and Catholics in the United States can be traced back to the mid-1950s, when there were a series of meetings at the Russian Center at Fordham University that brought together prominent theologians from St Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary and the Jesuit Woodstock College. These meetings were held in secret at the insistence of Cardinal Spellman of New York. This laid the groundwork for something more concrete to happen ten years later in the context of the dramatic improvement in relations during the 1960s.

The initiative to set up an official dialogue came from the Orthodox side: on March 5, 1965, Father Paul Schnierla, the General Secretary of SCOBA, wrote a letter to Cardinal Shehan of Baltimore informing him that the SCOBA bishops had resolved to propose a continuing dialogue between the two Churches in the United States. The Catholic side agreed, and the first meeting took place on September 9, 1965, at St. Spyridon's Greek Orthodox parish in Worcester, Massachusetts. This was after the encounter between Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras in the Holy Land, but before the lifting of the anathemas of 1054, which would take place on December 7, 1965. Even though he was not able to attend the first meeting, Archbishop Iakovos of America himself took up the position of first Orthodox Co-Chairman. I think it is fair to say that the strong support of Archbishop Iakovos was a critical factor in the establishment of this dialogue at such an early date.

This dialogue has now been in progress for 35 years, and has produced some remarkable achievements. Three phases of its history can be identified: 1) from 1965 to 1980 (the period before the establishment of the international dialogue), 2) from 1980 to 1990 (the period when the international dialogue was making progress), and 3) since 1990, when the international dialogue appears to have reached an impasse on the question of uniatism. Let's look at each of these phases in turn.

## THE FIRST PHASE

In the first phase of the dialogue, the consultation examined a number of theological and pastoral questions of concern to the two Churches. In many cases these were ground-breaking documents that drew upon the research of

many scholars and reflected the new relationship being forged at the international level. The first agreed statement (1969) was on the Eucharist. Later common documents were issued on mixed marriages (1971), respect for life (1974), the nature of the Church (1974), the pastoral office (1976), the principle of economy (1976), a reflection on the agenda of the Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church (1977), the sanctity of marriage (1978), and the spiritual formation of children born of mixed Catholic-Orthodox marriages (1980).

### THE SECOND PHASE

The second phase began in 1980 with the first meeting of the international dialogue. At this point the consultation began to work in a kind of synergy with the new international commission. The American consultation offered reflections on documents issued by the international dialogue. It also began to formulate statements on topics that the international commission was considering in the hope of being of some assistance in the process of drafting those international texts.

Thus, in May 1983 the American consultation issued a response to the Munich Document, *The Mystery of the Church and of the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity*. Aware that the international commission was going to take up the question of apostolic succession and ordination, it issued an agreed statement in 1986 on Apostolicity. In June 1988 it issued a response to the Bari Document, *Faith, Sacraments, and the Unity of the Church*. And in October 1989 it finished a joint reaction to the Valamo Document on apostolic succession and the sacrament of orders. And since the international dialogue had decided in 1988 to consider the relationship between conciliarity and authority, the American group issued an agreed statement on conciliarity and primacy in the Church in 1989. It had also issued a response to the Lima Document, *On Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, in 1984.

As you all know, the fall of communism in Eastern and Central Europe created new difficulties in Catholic-Orthodox relations, and has created a crisis in the international dialogue that still has not been overcome. Painfully aware of these new problems, the American consultation issued brief statements in 1990 and 1992 that attempted to contribute to an easing of the situation. In 1994 it issued a thoughtful and positive response to the inter-

national dialogue's 1993 Balamand Document. Since the Balamand Document had been strongly criticized in some Orthodox groups in the United States, the Orthodox members of the American consultation issued a statement of their own about the document in which they supported it as an essential step towards resolving the problem.

### THE THIRD PHASE

After these statements were produced in the early 1990s, and in view of the impasse on the question of uniatism that was holding up the work of the international dialogue, the North American Consultation had to refocus its efforts. This period of readjustment can be seen in the four-year gap between the October 1994 response to Balamand and the next common text issued in October 1998. The North American group had to find new avenues of investigation that would contribute to reconciliation between the Churches in spite of these new problems.

In October 1998 the American consultation issued a common statement in support of the Aleppo Document on the date of Easter that had been issued in March 1997 at a consultation sponsored by the World Council of Churches and the Middle East Council of Churches. Aware of the importance of celebrating the central mystery of our Christian faith together, the North American text strongly supports the solution that the Aleppo Document proposes, and responds to some criticism of it by some Orthodox Churches.

The North American group has also been considering underlying factors that contributed to the rejection of the Balamand Document by some Orthodox Churches. The Church of Greece, for example, had rejected Balamand in part because it disallowed the re-baptism of Catholics and Orthodox when they are received into the other Church. Indeed, a vocal minority within the Orthodox Church does not recognize the ecclesial reality of the Catholic Church, or the validity of any of its sacraments. And so our consultation undertook a lengthy investigation of this topic and eventually issued a statement in June 1999 entitled, *Baptism and "Sacramental Economy."* This text begins by laying out a theology of baptism that is common to both our Churches, and concludes that we share the same understanding of that sacrament. It also examines the ways in which Catholics and Orthodox have been received into each other's Churches in recent centuries, and the effect the notion of "sacramental economy" advocated by St Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain

in the 18<sup>th</sup> century has had on that practice. In its conclusions the text rejects the notion of sacramental economy as an innovation inconsistent with the authentic Church tradition, states that there are adequate grounds for mutual recognition of baptism, and calls upon the Patriarchate of Constantinople to withdraw its 1755 decree requiring the re-baptism of Latins.

I must say that this is a very courageous text, especially for the Orthodox who agreed to support it in spite of the attitudes of vocal conservative groups in their own Churches. In fact, Archbishop Spyridon of America found the document's conclusions so unacceptable that he dismissed all of the Greek Orthodox members of the Consultation. Fortunately this took place only a few days before he himself was compelled to resign in August 1999. The new Archbishop Demetrios reversed that decision even before he reached New York.

For some time now our consultation has been discussing the increasing anti-ecumenical sentiment in our Churches, and the problems this presents for our dialogue at all levels. And so we felt the need to make a statement about the dialogue that would respond to the concerns of those who oppose ecumenism, and explain the reasons why continued dialogue is so important. This was the background to our most recent agreed text, *Sharing the Ministry of Reconciliation*, issued in June 2000. Marking not only the turn of the millennium but also the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the American consultation, the document is a very strong statement about the value of ecumenical witness as corresponding to the will of Christ for all Christians.

### STILL MOVING FORWARD

And so, even though the North American Consultation has been shaken by negative developments in Catholic-Orthodox relations at the international level, it has by no means reached a similar impasse. It continues to move forward in spite of these problems. Why is this so? I think that several factors contribute to this.

First, in the United States there is a diminished relationship between religion and ethnicity. While in other parts of the world religion and ethnicity tend to be closely identified, in North America religion is seen first and foremost as a personal, individual choice. I think the great majority of religious people in America would say that they belong to their own religious group not because they were born into it, but because they have chosen to

stay with the religion of their family, or chosen a different one. All this helps to reduce nationalistic concerns that so often complicate Orthodox-Catholic relations in other countries.

Another factor has been the remarkable stability of the membership in our dialogue. In fact, three of those who were present at the first meeting in 1965 (Schnierla, Long, Bird) are still members of the Consultation today. This stability has allowed for the development of personal friendships over the years in such a way that we have been able to concentrate on theological and pastoral issues in an atmosphere almost entirely free of personal rivalries and tensions.

Another consideration is that even though the Catholic Church is ten times larger than the Orthodox Church in the United States, both of them are minorities, and most of our faithful immigrated to our continent relatively recently. In this situation neither side perceives the other as being dominant in society, or impinging on the rights of the other group. And so we dialogue more or less as equals in spite of the great difference in the size of our communities.

Another factor is the general mixing of populations in the United States and Canada and the day-to-day contacts among our faithful. A large percentage of Orthodox faithful in America marry Catholics, and many Orthodox priests chose to send their children to Catholic schools. This same mixing of populations also has an effect on the Orthodox internally, and on the composition of the Orthodox membership in our dialogue. Members come not only from the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese but also from the Carpatho-Russian Diocese, the Antiochian Archdiocese, the Orthodox Church in America, and the Romanian diocese under the patriarchate in Bucharest. All this creates an atmosphere in which the Catholic and Orthodox members tend to see one another as neighbors with many common concerns, and the interests of any particular Catholic or Orthodox group does not predominate.

And finally, I think that the fruitful continuation of our dialogue is due in large part to the openness and courage of our Catholic and Orthodox members, with our hierarchical co-chairmen in the lead. Time and time again, they have made clear their desire to work tirelessly to promote the reconciliation of our two communions, and to take bold steps to promote this effort. I believe that all our members are firmly convinced that the reestablishment of full communion between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches is a sacred cause that corresponds to the will of Christ himself. As they put

it in their most recent document, *Sharing the Ministry of Reconciliation*, the process of reconciliation

must be fostered by theological dialogue and expressed in acts of love and mutual forgiveness. As members of sister Churches which are responsible for upholding the apostolic faith, we cannot seek the victory of one tradition over another. Rather, we seek the victory of Christ over our divisions, for the sake of the salvation of all. To him be glory together with his eternal Father and his all-holy, good, and life-giving Spirit, now and forever and unto ages of ages, Amen.

## DIALOG PRAWOSŁAWNO-KATOLICKI: DOŚWIADCZENIA AMERYKAŃSKIE

### S t r e s z c z e n i e

Autor zarysowuje na wstępie północnoamerykański kontekst dialogów między Kościołami prawosławnymi i Kościołem katolickim.

W Stanach Zjednoczonych żyje ponad 60 milionów katolików (23% ogółu ludności, tworzą największy samodzielny Kościół w USA). Istnieje 176 łacińskich diecezji oraz 15 eparchii katolików obrządków wschodnich. Prawosławni podzieleni są między wiele różnych jurysdykcji: część Kościołów zależna jest kanonicznie od Ekumenicznego Patriarchatu Konstantynopola, część od Patriarchatu Antiocheńskiego oraz od innych Patriarchatów. Rosyjski Kościół Prawosławny w USA ma status autokefalii, przyznany mu przez Moskwę w 1970 r. Łącznie prawosławnych chrześcijan jest około 6 milionów. Wszystkie kanoniczne Kościoły należą do Stałej Konferencji Kanonicznych Prawosławnych Biskupów Ameryki (SCOBA)

Początki dialogu sięgają połowy lat pięćdziesiątych, kiedy to odbyły się pierwsze nieoficjalne, dyskretne rozmowy między teologami obu Kościołów. Oficjalny dialog teologiczny rozpoczął się 9 września 1965 r. z inicjatywy strony prawosławnej (SCOBA). W historii trwającego 35 lat dialogu można rozróżnić trzy etapy, z których każdy zaowocował licznymi dokumentami:

**PIERWSZY ETAP (1965-1980)** – wypracowano kilka wspólnych uzgodnień, poruszających następujące tematy: Eucharystia (1969), małżeństwa mieszane (1971), szacunek dla życia (1974), natura Kościoła (1974), urząd duchowny (1976), zasada ekonomii (1976), refleksja nad agendą Soboru Kościoła Prawosławnego (1977), świętość małżeństwa (1978), formacja religijna dzieci w małżeństwach mieszanych (1980).

**DRUGI ETAP (1980-1990)** – wiąże się ściśle z pracami rozpoczętego w 1980 r. dialogu katolicko-prawosławnego na forum światowym. Amerykanie wypracowywali dokumenty będące lokalną „odpowiedzią” na problemy poruszane przez komisję międzynarodową. Powstały następujące uzgodnienia: odpowiedź na dokument z Monachium (1983), deklaracja o apostołskości



(1986), odpowiedź na dokument z Bari (1988), odpowiedź na dokument z Uusi Valamo (1989), deklaracja o soborowości i prymacie w Kościele (1989). Ogłoszono także odpowiedź na Dokument z Limy – BEM (1984)

TRZECI ETAP – od 1990 dialog międzynarodowy znalazł się w impasie w związku ze sprawą uniatyzmu. Komisja amerykańska próbowała swoimi oświadczeniami (1990, 1992) łagodzić sytuację. W 1994 r. wydała starannie przygotowaną pozytywną odpowiedź na Dokument z Balamand. Następane lata to okres refleksji nad dotychczasowymi efektami dialogu oraz poszukiwania nowych dróg pojednania między Kościołami w związku z zaistniałymi problemami. W 1998 roku ukazało się oświadczenie popierające stanowisko tzw. Dokumentu z Aleppo, dotyczącego wspólnej daty świętowania Wielkanocy. W 1999 r. ukazał się „odważny” dokument *Chrzest i ekonomia sakramentalna*. W związku z narastającymi nastrojami antyekumenicznymi w obu Kościołach ostatni dokument, pt. *Dzielić postugę pojednania*, opublikowany w 35. rocznicę zapoczątkowania dialogu, podjął sprawę konieczności jego kontynuowania i wartości ekumenicznego świadectwa.

Na zakończenie Autor odpowiada na pytanie, dlaczego w Ameryce Północnej dialog między Kościołami posuwa się do przodu mimo trwającego kryzysu na forum światowym. Wpływają na to następujące czynniki:

- religia w USA nie jest tak silnie powiązana z przynależnością etniczną; jest bardziej osobistym wyborem;
- stabilność członkostwa w komisji dialogującej;
- oba Kościoły, pomimo dziesięciokrotnej przewagi liczebnej katolików, są mniejszościami w społeczeństwie, a ich członkowie wywodzą się głównie z emigrantów świeżej daty;
- ruchy ludności wewnątrz Stanów i mnogość wzajemnych kontaktów między wiernymi (mieszane małżeństwa, edukacja dzieci w szkołach wyznaniowych itp.);
- otwartość i odwaga katolickich i prawosławnych członków komisji, ze współprzewodniczącymi hierarchami na czele.

*Streścił ks. Tomasz Jaklewicz*

**Słowa kluczowe:** dialogi ekumeniczne, prawosławni i katolicy w Stanach Zjednoczonych, uzgodnienia ekumeniczne.

**Key words:** ecumenical dialogues, Orthodox and Catholics in the United States, ecumenical agreements.