

## **PILLAR TWO**

### **Orthodox Relations**

*The glory which Thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and Thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that Thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as Thou hast loved me.*

(Jn 17: 22-23)

#### ***Introduction***

As an autocephalous Orthodox Church, the Orthodox Church in America cannot exist in isolation. At the very basis of Orthodox ecclesiology lies the fact that Churches, just as individuals, must exist “in communion” – in union with God and in union with other members of the Body. It is therefore incumbent on the Orthodox Church in America that it develop and maintain good relations with our sister Orthodox Churches both here and across the world. In the same way, and for the same reason, every individual Orthodox Christian is required to maintain good relationships with fellow Orthodox; and every parish should do so with neighboring Orthodox communities. If we do not do this, at every level of church life, we simply cease to be the Church. These points are brought out strongly in the following pages.

However, just as we are required to maintain relations with our fellow Orthodox, so too must we pay attention to the world around us, and particularly to others who also call themselves Christian. Certainly as the Gospel tells us, as the Apostles Peter and Paul preached, we are a missionary Church, and our task is to “make disciples of all nations.” But it is also to bring God’s love, God’s forgiveness, to the whole world. We can certainly all agree with these goals – if we do not, we also cease being the Church.

But we often differ on how to achieve these aims, as the different sections in this chapter show. Here again, frank and open discussion are essential.

#### ***Inter-Orthodox Relations***

Over 30 years ago, the Russian Orthodox Church issued a Tomos granting autocephaly to the Orthodox Church in America, its former North American mission diocese, subsequently known as the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church or simply “the Metropolia.” Much has changed since then: in the Orthodox Church in America, in

American society, in the global political situation, and – most certainly – in world Orthodoxy.

In certain respects the Orthodox Church in America has accomplished a great deal over the past several decades. At the time of autocephaly, the Orthodox Church in America certainly was aware of being the fruit of mission and – in consequence – of the need for mission within the North American context. It was also devoted to the vision of unity set forth many decades earlier by St. Tikhon and other early leaders – a vision of unity in diversity and diversity in unity. But in terms whether of language or of cultural background, we appeared to be overwhelmingly Russian. Since then, we have become much more “American” both in our composition and in our outreach. English is the most common language in use. Converts and children of converts fill our parishes. Many positive achievements can be noted: growth of parish life in many areas where Orthodoxy previously was practically unknown, deepened liturgical life, increased presence and witness within North American society, and improved relations with other Orthodox churches both in America and around the world. Certainly the Orthodox Church in America has worked hard to fulfill the mandate given by the Tomos of autocephaly: to be truly the local Orthodox Church in America, not just one of a multitude of ethnic “jurisdictions.”

At the same time, contrary to the hopes of many, we have not become the catalyst for the wider structural unity of Orthodoxy in America envisioned at the time of autocephaly. At the time of autocephaly, Orthodoxy in North America was fragmented into over a dozen jurisdictions, which were distinguished in part by their ethnic background, in part by their stance towards Old World ecclesiastical and political regimes. Today Orthodoxy in North America remains fragmented. Since the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, divisions along political lines are less conspicuous than they once were, but jurisdictional divisions along ethnic and cultural lines are still conspicuous, and now, within the various jurisdictions, new tensions can be felt concerning what constitutes authentic Orthodoxy and how it is to be lived out within the wider American cultural context. Even the “spiritual” unity that once was claimed for Orthodoxy in America is now giving way to rancorous disputes, right down to the parish level. In this new situation, the Orthodox Church in America may enjoy a measure of acceptance and good relations with other Orthodox churches in North America and abroad. But if it is accepted, it increasingly is accepted simply as one “jurisdiction” among many, as an Americanized church for “Americans” alongside other ethnic jurisdictions, and not as the local Orthodox Church, having a unique responsibility before God for all Orthodox Christians – regardless of national identification – who live in North America.

Reasons for this change are many and varied. Phyletism – i.e., ethnicism or tribalism – has been a threat to Orthodox unity since at least the rise of nationalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and its impact on Orthodoxy in America – and in other areas of the so-called “diaspora” – through the 20<sup>th</sup> century is well known. What is remarkable now, in the opening years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is the extent to which phyletism has come to be regarded as natural, normal and even acceptable throughout the Orthodox world, even in places where the canonical principle of territoriality – of “one bishop in one city” (cf. I Nicaea canon 8) – used to be vigorously upheld. Reasons for this are not hard to find. Particularly since the fall of communism in Russia and Eastern Europe, phyletism has been encouraged by what might be called “hegemonism” – that is, the efforts of various churches to strengthen their own global position. Sometimes these efforts have been justified by reference to the need to provide more effective pastoral care for a dispersed flock. But all too often, these efforts amount to little more than self-aggrandizement and self-assertion at the expense of others.

While phyletism and hegemonism are global problems for Orthodoxy today, in North America they have become particularly acute due to changes in North American society. At the time of our autocephaly in 1970, most Orthodox Christians in North America were – for want of a better expression – “hyphenated Americans,” that is, they were Greek-American, Russian-American, Serbian-American, etc. For the most part they were children and grandchildren of immigrants, who took pride in their ethnic heritage but who by this point also took pride in being American. Massive immigration had ended in the early 1920’s, and while an influx of political refugees and displaced persons following World War II complicated life within many of the “jurisdictions,” by 1970 many Orthodox Christians in America were recognizing the common Orthodox identity that they shared with other hyphenated American Orthodox Christians. Just as they expected wider use of English in their churches and an a greater presence in American public life, so also they expected eventual Orthodox unity in America. In the 1960’s their hopes had centered on SCOBA. In the 1970’s and 1980’s attention turned to pan-Orthodox preparations for a “Great and Holy Council” that was supposed to deal definitively with the “diaspora” problem. But during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the reopening of immigration, this situation has changed dramatically. The eventual structural unity of Orthodoxy in America, or even deeper spiritual unity, can no longer be taken for granted as a sociological inevitability.

The new wave of immigration has complicated pastoral life within virtually all the Orthodox churches in America. Relations between well-established hyphenated Americans and the new immigrants (and

– one must add – the many converts who now play an important role not only within the Orthodox Church in America but also in other churches) sometimes can be strained. But the new wave of immigration poses particular challenges to us and our claims to be truly the local church in America. The Orthodox Church in America, like the other Orthodox churches in America, faces the internal challenge of incorporating new immigrants into its church life. We also face the difficult task of trying to build closer relations with the other Orthodox churches in America at a time when they are becoming increasingly preoccupied with their own internal issues. Finally, and most importantly, we must deal with the phyletism and hegemonism of the various “mother churches” of world Orthodoxy, whose understanding of the needs of Orthodoxy in America remains limited even as their rivalries have sharpened since the fall of communism in Russia and Eastern Europe. For many of them, the Orthodox Church in America may be fine for “Americans,” but it is not fine for their own “diasporas.” These “diasporas” need the pastoral care of their mother church – so goes the argument. But it is also evident that these mother churches at this point need their “diasporas” in order to bolster their own position back home and within world Orthodoxy.

Faced by these challenges, the Orthodox Church in America must reaffirm the basic principles on which it was established. This means, first of all, reaffirming its own understanding of the meaning of autocephaly. We know that, under the influence of nationalism, autocephaly from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onward sometimes has been understood as radical independence analogous to that which the modern sovereign state enjoys in the secular sphere. According to this understanding, an autocephalous church can organize its internal life in whatever way it deems most expedient, it can intervene on behalf of its “nationals” abroad by diplomatic or other means, etc. This understanding of autocephaly tacitly underlies much of modern Orthodox church life, but it is an understanding of autocephaly which the Orthodox Church in America has repeatedly rejected. Rather we take as our point of departure the norms for church order which prevailed within the Christian Roman Empire, according to which “autocephaly” meant purely and simply the capacity of a local church, in ordinary circumstances and in accordance with the Holy Canons, to manage its own affairs and elect its own bishops, including the head of the church, without necessary recourse to another church (cf. Balsamon’s commentary on I Constantinople canon 2).

In line with this definition of autocephaly, the Orthodox Church in America has insisted upon the need for ordering church life in accordance with canonical norms. To be truly “canonical,” a church must have an appropriate and adequate conciliar (synodical) structure - a real synod of bishops headed by its own primate. A diocese or

“jurisdiction” does not become “canonical” simply by being “under the omophorion” of a distant higher authority. Healthy and authentic Orthodox church life requires real conciliarity and real primacy. If there is indeed to be “oneness of mind” in the local church, so that “God will be glorified through the Lord in the Holy Spirit” (Apostolic Canon 34), it is essential that there be adequate mechanisms for ensuring the mutual accountability of the bishops of that church. The Orthodox Church in America can and should rejoice at efforts to establish, maintain and strengthen such canonical structures when they have been weakened or absent due to the force of circumstances.

The canons also indicate that in certain situations it is not only proper but also necessary to go beyond the structures of the local autocephalous church in order to maintain and express the conciliar (synodical) unanimity of all the Orthodox churches. As an autocephalous church, the Orthodox Church in America is obliged to do all within its power to foster true conciliarity and primacy within Orthodoxy on a global level and to deepen its communion with all the other local Orthodox churches.

Above all, the canons call for the visible unity of the Church in each place. The disunity of Orthodoxy in America is not simply a canonical problem. It is an ecclesiological problem of great magnitude. The principle of territoriality – “one bishop in one city” – is not a mere legal prescription. This principle is taken for granted throughout the canonical tradition of the Church precisely because it reflects a basic aspect of our faith: the reconciliation of all in Christ Jesus, in whom “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female” (Gal 3:28).

As the Orthodox Church in America has emphasized on many occasions, its highest goal is the full unity of Orthodoxy in North America on the basis of the canons. In this perspective, the Orthodox Church in America itself, even if autocephalous, must be understood as a transitional structure. This point has been acknowledged by us on many occasions. We believe that we have a unique vocation in America and in the quest for Orthodox unity in America. At the same time, as our Tomos of Autocephaly implies, other Orthodox churches also exercise jurisdiction in America. We therefore have a very strong obligation to cooperate closely with them. But this does not mean that the Orthodox Church in America is obliged to accept the present jurisdictional fragmentation as normal. Given the various sociological factors affecting Orthodox church life in America today (massive immigration, increased mobility, rapid means of communication), some flexibility in ecclesiastical structures may be necessary for many years to come. No one would advocate rigid adherence to the principle of territoriality for its own sake. Nevertheless, we must

remain committed to the formation of one truly united Orthodox Church in America: a local church with effective structures for maintaining the unity of the episcopate, for assuring mutual accountability, and for proclaiming – in and through its canonical structures – the unity of all in Christ.

### ***Relations with Non-Orthodox***

The Orthodox Church in America, like any living organism, responds to the challenges of its environment in a variety of ways. Sometimes, the response is inward-looking, oriented towards isolation. At other times, the response is one of engagement/participation or engagement/conflict. And often enough, the elements of isolation and engagement occur simultaneously.

In the Orthodox mission to the native peoples of Alaska, beginning at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we see a living encounter with the native tribes, an encounter in which the Gospel of Christ was brought to native people living in the context of their cultures and religious beliefs. The Russian missionaries did not take the position that native culture and beliefs were to be uprooted and destroyed. To the contrary, they made the effort to know well the native beliefs so that they could explain the Gospel in a way that could be understood by the native people. The missionaries sought out the elements of the native way of life and belief which affirmed and illustrated the core of the Gospel message. Their approach was to baptize the native culture whenever the native culture was not at odds with the Gospel.

Once Alaska was sold by Russia to the United States, the Russian Orthodox Diocese in America set out on a new journey. By this time, Metropolitan Innocent (Veniaminov), the great missionary to the Alaskan peoples, was Metropolitan of Moscow. He reflected on the sale of Alaska in terms of the mission of Orthodoxy in and to America, seeing the sale of Alaska as a positive step which opened America to the witness of the Orthodox Church. On the other hand, the acquisition of Alaska by the United States placed the new American territory under U.S. government administration, with great power in the hands of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. This power was used by Protestant – in the beginning specifically Presbyterian – missionaries to proselytize in order to bring the Orthodox native peoples to Protestantism. In this situation of tension and confrontation, the Russian Orthodox hierarchs and clergy in the United States attempted to protect and defend the native peoples and their Orthodox faith. There were efforts made to intercede for the Orthodox native peoples before government officials in Washington.

During last years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Russian Orthodox Diocese in America, especially in the

persons of its hierarchs and some of its priests, maintained friendly relations with the Episcopal Church.

After the Communist revolution in Russia, the Russian Orthodox Metropolia in America had to concentrate on survival. In the absence of support and administrative guidance from the Church of Russia, it took maximum effort to maintain some internal cohesion in church life. During this period, the Church in America had to withdraw into itself, accepting a marginal role in society, and living a “ghetto” existence. The slow rebuilding of church institutions and the establishment of St. Vladimir’s and St. Tikhon’s Seminaries in the late 1930’s little by little created again a foundation of stability, which enabled the Metropolia to leave the time of isolation.

During the decades after World War II, through the writing and teaching of well-known theologians such as Frs. Georges Florovsky, Alexander Schmemmann, and John Meyendorff, the Orthodox witness was heard in the ecumenical movement and in inter-Christian theological dialogues. Through these theologians and others, the Orthodox Church in America made a fruitful contribution as a bridge between East and West – making the Orthodox witness known to Christians of the Western traditions. The forums for this witness were in the ecumenical organizations, such as the World Council of Churches and the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, as well as in bilateral Orthodox-Protestant and Orthodox-Catholic dialogues. On academic and popular levels, the Orthodox voice also made its impact. For example, the best-selling book of Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, published variously as *For the Life of the World* and *Sacraments and Orthodoxy*, was first presented as a series of addresses to a student conference on a college campus.

With the advent of a “modern” and “postmodern” Christianity, the testimony of Orthodoxy in general and the Orthodox Church in America in particular on occasion had to become adversarial, challenging the new trends, saying “no” to new developments in the thinking of some Christians and in the worldview of society. Thus, Orthodox have participated vigorously in the Right to Life movement, in collaboration with like-minded Catholics and Protestants. His Beatitude Metropolitan Herman has given strong leadership to the Right to Life movement by his very visible participation in the annual Right to Life March in Washington, DC, in the month of January. In the ecumenical organizations, joining the other Orthodox Churches, the Orthodox Church in America has stood up for traditional faith and theology. Due to its experience in Western society, the Orthodox Church in America continues to be a bridge between East and West, confessing the Orthodox faith, yet seeking ways to be understood by the Christians of the Western traditions.

The same factors and developments which have compelled a greater engagement in ecumenical dialogue and in ecumenical confrontations have also provoked some Orthodox to dismiss these efforts as pointless. At times, Orthodox have sought alliances with groups of conservative Christians, both Protestant and Catholic. This, too, is not an easy road, since Protestants and Catholics who are part of the Christian Right in America also tend to be ignorant of Orthodoxy (at best) or hostile to Orthodoxy (at worst).

During the last ten or fifteen years, the Orthodox Church in America has been faced with the new demands of our time in relation to inter-faith encounter and dialogue. Not only has North America become more aware of religious pluralism, but the global situation of conflict and violence in which religion plays a role has become obvious. As a result, some parishes and parish clergy of the Orthodox Church in America are participants in inter-faith organizations and dialogues.

The answers to the challenges of Orthodox relations with other Christians and with other religions are never easy to find. Yet it will always be the responsibility of Orthodox Churches to find the right way to bear witness to the Orthodox faith in secular society and in encounters with those who are not in the Orthodox “household of faith.”

### ***Inter-Orthodox Relations – Looking to the Future A Bishop’s Perspective***

The only restraints placed on us in establishing and participating in inter-Orthodox relationships are those which we collectively impose and individually chose.

This Council of hierarchs, clergy, and laity having as its theme, **Our Church and the Future**, must not merely identify existing inter-Orthodox relationships but must commit itself to enhance and develop these relationships to the fullest extent possible as allowed by the limitations imposed by the absence of administrative unity. These relationships should have as their goal, the implementation of full administrative unity. New relationships which will promote this administrative unity must also be discussed, proposed, and implemented.

The importance of establishing and maintaining our inter-Orthodox relations both on our territory, as well as beyond North America, takes on special meaning for the Orthodox Church in America. No other Orthodox body here has this double obligation of both local and international relationships. Although there is no “road map,” no applicable canon for this unusual situation, we must neither withdraw from these tasks nor neglect them. We persevere, knowing that the

**How important is it for the Orthodox Church in North America to have a public voice, particularly on moral and ethical issues, and how is that voice most appropriately expressed?**



Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who is everywhere present, clarifying, illumining, sanctifying, is the one that unites that which is disunited.

The Orthodox Church in America, as a local Church, having taken her place in world Orthodoxy, is obliged to foster these relationships both with our brethren on the North America continent and with those throughout the rest of the world. That Inter-Sister Church relations are the tradition of the Church is evident from New Testament writings, particularly the Book of Acts and the Epistles of St. Paul. In her relationships with the Churches beyond North America, we must not diminish nor surrender our autocephalous status, but it should work to the extent possible with those Churches that recognize our canonicity, even if they do not acknowledge her autocephaly.

There would be no reason for local inter-Orthodox relations if the Church in North America was already administratively united. Inter-Orthodox relationships on the local level imply a multiplicity of differing authorities between which these relationships are necessary. Local inter-Orthodox relations are unique to the Orthodox Church in America. The administrative disunity of Orthodoxy in North America has not yet been resolved and thus, the Orthodox Church in America, as the autocephalous local Church, must dialogue on her own territory with the brethren who are eucharistically united with her but are administratively dependent on bodies outside North America. Although we acknowledge that the North American Orthodox witness is a unity in diversity of traditions, nevertheless full administrative unity is the goal of our local inter-Orthodox relations and is a major point of discussion in Inter-Sister Church dialogues.

Our non-North American International inter-Orthodox relationships can be defined as relationships both with Sister Churches which recognize the autocephalous status of the Orthodox Church in America and with Sister Churches which do not yet recognize it. These relations are fostered primarily through the Metropolitan Primate and the Holy Synod. Participation by clergy and laity in specific events, such as official visits and inter-Orthodox dialogue, is also part of these relationships.

There does exist a certain bridge between us and all Sister Churches through our participation in international Orthodox organizations and movements, such as the International Orthodox Christian Charities and Syndesmos. This is broadened through our participation in Orthodox theological dialogues with various religious bodies, and in some way, through our involvement in the World Council of Churches, in which other Orthodox Churches are also members.

### ***The Perspective of a Hierarchy of an Orthodox jurisdiction in North America on Orthodox Unity***

The Orthodox Church in America offers all American Orthodox Christians a real hope of having one united American Orthodox Church. The commitment of the Orthodox Church in America, indeed of all Orthodox Christians of whatever jurisdiction in America, is not merely a noble goal, let alone a stumbling block, but it is an absolute ethical and canonical requirement. For any Orthodox Christian in general, and for jurisdictions in particular, to tolerate the gross divisions amongst Orthodox Christians in our land are a great sin.

Administrative divisions are not God's will, and the perpetuation of these man-made divisions in the life of the North American Church is a major blot on the corporate conscience of the Church, a deep grief to the Holy Spirit, a violation of the sacred canons of the Church to which we owe unswerving obedience, a betrayal of Orthodox ecclesiology, a deep wound in the Church weakening all of our efforts at ministry, and a disgrace to our public witness. The fact that Orthodox bishops in America have now become witnesses to divisions rather than witnesses to unity in the Body of Christ shows graphically just how upside down we are.

Since the highpoint in the American quest for Orthodox unity at Ligonier in 1994 we have witnessed the tragic reversal of the movement for unity. New and mighty enemies to our unity have arisen, and have decisively struck at the quest for unity in our land with great success. We witness today a level of disunity perhaps never before seen in the Orthodox experience in America. The division of the Church, the New Israel, in our land into "ethnic tribes" certainly must provoke the Lord and stir up the prophetic spirit amongst us. But where is the voice of the Orthodox Church in America in the face of this attack on Orthodox unity?

I perceive that the Orthodox Church in America is both discouraged and perhaps tentative about its calling to gather all America's Orthodox into one. The Orthodox Church in America must remain constant and consistent in its commitment to unity, and even raise up its witness to such with greater vigor in the face of such current opposition.

On all levels Orthodox Christians should embrace the spiritual challenge involved in the commitment to cooperate outside of their jurisdictional boundaries. Laboring for inter-Orthodox cooperation takes energy and perseverance and this labor of love must be sustained by a vision. Our people are languishing in their efforts to cooperate because they perceive no greater vision, no sincere desire on the part

of their leaders to achieve unity. When apathy in the face of disunity reigns amongst the shepherds of the Church the sheep have a great difficulty sustaining their motivation for inter-Orthodox cooperation.

On the other hand, Orthodox Christians do not need the example or the encouragement of their hierarchs to cooperate in an inter-Orthodox manner. We should all *act* as if we were already united. The ‘fact’ will follow the ‘act’ and not vice versa. We bishops must get out of our ghetto ethnarch mode and be leaders of Orthodox Christianity not of “jurisdictions.”

We must remember that our present divisions are not historically normative for Orthodoxy in America. From 1794 until 1925 Orthodox Christians of many ethnic backgrounds in North America bore witness to their faith by practicing their faith in one church. St. Tikhon, Archbishop of America, had it right in my opinion in his visionary establishment of a single Orthodox synod (jurisdiction) with both territorial *and* ethnic dioceses (for those who *need* foreign language ministry). Why is that so difficult to get right? This polity is certainly accomplishable today.

The real question concerning Orthodox unity concerns whether our hierarchs have a will to accomplish it. Some at least have a voice to, but whether they have a will to is an open question. We judge a tree by its fruits, and history will judge us. The Orthodox Church in America is the beacon of light in the quest for Orthodox unity in America. She carries the torch, and she must both stoke the flame into a brighter glow and carry the torch more confidently and much higher. Greater investment is necessary in the cause of Orthodox unity. She must continue to put this pre-eminent issue before the face of America’s Orthodox Christians. She must labor to establish cooperation in such things as national conventions and clergy symposia where inter-jurisdictional cooperation would be so easy to arrange and so beautifully witness to our common faith and life. She must be courageous to face down the enemies of Orthodox unity, especially the Patriarchate of Constantinople, whose novel and uncanonical jurisdictional claims over America’s Orthodox need to be exposed and definitively answered. She must pray, providing texts and calling upon all American Orthodox Christians to regularly pray for the unity of the Church. There is no greater cause in which Orthodox Christians can invest their talents.

### ***Hierarchical Inter-Orthodox Relations***

The Orthodox Church in America is able to make her local inter-Orthodox relationships as full as each ethnic Synod in North America is blessed to do so by its Mother Church. In other words, there is no limit to the participation by hierarchs, clergy and laity of the Orthodox Church in America in local inter-Orthodox activities as long as it does not deny the uniqueness of her own local authority.

At this time, there is no permanent canonical relationship among all the hierarchs of North America. The Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in (North) America (SCOBA) is a “free-association” body which admits to membership just those hierarchs who are entitled “primate” of an ethnic group (see SCOBA Bylaws). SCOBA has no canonical status on which to resolve jurisdictional disputes or make official statements in the name of “the” Church. In 1994, SCOBA sponsored a gathering of hierarchs in Ligonier, PA. This gathering issued two important documents, a “Statement on Mission and Evangelism” and a “Statement on the Church in North America,” which described existing local inter-Orthodox activities and relationships. The 29 bishops clearly acknowledged the benefits of the then present inter-Orthodox activities and the promotion of future expansion of inter-Orthodox activities. These documents should be the touchstone of our present local inter-Orthodox relationships and the blueprint for future cooperation.

In addition to participating in SCOBA, hierarchs concelebrate holy services, including participating in “inter-jurisdictional” consecration of hierarchs, and participate in the theological dialogues with other bodies in which hierarchs from various jurisdictions participate as “the Orthodox” of North America. We expect an increase in these activities. As the number of hierarchs in America increases, we can hope for more contacts among them.

### ***Clergy and Lay Relationships***

Clergy and faithful participate in national organizations, such as IOCC, OCMC, OCEC, OCF, which are all under the auspices of SCOBA. They also support monasteries and seminaries, and establish clergy and/or lay associations to respond to local needs. They hold worship services, participate in choral societies and study groups. Others cooperate in charitable activities beyond the local parish or jurisdiction. The presence of more and more Orthodox Christians in the “March for Life” is an example of inter-Orthodox synergy.

Parishes cooperate in offering catechetical lessons for the faithful and for seekers, in social outreach to the needy, in festivals and processions. In metropolitan areas, there are more events which offer

increased possibilities for wider involvement as a group witness, whether in civic events or worship services. Parishes may cooperate in sponsoring communal collections for a specific cause in their city. In smaller cities and towns, the faithful and clergy are more likely to know each other on a personal basis, and this can be a boon in working together in community projects and allows for more frequent encounters.

The expansion of these activities depends on the interest and personal participation of clergy and laity. Communication on the local level of the existence of these organizations and of their programs could be greatly improved. Although there is the OCF for young Orthodox in college, there are few local inter-Orthodox youth programs. Organizations for senior citizens to learn, to socialize, to support city-wide programs and witness would bring added closeness and blessings on the local Orthodox community.

The recently-expanded Orthodox media, printed and electronic, brings faithful of various jurisdictions together through the general dissemination of Orthodox information. When the faithful relocate and become members in a parish of a different jurisdiction, they themselves create new and expanded relationships.

External and local inter-Orthodox relationships are essential and bear a common witness to Orthodoxy. As delegates to the 14th All-American Council, we must weigh our own understanding, support and participation in these activities and dedicate ourselves to leadership in promoting and supporting inter-Orthodox relationships. To promote implies to lead. To continue our role, we must remind ourselves of the necessity of establishing, fostering, and supporting activities which may even draw us out of our particular vision of the Orthodox Church in America in order to pave the way for us and our brethren to administrative unity.

There should be no doubt that our North American brethren do look to us and expect us to be leaders. The purpose of inter-Orthodox relationships is to strengthen our common witness to the Orthodox faith as One Faith, One Baptism, One Lord, One Church, universal and local.

### ***Relations with Non-Orthodox – Looking to the Future***

Perhaps the only simple thing about formal Orthodox relations with non-Orthodox Christians (usually called “ecumenical” relations) is their goal: the canonical reconciliation to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of those bodies and groups that have been separated from her for reasons of doctrine or church order. Indeed, the duty and

**Various points of relationship among churches are being offered in the section. Which of these points do you think are most important? Why do you think so?**

responsibility of Orthodox Christians to work in a genuine and committed way for the healing and resolution of the innumerable schisms in Christian history is universally acknowledged throughout the Orthodox world, and throughout Orthodox history. This duty is a direct corollary of our claim to be the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. It is an essential part of the Church's continual work of mission and her witness to the fullness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

*That* we must work for the reconciliation of non-Orthodox Christians with Orthodoxy is thus clear. Precisely *how* we must accomplish this work, however, is a subject of much greater controversy. Nevertheless, we can identify a number of fundamental principles and criteria that must guide any proposal:

- 1) Inter-Christian relations and the work for unity is essentially a *pastoral* task, analogous to and working on roughly the same principles as any other pastoral ministry of reconciliation: one leaves the ninety-nine and searches diligently after the one lost sheep, and one joins the Father in welcoming home the prodigal son with honor and dignity (see Lk 15). In short, one strives to imitate and manifest the very love and solicitude of Christ for His People and for ourselves. It requires, in particular:

An unflagging commitment to the truth of the Gospel, especially as pertains to the canonical and ecclesial organization of the church, and her institutional life; also, a willingness to suffer alienation and rejection for this truth;

An ability to communicate this truth in a manner that can be understood and appropriated by our dialogue partners; this assumes a deep respect and love for the people for whom one is ministering, and, above all, a keen and genuinely-felt desire for their reconciliation with the Church. Arrogance, condescension, impatience, fear, rudeness, or any type of passionate behavior is unacceptable – dialogue must be built primarily upon the building of real *relationships among persons* and not simply in the propagation of impersonal formulas or theories;

A deep knowledge of and interest in our dialogue partners, their history, and their lives; this implies a commitment to continual learning, reading, and studying;

A long-term commitment to truly *listening* and to trying to understand the perspective and historical memory of other Christians, and to discern, given this reality, the next realistic steps towards reconciliation;

The understanding that effective ministry implies as much “walking with” as “preaching to”; and “walking with” implies a long-term commitment, through both ups and downs;

A humble acknowledgement that personally and corporately we Orthodox often fall short of the truth ourselves, tainting the credibility of our message; thus our dialogue is above all a joint process of repentance before our Lord and the reality of His Church that we strive to witness to;

A recognition that in all pastoral praxis the minister is often ministered *to* as often as he or she ministers;

A recognition that long-term relationships are built on only respect, patience and friendship; “the rod” is only employed very rarely and very carefully (and usually first to oneself!).

- 2) Inter-Christian relations are not optional. Formal inter-Christian ministry demands a serious, credible and concerted effort on our part. Because of our identification with the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, in all of Her fullness, the onus of ecumenical engagement falls *heaviest* on us (in this sense, ecumenism is very much an “Orthodox problem”). Thus, while temporary withdrawals from dialogues or organizations may be appropriate as pastoral measures, long-term disengagement is impossible. There must always be a concrete, viable, and active policy in place to further inter-Christian relations.
- 3) As an international task, the ecumenical ministry is a pan-Orthodox ministry. The local Churches must act in concert. This means that local Churches, especially young local Churches, to say nothing of individual hierarchs, must be very slow to act on their own in either engagement or disengagement. Consultation and consensus are the norms of Orthodox action, and deep respect and deference for conciliarity must be shown.

**How can an OCA parish directly participate in strengthening the Orthodox Church in America’s ability to witness in the arena of inter-Orthodox and ecumenical activities and organizations?**

- 4) Participation in ecumenical activity does constitute a civic responsibility in most modern secular societies. Faith groups are expected to cultivate reasonably tolerant and friendly relationships among themselves, especially if they have pretensions to a credible public voice. While this concern is not a *determining* factor in ecumenical engagement, it is a contributing factor to decisions about the form, intensity and type of ecumenical participation.

Translating these considerations into institutional realities can be difficult. It is above all a careful pastoral process of seeking forums that provide extensive long-term contact with other Christians – so that relationships can grow – as well as opportunities for the clear and *convincing* articulation of the ecclesiological principles of the ancient and undivided Church – so that these relationships can have real content. In short, they demand long-term, collegial dialogue and education-oriented institutions in which Orthodox participation can be seen to lead, even if gradually, towards the substantial furthering of the canonical reconciliation of non-Orthodox Christians to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

The mainline institutions of ecumenical engagement (the World Council of Churches, the Faith and Order Conferences, the World Mission Conferences, and the various national Councils of Churches) are subject to regular and often harsh critiques by the Orthodox – even by those sympathetic to them. In light of the principles elaborated above, however, it is not difficult to see why the local Orthodox churches have been consistent in their support for participation in such organizations. These institutions have provided the necessary – and so far the only – infrastructure for sustained contact, discussion and study among Christians, as well as common work. They have provided critical space for Orthodox to gather and come to consensus on numerous issues. They have taken most churches from positions of almost complete mutual ignorance to regular and informed contact, and they have fostered the development of numerous personal relationships of trust and respect. They have been the focus of incremental, but definite, growth in awareness among other churches of the Orthodox world and Orthodox ecclesiology.

These organizations, however, have not been without their shortcomings. There has always been a tendency for Protestant ecclesiologies of denominationalism and ecclesial relativism to dominate the ethos, procedures, and languages of the councils. The councils have often been tempted to see themselves as somehow “super churches,” above and beyond their members. Similarly, the very politically-oriented theologies of many Protestant denominations have often threatened to derail the agenda of the councils away from

**The statement is made that we, as Orthodox, bear the greatest responsibility of making the fullness of the Christian faith known. According to the writer, this is one reason why we should be active in ecumenical gatherings. Do you agree?**



dialogue and unity, and towards political advocacy and activism. Concerns for practical cooperation in the short term have sometimes diverted attention from long-term *rapprochement*, and public positions have been taken that are inappropriate to the nature of such councils.

These tendencies have at times threatened to obscure the meaning of Orthodox participation, even to the point that the Churches have almost felt it no longer productive to be a part of these organizations. To date, however, the advantages of participation – contact, commitment, dialogue – in fulfilling our pastoral obligations of inter-Christian dialogue have been judged to outweigh the disadvantages, and no viable alternatives have been proposed. Further, many of the most heated conflicts have ultimately served as opportunities for some of the best dialogue, focusing in a very genuine and clear way where our dialogue partners are “at” in their understanding of the Church, and how the Orthodox must respond to this reality. Viewed in the long term, many of these problems can be seen to be inevitable, necessary, and ultimately productive.

Nevertheless, it is clear that these organizations are still far from ideal venues for inter-Christian dialogue. As we look to the future, two options present themselves: a) a focused and intentional program to improve these organizations and our participation in them, and/or b) the development of viable alternatives to these organizations. Whichever option is chosen, however, two observations are relevant.

First, over the last 15 years the ecumenical world has been undergoing a distinct internal transformation. Many of the more problematic trends in conciliar ecumenism are losing momentum, and councils around the world are re-inventing themselves along lines much more congenial to Orthodox understandings of inter-Christian dialogue, including greater focus on mutual pedagogy and doctrinal dialogue, decision making by consensus, and a much clearer understanding of the member churches themselves as the prime agents of the dialogue (and not the councils). In many cases these changes have led to profound shifts in institutional structures, procedures, and ethos, and the Orthodox have played critical roles in these changes (for example, in the Special Commission of the World Council of Churches, or the remaking of the Canadian Council of Churches as a “forum,” or the development of Christian Churches Together in the USA).

Unfortunately (and our second observation), this shift has not generally been embraced by the Orthodox in a substantial, dynamic way. The principles articulated above should incline the Orthodox not only to take an active role in these changes, but a *leadership* role. However, despite the fact that the ecumenical movement is today more open to Orthodox leadership and vision than it has been since at least

the 1950s, there is little evidence that the Orthodox are able to assume this leadership, or even sustain increased participation, despite a certain consensus that this is desirable. While individual Orthodox have shown themselves to be capable of providing serious leadership and vision (and the Orthodox Church in America has in particular provided more than its fair share of competent personnel!), as a whole we are rarely able to sustain leadership and strong participation on a long-term institutional level. Therefore, objectively, whether we wish to increase our participation in existing councils, with the goal of transforming and improving their operation, or whether we wish to set up entirely new structures or means of dialogue, there is very little evidence that we have the wherewithal either way.

This fact – that even under relatively “ideal” situations the Orthodox are unable to pursue the type of participation they desire – points to a reality that is quietly, but widely, recognized by many Orthodox ecumenical professionals: that the principal difficulties in ecumenical dialogue are not *essentially* external ones (problems with structures of councils, agendas of other churches and councils, theories of ecumenical engagement, etc.). Rather, they are problems *internal* to the Orthodox world itself, and of a fairly basic nature: lack of time, personnel, coordination, and, above all, finances. Given the resources, the Church has always been fully capable of addressing *any* given set of inter-Christian relations and circumstances with grace, dignity, and vision. But, practically, we are constantly stymied and slowed by systemic problems in sustaining regular representations, meeting financial obligations, and developing coherent pan-Orthodox agendas, projects, and ideas.

As we begin the 21<sup>st</sup> century, then, it is time to reorient our ecumenical thinking less around external realities (“them”) and more around internal commitments and consolidation (“us”). In particular, there is a need to:

1. Build stronger consensus on the basis and ideals of inter-Christian engagement;
2. Build a credible financial base for the funding of this work and institutions involved;
3. Cultivate more personnel for this task;
4. Build coherent, focused strategies of ecumenical engagement among the Orthodox (through inter-Orthodox conferences, symposia, etc.) that are realistic to our means.

In the end, we have no option of truly “withdrawing” from inter-Christian engagement. As long as we believe “in One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church,” engagement with our estranged brothers and sister will remain a part of our very life and work as the Church of Christ. We are perfectly capable of doing this work in an effective, meaningful and productive way – we just have to do it.

### ***An Alternative Solution – Should We Withdraw?***

In the current Christian setting, both in the United States and globally, there are more Protestants and Pentecostals outside the ecumenical organizations such as the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) than there are within these organizations. Furthermore, neither the NCC nor the WCC can count the Roman Catholic Church among their member churches. It should be noted, however, that the Catholic Church does hold membership in such ecumenical organizations as the Canadian Council of Churches and the Middle East Council of Churches, as well as participates in some aspects of the work of the NCC and the WCC, such as the commissions on Faith and Order, which engage in theological dialogue. It should also be noted that the majority of the Orthodox Churches participate in the WCC and the NCC.

Nevertheless, for the most part the Orthodox Church in America participates in ecumenical organizations which represent a minority of Christians. Furthermore, the ecumenical organizations in which we participate, in their theological and social views, are oriented towards policies which are not in harmony with Orthodox views. Thus our participation and the participation of other Orthodox Churches lend credibility and legitimacy to ecumenical organizations which, in the public perception, are espousing beliefs often antithetical to the Orthodox convictions.

The most advisable course for the Orthodox Church in America would be eventually to withdraw from the NCC and the WCC. This movement towards withdrawal should not be motivated by any “fundamentalism” or “anti-ecumenism.” To the contrary, the announcement of our withdrawal should be framed in the context of a defense of the proper and necessary ecumenical vision. Those ecumenical streams or contexts which hold theological promise – for example, the Faith and Order streams of the NCC and the WCC – should be affirmed. And ecumenical Christian relations should be sought with conservative Christian bodies.

The Orthodox Church in America’s withdrawal from the NCC and WCC should also be done in consultation with the other Orthodox Churches which are members of these ecumenical organizations. The

purposes of such consultation would be to discern the common mind of the Orthodox Churches. This means that some Orthodox Churches would continue to hold membership in the ecumenical organizations, some would withdraw, but the respective positions and motivations would be respected.

While such a policy by us would be seen by some as a voluntary “marginalization” of the Orthodox Church in America, it is important to remember that marginalization is a matter of perspective and interpretation. Another perspective would show us acting responsibly, with care and concern for the other Orthodox Churches, yet adhering firmly to principle and a realistic assessment of the prevailing ecumenical reality.

In following a policy of distancing itself from the ecumenical organizations and their liberal advocacy role, the Orthodox Church in America will need to exercise similar caution with regard to conservative Christian groups and movements. Political agendas are obviously present in conservative Christian organizations. Conservative Christians in the USA are similar to liberal Christian organizations in one specific quality – both can be politically-driven. For Orthodox Christians, this means that our alliances need to be formed on an issue-by-issue basis. Withdrawal from groups which are liberal advocacy groups, rather than religious bodies, should not be a pretext for joining organizations which are conservative advocacy groups, rather than religious bodies.

There are conclusions and implications to be drawn from the above recommendations. First, the Orthodox Church in America will need to expend considerable resources, time, and energy to maintain relationships of consultation and common action with other Orthodox Churches. Second, we will need to dedicate resources to discern in other Christian bodies, whether conservative or liberal, those persons and convictions which are in general harmony with Orthodox beliefs and convictions, in order to find a basis for common action in society. Third, the Orthodox Church in America will need to find the resources and people to do serious thinking about ethical, social, and political issues, so that the specifically Orthodox witness and perspective can be well-articulated, thus ensuring that the agendas of other Christian bodies, whether conservative or liberal, do not co-opt the Orthodox. Fourth, we will need to be in the forefront of Orthodox theological thinking on Christian unity. It is not enough to be “against” the distortions we see in the present ecumenical environment. It is important to present a vision of Christian unity we are “for.”

If the Orthodox Church in America fails to follow the recommendations enumerated above, it will indeed slide into a passive

role, accepting a “marginalized” existence in Orthodox and ecumenical settings. This will mean the slow but sure re-orientation of the Orthodox Church in America towards a “sectarian” way of thought, and an abdication of the “catholicity” of the Orthodox faith.

**Having read the section on Orthodox Relations, what do you think is the major priority for the Orthodox Church in America in the next 10 years in this area?**