

The Eastern Churches Among a Majority of Roman Catholic Churches

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Abstract

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Speaking primarily from personal experience as an Eastern Catholic bishop, the author reflects on three levels of relationship with the majority Roman Catholic Church. At the local or parochial level, the author speaks of surveys conducted among Roman Catholics, which seem to indicate the presence of a widespread lack of knowledge of Eastern Catholics and their traditions. At the diocesan or eparchial level, i.e., at the level or relationship between Eastern and Roman Catholic bishops, the author happily notes greatly improved relations and, indeed, strong support of Eastern Catholics, particularly within the framework of national bishops' conferences, coupled with an acknowledgment of prejudicial treatment of Eastern Catholics in past decades. At the International level, unfortunately, the author's experience is at times less than positive, with Roman Catholic structures enforcing "majority rules" principles, even in territories, where Roman-rite Catholics are not the majority. Nonetheless, the author concludes on a positive note and welcomes the Encounter as an opportunity to celebrate examples of cooperation and growth, while addressing difficult relationship issues in the hope of better serving the Churches of the East.



In presenting this report, I will strive to speak from my own experience and avoid extrapolating from the received experience of others. However, as I have listened to previous speakers, I can say that so much of what they have shared, both personal and historical, has found a deep personal resonance. I have also listened intently to the experience of my own community in Australia. Having said this, my task today as a Ukrainian Eparch is to share my experience of the relationship of the Ukrainian Catholic Church with that of the Roman Catholic Church. I thank the conference patrons and organisers for the opportunity to share this experience. I hasten to say that these are reflections. I do not wish to suggest solutions, but to leave it to the Holy Spirit to inspire us appropriately to find answers and solutions to the problems which I believe exist.

I have divided my reflections into three categories, each of which corresponds to what could be better described as three levels of relationship with our brothers and sisters of the Roman Catholic Church. I am almost certain that this classification may not be at all adequate to describe our complicated relationships, but time does not allow a more elaborate evaluation. For purposes of clarity the three levels of relationship are: the local level, the diocesan or eparchial level and the international level. This latter includes our relationship with the Holy See.

Before I begin to examine each level in turn, a few general comments are necessary. Let's be blunt. In Australia, as well as in other national contexts, the Ukrainian Catholic Church has for a long time been living its own largely isolated life. Ukrainian Catholic and Roman Catholic people, laity and clergy, do not really know much about each other, nor do they exhibit an appreciation for the historical and experiential road that each has travelled to bring them to this point in time. Opinions held of each other, found at all levels of Church life, from laity to eminent hierarchs, indicate that mutual understanding and respect for each other is a most urgent task which must be carried out at all of the three levels of our mutual relationships. There are many fine examples of energetic and committed individuals working to produce programs and mate-

rials which foster knowledge and mutual appreciation of the Eastern Churches. However, the Holy Father has cause for sadness if he considers the way in which his own constant calls, and those of almost all of his predecessors beginning with Leo XIII, for seminaries and educational institutions to design and implement courses of study to raise the educational standard of Roman Catholics concerning the spiritual traditions of the Eastern Churches. Indeed, one of our local Australian scholars has just penned a most perceptive article on Pope John Paul's 1995 Apostolic Letter *Oriente Lumen*, but has given his article the ironical title, *Music for Deaf Ears*.¹ Let us now be more specific.

The Local Level

There is cause for serious concern about the amount of real knowledge in the possession of Roman Catholic clergy and laity concerning their Eastern Catholic brethren. In preparing my paper and formulating these remarks, I took care to speak to a number of Roman Catholic priests about their experience. One confessed that he had never even so much as stepped inside a Ukrainian Catholic Church. He said, "Come to think of it, I drive past one every day, but I have never ventured inside." Another sent you a message. He asked me to tell the assembly in Boston that he knew much more about the Anglican Church and the principal Protestant denominations than he did about the Eastern Catholic Churches or the Orthodox Churches. Indeed, on my way here I visited Prince George in British Columbia, the diocese of the current President of the Canadian Catholic Bishops Conference. His diocese has many pilot educational programs. One parish in particular is considered to have a high level of knowledge concerning the Catholic Church generally. Consequently I chose this parish in which to make a modest survey. The Pastor of this parish volunteered to survey his people in order to find out just what they

¹ Knowles, Peter OP. 'Charter for reform or music for deaf ears', *Eastern Churches Journal*, 5:1 (1998): 127-136.