

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear friends!

First of all let me express a few appreciations.

Thank you for choosing this topic about ecumenism and the Greek-Catholic Church, for your interest in it and for inviting me here. I feel much honored and a little bit anxious to meet your high expectations.

I also would like to use this opportunity to thank you all for your constant generous support of the humble work we are doing in our country. I would like to thank personally Paul Wennekes and Kees Shidler. But I really realize that the development is possible due to the many and constant efforts of you all, as well as the many others. Thank you!

What I would like to do, is to give you some basic information on the ecumenical situation in Ukraine in general, and then to share with you a few observations and thoughts about the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC), its role in the ecumenical dialog, and the initiatives it has taken in the last 20 years after its legalization.

1). Religious landscape of Ukraine.

According to the last survey (summer 2007) made by Center of Economical and Political Research of O. Razumkov (www.razumkov.org.ua/eng/journal.php?y=2007&cat=111), 59% citizens describe themselves as believers, 9.6% – as non-believers, 14.8% – as undecided.

Among believers, 33% affiliate themselves with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP), 31% with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP), 18% with the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, and 2.5% with the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC). The rest surveyed declared themselves Roman Catholics, Protestants; Muslims, or Jews.

In order to understand the current situation of religious life in Ukraine, it is important to distinguish clearly various denominations. Four of Christian denominations in Ukraine trace their roots in the millennial tradition of Kyevan Christianity (X-century Kyevan Rus').

- Churches of Kyivan-tradition:
 1. Ukrainian Orthodox Church (in union with Moscow)
 2. Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyivan Patriarchate
 3. Greek-Catholic Church (in union with Rome)
 4. Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church
- Roman Catholic Church
- Protestant denominations
- Jews
- Muslims
- Others

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) is headed by Metropolitan Volodymyr (Sabodan). It is the only one of three Orthodox Churches in Ukraine that is recognized by the Orthodox world. Granted autonomy in 1991, the Church is still very closely tied to the Patriarchate in Moscow. Because of that continued association, it has been roundly criticized by the other Orthodox Churches in Ukraine.

For its part, the UOC-MP has repeatedly affirmed its independence from Moscow and tries to play more independent role in worldly Orthodoxy. There is a strong tendency toward autocephaly and towards the unification of Ukrainian orthodoxy, though in a very specific way. It is noteworthy that, during the last meeting (9-12.10.2008) of Orthodox Churches in Istanbul, the UOC-MP presented to the world Christianity its own position regarding the situation of the Ukrainian Churches.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kievan Patriarchate (UOC-KP) was formed in early nineties (1992) and, after a sudden death of Patriarch Volodymyr (Romaniuk) in 1995, is headed by Metropolitan Filaret (Denysenko). Because of the support for independent Ukrainian statehood and a legitimization of all state initiatives, this Church enjoys great support from the President and the Government. The Church struggles for recognition within the Orthodox world and is trying to reestablish a relationship with Constantinople Patriarchate. During the summer visit of Patriarch Bartholomew in Kyiv (25-27.07.2008) a lot of expectations were raised, but not fulfilled, for this Church.

The Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (UAOC) formed in early twenties of XX century was banned under the Soviet leadership and reestablish after independency. Unfortunately, couple of years ago this Church was divided internally and now, one of the diocese in Harchiv'sk region is independent under the leadership of Bishop Ihor Isichenko.

Outside of this core group of traditional denominations (which trace their origins to the X-century beginnings of Christianity in Kyevan Rus') there are, roughly speaking, two groups of Christian and non-Christian religious communities in Ukraine. First, there are denominations that have some historical roots in the country. This group includes: the Ukrainian Roman Catholic Church, the Armenian Orthodox Church, Baptists, Lutherans, and then, Jews and Muslims. The second group includes smaller Orthodox communities (Ruthenian Orthodox Church, the Russian Free Orthodox Church etc.), Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormons, as well as groups based on pre-Christian tradition and Eastern-based religious orientations and various charismatic groups.

2). Let me name a few reasons that influenced such diversity:

- Location on the map
- Absence of a strong independent national statehood before 1991
- Equal (almost) suppression by the Soviet regime
- Legislation (the Law on freedom of conscience and religious organizations, 1991 and the Constitution, 1996) – the new state has certainly been far from the Soviet totalitarian mode

This organic religious variety certainly contributed to the ecumenical character of the position and actions of religious communities in Ukraine. I will summarize this part with a conclusion of Jose Casanova – “Ukraine certainly could be recognized as the European laboratory for pluralism and (let me add) ecumenism. “

3). How does the Ukrainian Greek- Catholic Church situate itself in this diversity?

Key dates of history of the UGCC:

- Baptism by Volodymyr in 988
- Union with Rome Apostolic Sedis in 1596

- Liquidation (Lviv sobor) in 1946
- Legalization in 1989

In 2008 adherents of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church constitute the third largest group of Kyievan tradition (after UOC-MP and UOC-KP). Around 5 million believers constitute 9 eparchies, 3 exarchates, 3681 registered communities, and 2217 clergy members, 1269 religious persons (www.ugcc.org.ua/36.0.html).

According to this year survey, which was taken in Kyiv, 21.2% of believers – despite their denomination – trust the leader of UGCC His Beatitude Lubomyr Huzar (http://www.homin.ca/news_view.php?category=business&news=3215&lang=ua).

It is a very significant percentage, taking into account, that only 9% of Kyiv believers describe themselves as Greek-Catholics.

4). Here (slide#1) are portraits of four leaders of the UGCC in the XX century. Story of each one of them could be a great illustration of the life of the Church. Each of the leaders lived and worked in quite complicated circumstances: polish, soviet, nazi, and again soviet governance... And yet, each of them was able not only to survive but to build a strong commitment to reestablish the unity of Christians. For each one of them, the ecumenism was not a vague notion.

Because of that, the ecumenism is a strong commitment for the UGCC. Existing on different levels, ecumenism is – except of few groups – a desirable value for the Church community. It can refer either to an attitude, a broader concept of recognition of other groups and the borders between them, or it could refer to a set of the concrete actions on the local and all-Ukrainian level.

It is also the reason, why the UGCC communities extend far beyond “traditional” region of Galicia. Just this year, a new exarchate of Luc’k was established. How one could explain it? Is it proselytism? Allow me to tell you a personal story. My family is rooted in central and eastern Ukraine: Kirovohrad and Poltava. My father and mother met in Kyiv during their University years, worked in Uzhhorod (far West, near the Hungarian border) and then settled down in Lviv, where I was born. As descendents of teachers and public workers they were not allowed to manifest openly their beliefs. And I certainly doubt, that they had ever thought about that. After 1985, during the “Perestroika” period, many articles and books appeared about religion and Churches, and a lot of facts became known and many myths were ruined. It gave well informed freedom of choice for my parents and for me. And then, a personal encounter with a very vivid community of the sisters of St. Vincenty was just a next step in my family’s way towards the UGCC. And there are many stories like this...

5). What attracts in the UGCC most – its clear message:

- Truth about divisions and openness to overcome it
- Authenticity of “Kyiv-ness” and universality
- Dual-communion as a goal

6). As a way to the unity and harmonious coexistence and cooperation, the UGCC has initiated attempts to heal wounds of the past. First of all, three letters have been written to the Orthodox Church in unity with Moscow:

- Address of Myroslav-Ivan cardinal Lubachivs'ky from 1987 “we forgive and ask for forgiveness” (no answer)
- Address of Lubomyr Huzar in 2001 during the visit of Pope Joan-Paul II (no answer)
- Letter of Lubomyr Huzar to the Synod of UOC-MP in 2006 (answer from Metropolitan Cyril)

Secondly, initiatives to reconcile with neighbors have been made:

- Prayers at the Lychakiv cemetery on the graves of Polish and Ukrainian soldiers, Lviv, (each November 1st since 2003)
- Reconciliation act between Ukrainian and Polish people (Lviv-Warsaw 2005)
- Concert during the action “the Border # “803” in Dolhobyczow in south-eastern Poland (started in 2004)
- Ukrainian-German prayers on the graves of the victims of the II World War (started in Potelych on May, 8 2005)

Simultaneously, the UGCC is very actively involved in inter-religious dialog:

- First in Ukraine Judeo-Christian seminar in 1999 was initiated by IRS at UCU
- Jews-Poles-Ukrainians summer camp was held in Univ-lavra (from 2004)
- XXII International Congress of family, Kyiv 2006
- All-Ukrainian Conference IRS-2007 on “Dialog of cultures”
- TV-live discussion of cardinal Huzar, rabbi Dov Blajh and imam Tamim (4th November, 2008)

7). Some ecumenical initiatives and structures, in which the UGCC is taking an active part:

- local cooperation of priests to resolve problems with places for worship
- All-Ukrainian council of Churches and religious organizations
- Christian churches committee
- Ukrainian Catholic University: Institute of Religion and Society, Religion Information Service of Ukraine, Institute of Ecumenical Studies, Catechetical Institute etc.
- Commissions of UGCC (especially the ecumenical commission)
- Firstly-in-20-years published collection of 345 socially oriented documents from 1989-2008 with a protestant and orthodox commentary
- Concerned pastoral commitment in army, prisons, health institutions
- Ecumenical Social week in Lviv, June 2008, and Social week in Kyiv, Donec'k, Odessa, November 2008

8). To summarize, let me formulate some tasks for UGCC for the next 20 years:

- To successfully combine: reconciliation, structures and social commitment as a way towards unity
- To motivate qualified people to carry on particular initiatives
- To communicate with the world, share the achievements and failures.

Thank you for your patience!