



# HOLY CROSS ORTHODOX CHURCH

Through the cross joy has come into all the world

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### **The Episcopal Assembly, and Beyond** His Beatitude, Metropolitan Jonah

Perhaps the greatest and most important aspect of the Episcopal Assembly, not to be undervalued, was that it brought together most of North America's Orthodox bishops to meet and begin to speak to one another, in a constructive way. Certain organizational issues were discussed, such as dividing the North American Assembly to three separate assemblies – Latin America, the US, and Canada. Committees were discussed, and volunteered for. The ministries of the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas were discussed, and the Assembly recognized itself as SCOBA's successor. There was a common recognition of the need for coordination in many pastoral areas – sharing lists of disciplined clergy, the status of parishes and clergy, and so forth – and the need to create and finance an office to handle such work. A statement was issued.

But some of the glaring underlying issues were not discussed, despite an undercurrent in the Assembly, such as the position of the Orthodox Church in America and the nonrecognition of its autocephaly by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and allied Churches; the multiplication of bishops with the same See, by both the Greek and Antiochian Archdioceses and the OCA; the plurality of jurisdictions; and so forth. The contentious issues were not given voice, as perhaps it is too early to publicly address such issues before mutual trust is established.

As His Eminence, Archbishop Demetrios of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, who chaired the Assembly, put it, "this Assembly is not a small claims court." In fact, His Eminence was masterful in avoiding any contentiousness, and kept the

meeting moving in a very deliberate way. He deserves an immense amount of credit for keeping things together and moving, in a most gracious, constructive and refined manner. Of course, we also have to be grateful to him for keeping the OCA at the table, despite some powerful objections.

Perhaps the most important issue is what was not addressed – the vision for the future – which remains the central question. Save for the one committee tasked with preparing a plan for unity, to be presented to the upcoming Pan-Orthodox Council (whenever that is to occur), the range of vision present in the room could be characterized as, on one end, a new context of pastoral cooperation on pressing matters, to a unified Church (on the other end [of the room]). While we would all agree that we need to cooperate – and indeed there are many common issues – what is most divisive is precisely the question of where to go from here, and how to get there.

### **Different models of unity**

It was most apparent that there are also two or three very different models of how a unified Church could be organized, if current organization is any context for such speculation. About half the bishops in the room were subject to the Ecumenical Patriarchate: the Greeks, Ukrainians, Carpatho-Russians, and the EP Albanian bishop. This constitutes a model of unity, already existing among those jurisdictions, where each of the various groups has a relatively autonomous local Synod, but is directly under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. In fact, the Greek Archdiocese's Metropolitans each sit in rotation directly on the Synod of Constantinople. The non-Greek EP bishops are titular, with real flocks but without American Sees. On the Assembly's Executive Committee, all these bishops would be

represented by the Exarch of the Ecumenical Patriarch. How much actual interaction and coordination exists, I am not sure, other than that they do not form an American Synod together.

The second model present in the room was that of the OCA: a fully united, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural autocephalous local Synod, conscious of being the Church in America, with a mission to all people within our territorial boundaries. The OCA has already been granted autocephaly – complete independence from its mother Russian Church; it would be necessary also for each of the other jurisdictions to be released from and by their Mother Churches to join into such a unity. In the OCA, there is a single Synod with its Primate, the Metropolitan, who is the reference point for the unity of the whole.

A third “model,” if it can be so called, is the status quo: a loose cooperation of exarchates from Old World Churches, mainly concerned with consolidating and serving “their own” people. This was what SCOBA tried to consolidate, to no end.

The first two models are quite distinct. The first considers the Ecumenical Patriarch as the point of unity, though there remains a degree of jurisdictional autonomy. In the OCA model, the Metropolitan and united Synod within the territorial boundaries of North America are the point of unity. With the first, the canonical identity of the Church is derived from its relationship to the Patriarchate in Constantinople; with the second, the canonical status may originally have come from the mission sent by the mother Church, but it is now rooted in the reality of the Local Church and its local Synod. The first model preserves separate identities for each jurisdiction; the OCA model demands deeper integration and cooperation. With the first model, all major decisions are made in Constantinople, including the election of bishops; with the OCA model, all decisions are made locally and on a conciliar basis with the participation of the clergy and laity.

Another major issue is the nature of the OCA's autocephaly. The Ecumenical Patriarchate, while recognizing the canonicity of the OCA and its hierarchy, refuses to recognize its autocephaly. For this reason, the EP chose to exclude the OCA

from the Executive Committee, though it recognized and seated our bishops as canonical hierarchs. While this makes no sense to us, we accepted it, as we believed it is better to attend in humility than to boycott the gathering. We also hope that this will be corrected in the future.

Underlying the nonrecognition by the EP of our autocephaly are several major issues, all related. The first is that they did not grant it, nor did they accept Moscow's right to grant it. Second, they have a substantial presence here, parallel to the OCA; that presence, the Greek Archdiocese, is their largest constituency, and it does not work to have another jurisdiction on the territory of an autocephalous Church. Third, when autocephaly is granted, it is normally to a Church that embraces all Orthodox Christians in a given territory; the OCA's autocephaly was given only to one jurisdiction among others – regardless of the fact of the OCA's seniority in North America, which should have been the canonical basis for all other Churches. If they were to recognize the OCA's autocephaly, they would be forced canonically to release their jurisdictions to the Local Autocephalous Church. In short, the situation is very complex.

The Chambésy meetings, which set the protocols for the Episcopal Assemblies, have also now set protocols for the granting of autonomy and autocephaly. Autonomy can be granted simply by a mother Church to one of her archdioceses, with the other Churches being informed of such action. Autocephaly, however, is proposed by a mother Church to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which then gains the consensus of all the other Patriarchates for it. The Tomos given is then an ecumenical document, signed by all the Churches. This establishes the new autocephalous Church as universally recognized, so that all the Churches would relate to it as an autocephalous Church, and it would have a universally accepted place in the diptychs – the ordering of the Churches. This protocol makes sense; however, it is not retroactive. Were it retroactive, the OCA would be in a situation of having been proposed to the universal Church, and in the process of reception. Currently, five Churches accept the OCA's autocephaly; five reject it, and four are non-committal. What is not defined is the status of

such a Church while in process of acceptance.

**Where do we go from here?**

It is clear that the faithful of the OCA want Orthodox unity – a united Synod of Bishops in America making its own decisions and guiding the life of the Church in America. We want to elect our own bishops and metropolitan, and we want conciliar clergy and lay participation. We also believe that many other Orthodox Christians in America share this same vision of the Church. As the OCA, we are not about to surrender our autocephaly, because it is an essential part of our identity; but we will merge it into another, larger autocephalous structure, when that time comes.

We hope that this Assembly could lead to a “Pro-Synod,” in which all bishops come together and act as a single Synod, dealing with issues and problems that arise, perhaps even assigning bishops to areas where there are none, addressing overlapping jurisdictions, and building the foundations for a fully autocephalous Synod. In the meantime, each Church would retain its relationship to its mother Church. Its Primate would sit on the Executive Council of this Pro-Synod, but also represent it to its mother Church, and its mother Church to the American Pro-Synod. This is rather “out of the box” thinking, but that is what our anomalous situation demands. When the time is right, each American exarchate would be given independence from its mother Church, a single Tomos of autocephaly would be issued from all the mother Churches, and a Primate elected and universally recognized. The OCA would fully participate in such a structure.

In the meantime, we are who we are. We know ourselves to be the heir of the Russian Mission of 1794, the work of Saint Innocent and Saint Tikhon, Saint Raphael and the blessed Sebastian Dabovich, Saint Alexis Toth and Saint Iakov of Sitka, Saint Nikolai Velimirovich and Saint John of San Francisco. We are maturing as a local Church in America, with seminaries and monasteries, hundreds of churches, and a tradition of Orthodoxy already ten or more generations deep. More than half our laity – and most of our priests and bishops – are converts to the Faith. We come from dozens of ethnic origins, and all races. We are truly a local indigenous Church, the fruit of the original Mission as well as the immigration and return of Uniates to Orthodox Christianity. And we received the gift of autocephaly and are striving to live up to it.

Our mission is to openly embrace all others, to bring the light of Faith and the Good News of repentance and forgiveness to all those around us, to baptize them into the Orthodox Church, and to share with them our incorporation into the Body of Christ. We must embrace our fellow Orthodox Christians, leaving aside all that divides us, and finding the “unity of the Faith and the communion of the Holy Spirit” that unites us in profound intimacy.

Practically, we can share many things between our parishes, across all jurisdictional lines. Youth groups and activities are a major opportunity. Clergy Brotherhoods can become effectively pro-deaneries or pro-dioceses. We can share health and pension programs, insurance plans, and other such things. We can cooperate in the support of monasteries, seminaries and charitable works, which transcend jurisdiction.

But most of all, our task is to focus on the one thing needful: the Gospel of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the task He has given us to actualize our unity: “That they may be one, as we are one; I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be perfectly one, that the world may know that Thou hast sent me” [John 17:21].

*From The Orthodox Church magazine Spring/Summer 2010- Orthodox Church in America.*

<http://www.oca.org/PDF/DOC-PUB/TOC/2010/toc-spring-summer.pdf>



**Cleaning Schedule** - Members and council members should be in contact to arrange the best time for cleaning. Cleaning should be done in time for the following weekend’s services. If you should have a conflict with the week you are assigned, we ask if you could make arrangements to switch with another parish family member. If you have any further questions please feel free to contact Karen Afocx at [kafocx@clearwire.net](mailto:kafocx@clearwire.net) .



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## JULY 2010

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3 5PM - Great Vespers
4 9:40 AM - Hours 10 AM - Divine Liturgy	5	6	7	8 7pm - Inquirer's Class	9	10 5PM - Great Vespers
11 9:40 AM - Hours 10 AM - Divine Liturgy	12	13 7PM- Parish Council Meeting	14	15 7pm - Inquirer's Class	16	17 5PM - Great Vespers
18 9:40 AM - Hours 10 AM - Divine Liturgy	19	20 Diocesan 7pm -Sisterhood Meeting	21 Assembly 2010- Atlanta	22	23 5:15PM - Serving meal @Open Door Ministry	24 5PM - Great Vespers
25 9:40 AM - Hours 10 AM - Divine Liturgy	26 Fr. Christopher on	27	28 vacation through	29 the 31st	30	31 5PM - Great Vespers

