

Polish Catholic Church -Ecumenical Contexts

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The ecumenical activity of the churches plays a significant role in inter-religious relations of the modern world. Valuable contribution to the theory of ecumenism brought prof. Mikulas Russnak, whose works are of great importance both for dialogue between the Polish and Slovak theologians, but also for the modern understanding of ecumenism in the complex reality of the international twenty-first century.¹

For our discussion we assume the following definition of ecumenism²: "Ecumenism is the most common term used to describe the movement for Christian unity or the unity of the Church. In fact, however, it has a much broader meaning. The word ecumenism is derived from classical Greek language - oikumene - where it expressed the idea of "the whole inhabited world." In this sense, the term was first used in Holy Scripture (cf. Mt 24, 14, Coll. Ap. 17, 6, Hebrews 2, 5). However, Its importance has been qualified in a traditional Catholic approach, in which it was used to determine the general council, as opposed to the particular synods of the Catholic Church. In the language of modern theology, ecumenism went through the true evolution associated with the recognition of the problem of the divided Christian Church and the need to restore the lost unity. The movement of Christian unity that brought out the word to give it a new quality as a whole is inhabited by the followers of Christ Church. Since then, any commitment to Christian unity is popularly known as ecumenism and the ecumenical movement."³

¹ A. SLODIČKA, *Primát apoštola Petra a rímskych pápežov v reflexii profesora Mikuláša Russnáka (1878 – 1954)*. In: *Život a dielo profesora Mikuláša Russnáka (1878 – 1954)*. Prešov : 2010, s. 24-39.

² A. SLODIČKA, *Ekumenizmus Slovanov*. Prešov : 2004, s. 7-34.

³ <http://www.kosciol.pl/ekumenizm>, 9.09.2010.

Polish Catholic Church from its very beginning, partly also because of the conditions in which it was established, considered the problems of ecumenism very important in theory and practice of Christianity.

Polish Catholic Church in Poland, bearing the name of the Polish National Catholic Church until 1951, operates in the country under the Act of 30 June 1995, on the state's relationship to the Polish Catholic Church in the Polish Republic (OJ No 97, pos. 482). In accordance with Article. 3 of the Act, "the Church is governed in matters of their own domestic law, freely exercise spiritual authority, jurisdictional and manage their own affairs."⁴

Polish Catholic Church in Poland- as stated in the tradition and confirmed in the Inner Law of Polish Catholic Church in Poland, along with National Catholic Church in The United States A.P and Canada is a part of one holy, catholic and apostolic church. Catholic Church professes the truths of faith and morals and the principles of the Church's system contained in the Holy Scriptures, as well as in the universal symbols of faith and resolutions of the seven Ecumenical Councils of the Church.⁵

"The Polish National Catholic Church originates in XIX century. Its beginnings took place abroad, in the United States of America among the Polish immigrants. The reason for its creation was a growing dissatisfaction with the dominance of the clergy of Irish and German origin in Roman Catholic Church in United States of America.

A huge discontent among the Poles on American soil was a result of adoption during the Third Synod of the Roman Catholic Church, held in 1884 in Baltimore (Maryland), the so-called "Baltimore Right ". The law was referring to the church property"⁶ strengthening position of the clergy, while reducing the participation of parishioners in the management of the parish.⁷

This situation initiated a formation of independent Catholic parishes among Polish immigrants in the U.S. Those parishes, concentrated around the centers in Chicago, Buffalo and Scranton, were united in the years 1894-1896 to form the Polish National Catholic Church.⁸ Since 1897, Polish Catholic Church is a part of Old Catholic family associated in the Utrecht Union.⁹

"Between 6-8 of September 1904 during the 1st Scranton Synod, Polish

⁴ Act of 30 June 1995 on the state's relationship to the Polish Catholic Church in the Polish Republic, OJ No. 97, item. 482, Art. 3.

⁵ *Prawo Wewnętrzne Kościoła Polskokatolickiego w Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, Warszawa 2003, s. 3

⁶ M. MICHALSKI, B. SKOWROŃSKI, *KościółPolskokatolicki w kraju i na obczyźnie*, w: *Nierzym-skokatolickie Kościoły chrześcijańskie we współczesnej Polsce*, (red.) Z. J. Winnicki, T. Dębowski, Toruń, Wydawnictwo Rafał Marszałek, 2007, s.153.

⁷ *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York 1913, The Encyclopedia Press Inc., t. II, s. 239, w: Wysoczański Wiktor, *Polskokatolicyzm*, w: Kury Urs, op. cit., s. 425-459.

⁸ M. MICHALSKI, B. SKOWROŃSKI, *Kościół...*, op. cit., s.155; S. Włodarski, *Starokatolicyzm w Kościele Polskokatolickim*, „Posłannictwo” nr 1-2,/1965, s. 15; S. Pastuszewski, *Kościół Polskokatolicki*, „Przegląd Powszechny” nr 1 (737)/ 1983, s. 74.

⁹ M. MICHALSKI, B. SKOWROŃSKI, *Kościół...*, op. cit, s. 156.

National Catholic Church was formally constituted and had completely severed its ties with the Roman Catholic Church. The Vatican I dogma, relating to the universal jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome and his infallibility in matters of faith and morals, has been rejected. Father Francis Hodur was elected bishop, also Church Council was selected and Constitution was enacted.¹⁰

Church's missionary activity in Poland began in the first decade of the twentieth century, however, the first attempts to register the Church took place after 1918. However, during The Second Polish Republic (1918-1990), only a few religious associations were found consistent with law. Besides the Roman Catholic Church, also Protestant churches, the Orthodox Church, as well as Jewish, Karaimian and Muslim religious associations were registered.

The situation of other religious associations, including Jehovah's Witnesses and Adventists was not legally regulated. Only the Roman Catholic Church was mentioned in both constitutions of 1921 and 1935. The Polish government also signed a Concordat with the Holy See in 1925. The situation of the national church was even more complicated, slight doctrinal differences and the proximity of naming with the Roman Catholic Church led to numerous misunderstandings¹¹.

"After the war, from 26-27 of June 1945, a nationwide congress of the clergy took place in Warsaw, which called the new Council of the Church. The Council on 14 of September 1945, featured a request for legal recognition of the Church to the Ministry of Public Administration. In a letter dated 1 February 1946, the ministry recognized the Polish National Catholic Church in Poland for the public - a legal religious association.¹²" In 1951 the church changed its name to the Polish Catholic Church, it was also decided to declare its independence.

Polish Catholic Church operates in Poland under the Polish Act of 30 June 1995 on the state's relationship to the Polish Catholic Church in the Polish Republic.¹³ According to various data, Polish Catholic Church unites between 35.000¹⁴ to 50.000¹⁵- 70.000¹⁶ people in over 100 parishes.¹⁷

After 1989, due to changes in the socio-political conditions, the legal

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 157.

¹¹ In State Archives in Lublin there are acts documenting the the activities of the parish church in the region including describing the conflict in Majdan Lesniowski, Kumow and Zamosc.

¹² M. MICHALSKI, B. Skowroński, *Kościół...* op. cit., s. 161-162.

¹³ Dz.U. Nr 97, poz. 482

¹⁴ H. MASSON, *Słownik herezji w Kościele Rzymskokatolickim*, Katowice, „Książnica”, 1993, s. 180-181.

¹⁵ M. MICHALSKI, B. Skowroński, *Kościół...*, op. cit., s. 165.

¹⁶ S. MAC, *Obywatele drugiej kategorii*, „Wprost”, nr 38/1993.

¹⁷ http://www.polskokatolicki.pl/STRUKTURA/diecezja_wroclawska.htm, 7.09.2010.

functioning of religious associations in Poland also have changed¹⁸. The possibility of direct contacts between Polish Catholic Church in Poland and the Polish National Catholic Church in the USA had increased. In connection with the ecumenical activities of Pope John Paul II, who in 1980 recommended to examine the state of relations, as well as the possibility of dialogue between the Polish National Catholic Church in USA and the Roman Catholic Church in USA, dialogue between the two faiths had been initiated. The result of the action taken was establishing, in 1981, a correspondence between the chairman of the Committee of Ecumenism - Bishop Ernest Unterkoefer and the first bishop of PNCC- Francis Rowien-ski. The aim of the correspondence was to establish "ecumenical dialogue between the representatives of these religions at the local, regional and national level".¹⁹

Between 1984-1994, 10 ecumenical discussions were held. The report *Journey Together in Christ*, in which a desire to normalize relations and the importance of ecumenical dialogue was stressed, had been adapted.²⁰ Polish Catholic Church is part of the Polish Ecumenical Council, which "is a community of churches united in it. This community works for the development of ecumenical dialogue, religious tolerance and cultivation of fraternal relations between the Churches. Its activity is lead in many fields: organizing an ecumenical worship, conferences, camps and youth exchanges, charity, interfaith dialogue and consultation with state authorities, working with the media. The work of the Council are conducted in the committees and regional branches. Polish Ecumenical Council takes part in the international ecumenical movement, it also has the status of associate council with the World Council of Churches. What is more, it is working with the Conference of European Churches and the Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe".²¹

The Polish Ecumenical Council, also includes: Baptist Church, Lutheran Church, Evangelical Methodist Church, Reformed Church, Old Catholic Church Mariavites, Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church. Polish Catholic Church ecumenical activity has a various contexts on national and international level. It operates through Polish Ecumenical Council and its own contacts with churches in America, as well as in Europe and activ-

¹⁸ Por. M. MURAT, *Spółczesność polskie w okresie transformacji – wstępna analiza zagrożeń* (W:) *Zamojskie studia prawno-ekonomiczne*, Zamość, WSA, 2000, s. 139.

¹⁹ *Na drodze do pełnej komunii*. Na podstawie: *Journeying Together in Christ. The Report of the Polish National Catholic – Roman Catholic Dialogue* (W:) "Głos Wspólnoty Parafialnej. Pismo Kościoła Polskokatolickiego w Lublinie", nr 3/15/1992.

²⁰ Por.: E. SAWA-CZAJKA, *Spółczesność Kościoła Polskokatolickiego w Polsce w latach 1989-1994* (W:) *Samoidentyfikacja mniejszości narodowych i religijnych w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej*, Lublin, Instytut Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, 1998, s. 57-58.

²¹ <http://www.ekumenia.pl/index.php?D=2>, 7.09.2010.

ity of the parish church in the local communities. Polish Catholic Church actively participates in meetings, seminars and celebrations organized by the Council, particularly in the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

Dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church, which officially opened 10 February 1998 while meeting in Konstancin, also holds an ecumenical dimension. The theme of the meeting were: Old Catholic nature of the Polish Catholic Church and Dialogue in the USA and Canada between the Roman Catholic Church and Polish National Catholic Church in the USA.²²

Another meeting was held in Gietrzwałd on 21 April 1998 in the monastery of Canons Regular of the Lateran. The subject of the meeting were: *The person and writings of Bishop Francis Hodur (1866-1953) and the situation of Polish Catholic Church after World War II in the light of social and political conditions*. The Commission also took note of the effects of the theological dialogue which took place in the U.S. between the Roman Catholic Church and Polish National Catholic Church in the USA. The Commission met with the Metropolitan Archbishop Edmund Warminski Piszczon.²³ Other meetings were held in Konstancin Skaryszew, Warsaw, and were devoted to various aspects of dialogue, both in religious and social level. Discussion included, among others, the ecumenical dimension of John Paul II's pilgrimage to the Polish and the importance of Bishop Francis Hodur. Mixed marriages, religious dimension of baptism and the deepening of inter-religious dialogue was also discussed.

May 26, 2000 in Wrocław, agreement on cooperation and mutual respect of both churches was signed. Since then, within The Church operates a permanent team for dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church²⁴.

Apart from the nationwide activities, the church parishes are performing ecumenical activity in their area. What is important, efforts going towards the unification of Christian churches and communities are extremely important because of the emotions, and discussions on the position not only of the Roman Catholic church, but also all religion in the social space. In Polish conditions, where since 1989 the Roman Catholic Church gradually invaded the space of the political state – the ecumenical activity of Christian churches becomes extremely important. Polish problems related with using the symbol of the cross to the current political activities, generated, first time in many years, a serious discussion about the place of religion and the churches in society.²⁵

One of the local operations of a deeply ecumenical nature is a reward "Heart for Hearts" awarded since 1986 by the Polish Catholic Church Parish

²² <http://www.polskokatolicki.pl/ekumenia/spotkania.htm>, 7.09.2010.

²³ ibidem

²⁴ <http://www.polskokatolicki.pl/ekumenia/spotkania.htm>, 9.09.2010.

²⁵ Por.: *Kościół Bierze państwo*, „Polityka”, nr 35/2010, s. 14-15; A. SZOSTKIEWICZ, *Limia Michalika*, „Polityka”, nr 35/2010, s. 10-11.

in Lublin. The idea was to promote and reward with a symbolic bronze medal, people that works for ecumenism, children, people in need. Among the laureates in the field of ecumenism are: Teddy Kollek (Jerusalem mayor) and Sara Erlichman-Bank from Israel. From Poland: Fr. Abel Bishop of the Orthodox Church, Fr. Edward Balakier of the Christian Theological Academy, Fr. A. Skowronek of the Academy of Catholic Theology. The very same parish launched in 1990 the Ecumenical Singing Prayer Evenings held in different temples of the city. Evenings aim is to "show (...), the wealth of sung prayer of Christian churches".²⁶ in those concerts, among others, choirs of the Lutheran Church of Warsaw, choir of Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, "Fermata", led by Pastor Mark Wolkiewicz, Pentecostal Youth Team took part. What is more, many individual artists participated in the event. The concerts are taking place every May.

Another initiative taken in Lublin since 1984 are ecumenical discussion meetings under the overall theme of *"how many roads lead to God, as there are many problems which people live"*.²⁷ Among the topics of lectures we may find: *"The Christians of the Holy Land"* (Rev. Dr. Jan Gajewski - Catholic University of Lublin), *"Polish Brethren and Ecumenism"* (Edward Domalewski - Arian - Chełm), *"The cult of the Virgin Mary in Mariavism"* (Fr. prof. Konrad Rudnicki (Jagiellonian University, Old Catholic Church Mariavites), *"The tradition of Cyril-Methodic and its ecumenical value"* (Rev. Dr. Leonard Hill - Catholic University of Lublin), *"Polish-Jewish relations in the sphere of religion and culture"* (Dr. Anna Zuk - Catholic University of Lublin). Similar activities take place in other parishes.

These and many other examples of ecumenical activity show how important the role of ecumenism is in the uniting Europe, where unity and diversity complements each other, pointing the way of true dialog, that leads to the development of new values of European culture.²⁸ simultaneously true democracy protects the position of not only the great religions, political parties and trends, but also smaller religious groups, whose activities could bring a lot to interreligious and intercultural dialogue in the twenty-first century.

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²⁶ *Ekumeniczne Wieczory Śpiewanej Modlitwy w Lublinie*, „Rodzina”, nr 9/1993.

²⁷ „Głos Wspólnoty Parafialnej Kościoła Polskokatolickiego w Lublinie”, nr 1/18/1993.

²⁸ SLODIČKA A., *Introdukcja do dejín religionistiky*. Prešov : 2008, s. 8-45.

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