

Eastern-Rite Catholicism: Its Heritage and Vocation

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In my Father's house there are many mansions (John 14:2)

INTRODUCTION

The first crisis faced by the primitive Church concerned a problem that was to recur again and again throughout the whole of Christian history: the problem of particularism versus universalism, of diversity versus uniformity. And the first and ever-recurring temptation of Christians was to fail to see the paradox that only through a multitude of particularisms and the resulting diversity can the Church realize her universality in the fullest way.

Through the influence of St. Paul, the Church solved this crisis by coming to see that her unity and universality, like that of God's creation, is not destroyed but enriched by diversity. From the beginning this catholic spirit had animated Paul's apostolate among the Gentiles at Antioch. "But some came down from Judea and began to teach the brethren, saying, 'Unless you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved.' And when no little objection was made against them by Paul and Barnabas, they decided that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to the apostles and presbyters at Jerusalem about this question" (Acts 15,1.2).

The Council of Jerusalem, convoked to settle this dispute, supported the Pauline spirit and vigorously opposed the imposition of the Mosaic Law on Gentile converts (Acts 15,6.29). This first definition of Christianity as a new and eternal covenant not bound to the religious and cultural limits of the Old Law enabled the early Church to adopt a policy of accommodation that would reflect an inner catholicity in her external structure. Branching out from Judea, the Church took conditions as she found them, establishing local Churches which organized their own life according to the demands of the moment. Through the centuries this process of adaptation resulted in many traditions, Western and Eastern, which are still part of our Catholic heritage today.

The modern diaspora of Eastern European peoples has made most of us aware of this cultural diversity in the Catholic Church. Married priests, liturgy in the vernacular, Communion under both species—all these things, we now realize, have their place in those Catholic traditions that we call the "Eastern Rites."

But in our modern world, gradually evolving toward a unified secular culture dominated by Western technology, is there any significant place left for our Eastern Rites, ancient and venerable to be sure, but perhaps also passe? Are they a truly relevant part of our heritage as Catholics in this modern world? The Popes have certainly thought so. They have repeated time and again that not only are the Eastern Rites of great beauty and value for their own members, but that, together with the Western Rites, they manifest the glory of God's Church and provide Western Catholics with a deeper appreciation of their own traditions. In fact we can add that the Catholic whose idea of Catholicism is limited to his own particular tradition has a distorted notion of the true nature of his Church.

In the interest, then, of fostering a truly catholic openness of mind and heart to all that is so rich and valid in our Catholic traditions, it will be profitable to look beyond the external rites and ceremonies of Eastern Catholicism to the true nature and value of Eastern Christianity in the Church today. We will first try to discover what a "Rite" is, and examine briefly how the Eastern Rites originated. Then we will study in somewhat greater detail the heritage and spirit of the Christian East, its value, its problems, and its vocation in the Church today.

WHAT IS A "RITE"?

A “Rite” is simply Catholicism as it has developed according to the culture and spirit of a particular people. The word “rite,” bearing as it does the connotation of “ritual” or “ceremony,” is perhaps a poor choice to denote an extremely complex and rich reality. For “Rite” is not just liturgy, but rather a complete Catholic tradition, the unique way that a particular community of the faithful perceives, expresses and lives its Catholic life within the one Mystical Body of Christ.

We best know the various Rites of the Church through their liturgies. This is understandable, for liturgy is the most perfect and “official” expression of the soul that animates each tradition. It is by no means the only expression, however. “Rite” also includes all the other elements we would expect to find in a Catholic culture: schools of theology with their Fathers and Doctors, canonical discipline, schools of spirituality, devotions, monasticism, art, architecture, hymns, music and also—and this must be stressed—the peculiar spirit that created this tradition, that in turn is fed by this tradition and that is essential to this tradition.

There is of course no question of one Catholic Rite denying what another affirms. All Rites are one in the union of Christ’s Church under the headship of the Bishop of Rome. All have the same sacraments, the same dogmas, the same moral code. The differences are a matter of emphasis. Each tradition stresses diverse aspects of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Tradition common to all.

In his encyclical *Orientalis Ecclesiae* Pius XII indicates clearly that our Oriental traditions include much more than liturgy:

It is...important to hold in due esteem all that constitutes for the Oriental peoples their own special patrimony, as it were, banded down to them by their forefathers; and this whether it regards the sacred liturgy and the hierarchical orders, or the other essentials of Christian life, provided only that all is in full conformity with genuine religious faith and with the right rules of moral conduct. For a lawful freedom must be allowed to each and every people of Oriental Rite in all their own peculiar genius and temperament, so long as they are not in contrast with the true and integral doctrine of Jesus Christ.

An Oriental Rite, therefore, is not just a different way of saying Mass. It is a “special patrimony” with its own feasts and fasts, saints and shrines. It is devotion to the Mother of God without rosaries, devotion to saints without novenas, devotion to the Eucharist without Exposition or Benediction, the observance of Lent without stations of the cross. And what is more important, it is another “genius and temperament,” an Oriental ethos from which these ritual and devotional differences flow.

ORIGINS OF THE EASTERN RITES

During the first few centuries after Christ there arose in the Eastern Roman Empire two main groups of local Churches centered around the great sees of Antioch in Syria and Alexandria in Egypt. These centers of ecclesiastical life were not only the major cities of the Eastern Empire, but were also sees of apostolic origin. St. Peter himself had ruled Antioch before journeying to Rome, and Alexandria traced its origins to the Prince of the Apostles through his disciple St. Mark.

Because of the prestige of these apostolic sees, their liturgies and customs exerted a great influence on the lesser Churches within their spheres of influence. The gospel had first been preached in the great cities of the Empire. From them, the surrounding country was evangelized. Missionary bishops consecrated and sent forth by the bishops of the older sees looked upon their consecrators as their superiors, and imitated the customs of the Mother Church.

The influence of a third Church, Jerusalem, must also be noted. The sacred position of the Holy City as the scene of our redemption made it a great center of pilgrimage and monasticism, and its liturgical customs spread

throughout the whole world. Although the Rite of Jerusalem no longer exists as a distinct tradition, traces of its usages can be found to a greater or lesser degree in the customs of every Rite existing today.

The traditions of these three Churches, Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem, are the basic sources from which our present Eastern Rites have evolved. The primitive Greek usages of Alexandria underwent strong monastic and Syrian influences and eventually developed into the Coptic Rite of present-day Egypt and the Ethiopic Rite, the national religious tradition of Ethiopia. The evolution of the Syrian tradition centered in Jerusalem and Antioch is much more complicated. In Syria itself, the ancient Greek liturgy of Antioch later adopted customs proper to Jerusalem and produced the West Syrian Rite found in the Levant and among the Malankarese Christians of India. The Maronite Rite of Lebanon is basically a Latinized variant of the same tradition.

In Persia, beyond the frontiers of the Roman Empire, the Syrian tradition had a different history. Christianity first spread to the Persian Empire from Edessa in Mesopotamia, a daughter Church of Antioch and an important center of Semitic culture. Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem were Greek in language and culture during this formative period of the early Church, and Greek was their liturgical language. Coptic and Syriac were introduced later, as the Church spread to the hinterlands of Egypt and Syria and customs were remodeled under the influence of the monasteries and small villages. But the East Syrian or Chaldean Rite which took shape in the Church of Edessa at a very early date preserved the Semitic stamp of the first Jewish Churches. This tradition is found today among the Chaldeans and Nestorians of the Middle East and, in a form extremely Latinized but now being restored, among the Malabarese Christians of India.

With the rise of Constantinople to the position of chief patriarchal see in the East during the 4th and 5th centuries, the Syrian tradition entered upon a new and most fruitful development. When the Emperor Constantine moved the seat of his Imperial government to Byzantium in 330, the bishop of the new capital was only a suffragan of the Metropolitan of Heraclea in Thrace, within the Patriariate of Antioch. But Byzantium became Constantinople, the "New Rome," and her bishop, court prelate of the Roman Emperor, gained a position of great political importance in both Church and Empire. The supremacy of the Church of Constantinople in the East soon became a *fait accompli*, and eventually received the approval of the whole Church.

As we might expect, the new pre-eminence of Constantinople led to a development and enrichment of the old traditions of Byzantium. The customs of Antioch and Jerusalem played the decisive role in the final formation of the superb Byzantine Rite. This Rite was to spread throughout most of the Christian East and into the Slavic lands, and is found all over the world today.

The Christian traditions of Armenia have similar origins. A "distinctive synthesis of Syrian and Cappadocian elements within a framework borrowed from Jerusalem" (Dalmais), the Armenian Rite bears a resemblance to the old liturgy of Byzantium. By the end of the 4th century the Church of Armenia had become independent of the Metropolitan of Caesarea in Cappadocia, and its liturgy, celebrated in the national language, was later modified under Byzantine and Latin influence. Armenian Christians throughout the world still follow these customs.

HERITAGE AND GENIUS OF THE CHRISTIAN EAST

So far we have limited our observations to the liturgical development of the Eastern Rites. This was necessary, for the evolution of a religious culture can be observed only in the concrete forms it adopts to express its inner genius. But as we have seen, there is far more to Rite than ceremonial. We can turn now to what Pius XII called the "special patrimony" and the "peculiar genius and temperament" of the Christian East.

The student of Church History cannot help noticing that the story of early Christianity is centered for the

most part in the Eastern half of the Roman Empire. The Church was born in the East. For centuries the East dominated her life and thought. The center of gravity shifted westward around the 8th century. By then the Eastern Churches had left the indelible stamp of their genius on the future life of the Church. The litany of their Fathers and Doctors—Ignatius, Ephrem, Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Cyril of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, Chrysostom, Damascene—is unrivaled. In the East, Christian theology and monasticism began before being adopted and enriched in the West. For 900 years every Ecumenical Council took place in the East. There the great battles of Christian orthodoxy were fought. Prayers borrowed from the Eastern liturgies—Kyrie eleison, Gloria, Credo, Agnus Dei—are still sung in Latin churches today.

What are some of the products of this Christian genius that flowed out from the four great Oriental sees, which were for over 1000 years the crossroads of world thought and civilization? Each of the four patriarchal sees of the East played its distinct role in forming the common patrimony of the Catholic Church. From Antioch St. Paul went forth to convert the world. St. Peter was her first bishop; his successor St. Ignatius is still remembered for his glorious martyrdom as well as for the spirit of Christ that shines forth in his epistles to the Churches of Asia Minor. The celebrated theological schools of the Antiochene tradition and the Fathers and Doctors they produced remain a living force in Christian theology today.

There is no need to stress what we have received from Jerusalem. The primitive form of her liturgy of St. James, brother of the Lord, is the ancestor of all Christian worship. In her churches Egeria, the famous Aquitanian nun, heard the Kyrie eleison for the first time, and the Holy Week services of Jerusalem spread to the whole world with the returning pilgrims of East and West.

It was in 'these two cities, Antioch and Jerusalem, that Christian worship developed its finest symbolism. The West Syrian liturgy overflows with a wealth of poetic hymnology and symbolism. Its intensely human spirit reminds one of the spontaneity and drama of the Medieval West. But there is also a sense of mystery, a focus on the Second Coming, and the symbolism is directed at making this unutterable mystery felt. The East Syrian liturgy is the most primitive form of Catholic worship still used today. It evolved into its present form at an early date, beyond the Roman world, in small Christian communities where Jewish influence remained strong. It is a liturgy of great austerity and simplicity, with little rhetorical or ceremonial embellishment.

Alexandria rivaled Antioch in its contribution to Christian life and thought. Origen, St. Athanasius and St. Cyril of the Alexandrine school are among the great luminaries of the early Church. But we must look beyond the city to the desert for one of the Alexandrine tradition's greatest contributions to the Christian experience. With St. Paul of Thebes, St. Anthony, St. Pachomius and their successors, the desert of Egypt became one huge monastery, to which St. Pachomius gave the first monastic rule of life. "If you want to see heaven on earth," wrote St. John Chrysostom, "go into the desert of Egypt." The liturgy of Alexandria, modified under monastic influence, still bears the stamp of this desert life. It is a monastic liturgy, long and slow, with little external ceremony, but with much active participation by the community.

For the Eastern tradition that is most highly developed and widespread in the world today we must turn to Constantinople. In the Byzantine liturgy, the exuberance of Antioch and Jerusalem is tempered by the balance and moderation of Byzantine civilization. It is a liturgy of profound adoration, with a deep sense of mystery; a liturgy which turns the pomp of the imperial court ceremonial into a service of the Heavenly King. In Slavic lands, this Rite took on new dimensions not so much in textual and rubrical modifications, but in the spirit and "style" of Christian life and worship. The Slav's profound spirit of reverence and contemplation gives a tone and tempo to his worship that distinguishes it from the more vigorous celebration of the Greek. It is by this spirit, with its products in art and spirituality, that the Russians made their lasting contribution to the Byzantine Rite.

The Armenian liturgy is more reserved in its expression. Its solemn and recollected spirit, a bit mournful, is

marked by one of the most beautiful chants in all the Eastern liturgies, as well as by the beauty of its hymns and the magnificence of its ceremonial and appointments.

SPIRIT OF THE EASTERN RITES

The historical value of all this is obvious. But we are not antiquarians. Our initial question remains, 'then: are the Eastern Rites a vital force in the Church today? Is there any significant place in -the modern Church for something "Oriental"?'

Do not be misled by the terms "Eastern" and "Oriental" as applied to the traditions we have been discussing. The "Orient" of the Oriental Rites was the Eastern Roman Empire, much of which lay within the "West" of today. It is true that some Eastern Rites are immersed in an atmosphere strange and exotic to the Westerner. But we must not mistake the clothes for the man. The essence of Eastern Christianity cannot be reduced to certain exotic aspects of its ceremonial and chant, which are the product of time and can change. For Oriental Catholicism is not Catholicism in an old-fashioned suit, but a "style" of Christianity, a peculiar Christian "spirit" which is of lasting value. It is as suitable and adaptable to 'the historical and cultural evolution of the world as the Second Vatican Council is now proving our Western traditions to be.

Each Oriental Rite gives its own special nuance to -this "type" of Catholicism, but in its broadest outlines the Eastern tradition is one with respect to its Western complement. Consequently, although we will limit our illustrations of the Oriental spirit to the Byzantine tradition, most of what we say will be characteristic of Eastern Catholicism as a whole.

1. Eastern Catholicism Is Non-Latin

We have already seen, implicitly, one fundamental characteristic of Eastern Catholicism: it is non-Latin. The East did not receive the faith as daughter Churches of Rome, but directly from the apostles. This was a decisive factor in shaping the ecclesiastical physiognomy of the Catholic East.

The unique position of the Roman Church as the See of Peter and sole apostolic and patriarchal Church of the West provided an ideal setting for the growth of the highly centralized ecclesiastical organization so characteristic of Latin Catholicism. This development was facilitated by the fall of the Western Roman Empire. This event created a political and cultural vacuum that left the Roman Church as the sole source of unity and culture in the West.

In the East a very different pattern of ecclesiastical organization emerged. Not only were there four great centers of Christian life within the Eastern Empire, but beyond the frontiers of the Roman world were the national Churches of Persia and Armenia. The cultural situation was also more complex in the East. Throughout the Western Empire, Latin had largely supplanted the local languages in pagan worship even before it was adopted as a liturgical language by the Church. But a foreign liturgical language could not be imposed on the more or less refined and diversified cultural groups in the East. Even in such centers of Hellenism as Antioch and Alexandria, Greek eventually gave way to the local Syriac and Coptic in the liturgy.

Developing according to the ethnic and cultural exigencies of its own, non-Roman milieu, Eastern Catholicism directed its attention to the local Church as the prime reality of Church life. Emphasis on local autonomy, the role of the local bishop, the collegial aspect of the hierarchy, gave the East a flexibility that allowed it to absorb and contribute to local culture in a way never achieved in the West. And all these factors have had their effect on what we have called the Oriental "style" of Catholicism.

2. Oriental Religious Point of View

The Oriental Catholic's religious point of view is as universal in essentials as the Westerner's. But he is unwilling to associate this with the fruits of human organization, of law and order and uniformity. Tending to emphasize the mystery of the Church rather than its earthly form, he is less concerned with the disciplinary and administrative aspects of its life. He sees the Church not so much as a visible society headed by Christ, than as His theophany, a coming of the eternal into 'time, an unfolding of the divine life through the deifying transformation of humanity in the worship and sacraments of Christ. Life in the Church is spoken of in terms of glory, light, vision, union, and transfiguration. The more juridical vocabulary of power, order, right, justice, sanction is less known to him.

3. Eastern and Western Devotional Attitudes

The devotional attitudes of Easterner and Westerner are in harmony with their views of the Church. The Westerner tends to emphasize the moral aspects of the sacramental and spiritual life, the strength received to aid him in his pilgrimage toward his final beatitude. Grace is seen as a principle of meritorious action, restoring to man the capacity for salutary works. The Oriental, however, sees man more as an imperfect similitude of God which grace perfects. His life in Christ is a progressive transfiguration into the likeness of God. Less is said of merit, satisfaction, beatitude, than of divinization, transfiguration, the transformation of man into the image of God.

4. Oriental Rite Is Closer to the People

The Oriental is not disturbed by the fact that his Rite is less widespread than another. His worship is meaningful to him because it is intimately his, not because it is also yours. That his religion, his worship, should be inextricably bound up with the history and life of his people, that he should worship God in a language that is the fruit of his own culture with a liturgy which preserved not only the faith but also the sense of national unity of his forefathers during dark days of oppression—this is what matters. That Italians and Irishmen do things differently does not surprise him. It is precisely what he would expect.

This intimate union of religion, nation, culture contains dangers, of course. But it has given the Eastern Christian a deep sense of responsibility for the Church. The election of a patriarch arouses his lively interest; the improper performance of the liturgy by his pastor would not be met with silence. His access to his bishop or patriarch is remarkably casual, and chanceries in the Middle East always seem to be overflowing with the laity, peasant and shopkeeper as well as dignitary, who have come to request a favor, protest a point, or offer their congratulations on a feast. Many of these laymen will be clerics in minor orders or even deacons. Ordained cantors or subdeacons at an early age, they continue their liturgical service in their parish church throughout their lives. On a Sunday morning in the Syrian or Chaldean churches of Iraq, it is most common to see a handful of laymen leave their families on entering the church and go into the sacristy to emerge vested in the robes of their order and chant by heart the office and Mass with an unaffected gusto.

EASTERN LITURGY

We could cite many more examples of the Eastern spirit, but the best way to reach -the living soul of a Church is through its liturgy. This is especially true of the East, where the intimate union of Rite with the religious culture and piety of the people has preserved the primitive centrality of the liturgy in the religious life of the Christian community. The present strenuous efforts in the West to forge once again the link between piety and the prayer of the Church highlight the ease with which the Oriental situates his spiritual life within the cadre of his liturgical prayer. For him the liturgy is not one of various spiritual duties; it is the central fact of Christian life, the supreme expression of his life in God. The purpose of God's saving revelation is to render man capable of the life of God, and the liturgy is the privileged ground of this encounter. It is the place of theophany, where man is introduced into the divine life by participating in the mystery of redemption.

This patristic notion of Christian life as primarily sacramental, as a salutary encounter with the glorified Christ by participating in the mystery of Christ which is the liturgy, is common to both East and West. But the Eastern Churches have preserved it as a vital force in a way that is peculiarly their own. In the absence of the shocks of Western intellectual and religious history — Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment — the East has retained a unique loyalty to the Fathers, whose vital spirit still animates Eastern piety. Something of the spirit of the first age of Christianity with its unaffected joy in the Resurrection of the Lord is still enshrined in the liturgies of the East. And it was through the divine pedagogy of these liturgies, a tangible catechism of the divine economy, that the East held fast to Christianity throughout the long centuries of Mongol and Turkish oppression.

No one who has worshiped with Eastern Catholics can fail to sense the extraordinary hold that the recurring cycle of their liturgy has upon the piety of the people. No one who has stood for long hours in a crowded Russian church on Holy Saturday evening has awaited the Resurrection of the Lord in vain. While the body of the Savior lies in the center of the nave, the liturgical representation through psalm and prophecy of our Passover from death to life moves in crescendo to the moment of the Resurrection when the church, now alight with hundreds of flickering tapers, resounds with the cry of the priest: "Khristos voskrese!" "Christ is Risen!" And a world that is reliving the joy of its release from the bondage of sin and death exults: "Voistinnu voskreset" "In Truth He is Risen!" No one who has lived this can fail to realize that for the Eastern Christian the gospel is inseparably linked to the liturgical cycle of feasts and fasts that unfolds week after week in his parish church.

Sacredness and Mystery

What are some of the qualities of this liturgy so dear -to our brethren in 'the East? Apart from the complexity and length of the services, and the magnificence of its ceremonial, the most striking aspect of the Byzantine liturgy is the atmosphere of sacredness and mystery which surrounds its every movement and communicates a sense of reverential awe. For the Byzantine-Rite Christian, as St. Germanus of Constantinople notes, even his humble parish church is "heaven on earth, the place where the God of heaven dwells and moves"; where man can "lay aside all earthly care," as the liturgy enjoins, to "welcome the King of the Universe." It is the heavenly sanctuary "where men and women, according to their capacity and desire, are caught up into the worship of the redeemed cosmos; where dogmas are no barren abstractions but hymns of exulting praise." (P. Hammond)

Historical reasons can be found to explain much of this spirit. By the end of the 4th century the piety of the Byzantine East, molded in the matrix of the great Christological disputes, had become impregnated with an overwhelming sense of the awesome divinity of Christ and the unsearchable transcendence of God. To participate in the holy mysteries became a fearsome thing; holy objects had to be hidden, viewed from afar. Gradually the simple and direct liturgical action of the early Church became an object of contemplation, an awesome vision, full of mystery, before which man prostrates himself in reverential fear.

While the Church in the West, involved in the practical struggle to maintain civilization and culture and to convert the barbarians, developed what we might call an incarnational spirit, attentive to the present problems

of Christian life on earth, the genius of the East found expression in a more mystical point of view. There, as in the West, many non-theological factors fostered this evolution. The intimate union of Church and Empire in the East relegated much of the institutional, juridical aspect of Church life to the emperor. Thus the Church was free to develop an ecclesiology in which she appears not as a militant society of the faithful on earthly pilgrimage toward the heavenly goal, but as a manifestation of the eternal in time, an epiphany of the New Kingdom in its final consummation. The emphasis is vertical rather than horizontal: a view of the Church in depth rather than in extension.

Eastern Liturgy Viewed as a Participation in the Heavenly Liturgy

Consonant with this view of the Church as “paradise on earth,” a view that the Greek Fathers loved to stress, the liturgy became an icon of the celestial liturgy described in the Epistle to the Hebrews and in the Apocalypse. The Westerner sees the Eucharistic cult more as a means of preparing the militant Christian to “fight the good fight” through the grace-giving mediatorship of the Incarnate Word. The Oriental looks to the liturgical community’s transfiguring participation in the eternally triumphant God-man’s Passover from death to life as a foreshadowing of the final divinization of God’s People in the Kingdom to come.

The spirit is not one of loving compassion for the suffering Mediator expiating our sins on the cross, but of glorifying adoration of the Heavenly Ruler of All in the renewal of His triumph over death. The Eucharistic liturgy is indeed the renewal of an historical occurrence, but the emphasis is not on the act in its historical perspective, not on what is being renewed, but on the gloriously triumphant renewal here and now. It is not so much the immolation of the cross and a sacramental communion with the immolated Victim, as a homage to the Victorious Lamb and a reception of His “Sacred and Heavenly Gifts.” The Eucharistic dogma is the same in East and West; the emphases differ.

This view of the liturgy as a participation in the celestial worship of our glorified Heavenly King finds unmistakable expression in the Byzantine offertory rite of the Great Entrance, when the clergy bear the sacred offerings in procession from the altar of preparation to the altar of sacrifice. The Cherubic Hymn sung during the procession expresses the symbolism in which the whole cult is immersed, enjoining the faithful to associate themselves with the heavenly choirs and share in their eternal view:

Let us who mystically represent the Cherubim and sing the thrice-holy hymn to the life-giving Trinity now put aside every earthly care, so that we may welcome the King of all who comes escorted by invisible hosts of angels. Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

Even more explicit, perhaps, is the ritual for the consecration of a church:

O Lord of heaven and earth, who with ineffable wisdom...has appointed the order of the priesthood on earth as a symbol of the angels’ service in heaven . . . fill with Your divine glory this temple erected to Your praise, and show forth the holy altar erected therein as the Holy of Holies, that we who stand before it, as before the dread throne of Your Kingdom, may serve You uncondemned.

This insistence on participation in the heavenly liturgy is not a sentimental evasion into the unreal, but a confession of faith in what is most real, our life in Christ. And the stress on the completion of our transfiguration after death gives a sense of triumph to our faith, which begins this process during life.

The Symbolism of Light

One of the most common themes used in the Byzantine liturgy to illustrate the transfiguring nature of our life in Christ is light. The Johannine theme of light, the light of the Lamb in the City of God (Apocalypse 21,22.26),

pervades Oriental spirituality and mysticism. The life of the spirit is an illumination by this divine light; to see God by this light is to live in Him. St. Irenaeus wrote, "To see 'the light is to be in the light and participate in its clarity; likewise to see God is to be in Him and participate in His life-giving splendor; thus those who see God participate in His life.'" This symbolism of light marks the rhythm of the hours in the Byzantine office, evoking in the faithful a nostalgia for the divine vision which they are allowed to glimpse symbolically here on earth. It is a refrain heard daily in the Eucharistic liturgy, in the hymn after Communion: "We have seen the true light, we have received the heavenly Spirit, we have found the true faith worshiping the undivided Trinity that has saved us."

The patristic and liturgical texts that illustrate this theme of transformation in Christ are innumerable. In a moving passage of his Sermon on the Transfiguration, Anastasius of Sinai has our transfigured Lord say: "It is thus that the just shall shine at the resurrection, it is thus that they shall be glorified; into my condition they shall be transfigured, in this glory they shall be transformed, to this form, to this image, to this imprint, to this light and to this beatitude they shall be configured, and they shall reign with me, the Son of God." The liturgical tropes of the feast of the Transfiguration bear the same message:

You were transfigured on the mount, O Christ-God, revealing to Your disciples Your glory in so far as they could bear it. Let Your eternal light illumine us sinners too . . . O Light.giver, glory to You!

Come, let us climb up the mountain of the Lord into the house of our God and contemplate the glory of His Transfiguration; in its light let us acquire the light, and elevated by the Spirit let us hymn the consubstantial Trinity in every age.

Importance of the Resurrection in the East

But the liturgical texts, like the sermon of Anastasius, make clear that the glory of Thabor is but a sign of the Resurrection, a figure of the cosmic divinization that is to come:

Before Your crucifixion, O Lord, having taken Your disciples onto a high mountain, You were transfigured before them desiring to show them the radiance of the Resurrection.

For it is faith especially in the mystery of Christ's Resurrection that renders effective the Byzantine liturgy's confession of the reality of 'the vision of God. It is difficult to communicate the importance of this mystery in the life of the East. Even in Holy Week, when the Great Fast lies heavy on the Church and the liturgy marks the lament and desolation of the death on the cross, the note of joy is heard:

Lament not for me, O Mother, when you behold in the tomb the Son whom, without seed, you conceived in your womb, for I shall rise again and glorify myself; and since I am God I will raise into unending glory those who with faith and love magnify you.

It has been said that the differences between Eastern and West. em spirituality can be summed up in the names given to the basilica that covers Golgotha and the tomb of Christ. To the Westerner it is "The Holy Sepulchre," but the East knows it as the "Anastasis ,"

"The Resurrection." This much is certain, however: the whole life of the Byzantine East is a praise of the Risen Lord. In the Byzantine Rite the Pasch itself is preceded by ten weeks of preparation and followed by an uninterrupted eight-week feast. To this saving Passover all other mysteries point; in it they find their fulfillment. The offices of every Sunday in the year are dedicated to the celebration of the Resurrection. Every Saturday evening, during matins of the vigil, one of the eleven gospels of the Resurrection is proclaimed, followed by this hymn:

Having beheld the Resurrection of Christ, let us adore the Holy Lord Jesus, the only sinless one. Your cross do we adore, O Christ, and Your holy Resurrection we praise and glorify: for You are our God and we know no other besides You; it is Your name that we proclaim. Come all you faithful, let us adore Christ's holy Resurrection. For lo, through the cross has joy come into all the world. Ever blessing the Lord, let us sing His Resurrection: for, having endured the cross for us, He has by His death trampled death.

These themes of the Byzantine liturgy—light, glory, paschal joy—rooted in the Resurrection, overlaying one another, tirelessly chanted day after day, enveloped in an atmosphere of the world to come, find their completion in the Eucharistic liturgy when the priest, having distributed the Eucharist to the people, adds the hope of the Parousia to his recital of the Resurrection hymn quoted above:

Shine, shine new Jerusalem. for the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. Now rejoice and be glad, O Sion. Come forth in splendor. O Pure Mother of God, for He whom you bore is risen. O Christ, great and holiest Passover! O Wisdom, Word and Power of God! Grant that we may receive You more perfectly in the day of Your eternal kingdom.

This is indeed the conclusion not only of the New Testament, but of our liturgical lives as well:

“I am the root and offspring of David, the high morning star” And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” He who testifies to these things says, “It is true, I come quickly!” Amen! Come Lord Jesus! (Apocalypse 22:16-21)

Byzantine Art and Architecture—Liturgical and Hierarchical Themes

As we might expect, this spirit of profound humility and adoration, of paschal triumph, of participation in the divinizing mysteries of the Eternal King, extends to the Byzantine liturgical setting as well as to the texts and rubrics of the rites themselves. The structure, arrangement and decoration of the Byzantine church building are flooded with the splendors of the heavenly world. Unlike the soaring cathedrals of the West, the Byzantine church from without seems a stolid, geometrically compact mass of heavy masonry. We are unprepared for the vastness within. The ordered and ascending progression of arches and domes, increasing in volume as they approach the great central cupola, sky of its own self-contained universe, draws the worshiper forward and upward, but not beyond. The unbroken lines of apse and dome show forth a cosmos sufficient unto itself.

The flowing surfaces of the interior are so enveloped in the imagery of a decorative scheme that building and icon become one in evoking that vision of the other world, the Christian cosmos, around which the life of the Byzantine Rite revolves. From the central dome the image of Christ the Ruler of All dominates the whole scheme, giving unity to the two basic iconographic themes, the hierarchical and the liturgical. The movement of the hierarchical theme is vertical. It is the eternal view of God's People and their salvation history, ascending from the present, worshiping community assembled in the nave up through the ranks of saints, prophets, patriarchs and apostles, to the Lord in the heavens attended by the heavenly choirs.

The liturgical theme, extending upward from the sanctuary, is united both artistically and theologically with the hierarchical. In fact it is only with the liturgical theme that the symbolism of the church comes alive, and appears as more than an impressive but static embodiment of the cosmos as seen through the eyes of God. A link between the divine and created worlds was forged by Christ in the Covenant of His Blood, a covenant renewed in the Eucharistic liturgy and ratified by the “Amen” of God's People.

This dynamic bond is expressed in both the disposition and iconography of the church. The enclosed sanctuary wherein the mysteries of the covenant are renewed is conceived as the link between heaven and earth. Behind

and above the altar of sacrifice, on the wall of the central sanctuary apse, is depicted the “Communion of the Apostles,” Christ the High Priest, surrounded by the angels, giving the Eucharist to the Twelve.

Over the altar, in the conch, is the Mother of God interceding in our behalf. With her is the Christ child, figure of the Incarnation that made this sacrificial intercession possible. Above this, at the summit of the arch, is the “Throne of Divine Judgement,” where the sacrificial mediation intercedes before God. From the sanctuary, cycles of liturgical feasts are depicted in lateral bands of frescoes that extend around the walls of the church, binding the historical past into the salvific renewal of the present. Within this setting the liturgical community commemorates the mystery of its redemption in union with the Heavenly Church, and offers the mystery of Christ’s Covenant through the outstretched hands of His Mother, all made present in the sacramental surroundings of the iconographic scheme.

The appointments and spatial disposition of the Byzantine church also reflect the Eastern spirit of reverent awe. The great barrier of the iconostasis rises up before the sanctuary, holy of holies and throne of God. Through the doors of this altar screen none but the sacred ministers dare to pass. For the Oriental, the Latin’s claim to gaze on the Lord, to be admitted at any moment to His presence, is indeed an extraordinary one. In the East the throne must be viewed from afar.

But this sanctuary barrier that cuts off the altar from our view is not a hindrance to popular participation in the mysteries of the liturgy, but rather an aid, an aid to the Eastern spirit of worship. For Eastern devotion is aroused by concealment as well as by exposition, and the doors and veils of the iconostasis are not only to hide, but also to reveal. Understood in this way, the icon screen is a tangible witness to the mystery we live in the liturgy. It is not a barrier but a symbolic gateway into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Worshiping in ‘this atmosphere of profuse symbolism through which the supernatural splendor of the inaccessible divine majesty is approached, the Eastern Christian witnesses the exaltation and sanctification of creation, the majestic appearance of God who enters him, sanctifies him, divinizes him through the transfiguring light of His heavenly grace. It is not only a matter of receiving the sacraments, but of living habitually within a liturgical atmosphere which stirs man in body and soul in order to transform him before a vision of spiritual beauty and joy.

Eastern Liturgical Approach

In tune with the spirit of his liturgy, the liturgical approach of the Byzantine Christian is less active than the Westerner’s. The Latin Mass, with the austere and pure simplicity of its setting, its clearly defined parts, the sobriety of gesture and ceremonial, the directness of expression, the concentrated structure of its prayers—all this clearly reflects the order and restraint of the Roman genius. So too, the liturgical approach of the Westerner manifests the same direct approach to Christian life. At Mass the Western Catholic unites his sufferings to the sacrifice of Christ. Even when receiving Communion he is conscious of the positive aspect, of doing a good act pleasing to God.

But the Easterner seems to find his liturgical consolation less in giving than in receiving. He does not offer his sufferings as a sacrifice united to that of Christ. He leaves them behind and is carried beyond them to heaven, to receive the food of angels for the nourishment of his life in God. This emphasis on the action of God is found even in the sacramental texts. In baptizing, for example, the priest says: “The servant of God (name) is baptized...” instead of the more positive “I baptize thee...”

One might object that such stress on the majesty and mystery of God must be somewhat forbidding to the faithful; that a passive approach in such a climate of symbolism and sacramentality can breed mere habit. Does not this profusion of externals entail the danger of stopping short at a sentimental feeling of communion with

the divine that does not imply any real participation in the mystery nor have any direct influence on Christian life?

The problem is real, and the East has at times shown a tendency to ritualism and externalism, a tendency to educate the heart but not the mind and the will—but only when the East has been untrue to other, complementary aspects of its tradition. For the basic presupposition of this ritual and pictorial splendor is that the divine world it evokes is explicitly another world, the world beyond the senses, beyond death. It is a world as radically other as the world beyond our resurrection, and our only access to it now is through voluntary death to self.

St. John Climacus, seventh century abbot of the monastery on Sinai, provides us with many examples of the stern asceticism which the East demands. Step twenty-nine of his famous Ladder of Divine Ascent is “Concerning Heaven on Earth, or Godlike Dispassion and Perfection, and the Resurrection of the Soul before the General Resurrection”; but this is at the summit of the Ladder. To reach it we must first climb the bottom rungs: “Renunciation of the World,” “Detachment,” “Exile,” “Blessed Obedience,” “Painstaking and True Repentance,” “Remembrance of Death...”

But the emphasis on man’s lowliness and unworthiness when faced with the unsearchable majesty of God might still be forbidding were it not for the deep Christianity of the Byzantine liturgical prayers. The glory of the Lord and His incomparable transcendence, the lowliness and sinfulness of man—these themes lead us to a deep sense of reverence and humility. “Lord have mercy!” is the congregation’s incessant refrain to the diaconal petitions. These sentiments find balance, however, in another constantly repeated theme: Christ is the Ruler of All to be sure; but He is also the divine philanthropist, the “lover of mankind” who poured Himself out for our salvation.

Not only in the silent prayers of the priest but also in the exclamations to which the people respond with their “Amen,” this balance between glorification and tender love is a constantly alternating refrain.

For You are a good God and You love mankind, and we give glory to You...

Again and again we bow down before You and we beseech You. O gracious Lover of mankind...

To You O Lord and Lover of mankind we commend our whole life and hope...

Other Characteristics of Eastern Liturgy

Other characteristics of this liturgy worth noting are its realism and objectivity, the basic doctrinal character of its prayers, and the fact that it is liturgy, literally, in practice as well as in theory. Eastern piety has remained largely free from the historical developments that in other places have led at different periods to the highlighting of this or that relatively peripheral aspect of Christian devotional life. Consequently, the East’s devotional storehouse has remained more or less uncluttered; its piety is still focused almost exclusively on the fundamental truths of the faith. And these truths do not remain hidden away in precious texts unheard by the congregation. They are proclaimed to the people unceasingly, day after day: God is Triune; He has sent us His Son and we have been saved; death has been conquered by the Resurrection. Only a very obtuse Christian could sing aloud the famous Monogenes every Sunday of his life and lack a sense of what Christianity means:

O only begotten Son and Word of God, though You are immortal You condescended for our salvation to take flesh from the holy Mother of God and ever-virgin Mary and, without undergoing change, You became man. You were crucified, Christ God, by Your death trampling upon death, You who are one of the holy Trinity and are glorified with the Father and the Holy Spirit save us!

True, enthusiasts have definitely overstated the case in their praise of popular participation in the Eastern liturgies; the picture is by no means as perfect as they would have us believe. Nevertheless, it can still be said that liturgy in the East has largely remained just that: leitourgia, the official and public worship performed by the whole of God's People, each according to his rank. It is not something that is attended, but something that is done, by and for the whole gathering, without, however, any confusion between the respective roles of clergy and laity. As the public community act of the day, it takes place in the community assembly, once a day, on the one altar. If many priests wish to celebrate, they do so together. It is a time for communal prayer, communally expressed. Silence is the exception. There is a continuous dialogue between deacon and people, a dialogue of simple petitions for their basic needs; peace, mercy, salvation, health, protection. There is a continual ratification of the sacrificial work of the priest in the "Amen" to the doxologies that conclude the sacerdotal prayers. And the invitations to prayer exhort the people to unite themselves not only with the priest, but with one another as well:

And grant that we may with one mouth and one heart glorify and praise Your most noble and sublime name...Let us love one another, so that with one mind we may profess...

Even the iconostasis is a reminder of each one's proper role in the communal worship. For the altar within the holy of holies is reserved almost exclusively for the strictly sacerdotal functions of the Eucharistic liturgy. And the deacon, link between the various orders in the church and leader of the people in their petitions and prayers, stands at the head of the congregation before the central doors of the iconostasis, "a body standing before men, but a mind knocking at the gates of heaven through prayer," in the lively image of St. John Climacus. These are but few examples of the actual and not merely symbolic realization in the Byzantine tradition that the community is not to be ignored during its worship.

Any adequate treatment of Eastern Catholicism would demand many more chapters: on the Mother of God, icons, monasticism, theology, the Jesus Prayer. But we have seen enough to perceive, inchoatively at least, the spirit of the Christian East.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EASTERN RITES

For the Catholic, Eastern and Western, the existence of Rites other than his own is a continuing witness to the true nature of his Church. We know from our catechism that "catholicity" is one of the essential marks of the Church, a characteristic Karl Adam has defined as the Church's "essential aptitude for the whole of mankind." By her catholicity the Church is capable of restoring and unifying all things in Christ. But to do this, she must be adaptable to all the varied human material she must incorporate within herself, so that she may in turn incorporate all into Christ.

It is not enough, then, for the Church to be integral Christianity in essence. To fulfill her vocation she must strive always toward greater realization of this inner dynamism in the external manifestations of her life. She must strive to be a Christianity complete in its external expression, a Christianity in which every human variety finds its rightful place in the unity of truth and love.

Unfortunately, the overwhelmingly Western character of Catholicism for over 900 years makes it necessary for us to remind ourselves that variety within the Church is not only a fact, but that any other situation would be deplorable. There was a time not so long ago when some sort of proof for the universality of the Church was found in the false belief that, "Wherever a Catholic goes, he will feel at home when he enters a Catholic church because there he will find the familiar Mass celebrated in the common language of the Church." Not only is this untrue, but if it were true, it would be not the glorious thing we might have once imagined, but a chilling commentary on the narrowness we had imposed on the Body which Christ fashioned for all mankind. To impose one Rite on everyone does not render that Rite, or the Church, more universal. It only impoverishes the catholic

expression of the Church's life.

Of course, the Church ever remains the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ regardless of the greater or lesser perfection in the universality of her cultural forms. But we cannot rest content with that. The gifts of God are given to provoke our activity, not to justify our sloth. We cannot be indifferent, then, to Catholic traditions other than our own without diminishing the fullness of our Catholic life. Hence our attitude toward other expressions of our faith, even toward those not yet born, should be one of need, for the Church truly needs these expressions to manifest perfectly her inner self. Until the Church is enabled to express her unlimited appeal in a Chinese way, an African way, a Scandinavian way, this need will remain unsatisfied.

THE PROBLEM OF EASTERN CATHOLICISM TODAY

In the early centuries after Christ the catholic nature of the Church led to a marvelous variety in the visible life of the Church. Unfortunately, this broad comprehensive spirit of the early Church

did not last, and diversity of Rite, once accepted as the most normal circumstance of Church life, became instead a problem. Both schism and ecclesiastical politics were behind this new source of tension. We cannot go into the long history of how East and West gradually drifted apart. We should observe, though, that one effect of the division of Christianity was the tendency to identify Rite with religion, or at least to see unity of Rite as the safer, more prudent state of affairs.

The breakup of East and West began in the 5th century, when the Christological disputes mingled with a liberal dose of anti-imperial politics led into schism the Churches of Armenia and Persia, and later Ethiopia, along with parts of the Churches of Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem. The members of the last three patriarchates who had remained faithful to Empire and Church eventually adopted the Byzantine Rite. With the break between the Byzantine Churches and Rome, the identification of Rite and religion became, with few exceptions, a fact. In the West this fact did not develop into a theory, but it did lead to a pragmatic policy of Latinization as a result of the one-sided development of Catholicism that the schism produced.

Cut off from the West by schism and Islam, the Churches of the East ultimately evolved into enclaves of national particularism in which Rite, faith, culture, and nationalism became a confused unity in the national Church as the one bastion of national and cultural independence. The West was more fortunate, for the Patriarch of the Latins was also in fact Vicar of Christ and visible head of the Church. Hence the schism left the West on the right side when division had become a fact. But the later evolution of the West had its unfortunate effects from which we still suffer today. With the loss of the East, the Latin Church became the Catholic Church by default, and without the counterbalance of the East it was inevitable that the future external development of Catholicism would be one-sided.

Hans Kung describes well the ultimate result of this progressive narrowing of the Church's visible catholicity: "While the Church, like St. Paul, became Greek to the Greeks and barbarian to the barbarians, it has not been Arab to the Arabs, Negro to the Negroes, Indian to the Indians, nor Chinese to the Chinese." What he fails to add is that it also ceased in large part to be Greek to the Greeks. The Latin way of doing things became in fact the Catholic way, and although the Orientals who returned to unity preserved their ritual, they preserved little else for the simple reason that Catholics did not fully realize there was anything else.

With the predominance of the Latin world a fact of Church history, the Catholic Church came to appear not as a community of Churches united by their communion with each other and with the one head, the Vicar of Christ, but as a tightly organized, highly centralized European institution. In this context, the problem of reunion with the East sometimes appeared to be a question not of restoring communion with Churches in schism, but of absorbing them into the Patriarchate of the West.

The main reason for this lopsided development was schism. Had the East remained in the Church, perhaps none of this would have happened. In fact, if the union established at the Ecumenical Council of Florence in 1439 had lasted, the course of history would have changed. For the aim of this Council was to establish total reunion on a corporate basis with mutual respect for the rights and customs of all. But the East ultimately rejected the Union of Florence, and the trend was not reversed.

Since the rejection of the Florentine Union, the Holy See has re-established communion with members of every Eastern Church. In so doing, the Holy See solemnly committed itself to respect the ancient Catholic heritage of those Churches, and it was hoped that these groups would be the seed and first fruits of a future general reunion of the East. This hope, unfortunately, has never been fulfilled, because the way in which these groups have developed since returning to the Catholic Church has provided the non-Catholic East with a pattern of reunion little to its liking. For it must be frankly stated that the Orientals did not always find a congenial home within 'the Catholic Church. They were often viewed with reservation and suspicion by ill-informed Catholics in spite of the strenuous efforts of more magnanimous men to aid and protect them.

Finding themselves clearly subordinate to the Latin majority, the Orientals were defenseless against the invasion of Latin ways and customs, and gradually many of them lost touch with the spirit of their own heritage. Often this was their own doing. They wished above all to be Catholic, and in a world in which this was often taken to mean "Latin," they eagerly imitated Latin practices, many of which were not attuned to their own, religious culture, to prove that they too were real Catholics. Often it resulted from the misguided actions of Latins. Lastly, we must not underestimate the enormous influence of simply belonging to a Church, which had become so totally Western. Had there never been a schism, Rites would have continued to influence one another. Schism made the process a one-way street.

"Uniatism"

The end-product of this history is what some writers rather contemptuously refer to as "Uniatism," a term used to describe the position in which many of our Oriental Catholics find themselves today. The meaning of the term, however, depends very much on one's point of view.

For many Orthodox, "Oriental" and "Roman Catholic" are contradictory terms. The Catholic Church, in their view, is the Latin Church, the Patriarchate of the West, the Church of the Latin Rite. For the Pope to establish non-Latin Churches directly subject to him is an unacceptable extension of power beyond the limits of his own patriarchate. In setting up "Uniate" Churches, the Catholic Church is not striving for true ecumenical reunion but rather, by means of partial reunion, is proceeding by consecutive amputations to subject the East to the West and turn the Church into one enormous patriarchate subject to the power of Rome. In support of their attitude, the Orthodox point to the fact that Oriental Catholics have indeed failed to be completely faithful to the East. Reunion has not established a viable bond between the two Christianities of East and West, but has led to the partial Latinization and absorption of East by West.

This, then, is what many Orthodox comprehend by "Unia," from the Slavic neologism unija coined after the Union of Brest (1596) to label a union that in their minds was rather a submission, a surrender to Latinism, a sacrifice of one's native religious heritage for an artificial unity. And the result of "Unia" is not Oriental Catholicism but "Uniatism," a superficial clinging to certain Oriental forms by people who are in fact simply Latins in spirit. To do this is to make empty and superficial use of a liturgy, which is the deepest expression of a spirit, they neither comprehend nor possess.

VOCATION OF ORIENTAL CATHOLICISM

But if this view is partisan and distorted, what is the reality of Oriental Catholicism today? What do the Oriental Catholics represent in their own eyes? The educated Oriental Catholic is well aware of what truth there is in the Orthodox accusations. For the trend toward Latinization has left much of the Catholic East stripped of its heritage. The Catholic West even today does not understand completely that besides liturgy many other treasures—spiritual, cultural, theological, canonical—are an integral part of our Oriental patrimony and must be preserved not as a concession to particularism, but for the benefit of the Universal Church. Consequently, the Easterner must strive to live his role as a builder of Christian unity for his people. But in fulfilling his peculiar vocation of absolute loyalty to both Catholicism and the East, he finds himself like a split-personality, trying to be Catholic in a way Catholics do not understand, trying to be Oriental in a way the East will not yet accept.

But let us make no mistake here. The Oriental Catholic loves Christ's Church and loves It as it is, not with a blind uncritical love, but with a love that corresponds to what Christ demands of us all; that we live in the union of His Body now, and as it is now; not as it might be after the Ecumenical Council; not as it might be in 100 years. That his life in Christ means a dying to self, he knows and accepts. He knows that the fundamental question is not one of faithfulness to East or West, but to Christ; and that it is far better to lose his culture and his Rite than to sacrifice the faith and unity God requires of him at the cost even of his blood.

But the Oriental Catholic true to his vocation cannot stop here. His presence within the Church must, by his fidelity to the East, be a witness of what is to come. As the Catholic Melkite Patriarch Maximos IV has pointed out, he can do this only if he accomplishes the twofold mission that history has left him in the Church today:

We must fight to insure that Latinism and Catholicism are no longer synonymous, that Catholicism remains open to every culture, every spirit, and every form of organization compatible with the unity of faith and of love. At the same time, by our example, we must force the Orthodox Church to recognize that a union . . . with the See of Peter can be achieved without their being compelled to give up Orthodoxy or any of the spiritual treasures of the apostolic and patristic East which is open toward the future no less than toward the past. If we remain faithful to this mission, we shall arrive at shaping and finding the kind of union that is acceptable to the East as well as to the West, a union that is neither pure autocephaly nor an absorption, in principle or in actual fact. but a sharing of the same faith, same sacraments, and same organic hierarchy, in a spirit of sincere respect for the spiritual heritage and organization proper to each Church, under the vigilance, both paternal and fraternal, of the successors of the One to Whom it was said:

“You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church.”

The path is not an easy one. There are no easy answers to the problems faced by Oriental Catholicism as it moves to reintegrate its heritage into the life of the Church. The process has clearly begun and the Holy See has already done much by the reforms accomplished within the past few decades. And the process will continue, prudently, without fanaticism or rigid conservatism, and with due regard for souls.

CONCLUSION

“We lay a special injunction on you: convert the Latins,” said Pius XI in 1934 to some newly ordained Oriental Catholic priests. Convert them, that is, to a love and esteem of the Catholic East. This has been our aim in this brief study—a presumptuous aim, perhaps, but one undertaken all the same with the blessing of the Holy See.

History itself is largely responsible for the errors of our ancestors, and there is no point in brooding over the past. But we can learn from it. Non-Catholics judge the Church of Christ by what they see, and it is our responsibility if what they see does not correspond to the essence within. Part of this essence is for the Church to be catholic, universal, the spiritual homeland of all mankind. What this means has been stated very frankly by Maximos IV:

We must be convinced that Christianity can never accomplish its mission in the world unless it is catholic; that is, universal, not only in principle but also in actual fact. If one cannot be Catholic unless he gives up his own liturgy, hierarchy, patristic traditions, history, hymnography, art, language, culture, and spiritual heritage, and adopts the rites, philosophical and theological thought, religious poetry, liturgical language, culture, and spirituality of a particular group, be it the best, then the Church is not a great gift of God to the whole world but a faction, however numerous, and a human institution subservient to the interests of one group. Such a Church could not be the true Church of Christ. In resisting, then, the Latinization of our institutions, we are not defending any petty parochial interests or an out-dated traditionalism; rather, we are aware of defending the vital interests of the apostolic Church, of remaining faithful to our mission, our vocation which we could not betray without betraying ourselves and disfiguring the message of Christ before our brethren.

By expanding our vision of Catholicism beyond the limits of our own particular tradition, we can give our fellow Catholics the sympathy and help they need to fulfill this difficult vocation. At the same time we will come to a truer appreciation of our Catholic faith that will enrich our own spiritual lives.

STUDY-CLUB QUESTIONS

1. What has diversity to do with unity or universality?
2. Does a "Rite" include more than liturgy and ceremony? Explain.
3. Which were the main groups of local Churches that arose in the Eastern Roman Empire? Describe their origins and the reasons for their influence.
4. To what sources do the Coptic Rite and the Ethiopic Rite trace their origin?
5. Describe the evolution of the Antiochene liturgy in Syria, and how it later developed.
6. How did the East Syrian tradition both develop and spread?
7. What were the results of the rise of Constantinople as the seat of the imperial government?
8. Trace the origin of the Armenian Rite.
9. List the luminaries and the achievements of the early Church in the East.
10. What elements and national strains make up the Byzantine Rite?
11. Discuss the causes and effects of the flexibility of the Church in the East.
12. Whereas the Western Church emphasizes law, order and uniformity, the moral aspects of the sacraments, etc., how does the Eastern Church regard the essence of the Church?
13. Does the East face the problem of linking piety and the liturgy as does the West? Explain.
14. Western Catholics refer to the basilica over the tomb of Christ as the "Holy Sepulchre"; Easterners call it

“The Resurrection-”What deeper significance do these names indicate?

15. Comment on Byzantine art and architecture. How is the spirit behind the symbolism of these art forms linked with the liturgy?
16. Compare the Easterners’ and the Westerners’ approach to the Eucharist (Mass and Communion).
17. What dangers are there in the passive approach of Eastern spirituality? Is there anything to counteract them?
18. “To impose one Rite on everyone does not render that Rite, or the Church, more universal.” Comment.
19. What in the history of the Church made uniformity of Rite seem to be the more accepted thing?
20. When did the breakup of East and West begin? Discuss the causes of the breakup and what resulted from it.
21. Since the schism the Church in the West has been fortunate and unfortunate. Explain.
22. What brought about the predominance of the Latin world as a fact of Church history?
23. Describe “Uniatism”
24. How is the preservation of the Oriental patrimony (liturgy, spirituality, culture, theology, etc) a benefit of the Universal Church and not a concession to particularism?
25. Has the scriptural quotation, “In my Father’s house there are many mansions.” any significance for the question of Eastern Rites?