



## THE EASTERN TRADITION: A WESTERN PRIVATION

It required an ecumenical council to stimulate American Catholic thought to an interest in the dissident churches of the East, due especially to the possibility of their reunion. But isn't it remarkable that American Catholics have even up to the present shown little or no interest in the Eastern Rites which are in communion with Rome, especially those to which so many fellow American Catholics adhere? The extent of this disinterestedness becomes most evident from the results it has achieved. Due principally to the ignorance and misunderstanding on the part of their Latin Rite brethren, some 600,000 Eastern Rite Catholics have already gone into schism in the relatively short history of our nation, and this ignorance and misunderstanding has further isolated those who are still united to the fold, establishing Eastern Catholic ghettos, as it were, amid the uncharitable atmosphere of Latinism.

It is difficult to imagine how this flagrant neglect can be allowed to continue, not only because of the immense value of the souls lost to the Church in schism, or the uncharitable alienation of those of a more ancient Tradition within the Church, but also because of the privation it causes in the understanding, appreciation, and living of the faith on the part of many Latin Rite Catholics themselves. The term privation, the absence of a perfection one should, but does not have, is adequately expressive of the situation which results in Latin Catholics, because, by a right of inheritance, they should be familiar with the Eastern Tradition which indeed is a component of the wisdom and richness of the Church. Further, it is incumbent on all Catholics to have a true and proper understanding of the doctrines of the Church, and some of these become distorted when the Eastern Tradition is neglected. It is precisely this privation which Latin Catholics should rectify.

This privation can both be presented and estimated by considering the numerous positive benefits which would accrue from a knowledge and understanding of the Eastern Tradition in the Church. Actually this is not a difficult task, but because of the provincialistic outlook of many American Latin Rite Catholics who often presume that Latinism and Catholicism are synonyms, these benefits are too easily forgotten. One could not attempt to

enumerate all the riches which can be obtained by such an understanding of the Eastern Tradition, so only some have been selected for consideration.

In terms of the necessities of the present situation, the most beneficial effect accomplished by the study of the Eastern Tradition by American Latins is that much wider, deeper, and more appreciative knowledge of the true universality of the Church, a knowledge now absent from the Catholic thought of our nation. This benefit is most important because it eliminates the ignorance and misunderstanding which hinder the attainment of all the other possible advantages. Realizing that the Eastern Tradition is the very source from which the Western Tradition was born, that the expressions of the fundamental doctrines of the faith were formulated by the East, that the existence of many great liturgical feasts in the Western calendar are owed to that more ancient Tradition, can American Latin Rite Catholics be so presumptuous as to hold that they alone represent Catholicity in the fullest?

Christianity was born in the East. Of its people it is written in the Acts of the Apostles (11:26): "it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called Christians." Having been vitalized by the preaching of St. Paul, the Eastern Christians began to multiply so rapidly that even in the first century Pliny, the emperor of Bithynia, remarked, "the pagan temples are being deserted." In the second century there were large and well organized communities of Christians in the East, and it was to these flourishing centers of the faith, especially Asia Minor, that the charge of preaching to the barbarians was principally entrusted. By the middle of the second century there was a catechetical school at Alexandria whose purpose was to establish a harmony between philosophy and faith. In point of fact, this was the first effort toward a theological synthesis of the data of revelation. From this attempt and from that of the school of Antioch established somewhat later come the formulated expressions of the fundamental doctrines of the faith. Thus the center of Church scholarship was in the East and continued there up to the end of the second century when Latin, through the writings of Tertullian, became a vehicle of Christian thought in concert with the Greek which had been the only instrument up to that time. Christian poetry and hymnology began in the East, and the large communities of Catholics which participated in public worship necessitated a codification of public prayer. Thus the first sacramentaries also appeared in the East.

In regard to the formulated expressions of doctrine, it must be admitted that the early major heresies developed in the East, even though a

few were the result only of political machinations. Nevertheless, it must also be admitted that the Eastern Catholic theologians were the first to attempt the synthesis of reason and faith. In the intellectual strife caused by the errors of some, they produced magnificent theological formulas of such doctrines as: the Trinity in terms of Three Persons united in One Divine Nature; the existence of two natures in Christ, and the duality of will, human and divine; the veneration of images and relics; the worth of prayers to the saints; and Mary's divine maternity. All these flow from the Tradition of the East.

If Latin Rite Catholics would study the Eastern Catholic Tradition, they would appreciate and grasp more profoundly the universality of the Church, which not only rightfully includes this glorious Tradition but takes pride in it. Further, relevant to the doctrines above, would not Latin Catholics thus possess a deeper understanding of these doctrines, knowing the controversies leading to their definition, the difficulties in attaining the formulas, and the necessities dictating the choice of terms? Because of the dignity of the truths expressed by these definitions does it not seem unnecessary to urge the study of the Tradition which formulated them?

It is by no means the intention of this article to minimize the genius of the West which gave to the Church the freedom, stability, wise rule, and continuous purity and integrity of the faith. The great emphasis on the origin and contribution of the Eastern Tradition has but one purpose: to impress on the mind of Americans of the Latin Rite that the source of their theological Tradition is the East where Christianity began.

It would be naive for those of the Eastern Tradition to neglect the West. What must be thoroughly kept in mind is that the Church is truly one—her Tradition is twofold: East and West. One Tradition is not exclusive of the other, but both are complementary, correlative Traditions. A consideration of each is necessary for a true and proper understanding of the universality of the Church. As Pope Pius XII remarked in his Encyclical, *Orientalis Ecclesiae Decus*, concerning these two Traditions, "both are to be regarded with equal esteem and veneration for they surround our common Mother the Church with, as it were, a regal variety." This proper attitude can permeate the atmosphere of Latinism if the Latins will make only a cursory study of the Eastern Tradition.

As an outgrowth of an accurate notion of the universality of the Church, elegantly expressed as a Mother amidst regal diversity, one is led to a more perceptive understanding of the significance of the term "one," when it is predicated of the Church. Unity in regard to the Church does

not imply a conformity in accidental differences such as liturgical feasts, rites, or modes of expression, but consists in a unity in those things essential to the faith. Again calling on the words of Pope Pius XII in the same Encyclical: "For a lawful freedom must be allowed to each and every people of the Oriental Rite in all those things which derive from their history or depend upon their own peculiar genius and temperament, *so long as they are not in contrast with the true and integral doctrine of Jesus Christ*" [italics added]. Commenting on this legitimate diversity the late Holy Father adds, "such a diversity of rites and institutions, while conserving intact and inviolable all that is ancient and precious in each confession, does not put the least obstacle in the way of true and genuine unity." Truly it does not form an obstacle, rather it can serve to impress on the Church's faithful the magnificence of her unity which assimilates the various cultures and peoples for the praise of her wisdom, and for the enrichment of her Tradition, liturgy, and customs.

It is not rash to suggest further, that the Eastern Catholic Tradition could elicit from American Latin Rite Catholics a deeper appreciation for the doctrine of the Primacy of Rome. This suggestion is based on the analogy between converts and Catholics from birth. Is it not true that a convert generally shows greater appreciation for his membership in the true Church than one reared in the faith who is apt to take Catholicity as an assumed inheritance? The vigorous gratitude frequently exhibited by converts usually awakens a more appropriate response to the faith on the part of Catholics from birth. Might not the Eastern Catholic Rites (excepting the Maronites who as a totality were never formally in schism) perform that task in regard to the Primacy, eliciting from their Latin brethren a greater appreciation of the fact that they are forever guided to salvation by the successor to St. Peter, infallible in matters of faith and morals? Certainly the example of the Eastern faithful's solicitude to be united to the true successor of St. Peter, the Vicar of Christ, coupled with the humility required for such an undertaking and given so generously cannot help but enhance the appreciation of other Catholics for the noteworthy treasure they possess. Though no one can truly evaluate the presence of Christ's Vicar on earth, nonetheless, all can appreciate his role in the Church through which eternity in heaven is achieved.

A study of the Eastern Tradition would not only aid in attaining a more profound understanding and appreciation of some of the doctrines of the faith, but would also enrich the very living of the faith on the part of Western Catholics. This is most true of the liturgy, the public worship

of the Church. The liturgy of the Eastern Catholic Church is a masterpiece. It presents to its people an atmosphere of sacredness with almost a maximum of lay participation, through which the main doctrines of the faith are presented by chants known by almost all the faithful. It offers great appeal to the senses: praise for the tongue, color for the eye, music for the ear, and incense to the smell. There is a warmth, an exuberance to the Eastern liturgy which has the effect of moving not only the mind to God, but also the heart.

The Western liturgy, on the other hand, though it seeks to appeal to mind and heart, in practice, appears cold and abstract. In regard to participation, the Latin Rite faithful some twenty-five years ago were, for the most part, but observers. With the popularity of the Sunday missal, participation progressed and continually developed so that now they are active participants through the dialogue Mass and other means.

If some attention had been paid to the Eastern liturgy, the practice of lay participation might not have been lost. The clergy would not have to confront the difficulty of continuously reminding the faithful of the fact that the Mass is also their sacrifice. The Mass itself would have remained more meaningful for the laity, more a part of their lives. The lack of this meaning can be evidenced by their anxiety concerning the time Mass consumes. They are eager for the shortest sermon and the most rapidly said Mass and often depart before its conclusion. In the West the time set aside for God becomes relatively shorter, while in the East, where the liturgy is more meaningful, time is of no concern. Further the liturgy of the Latin Rite could have been used more effectively as a vehicle for instructing the people in Christological and Trinitarian doctrine had the Latin chants and prayers been taught to the faithful earlier. It might be objected that although many Eastern faithful know the chants by heart, they do not understand their meaning. However, this article treats of American Eastern Catholics, of whom it can be assumed without fear, that they possess a much greater education than their brethren in Europe or the East.

To suggest other areas of benefit regarding the living of the faith, the East might awaken in the Latin Tradition a greater emphasis on the mystical character of the faith, the use of symbolism, and a greater Christian community-consciousness among the faithful.

These are but a few of the benefits which would accrue to American Latin Rite Catholics if they knew the Tradition of the Eastern Catholic Churches. Some of these are ancillary enrichments, while others touch on attitudes influencing the essential understanding of some of the doctrines



of the Church. Every Catholic should be exposed to both Traditions by his right of inheritance from Holy Mother the Church, and by his right to all means necessary to aid and insure a proper understanding of the doctrines of the Church.

The Eastern Catholics in the United States have almost by necessity received the benefits of the West since their present seminarians are, for the most part, educated in Latin seminaries or Pontifical Faculties. Their faithful, largely without schools of their own, and in some cases without churches in their vicinity, also have been exposed to the Western Tradition. The deficiency of knowledge comes by way of the Latin Rite, which, by having an adequate number of schools and churches, has not been compelled to know its Eastern counterpart. What can be done to remove this shameful privation which had caused so many to leave the Eastern Catholic Church, which has isolated the remainder, and which hinders a proper understanding and appreciation of the faith on the part of many American Latin Rite Catholics?

If knowledge of the Eastern Tradition is to be given to the Latins, it must come principally from the institutions of education. There are many possibilities for introducing this knowledge without inserting special courses, though that would be praiseworthy. By merely mentioning from time to time the existence of the Eastern Catholic Tradition, by informing students of some of its customs, by explaining its liturgy, by provoking an interest in the Eastern Tradition, teachers can make a sufficient start to remove that privation. It would be good to suggest some of these possibilities in regard to the three levels of Latin Catholic education: elementary, secondary, and collegiate.

In the elementary program a knowledge of the Eastern Tradition might be incorporated in the following ways. When teaching the children the physical structure of the Church (altar, sanctuary, etc.) for instance, the corresponding parts of an Eastern Catholic Church may be presented. This also could be accomplished in regard to the vestments and articles used in the Mass. It is possible to have a bulletin board contrasting the two Rites in regard to these areas. For source material one might consult the *Boston Pilot*, which, in past issues of this year, presented the pictures and names of the vestments and articles of each of the Eastern Rites. In instructing the First Communion class, it might be brought to the students' attention that some Catholic children receive the Eucharist under two species, and if any of the class attend an Eastern Liturgy, they may too. Further, students might be informed that they can attend the Divine Liturgy

in an Eastern Catholic Church and fulfill their Sunday obligation. In teaching the Mass, one could compare the Eastern Divine Liturgy to the Latin so that the student would be capable of attending intelligently if the occasion should arise. In choir practice one could point out that the Kyrie is part of a litany still sung in the Eastern Tradition. These suggestions are casual and lack real creativeness, but the possibilities are numerous and with a little imagination much can be done. Can it be urged on elementary teachers, who for the most part are brilliantly creative, to attempt the beginning of this vital work?

In secondary schools, the elementary possibilities could be re-applied but with greater detail in the mode of presentation. In addition, students might contribute papers on the Eastern Rites from which much interest could be generated. There is also the opportunity for a class to attend the Liturgy as a group. Students who belong to one of the Rites might be asked to speak of its customs, history, or liturgy. Following the talk a discussion might be held where questions could be asked and adequate answers given for the certain benefit of all.

In the collegiate or university atmosphere more pertinent advances could be made. Many college campuses have been the site for offering the Divine Liturgy. Eastern Catholic priests could be called into lecture on their Tradition. Courses might be offered in various fields with special attention to the Eastern Tradition, such as Byzantine art and history; studies of Eastern Catholic hymnology, poetry, liturgy, modes of theological expression, commentators of Scripture, mysticism, symbolism, apologists, and language. The possibilities are there waiting to be used.

If anything is to be done at all it must be based on the conviction that such a knowledge is necessary. The souls lost, the uncharitable alienation of fellow Catholics, the deficiency in the proper understanding of some doctrines of the faith on the part of many Latin Rite Catholics, seem sufficient indication of the need for such a program of instruction.

How long will the neglect continue? It will continue until American Catholics of the Latin Rite realize that, as Catholics, it is not the customs of the East of which they are unaware, nor the richness of another's liturgy of which they are deprived, nor is it the Eastern Tradition of which they are ignorant; rather, it is of their own.

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