

## Eastern Christians in Australia since Vatican II

Lawrence Cross

---

**Abstract:** *Deep in their saddlebags, whether they know it or not, the Eastern Catholic Churches in Australia, are carrying the precious wisdom of the ancient Church and its patristic inheritance, gifts crucial to the re-evangelisation of modern Australia. But are they up to the task? There is every reason to think that they are not. The Latinising of these communities goes on apace, such that the calls from Rome to return to their traditions fall on deaf ears. John Paul II's *Oriente Lumen* may very well be just beautiful words built on forlorn hopes. Are these Churches heirs of that choir of bishop-theologians led by Patriarch Maximos IV who so enriched the whole Church at Vatican II? The Eastern Catholics in Australia may look more or less Byzantine, but do they possess the mind, the phronema of Orthodoxy within? This article argues that the turning point has been reached and that a now or never situation faces eastern Catholic Churches in Australia. Assert your irreducible identity. Be yourselves, or perish.*

---

**Key Words:** Byzantine Church, Eastern Catholic Churches, Patriarch, Exarch, Uniate, sobornost, Divine Liturgy, Latinisation, Vatican II

---

The principal difficulty in discussing the experience of Eastern Christians in Australia, after Vatican II is that there is no literature to which we can refer. Consequently, much of what follows is drawn from experience, general knowledge and anecdote. There is, however, some literature on the experience of some Eastern Catholic Churches in the United States following Vatican II, and their experience, to some extent, mirrors the experience of Eastern Christians in Australia since the 1960s. Because of the lack of literature, it might be useful to start on the broader canvas of the place and relationship of the Eastern Catholic Churches in the wider global Catholic community, and their relationship to the Roman Church.

In a very concrete way Vatican II itself was a beneficiary of gifts from the Christian East, and not the other way around. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, owes much to the Christian East. While the footnotes of *Lumen Gentium* cite western and eastern patristic sources, the contribution of Eastern Catholics is well known and documented. The contribution of the Patriarchate of Antioch was amazing for its size.<sup>1</sup> Patriarch Maximos was accompanied only by some sixteen bishops, as well as the four

---

<sup>1</sup> The other two great Eastern Catholic Churches who could have played a similar role to the Melkites, the Romanian Greek-Catholic Church and the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church were both still underground in the home lands and in the grip of bitter persecution.

superiors general of the Melkite religious orders. But this small band, in a sea of Latin Rite hierarchs, managed to introduce such items as the use of the vernacular, eucharistic concelebration, and communion under both kinds in the Latin liturgy, the restoration of the diaconate as a permanent order, the creation of what would become the periodically held Synod of Bishops and the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity, while championing new attitudes to and less offensive vocabulary in ecumenical relationships with other Christians, especially with the Orthodox Churches, and the recognition of Eastern Catholic communities for what they are, “Churches,” not “rites.” Robert Taft outlined the source of the remarkable role of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church at the Council:

In his Preface to the 1967 French edition of this volume, Patriarch Maximos IV attributed it, first, to the fact that the Catholic Melkites had never lost contact with their Orthodox roots, and thus never became closed in on themselves. This allowed them to discern what is essential (i.e., Catholic) from what is contingent (i.e., Latin) in Catholicism, enabling them at Vatican II to witness to a *pensée complémentaire*, another, complementary way of seeing things, as a counterbalance to Latin Catholic unilateralism.<sup>2</sup>

Taft believed that the Melkites, as the Orthodox presence on the floor of the Council, achieved what they did because they possessed collegiality *ante factum*, well before the later work of the Council had made this ecclesiology common coin and that they were successful because of the audacious yet unfailingly courteous courage of Maximos IV and his close collaborators.

Thus Patriarch Maximos and his episcopal theologians have much of the responsibility for the Trinitarian emphasis in *Lumen Gentium*, and particular responsibility for the renovated vision of conciliarity-collegiality in the Church; what their Russian brethren would recognise as *sobornost* or *sobornicity*. So what went wrong? Because despite this refreshed vision of the Church, progressively in the last 50 years, the Roman Catholic communion has developed further a method of *management from the matrix*, which is to say heavily centralised authority which reduces bishops to delegated local agents of the papacy. The cruel irony is that while the Melkites may have contributed heavily to the thaw in Roman ecclesiology represented by Vatican II, with its emphasis on conciliarity and communion, no part of the Catholic Church has suffered more, both well before, as well as after the Council, from Roman ecclesiological authoritarianism, such that even Patriarchs and synods are not granted their traditional rights and freedoms.

The debilitation of the local Church has its own separate history amongst the collection of Churches known as the Eastern Catholic Churches. Centuries in the making, this progressive debilitation becomes clearer from Pius IX’s bull *Reversurus* of 1867, which degraded the patriarchal dignity in both law and honour amongst Eastern Catholics. Patriarchal jurisdiction, even that of the Apostolic and first Petrine See of Antioch, was restricted to the so-called homeland territories. Evidently only one Catholic bishop is to have global authority, not only over the members of his own Church, but over the faithful of all other Churches outside their “homeland territories”. As the Pro-Secretary of the Papal Commission for the Revision of the Eastern Code of Canon Law observed, granting

---

<sup>2</sup> Robert Taft SJ, *Introduction to Discourses and Memoranda of Patriarch Maximos IV and other Hierarchs of His Church at the Second Vatican Council*, (Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome 1992) p5. Available at: <https://melkite.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/CouncilFrontMatter.pdf> (accessed 29 August 2012)

world-wide authority to a Patriarch “would be difficult to reconcile ... with the nature of the office of the Supreme Pontiff, who alone has full authority over the entire world.”<sup>3</sup> The remote justification for this situation is attributed by the Roman canonists to Canon 28 of the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE), which they read as granting immediate and sole authority over all Eastern Christians living outside their historical territories in any part of the Western Church. This has been used in the case of a great Church, such as the Melkite-Greek Catholic Patriarchate of Antioch, to create a situation “when a Christian community is prevented by law from preserving full ties with its own spiritual children ... scattered in various parts of the globe”<sup>4</sup> and where even the election of bishops by its Holy Synod needs Roman approval in each case, and not just in the Melkite diaspora.<sup>5</sup> The situation for the tiniest of the Eastern Catholic Churches sees this law operating in a particularly damaging fashion. It suffers differently, but in the same spirit. In this case the papacy has withheld the provision of a hierarchy to shepherd the Russian Catholics for over fifty years, and the two Exarchates, one for Russia and the other for Harbin, China, remain unfilled for the most confused of reasons, both pseudo-ecumenical and diplomatic.<sup>6</sup> Thus, in regard to ecclesial freedom for Eastern Catholics, Vatican II changed nothing of substance. Much of the substance of *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, affirming and refreshing as it is, remains largely a dead letter, particularly being followed by the so-called *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* which uses what it calls “special circumstances” to make deleterious interventions into the life and traditions of the Eastern Catholic Churches.

This is not to say that the one clear benefit for Eastern Catholics that came from Vatican II was the Decree on the Eastern Churches, though in many instances the word “Catholic” is omitted and it seems that this decree is intended for the Orthodox as well. The efforts of Patriarch Maximus IV to sound the voice of the Christian East as a whole within the Roman Catholic Church are praised by Orthodox leaders, but a deep ambiguity remains in the mind of the Orthodox when they see in the years following the Council, evidence of continuing “uniatism”<sup>7</sup> and little evidence, and quite the contrary, that the statements emphasising the rights and dignity of the Eastern Catholics are not honoured in practice. As well as this, the Decree solemnly proclaims the equality of the Eastern tradition, but it formulates and regulates it in terms of a Western and even juridical ecclesiology unable to express its spirit and deeper intentions. It is still largely a Latin text about the Eastern tradition. Other serious barrier-creating problems remain which impact on both the Eastern Catholics and upon the prospect of reunion with the Orthodox. These must be mentioned because they reach down in a quite practical way to impact on both Orthodox and Eastern Catholic.

---

<sup>3</sup> *Nuntia*.6 (1975) 16.

<sup>4</sup> Victor J. Pospishil, *Ex Oriente Lex* (NJ: Carlet, 1997), 116.

<sup>5</sup> It is worth recalling that less than two hundred years ago, not all and most bishops in the Latin Church were not directly appointed by Rome, nor pre-approved by Rome. Fr Rosmini, who Rome now proposes to canonise, used the image of the *wound in the left foot* of the Crucified to describe the changing situation of episcopal appointments from which the local church was virtually and progressively excluded in any meaningful way.

<sup>6</sup> From the late 1940's, Russians, both Orthodox and Eastern Catholic, were forced to flee Mao's China. It is understandable that the Harbin exarchate remains without an exarch, but that for Russia and its Russian Catholic *diaspora* is quite another case.

<sup>7</sup> Uniatism is a term used by the Orthodox to describe those Eastern-Rite Catholics whose mentality is quite Western or Westernised, while their external practice mimics the Byzantine. It is no secret that it was the issue of uniatism that virtually derailed the Roman Catholic-Eastern Orthodox International Theological Dialogue, the charge being led by the Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Australia, Stylianos Harkianakis.

The years following the Council also saw the completion of the long signalled *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* in October 1990. This was something that the Eastern Churches had never asked for and which bears an uncanny resemblance to the 1983 *Codex Iuris Canonici*, the revised Latin code of canon law. Some wags have suggested that the Eastern Code is really the Latin Code, to be read with the helpful instruction, “for cow read horse throughout!” One of the most damning judgements on *Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* was penned by Professor Thomas E. Bird in his keynote address to the 34<sup>th</sup> National Melkite Convention in New York in 1994. Bird first asks why such a code was promulgated when the Eastern Churches had requested no such thing, and why is it not considered odd that the whole process was supervised by Latin Catholic prelates, and how is it that once promulgated, it is to be interpreted by a Roman Pontifical Council, which after all is an administrative department of the Roman Curia of the Latin Catholic Church? The *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* is also an ecumenical disaster, because for reasons shortly to be explained, no Orthodox Church would ever dream of reunion with Rome under the conditions and mentality expressed in this codex. As Archimandrite Victor Pospishil (1915-2006) the Ukrainian Catholic theologian and scholar concluded, “No Eastern non-Catholic Church could ever consider affiliation with the Roman Pontiff on the conditions incorporated in the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*.”<sup>8</sup> Two matters out of many illustrate the point. One is the question of the marriage of the clergy. The other is the imposition of Roman Catholic theology and law concerning marriage. The Eastern Christian Churches, at least those of the Byzantine family of Churches, have a quite different theological tradition and legal customs concerning marriage which they would never surrender for the sake of what would be a patched-up reunion with Rome.

Pope Paul VI, on 26 May, 1964, wrote that “Union with Rome ... is not a servitude, but a brotherhood” declaring it derived from the true tradition of the Apostles, and in which Peter is *consenior*. But the Council and the subsequent activities and statements of successor popes have changed the actual situation very little. Even John Paul II’s *Orientalis Lumen* saw no break in the way Eastern Catholic Churches are supervised by the Congregation for the Eastern Churches, and through it, subjected to the infamous “special circumstances”. As for the Orthodox, they watch on as the Roman Church becomes more and more managed from the matrix and in a manner which makes reunion a far off illusion. No Orthodox Church would ever be prepared to have a relationship with the Roman See as do the local Latin dioceses around the world. The international theological dialogue between the Roman Catholics and the Orthodox Churches can meditate on the Holy Trinity and the Church, and upon the sacraments and the like, but to no avail until the real issues are confronted. The Eastern Catholic Churches are urged to model the kind of future union between the communion of Churches. Rather, their present working relationship with the Roman See is little less than a scarecrow in the field of future Orthodox- Roman Catholic reunion. The issue hiding in the background is the reform of the papacy itself, but here we must be careful to note that it is “papacy” that needs urgent reform. It is not to say that Peter’s primacy is in doubt.

The interference of the Roman Church, through the instrumentality of its Congregation for the Eastern Churches, in the time-honoured tradition of the Eastern Churches of ordaining married men to the priesthood, has been a neuralgic issue, still

---

<sup>8</sup> Victor Pospishil, *Eastern Catholic Church Law according to the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* (Staten Island, NY: Saint Maron Publications, 1996): 59

persisting, that has reached all the way to the Eastern Catholic Churches in Australia. The Roman Church in recent centuries has been seeking to limit and even annul this practice. The most famous case is that of Fr Alexis Toth, a Carpatho-Rusyn Greek-Catholic priest, who led his Ruthenian Catholic flock back to Orthodoxy after the brutal treatment meted out to him and his American immigrant flock by Archbishop John Ireland of St Paul and Minneapolis.<sup>9</sup> Greek Rite Catholic married clergy, who Archbishop John Ireland saw as virtually an alien sect, did not sit well with Ireland's famous vision of the Catholic Church's "americanisation". On the 9<sup>th</sup> of November, 1949, the First Plenary Council of Australian Bishops, following the papal lead, also ruled against married clergy of the east working in Australia.<sup>10</sup> This was undone in 1998 when the Australian Episcopal Conference, with two Archbishops voting against it, declared itself open to married clergy of the Christian East working and being ordained in Australia. The so-called Code of Eastern Canon law, [viz. Canon 758 #3] however, still insists that "With respect to married men to be admitted to sacred orders, the particular law proper to each autonomous Church or the special norms issued by the Apostolic See shall be observed." This can still be used to prevent or hamper bishops or eparchs in Australia from ordaining married men to the presbyterate. Rome does not seem anywhere near as sensitive in the matter of the diaconate, but is quite happy to ordain one-time Protestant clergy to the presbyterate to serve in the Latin Rite when there is a benefit to be achieved for the Roman Catholic Church.

This treatment of the Eastern Catholics, well after Vatican II's *Ecclesiarium Orientalium* and John Paul II's *Orientalis Lumen* can still produce the bitterest comment and feelings, as this edited passage from an article by Dr Andrew Kania, a young Australian Ukrainian scholar illustrates.

Inevitably this attitude of cultural imperialism relegated the Eastern Catholic Churches to a level of second-class Catholicism, for the whims of the Latin Church had taken precedence over the canon law of the East. The Ukrainian Catholic married priest Father Paul Smal was expelled from Australia as a result of this decision. It was not until May 1998 that the Australian Council of Catholic Bishops reversed this abhorrent decision ... Should Eastern Catholics be grateful to the Latin Church hierarchs for the eventual lifting of this ban? I would suggest that Eastern Catholics should be as grateful as the Australian Aboriginal when being magnanimously told in 1967 that they were now indeed citizens.<sup>11</sup>

While in 1995 John Paul II could write that "I particularly urge the Latin Ordinaries in these countries to study attentively, grasp thoroughly and apply faithfully the principles issued by this Holy See concerning ecumenical co-operation and the pastoral care of the

---

<sup>9</sup> This was a windfall, so to speak, for the Russian Orthodox Church in America. The entry of some 250,000 ex-Catholics altered its centre of gravity. Previously located in San Francisco, the Russian Church, with its missions to the Aleut in Alaska, relocated its Archbishop to the East Coast. The OCA of today, in so many of its leading clergy, is made up of one-time Eastern Catholics. Looking back at their Catholic forebears, many contemporary apologists for the OCA call them "uniates", in the most derisive use of the word. They could not be more wrong. Their Rusyn Catholic forebears, in returning to Orthodoxy, manifested an authentic Orthodox impulse and mentality in the face of Roman Catholic intolerance.

<sup>10</sup> The Australian Catholic bishops were clearly well tuned to the three papal *moto proprios* of the period, *Cum data fuerit* of 1929, *Graeci-Ruthenii* of 1930 and *Qua sollerti* also of 1930 which not only dealt with Ukrainians and Ruthenians in the USA and Canada, but with any other Eastern Catholic clergy working in the diaspora, that is, outside their "traditional" homeland territories.

<sup>11</sup> Kania, A., "The 'Cultural Imperialism' of the Latin Church", available at [http://www.catholica.com.au/andrewstake/041\\_andrewstake\\_180907.php](http://www.catholica.com.au/andrewstake/041_andrewstake_180907.php) (accessed 29 August 2012)

faithful of the Eastern Catholic Churches, especially when they lack their own hierarchy".<sup>12</sup> Such encouraging papal pronouncements in favour of Eastern Catholics, are honoured mostly in the breach. The other neuralgic area affecting Eastern Catholics after Vatican II is the question of marriage, but ironically, because of deep Latinisation, both amongst the clergy as well as the laity, few realise that the laws regulating marriage, as they appear in the new Code of Canon Law for the Eastern Churches, and the theology governing both the laws and the laity's understanding of marriage, are not those of the Byzantine tradition but those of the Roman Catholic Church. They are not drawn from the tradition of the Christian East. This area is of the utmost importance both for restoring their traditions to the Eastern Catholics, as well as for any prospect of reunion between the Churches of Old and New Rome. As mentioned above, the principal obstacle to the restoration of full communion between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches, is, as Pope Paul VI once declared, his own office. We would legitimately modify this as referring to the manner in which the papal office is expressed, not the Petrine office itself. But a further two impediments to reunion, though at another level, are just as certain to make restoration of full communion an unrealisable dream. We have spoken of married clergy in this context already and for long enough. The other, more important, and third issue is the question of marriage.

Here we must be brief, though the question is of the utmost importance. *The Code of Canon Law for the Eastern Churches* clearly ignores the relevant Byzantine canonical sources regarding marriage and merely reworks the relevant elements found in the Latin Church's Code and intrudes a Latin theology. The Byzantine Church does not hold that the marriage covenant is founded on "an irrevocable personal consent ... ordered toward the good of the spouses and the generation and education of offspring" [Canon 776]. Rather, it is the blessing of the priest on which the marriage is founded, and not on the mutual consent of the spouses. Obviously the spouses' consent is required, but only in order to receive the Church's blessing through her minister, the priest. Also, the Byzantine tradition, while praying throughout the wedding service for the blessing of fair children, does not describe the partnership of marriage as structured for the procreation of children.<sup>13</sup>

It is because a marriage is founded upon the Church's blessing, that the Church retains authority over the marriage, such that the bishop's spiritual court can grant a divorce to marriages that were entered into legally and in accord with the sacred canons. Invoking the principle of economy, and with a certain merciful condescension, the Church will allow the remarriage of the innocent party. This is the tradition of the Eastern Catholics as well, but it is not enshrined in the Code of Canon Law written for them. Rather, the Latin Code is the model and source for the so-called Eastern Code, in which the law is used to impose a thoroughly Latin theology and practice upon the Eastern Catholics. However, the estrangement of so many Eastern Catholic faithful from the roots of their Orthodox tradition has become so deep, that they do not even recognise this tradition as their own. Latinisation has gone so deep. As observed above, in regard to the exercise of papal authority, no Orthodox hierarch will ever come into communion with the Roman

---

<sup>12</sup> *Oriente Lumen*, 26

<sup>13</sup> Patrick D.F. Viscuso, "Twenty Five Years after Vatican I; An Orthodox Perspective", in P.M.Hegy (ed.) *The Church in the Nineties: Its Legacy, Its Future* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 287.

Church if part of the price is to sacrifice the Byzantine Church's theology and practice governing the sacrament of marriage.

When Eastern Christians do get a mention in the Australian Catholic media and even in more academic publications, they are often referred to as a rite, rather than a Church. Roman Catholics still very easily talk of the Ukrainian Rite, or the Melkite Rite, or the Maronite Rite, rather than of the Ukrainian, Melkite or Maronite Church. This is despite the fact that the second Vatican Council pronounced that these communities were Churches, not Rites. This enduring habit leads one to suspect that these communities and their practices are viewed as some curious relics from an antique past, better forgotten. Rather, the task of these other Catholic Churches in our midst is not merely to receive new immigrants and help them in transition to the Australian cultural mainstream, but as Matt 28: 19-20 commands, to go out and make disciples of all nations, baptising in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all of the commandments. In other words, their task is exactly the same as that of the Roman Catholic majority. Evangelisation is not merely a possibility, but a command.

While a healthy relationship with the Roman Catholic Church is important, the comparative size of these communities with the Roman Catholic majority creates problems of its own. Rubbing shoulders with Roman Catholics, paradoxically, is a problem for Eastern Christians in that, little by little, Roman Catholic liturgical customs, devotions and mentality begin to infiltrate the traditional liturgical and spiritual life of the Eastern Church. At an official level, the Holy See and the Vatican very much discourage Christians from various traditions arbitrarily mixing and matching rites and customs. Nevertheless, these intrusions occur and they are real. For example, in churches of the Melkite Eparchy, the gift stall, as in many another Eastern Church in Australia, will be stocked with statues, rosaries and the bric-a-brac of various popular Western devotions. Any decent icons are few to be found and the knowledge and practice of the mystical prayer of the Eastern Church is rare. As well as this, many of the Eastern clergy seem to have acquired some bad liturgical habits from their Roman Catholic brethren, and feel authorised to alter the ways of celebration of the liturgy and the Holy Mysteries, largely according to whim. So-called "prayers of the faithful" regularly appear in a liturgy already well equipped with petitionary litanies. It is also possible to give a morning's conference to Eastern clergy on the Prayer of the Heart (the Jesus Prayer) and hesychast spirituality, only to discover that none of the said clergy have any idea of what was being discussed. Given that the whole theological and spiritual structure, at least of the Byzantine Tradition, arises from the Liturgy and the apophatic approach to prayer, such ignorance is alarming and a sure sign that one is dealing with "uniates".

All of this is of consequence if these Churches are to survive as Churches. To do so, they must preserve an irreducible identity. They did not have this problem in their homelands, but it is now urgent that steps be taken to understand this irreducible identity and to protect it. If Eastern Christians in our midst are not provided with an identity, reducible to no other, they will simply assimilate and vanish into the wider community, and in practice this often means that they will probably become Latin Rite Catholics. In fact, this will be a loss for the whole Church because their ecclesial status and autonomy

does not flow from some privilege granted by the Roman Church, but from a “legitimacy with which it has been endowed since apostolic times”.<sup>14</sup>

Presently in Australia, there are eight communities of Eastern Christians, which are outposts of eight *sui juris* Churches. These are the Ukrainian Greek-Catholics, Melkite Greek-Catholics, Maronite Christians, Armenian Catholics, Chaldean Catholics, Syrian Catholics, Russian Catholics and Coptic Catholics. This writer’s competence does not extend much beyond those Eastern Catholic Churches of the Byzantine tradition, but a glimpse of the public liturgy of the Maronite Church, and even of the recently arrived Chaldean Church, looks externally very Roman Catholic indeed. West facing celebration of the Eucharist has become usual, and young female altar servers have appeared amongst the Melkites, Maronites and Chaldeans, in imitation of the recent concession to Roman Catholics (itself questionable) and there is not one Maronite Church in this country, as far as we know, that has been purpose built in the Maronite liturgical tradition.

All of this is not the influence of Vatican II itself, but practices that have sprung up amongst the Roman Catholics since the Council and are now imitated by many of the Eastern Catholics in Australia, in the sad desire to be “modern” and under the illusion that they are being “pastoral”. When Pope Pius XI was asked by the Russian Catholics to rule on their liturgical practice in regard to the Orthodox tradition from which they had come, he gave the famous ruling: “Nec Plus, Nec Minus, Nec Aliter”, *No more. No less, No Other*. Subsequent Popes have exhorted the Eastern Catholic Churches, again and again to hold to their traditions in the same spirit. Progressively this is being eroded in many of the parishes of the Eastern Catholic Churches in Australia. A visit to some Melkite parishes will see large parts of the liturgy omitted and abbreviated so that “the Mass will not go too long for the people’s sake”. This cavalier attitude to the Divine Liturgy is justified on the mistaken grounds that after all, the liturgy is for the people, whereas anyone with even the slightest grasp of the mind of Byzantine liturgical theology knows that the liturgy is for God and His worship. This too should be the position of Roman Catholic liturgical theology, but it too has been swamped with a kind of liturgical populism.

The liturgical practice of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Australia is more sober than that of its middle-eastern sister, but even here the Church is recovering from years of Latinisation in the form of Polonisation that was forced upon it in the homelands. The great churchman, Metropolitan Andrii Sheptyts’kyi, worked assiduously to reform these abuses. Archimandrite Pospishill lists them thus: some Churches were operating without an iconostasis; musical instruments, particularly the organ, were being used in the services; servers rang bells at certain points in the service in imitation of the Latin custom; statues, non-canonical art and “stations of the cross” had appeared in the churches; and worst of all, the *filioque* clause was inserted into the creed, without any apparent theological discomfort. This last still happens in many a church, both here and in the USA and Canada; said Masses or music-less liturgies were/are common, particularly with the introduction of the daily celebration of the Eucharist. More odd still, a form of benediction was concocted along with the exposition of the blessed sacrament, with priests often using

---

<sup>14</sup> *Euntes in mundum*, January 25, 1988, available at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_letters/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apl\\_25011988\\_euntes-in-mundum-universum\\_it.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_25011988_euntes-in-mundum-universum_it.html) (accessed 29 August 2012).



vestments from the Latin Church. While grafting-in Latin practices, certain “Orthodoxisms” or Orientalisms were despised and deleted, things such as the prescribed use of incense at the set times in the Divine Liturgy and other offices, and ritual gestures such as the kissing of the priest or bishop’s hand when seeking a blessing or handling sacred implements. Such were considered too oriental and demeaning. Communion rails appeared in Churches and the faithful knelt for communion. But perhaps one of the worst abuses was the adoption of the idea of “First Holy Communion”, a communion delayed in imitation of the Latin rite practice (itself liturgically dubious) along with the withholding of Holy Chrismation to the newly baptized. New church buildings were no longer East-facing, and were now filled with regimented pews and confessional boxes, the faithful in the Churches have forgotten the meaning of standing to worship, the liturgical nature of confession and the point of facing the East to pray. Meanwhile Rome makes the ordination of the married more difficult and the promotion a celibate clergy encouraged.

So why do things that take Eastern Catholics further and further from Orthodoxy? Why borrow failed strategies from the Latins? Gimmicks simply don’t work. Guitars, rock music, clown and rapper priests and the like, do not call youth to the Church. Likewise, the question of language is an important, but tricky issue. While the complaint from youth that they don’t understand because of language should be listened to, it is also important that clergy and responsible laity are not duped. English does not equal liturgical education. This complaint is often the hoax of cunning kids. This writer’s children have tried this same trick themselves. Simply introducing the English language service is not enough, and the problem is not solved with the introduction of overhead screens announcing the various parts of the service and selected texts and prayers. These don’t help, and while insulting most people’s intelligence, they serve only to further distract the worshipper and work against and disrupt the ritual flow of the liturgy. In short, these represent a liturgical dumbing-down in the real sense. The answer lies in education in the rite, which must start in Sunday school, in the Catholic school, and in the family.

It is also noticeable that the communal prayer life of many of the Churches of the Byzantine rite is breaking down amongst the Australian Churches. Very seldom are the offices of the Church publicly celebrated. Like the Roman Catholics, all that seems to be left in the years following Vatican II is the Mass or the Divine Liturgy which is often abused by being used to adorn or fill out other communal events and celebrations which could just as easily use an office or prayer service for the purpose. And as it happens, the Byzantine Rite has an abundance of such occasional services that could be used. As far as this writer knows, there is not one Roman Catholic Cathedral in Australia in which the offices of Vespers and Matins (evening and morning prayer) are celebrated daily, if at all. The same is sadly true for the Eastern Churches of the Byzantine Rite. But in imitation of the Latins, many a Byzantine parish now has a daily Eucharist, even on those days when, according to Orthodox usage, there should be no eucharistic liturgy celebrated. The use of the Liturgy of the Presanctified (St Gregory’s Liturgy) has also virtually disappeared from the Wednesdays and Fridays of Great Lent when it is proscribed to be celebrated in the Byzantine Rite.

Rather more worrying are some of the expressions of popular piety that have appeared amongst the laity and which are promoted by some clergy. If we want a barometer to measure where the people are devotionally, and where they have been led,

the piety stall is such a measure. Barely an icon, let alone a good one, is to be seen. Instead, the stall is filled with the high glucose offerings of the Roman Catholics. Ironically, Rome who once constantly Latinised, now calls the Churches back to their traditions, but the problem is now one of will. Do the faithful of those Churches want to be called back? For many John Paul's beautiful *Oriental Lumen* may be just a waste of beautiful words and forlorn hopes. Archbishop Stylianos, Greek Orthodox Archbishop of Australia might finally be proved right when he declared that a "uniate" is one who looks Byzantine on the outside, but who does not possess the mind, the *phronema* of Orthodoxy within. Worse still, unless the Eastern Catholics in Australia wake up from their sleep, and soon, the question of them being either Catholic or Orthodox might be resolved by them being found to be neither. Meanwhile Latinising goes on apace. The Catholic schools to which Eastern Catholic children are sent are its best agents, and after them the Eastern Catholic Churches themselves.

The Eastern patristic theological tradition is one of the bulwarks of the Byzantine Church's life, a tradition most often expressed and imbibed liturgically. This is under threat by the kind of theological education offered to potential Eastern Catholic clergy in Australia. It does not seem to have been noticed by bishops that simply sending candidates for the priesthood to a local Roman Catholic seminary or theological college is not sufficient or even suitable formation. They are not exposed to the Eastern and Orthodox theological tradition and often contract a deal of viruses, including clericalism, from those environments. An ecumenical approach to an Orthodox theological school to form future Eastern Catholic clergy is almost certainly a proposal too radical to be considered presently and would be rebuffed by the Orthodox. In Australia they would almost certainly not be welcome. In the meantime laity and even clergy pursue signs and wonders with enthusiasm. The Melkites, certainly, have flirted with dubious phenomena - holy houses and apparitions, various seers and charlatans, and uncritical promotion of Medjugore. Meanwhile the ancient Eastern mystical tradition, always wary of these kinds of phenomena, remains almost unknown, even the Prayer of the Heart and the accompanying hesychast tradition is unexplored territory.

### QUO VADIS ECCLESIA?

Perhaps the overarching question for all of the Churches of the East that are present in Australia, is the very same question that faces the larger Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox and the Protestant denominations. That question is how to bear witness to the Gospel in a culture now deeply secularised, as in modern Australia. It is not that long ago that the Eastern Catholic Churches in Australia transferred themselves from an agrarian context in their homelands to a secular and urbanised Australia. The Churches face the doubly difficult task of dealing with both urbanisation and secularisation. This is a challenge of some complexity in that, as Harvey Cox explained, secularisation is "the loosening of the world from religious and quasi-religious understandings of itself, the dispelling of all closed world-views, the breaking of all supernatural myths and sacred symbols."<sup>15</sup> If this is secularism, how is it possible to engage in an exercise of evangelism and dialogue which traditional Christians might be forgiven for thinking a dialogue with the devil. Of course, both Christians East and West, cannot uncritically participate. While

---

<sup>15</sup> H. Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: Collier Books, 1965), 2.

recognising that one of the deepest problems is the impaired capacity of the “secular city” to hear the Gospel at all, the Eastern Christian Churches in Australia, like the other Western Churches, must approach this in a deeply Catholic way and in obedience to holy scripture, the Fathers and the with responsibility for the Church. These three elements are the channel markers for the voyage of speaking to the conditions of the times without being conditioned by the times.

Given the present state of the Eastern Catholic Churches in Australia, they are not really up to the task. Many still cluster around homeland memories and injuries, while others are busy with ethnic maintenance in a new cultural context such as Australia. Few are actually looking to the bigger picture and some are not yet really capable of understanding and responding to it. There must be no mistake that we are saying that these Churches and communities have nothing to offer, quite the opposite. Deep in their saddlebags, whether they know it or not, they are carrying the precious wisdom of the ancient Church and its patristic inheritance. It is only by renewed fidelity and in some cases rediscovery of the riches of the Eastern Christian traditions that the Eastern Catholic Churches can meaningfully participate in the evangelisation of modern Australia.

In the case of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, it seems to be suffering from many of the same problems as the Roman Catholics: greying and thinning congregations, missing younger generations and little purchase on social and socio-moral questions and contemporary problems in society. Most of the Ukrainians, Orthodox and Catholic, have been in this country for quite some time, particularly after the Second World War, but now the initial energy and elan of the early years seems to have stalled. The great Ukrainian Church does however show signs of awakening in the new and ever-changing cultural context. One testimony to this is the publication of the new Catechism of the Ukrainian Catholic Church and the appointment of a young and vigorous Patriarch. It is an outsider’s opinion, but it seems to this writer that one of the highest aims of the Ukrainian Catholic Church is to see a united Byzantine Church for the nation of Ukraine, with its Kievan Patriarch. This is its highest ecumenical aim for the old country. In terms of Australia, it is yet to find a way to open up its patristic and spiritual heritage so that other Christians of good will and spiritual seekers generally might find their way to Christ in this Byzantine Ukrainian mode.

The Eparchy of the Melkites of Australia and New Zealand seems to be a long way and different from the Church of Antioch whose voice was heard on the floor of the Second Vatican Council. Compared to the Ukrainians, the Melkites are more recently arrived, but the community is less homogenous than it appears. The Melkite faithful in Australia can come from Syria, Lebanon, the Palestinians of Gaza, the West Bank, and Israel, and from Egypt and North Africa, and from as far away as the Persian Gulf. It is the Arabic language and the Byzantine worship tradition that holds them together. The Melkites, as more recent arrivals, can still count most of the generations from the babies to the grey hairs in their congregations, but there is little emphasis or attention given to their relationship to the wider Australian society. Evangelisation of the wider community is not really on their agenda presently and although it is a quite raw migrant Church they also carry with them rich resources of liturgy and spiritual practice that are needed, both by the Catholic Church at large in Australia and for the wider task of evangelisation. One of its most urgent

needs is to raise the standard of the education of the clergy which, in some cases, is barely beyond high school.

The Russian Byzantine Catholic Church has been in Australia from the early 1950s, following post-Second World War migration. Russian Catholics were a persecuted minority in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in Russia and were even more fiercely persecuted under Soviet, atheistic communism. It is a miracle that any one of this Church survives to this day. Small as it is, however, it is adorned with the blood of martyrs. In the matters of liturgy, theology and ecclesial practice, this small Church took the advice of Pope Pius XI very seriously. It is the most observant of the Eastern Churches in Australia, adhering to the calendar and liturgical practice of its mother, the Russian Orthodox Church. As noted earlier, Pope John Paul II stated:

I particularly urge the Latin Ordinaries in these countries to study attentively, grasp thoroughly and apply faithfully the principles issued by this Holy See concerning ecumenical co-operation and the pastoral care of the faithful of the Eastern Catholic Churches, especially when they lack their own hierarchy.<sup>16</sup>

Despite this advice, recent years have seen an unsuccessful but quite deliberate attempt to liquidate this Church by aggressive neglect. Paradoxically, however, the attempt has brought about a revival. Many old Russian Catholics and families have re-established contact; the Russian Catholic core-parishioners have stood firm and, as at post-Pentecost, the Lord has added to numbers daily with many “Australians” from various ethnic backgrounds making their home in the community. Though, with only 157 parishioners, and another thirty three associates, this little Church enjoys a cordial relationship with the Russian Orthodox and other Orthodox Churches, and mounts various cultural and artistic events which bring the communities together through its instrumentality. It also has the warmest relationship particularly with the larger Catholic Melkite community in Australia.

The Eastern Catholic Churches in Australia have an essential role to play in manifesting the Church’s Catholicity. John Paul II esteemed and admired the Christian East and considered its contribution crucial for the “full realisation of the Church’s universality.”<sup>17</sup> The larger Latin-Rite communion also needs the Eastern Churches at its side, or in concert, in engaging the wider society in the transformative dialogue necessary to have the Gospel heard by contemporary Australians. The Eastern Christian Churches have a role to play in the deep critique of contemporary culture that all Christian Churches need to make and they are obliged, putting aside narrow ethnic and confessional occupations, to understand well the world around them. The Eastern Churches have to understand that they are not mere minorities in a Western Rite sea, but that they are “the gifted ones”, called to an *aggiornamento* of the whole Church, as described and hoped for in John Paul II’s *Oriente Lumen*, and dreamt of by John XXIII’s Council. The task of the Eastern Churches is to understand the modern world, its strengths, deep weaknesses and anguish, and from the treasure house of its patristic inheritance to evangelise it, transforming it from within.

---

<sup>16</sup> John Paul II, *Oriente Lumen*, 26.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

---

**Author:** Archpriest B.J. Lawrence Cross OAM is Associate Professor in the Faculty of Theology of the Australian Catholic University and a member of the Centre for Early Christian Studies. He is an editor of the conference series *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church, Vols I – V*, and *Oriente Lumen: Australasia and Oceania Vols I & II*. He has a Doctor of Theology from the Melbourne College of Divinity. His work on ecumenical themes has appeared in *One in Christ, Pacifica, The Ecumenical Review, St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly, Australasian Catholic Record, Irish Theological Quarterly and Eastern Churches Journal*. Recent publications include Джозеф ЛИЧ and Лоуренс Кросс, *ДУЖ И ОГОНЬ: ОПЫТ ВВЕДЕНИЯ В БОГОСЛОВИЕ ТАИНСТВ*, Издательство (Москва: Духовная Библиотека, 2008) and J. Leach and L. Cross, *Image, Symbol and Mystery: An Eastern Christian View of the Sacraments* (Fairfax, Virginia: Eastern Christian Publications, 2009).

Email: [lawrence.cross@acu.edu.au](mailto:lawrence.cross@acu.edu.au)

---