The Eastern Rites

by

Reverend Alexander Beaton, S. A. Reverend Canisius Kiniry, S. A.



THE CATHOLIC HOUR



The Eastern Rites



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Two addresses delivered in the nationwide Catholic Hour, produced by the National Council of Catholic Men, in cooperation with the National Broadcasting Company on January 12, 1947 and January 19, 1947

BY

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THE STORY OF THE EASTERN RITES

By Alexander Beaton, S.A.

Address given on January 12, 1947

In your family life you have a heritage and a culture, which has been passed on by parents to children. The little children learn their prayers and religious customs from their mother and father. When the children marry, they tell their little ones what they did when they were young. It is the example set by the parents which is preserved and remembered by the children.

There are elements which help to influence the family tradition. You may marry a person of a different nationality, whose customs will influence your children. One family may have the custom of praying before an altar dedicated to a particular saint. Another family may follow the beautiful custom of reciting certain family prayers—yet both families are Catholic. No matter how varied your family culture becomes, you can trace it to a common root.

The Catholic Church is also a family. Within this family there are children of many nationalities, some of whom follow particular rules and ceremonies in their worship of God. The Church includes these rules and ceremonies under the name of RITE. Rite, therefore, in the meaning of the Church comprises both the ceremonies to be observed in the celebration of the Mass, in the administration of the sacraments, as well as in the Church Law.

Because many of us belong to or are acquainted with the Latin rite, we may think that it is the only rite in the world. The speech of one of our Catholics is typical of such misunderstanding.

"Gentlemen," said the speaker, "as Catholics, no matter where we go we shall find the same sacrifice of the Mass; hear the familiar Latin, and the corresponding music; see the same ceremonies we saw this morning in our own church."

This, of course, is not true. I know of hundreds of Catholic churches where not even a single word of Latin is spoken during Mass. There are countries where the Mass is celebrated in Arabic; others where it is celebrated in Chaldean, Slavonic,

Armenian. In some lands, one can hear the Mass in Greek and Old Ethiopian. These Catholic Churches observe different customs and have their own particular cultural music.

It is only natural that this diversity should exist, because of the words of Christ: "Going therefore, teach ve all nations . . ." (Matthew 28:19). But every nation has its own particular way of life, its laws, and its culture. Man worships God with his whole body and soul. If his worship is to be natural, he will be influenced by his national ways of life. This is exactly what happened as the different countries received the faith of Christ. Consequently, there are twenty-two rites in the Church, all of them united in faith and loyalty with the Pope of Rome, the Vicar on earth of the Eternal Christ in Heaven.

Just as you can trace your ancestry and culture, so also may one trace the history of the different rites to Christ in the Supper Room at Jerusalem. This first offering was very simple because Christ, the Divine Son of God was the Priest. What solemnity could any earthly beauty or ceremony add to the divine presence of Christ? But

the Apostles and later priests were human. To the simple act of sacrifice they therefore added prayers and ceremonies to make the celebration more edifying.

After all the Apostles were dead, the organization and the liturgy of the Church was in the process of development. unit was the local church presided over by a bishop. It was not long before certain prominent bishops were exercising authority over other bishops. This was the beginning of metropolitans or archbishops, and later led to the very important office of patriarch, who ruled a large territory. The forms of worship offering differed from church to church, and were in the common language of the people—Aramaic at first in Jerusalem: Greek at Antioch and Rome. Gradually these forms solidified into families, those of the most important churches becoming the standards for the lesser ones.

Within a short time, Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, and Constantinople became the leading cities. These four cities gave their names to the four chief types of Christian liturgies, which, with their subdivisions, are in use today.

It was in this manner that the two great rites, broadly called the Eastern and the Western, came into being. Each has a number of dependent rites, and they like the beautiful flowers of a charming garden grace the Catholic Church in a perfect unity. Consequently, the holy Mass, called the Divine Liturgy in the Eastern Rite, is celebrated today not only in one language, but in twelve different ones.

The Eastern Rites include about ten million souls. About one million of them have come to America as immigrants from different parts of Asia, Africa, and Europe. Here they have established their churches, and have continued their religious practices according to their own rites.

Several factors helped to make the difference of culture between the East and West more evident. In the early years of Christianity, national development made a strong cultural division between the East and the West. The Church in the West had to fight for her very existence. She painfully had to hammer out a new order from the ruins of the Western Empire. Thus the West developed more along legal lines;

external discipline was the standard.

The East, on the other hand, had harmony between the church and the civil authorities, to such an extent that even until the year 378, the Emperor called himself the Bishop of External Affairs.

Owing to this harmony, the East had a better opportunity to concentrate on the teachings of her philosophers and monks. The moral ideal of the monks of the desert was the desire to rise above earthly limitations. Because the people looked up to these monks, they were greatly influenced by their ways of thinking and their ceremonies. The Oriental thus developed a tremendous sense of the majesty of God. He thinks more of the Father-Servant relationship between God and himself. He reverences God in all places and at all times. We are therefore not surprised when St. Gregory of Nyssa tells about men in the fourth century discussing at work and on the streets the nature of the God-Head. Of course. if this type of conversation took place in an American factory, we would be somewhat amazed, for this is not part of our heritage.

Because of historic and nat-

ural influences, the Oriental expresses his simple, childlike reverence for God through external signs and ceremony. He points to Christ as his great exemplar—Christ who had an Eastern mentality; Who worked and died in an Eastern land.

Infinite Greatness, the Oriental will say, taught us the greatness of the little external things of life. The Divine Master always taught us in the language of the senses through His parables. Under sense forms, He has lovingly arranged to dwell in our midst in the Holy Eucharist. The warmth and the poetry of the Oriental Mass, adorned with symbolic ceremony, is therefore genuinely Christian—it follows in the direct tradition of Christ.

These two features of Oriental worship, the majestic sense of the Presence of God, and the importance of external ceremony, are stamps impressed on the Oriental Liturgy by early Eastern influences. This culture has come down through the Apostles, most of whom worked in Eastern lands. These features marked the works of the first Councils of the infant Church which were held in Eastern cities. This heritage

has come down through the Greek Fathers and Doctors, through the twenty Oriental Popes to the present day.

You will find these two family characteristics today in the beautiful Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom of the Byzantine Rite. I use it as an example because among the Eastern Rites, the Byzantine has the greatest number of followers.

The Mass or the Divine Liturgy in both the Eastern and the Western rites is a public act through which the priest and the faithful alike actively worship God. The Oriental, however, seems to participate more actively than we of the west, and so he joins with his fellow worshippers in offering the sacrifice to God with simple fervor and elaborate ceremonies.

The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom is rich and beautiful in its prayers and music — prayers expressing in particular the majesty of God, His Blessed Mother, and the Saints of Heaven—music rising in lofty crescendos, breathing forth the awesome Presence of God.

It is the moment of consecration which best displays the social and majestic aspect of the Mass. Here the King of Heaven and Earth is about to come down on the altar. Priest and faithful cannot restrain their joy and emotion. The celebrant therefore does not whisper the words of consecration, but sings them from the bottom of his heart. The faithful join him by answering—Amen.

It is characteristic of the Byzantine liturgies to insist that man needs an element of beauty in his worship to lift him up to the divine. The liturgy provides that beauty. In any Oriental church you will see many icons or pictures, beautiful vestments. and the symbolic use of incense. The mind of the Oriental does not attach itself to any individual external. His veneration is for the entirety—the majesty of the Divine Presence, the atmosphere of reverence and peace, which these outward signs and figures represent and invoke.

Most important of all is the fact that this type of love has become for the people one of the means through which God pours out the benefits of His grace and power.

And so the Oriental uses in

his liturgy today all those things which are part and parcel of his heritage and tradition.

The Catholic of the Roman Rite loves his Latin Liturgy and discipline. They are dear to us beyond the power of words. In them we move and live, and have our being because the majestic simplicity of the Roman Rite is our heritage.

Nevertheless, we know that other Catholics have not this rite, but their own beautiful and well-loved rites. They too are fully approved by Our Holy Father, the Pope. It is most important in the work Church Unity that we have a love for and an understanding of these Eastern Rites. Church Unity Octave is an eight-day program of prayer for the religious unity of all Christendom. One of the intentions of the Octave is to pray for the return of those members of the Eastern Rites who do not give obedience to the See of Peter.

The Eastern Catholics are great powers in this work of Church Unity. It will be through them that the unity of the East will be accomplished, because they have the culture of the Orient. They understand the

problems of their Eastern brothers. We should therefore encourage and pray for them.

It is only when the peoples of the East and the West meet in mutual love, in unity of faith and obedience, that the prayer of Christ will be fulfilled: "... That they may be one, even as we are one... that they may be perfected in unity..." (John 17: 22, 23).

THE EASTERN RITES AND THE MODERN WORLD

By Reverend Canisius Kiniry, S.A. Address given on January 19, 1947

The Feast of St. Peter's Chair at Rome was fittingly celebrated on January 18th throughout the Universal Church. On that memorable day, amid the splendor of St. Peter's, the august figure of the whiterobed Father of Christendom stood before the altar in the Eternal City and offered up the Holy Sacrifice to Almighty God for the intention of Church Unity. "For it has pleased God the Father that in him all his fullness should dwell and that through him he should reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in the heavens, making peace through the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1:19).

The prayers of our Holy Father the Pope solemnly opened the Church Unity Octave, an eight day period of prayer which closes on January 25th, the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul. During these days the entire Catholic world joins in special devotions for the unity of Christendom.

The Feast of the Epiphany, whose origin is in the Oriental

Church and is celebrated by it on January 19th, recalls to our minds the quest of the Magi from the East. These men were among the wisest from the studious Orient. They represent the lore and science of their day. They were men whose science led them to God; men, we may be sure, of good habits, of ascetical lives, and of habitual prayer. Early traditions and the ancient prophecies were to them as precious deposits which spoke of God and were filled with hidden truth. The corruption of men pressed heavily upon their hearts. They, together with all the world, pined for the coming of a Redeemer; for a new beginning of the world; for one who should save them from their sins. In the dark blue of the lustrous sky, there rose a gleaming star. It was the sign of which an ancient prophecy had spoken. They left their homes, their state, and their affairs and journeyed westward, they knew not where, under the guidance of this star. It led them at length to the cave of

Bethlehem and presently the Wise Men from the East knelt at the feet of the infant Christ.

When we contemplate the Magi, it is natural for our thoughts to turn to the Christians of the east, for it was to people such as these that Christ chose to reveal Himself. Many of these, however, are not today in communion with Rome. Here we find whole nations who believe as we do in the teachings of the Apostles and the Fathers of the Church. Their priests raise in consecrated hands the Body and Blood of Christ to His Eternal Father in a true renewal of the sacrifice that redeems the world. Their bishops guard the flock of Christ in which the Holy Spirit has placed them to rule the Church of God which He has purchased with His precious Blood. Christ in the Blessed Sacrament is placed on the tongues of men, women, and children who come to His holy table in faith and love. These Christians should be praised for keeping the true apostolic succession of their bishops, the real Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the valid sacraments. They should be revered for their constancy amid terrible persecution. In our generation alone literally millions of them have died for the faith. Yes. thanks be to God, the faith is very much alive among these people of the East. It lives in millions of peasant homes. lives in a thousand thousand The example of their hearts. lives and the heroism of their deaths, cannot help but arouse in us great respect and sympathy for those vast numbers. over one hundred and sixty millions in the Near and Middle East, who have suffered for their faith. Pope Pius XI summed up the attitude of the Papacy in our day when he describ-Dissident the Eastern ed Churches thus: "Pieces broken from gold-bearing rock themselves bear gold. The ancient Christian bodies of the east possess so venerable a holiness that they deserve not merely respect but complete sympathy." How sincerely we pray that they, like their forbears who followed the light of Christ's star to His crib, may follow the light that leads to full unity with Christ's Mystical Body on earth. The Church is called the Mystical Body of Christ because the supernatural life-force is had only by vital communication with Christ the Head and Lord of all. For we recall His words, "Abide in me and I in you, As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, . . . so neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches, He who abides in me, and I in Him, he hears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing" (John 15:4-6).

The spirit of the Church Unity Octave compels us to include in our prayers all churches not in union with the See of Peter. We pray that they may be joined to the Catholic Church in the bonds of unity-that unity so greatly desired by Christ, that unity so ardently promoted by saintly men like Saint Basil the Great, Saint Chrysostom and Saint John Gregory, men venerated even by dissidents themselves - that unity so faithfully fostered by the successors of Saint Peter.

The transition of Orthodox Christians to the true fold would require no great change of ritual and ecclesiastical customs; the sacrifice of the Mass, or the Divine Liturgy, as it is called in the Eastern Church, would continue to be celebrated in Slavonic or Greek as the case may be. Many Latin Catholics are puzzled by the differences in ritual and language used in the lit-

urgies of the east. If they were to probe beneath the surface of appearances, they would come to appreciate more fully the faith of the Orientals. Unless they are willing to go further than this, they will never be able to have a sympathetic understanding of the beauty and splendor of Eastern devotion.

Christ's mission of atonement and sanctification was embodied in the earthly forms of sense. God became man in the winsome form of a child. Religion which will not express itself in terms of sense is not Christ's idea of religion befitting human nature, so completely immersed in sense. Our Divine Lord taught us the lessons He would have us learn under such forms. Under the sense form of the seven sacraments, divine life dwells in all the members of His Mystical Body, the Church.

The language of Oriental worship is pictured expression formulated by people whose thought clothes itself spontaneously in rich imagery. Their ceremonies are beautiful and moving. They illustrate the fact that the rule of faith determines the rule of worship. It would be difficult to obtain a more concise statement of doctrine pertaining to

Christ than is found in the Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, "O only begotten Son and Word of God Who, being immortal, didst vouchsafe to take flesh for our salvation of the Holy Mother of God and Ever Virgin Mary: Thou Who without change didst become man and wast crucified, O Christ our God, by death trampling upon death; Thou Who, being Thyself, one of the Holy Trinity, art glorified with the Father and the Holv Spirit, save us."

One finds in these rites an ardent piety, a tender devotion to all the mysteries of our holy religion. In particular to the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, to the Passion of Christ, to the Holy Eucharist and to the Blessed Mother of God.

Among other beautiful customs of the Byzantine Rite there is the dedication of each day of the week to a mystery—Sunday to the Resurrection and the Blessed Trinity; Monday to the angels; Tuesday to St. John the Baptist; Wednesday and Friday to penance in union with the Passion of our Divine Redeemer; Thursday to the Apostles and St. Nicholas; Saturday to all the saints and to all the faith-

ful departed. Moreover, in these rites there is an abundance of ascetical teaching which seeks to instill an abiding and perpetual sorrow for sin. They make copious use of Sacred Scripture and frequent reference to the Fathers and Doctors of the Church which form so important a link with the early history of the various rites. Their chant is very beautiful and they never use musical instruments in church because they say that God made the human voice for worship.

Processions, candles, incense, and gorgeous vestments mark their ceremonies and everything is symbolic. It expresses something very real to the worshipper. Where we Westerners need words to express our feelings, the people of the East express much of their adoration and aspiration in ceremony.

The various rites founded in the Church are but the natural external expression of internal belief, revealed in terms of the culture and the customs of various countries. It is the distinct privilege of the Church to have a variety of rites in the unity of faith. The vast majority of dissident Easterners were very poorly instructed in matters of faith. They lived on the tradition handed down to them. They could not easily distinguish between faith and rite. To them whatever pertained to religious worship was of divine origin and consequently unchangeable. Any change in rite was looked upon by them as a change in faith. To the Easterner his rite is the reflection of his traditions, his ideals, his dreams; it is the picture of his inner self, the picture of his soul.

The real fulness of Catholic worship cannot be comprehended except by realizing that the rites of both the East and the West form one grand whole, the living expression of the worship of Christ's Mystical Body. Beneath the ceremonies, processions, and customs lies the core of truth given by Christ to the Apostles. Our Lord gave his followers most explicit commands that they should belong to the one, true, Church which He founded. He never specified that their prayers should be said in Latin, Greek, or even his own tongue. It has always been the mind of the Church to maintain unity in essentials, liberty in non-essentials, and charity in all things. Though these oriental rites flourish in the most part

in the Near East, our own country may be said to be a miniature Near East for practically every rite is represented here. Nearly one million Eastern Catholics worship God in some Oriental Rite in the United States.

Today there is a spirit of unrest in the world. Selfishness and greed have seized the hearts of men and nations. Atheistic philosophy seeks to rob the souls of men and of nations of all sense of justice and charity. Hate supplants love and justice. Force is used to instill fear. Truth is mingled with error. Virtue vields to vice. All sense of sin is lost. Is it any wonder that suspicion and mistrust are so prevalent? Is it any wonder that disunion and divisions disrupt world order? Men cry for peace and yet fail to seek peace at its true source. They heed not the words of our Divine Lord Who said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you" (Luke 12:31). Men strive for unity and yet fail to see the most perfect unity existing in the world today. Where find this unity? Look about you and see! Only in the faith which Christ founded. This was the

unity for which our Divine Lord prayed to His Heavenly Father. This unity was to be a mark of divine favor as it was to be an answer to a divine prayer and proof to the world of Christ's mission. It was to embrace and unite men of the most dissimilar character and disposition. Men of every nation and living under every clime were to become one in faith, in obedience, and in charity. And what do we behold in fact? Men sharply divided by policies, national rivalries and aspirations are united in the one, true church of Christ. No matter how different are tongues, races or traditions. nevertheless they all present a spectacle of unity of faith and submission to the one visible shepherd upon earth. This unity can be-seen by men and is tangible. The world never produced anything like it for it is neither geographical nor racial.

It is in direct hostility to the pride and passions of men and triumphs over them. It is a standing miracle for it has penetrated all differences of race, color, government, mentality, and culture—a unity which links together in one bond more than three hundred millions of people.

That unity lies in the oneness of belief and worship and obedience. That is the unity for which we pray during this Church Unity Octave. That is the unity to which Holy Mother Church invites all the nations of the earth. That is the unity she would share with her children of the East and West alike. Like the Magi of old, may they yield to the promptings of divine grace and find that peace and unity which comes only from being at home in their Father's house . . . God bless you.

THE PURPOSE OF THE CATHOLIC HOUR

(Extract from the address of the late Patrick Cardinal Hayes at the inaugural program of the Catholic Hour in the studio of the National Broadcasting Company, New York City, March 2, 1930.)

Our congratulations and our gratitude are extended to the National Council of Catholic Men and its officials, and to all who, by their financial support, have made it possible to use this offer of the National Broadcasting Company. The heavy expense of managing and financing a weekly program, its musical numbers, its speakers, the subsequent answering of inquiries, must be met. . . .

This radio hour is for all the people of the United States. To our fellow-citizens, in this word of dedication, we wish to express a cordial greeting and, indeed, congratulations. For this radio hour is one of service to America, which certainly will listen in interestedly, and even sympathetically, I am sure, to the voice of the ancient Church with its historic background of all the centuries of the Christian era, and with its own notable contribution to the discovery, exploration, foundation and growth of our glorious country. . . .

Thus to voice before a vast public the Catholic Church is no light task. Our prayers will be with those who have that task in hand. We feel certain that it will have both the good will and the good wishes of the great majority of our countrymen. Surely, there is no true lover of our Country who does not eagerly hope for a less worldly, a less material, and a more spiritual standard among our people.

With good will, with kindness and with Christ-like sympathy for all, this work is inaugurated. So may it continue. So may it be fulfilled. This word of dedication voices, therefore, the hope that this radio hour may serve to make known, to explain with the charity of Christ, our faith, which we love even as we love Christ Himself. May it serve to make better understood that faith as it really is—a light revealing the pathway to heaven: a strength, and a power divine through Christ; and joys, bringing not only justice but gladness and peace to our search-pardoning our sins, elevating, consecrating our common every-day duties ing and questioning hearts.

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