

# **Oriental Catholic Churches and Their Theology**

## **The relevance of oriental disciplines in the theological formation today**

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Since the Second Vatican Council there is an increasing conscience of the importance of the Churches of the oriental traditions of the Church universal. This conscience has slowly become general. Although the Christian East was not completely out of consideration before Vatican II and there were important documents pertaining to the Churches of oriental apostolic traditions, they have led rather a marginal life. It is timely that the members of these Churches as well as of the numerically largest Church of western tradition, the Roman Catholic or Latin Church, draw their attention seriously to these documents that contain substantial guidelines.

It can be said that the 20<sup>th</sup> century has the merit to have brought to evidence that *the Catholic Church is not identical with the Roman Catholic Church*. The latter is but one of the Churches *sui iuris*<sup>1</sup> of the Catholic (universal) Church. So also the Christian East is not limited to *the* Orthodox Church communion that is following the Byzantine tradition and accepts the first *seven* ecumenical councils as the basis of her faith and discipline. This vision that is largely spread in the West is simply too narrow. We ought not to overlook that the apostolic heritage was, in its beginning, handed down as well to Rome and the West as to the Byzantine world by the messengers of Christ who were Semitic and whose mother language was Aramaic (Syriac). So we can rightly say that Christianity is based on three columns: Syriac, Latin, Byzantine (Greek).<sup>2</sup>

These remarks have the aim of elucidating the *diversity* existing in *the one Church of Christ* and her traditions. This is why the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches (CCEO), published by Pope John Paul II in 1990, underlines that the Churches of the East arise from five traditions: the Alexandrian, the Antiochian, the Chaldean (Syro-oriental) and, the Constantinopolitan (Byzantine).<sup>3</sup> These traditions are specified in various rites. The Code is giving a clear-cut clarification also of this term in order

to avoid confusion between “Church” and “rite”. “A rite is the liturgical, theological

spiritual and disciplinary patrimony, culture and circumstances of history of a distinct people, by which its own manner of living the faith is manifested in each autonomous church.”<sup>1</sup> This means that a *rite* can be common to several Churches. It is in this context that we have to understand the sayings of the Second Vatican Council in its decree on the Oriental Catholic Churches, although its terminology is sometimes not so clear:

“All clerics and those aspiring sacred orders should be instructed in the rites and especially in the practical norms that must be applied in inter-ritual questions. The laity, too, should be taught about rites and their norms as part of its catechetical formation”<sup>2</sup>. This saying is founded on the fact that “this entire heritage of spirituality and liturgy, of discipline and theology in the various traditions belongs to the full catholic and apostolic character of the Church.”<sup>3</sup>

### **A few documents of the past**

More than a hundred years ago Pope Leo XIII emphasised the beauty and dignity of the different liturgies celebrated in the Churches of oriental tradition.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, he condemned every attempt of their latinisation. “The preservation of the oriental rites<sup>2</sup> is much more important than one would believe. The venerable age excelling the different kinds of these rites is an eminent ornament for the whole Church and, at the same time, it calls forth the divine unity of the catholic faith... Perhaps there is no more marvellous proof of the catholicity of the Church of God than this unique ornament, which the different forms of ceremonies and the time-honoured languages are giving her. These are the more noble, as they arise from the Apostles and the holy Fathers.”<sup>3</sup>

Pope Pius XI published an important encyclical on September 8, 1923 in which he emphasised the necessity of taking into consideration the Churches of oriental tradition and their entire heritage.<sup>1</sup> This encyclical, as well as the sayings of Vatican II, are addressed to all the Catholics whatever Church *sui iuris* they may belong to. The then Congregation for Universities and Seminaries (now the Congregation for Catholic Education) established thereupon, on August 28, 1929, prescriptions for all the Catholic institutions depending on it. Special attention should be given to all the questions and issues pertaining to the Churches of oriental traditions and the peoples in the course of the theological studies.<sup>1</sup> In a letter to all the Roman Catholic (i. e. Latin) bishops, the same Congregation prescribed the introduction of an *oriental day* (once a year) in every seminary. Lectures on the Churches of oriental tradition as well as the celebration of an oriental Divine Liturgy should mark the day. This prescription has widely fallen into oblivion in the post-Vatican II time.

### **Some documents published during the pontificate of Pope John Paul II**

In the first instance, we call to mind the *Letter of the Congregation for Catholic Education* of January 6, 1987<sup>1</sup>. It should be read in the context of the documents quoted above. Its addressees are the bishops, rectors of seminaries, presidents and deans of ecclesiastical faculties and the other dicasteries of the Roman Curia. It rightly stresses the lacuna in the Roman Catholic theological studies as regards the Churches of oriental traditions.<sup>2</sup> Nowadays a genuine knowledge of the Christian East and the Churches of oriental traditions is still more urgent than at Pope Pius XI's time. This obligation has to be taken seriously, especially by Roman Catholic and oriental Catholic bishops and clerics, even those who boast of having graduated abroad from outstanding universities and ecclesiastical faculties, even pontifical ones.<sup>3</sup>

An American ecumenist rightly stated:

“As Western Catholics, we are not sufficiently free from our ingrained habit of simply identifying ourselves with the ‘universal’ Church to be able to answer this simple question in a way that preserves the equal dignity and responsibility of the Eastern Catholic Churches in deed as well as in word.... Twenty years after Vatican II the Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches still stands as a reminder to us that the basic theological question remains unanswered and that the union of all Churches of East and West depends on finding this answer.”<sup>1</sup>

The mere existence of Catholic Churches of oriental traditions forming integrating parts of the catholic treasury of belief is simply disregarded. For many Roman Catholics, their eastern brethren are rather “stepbrothers”, simply something like “Orthodox”<sup>2</sup> and therefore remain outside the scope of their interests. Others – and their knowledge is not more developed, even if they pretend to be distinguished “ecumenists” – not rarely express, with uttermost conviction, their opinion that the oriental Catholic Churches *sui iuris* are, in comparison with the Roman Catholic Church numerically unimportant, more or less a *quantité négligeable*. They ought to adapt themselves, also in the externals, to the great Latin Church, which means nothing else than to allow to be absorbed by the latter. The “united Catholics” – and frequently they speak of *Uniates*<sup>3</sup> - are an essential hindrance for ecumenical dialogue and progress, and it would be good if they disappeared from the scene.<sup>4</sup> An assertion does not become truth, even if many or even a vast majority repeat it again and again.

Who are these “united Catholics”? The term *united* points to those “that are one, who are linked together”. United are on the one hand those parts of the Churches of eastern tradition possessing all elements of autonomous Churches with the Church of Rome, and on the other hand the Church of Rome with them. In other words: There are no

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<sup>1</sup> R. BARRINGER, “‘Orientalium Ecclesiarum’ deserves more attention, *Byzantine Catholic World* (Pittsburgh, 29.12.1985), p. 3. We regret to state that Fr. Barringer’s comment is as valid today, almost 40 years after Vatican II, as it was at the time of its publication. This honest statement is not accepted by all Roman Catholic theologians and it is not even shared by many latinized and latinizing Orientals (fostering by their attitude an irrational inferiority complex).

<sup>2</sup> In the confessional meaning.

<sup>3</sup> This term has its origin in the old Russian polemics after the Union of the Ukrainian metropolity of Kyiv (1596) and has a pejorative meaning.

<sup>4</sup> The *Dialogue within the Syriac Tradition* under the patronage of the Foundation Pro Oriente (its president is the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Vienna, Cardinal Christoph Schönborn), in which all the Churches of Syriac Tradition, non-Catholic and Catholic, participate, is clearly a counter-proof of this assertion. It is the most fruitful among all ecumenical dialogues.

Catholics on earth who are not also “united”, and there is no autonomous Catholic Church (*sui iuris*) that is not also “united” with all the other autonomous Catholic Churches. This counts also for the Roman Catholic Church whose protohierarchy, the *Patriarch of the Occident*, holds the primatial succession of St. Peter, the head of the apostolic college, as the Bishop of Rome. It is just this fact, which is realized in the *koinonia*, the *communion* of the Catholic Church that by definition is essentially a *unity in legitimate diversity*.

The Catholic Church is not a monolith, but a communion of Churches. Therefore she is neither western, nor eastern. As *koinonia* she embraces East and West, North and South, she is the vocation of all mankind in virtue of the saving and redemptive economy (*mdâbrânûtä* as the Syriac Fathers say).

The different traditions in the Church are not contradicting, but on the contrary supplementing each other. This becomes evident, if we compare e. g. the eastern and western approaches of the mystery of the Holy Trinity. An exclusive approach and meditation of the central mystery remains insufficient.<sup>1</sup>

In autumn 1986 we published a study<sup>2</sup>, where we criticized, in its final part, the lack of any hint to the study of the Churches of oriental tradition in the canons of the Code of Canon Law (1983) referring to the curriculum of the Roman Catholic theological studies. The letter of the Congregation for Catholic Education was therefore like a response to this article. It has the character of an *instruction*. It sees clearly the defect in the Roman Catholic theological studies.

Before analysing this document in details, we have to take into account also the Apostolic Letter *Orientalis Lumen* published on the feast of St. Athanasios of Alexandria,

May 2, 1995<sup>1</sup>, the encyclical *Ut unum sint* of May 25, 1995 and the document *The Greek and the Latin traditions with regard to the procession of the Holy Spirit*, that wants to bring some clarification of the thorny issue of the *western addition* to the Creed of Nicea and Constantinople, the *Filioque*

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<sup>1</sup> This was already emphasised in the early works of the later Major Archbishop (Patriarch) of the Ukrainian Catholic Church. See J. SLIPIYI, “Die Trinitätslehre des byzantinischen Patriarchen Photios”, *ZkathTh* 44 (1920) and 45 (1921), reprinted in I. Choma-I. Jackiw (eds.), *Opera Omnia Card. Josephi (Slipyj-Kobernyckyj-Dyèkovskij)* I, Rome 1968, 93-158; see also “De principio spirationis in SS. Trinitate”, *ibid.* 211-331; “De valore S. Thomae Aquinatis eiusque influxu in theologiam orientalem”, *ibid.* 191-210.

<sup>2</sup>

*Der christliche Osten* 41 (Würzburg 1986) 237-245, (English version) “Oriental Catholics in Roman Catholic Dioceses. ‘Inter-ritual’ norms according to the new Codex Iuris Canonici”, C. PAYNGOT (ed.), *Homage to Mar Cariattil, Pioneer Malabar Ecumenist*, Rome 1987, 111-122.

## *Study on Liturgy*

In this context of *Oriente Lumen*, the Congregation for the Oriental Churches published a highly important *Instruction*<sup>1</sup> that insists that all aberrations and deviations of the past and present times have to be remedied<sup>2</sup>, and this has to be done *without delay* (*senza indugio*), as this is the mind of the Council Vatican II, the teaching of the Popes Paul VI and John Paul II as well as of the *CCEO*.

The Decree of Vatican II on the Oriental Catholic Churches as well as later documents affirm that the Orientals have not only the right, *but the duty* to preserve their authentic patrimony and to acquire a more perfect knowledge and practice of their respective rites. This is a clear condemnation of every attempt to estrange oriental faithful from their own Church *sui iuris* with their entire patrimony. The instruction emphasises that the Churches of oriental traditions have preserved, with a jealous care, the symbolical biblical theology, as it is explained by the Fathers. They have kept the sense of the terrible and ineffable mystery, which surrounds and marks the liturgical texts and the spirit, maintaining the sense of liturgy as incessant doxology, entreaty for pardon and uninterrupted epiclesis, with formulae, which are at the same time rich in contents and suggestive. They excel in a spirituality directly linked with Sacred Scripture and, consequently a theology less subject to categories that are more directly rational. It is for historical and cultural reasons that they have maintained a more immediate continuity with the spiritual atmosphere of the Christian origins, which also the West considers more and more not to be a sign of immobility and backwardness, but of precious faithfulness to the sources of salvation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Istruzione per l'applicazione delle prescrizioni liturgiche del Codice dei Canonici delle Chiese Orientali*, January 6, 1996. Cf. J. MADEY, *Liturgy and Canon Law in the Light of the Instruction «Il Padre, Incomprensibile»* [Instruction], Changanassery-Paderborn 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. VATICAN II, Decree *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, no. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Instruction*, no. 9.



“In the study of revealed truth East and West have used different methods and approaches in understanding and confessing divine things. It is hardly surprising then, if sometimes one tradition has come nearer to full appreciation of some aspects of a mystery of revelation than the other, or has expressed them better. In such cases these various theological formulations are often to be considered complimentary rather than conflicting....

The Christian tradition of the East implies a way of accepting, understanding and living the faith in the Lord Jesus... Yet it is legitimately and admirably distinguished from the latter [the tradition of the West], since Eastern Christians have their own way of perceiving and understanding, and thus an original way of living their relationship with the Saviour...”<sup>1</sup>

Although the patrimony of the Churches of oriental traditions is not to be reduced on liturgy alone, the oriental liturgical practice is the summit of the expression of the *whole* patrimony proper to a Church *sui iuris*. “The holy liturgy where proclamation and adoration have their place, and in which the communion and fraternity among the believers become evident, is verily the teacher of Christian life and the most complex synthesis of its aspects.”<sup>2</sup>

The liturgical patrimony is for the oriental Catholic Churches *the source of their identity*. Although largely influenced by the mighty and weighty occidental tradition, in general, the Catholic Churches of oriental traditions have preserved, in the domain of liturgy, a greater faithfulness to their genuine traditions.<sup>3</sup> Their own liturgies, restored to a greater authenticity and vitality, where alterations, which, in the course of history,

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<sup>1</sup> *Oriente Lumen*, nos. 5 and 6. – See also J. KALLARANGATT, “Dimensions and Perspectives of Oriental Theology, X. KODAPUZHA (ed.), *Eastern Theological Reflections in India* [=OIRSI, 216], 86-104.

<sup>2</sup> POPE JOHN PAUL II, Allocution of January 22, 1994 to the participants of the reunion studying the actual problems of the Byzantine rite Catholics in Romania, *L'Osservatore Romano*, 22.01.1994, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> In this regard, the Syro-Malabar Church that lived under foreign, Roman Catholic, bishops for three centuries, is an exception. Practically nothing of her genuine Syro-oriental patrimony survived in its authentic purity. So she has to take pains to recover its authentic and genuine heritage and identity. On the other hand, it must be pointed to the fact that Roman dignitaries in authority over the Oriental Catholic Churches have not always manifested a sincere (or even intellectual) understanding of their liturgical heritage. Cf. W. DE VRIES, *Rom und die Patriarchate des Orients* [= *Orbis Academicus* III, 4], Freiburg-Munich 1963, esp. 183-22 and 318-327.

had penetrated in have been eliminated<sup>1</sup>, will become a better point of departure for the growth of their specificity.<sup>2</sup>

This begins with the application of the right terminology, both in the domains of liturgy and of canon law. Terminology has certainly also an impact on theology. One can hear bishops and priests of Churches of oriental traditions speak of “Holy Mass”<sup>3</sup> to design the celebration of the Eucharist. This is at least an unhappy designation. In the oriental tradition, the *Divine and Holy Liturgy* is celebrated. This appellation is more adequate for the eucharistic mystery. In the antiquity the meaning of liturgy was a public service. The Divine and Holy Liturgy is at the same time a public service rendered to us by God in Jesus Christ and a public service that we offer God in Jesus Christ. Celebrating the liturgy, we let ourselves immerse in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ “By the *epiclesis* (invocation of the Spirit) the work of salvation is actualised and becomes present in the spirit, soul and body. In this way the anticipation of what is expressed in a hymn of the primitive Church is realised” (Phil 2: 9-11). In the oriental tradition, the Institution narrative is subordinate to the epiclesis and constitutes its “juridical basis”. This means: The celebrant’s position *is not facing the people* (versus populum) as the representative of Christ when he says the anaphora, but as the representative of the people of God he makes the intercession facing God (symbolically turning to the East). In this perspective, the words of institution are words of authentic promise, because as “juridical basis” they produce the certitude that

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<sup>1</sup> The instruction emphasizes the need of restoration and elimination of alterations. One of the issues is *latinization* of the text or the ceremonies (rubrics). The *6th Pro Oriente Syriac Dialogue* (Vienna 2003), in its final *Joint communiqué* states:

“1. c) Another kind of addition or alteration, behind which there is an underlying purpose concerns »latinizations« which have been introduced, whose aim has been to »remedy deficiencies« perceived in the Syriac liturgical rites.

the epiclesis, prayer of the celebrant and the assembly for the coming of the Holy Spirit, comes true. If arbitrarily certain rites, as incense, the *zeon* (in the Byzantine liturgy), etc.<sup>1</sup> are omitted, if one dispenses with chant, the celebration becomes more similar to a Roman-rite Mass than to the Divine and Holy Liturgy, the *Qurôbô* or *Qurbânâ* inherited from the holy Fathers of East.<sup>2</sup>

In this context we have to add that also the Syro-Antiochian Church is having anaphoras without the biblical text of the institution of the Eucharist, e. g. of Mar Xystos of Rome<sup>3</sup> and of Mar Dionysios Bar Salibi, while in the anaphora attributed to St. Peter the Head of the Apostles that begins “O God of peace, o Lord, Lord of tranquillity”, the words “This is my body” are missing.<sup>4</sup> Through the common declaration signed by Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Mar Ignatios Zakka I Iwas of Antioch and All the East, *all* the Sacraments have been mutually recognised, so at least implicitly the eucharistic liturgies.<sup>5</sup> The Malankara Catholic Church should be asked why even the post-Vatican II edition of the liturgical book containing the anaphoras<sup>6</sup> has not restored the ancient text that is used by the non-Catholic Malankarites, but instead has given all the anaphoras the words of Institution, as found in the anaphora of St. James the First Bishop of Jerusalem? We should have in mind the unhappy destiny of the Maronite anaphora *Šarar* that is “one of the examples (types), which are detaching the Maronite rite from its relationship with Western Antioch to link it with Eastern Antioch. This means that this rite is situated half-way between the hellenised Antiochians and the Chaldeans of Aramaic flavour”<sup>7</sup>. The first Maronite Missal printed in Rome in 1592/94 reserved to *Šarar* the last place among the fourteen anaphoras. “The use of this missal was prohibited by Patriarch Sergios Rizzi († 1596), not because of distrust of Rome, as it was interpreted by Renaudot<sup>8</sup>, but rather *because*

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<sup>1</sup> Mostly there is no incense applied and the Mass is simply “dialogued”, sometimes parts of the anaphora (Preface, final doxology, Our Father) are sung.

<sup>2</sup> See F. DILLIER, “Messe ou Divine Liturgie. Plaidoyer pour la Tradition orientale”, *Le Lien. Revue du Patriarcat Grec-Melkite-Catholique* 68/1 (Beirut 2003), 13-17.

<sup>3</sup> Patriarch Mar IGNATIUS EPHREM II (RAHMANI) says that its author was a certain Aaron who could not yet be identified so far ( *Les Liturgies Orientales et Occidentales étudiées séparément et comparées entre elles*, Beirut 1929, 309f.

*of the substitution of the formulae of Institution proper to each anaphora by the only formula translated from the Roman rite.* It is to be added that also the epiclesis had been transformed the first part of which was cut away. This interpretation is most valid, as it was given by Patriarch Stephen Douaihi († 1704), eminent Maronite historian and liturgist.”<sup>1</sup> The second edition of the Missal printed in Rome in 1716 eliminated *Šarar*, and the following editions reserved for it a place as a formulary for the liturgy of the presanctified gifts to be celebrated on Holy Friday. “We hope that this text will be rehabilitated in the new reform of the Maronite missal”<sup>2</sup>

### ***Study of Canon Law***

On June 3, 2003, the Congregation for Catholic Education issued a Decree concerning the studies in Faculties of Canon Law that is valid as well for the Roman Catholic Church as for the Churches of oriental traditions.<sup>3</sup> It is based on the teachings of Vatican II. Article 76 of the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia Christiana* and the articles 56 and 57 of its regulations (*regolamenti*) have been changed.

There are three cycles of studies. The first lasts four semesters or two academic years during the philosophical and theological formation, also for those who possess an academic degree in civil law. During this cycle, a particular study of the general institutions of canon law is a subject.

The second cycle of six semesters is devoted to a thorough study of the whole CIC, the CCEO and the other norms in force. Students who have completed their philosophical and theological studies in a major seminary or a theological faculty may be immediately admitted to this course, unless the dean does not deem it necessary or opportune to demand previously a course of Latin or of the general institutions of canon law. Those having a degree in civil law may be exempted of some subjects (e. g. Roman law, civil law).<sup>4</sup> If the faculty is for Roman Catholic students, among the subjects, the introduction into the CCEO prescribed, if it is a Faculty of oriental canon

law, the introduction to the CIC.<sup>1</sup> The students, after having followed the obligatory first cycle and of this cycle, may be admitted to the examinations for obtaining the academic licentiate's (master's) degree. They must know Latin to such an extent that they understand the CIC and the CCEO as well as the other canonical documents.

The third cycle of two semesters is dedicated to the necessary perfection of their formation by a scientific research in view of the elaboration of the doctoral dissertation. The students should be able to give a correct interpretation of the sources of law.<sup>2</sup>

*The contents of the document of January 6, 1987*

We continue to consider the document of January 6, 1987 mentioned above as basic. Already in its beginning, it refers to the continuous teaching of Pope John Paul II regarding the very contents of the catholicity of the Church. On June 28, 1985, in his allocution to the Roman Curia, he emphasised that the Catholic Church "must learn to breathe again with two lungs, its Eastern one and its Western one"<sup>3</sup>. In many of his allocutions dealing with the Christian East, the Pope has always stressed the following points:

- a) the attitude, which should prevail between Roman Catholics and eastern Christians, Oriental Catholics as well as non-Catholics;
- b) general ignorance of the spiritual traditions and riches of the Churches of eastern traditions, which originated in the Middle East, North Africa, India, and Eastern Europe;
- c) the relevance and importance these traditions possess for the universal Church.

In his Apostolic Letter *Orientalis Lumen* we read:

“From the beginning, the Christian East has proved to contain a wealth of forms capable of assuming the characteristic features of each individual culture, with supreme respect for each particular

community. We can only thank God with deep emotion for the wonderful variety with which he has allowed such a rich and composite mosaic of different tesserae to be formed.

Certain features of the spiritual and theological tradition, common to the various Churches of the East mark their sensitivity to the forms taken by the transmission of the Gospel to western lands. The Second Vatican Council summarized as follows: ‘Everyone knows with what love the Eastern Christians celebrate the sacred liturgy, especially the Eucharistic mystery, source of the Church’s life and pledge of future glory. In this mystery, the faithful, united with their bishops, have access to God the Father through the Son, the Word made flesh that suffered and was glorified, in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. And so »made sharers of the divine nature« (2 Pt 1:4) they enter into communion with the most holy Trinity’.<sup>1</sup>

These features describe the Eastern outlook of the Christian. His or her goal is participation in the divine nature through communion with the mystery of the Holy Trinity.”<sup>2</sup>

It was no doubt a sign that cannot be overlooked that the Holy Father did not only celebrate the *de-Latinised* solemn Divine Liturgy of the Syro-Malabar Church on February 8, 1986, but used also the Syro-oriental liturgical vestments. He thus wanted to make evident what the Second Vatican Council had proclaimed: “These individual Churches of the East as of the West ... are... each as much as others entrusted to the pastoral government of the Roman Pontiff, who divinely succeeded St. Peter in the primacy over the universal Church. They are consequently *of equal dignity so that none of them is superior to others* as regards rite, and they all enjoy the same rights and they are under the same obligations, also in regard to *preaching the Gospel to the whole world* (cf. *Mk 16:15*) under the direction of the Roman Pontiff.”<sup>3</sup>

Eastern and western Christians encounter each other nowadays more frequently due to the development of the means of communication. Many eastern Christians have found a new homestead in those parts of the world, which received the Gospel from

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<sup>1</sup> VATICAN II, Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*, no. 11,1.

<sup>2</sup> *Orientalis Lumen*, nos. 5-6.

<sup>3</sup> *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, no. 3.



missionaries of the Roman Catholic Church and are traditionally regarded as “Latin”.<sup>1</sup> This point is taken up also in the second paragraph of the Apostolic Letter. Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century many Christians have been constrained to leave their native countries for different reasons, especially after World War I and still more after World War II until the recent war in Iraq. A massive emigration of eastern Christians from the Holy Land, Lebanon and other countries of the Middle East, especially to North and South America, Australia, and Western Europe, has not yet stopped. The instruction mentions also the emigration of eastern Christians within India. It is quite understandable that such a shifting and mingling of Christians of different ecclesiastical traditions have effects on the pastoral work as well as on the religious life of families. Marriages of Catholics of different autonomous Churches or between Catholics and Orthodox are not rare and demand the observance of certain juridical norms.<sup>2</sup>

Our document makes an appeal to Roman Catholic hierarchs and pastors to make an examination of conscience when it directly asks the question: “How much is known of the is known of the liturgical and spiritual<sup>3</sup> life of the ancient Christian traditions of these new neighbours? Are serious efforts being made to acquire and spread this knowledge and to draw suitable conclusions of pastoral nature?”

Are these questions not equally valid for Latinised Orientals disregarding their own patrimony, who are more at home in the western Church of their seminary masters of old than in their own one? What do they know of the other Churches of oriental traditions? And even if they are well acquainted with their own Church heritage and

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<sup>1</sup> The *Annuario Pontificio* for 2003, 1059-1062, gives the hierarchical set-up for the different Churches of oriental tradition outside their original territory: **Maronites**: Argentine, Brazil, USA (2 eparchies), Australia, Canada, Mexico, **Syrians**: USA and Canada, Venezuela (Apostolic Exarchate); **Armenians**: France, Greece (Ordinariate), Latin America (Apostolic Exarchate), Argentina, Romania (Ordinariate), USA and Canada (Apostolic Exarchate), Eastern Europe (Ordinariate); **Chaldeans**: USA (2 eparchies)

tradition, are not many living in some kind of self-made spiritual ghetto? These questions are, in the first line, addressed to the teaching personnel of ecclesiastical faculties and major seminaries, particularly when there are Oriental students coming from other rites<sup>1</sup> and Churches *sui iuris*.

The Instruction acknowledges the spiritual opening towards the Oriental Churches *sui iuris* and their treasures<sup>2</sup> here and there that we are witnessing since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and has its visible fruits in that scientific movement commonly called *Retour aux sources*. It seems, however, that it was more alive before Vatican II than after it. Theological, liturgical and ascetical works of the Church Fathers have appeared since then in many languages. In this context, we have to mention also the work undertaken by the Oriental Congregation under the impulse of Pope Pius XI towards the codification of the oriental canonical discipline.<sup>3</sup>

Eastern forms of *piety*, e.g. the hesychastic prayer of the heart, have also met with interest on the part of faithful of the Roman Catholic Church. There remains, however the question, how far these treasures of eastern tradition have been properly understood and integrated in the lives of those who had adopted them, or whether they had been received rather superficially, imitated for a certain time and then, as it may happen with things considered as exotic, abandoned for good. Many a religious movement started with enthusiasm for oriental things, disappeared completely because of the lack of really serious efforts for a study in depth and right comprehension. In this case, the spiritual values borrowed from oriental traditions did not contribute to an enrichment and growth in prayer neither in individual nor communal life. It is a fact that the Churches of oriental tradition have better preserved their authentic apostolic heritage than the Church of the Occident, although there are cases that originally Churches of oriental traditions abandoned their patrimony for the sake of imitating the Church of the Occident.<sup>4</sup>

This also counts for certain monastic and other religious communities of western - and sometimes - eastern traditions, that, in the last decades after Vatican II, believed to seek for an enrichment of their own spirituality rather the experience of spirituality in Asian non-Christian religions. From such a point of departure, lacking any biblical and patristic background as lived in the Churches of oriental traditions, the path to syncretism has not been distant and many unsound developments have found their way into the theological thinking of those who disregarded others as “outdated” and “conservative”.<sup>1</sup>

Pope John Paul II therefore points to a domain that has been widely forgotten or, at the most, taken only as one of subjects of theological formation. His words merit attention, reflection and meditation:

“Moreover, in the East are to be found the riches of those spiritual tradition which are given expression in *monastic life* especially. From the glorious times of the holy Fathers that monastic spirituality flourished in the East which later flowed over into the Western world, and there provided a source from which Latin monastic life took its rise and has often drawn fresh vigour ever since. There it is *earnestly recommended that Catholics avail themselves more often of the spiritual riches of the Eastern Fathers* which lift up the whole man to the contemplation of the divine mysteries.”<sup>2</sup>

Our document, therefore, exhorts all to remember what Vatican II *really proclaimed* and not to refer to a certain, ominous, indefinite “spirit of the council” to hide the lack of arguments. The decree on the Oriental Catholic Churches underlines the actual importance and the role of these Churches and desires their development in loyal faithfulness to their respective authentic traditions. The decree on Ecumenism on its part emphasises the rich treasures “from a common tradition which Catholics still share with Orthodox despite the fact that, at present, there is not full communion between them”<sup>1</sup>

“Tradition is the heritage of Christ’s Church. This is a living memory of the Risen One met and witnessed by the Apostles who passed on his living memory to their successors in an uninterrupted line, guaranteed by the apostolic succession through the laying on of hands down to the bishops of today... Only a religious assimilation, in the obedience of faith, of what the Church calls ‘Tradition’ will enable Tradition to be embodied in different cultural and historical situations and conditions<sup>2</sup>.... If Tradition puts us in continuity with the past, eschatological expectation opens us to God’s future.”<sup>3</sup>

And the Pope praises the East emphatically:

“The East expresses in a living way the reality of tradition and expectation. All its liturgy, in particular, is a commemoration of salvation and

an invocation of the Lord's return. And if Tradition teaches the Churches fidelity to what give birth to them, eschatological expectation urges them to be what they have not yet fully become, what the Lord wants them to become, and thus to seek ever new ways of fidelity, overcoming pessimism because they are striving for the hope of God who does not disappoint."<sup>4</sup>

A genuine study in depth of the Tradition of the Church cannot and may not leave out of consideration the *particular* traditions proper to the apostolic Churches *sui iuris*. As the universal Church is a *communion of Churches* (*communio Ecclesiarum*), it is just because of this fact that each individual Church *sui iuris* enjoys, within this

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<sup>1</sup> *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, ch. 3/1.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Interpretationis Problema* (October 1989), II, 1-2; *Enchiridion Vaticanum* 11, 1717-1719.

<sup>3</sup> *Oriente Lumen*, no. 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 8.

communion, the same dignity and the same rights. This is why a reconsideration of the sources is indispensable. The study of the traditions of the first centuries shows a multitude of expression and, at the same time, a wonderful spiritual, religious agreement. For the theologian studying these sources, this occupation will bring enrichment and better understanding of the doctrine of our faith. “By returning to the essential sources of the faith, the theologian who belongs to an individual Church *sui iuris* not only enriches himself through this experience of the ‘others’, but also, through this method, returns to his own roots... Through studies in this wide historical context the teachings of the faith are better understood, because they are seen as rising out of a truly living environment.”<sup>1</sup>

This means that *Patrology*, not so much in an archaeological way but really as a theological discipline of wide relevance, has to get its appropriate place. In it the Syriac<sup>2</sup>, Greek and Latin Fathers and authors of antiquity must receive due attention. It is not at all sufficient, if patrology leads a shady existence as part of the subject “Ancient Church History”.

The instruction rightly points, in this context, to the rich experience the Churches of oriental traditions possess in the field of what is called nowadays “inculturation”<sup>3</sup>, i. e. “the knowledge of how to plant the mystery of Christ in the native soil of the genuine traditions of various peoples”<sup>4</sup>

Inculturation emphasised by Vatican II in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* and the Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity *Ad gentes*, does obviously not mean superficial adaptation, which can be observed nowadays in many places and which Pope John Paul II as well as realistic level-headed missiologists deplore.

“It is necessary, however, that this important work of adaptation be carried out with a constant awareness of the ineffable mystery against which every generation is called to measure itself. The ‘treasure’ is too important and precious to risk impoverishment or compromise through forms of experimentation or practices introduced without a careful review on the part of the competent ecclesiastical authorities. Furthermore, the centrality of the Eucharistic mystery demands that any such review must be undertaken in close association with the Holy See. As I wrote in my Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* ‘such cooperation is essential because the Sacred Liturgy expresses and celebrates the one faith professed by all and, being the heritage of the whole Church, cannot be determined by local Churches in isolation from the universal Church’.

All of this makes clear the great responsibility, which belongs to priests in particular for the celebration of the Eucharist. It is their responsibility to preside at the Eucharist *in persona Christi* and to provide a witness to and a service of communion not only for the community directly taking part in the celebration, but also for the universal Church, which is a part of every Eucharist. It must be lamented that, especially in the years following the post-conciliar liturgical reform, as a result of a misguided sense of creativity and adaptation there have been a number of *abuses* which

have been a source of suffering for many. A certain reaction against “formalism” has led some, especially in certain regions, to consider the “forms” chosen by the Church’s great liturgical tradition and her Magisterium as non-binding and to introduce unauthorized innovations which are often completely inappropriate.

I consider it my duty, therefore to appeal urgently that the liturgical norms for the celebration of the Eucharist be observed with great fidelity. <sup>65</sup>

The Churches of oriental tradition have been confronted with the issues of indigenisation and inculturation from the very beginning of Christianity. They have developed mastery in this domain without obscuring or blurring the differences. They always have remained faithful to what is essential.

Having in view inculturation or adaptation, it is worthwhile to make a thorough study of the development of the rite of Alexandria in the Ethiopian Church or of the Syro-oriental rite in the Church of the Indian St. Thomas Christians in pre-Portuguese time.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> POPE JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (April 17, 2003), nos. 51-52.

<sup>1</sup> PAULOS CARD. TZADUA, “The Divine Liturgy according to the rite of the Ethiopian Church”, J. MADEY (ed.), *The Eucharistic Liturgy* (fn. 37), 37-68; A. THAZHATH, *The Juridical Sources of the Syro-Malabar Church* [= OIRSI, 1069, Kottayam 1987, 33-63; X. KOODAPUZHA, *Christianity in India* [= OIRSI, 200], Kottayam n.d. (1998); various publications of the late PLACID J. PODIPARA.





Taken this into consideration, the Instruction says: “The study of this process can serve as an example and guide for those involved in a similar process today. It can indicate those ways, which the experience of centuries shows to be profitable and which *distinguish them from superficial adaptations, which may only harm the process and perhaps even deform it.*<sup>1</sup> In like manner this can be useful also in other fields of theological and pastoral life, e.g. in the renewal of the liturgy and the adaptation of the canonical discipline, “as well as Church history (particularly where it touches upon what has united Christians, what brought about their divisions and what may still be maintaining them).”<sup>2</sup>

The observance of all that has been said above would indeed only strengthen the *communion* of the Catholic Churches *sui iuris* of different rites<sup>3</sup>. Tensions between Roman Catholics and Catholics of oriental traditions could be reduced, even avoided, and the latter could play, in the life of the universal Church, that role that is due to them and their vocation: They could make manifest in face of the whole Christian and non-Christian world, that it is quite possible to be, at the same time, *Catholic*, i. e. to live in full communion with the Church of Rome *without being Roman Catholic*<sup>4</sup>. If this truth had been lived at any time, the tragic and regretful history of the Churches of oriental traditions in the diaspora, i. a. in North America and elsewhere, which brought forth several schisms<sup>5</sup>, would have had another course.

From this observance also the ecumenical efforts of Catholics and Orthodox could draw profit. Many obstacles and hindrances would disappear, if the Orthodox could perceive a *living and lived communion* among the autonomous *sui iuris* Churches and not open or hidden attempts of certain dignitaries of the majority Church to diminish the legitimate rights and customs of the Churches of oriental tradition to such an extent that their individuality is affected.

Finally “the entire Church, in its renewal and adaptation to the needs of the present, can *profit* from the experiences of the past and *from*

*the multiformity of Christian traditions, which are part of its history and heritage”*<sup>1</sup>

The Congregation for Catholic Education therefore exhorts as well the other responsible dicasteries of the Roman Curia as the ecclesiastical authorities of the different Churches *sui iuris* to open themselves to these issues. As far as the realm of the above mentioned Congregation is concerned, a series of *Guidelines and Directives* are offered<sup>2</sup>.

The bishops and superiors of religious institutes are *emphatically* exhorted to send qualified clerics and other faithful to the Pontifical Oriental Institute [POI] in Rome founded by Pope Benedict XV in order to support them during the time of their studies and to use them *effectively* in diocesan and religious institutions.<sup>3</sup> The need of experts in the field of “Eastern Churches” is large in the Roman Catholic Church, but also in the Churches *sui iuris* of oriental traditions. The Roman POI disposes of two faculties: the faculty of oriental Churches doctrines and the faculty of eastern canon law.<sup>4</sup> The Institute was not founded exclusively for students belonging to the Churches of oriental traditions<sup>5</sup>, but also for those belonging to the Roman Catholic Church. It is an affiliated institute (*istituto consociato*) of the Pontifical Gregorian University.<sup>6</sup>

The document emphasises also the following:

“Seminaries, institutes for the formation of [permanent] deacons or directors religious education, teacher raining institutes are examples

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<sup>1</sup> No. 7.

<sup>2</sup> No. 8.

<sup>3</sup> No. 9.

<sup>4</sup> See

S. CONGREGAZIONE PER LE CHIESE ORIENTALI, *Oriente Cattolico. Cenni storici e statistiche*, Vatican City 1974, 745-752; cf. *Annuario Pontificio* 2003, 1606.

<sup>5</sup> Students from Churches of oriental traditions that are not in full ecclesiastical communion with Rome are admitted, too.

of the types of institutions whose work would be rendered more effective if they could call upon the regular assistance of *persons whose serious academic training qualifies them as experts in the field of Eastern Christian studies.*"<sup>1</sup>

The following paragraph of the instruction<sup>2</sup> shows some of the concrete tasks of the theological faculties and major seminaries. They have to communicate

- a) a basic knowledge of the various Churches of oriental traditions, their theological teachings, liturgical and spiritual traditions;
- b) a complete and real knowledge of the Fathers of the Church, both oriental and occidental<sup>3</sup>;
- c) also in the other study subjects, the heritage of the Christian East should be an essential part of learning. For students of the Roman Catholic Church this will be an enrichment promoting a better appreciation of the Churches of Oriental traditions, for students of the eastern Churches *sui iuris*, this will promote the consciousness of their ecclesiastical identity.

Some points, which are indispensable and have to be dealt with in the theological formation, are expressly mentioned: a) the oriental approach of the mystery of the *Holy Trinity*: "His or her goal is participation in the divine nature through communion with the Holy Trinity. In this view the Father's 'monarchy' is outlined as well as the concept of salvation according to the divine plan, as it is presented in eastern theology..."<sup>4</sup>;

b) *Christology*: In regard to the Assyrian Church of the East, the Holy Father writes:

“More recently, the Lord has granted me the great joy of signing a common Christological declaration with the Assyrian Patriarch of the East, His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV, who for this purpose chose to visit me in Rome in November 1994. Taking into account the different theological formulations, we were able to profess together the true faith in Christ. I wish to express my joy at all this in the words of the Blessed Virgin: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord” (Lk 1:46).”

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<sup>1</sup> No. 9.

<sup>2</sup> No. 10.

<sup>3</sup> For the Malayâlam speaking communities the literary work of GEEVARGHESE CHEDIATH, professor at “Paurastya Vidyâpîtham”, Kottayam, and St. Mary’s Malankara Seminary, Thiruvananthapuram, is highly important and should be appreciated.

<sup>4</sup> *Oriente Lumen*, no. 16.

And he explains: “Ecumenical contacts have thus made possible essential clarifications with regard to the traditional controversies concerning Christology, so much so that we have been able to profess together the faith which we have in common. Once again it must be said that this important achievement is truly a fruit of theological investigation and fraternal dialogue. And not only this. It is an encouragement for us: for it shows us that the path followed is the right one and that we can reasonably hope to discover together the solution to other disputed questions”<sup>1</sup>; c) Pneumatology<sup>2</sup>; d) the relation between nature and ‘super nature’, grace, the eucharistic nature of the Church, the “Mystery” celebrated in the Divine Liturgy.<sup>3</sup>

The students should also be prepared for the pastoral problems arising from the living together of different Churches *sui iuris* in the same place. “Where possible, this formation should include direct contacts with (other) Eastern Christian communities and their liturgical life. The students should recognise and come to understand the liturgical and cultural diversity among the eastern Catholic Churches.”<sup>4</sup>

In the faculties of *Canon Law* – and the same is valid also for the Institutes of Canon Law and the Canon Law Seminars within theological faculties – the ecclesiastical law of the Churches *sui iuris* of oriental traditions, as it is found in the legislation of the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches/Codex Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium* (1990), must be given due consideration. Also the main elements of the canon law in force with the Eastern Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox Churches should be a matter of teaching, as they have their origin in the early ecumenical councils of the then still undivided Church. This knowledge is not only important for those teaching canon law, but also for the collaborators of eparchial tribunals and chanceries.

In Catholic colleges and universities some treatment of eastern Christianity should be included in the general curriculum. This counts also for minor seminaries and other institutions of advanced formation for the laity, e. g. pastoral institutes and other centres of learning. Our instruction also exhorts to establishing particular Eastern Churches Institutes within the faculties to provide academic formation in those areas. Such institutes are not limited to faculties of theology.<sup>1</sup>

In order to deepen the eastern Christian studies, the instruction prescribes to supply the libraries of the faculties and colleges with books, reviews and other means necessary for the formation of the alumni in this field.<sup>2</sup>

According to the *Ecumenical Directory*, part II, ch. IV, collaboration between Catholic and Orthodox authorities and professors is recommended, also on the local level. In this regard, there are already some promising beginnings between eastern Catholics and Orthodox.<sup>3</sup>

The last paragraph<sup>4</sup> of the instruction emphatically states, that despite all progress to be observed here and there, there remains a great need among Catholics of the western tradition regarding the peoples, traditions and Churches of the Christian East. The inspirations and signs put forward by the Popes Benedict XV and Pius XI, which have been taken up also by their successors, have not lost anything of their actuality, on the contrary, they must not longer remain dead letter, but must be filled with life. Vatican II has marked the way to achieve this goal, especially in its documents *Lumen gentium*, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, and *Unitatis Redintegratio*.

There is also a similar defect with the members of the oriental Catholic Churches *sui iuris* that has to be mentioned in this context, but not so much in regard to the Roman Catholic Church *sui iuris*, which they know rather well, but in regard to the other oriental Catholic Churches.

Therefore the document of the Congregation for Catholic Education should be seen as an encouragement and exhortation to acquire a better knowledge and more appreciation for the Sister Churches.

In obedience to Vatican II, this Congregation has adopted the intentions of the Council Fathers proposing new *concrete guidelines*. It expects that more attention will be given to them by those in responsibility, in the first instance the bishops and the other addressees, but also by the students. We believe that this document of 1987 deserves being attended, warmly welcomed and finally executed into practice. Only then the often-quoted *Sentire cum Ecclesia* would find a convincing expression.

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<sup>1</sup> No. 11.

<sup>2</sup> No. 13.

<sup>3</sup> So, e.g. the Greek Orthodox (“Melkite”) Patriarchate of Antioch is sending boys wishing to become priests of their Church, to the minor seminary of the Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarchate of Antioch in Damascus for high school studies, and the seminarians of St. Gregory Major Seminary of the Melkite Greek Catholic eparchy of Newton, Mass., USA, are enrolled in the faculty of theology of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America at Brookline, Mass., which is under the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. – Cf. *Le Lien. Almanach de la Communauté grecque-melkite catholique*, Beirut 1986, 40 and 163. – We are glad to note that first steps for a closer collaboration are also being made by the Patriarchs of the Syrian Catholic and of the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch. – See *The Harp* 15 (Kottayam 2002), 323-327.

<sup>4</sup> No.15.