



The Eastern Churches

Orthodox & Catholic

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1 Introduction

In the late Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Orientalis Lumen* ("The Light of the East"), the Pope states: "the venerable and ancient tradition of the Eastern Churches is an integral part of the heritage of the Catholic Church." The Pope called upon all Catholics to become "fully acquainted with this treasure."

In this short talk, I hope to help you become better acquainted with Light of the East. My Church, the Melkite Greek-Catholic Church, forms part of this treasure and is itself a Light of the East, founded by the holy apostles Peter and Paul.

2 How we came to have an East and a West

2.1 Roman Empire splits into East & West

The Roman Empire was first split into East and West by Diocletian in AD 285. He created administrative centres, which were situated closer to the empire's frontier than was Rome.

A key difference between East and West was that the East consisted of a largely urbanised and Hellenised culture; the West was less sophisticated and consisted of largely rural regions.

Such differences eventually came to be reflected in how the peoples led their lives and expressed themselves in art and literature - cultural differences that are extant today.

2.2 Constantine's Eastern Influences

Although born in the West, in what is known as Serbia today, Constantine became a true son of the East.

When his father was appointed Caesar under Diocletian, Constantine - as heir presumptive to his father's position - moved to the court of Diocletian, which was in Nicomedia, in present-day Turkey.

Constantine the Great (his Roman name was: Caesar Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Augustus) became Caesar in AD 306. By 324 the old system of the tetrarchy had collapsed, and Constantine had conquered his rivals to become the sole emperor of the Roman Empire.

In the year AD 312, Constantine had a vision of the Cross and heard the words "In this sign conquer". He ordered his army to march under the standard of the Cross (actually the Chi Rho symbol). He thus defeated Maxentius and entered triumphantly into Rome, where he was acclaimed the greatest Augustus.

By 320, Licinius had reneged on the earlier Edict of Milan (AD 313), and began another persecution of Christians. It became a challenge for Constantine and culminated in the civil war of 324. In Constantine's battles against Licinius, it was clear that Licinius represented the old, pagan ways of Rome; Constantine representing the sophisticated Eastern court and the Christian faith.

Constantine's defeat of Licinius signified the passing of old Rome. Constantine moved his capital eastwards, initially to Nicomedia.

He rebuilt a nearby town called Byzantium and renamed it Constantinople ('city of Constantine') in AD 330.

The seat of the Roman Empire never returned to Rome.

3 Early Church East & West

3.1 Church reflects the People, Culture, and Polity of its time

In the East, we find several different peoples and (sub-) cultures within the greater Roman Empire.

Two of these peoples with a strong sense of their own community and their historical greatness were the Persians and the Egyptians. Their sense of themselves as being different from the others - and perhaps unhappily subservient to the Roman Emperor in distant Constantinople - will later add fuel to the fire of theological differences.

3.2 Three groups of Churches in the East

There are three groups of Eastern Churches:

The Churches of the East or Assyrian (or Nestorian)

The Oriental Orthodox (or Monophysite)

The Eastern Orthodox.

The Latin or Roman Catholic Church is the Western sister Church of the latter (Eastern Orthodox).

There are, however, several groups of Churches from each of these three branches that are in communion with Rome.

The Maronite Church, of Syrian origin, claims to have remained in communion with Rome since its inception - although it was out of contact with both Constantinople and Rome for several centuries.

3.2.1 Churches of the East

The first Church to separate from the main body of Christianity was the Persian Church, which separated in 424, before the Council of Ephesus (431).

This separation was purely political; there was no underlying theological argument or excuse.

The bishops of Persia met in council and decided that their Church would no longer come answer to another power - especially that of a council of the Roman Empire.

It was at Ephesus that the title "Theotokos" ('God-bearer') was given to the Mother of Jesus. Thus these churches still only call her "Christotokos"; rejecting "Theotokos". They were not part of greater Christianity when the Council of Ephesus convened, and so do not feel bound by its decisions.

They had previously been referred to as **Nestorian**, although this description is not accepted by these Churches, which reject the teachings of Nestorius. There are 55,000 people who belong to these Churches in Australia. There are almost 33,000 in the Chaldean Catholic Church - the Church from this tradition that is in union with Rome.

3.2.2 Oriental Orthodox

These Churches accept the first three councils (Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus), but reject the Council of Chalcedon (451).

These Churches, thus, split for a theological reason; at least nominally. Underlying the negotiations and discussion were two important factors that will appear again and again in schisms:

The people - in this case the Egyptians - felt much aggrieved by the treatment they received from the Byzantines. (Greeks held most of the civil and religious positions of power in Egypt.) They felt that the Greeks discriminated against the native Egyptians and saw no advantage in being a conquered nation forming part of the Roman Empire.

The local Egyptians spoke Coptic. Translating Greek theological terms into this language was difficult. Even to this day, Coptic theological terms are actually Greek words - a Coptic term was not often found that would clearly describe the sense of the Greek. Misunderstandings were apt to occur.

These non-Chalcedonian Churches - they did not accept the Council of Chalcedon - are often called "Monophysite", although they themselves reject this label. There are 32,705 people reporting themselves as belonging to this church in Australia. In the 2006 census, there were no categories for people to identify themselves as Armenian Catholic, Copt Catholic, Ethiopian Catholic, Eritrean Catholic, or Syrian Catholic, so we do not have numbers for these adherents, although there are several churches in the major cities serving them.

3.2.3 Eastern Orthodox

These are those Churches that we say separated from Rome around 1054 in what is called the "Great Schism".

The best known of these Churches in Australia are the Antiochian, Greek, and Russian Orthodox Churches.

There are 544,153 adherents in Australia. There are 50,000 people reporting themselves as coming from this background, but in communion with Rome (i.e., Melkite or Ukrainian Catholic). It is important to note that the census of 2006 was the first time such Catholics could report themselves as distinct from the main (Latin) Catholic body.

We suspect many did not report themselves as distinct. Also, in Arabic, for example, Greek Catholics (i.e., Melkites) call themselves "ruum kaathuulik". Some may therefore equate this term with the homophonic Roman Catholic rather than look for a more accurate translation.

4 Who are the Eastern Orthodox?

4.1 The Patriarchates

Orthodox means "correct teaching or worship". The Orthodox Church began its journey during the period of the former Byzantine Empire. Today, the highest concentration of Orthodox remains in the former Byzantine Empire: Greece, Russia, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. Nowadays, the Orthodox are spread throughout the world, totalling approximately 200 million faithful.

The mission of the Eastern Orthodox Church is to preserve the faith of the original apostolic Christian Church. There are nine Eastern Orthodox patriarchates - four from the ancient Pentarchy (Rome was the first of the five in the pentarchy): Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem; and five newer patriarchates: Russia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Georgia. Each patriarchate of those Churches is independent or autocephalous under the jurisdiction of a Patriarch in communion with the other Eastern Orthodox Churches.

There is no central organisation; each church is episcopal in character and fulfils its own church governance. The ecclesiastical structure is hierarchical, with a bishop ordaining priests and deacons. However the Patriarch of Constantinople is a figurehead for all Orthodox Christians and holds a primacy of honour.

4.2 Eastern Orthodox in Australia

In Australia, the Eastern Orthodox Churches are immigrant churches. The first Orthodox Church was established in 1898 in Sydney for all the various Orthodox backgrounds.

In 1924, the Greek Orthodox Diocese was established by the Patriarch of Constantinople. There are 375,000 Greek Orthodox in Australia.

In 1922 the first Russian church was built in Brisbane, the Russian diocese was established in 1949, with the arrival of Archbishop John Lupish. There are about 20,000 Russian Orthodox in Australia.

In 1926 the Serbian, Macedonian and Ukrainian Orthodox Churches were established in Australia. They have respectively 40,000, 48,000, and 3,000 adherents.

In 1920, the first Antiochian Orthodox church was established in Sydney. It was only in 1969 that the Holy Synod of the Antiochian Orthodox Church established a diocese in Australia. In 1999, the same Holy Synod elevates the diocese to an Archdiocese comprising Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines. They are about 45,000 in Australia (although the 2006 census shows only 8,000).

5 Eastern Catholic and Eastern Orthodox

On 2 May 1995, Pope John Paul II issued an apostolic letter *Orientalis Lumen* ('The Light of the East') on the importance of the Eastern Churches in the life of the whole Church. The Pope explained how important it is to know each other: "I believe that one important way to grow in mutual understanding and unity consists precisely in improving our knowledge of one another".

He then calls on Catholics to "deepen their knowledge of the spiritual traditions of the Eastern Churches; and to deepen their knowledge of the spiritual traditions of the Fathers and Doctors of the Christian East, to follow the example of the Eastern Churches for the inculturation of the Gospel message; to combat tensions between Latins and Orientals and to encourage dialogue between Catholics and the Orthodox. ..." (n. 24).

There is much in common between the Eastern Churches, Catholic and Orthodox, I believe. They share the same liturgy, traditions, and spirituality -especially the teaching of the Fathers. Some particular churches even share the same language. They are very conscious of being the living bearers of their traditions.

In the Diaspora, these Churches also share the same challenges and difficulties, including the challenge of the Latinisation. They struggle to preserve their identity and heritage in a world, where the very tradition they represent can be seen as foreign. Indeed, both the Eastern Catholic Churches and the Orthodox Churches - the collective bodies *per se*, and the individual faithful within them - are struggling to distil a self-identity separate from the cultural milieu, from which they have come; but without rejecting their own valid history, tradition, and culture - a culture which is proper to the Church and to the individual; and distinct from the "national" culture of the homeland. This determination of a fundamental self-identity cannot occur successfully without the full participation of the Mother Church - and indeed will eventually affect the role and self-identity of that Mother Church. This growth is painful, as is all growth and change; but there is hope, as we truly live in apostolic times!

5.1 Origins of those Eastern Catholic Churches represented in Australia

The Catholic Churches that have eparchies ('dioceses') in Australia are: Chaldean Catholic, Maronite, Melkite Catholic, and Ukrainian Catholic Churches.

The eparchies (dioceses) of Eastern Catholic Churches are as follows:

- St Thomas (Chaldean, NSW)
- St Maroun (Maronite, NSW)
- St Michael (Melkite, NSW)
- Saints Peter & Paul (Ukrainian, VIC).

Table 1 below gives a brief outline of how each of these Eastern Catholic Churches that are represented in Australia came into existence.

Table 1: Description of Origin of Eastern Catholic Churches in Australia

Church	Brief Description
Chaldean Catholic	<p>The Chaldean Catholic Church has been in and out of communion with the Catholic Church since 1552.</p> <p>In 1672 a new union with Rome began, which culminated in 1830 with the union of two patriarchal lines into one, which remained in communion with Rome.</p> <p>It sprang from the Church of the East, an Assyrian Church that left communion with Christendom in 424.</p>
Maronite	<p>The Maronite Church's history reaches back to a Syrian Monk, St Maroun, in the 5th century. The Maronites fled Monophysite persecution and went into the mountains of Lebanon.</p> <p>After the martyrdom of the Patriarch of Antioch, they elected their own patriarch in 687. The Crusaders discovered the Maronites late in the 10th century - the Western world did not know they were still in existence.</p> <p>The Maronites maintained their close relationship with the Crusaders, and affirmed their affiliation with Rome as late as 1182.</p>
Melkite Catholic	<p>The Melkite Greek-Catholic Church was formed in 1724, when Constantinople imposed a new Greek patriarch on Antioch, after the duly elected Patriarch of Antioch had sought communion with Rome.</p>

Church	Brief Description
Ukrainian Catholic	<p>The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church is a successor to the Churches that stem from Vladimir the Great's acceptance of Christianity in 988.</p> <p>The Ukrainian Catholic Church formed at the Union of Brest, 1595, where the Polish (Catholic) king promised to stop persecuting the Ukrainians (then Orthodox), if they withdrew their loyalty from Constantinople and gave it to the crown.</p> <p>This Church has had a difficult history as its faithful suffered under various governments and regimes, including communist Russia.</p>

In Figure 1 below, you will see together Catholic and Orthodox Christians make up about thirty per cent of the Australian population.

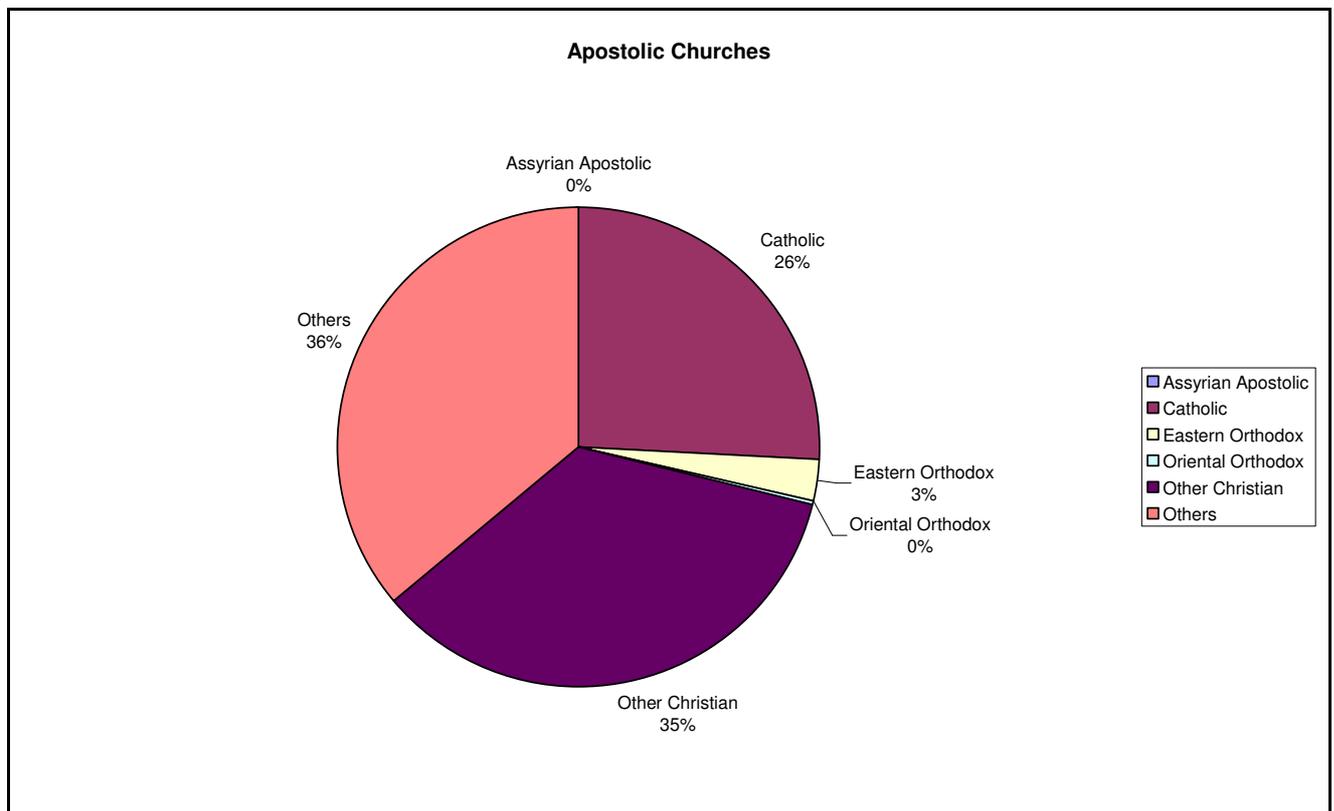


Figure 1: Percentage of Churches of Apostolic Origin in Australia

6 Spirituality of the Byzantine Churches

In this section, I like to share with you some very brief observations on the spirituality of the Byzantine Churches as exemplified by the Melkite Greek-Catholic Church of Antioch.

6.1 Ekklesiastika

Within the Catholic Communion, the Melkite Church is one of the twenty-two Eastern Catholic Churches, of which fourteen follow the Byzantine Rite.¹ We must be careful to avoid using RITE interchangeably with CHURCH. A Church is a community of believers who have been called together, hence *ekklesia* from *ekleo* 'to call'. A rite is the entire ecclesiastical lifestyle that incarnates the spiritual life of the faithful of a particular Church. The Melkite usage of the Byzantine Rite is the way we Melkites as a Church experience what St Nicholas Cabasilas rightly calls: "**Life in Christ.**"

Our spirituality - our life in Christ - is realised both within and through what the Greeks would call our *ekklesiastika*, and the Slavs our *tserkovona*: i.e., our "churchness". Every Christian Community expresses its inner life, its spiritual life, within the historical, artistic, intellectual, and cultural heritage of its particular tradition. For us, that tradition is Greek and it is Byzantine. The heritage of Christian Hellenism, that so vitalised the Byzantine Empire for over a thousand years, is our heritage.

Let us then reflect upon some aspects of that Byzantine way of living in Christ.

6.2 The Mystery of the Divine Trinity, Theosis

It could be said that what we are really considering is the way Eastern Churches, Orthodox and Catholic, live out their conversation about God, in other words, how they **live their theology** - or, as the Americans might say, how they theologise.

At the heart of all theology, and upon which all else rests, are the mysteries of the Divine Trinity and the Incarnation of the Eternal Word. Indeed, it is these two central dogmas, and their attendant controversies, which shaped the theological and ecclesiastical landscape of Eastern Christianity in such a way that the consequences are still with us today.

If one wishes to walk through early conciliar history, with all its dramas and theological dispute, wander through Greenacre and Punchbowl in Sydney, NSW. In a half hour's walk, one can pass a Maronite Catholic Church, a Coptic Orthodox Church, an Antiochian Orthodox Church, a Melkite Catholic Church, and a Syriac Orthodox Church!

Eastern anthropology - our theory of man - begins with the fundamental conviction that human beings are made in the image of the Trinitarian God. The Father did not say, "Let us make man in my image", nor did the Son say to the Holy Spirit, nor the Holy Spirit to the Son, "Let us make man in your image." No, it is **our** image.

6.3 Trinitarian God and Sacraments

To be human is to be the very image and likeness of the Trinitarian God - and it is for this very reason that we are called to *theosis*, to a share in the Godhead, to live in the life of the Divine Trinity. Furthermore our being made like God is not something which begins in the afterlife, i.e., life in heaven, but it is a process which is, in a sense, set in motion simply by our being. We were destined for it from the first moment of our existence!

¹ Albanian, Belarusian, Bulgarian, Byzantine Church of the Eparchy of Križevci, Greek, Hungarian, Italo-Albanian, Macedonian, Melkite, Romanian, Russian, Ruthenian, Slovak, and Ukrainian Greek Catholic Churches.

The process takes on a unique dimension at our baptism, by which the natural orienting towards salvation is begun, as it were, by our being inserted into the Christological Mystery - by our own death and burial in the baptismal waters and our being raised to new life as we are lifted from the font of rebirth.

It is from that moment of baptismal rebirth that the journey towards Theosis begins, towards the vision of the Uncreated Light so eloquently presented and so keenly defended by the Hesychast Fathers, represented most typically by St Gregory Palamas.

For us the Trinitarian Mystery is not something reserved for clergy in their journey through the tract *De Trinitate*. For us, as it should be for all Christians, our existence both physical and spiritual, that is the fullness of our personhood, only has meaning to the degree that our lives are informed by divine grace. It is in the **Trinitarian** God that "we live and move and have our being."

The passion with which the East defends the doctrine of the Trinitarian God and that of the Divine Incarnation arises from our conviction that these two beliefs are the truths from which all others flow and to which all truth leads.

6.4 The Filioque

It was for this reason that the proposition of the *filioque* was so vehemently opposed in the East. For Orthodox theologians, there is the suggestion that the *filioque* endangers the unique position of the Father as the source of Trinitarian life. If one says that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father AND the Son, are there not now two *archaic* or originating principles being proposed?

Perhaps much of the difficulty also arises from the fact that the *filioque* was inserted into the Nicæan Creed unilaterally by the Frankish church, and, even not accepted at first by the Patriarchate of Rome.

Made in the image of the Trinitarian God, we are icons of his divinity, and, whilst the renewal of that icon begins even in this life, it is after death that the perfection of our original image will be made complete - and I include in the expression "after death" the Last Day when all things will be restored in Christ

It is in Jesus Christ, God the Son, the Son of God, the Wisdom, the Word, and the Power of God, that the Trinitarian God is most perfectly revealed and communicated to humankind. He is the Word through whom the Father has created, through whom he has spoken and through whom he brings humankind and all creation to salvation.

The Western Church has traditionally associated the Old Testament Wisdom with our Lady. For us Christ is the SOPHIA TOU THEOU, the Divine Wisdom in whom creation is made sensible. When you encounter an Eastern church called in English St Sophia, it is not dedicated to St Sophia the Martyr, but to Christ, the Divine Wisdom - the most famous example, of course, being Hagia Sophia in Constantinople.

The Eastern Churches are absolutely Trinitarian in their understanding of God and are equally committed to the reality of the divine incarnation. The Eternal Logos, through whom all things were made, yet who was himself uncreated, took upon himself human nature. He entered creation and became part of creation. For us there can be no Docetism - the Jesus Christ who lived with us was not a phantom or even a perfect spirit - he was, and remains, true God and Man, or as we say in Greek, the *Theanthropos*.

Although free from sin, he permitted himself to be tempted. In the words of the Prologue to St John's Gospel, literally, and, I suspect more beautifully translated, "He became man, and pitched his tent amongst us."

The Christological controversies aroused by Arius and Nestorius have, of course, left their legacy of antagonism and animosity even to this day. It is to be noted that these two teachers of a great section of the non-conformist East are amongst those formally condemned each year in the reading of the anathemas at the vigil of the first Sunday in Lent. Although it is an interesting comment on theological disputes that with the signing of agreed statements between the Roman Catholic Church and the so-called Oriental Orthodox - the Monophysites and Nestorians - it seems that we have been saying the same thing all along! We just did not understand each other's terminology!

Perhaps you will have begun to form the impression that the early history of the Eastern Churches was one of dispute, disagreement - at times, violent disagreement - and you would to a great extent be right! However, for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, and thus with things ecclesiastical, our most heated differences of opinion have resulted in some of our most glorious achievements!

6.5 Cosmic Dimension of the Eucharistic Liturgy

Our Holy Liturgy, in many ways is an example. If St John Chrysostom were to walk into even the most rubrically observant Byzantine Church today, there would be much of the liturgical action that he would not recognise. This is simply because our Liturgy, as with all forms of worship spread over sixteen hundred years, has not remained at a standstill.

An example would be the inclusion in the Liturgy of one of our most well-known Christological hymns, O Monogenis ('Only Begotten Son and Word of God'). It was composed by the Emperor, St Justinian the Great, and so could not have entered the Liturgy before the eighth century.

However, it is fair to say that the broad outline of the Liturgy ascribed to him, and that Liturgy named for St Basil, generally preserve the overall format of the early liturgical traditions of both Antioch and Constantinople. It is perhaps safe to say that liturgical change in the East has been very much the result of theological debate and the resolution of these controversies. In the present Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, the Holy Trinity is mentioned over thirty times!

Above all, we should remember that Man is a *Eucharistic* being. It is in his nature to give thanks - this surely is one of the characteristics of Eden not lost by the Fall - and just as the nine lepers, who were made clean, we sometimes forget to return in thanksgiving, we still have that inclination to thank God.

And at the very heart of our Eucharistic nature, our innate thanksgiving is the celebration of the Eucharist given to us by Jesus as the memorial in which he is both the one who offers and who is offered.

The Byzantine East has not forgotten the cosmic dimension of the Eucharistic liturgy: the cherubim stand with us, the saints are present, the Church throughout the ages gathers together, heaven descends - and for the duration of the Liturgy, earthly time is abolished - past, present, and future are fused together in one moment of eternity.

If the Latin Church seems to have forgotten this, it is perhaps the unfortunate result of everything having to be made relevant and meaningful - which unfortunately has often realised in the pedestrian and the theologically weak. If I may give but one, at first seemingly insignificant, example: the appreciation of liturgical time and the interwoven complexities of actions and events. In the present embolism after the Lord's Prayer in the Roman Rite, the priest says, "Deliver us Lord from every evil and grant us peace in our time..."

Consider for a moment the original prayer: "Deliver us Lord from every evil, **past present and to come**, and grant us peace in our time." There is an understanding of liturgical time and there is an understanding that at any given moment in history - indeed, at any given moment in salvation history - men and women are not immune from evil, even vastly spread out across time, but are given peace and security only in and through the Lord Jesus Christ.

An interesting feature of our liturgical life is the regular celebration of the Divine Office in parish churches. Amongst the Slavs, Sunday Matins is anticipated by being recited with the Vespers of Saturday. In the Greek (and Arab) churches, Sunday Matins is prayed before the Holy Liturgy. I might note that it is the joining of monastic offices to the parish liturgy that is the real cause of outsiders thinking that the Easterners have Liturgies that go on for hours!

In fact, the Divine Liturgy can be celebrated properly and with a homily in about an hour and a half.

In our present discipline we have three liturgies with which the vast majority of the faithful would be familiar:

firstly that of St John Chrysostom - for all the Sundays and weekdays of the year unless otherwise indicated.

secondly that of St Basil - for the Sundays of Lent, and on his feast day, 1 January. It is from this anaphora that the Roman rite derives its fourth Eucharistic prayer.

thirdly that of Pope St Gregory, the Liturgy of the Pre-sanctified - for the non-liturgical days of Lent.

It is true to say that a deficient Trinitarian theology produces a deficient Christology - and an inadequate Christology requires no devotion to our Lady, the Theotokos. Because we are left speechless before the mystery of the Incarnation, the participation of the Blessed Virgin is beyond our comprehension. If we consider some of the salutations with which the Byzantine Church greets our Lady in the Lenten Akathist hymn (sometimes referred to as the "Eastern Rosary"), we begin to appreciate the place of the Virgin Mary in our spirituality:

"Rejoice, O Unfading Rose who budded forth the unfading apple!"

"Rejoice, O Lady, sweet smelling lily that sends forth its fragrant scent to the faithful."

"Rejoice, aromatic incense and precious oil of myrrh."

"Rejoice, luminous morning that alone brings Christ the Sun"

"Lady, you truly gave birth to the divine Giver of the law who washes clean the lawlessness of all."

"O incomprehensible depth and ineffable height, Maiden unwedded, through whom we are deified."

7 Efforts of the Melkite Church towards Unity with the Antiochian Orthodox Church

7.1 Introduction

From her very birth as a distinct body, the Melkite Catholic Church has faced a double challenge: the Orthodox Church, from whom she has been separated, and the Catholic Church, to whom she has been united. But the image of the reunion between the Churches, especially between the Greek Melkite Church and the Antiochian Orthodox Church, as the one Church of Christ breathing with both of her lungs is indeed a source of ecumenical inspiration and hope for the Greek Melkite Church. In this part of my presentation I should like to comment firstly on the Ecumenical Role of the Melkite Greek-Catholic Church, and secondly on the Melkite Greek-Catholic calls for unity, which highlight the effort of the Melkite Greek-Catholic Church towards unity with the Antiochian Orthodox Church.

7.2 The Ecumenical Role of the Melkite Greek-Catholic Church

The Melkite Greek-Catholic Church is the legitimate daughter of the Great Church of Antioch. The Church of Antioch has enriched the Universal Church with her contributions in theology, liturgy, architecture, music, and poetry. So when we say that our Church is “Greek,” we mean that we are linked to the Greek and Byzantine patrimony by language, culture, and civilization.

7.3 The Word Melkite

The Melkite comes from the Syriac *malkāyā*, which means ‘imperial’. It is a cognate of our Arabic word *malik*, meaning ‘king’. After the Council of Chalcedon, those who did not accept that council called us “Melkites” -because our ancestors in the Faith followed the faith of the king, i.e., the Roman Emperor in Constantinople, Marcianus, who had summoned the Council of Chalcedon.

Melkite, this Arab word underlines our relations with the non-Chalcedonian Churches, with the Arab world, and with Islam.

Melkite incarnates the roots of our Church within her own milieu.

Melkite is the sign of our duty to find reconciliation with those who call us by this name: that is, with the Christians of the Coptic, Armenian, and Syriac traditions.

7.4 The Word Catholic

It implies our communion with the Roman Catholic Church and the Universal Church.

Within Catholicism, our Church testifies to the universality of the Church, which is not only Latin and Western.

For the Orthodox Church, our Church is the sign of the possibility of remaining *oneself* within communion with Rome.

7.5 Arab Church

But our Church is an Arab Church. As in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and Sudan, our Church has taken root throughout the Middle East and has established peaceful, fraternal relations of coexistence with all the communities therein. In this one sentence Archbishop Neophytos (Edelby) of Aleppo summed up these characteristics of the Melkite Greek-Catholic Church of Antioch: “we are Arab, but not Muslim; Eastern, but not secessionist, Catholic, but not Latin. And that is our triple singularity!”

7.6 The Melkite Church as a Bridge

The Melkite Greek-Catholic Church is an Orthodox Church in full communion with Rome. This communion is the only real reason for our existence as a distinct community. This, in fact, is the difference between Greek-Catholic and Greek Orthodox: we are united with Rome. It is quite clear that our role as a bridge -Church between the Roman Church and Orthodox is to prepare a propitious ground where it is possible to test a new vision, a new bridging ecclesiology truly inspired by the Second Vatican Council.

“The Eastern Churches in communion with the Apostolic See of Rome have a special duty of promoting the unity of all Christians, especially Eastern Christians, in accordance with the principles of the decree, *About Ecumenism*, of this Sacred Council, by prayer in the first place, and by the example of their lives, by religious fidelity to the ancient Eastern traditions, by a greater knowledge of each other, by collaboration and a brotherly regard for objects and feelings.”²

The Greek-Catholics, and especially the Melkite Greek-Catholic Patriarchate, have a very important role: to be the true model of the unity of the Church. If this experiment succeeds, she will be able to convince the other Churches to follow this model. Such a role requires much courage and a lot of humility as well as trust and love, and an openness to change by all parties. This has major implications for a common ecclesiology. Firstly, the unity of the Church is not to be understood simply as imposed from the top down, but is a harmony that arises from the playing of many varied instruments. Secondly, this conceptual shift promotes what the Council called “cultural adaptation” or what is now referred to more commonly as inculturation. *Ad Gentes* spoke of how the Gospel is like a seed that takes root in various types of soil and produces a variety of plants. The gospel exists only in inculturated forms, and great care must be taken not to impose an alien culture unnecessarily upon people who deserve to hear the gospel in a way that can preserve whatever is legitimate in their own heritage.

7.7 Melkite Greek-Catholic Calls for unity

The holy Synod of the Melkite Greek-Catholic Church met in Rabweh, Lebanon 22-27 July 1996 and after studying the question of unity within the Patriarchate of Antioch, declared that *communicatio in sacris* [worship in common] is possible today and that the ways and means of its application would be left to the joint decisions of the two Antiochian Church Synods - the Melkite Greek-Catholic and Greek Orthodox.

7.8 Unity is possible

At Vatican II, the Melkite Patriarch, Maximos IV (Sayegh) strenuously defended the rights and privileges of patriarchs and Eastern Churches in communion with Rome, achieving their restoration to the state when East and West were in full communion. The Ecumenical Patriarch of the Orthodox Church, Athenagoras, acclaimed the Melkite Patriarch on his visit to Istanbul in 1964 and said: “You have represented the East at the Council and there you have caused our voice to be heard!” (Descy 1994, p. 81).

Eastern Catholic Churches in general - and the Melkite Church in particular - are tasked with the goal of ecumenism; i.e., working towards the restoration of full communion between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches.

A recent example of this is the pilgrimage (“Walk of Witness”) to open the year of St Paul led by the Melkite Patriarch, 23 September 2008. The pilgrimage, with several thousand participants, began at the Greek-Orthodox Patriarchate (Antioch) finishing at the Melkite chapel of St Paul on the Wall.

²) Decree on the Catholic Churches of the Eastern Rite *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*.

The synod of thirty-four bishops and four superiors general, under the presidency of the late Patriarch Maximos V (Hakim), deliberated extensively on the topic of Church unity particularly within the Antiochian Patriarchate, and issued a document titled “Reunification of the Antiochian Patriarchate.” It includes eight points about the unity of the Churches and was sent by the Catholic Patriarch Maximos V to the Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius IV (Hazim). It emphasizes that there is openness on the part of the Melkite Greek-Catholic Church to heal the division of 1724 and all the difficulties that followed in order “to preserve our one heritage and one worship which is the font of one belief.”

The Fathers of the Synod affirmed that unity was not “a victory of one church over another, or one church going back to the other, or the melting of one church into the other,” but rather “putting an end to the separation between the brothers.” This unity has become possible today because of the extensive work of the Joint international Theological Commission between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches. Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint*: “The Catholic Church desires nothing less than full communion between East and West. She finds inspiration for this in the experience of the first millennium.” The Melkite Greek-Catholic synod sees that the Church of the first millennium could be the model for unity today.

7.9 Reunification of Antiochian Patriarchate

In 1996 the Fathers of the Holy Synod of the Melkite Greek-Catholic Patriarch convened in Rabweh, Lebanon and studied a document presented by the Patriarchal Commission established by His Beatitude Maximos V (Hakim).

The Patriarch asked this Patriarchal Commission to do whatever is necessary, through communications and meetings with the Orthodox Patriarchal and Synodical Commission, to reach Antiochian unity through oneness of heart, and to find ways for the two Melkite Churches, Greek-Catholic and Greek Orthodox, to return to communion with each other and into unity within one Patriarchate of Antioch.

The entire Synod still anxiously looks forward to the day when the Melkite Greek-Catholics and the Greek Orthodox in the Patriarchate of Antioch return to be one Church and one Patriarchate. Also the Synod considers their task of re-establishing communion within the church of Antioch a part of re-establishing full communion between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches at the international level.

8 Efforts towards Unity & Pastoral Agreements between other Churches

8.1 Zoghby Initiative

In early May 1974, the synods of the Greek Catholic and Greek Orthodox Churches of Antioch exchanged visits. These synods were being held at the same time, and both in Lebanon.

Archbishop Zoghby made a recommendation to the Greek Orthodox bishops that there could exist a local communion between their two Churches, as the original causes of the separation no longer existed.

This proposal gained little ground with both Churches, and was not favourably received by the Vatican.

However, dialogue, practical collaboration in community activities and pastoral work are now seen as the best steps forward towards eventual union of the Churches.

8.2 Two Churches serving at One Altar

In Dummar, Syria, a single church building serves both the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. By pooling donations and the resources provided by the government to the Christian minority, a church was allowed to be built that was larger and more suitable to each congregation.

Today, Orthodox and Catholics worship separately, at separate times; each community with its own parish priest - however they worship in the same church on the same altar.

One cannot but see hope, here, for an eventual union of the two Churches!

8.3 Syrian Orthodox Church (Oriental Orthodox)

In 1984, a Common Declaration between Pope John Paul II and the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Zakka I Iwas of Antioch was signed expressing:

The common profession of faith between the Pope and the Patriarch on the mystery of the Incarnate Word;

The common affirmation of their faith in the mystery of the Church and the sacraments;

The possibility given by the declaration for a pastoral collaboration including the mutual admission of the faithful belonging to both churches to the reception of the sacraments of penance, Eucharist and anointing of the sick for a grave spiritual need.

The Malankara Syrian Orthodox Church, which is an autonomous Church under the Syrian Orthodox patriarch (aforementioned), went one step further and announced a pastoral agreement, which allows couples and their families -where one of the couple is Catholic and one Syrian Orthodox - to receive the Eucharist at the church in which the wedding is held.

9 Role of the Catholic Church in Australia in promoting Dialogue with Eastern Orthodox

Archbishop Hilarion from the Russian Orthodox Church had the following to say, after meeting Pope Benedict XVI on Monday 21 September 2009, "There are so many reasons for Catholics and Orthodox to cooperate in our de-Christianized world that it is time to move past divisions and competition and exist in solidarity and mutual love".

I believe that the Orthodox Churches look forward to working closely with the Catholic Church and to overcoming any problems that remain between the two traditions. However Catholics and Orthodox must work together to face the challenges of our society, to offer the values of the Gospel to the world, and to ensure that justice, peace, and human rights are championed by the international community.

We Catholics believe firmly that the tradition of the Eastern Church is an integral part of the heritage of Christ's Church. From this, it follows that the western Catholic needs to be aware and familiar with that Eastern tradition. In no other way can we work towards unity between the Church of the East and the Church of the West.

In Australia, we do not hear much from the Orthodox. Perhaps they are locked away behind ethnic and social barriers? If so, then we Catholics might accomplish a great deal, if we put some energy into drawing the hierarchs of these Orthodox Churches into discussion and then to cooperative action on social and moral issues that we face in Australia. Examples of this are: a debate in Parliament concerning same-sex marriage, abortion, other moral concerns, or matters of social justice. We do have a common ground on these matters; both the many Orthodox Churches and the Catholic Church.

The Catholic Church in Australia can acknowledge also some of the great Feast Days and important sacred events in Orthodox tradition. Paying attention to their important feasts and holy days would mean a lot to them. After all, nearly all of them are equally important to the Eastern Catholic Churches!

If we think theologically and ecclesiologicaly, it seems to me that we Catholics have more in common with the Orthodox of the Eastern Churches than with any other Christian Church. Roman Catholics should feel more at home in an Orthodox Church. Consequently, the Roman Catholic Church in Australia should be working to assist and encourage the Orthodox to cultivate regular encounters between Orthodox and Catholic faithful.

In the domain of theological and academic interest, students from the various communities should be encouraged to follow some courses of study at both Orthodox and Catholic theological schools. This should especially be in areas where a particular Church has a special interest or expertise. Orthodox students would do well to study western church history at a Catholic campus. Catholic students could take courses in patristics at an Orthodox institution or any Eastern catholic institution. This might be realised in their present institutions by visiting lecturers.

From the aspect of publications, it would be a great idea to publish a common journal once or twice a year. It would be a good instrument for dialogue.

Concerning media or art, there is a need for a combined response, when they offend Catholic–Orthodox sensibilities. For example, recently the fictional character Harry Potter was depicted as a Byzantine icon of Christ in an American newspaper article. The local Orthodox community protested; I can find no reference to an official Catholic reaction, however.

Catholic hierarchs should visit their Orthodox colleagues to exchange Easter greetings. Perhaps, a Catholic bishop could attend the Easter service in the Orthodox Cathedral or Church in his diocese. I use the example of the Catholic bishop because Orthodox Easter is usually after the western celebration.

Both Catholic and Orthodox maintain school systems. There should be co-operation in obtaining the best possible considerations for these schools in our dealings with government at all levels. Orthodox students, provided they are qualified and can demonstrate a real connection with their Orthodox parish, should be given preference after Catholic students in Catholic school enrolments, for example.

On Thursday, 10 September 2009, a first meeting was held in the Melkite Catholic Centre in Greenacre between Orthodox hierarchs and the Bishops Commission for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Relations. Archbishop Wilson, president of the Catholic Bishops conference was also present. From this meeting we can look to a new era of cooperation and understanding between Catholic and Orthodox in Australia.

10 Hope for the Future

Pope John Paul II told Patriarch Dimitrios: “The Church of Christ has two lungs: the Eastern, and the Western; it is about time for the Church to begin breathing with both its lungs!”

Let us hope that the prophecy of this great Pope will be soon achieved!

I believe that all of us have the duty to witness and to work for the unity of the Church. United, we show the true face of Jesus Christ to the entire world. This unity can be achieved when we live in solidarity and mutual respect. In our relations with one another, we must give priority to the heart and handle our problems with love.

We often use the term “sister Churches” when we speak of the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches. If we truly believe this, then the time has come to recognize one another as such, and to rediscover the richness within each other!

In so doing, we are responding to Jesus’ prayer: “May they all be one, just as You Father are in me, and I am in you. May they be one in us” (Jn 17:21).

Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will grant us all the gifts that we need to remove the walls of separation from between us!

Amen