

## Rome's Liturgical Instruction for the Eastern Catholic Churches

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### Abstract

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By means of a detailed study of the 1996 Vatican document, *Instruction for Applying the Liturgical Prescriptions of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, as well as the *Code* itself, the author attempts to assist Eastern Catholics in the process of returning to their roots and eradicating whatever is foreign to their rich liturgical and spiritual patrimony as mandated by the Second Vatican Council and subsequent Roman documents, especially those of Pope John Paul II. The author concentrates on the structures of Eastern Catholic Churches and their lawful autonomy and authority before focusing on several key areas, including: the publication of liturgical books; liturgical formation of seminarians; the proper celebration of the sacraments of initiation, healing, and vocation; sacramentals; the sanctoral cycle, including days of feast and fast, and the importance of lost traditions such as the Lenten Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts; the spiritual necessity of recovering public celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours; and the role of icons. He concludes with an appeal for the full restoration by Eastern Catholics of their liturgico-theological heritage for its own sake as well as for the sake of Orthodox-Catholic unity.



### *Introduction*

On January 6, 1996, the Congregation for the Eastern Churches published an *Instruction for Applying the Liturgical*

*Prescripts of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*<sup>1</sup> (hereafter: LI). The *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* (hereafter: CCEO), following the Second Vatican Council's *Decree on the Eastern Churches (Orientalium Ecclesiarum* n. 1), deals here and there with a series of important norms pertaining to liturgical matters. The LI, by contrast, gathers all these norms into a systematic whole, completing them with further details, and presenting them to the Eastern Catholic Churches so that they fully realize their own identity (n. 5).

The LI has the following objectives: a) to lead to a more profound understanding of the immense richness of the authentic Eastern traditions, which are to be scrupulously maintained and communicated to all the faithful; b) to arrange the liturgical norms valid for all the Catholic Eastern Churches in an organic summary and to introduce recovery, where necessary, of the Eastern liturgical authenticity, according to the Tradition which each Eastern Church has inherited from the Apostles through the Fathers; c) to exhort a permanent liturgical formation to be organized on a solid basis, for both the clergy – beginning with seminaries and formation institutes – and the laity through schools of mystagogical catechesis; and d) to list the principles in common for the elaboration of liturgical directories for the individual Churches *sui iuris* (n. 5). In light of these principles, we reflect below on the most germane parts of the LI.

### ***Eastern Code and Liturgy***

In canon 3, the CCEO states that: “the code, although it often refers to the prescripts of liturgical books, does not for the most part determine liturgical matters; therefore, these prescripts are to be diligently observed, unless they are contrary to the canons of the Code.” Thus the CCEO does not directly regulate questions of a liturgical character. It belongs,

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<sup>1</sup> *Istruzione per l'applicazione delle prescrizioni liturgiche del Codice dei Canoni delle Chiese Orientali* (Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996). In English: *Instruction for Applying the Liturgical Prescripts of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996).

therefore, to the competent ecclesiastical authority to regulate public divine worship according to can. 657. Can. 3 uses the expression “prescripts of liturgical books” and not that of “liturgical norms,” and this is because the code underlines the obligation of these “*praescripta*” to be observed by all the Eastern Churches and determines which authority can approve the liturgical books.

The reference to the liturgy is something fundamental and constant in the CCEO.<sup>2</sup> The code refers repeatedly to “liturgical books,” to the “prescripts of the liturgical books,” to “what is contained in the liturgical books,” to the “liturgical laws,” to the “particular law” in liturgical matters, and to “the legitimate customs” in liturgical matters. All these expressions, although they may not always have the same juridical significance, are inserted into the “particular law,” understood in the sense of can. 1493 § 2 as “all laws, legitimate customs, statutes and other norms of law, which are not common to the entire Church nor to all the Eastern Churches,” but to each Church *sui iuris*. The frequent reference of the code to the laws and norms or liturgical prescripts attributes to them greater vigor, as much as their application is really required for the application of the same canonical norms. In fact, the liturgical books of the different Churches *sui iuris*, legitimately approved, contain particular prescripts for the order of divine worship and the celebration and administration of the sacraments and sacramentals. Here it is not a question of liturgical rubrics or mere exhortation, but the true liturgical order, required by sound spiritual life and a real ecclesial foundation. Therefore, can. 3 establishes a general norm whereby the prescripts of the liturgical books should be diligently observed, unless they are contrary to the canons of the code.

It is obvious that the reform and changes of the liturgical books undertaken by the various Eastern Catholic Churches, after the promulgation of the code, cannot contain liturgical norms contrary to the canons of the code. In this perspective, can. 40 § 1, confirming the teaching of Vatican II<sup>3</sup>, orders that

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., especially Title XVI, “On Divine Worship and Especially the Sacraments.”

<sup>3</sup> See the conciliar decree, *Orientalium Ecclesiarum n. 6*.