

## Orthodox in Communion with Rome: The Antinomic Character of Eastern Catholic Theology<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

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Since the Second Vatican Council Eastern Catholic Churches have been enjoined to preserve and develop their own, non-Roman, yet Catholic theologies. This article presents Eastern Catholic theology as Eastern Orthodox theology, which, however, considers divergences between itself and Roman approaches as complementary rather than contradictory. This includes even the very volatile issue of ecclesiology and an understanding of the role of the Roman papacy. The author goes on to examine Eastern Catholic approaches to missiology, inter-religious explorations, relations with the Reformed traditions and the contingent nature of Eastern Catholicism.



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<sup>1</sup> The original version of this paper was delivered at the Catholic Theological Society of America, Ottawa, Canada, June 1998. It has been expanded for publication.

### *A Disputed Identity*

At the 1988 World Mission Institute in Chicago (of which I was one of the organizers and which focused on Eastern Christian mission), I identified myself at one point as an Orthodox Christian in communion with Rome. This was met with protest from the eminent Romanian Orthodox theologian, Fr. Ion Brian, who said: "This is impossible. This cannot be. We have no category for you." Feeling acutely the wounds inflicted by various Latin Catholics, Eastern Orthodox and even fellow Eastern Catholics who had refused me this identity, which I still claim and cherish, I responded, paraphrasing the Risen Lord: "Put your hands into my wounds and see that I am real and do not be an unbeliever, but rather believe." While Dale Carnegie might not have thought this the optimum way to win friends and influence people, I made what I considered to be a prophetic stand for a reality that is too often ignored or misunderstood.

If to be an Eastern Catholic is to believe that one can simultaneously live the fulness of Orthodox tradition and enjoy the fulness of Catholic communion, then to do Eastern Catholic theology is to be reconciled to the inevitable and unresolvable tension between these two loyalties in the theological realm.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> I have written on similar subjects elsewhere. See A. Chirovsky, "The Ukrainian Church in the Second Millennium," in Nicholas L. Fr. Chirovsky, ed. *The Millennium of Ukrainian Christianity* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1988), 260–86. "Ukrainskyi Katolytskyi Universytet: Konechnist dlia Kozhnoho Ukraintsia," [A Ukrainian Catholic University: A necessity for every Ukrainian], *Svoboda* 83 (nos. 31–35, Feb. 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 1976): 2. "Dukhovo-Studiyinyi Tsentr dlya Torontons'koyi Eparkhiyi" [A spiritual and religious studies center for the Toronto Eparchy] *Nasha Meta [Our Aim]* 31 (no. 6, Feb. 10, 1979): 3. "Pravoslavni u Ziednanni z Rymom: Deyaki Ekumenichni Rozvazhannia" [Orthodox in communion with Rome: Some ecumenical considerations] *Church Herald*, 16 (no. 2, Jan. 23, 1983): 4–6. "Misia Ukrayinskykh Tserkov v druhomu tysiacholitti." [The Mission of the Ukrainian Churches in the second millennium] *Suchasnist* 28 (no. 9, 1988): 71–79. "Toward the Second Millennium of Kievan Christianity" *New Theology Review* 1 (1988): 56–65. "The Tradition of Ukrainian Spirituality," in Anne Laszok and Joseph Stoutzenberger, eds. *Conversion of Ukraine: The Continuing Story*. Parma, OH: Ukrainian Catholic Diocese of St. Josaphat, (1988), 27–43. "Several Twentieth Century Institutions and their Contribution to Ukrainian Catholic Scholarship" *The Ukrainian*

*Contradiction or Complementarity?*

Is it an oversimplification to say that where there is a difference of opinion between Eastern and Western Christianity, Orthodox theologians see the difference as a contradiction, while Eastern Catholic theologians consider it a case of complementary views challenging the other, perhaps even teasing or chiding the other, but not fundamentally contradictory? If they were contradictory, would not the communion which we have with the Latin Church be false? As an aside, one might perhaps add that when such a difference of opinion arises between East and West or is discovered as longstanding by Western theologians, their reaction, all too often, is to yawn at the allegedly irrelevant ideas emanating from either Orthodox or Eastern Catholic minds. That is due partly to the arrogance of a very dominant and self-confident West, and partly to the ineffective presentation of vital issues by the Eastern parties in question, who are adept at linking up with two thousand years of Tradition (Scriptures, Fathers, liturgy) but less successful sometimes in connecting with the concerns of the here and now. To jump antinomically to the other pole of this reality, one must add that the Christian West is today more often better at connecting with contemporary society but less effective at holding onto the sources of Tradition in this encounter with modernity.

This brings us to the question of starting points. It will come as no surprise to anyone that, while we must constantly be on guard for oversimplifications, I would reiterate the common assertion that Eastern and Western Christians arrive at the same conclusions about central trinitarian, christological, anthropological and soteriological doctrines, even though their starting points differ. This difference, however, is significant. Whereas Eastern Christians have to struggle to maintain the unity of the Holy Triad (by means of a metaphysically weak *monarchia* of the Father), the Christian West has always started its discussions of God from the unity of essence and proceeded to what has at times been a less than convin-