

Eastern Churches in a Western World: The Relationship to the Churches of Origin

John D. Faris

Abstract

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Chorbishop John Faris applies his canonical expertise to the issue of relationship between the Eastern Churches in the New World and their Churches of Origin. Beginning with a reflection on the general terms: "Eastern," "Catholic" and "Church," the author raises a whole series of questions which touch upon the issue of identity and mission: Byzantine and non-Byzantine, serving "one's own" and preaching the Gospel to others, understanding a particular Church as a portion of the people of God entrusted to a bishop following a personal rather than territorial principle. A further clarification of nomenclature includes defining both *Ecclesia sui iuris* according to the varying degrees of legitimate autonomy, as well as the term "Rite," which denotes the rich liturgical, theological, spiritual and disciplinary heritage of an Eastern Church. Specifically, in reference to the "bisection" of communities inside and outside their historical territory, the author notes the limitations of such terms as "Diaspora," "Mother – Daughter Church", and discusses other select issues, such as: patriarchal / synodal jurisdiction, metropolitan structures and the prohibition against married priests. In conclusion, the author emphasizes that in the last century there may have been failures, but there have also been wonderful successes and certainly there is great hope for the future of the Eastern Catholic Churches as they expand throughout the world.



I would like to express my gratitude to Bishop Nicholas Samra and the coordinating committee for giving me this opportunity to speak with you today. All of us who are members of an Eastern Catholic Church owe a debt of gratitude to His Eminence Achille Cardinal Silvestrini and the Congregation for the Eastern Churches for sponsoring this conference. Such a forum offers an opportunity for personal and communal renewal, for a reinvigoration of the fraternal solidarity among the bishops and for an exchange of ideas and a wealth of diverse experiences.

The title of this presentation is itself indicative of an anomaly: why are there Eastern Churches in the West? The phenomenon of the dispersion of the faithful of Eastern Churches to the Americas and Oceania is the consequence of two world wars, the collapse of the Hapsburg and Ottoman empires, the Arab-Israeli wars and subsequent Middle East turmoil and, most recently, the disintegration of the Soviet empire.

These emigrants' love of God, their Church, rite and cultural heritage impelled them to bring priests from their homeland, and soon parishes were established. Later, bishops would be appointed.

I have been asked to reflect upon the theological and ecclesiological relationship of these communities to their Churches in the homeland. Naturally, as a canonist, I shall be unable to refrain from making reference to the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* promulgated by Pope John Paul II in 1990 to regulate the lives of the 21 Eastern Catholic Churches.

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Inasmuch as the words we use and the way we use them not only reflect our perception of reality but also affect it, it might be useful to address the issue of nomenclature: 1) how do we identify these Eastern Catholic Churches; 2) how do we identify those portions of the community found outside their lands of origin?

Generic Nomenclature

We shall begin with an examination of the three elements of the term *Eastern Catholic Church*.

Eastern

The term *Eastern* refers to the origins of these Churches in the Eastern Roman Empire, a political entity that collapsed more than 500 years ago. Use of the term poses certain difficulties because it creates the impression of a high level of commonality among these Churches. While these Churches share the same historical roots, there is a great diversity among them. We should recall that the Romanian Church, the Syrian Church, and the Syro-Malabar Church – representing three very different traditions – all fall under this category of Eastern.

With all due respect for our brothers and sisters of Churches whose rites have evolved out of the tradition of Constantinople, we must be as vigilant against subtle forms of “byzantinization” as well as against “latinization.” I say this because one occasionally finds *Eastern* to be equated erroneously with *Byzantine*.

The diversity among the Eastern Catholic Churches should be kept in mind when establishing entities to deal with Eastern matters because their cultural backgrounds and current circumstances are quite diverse. It is interesting to note that in this assembly of Eastern Catholic hierarchs, western languages are employed in order for the participants to communicate. Their familiarity with the western world – and perhaps the obstacles they face – are perhaps what they have most in common.

Catholic

Inclusion of the term *Catholic* in the appellation of these Churches refers to the fact that they are in full communion with the See of Rome and, therefore, with the entire Catholic Church. However, these Eastern Catholic Churches are also