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What is Eastern Catholic Theology?: Some Ecclesial and Programmatic Dimensions

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Abstract
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Building on Prof. Taft's presentation, the author nonetheless suggests an earlier starting point in the search for Eastern Catholic theology: the period of the Churches' various Unions with Rome. Elements of Eastern particularity (subsequently quelled) were still evident during this period. He then suggests that "Catholic Eastern theology" can only be an ancillary phenomenon for Eastern Catholics as the latter are called upon in three Vatican II documents to express themselves theologically as *Churches*. Finally, he compares the development of Eastern Catholic theology in environments where Eastern Catholics are a minority with those where they constitute the majority, indicating that in the latter case their theology is far less self-conscious and prone to envelope itself in a hermeneutic of "distinctiveness." The latter tendency has prevented minority Eastern Catholics from taking up more universal concerns.

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Our panel[1] was designed to give those of us speaking after Professor Robert Taft an opportunity to build on his presentation. It is a solid foundation, but I believe that he has invited us – by leaving some questions dangling and not pursuing others – to construct a split-level complex. I shall begin by adding an historical footnote to Father Taft's starting point, and then revisit the question of "Eastern Catholic theology" vs. "Catholic Eastern theology." Finally, I will turn to what might be called "pitfalls on the road to recovery": an analysis of what happens when a reality proscribed for so long finally re-emerges.

Professor Taft's presentation has been thematic, historical and definitional. I would like to go in the direction of the programmatic: What kind of theology materializes when one attempts to implement a programme of studies taught by-and-large by Eastern Catholics conversant with Eastern sources, for students predominantly from Eastern Catholic Churches? While in North America or Western Europe such a phenomenon is rare, in Eastern Europe, with the legalization of Eastern Catholicism after Communism's demise, it can be that of a majority within a region populated by millions.

Another Starting Point in the Search for Eastern Catholic Theology

First, the historical footnote. While Professor Taft's decision to begin with events surrounding Vatican I is not surprising, I believe that going further back and reviewing the theological output of Eastern Catholic Churches during the period immediately following their Unions with Rome would be a better starting point. At least in the case of the Kyivan Church (I have not had time to research the other Churches), the period from 1596 (the Union of Brest) to approximately the 1630's witnessed a respectable amount of indigenous theologizing (albeit usually polemical). By this I

[1] Originally delivered at the panel, "What is Eastern Catholic Theology?" during the Convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America, Ottawa, June, 1998.

mean that Greek patristic, Slavic-Byzantine liturgical, and Kyivan theological sources featured prominently – even in works written in Polish!

To cite some examples: Josaphat Kuntsevych quotes exclusively Eastern sources in the Regulations for his priests.[2] Sophia Senyk, who has de-mythologized the image of "Josaphat the Latinizer" by demonstrating his dependence on, *inter alia,* Nil Sorskii, writes: "[Josaphat's] success [in promoting the Union] was due above all to his fidelity to eastern traditions. How steeped he was in them and how much he strove for that fidelity is seen in his efforts to obtain a translation of the commentary on the canons of Zonaras. This was made for him, and we see its influence in his Regulations for priests annotated exclusively with canons from the period of the seven Councils."[3] When we keep in mind that Josaphat did not know Latin, his grounding in Eastern sources becomes all the more understandable.

Another example is Saint Josaphat's collaborator, Lev Krevza, who did know Latin. His reliance on Eastern sources had an additional, strategic, dimension. Prefacing his apologia for the Union of Brest, he wrote: "All this we intend to prove, with God's help, with the aid solely of Slavonic books, ancient and unsuspect, which the opposite side also has, or may have if its looks for them in its churches and monasteries."[4]

Finally, Meletii Smotrytsky was able to propose a creative solution for the Kyivan Metropolia's unionistic impasse, the erec-

[2] For a Latin translation of these see Alphonse Guépin, *Un apotre de l'union des églises au xvii siècle* (Paris-Poitiers: 1897), 21–31.

[3] "The Sources of the Spirituality of St. Josaphat Kuncevyč," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 51 (1985): 435.

[4] Bohdan Strumiński, trans., *Lev Krevza's* A Defense of Church Unity *and Zaxarija Kopystens'kyj's* Palinodia, Part 1 – Texts, Harvard Library of Early Ukrainian Literature, vol. 3, part 1 (Cambridge, MA: Ukrainian Research Institute of Harvard University, 1995), 10.

tion of a Ruthenian patriarchate, because he had retained remnants of a local-Church (Eastern) ecclesiology.[5]

Kuntsevych's, Krevza's, and Smotrytsky's approaches involved a commitment to Eastern particularity even though their predecessor, Ipatii Potii, for example, had relied heavily on Robert Bellarmine.[6] Of course, such reliance does not invalidate Potii's arguments nor diminish the work's significance – to suggest this *a priori* would be to promote intellectual isolationism. The point is, rather, that at this stage the Kyivan Catholic Church's elites had not yet been overwhelmed and constrained by the achievements of Latin theology.

"Eastern Catholic" vs. "Catholic Eastern"

Professor Taft stated that his appointment to a chair of Eastern Catholic theology spurred him to ask what the latter might be. In my case it has always been Vatican II's revolutionary shift concerning Eastern Catholic theology that has driven the question. Because this shift occurred in the context of a re-evaluation of the Eastern Catholic Churches per se, an ecclesial dimension must be included.

Father Taft outlined various initiatives by Eastern Catholics before Vatican II indicating their appreciation for a distinctive Eastern worldview and praxis. However, even if prior to Vatican II someone had had the courage and intelligence to synthesize these into a theology or theologies, understood as a relatively systematic, or at least coherent, reflection on fundamental questions of divine and human existence, that individual would have run up against the

[5] "Paraenesis abo napomnienie" in *Collected Works of Meletij Smotryc'kyj*, Harvard Library of Early Ukrainian Literature, vol. 1 – Texts (Cambridge, MA: Ukrainian Research Institute of Harvard University, 1987), 643–76.

[6] See, for example, H. Pociej, *Antirresis albo apologija przeciwko Krzystofowi Philaletowi*, J. Byliński and J. Długosz, eds. (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1997).

brick wall of non-recognition.[7] It was only *Orientalium ecclesiarum, Unitatis redintegratio* and *Lumen gentium* that finally recognized the possibility of a particular and distinctive Eastern Catholic theology. Previously, only a distinctive liturgy and canonical tradition were recognized, and even these had mutated owing to the absence of an appropriate theology to undergird them.

Allow me to quote the relevant sections of the three conciliar documents. Doing so may seem odd – especially more than thirty years after the Council. However, as is abundantly clear to anyone who has followed the publications and celebrations marking the various anniversaries of the Council's conclusion, the Eastern Catholic factor has been virtually ignored.[8] The following paragraphs remain generally unappreciated outside Eastern Catholic circles.

Lumen gentium, paragraph 23, reads:

> By divine providence it has come about that various churches, founded in various places by the apostles and their successors, have in the course of time become joined together into several groups, organically united, which, while maintaining the unity of faith and the unique divine constitution of the universal church, enjoy their own dis-

[7] In 1963 Bernard Schultze described the effects of this non-recognition (albeit in exaggerated fashion and, incidentally, without any critique of this "brick wall") when he wrote that "[...] no original Catholic theology has been formed among the millions of Oriental Catholics in the several centuries of their union." "Latin Theology and Oriental Theology," in Polycarp Sherwood, ed., *The Unity of the Churches of God* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1963), 186.

[8] A very random sample of such publications includes: George P. Schner, ed., *The Church Renewed: The Documents of Vatican II Reconsidered* (Lanham, MD – London: University Press of America, 1986); Lucien Richard et al., eds, *Vatican II: The Unfinished Agenda* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987); Gérard Defois, *Le second souffle de Vatican II* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1996); Klemens Richter, ed., *Das Konzil war erst der Anfang* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünewald, 1991); and even the substantial three-volume series edited by René Latourelle includes only one article treating Eastern Catholic realities at any length, that is, Ivan Žužek, "The *Ecclesiae Sui Iuris* in the Revision of Canon Law," in R. Latourelle, ed., *Vatican II: Assessment and Perspectives Twenty-five Years After (1962–1987)* (New York – Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988), 288–304.

> cipline, their own liturgical usage and their own *theological* [my emphasis] and spiritual patrimony. Among these there are some, especially the ancient patriarchal churches, like matrices of the faith, which have given birth to others as daughters; and right down to our own times they are more closely bound to these churches by the bond of charity in sacramental life and in mutual respect for rights and duties. This variety of local churches, in harmony among themselves, demonstrates with greater clarity the catholicity of the undivided church.[9]

In *Unitatis redintegratio*, paragraph 17, we read:

> This synod thanks God that many eastern daughters and sons of the catholic church, who preserve this [Eastern] heritage and wish to express it more faithfully and completely in their lives, are already living in full communion with their brothers and sisters who follow the tradition of the west. It declares that all this heritage of spirituality and liturgy, of discipline and *theology* [my emphasis], in its various traditions, belongs to the full catholic and apostolic character of the church.

And, oddly – though typically, the Decree on the Eastern Catholic Churches, *Orientalium ecclesiarum*, paragraph 5, speaks only of "liturgy, ecclesiastical order and spiritual heritage" with no explicit reference to a distinctive theology, though even conservative commentators like Meletius Wojnar, the Basilian canonist, believed that "spiritual heritage" includes theology.[10]

When these three documents finally admitted the possibility of an Eastern Catholic theology, it was presumably because their authors felt that particular faith communities should be allowed to

[9] I cite the translation edited by Norman P. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, vol. 2 (Washington: Sheed & Ward and Georgetown University Press, 1990).

[10] "Decree on the Oriental Catholic Churches," *The Jurist* 25 (1965): 181.

express themselves and nourish their thought in a manner appropriate to their genius, that is, respectful of the Spirit's unique presence in their particular Churches. Consequently, these theologies should be more than just theological movements or schools of theology; they express the religious worldview of *Churches* rather than segments thereof. Therefore, as important as it will always be for Eastern Catholics to benefit from the work of Roman Catholics doing Eastern theology, in principle this can only be an ancillary phenomenon.

Edward Farrugia (albeit overstating the case unfairly and inaccurately) has written: "Western authors will ransack the spiritual treasures of the East the more they become known, but without providing a true synthesis. Thus, the true *Sitz im Leben* of Eastern spirituality, the liturgy, remains closed to them."[11] The import of Farrugia's statement lies in its appreciation for the liturgical – and therefore communitarian and existential – grounding of theology. The former identification of "Churches" with "Rites" is actually valid *to the extent that* liturgy makes Church. And by insisting on a liturgical context for theology Farrugia no doubt has in mind more than mere "dabbling" in Eastern worship.

The Programmatic Dimension

Because I otherwise agree with Professor Taft as to the contours, spirit and orientation of Eastern Catholic theology, I would now like to review what happens when Eastern Catholics attempt to teach and "do" the kind of theology he describes.

The first issue relates to Father Taft's reference to Eastern Catholic theology's possible "lack of relevance outside the Catholic-Orthodox axis."[12] There is no doubt that presently the

[11] "The Theological Profile of the Pontifical Oriental Institute," in Edward G. Farrugia, ed., *The Pontifical Oriental Institute: The First Seventy-five Years – 1917–1992* (Rome: Orientalia Christiana, 1993), 38.

[12] This was the phrase used in the original version of Fr. Taft's paper prepared for the CTSA panel in Ottawa. He has altered it in his final version, but as an intellectual exercise I think it is valid to respond to his original formulation, especially as there may be students of the problem who do believe that Eastern

meagre offerings in Eastern Catholic theology (or even Catholic Eastern theology) do not evoke the interest of larger audiences. However, as successive generations of Eastern Catholics, freed of pre-Vatican II restraints, do develop theologies resonant with their ecclesial particularity, will this lack of relevance outside the Catholic-Orthodox axis continue? Possibly so, but what would this signify? Such a limited discourse would become, among other things, a hermeneutic of ecclesial identity, or a construct of meaning for those satisfied with social and intellectual isolation, rather than a theology in the sense referred to above. In other words, a theology failing to attempt to address a full-range of universal human concerns would be misrepresenting itself by appropriating the name. For all of the rough edges and flaws of liberation or feminist theologies, these nonetheless make an attempt – or at least in principle are not opposed to attempting – a reflection on 1) the human condition *per se* 2) God's relationship to that condition, and 3) very importantly, the methodological and philosophical context for such reflection.

Of course, no theology is ever universal, and any attempts to make the claim should be decried, which is why Eastern Catholics are irritated when in mixed Eastern and Western Catholic faculties their courses are inevitably titled "Byzantine Sacraments," or "Eastern Christian Spirituality," while analogous courses offered by Roman Catholics are designated "Christian Sacraments" or "Christian Spirituality." Granted, the latter courses presumably cast their nets more widely for textual and experiential bases, but they, just as much as the Eastern Christian courses, work from a particular set of biases and perspectives that really should be exposed by more accurate nomenclature. Majorities should never be allowed the pretence of comprehensiveness and exclusivity.

To return, however, to the question of "pitfalls on the road to recovery," during the post-Vatican II period of recovery Eastern Catholics have relied heavily, and quite appropriately, on Eastern *Orthodox* theologians to provide some of the "universal" reflection

Catholic theology's relevance is limited to the Catholic-Orthodox axis.

referred to above. John Zizioulas has an engaging ontology and anthropology,[13] Alexander Schmemann gave us a liturgy-life hermeneutic,[14] and Christos Yannaras speaks to basic questions of moral existence.[15] But the next step is to ask where one goes for reflection on areas equally universal and foundational, but not addressed adequately by Orthodox theology, at least not at the present time. The nature of religious hermeneutics per se, the psycho-anthropological study of rites, critical church historical research, the modalities of Revelation, Quantum physics and faith – not to mention the broader area of faith's relation to science as a whole: all of these are areas in which an Eastern Catholic relying on Orthodox theologians will be disappointed. Of course, at that point one does what the best Orthodox themselves do – turn to the theologians of other Churches. This brings me to another aspect of "recovery."

It is ironic that the very phenomenon that legitimized Eastern Catholic theology will also require that it become less "Eastern Catholic" if by the term one understands an integrated system of thought consonant with the spiritual "physiognomy" of a particular faith community as that community presently understands itself. It was pluralism that restored Eastern Catholic theology to the Catholic Church's consciousness; the same healthy pluralism will require that Eastern Catholics appropriate and synthesize currents of thought that until now have been alien to their worldview. This they will have to do if they desire to maintain theology as a study of the really real, rather than just an ideology bolstering ecclesial identity.

This will be hard for some Eastern Catholics. As their identity has been violated for so long, the first generations of "survivors"

[13] See his *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985).

[14] His most concise presentation of this appears in his classic, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973).

[15] See, for example, his *The Freedom of Morality* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984).

will inevitably overcompensate for previous strictures, as is usually the case with emerging minorities. In Western countries, where Eastern Catholic courses or programmes of study exist alongside Western counterparts, Eastern Catholics will sometimes cloak themselves in a hermeneutic of differentiation, in which theology ends up being taught over against allegedly "competing" theologies. One then does not engage reality directly, but rather through a prism intended to guarantee that the illuminating rays of scholarly inquiry remain distinct.

This phenomenon emerges analogously when Western Christians enroll in Eastern courses first and foremost in search of the "distinctive." In such a context, no matter how conversant an Eastern Catholic professor may be with the insights of Gadamer, Ricoeur, Rahner, or for that matter any other Western author – and no matter how relevant their thought may be to a question treated in an Eastern course – the professor will feel constrained to allot them only scant attention.

It is fascinating how this changes when one does Eastern Catholic theology in an environment devoid of the compulsion to relate "over and against" others. In Western Ukraine, for example, where Eastern Catholics comprise the majority of Christians and operate the majority of viable theological institutions, theology develops far more organically because the questions posed to Eastern Catholic theologians are those of an entire society, rather than of discrete communities located at society's peripheries. Eastern Catholic self-consciousness fades as these theologians are called upon to rebuild an entire nation. This dimension is important, because, of course, it is the questions, rather than answers, that determine intellectual agendas; and shifts in the history of thought are frequently stimulated by new questions.

Finally, to the extent that all theologies are conditioned by an ecclesiology, it will be crucial to follow how Eastern Catholic theology develops as a result of Vatican II's new ecclesiology. (Though note that the latter has been neither promoted thoroughly by the last three pontificates, nor appropriated by Eastern Catholics themselves.) I have in mind the view of Church as a communion of particular or autonomous (*sui iuris*) Churches. This ecclesiology, as is well known, holds that each particular Church manifests in its

own area and in all of its initiatives the one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church, rather than a part thereof. Consequently, these particular Churches – the Maronite, Melkite, Ukrainian or Romanian Catholic – are now challenged to become *kat holon* in the sense of bearing Christ's message and mission comprehensively. Ethno-centric, phyletistic ecclesiologies are thus unmasked as fundamentally heretical, with the result that a local Church now called upon to act "universally" must generate a theology congruent with this message and mission.

As hinted, Eastern Catholics have only begun thinking and acting more universally in holistic, not partitive, fashion. Consequently, as Fr. Taft has noted, Eastern Catholic theology has more of a future than a past or present, and I believe that future will be bright if it can avoid a stultifying particularism as it rediscovers its legitimate particularity.

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Резюме

Вищеподана стаття професора літургіології в Інституті ім. Шептицького при Університеті св. Павла п.з. „Що це Східньо-католицьке богослов'я? – церковні та програмові виміри", була виголошена як доповідь на конвенції Американського Католицького Богословського Товариства в Оттаві, в червні, 1998.

У пошуках за східньо-католицьким богослов'ям, автор пропонує перегляд творів з доби відновлення єдности східніх Церков з Римом. У берестейському періоді такі діячі як св. Йосафат Кунцевич, Лев Кревза та Мелетій Смотрицький ще відзначалися знанням грецької патристики, східньої літургійної спадщини та київського і загально-слов'янського письменства. Згодом, „велич" латинського богослов'я „приголомшувала" уніятських богословів.

Автор тоді пропонує, що „католицьке-східнє богослов'я", цебто богослов'я написане латинниками, обізнаними з східніми джерелами, може бути тільки допоміжним явищем