

Western Rite Orthodoxy: An Apologia – Part 2

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In the first part of this article, we saw that the Fathers, who are the teachers of our holy Orthodox faith, not only recognized the variety of different rites which prevailed in the early church, but actively extolled this diversity. Our conclusion, therefore, was that of Fr Schmemann: 'Orthodoxy has no objection to the Western Rite as such.'¹

In this part, I want to look at the question as to whether or not the rites actually practiced today in the Antiochian Western Rite Vicariate are Orthodox.

The answer may seem obvious. These rites are sanctioned by the authority of the church, and those who practice them are fully Orthodox Christians. This point is fundamental. *It is not a rite that makes people Orthodox.* The 'Eastern Catholics' evidently use the Byzantine Rite, and there is even a Society for Eastern Rite Anglicanism, one of whose patrons is a female bishop!² Thus, to paraphrase Bishop BASIL (Essey), there are some people whose churches may look like ours and sound like ours and smell like ours – but they are not, for all that, our churches.³ What makes people Orthodox is not the use of a rite, but the profession of the Orthodox faith in the communion of the Orthodox Church.

Now, it may be argued that Western-Riters are Orthodox, but that the liturgy they use is not. And this, as Fr Schmemann points out, is the essential issue. 'The only question is whether a rite adequately embodies, manifests, and communicates the eternal and unchanging Truth – is *Orthodox* in the deepest sense of this word.'⁴ Let us examine this point, first in relation to the so-called Rite of St Gregory the Great. This is, in fact, to all intents and purposes, the ancient Roman Rite, already approved by the Holy Synod of Russia in 1870,⁵ and, before that, the rite of countless Orthodox Christians in the west prior to the Schism – whence the well-known words of St John of San Francisco: 'The west was fully Orthodox for a thousand years, and her venerable liturgy is older than any of her heresies.'⁶ To quote Dom Gregory Dix, in his magisterial *Shape of the Liturgy*, it is 'a series of texts which has not changed by more than a few syllables since Augustine used those very words at Canterbury on the third Sunday of Easter in the summer after he landed.'⁷ As another very eminent liturgist, Josef Jungmann, notes: 'For the most part ... the canon, but likewise the major portion of the variable prayers ... and the readings are almost identical with present-day usage.'⁸ Certainly, some things have changed over the centuries, but, as yet another liturgical 'great,' Edmund Bishop, demonstrates, the vast majority of those elements which compose the Tridentine mass, belong to the pre-schism period.⁹ What is added in terms of text is minimal, and can hardly be objected to as un-Orthodox, as, for example, the employment of the forty-second psalm at the start of mass and the Johannine prologue at the end.

Unable to assail the text of the mass, critics are compelled to attack the rubrics, especially the ceremonies surrounding the words of institution, which they claim to be evidence of a false understanding of the 'moment of consecration.' In response to this, one may answer, first, that no serious modern scholar, either of theology or of liturgy, Orthodox or otherwise, who would want to speak nowadays about a 'moment of consecration.' Rather, the academic consensus is that the whole rite is consecratory.¹⁰ Second, being celebrated in the context of Orthodoxy, the rituals accompanying the words of institution cannot but be interpreted in an Orthodox way, as proleptic, akin to the ritual gestures (including kneeling) performed during the Great Entrance in the Byzantine Rite.

Another objection to the Gregorian rite concerns the language of merit. Here we must make a distinction. In liturgical Latin, the verb 'to merit' *merere* simply has the force of 'may.' Thus, for example, in the collect at prime we ask *salvati ... mereamur*, not 'let us deserve to be saved,' – obviously, because we are saved solely by grace – but 'may we be saved' – the reference being to God's goodness, rather than to our deserts.

For the noun, *meritum*, we say with St Augustine that our merits are nothing but God's gifts at work within us, gifts which, nonetheless, He, of His goodness, chooses to reward as if they were our own.¹¹ In strict justice, we deserve nothing from Him (except wrath); yet in His love for us He promises to reward each of us according to our works (Romans 2, 6; 2 Corinthians 5, 10). Even to give a cup of cold water to one of Christ's disciples will be rewarded – *merits* a reward, we might almost say (Matthew 10, 42).

Let us turn, next, to the Rite of St Tikhon. The name does not mean that St Tikhon composed the rite – any more than we should imagine that St John Chrysostom composed the liturgy that bears his name. Rather, the link with St

Tikhon comes from his request to the Holy Synod of the Russian Church to explore the possibility of allowing Anglicans who converted to Orthodoxy in America to continue using their own liturgical books

The Synod handed the topic over to a committee dealing with relations Anglicans and Old Catholics, and a report was drawn up, published in English as *Russian Observations upon the American Prayer Book*, a work which can be most conveniently found on-line at: anglicanhistory.org/alcuin/tract12.html. After reviewing this report, the Committee allowed that converts from Episcopalianism to Orthodoxy might worship using the Prayer book, if corrections were made to it:

On the one hand everything must be removed from the Book that bears a clearly non-Orthodox character – the Thirty-nine Articles of the Anglican Confession, the Catechism with its protestant teaching about the sacraments, the Filioque, the idea of the sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures as the sole source of the teaching of the Faith, etc. On the other hand, there must be inserted into the text of the prayers and rites contained in the Book those Orthodox beliefs which it is essentially necessary to profess in Orthodox worship ... the profession of belief in the change of the Holy Gifts into the Body and Blood of Christ, and of belief in the sacrificial significance of the Eucharist ... Into all the services in general prayers must be inserted addressed [sic] to the Blessed Mother of God, to Angels and Saints, with the glorification and invocation of them (direct), also prayers for the dead ... There must be included in liturgical practice, and put into the Book, the missing rites for the sacraments of penance, oil-anointing and unction, and the rite of consecration of churches (as distinct from the consecration of a house of prayer); and finally there must be introduced the cult of sacred images.¹²

This is exactly what has happened with the Liturgy of St Tikhon, although we may note that this liturgy is based not the Prayer Book per se, but rather on the *Anglican Missal*, a composition of the 1920s, produced by Anglo-Catholic clergy who had exactly the same objections to the Prayer Book as those raised by Russian Synod.¹³ Thus, when people point to the Tikhon rite and say that it is 'Protestant' or 'Cranmerian,' they fall very far of the mark indeed.¹⁴

Or do they? Some, for example, claim that the Tikhon rite portrays God as harsh and angry, whereas, in Orthodox theology, 'He is good and He loves humankind.'¹⁵ In fact, however, this goodness and love are wonderfully underlined in the Tikhon liturgy. It reminds us that we have offended God by sin and deserve His wrath, yet, despite this, He forgives us, precisely because He is good and loving and merciful. His 'property is always to have mercy.' In His 'great mercy,' He, 'our Heavenly Father,' 'hath promised forgiveness of sins to all those who with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto Him.' And, in the Tikhon rite, this is exactly what we praise Him for. The 'Comfortable Words' of Matthew 11, 28, John 3, 16, 1 Timothy 1, 15, and 1 John 2, 1-2 lead directly into the *Sursum Corda*. We lift up our hearts and praise God *because* of His love and compassion.

Another complaint one sometimes hears, is that the Tikhon rite is not sufficiently pneumatic. This is simply not so. The rite begins with the collect for purity, in which we ask that God may 'cleanse our hearts by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit,' and ends with the Trinitarian benediction. In between, we praise the Holy Ghost in the Gloria and confess Him in the creed, we ask Him twice to come down on our oblations, once at the offertory, then again at the epiclesis. We doxologize Him at the end of the canon and at the embolism, as well as at the end of the Post-Communion Prayer. In addition to this, we have an abundance of material in the propers, which often speak about the Spirit, not least the epistle lessons in Trinitytide.

Also often objected to is the description of the Lord's death as satisfaction. We respond that the idea of satisfaction is present in the scripture and the writings of the holy Fathers,¹⁶ which is how one of the greatest patristic theologians of our church, Fr Georges Florovsky can quote the very phrase that critics of the Tikhon rite condemn.¹⁷

Having looked at the two rites of the Vicariate, let us examine next some criticisms made of the Western Rite more generally. It is sometimes alleged that the Western Rite employs unleavened bread, but this is absolutely not so. The directives issued by the Vicariate are very clear about this, and I have yet to meet any priest who does not obey them.

Also criticized is our practice of Eucharistic adoration. But is Christ Our God not to be worshipped and adored? 'Not only,' says Blessed Augustine, 'our adoration is not sin, but we sin if we fail to adore.'¹⁸ Augustine may, perhaps, be too western a Father, so let me quote the 1718 reply of the Eastern Patriarchs to the Non-Jurors: 'To be against worshipping the Bread which is consecrated and changed into the Body of Christ, is to be against worshipping Our Lord Jesus Christ Our Maker and Our Saviour.'¹⁹

These are certainly words that some Orthodox need to hear and heed. So much is theirs a 'negative religion of anti-papalism,'²⁰ that they appear 'to deny that the Eucharist is that flesh of Christ Who was made flesh for us.'²¹ They seem not to share the faith which cries out with St John Chrysostom: 'Oh! What a marvel! What love of God to man! He who sits on high with the Father is at that hour held in the hands of all and gives Himself to those who are willing to embrace and grasp Him.'²²

Of course, the more astute amongst those who criticize the western rite will say that it is not the worship of the eucharist which is wrong, but worship of it exterior to the Liturgy.²³ But, in fact, our worship of the eucharist outside of mass is inextricably linked to the Liturgy; it serves to reinforce the truth that in the Liturgy the bread is made the Body of Christ and that which is in the Cup His precious Blood, changed by the Holy Spirit.²⁴

In connection with our worship of Christ in the eucharist is our practice of kneeling during mass. This seems to be contrary to the twentieth canon of the first ecumenical council, which states:

Forasmuch as there are certain persons who kneel on the Lord's Day and in the days of Pentecost [i.e. the fifty days of Easter] therefore, to the intent that all things may be uniformly observed everywhere (in every parish), it seems good to the holy Synod that prayer be made to God standing.

Likewise, canon 90 of the Council in Trullo declares:

We have received from our divine Fathers the canon law that in honour of Christ's resurrection, we are not to kneel on Sundays.

Despite these canons, we find that in many Byzantine churches, not only laity but also clergy and even hierarchs kneel during the Liturgy. They do so out of a profound reverence for the Lord present in His mysteries. And this is the key to a correct understanding of the canonical prohibition on kneeling. That prohibition is directed against kneeling as a penitential gesture,²⁵ regarded as incompatible with the joy of the Resurrection. We, however, kneel not as a sign of penitence but in adoration of the Risen Lord present amongst us, He to Whom every knee shall bow and every tongue confess (Philippians 2, 10-11).

This said, despite what actually happens in probably every AWVR parish, the more correct *western* practice is to limit kneeling. Thus, according to *the Ritus Servandus* of the pre-Vatican II *Roman Missal*, kneeling at mass was supposed to be restricted, at least for those serving at the altar, to the period from the *Quam oblationem* (when the bell is rung) to the celebrant's last genuflection at the words of institution. After that, they 'rise and stand in their places.'²⁶ Similarly, the *Ritual Notes* which govern the rubrics of the Tikhon Rite state that: '[T]he normal and correct attitude at liturgical prayer is standing, not kneeling' (No. 131).

Some people argue that the western rite is divisive. Leaving aside the fact that the use of the Byzantine rite is by no means a guarantee of unity amongst Orthodox, this is simply not the case. To speak simply of my own experience, prior to COVID, I often concelebrated with my eastern rite brethren (from several jurisdictions); my congregation 'shares' a deacon with the neighbouring eastern rite parish; parishioners from eastern rite parishes come to our services; our parishioners go to theirs. So, no, the western rite is not divisive – or, rather, it only becomes so when people make it an issue!

People also ask why western Christians should want to keep their own rites and customs. Why can't they just accept the eastern rite? Why is maintaining their rite so important to them? The answer, I suggest, is this. Unlike Baptists, say, or Pentecostals, who have no liturgical background, for many Anglicans and Roman Catholics, their spirituality and piety is inextricably linked to the liturgy. Like St Benedict, they 'prefer nothing to the Work of God.'²⁷ To ask them to repudiate that by which they have been all their lives inwardly nourished and fortified – that by which, indeed, they have, in many cases, been brought to Orthodoxy – is to demand a very great, and a very unnecessary, sacrifice, contrary to the practice of the Apostles, who decreed that no burden should be laid on converts beyond that which is necessary (Acts 15, 28). St Paul exemplifies this policy. Thirsty for souls, the great Apostle declares:

To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law – though not being myself under the law – that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law – not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ – that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some (1 Corinthians 9, 20-22).

The corollary of this is tolerance of legitimate diversity, of freedom in non-essentials. 'Who are you to judge another's servant?' Paul fulminates. 'To his own master he stands or falls' (Romans 14, 4). For him, ritual did not matter; what matters is a saving relationship with Christ. As he puts it in Galatians: 'Neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation' (6, 14). It is an ideal which some Orthodox need to re-appropriate, recalling that, when we call the Church Apostolic, that is just the Greek for 'missionary.' We are sent out to win people for Christ – and this is what animated those who first revived the western rite in Orthodoxy. They desired to save souls, and wanted to make the path into the church as easy as possible, by permitting western Christians to retain the rites which were so dear and so familiar to them.²⁸

It is this that matters! To save souls. To win them to Christ and to His Holy Church. If the western rite succeeds in doing that for a single individual, then it has more than served its purpose. For 'there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous who need no repentance' (Luke 15, 7).

¹ Fr Alexander Schmemmann, 'Some Reflections Upon "A Case Study,"' *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 24.4(1980), pp. 266-269, p. 269.

² See <https://www.easternanglicanism.org/about/>, accessed June 16 2020.

³ Bishop Basil (Essey), 'Bishop Basil's Comments on the Western Rite,' <http://ww1.antiochian.org/node/18318>, accessed July 21 2020.

⁴ Schmemmann, 'Some Reflections,' p. 268.

⁵ David F. Abramtsov, 'The Western Rite and the Eastern Church,' (University of Pittsburg, PhD dissertation, 1961), pp. 13-15.

⁶ The remark was made to Dom Augustine Whitfield, at the banquet following the consecration of the ROCOR cathedral of Our Lady of the Sign in 1959.

⁷ Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (2005), p. 745.

⁸ Josef Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite*, (1959), p. 37.

⁹ Edmund Bishop, 'The Genius of the Roman Rite,' in *Liturgia Historia* (1962), pp. 1-19, p. 7.

¹⁰ See Robert Taft, 'Mass Without the Consecration?' http://www.americancatholicpress.org/Father_Taft_Mass_Without_the_Consecration.html, accessed June 19 2020.

¹¹ See, for example : *Sermo 298, 4-5* ; *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, 6, 15.. For merit in the Fathers generally, see Anselm Forster, *Verdienst (Systematisch)* in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 10 (1965) cols. 677-680.

¹² *Russian Observations*, anglicanhistory.org/alcuin/tract12.html, accessed November 11 2019.

¹³ http://anglicanhistory.org/liturgy/mccauley_missal1942.html, accessed July 31 2020.

¹⁴ An example is provided by Allyne Smith in his review of *the St Andrew Service Book* (*St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 41. 2-3 (1997), pp. 294-68): '[I]t is clearly a liturgy whose principal identity is that of a Reformation liturgy,' Smith declares, (p. 225), a 'fundamentally Protestant rite' (ibid.) Smith also claims, rather bizarrely, that 'most of the changes required by the *Observations* were not made' (p. 256).

¹⁵ In relation to this, note how the Gregorian rite, at the beginning of the canon, addresses God as *clementissime Pater*, most-loving Father.

¹⁶ Matthew Baker, 'In Ligno Crucis: Atonement in the Theology of Fr Georges Florovsky,' in Matthew Baker et al., *On the Tree of the Cross* (2016), pp. 101-126, p. 125. See Nicholas Cohen, 'Patristic Analogues in Anselm of Canterbury's *Cur Deus Homo?*' (PhD diss, Boston College, 2011): <https://dlib.bc.edu/islandora/object/bc-ir:101195/datastream/PDF/view>, accessed July 28 2020

¹⁷ Georges Florovsky, 'The Patristic Age and Eschatology,' in *Collected Works*, vol. 4 (1972), pp. 63-78, p. 65. Of course, Florovsky recognized the inadequacy of the word – but then every word is inadequate to describe the divine mystery of our salvation! For patristic use of the term.

¹⁸ *On Psalm 98.9*.

¹⁹ George Williams, *The Orthodox Church of the East in the Eighteenth Century* (1868), p. 57.

²⁰ A phrase inspired by Marcus Plested, *Orthodox Readings of Aquinas* (2012), p. 184.

²¹ St Ignatius of Antioch, *To the Smyrneans*, 7.

²² *On the Priesthood*, 3.4.

²³ This objection always amuses me, since it echoes the cry of the Protestant Reformers that the sacraments 'were not ordained of Christ to be gazed upon or to be carried about, but that we should duly use them' (*Thirty-Nine Articles*, Article 25).

²⁴ See the anaphora of the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom.

²⁵ Whence the use of the term *metanoia* both for prostration and the repentance that inspires it.

²⁶ *Ritus Servandus*, VIII. 2.

²⁷ *Rule*, 43, 3.

²⁸ In this regard, I am reminded the comment of Metropolitan PHILARET (Drozdov), that the church has always 'adopted new orders of services for their beneficial effect upon the people' (quoted Schmemmann, *Liturgical Theology*, p. 21).