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Encountering Eastern Catholicism

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Introduction: The how, but more importantly, the why.

In 1965, a college student from Bozeman, Montana spent a year in Banaras, the often-dubbed spiritual capital of India.¹ Two decades later, this same woman, having since obtained a doctorate, written several books, and become a lecturer at Harvard, would be invited to be a part of a theological consultation on interfaith dialogue by the World Council on Churches.² Though these are all exemplary accolades, what strikes me most about Diana Eck's spiritual journey is her continual desire to engage with difficult, sometimes unanswerable, questions.

Eck is clear that if we want "to be honest persons of faith who encounter the religious life of other faiths and are both challenged and enriched by that encounter," we must be willing to ask the "questions that academics and theologians find awkward to address, or want to address only by raising hermeneutical, or interpretive, considerations".³ These are the type of questions with which I have found myself engaging over the past four years at Regis University, but also consistently over the course of my life and faith education.

I struggled deeply over the course of this thesis process, not because I couldn't find a topic, but because I found far too many. I wanted to address the relationships I was seeing between medieval hagiographic literature and modern science fiction. I considered investigating the role Eve has played in the creative literatures of the Jewish, Christian,

¹ Diana Eck, *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras*, (Boston, Beacon Press, 1993), 6.

² Ibid, 12.

³ Ibid, 12.

and Muslim traditions. For a while there I was even going to make a claim that the works of Flannery O'Connor are a form of Catholic fairy tale literature. For many of these and other considered topics, I conducted weeks if not months of research and writing toward my final goal only to eventually scrap the entire project. I was often left feeling demoralized and at several points began to question whether perhaps obtaining a Religious Studies minor instead of completing this final hurdle might be the more prudent option. Yet, here we are.

During the defense of my thesis, one of my advisors brought up a question I had not previously considered with regard to my current topic. He asked, "Do you think you had to write all those other theses first before you could give yourself permission to write this one?" Whether he was trying to point something seemingly obvious with that question or was simply curious as to my response, his inquiry was important to me for two reasons. First, it gives meaning, however superficial, to the many hours and pages of work that I had to toss in the garbage. Secondly and probably more importantly, it begs the follow up question of why I did not feel it was permissible for me to write the thesis I really wanted to write.

This thesis has been so many things over the past year and a half, but what it has truly become is a capstone of both my interfaith education in the Religious Studies department at Regis University and my lifelong experience as an American Roman Catholic. I have chosen to root the written portion of my thesis in Eck's *Encountering God*, because her writing inhabits what I feel is an effective middle ground between

personal narrative and academic research and serves as an example of what I hope to do on a much smaller scale in my own writing of this thesis.

I believe that small scale is part of the reason I felt, at some level, that I needed permission to write a Religious Studies thesis based entirely upon my own tradition. I entitled my own work "Encountering Catholicism" intentionally. Unlike Eck, I am not investigating issues of polytheism as opposed to monotheism. Actually, by investigating the relationship between the Eastern and Western Rites of Catholicism, I'm not even dealing with two different religions. For quite some time, up to and throughout the actual defense of my thesis, I was unsure whether the research I was doing was enough.

I have spent the past four years taking classes on interreligious topics and interfaith dialogue, and I care deeply about the work being done globally in these areas. To limit my own work to simply one religion, even for something as niche as an undergraduate thesis, felt like a cop-out. Catholics are one of the largest religious populations world-wide. They have thousands of ordained clergy to deal with any of the many issues I have seen over my past 22 years as part of the Catholic Church. Yet, after giving myself enough space to take part genuinely in what I have been referring to as *intra*-faith dialogue, I have found that there is absolutely a space for this kind of work.

Whereas Diana Eck traveled nearly halfway around the globe and experienced for the first time a religious tradition entirely alien to her own, I merely took I-70 across two and a half states and attended a Catholic service in the same building I do every week, just three hours later. I attended Divine Liturgy at the Russian Greek Catholic Community of SS. Cyril and Methodius on Regis University's campus for the first time

my sophomore year as a site visit for an Anthropology of Religion class. Going in I knew my attendance would fulfill my 'Sunday obligation' and that this community was 'in communion' with the Catholic Church as I understood it. I left, wrote my required reflection paper, and quite honestly forgot about SS. Cyril and Methodius as everything except a potential 2:30 p.m. option if I slept past my usual 11 a.m. Mass.

Four semesters and most of a Religious Studies major later, I took a 400 level Gospels course with Fr. Chrysostom Frank (Fr. Chrys and/or Dr. Frank) who works in the Religious Studies department and serves as the chaplain for the Russian Greek Catholic Community on campus. During one of our classes Fr. Chrys showed a resurrection image common to his own Eastern Catholic tradition that resonated with me. In the image (seen in thousands of different mosaics, frescos, and other artistic forms), Christ is pictured standing on the broken gates of hell, death crushed and defeated beneath his feet, arms outstretched to Adam and Eve, lifting them from their tombs. In this picture, as will be encountered in greater depth later in this text, I discovered a truth about redemptive power of Christ that I hadn't grasped nearly as well over the course of my early Catholic education. This new perspective and the rich potentiality that developed as a result of this discovery sparked a desire to learn anything and everything there was to know about Eastern Catholicism and what it meant to be an Eastern Catholic.

The first thing I learned about Eastern Catholicism was that I knew absolutely nothing about Eastern Catholicism. This was wonderful in the respect that everything I read and researched was fresh and new, but rather debilitating during the writing portion of the process. Prior to beginning my research into Eastern Catholicism, I would have

considered myself quite well educated in the topic of Catholicism. Nine years of ‘Religion’ classes in my Catholic elementary school, four years of ‘Theology’ at my Catholic high school, a Religious Studies major, and 22 years as an actively practicing Catholic seemed like enough background to assert my level of knowledge on the subject. Nonetheless, it was not until that twenty-first year that I became consciously aware of the Eastern branches of my own religion.

Partially as a result of finding some of my own blind spots, but also probably due to my personal identification and upbringing as an American female Roman Catholic, I did not feel that I qualified as a theologian. While it is absolutely true that I am by no means a *professional* theologian, it came as something of a revelation to me that this does not preclude me from doing equally important work for myself and those around me.

In her explanation of Karl Rahner S.J.’s theology, Dr. Elizabeth Johnson explains the so-called “winter” of Christianity. She expands Rahner’s metaphor about Christianity in the modern global culture (dating back to the early twentieth century) saying, “a person can no longer be a Christian out of social convention or inherited custom. To be a Christian now requires a personal decision, the kind of decision that brings about a change of heart and sustains long-term commitment.”⁴ We are living in a world wherein agnosticism is a predominant lens through which people view the world. We know that we do not know, and for many of us that is both a freeing and a crippling way to live. It

⁴ Elizabeth Johnson, *Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God*, (New York, continuum, 2007), 28.

was into this kind of society, specifically during the intra-World War period, that Karl Rahner began writing his theology for the modern Christian.

It was Rahner's belief that our world, within which Christianity survives as "a diaspora church, scattered among unbelievers and believers of various stripes," must encounter both God and theology differently than those who have come before us.⁵ We are not the sweet summer children who lived through the blossoming of great and beautiful devotions and beliefs, witnessing Doctors of the Church in their prime. Those blooms have shrived and fallen away with the chill of modernity. Thus, in order "to survive, people of faith need to return to the center, to the inmost core that alone can nourish and warm the heart in winter."⁶ This is not time for complex debates and doctrinal nit-picking. We need to get back to the basics.

So what exactly does it mean to 'personally decide' to become or remain a Christian? According to Drs. Howard Stone and James Duke, professors of theology at Brite Divinity School (TCU), this process involves engagement with what they have dubbed *deliberative theology*. For Stone and Duke, deliberative theology is defined by its inherent connection to *embedded theology*, where embedded theology is the "understanding of faith, disseminated by the church and assimilated by its members in their daily lives" via primarily organic means, and deliberative theology is "the understanding of faith that emerges from a process of carefully reflecting upon embedded theological convictions."⁷ This contrast can be elucidated further, perhaps rather

⁵ Elizabeth Johnson, *Quest for the Living God*, 28.

⁶ Ibid, 29.

⁷ Howard Stone and James Duke, *How to Think Theologically*, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1996), 13-16.

irreverently, by the following analogy: many Christians who live in the realm of embedded theology could be seen as sleeper-agents who live comfortably and carry their faith within themselves “for years, unquestioned and perhaps even unspoken,” only making leaps into the realm of deliberate theology, i.e. activating, during/after periods of crisis.⁸

In its most basic form, “deliberative reflection questions what had been taken for granted.”⁹ By this definition, professional theologians are assumedly always engaging in deliberative theology, but so might your pastor, or your mom, or even a child encountering a new doctrine for the first time. Although this process is often conducted by persons highly educated and perhaps acclaimed within their field, Stone and Duke are clear that “deliberative theology does not have to be inaccessible in order to be good, and readers of theology need not be impressed or intimidated by theologians who are only acting like they are profound.”¹⁰

Elizabeth Johnson, whose text, *Quest for the Living God*, I cited previously in this chapter is a firm believer in this same concept. In her phenomenally sharp, twenty-six page letter to the U.S. bishop’s Doctrine Committee responding to their critique of said text, Johnson references now Saint John Paul II when she claims that theology is meant to “engage with the world; dialogue critically with all forms of human knowing; bring that wisdom to bear on faith; invigorate understanding of the relation of humanity and God; [and] bring out new possibilities in Christian expression of the revelation God has

⁸Howard Stone and James Duke, *How to Think Theologically*, 16.

⁹ Ibid, 17.

¹⁰ Ibid, 18.

given.”¹¹ Certainly, a veteran archbishop serving at the Vatican or a professor of biblical history know more than I about many subjects, yet I most assuredly know more than they about growing up in the Catholic Church post-9/11 and in the wake of the ongoing and seemingly countless abuse-scandals.

In the secular world, and even in the Catholic Church to a much slower and less-extensive extent, we are recognizing the need for diversity of people and opinion. Johnson claims her text, which by its titular definition serves as a *mapping* of current *frontiers in the theology of God*, “represents how contemporary believers are seeking to express the ancient wisdom with new relevance,” specifically by presenting “the dialogue of faith with ideas beyond the ecclesiastical circle, exploring new possibilities in Christian belief and practice coherent with people’s lives today.”¹² In other words, the modern laity has just as much to contribute to the Catholic Church as ordained ministers.

It is worth noting that Blessed John Henry Newman, way back in the 1800’s, also spoke to the value of the laity’s voice in theological and doctrinal matters. In his essay “On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine,” Newman remarks that “the body of the faithful is one of the witnesses to the fact of the tradition of revealed doctrine, and because their consensus through Christendom is the voice of the Infallible Church.”¹³ He goes on to explain that “the tradition of the Apostles...manifests itself variously at

¹¹ Elizabeth Johnson. "Johnson letter to U.S. bishops' Doctrine Committee." National Catholic Reporter. Last modified June 6, 2011. <https://www.ncronline.org/news/parish/johnson-letter-us-bishops-doctrine-committee>.

¹² Ibid, 3.

¹³ John H Newman. "On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine." Newman Reader. Last modified July , 1859. <http://www.newmanreader.org/works/rambler/consulting.html>, § 2.

various times: sometimes by the mouth of the episcopacy, sometimes by the doctors, sometimes by the people, sometimes by liturgies, rites, ceremonies, and customs, by events, disputes, movements, and all those other phenomena which are comprised under the name of history” and that, as a result, “none of these channels of tradition may be treated with disrespect.”¹⁴ Speaking as a member of the clergy and as a soon-to-be canonized saint, Newman’s words carry significant weight with those who might doubt the validity of my previous source materials. Though he is clear to specify that the “discerning, discriminating, defining, promulgating, and enforcing” of any specific tradition belongs “solely” to the Church hierarchy, he is also quite adamant that the voice of the laity at large should not by any means be ignored or silenced.¹⁵ Though this is an important claim with respect to laity and the Catholic Church at large, it was equally as important for me personally in that it helped me grant myself permission to speak with validity on topics which I previously felt I could not.

This thesis is, at its core, a work of theology. However, it is a living theology informed by my own experiences and held accountable by interfaith dialogue theory and practice. In his text, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, Daniel Migliore, Professor Emeritus of Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, asserts that “faith and inquiry are inseparable.”¹⁶ More specifically, he argues, “If we believe in God...we will no longer be satisfied with the unexamined beliefs and practices of our everyday personal and social world.”¹⁷ This falls directly in line with Stone and Duke’s previous idea of embedded

¹⁴ John H Newman. "On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine.", § 2.

¹⁵ Ibid, § 2.

¹⁶ Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, (1991), 1.

¹⁷ Ibid, 4.

theology as opposed to deliberative theology as in order to grow in faith and understanding, we must always be reexamining our own perspectives and beliefs.

In our post-scientific age, there is inherently a difference between belief and knowledge. Where knowledge is something provable, verifiable, and inviolable, at least until eventually expanded upon or disproved (we all *knew* Pluto was a planet for quite a while there), belief is something in which you must place trust or perhaps even faith. Where knowledge is intellectual, belief runs deeper. I *know* my would dad do anything for me at the drop of a hat if I needed him, but that intellectual knowledge comes from a lifetime of experiencing and believing in his love for me. Similarly, as a child, I *knew* God existed. He was there somewhere, not necessarily sitting on the clouds, but definitely somewhere in that vicinity. As I grew older, however, and began asking questions, began engaging in what Stone and Duke refer to as deliberative theology, I was no longer sure intellectually of God's existence, but I still believed. It's a very small distinction, but one whose implications are infinite.

Growing up I was fully enmeshed in what I believed to be *the* Catholic Church. For the first 13 years of my academic career, religion was something you could get a B in. I have attended a Catholic mass at least once a week for my entire life. During high school I was a part of a Catholic youth group at my parish and spent time, often twice a week, praying and hanging out with other Catholic teens. On standardized tests I always selected the bubble that said "Roman Catholic," aware that I was Roman Catholic only in that, for me, Catholic and Roman Catholic were synonymous.

Growing up I remember being told that if it was impossible to make it to a Catholic mass, we could always just go to an Orthodox church or the Egyptian Coptic parish up the street, since they were ‘in communion’ with the Catholic Church. This was all I knew about Eastern Christianity, and as will be covered in the next chapter, was false. My first real experience with Eastern Rite Catholicism, the focus of this thesis going forward, occurred during my sophomore year at Regis University. My Anthropology of Religion course had several required site visits over the course of the semester, and the Russian Greek Catholic Community of SS. Cyril and Methodius was a relatively simple visit as it meets weekly in the chapel on Regis’ campus.

Looking back, my overall impression of the Divine Liturgy I attended was a mixture of stress, gratitude, and awe. I was stressed because I had very little understanding of the faith tradition into which I was entering. I was grateful that this tiny, loving community was so welcoming. And I was awed by the beauty of the chanting, prostration, and other ritualistic aspects of the Divine Liturgy when compared with my own regular ‘Sunday obligation.’ I saw a bit of similarity to my own Roman Catholic tradition. Some of the prayers were recognizable, if not exactly the same, but there seemed to be a different level of appreciation for the actual words being spoken than I had experienced at a Roman Catholic Mass.

Looking back three years later, I can say I have learned a lot. I am not an expert, nor have I even scraped the surface of the spiritual wealth Eastern Catholicism has to offer, but I know much more than I did at the start, and therefore, much more than most of the Roman Catholics I know. Over the next 30 or so pages, I hope to bring into focus

three points. First, I will layout a very brief overview of some of the historical and cultural contexts that both isolate and unite the 23 different rites of the Catholic Church. Second, I will discuss the relationship between the treatment of sin in the Eastern Church as opposed to the Western Church and how each treatment impacts that tradition's understanding of baptism, respectively. Finally, I will engage in a personal reflection surrounding my own experience of SS. Cyril and Methodius' celebration of Holy Week and Pascha, and more broadly, what I feel the Western Church has to gain from greater interaction and improved relations with her Eastern sister churches.

On its website, St. Rafka's Maronite Catholic Church in Denver "accepts its mission "to serve as a bridge between East and West, working tirelessly for the full union of the Church."'¹⁸ I only hope to do a bit of the same.

¹⁸ St. Rafka Maronite Catholic Church in Denver. Last modified , 2013.
<http://www.strafkadenver.org/tp50/page.asp?ID=296782>.

Chapter 2: Interfaith and Intrafaith

When I began my undergraduate career at Regis, I was adamant that I was finished with religion classes. I would take my required two and be on my way to a dual degree in English and Peace & Justice studies. And yet, as time went on and I continued taking Peace & Justice courses, it quickly became clear that the courses I enjoyed the most from that major were the ones that double counted in the Religious Studies department. Coming to a Religious Studies major from this perspective, a focus on interfaith dialogue seemed a natural transition.

Though the terms interreligious and interfaith are often used interchangeably, Eboo Patel explains his preference for ‘interfaith’ quite eloquently. In his text, *Interfaith Leadership: A Primer*, Patel defines interfaith as follows:

“The ‘inter’ in interfaith stands for interaction between two people who orient around religion differently. The ‘faith’ in interfaith stands for how people relate to their religious and ethical traditions. Put together, ‘interfaith’ is about how our interactions with those who are different have an impact on the way we relate to our religious and ethical traditions, and how our relationships with our traditions have an impact on our interactions with those who are different than us.”¹⁹

This process of experiencing and changing as a direct result of an interaction with someone religiously or culturally different from myself is something I’ve been engaging

¹⁹ Eboo Patel, *Interfaith Leadership: A Primer*, (Boston, Beacon Press, 2016), 39.

with since childhood. When I learned that one of my second grade classmates celebrated Passover with his mother's family and Christmas with his father's, I briefly considered becoming kosher and converting to Messianic Judaism. After watching the episode of *The Proud Family*, where Penny does a week long exchange program with a Muslim family during Ramadan, I considered following Ramadan fasting practices the next time Lent rolled around. My eighth grade research paper focused entirely on the Hindu pantheon. In each of these moments, as well as many others, I was interested in learning more not because I was academically interested, but because I saw something in each of these traditions that was inherently different from my own, and yet still sparked a connection.

According to Patel, "Interfaith leaders are people who have the ability to lead individuals and communities that orient around religion differently towards understanding and cooperation."²⁰ By this definition, a conversation between an American member of the Latin Catholic Church and a Ukrainian member of the Russian Greek Catholic Church would absolutely be considered an interfaith encounter. However, according to the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs at Georgetown University, since the individuals involved in this conversation are not discussing or disagreeing over "matters of doctrine," it would not really qualify as a genuine interfaith dialogue.²¹

²⁰ Eboo Patel, *Interfaith Leadership*, 4.

²¹ Georgetown University Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs.
<https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/resources/interreligious-dialogue>.

Although I could make a compelling argument as to why conversations and interactions between the many cultural groups within the Catholic Church at large could be considered instances of interfaith dialogue, I have chosen not to do so for three reasons. First, as is seen above in just the two definitions to which I referred, arguing about what *exactly* is meant by interfaith dialogue will not get us much of anywhere. Second, interfaith is often used and understood colloquially as having the same meaning as interreligious. From this perspective, a discussion between two Catholics, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, would not qualify. Third, other words I could have used to convey my meaning, such as ecumenical or inter-Christian, tended to carry additional connotations that I felt would be detrimental to my argument. Finally, by using the term intrafaith, I am able to clarify explicitly that the many Catholic Churches mentioned in thesis are truly part of one religious tradition, while still overtly respecting their cultural and spiritual uniqueness. That being said, the practical interfaith skills I have learned at Regis from my professors, Diana Eck, Eboo Patel, and many others have proven just as applicable in my intrafaith interactions.

When it comes to personal identity, few aspects are as defining as religion. “The theologian Paul Tillich famously said that religion is about ‘ultimate concerns.’”²² This is to say that “religious traditions contain elements that are ultimate in nature—stories of creation, views on human purpose, questions about salvation and the afterlife.”²³ Religion has the sometimes dubious honor of affecting nearly each and every other defining

²² Eboo Patel, *Interfaith Leadership*, 69.

²³ Ibid, 69.

characteristic one might have. Many religions have ethnic or cultural ties. Most extended families belong to the same, or at least similar faith traditions. The way you interpret and act towards your sexuality is most assuredly impacted by your religious influences. Even persons raised in atheist or non-religious households are impacted by their perspectives on the religions of those around them.

The importance of being able to name and own each aspect of one's identity is one of the first and most critical lessons in interfaith dialogue. In the words of Patel, "My identity shapes my world and my worldview—my networks of relationships, the stories I am likely to hear, and the manner in which I am likely to filter them."²⁴ More specifically, someone attempting to work in the field of interfaith "need not check her identity at the door, but does need to be aware of how her various views and positions might affect her engagement in any particular situation."²⁵ I already did much of this kind of work in my introductory chapter, but to be clear, my identity as a white, female, American Catholic makes my experience of the world different from the vast majority of the world.

Keeping that first lesson in mind at all times, Patel outlines several "key skills" that have helped me dramatically during the creation of this thesis.²⁶ I think he "radar screen" Patel presents as his first point should be considered a basic life skill. This "religious diversity" radar consists of four related parts and examines "immediate situations, current events, long-term trends, and the appreciative knowledge."²⁷ Much of

²⁴ Eboo Patel, *Interfaith Leadership*, 13.

²⁵ Ibid, 13.

²⁶ Ibid, 135.

²⁷ Ibid, 137.

this information will be addressed in the context of the Eastern Catholic Churches in the next chapter, but for now this would include awareness of the existence of the Eastern Catholic Churches, awareness of the state of Christians in the East today, some basic history on the development of the Eastern Catholic Churches, and a basic understanding of some of the spiritual and cultural contexts within the Eastern Catholic Churches.

Another of the points that was significantly helpful in my own process was the “building [of] relationships” across “religiously diverse” groups.²⁸ This thesis stemmed from my personal interactions with the members of the SS. Cyril and Methodius community on Regis’ campus. By attending Divine Liturgy with the community and taking part in their communal meal after the service, I was able to learn enough about the people involved to know I needed to learn more about the tradition at large.

Finally, one of the most important aspects of interfaith and intrafaith work is the ability to “facilitat[e] interfaith conversations with religiously diverse groups.”²⁹ As a future teacher, I often find myself in the position of facilitating discussions. However, the facilitation of interfaith conversations is not the same as discussing *Jane Eyre*. At the most basic level, the questions involved in interfaith dialogue are more complicated to construct. According to Patel, “Good questions actively guide interfaith conversations in useful directions. They are compelling to a wide range of people, evoke stories rather than opinions, and build connections across lines of difference rather than encouraging people to dig into entrenched, oppositional positions.”³⁰ Even more than that, however,

²⁸ Eboo Patel, *Interfaith Leadership*, 135.

²⁹ Ibid, 135.

³⁰ Ibid, 150.

“the best questions...help people deepen their relationships with their own traditions and their relationships with others at the same time—the very definitions of interfaith work.”³¹ These types of questions are the ones I constructed when I was planning my interviews.

As part of my research for this thesis, I conducted a series of 20 qualitative interviews, probably better described as question-driven conversations, on the topic of Eastern Catholicism. These conversations were by no means intended to serve as scientific or statistical evidence of a hypothesis. Rather, I hoped that through these conversations I could get a sense for whether or not my own experiences with Eastern Catholicism were common. Links to these interviews are provided at the end of this chapter as opposed to a transcript of the process since, due to their conversational tone, I felt something was lost when they were reduced to text alone.

All individuals interviewed during the process were current members of Regis University’s student body, and quite a few of them were work-study students in University Ministry. As a result, there was not much hope of finding a non-biased interview sample. Nearly all students interviewed were either culturally Catholic or had some exposure to Catholic doctrine. The few outliers were particularly interesting to me, as they were able to provide a perspective with which I have absolutely no personal experience. For example, one student was born and raised Lutheran. During our interview it came up that, because Lutherans utilize the Apostles’ Creed, part of her religious education focused on the meaning of the word “catholic” within the creedal text.

³¹ Eboo Patel, *Interfaith Leadership*, 150.

Retrospectively, this focus in Lutheran education seems obvious. Coming from my overtly Catholic religious background, however, it was an issue I had not previously considered in depth.

In general, if we were to use scientific terms in addressing my expectations for these interviews, it could be said that I hypothesized that most students I was interviewing would have little to no awareness as to the existence of the Eastern Catholic Rites. In general, the interviewees either had no knowledge of the Eastern Catholic Rites or were aware of the tradition peripherally through interaction with one or more specific Eastern Catholic individuals. The sample, as previously stated, was a bit biased, as many of the participants work in the University Ministry Office at Regis. Through this work, they have all come into contact with Fr. Chrysostom Frank, a priest in the Byzantine Rite who has his on campus office in University Ministry. There were also a few students who, through their own academic research or through interpersonal relationships, had come into contact with Eastern Catholicism. This being said, there was a prevalent and overarching theme of confusion around the topic.

When formulating my interview questions and conducting the interviews themselves, I aimed to avoid leading questions and allow the interviewees to speak from their own understanding of the topics at hand. I think one specifically helpful decision I made during this process was to ask the following questions in the following order: “What, if anything, do you know about the relationship between Catholicism and Orthodoxy?” and “What, if anything, do you know about the Eastern Rites of Catholicism?” I ordered these questions in this way because, in my own experience,

Eastern Christianity and Orthodoxy appeared to be synonymous. Curious as to whether my peers held a similar perception of the relationship, I was sure that I did not want to bring up the issue of Eastern Catholicism until I had at least touched on the interviewees' understanding of Orthodoxy.

My findings from this portion of the interviews were also as expected. There was a definitive lack of clarity around the exact definitions of most terminology. At the most basic level, I was hoping to ascertain whether the interviewed students knew there was even such a thing as Eastern Catholicism. While many seemed aware that there was definitely an Eastern branch of 'the Church' at large, there was very little distinction for most students between Eastern Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy. Terminology from my own religious education was thrown around, such as the phrases "in communion with the Church" and "schism," but nothing definite. Even students who considered themselves well-versed in Catholicism and who had conducted some research into Eastern Catholicism used terms like "Eastern Orthodox Catholics," which is an incorrect confusion of several different concepts in one.

If you choose to listen to any of the interviews, which I would highly recommend, you will notice that this is the point at which most students were becoming embarrassed, frustrated, or a mixture of the two and were in need of reassurance that their lack of knowledge in this area was pretty much exactly what I was looking to prove. This is the type of moment that Patel is talking about when he mentions 'facilitation.' The ability to keep someone comfortable during discussion is an extremely important piece of a successful dialogue. If I had simply let my interviewees feel inadequately educated and

ill-prepared for this conversation, they would have shut down. However, by providing them with the information that I didn't expect them to know any of this information, I was able to get them to a place in which they were open and willing to fill in the gaps in their knowledge. This was helpful for me, in that they were willing to continue our discussion, but helpful for them in that they left the conversation with more knowledge than they entered.

It should be made apparent that, although many of Patel's points and ideas were helpful during my interviews, their application was not perfect. As my goal in the interviews was to find out what by subjects knew about Eastern Catholicism and not primarily to investigate their own experiences and traditions, not all aspects of Patel's curriculum could be utilized since my interviews were not technically interfaith dialogues, but rather conversations in which I used his dialogue skills to facilitate a more meaningful discussion.

As mentioned previously, these interviews were conducted predominantly out of curiosity as to whether or not my own lack of experience with Eastern Catholicism was normative. Based on my findings for this first chunk of questions, I would say this is the case. Except in cases where students had prior encounters with specific individuals, the lack of Eastern Catholic knowledge was complete.

This conclusion, in line with my expectations, led easily into the final two questions of my conversational interviews. I was interested whether, having been given a brief summation of my research found later in thesis, the students being interviewed would be interested in learning more about Eastern Catholicism. Following that, I wanted

to know if the interviewee had any ideas as to practical ways Western Church might be able to learn more about her Eastern sister Churches. I feel the responses to this question are actually one of the most important pieces of my thesis, as they look forward to what kind of possible application my research could have in the greater Catholic landscape.

My interviewees seemed to agree that this question held significant weight, inasmuch as many of them appeared to find it the most daunting to answer. Responses were varied. Several participants indicated that information about Eastern Catholicism should be included during early religious education classes, alongside sacramental preparation. Others did not have much in the way of suggestions, but were clear in their belief that Western Catholics ought to be more knowledgeable about these Eastern rites. As far as practical responses go, however, two specific and related ideas jump out at me. One student, relatively early on in my interviewing process, suggested that seminary students ought to be receiving this knowledge. I do not know a whole lot about the Catholic seminary curricula, but I would hope the rites of Eastern Catholicism are one of the covered concepts. That being said, it was the second student's idea that really struck me as the potential first step in bridging this gap.

This student indicated that the best way for knowledge about Eastern Catholicism to be spread would be during weekly homilies at Western Catholic Masses. She went on to reference a conversation the two of us had held previously, wherein we decided the best homilies we had heard always included the conveyance of additional, previously unknown knowledge or context. I suppose this might be a given, and I do not intend this

to tangent off too far, but it seems to me that Catholic parish priests could be doing more in their role as educators.

My research into even the barest differences between Eastern and Western Catholic perspectives on the sacrament of Baptism (which you will find in the next chapter) helped me to understand the “why” of Christ’s resurrection with far more clarity than I have ever had before. I do not believe this is necessarily because one cultural emphasis is better or more accurate than the other, but rather, because a change in viewing angle can often help you see something you would never have thought of previously. Just as there are moves within the American education system to work with all types of learners, be they visual, kinesthetic, etc., it seems reasonable that the Western Catholic Church explore additional forms of understanding within her sister Eastern Churches. This goal of better understanding the beliefs and worldviews of those different from ourselves is at the very heart of interreligious dialogue.

With this in mind, the following three chapters of my thesis will address one possible solution or way of moving forward from this place of Eastern Catholic illiteracy. This solution is three-pronged. First, I will encounter the historical context of the Eastern Catholic Churches. This examination will not by any means be comprehensive, but will give a base level of knowledge from which the reader can continue on to the next step in the process. I will then encounter the theological framework as seen in the Eastern Catholic tradition. Though the Eastern Catholic Churches are full members of the Catholic Communion, their perspectives and expressions of Catholicism differ significantly from those found in Western Catholicism. Finally, and perhaps most

importantly, I will address interpersonal encounters with Eastern Catholics at the Russian Greek Catholic Community of SS. Cyril and Methodius. It is my hope that through this exposure to historical contexts, understanding of the theological framework, and encounter with Eastern Catholic persons, Western Catholics can grow into a greater understanding of what it means to truly be Catholic.

Free access audio for interviews can be found here: <https://alimeehan.podbean.com/>

Chapter 3: Eastern Catholicism, a brief historical overview



The image above is a perfect example of the icon that first drew me to Eastern Catholicism. As I mentioned in my introductory chapter, it was in this image that I discovered a truth about redemptive power of Christ that I hadn't grasped nearly as well over the course of my early Catholic education. In his text, *Interfaith Leadership: A Primer*, Eboo Patel points out a well-known, but often unexamined truth saying,

Different people are motivated in ultimate ways about different dimensions of religious traditions. Scripture motivates some in ultimate ways; for others, it is a sacred place and peoplehood; and for others it is

rituals and ceremonies. Moreover, not only do people emphasize different dimensions of traditions, but they interpret and relate to those dimensions in very different ways.³²

I am sure many of us have encountered what Patel speaks of as ‘ultimate’ throughout our lives. As someone raised in the Latin Catholic tradition, I have been raised to recognize the ultimate in the ritual aspects of the Mass, but also in the people and the world around me. Similarly, as a part of my Western Catholic heritage, I have become familiar with certain forms of religious artwork. When I see an image of the Last Supper, I can recognize it and what it represents, because just about all images of the Last Supper look similar.

In their book, *Resurrecting Easter: How the West Lost and the East Kept the Original Easter Vision*, John and Sarah Crossan encounter this very issue. In the first chapter of their text, they establish that, “despite brilliance in artistic imagination and genius in technical invention,” biblical images “remain easily recognizable across centuries” because, “biblical artists illustrate visually and creatively what they read verbally and traditionally.”³³ This declaration, however, has one notable exception, an exception which the Crossans are correct in labeling “the most important and climactic [event] of them all.”³⁴ Christ’s resurrection is complex in that the Bible lacks “any direct report of the event itself as it was actually happening.”³⁵ In other words, because the

³² Eboo Patel, *Interfaith Leadership*, 69.

³³ John Crossan and Sarah Crossan, *Resurrecting Easter: How the West Lost and the East Kept the Original Easter Vision*, (New York, HarperOne, 2018), 1.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 2.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 2.

disciples only witnessed the aftermath of the resurrection, there is no description of the event upon which artists can base their representations. As a result, depictions of the resurrection require a bit more imagination and come in a greater variety.

In their research, the Crossans have broken resurrection imagery into two categories: the indirect resurrection tradition and the direct resurrection tradition. Within the indirect tradition are the empty-tomb tradition and the risen-vision tradition. These two traditions call back to well-known Bible stories about the events following the resurrection. Within the direct tradition, however, artists use their imagination to represent the actual event of Christ's resurrection, both individually and universally. The individual resurrection image is that with which we are most familiar in the West. This is the image of Christ generally stepping out of the tomb, but doing so alone. In direct opposition to this solitary understanding of the resurrection exists the universal representation of Christ's resurrection. This is the kind of resurrection imagery found in the icon at the beginning of this chapter.³⁶

In this image, and many others like it, Christ is pictured standing on the broken gates of hell, death crushed and defeated beneath his feet, arms outstretched to Adam and Eve, lifting them from their tombs. The others pictured are generally a collection of Jewish patriarchs and various saints. As the Crossans indicate by way of their terminology, it is a rendering of a *universal resurrection*. It is a visual representation of what we as Christians believe Christ achieved through his death and subsequent

³⁶ John Crossan and Sarah Crossan, *Resurrecting Easter*, 2-4.

resurrection, the rescue of humanity from death, and it was something I had never seen before.

This overtly simplistic yet deceptively complex visual theology lesson sparked a question within me that I have been attempting to answer ever since: if I could gain so much personally from just a single picture in the Eastern Catholic tradition, what else is there for Western Catholics to learn from their Eastern sister Churches?

Eboo Patel claims that “diversity, when left alone, tends toward isolation.”³⁷ In other words, if we do not make an active effort to engage with the diversity present around us, we will fall into patterns of stagnancy, creating our own echo chambers. This is something I have found to be true in my own life, but even more so in my religious upbringing. The diversity about which I am most aware is that to which I have been overtly exposed. I have taken a college level course on Islam, and although I would by no means call myself an expert on the topic, I knew far more about Islam before this project than I did about the Eastern Churches of my own religion. This is due in part to the lack of education provided in the Western Catholic Church on the topic of the Eastern Catholic Churches. In Patel’s words, our diversity is being “left alone.” As a result, the average Latin Catholic attending an Eastern Divine Liturgy or mass will be far more inclined to see the differences in the traditions that lead towards isolation than the similarities that draw us towards unity.

In his apostolic letter *Orientalium Ecclesiarum* Pope John Paul II remarks, “I listen to the Churches of the East, which I know are living interpreters of the treasure of tradition they

³⁷ Eboo Patel, *Interfaith Leadership*, 61.

preserve. In contemplating it, before my eyes appear elements of great significance for fuller and more thorough understanding of the Christian experience.”³⁸ This statement from the Pope is directly in line with Stone and Duke’s claim that “As Christians, we are called to pursue growth in faith: by relearning and reinforcing what we already understand faith to be and by expanding, deepening, and even correcting our initial understandings of that faith.”³⁹ It seems rather obvious when put in this language, but how on earth are we to expand or deepen our faith, let alone correct it, if we only grant ourselves access to the knowledge and understandings we already possess? Just as any politics student would be remiss to follow only one news outlet, anyone hoping to learn more and grow in their own faith tradition must find ways to encounter other perspectives. This is what Pope John Paul II is calling for later in *Orientale Lumen* when he asks for “conversation” to occur within the “Latin Church, that she may respect and fully appreciate the dignity of Eastern Christians, and accept gratefully the spiritual treasures of which the Eastern Catholic Churches are the bearers to the benefit of the entire Catholic Communion.”⁴⁰

Before we can hold the kind of “conversation” that now St. John Paul II was seeking in his letter, however, we first must orient ourselves to the basic knowledge available about the Eastern Churches. Thus, it is necessary to address at least some of the historic and cultural contexts around Eastern Catholicism.

³⁸ John Paul II, *Orientale Lumen*, no. 4.

³⁹ Howard Stone and James Duke, *How to Think Theologically*, 24.

⁴⁰ John Paul II, apostolic letter *Orientale Lumen* (OL), no. 21.

In the most basic sense, the Catholic Church as a whole is a collection of twenty-four separate Churches. The Latin or Roman Church is by far the largest of these Churches, accounting for about 98% of the global Catholic population.⁴¹ The other two percent is made up of twenty-three culturally and theologically distinct Churches. These Churches can be broken down in a variety of ways, but for clarity's sake, I will divide them by Rite or Family.

In the East-Syriac Rite, there are the Chaldean Catholic Church and the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church, both of which branched off from the Orthodox Assyrian Church of the East. The Chaldean Catholic Church is based largely out of Iraq, but has members in more than eight countries and a membership of over 300,000.⁴² The Syro-Malabar Catholic Church is based out of India and is one of the fastest growing Catholic Churches in the world with nearly four million members.⁴³

The West-Syriac Rite consists of three Churches: the Maronite Catholic Church, the Syriac Catholic Church, and the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church. Of these Churches, the Maronite Catholic Church is by far the oldest, tracing its roots back to the late fourth century. They are the only one of the Eastern Churches to claim to have always been in full communion with the Holy See.⁴⁴ The Syro-Malankara Catholic Church is another India-based Church and shows exponential growth. It is known specifically for its

⁴¹ "Field Listing: Religion." CIA World Factbook. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/fields/401.html>.

⁴² Ronald Roberson, *The Eastern Christian Churches: A Brief Survey*, (Rome, Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1999), 147.

⁴³ Ibid, 151.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 143.

monastic communities, which integrate Hindu and other East-Asian aesthetic practices alongside Benedictine and Cistercian traditions.⁴⁵

The Armenian Rite contains only the Armenian Catholic Church, based predominantly in Lebanon and Syria. Similarly, the Coptic Rite contains only the Coptic Catholic Church, but is closely related to the Ge'ez Rite, which is comprised of the Eritrean Catholic Church and the Ethiopian Catholic Church. Interestingly, as the Eritrean Catholic Church is a direct offshoot of the Ethiopian Catholic Church, Eritrea is the only country in the world where all Catholics, including Latin Catholics, are under the jurisdiction of Eastern bishops.

Finally, the Byzantine Rite, which is by far the largest after the Latin Rite, is made up of fourteen individual Churches: the Albanian Greek Catholic Church, the Belarusian Greek Catholic Church, the Bulgarian Greek Catholic Church, the Greek Byzantine Catholic Church, the Greek Catholic Church of Croatia and Serbia, the Hungarian Greek Catholic Church, the Italo-Albanian Greek Catholic Church, the Macedonian Greek Catholic Church, the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, the Romanian Greek Catholic Church, the Russian Greek Catholic Church, the Ruthenian Byzantine Catholic Church, the Slovak Byzantine Catholic Church, and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. The national and cultural terminology which accompanies the titles of many of these Byzantine-originating Churches is present due to their direct branching off from the various Orthodox Churches.

⁴⁵ Ronald Roberson, *The Eastern Christian Churches*, 159.

In order to begin the most basic of history lessons, it must first be established that the Christian Churches have never existed as a single entity. Differences in belief, doctrine, and culture have always stood as an impediment to any kind of overarching unity across Christian communities at large. Possibly the most important split in these communities (the only other significant contender being the Protestant Reformation) is the division between Eastern and Western Christianity.

By the third century CE, Constantinople, and therefore civilization in the Eastern Mediterranean, was rising as a new world power, whereas Rome was beginning to fall. An important shift occurred when the peoples of modern day France and Germany accepted not only Christianity, but “also transformed Latin culture,” driving the sphere of the Roman Church westward.⁴⁶ In the year 800 Rome reinstituted the Empire in the West by crowning Charlemagne as Holy Roman Emperor. According to George Appleyard, a priest in the Ukrainian Catholic Church and author of *Light of the East: A Guide to Eastern Catholicism for Western Catholics*, “Insofar as church and state had become tightly allied, the leadership in the East viewed these moves as both heresy and treason.”⁴⁷ Though the formal schism did not officially occur until 1054, this was the first significant paver down that road.

At the root of the schism was the combat against Arianism, a view in which the consubstantial and coeternal nature of Christ was denied, which was considered a heresy and caused far more of an issue in the West than the East. As a result and in an effort to

⁴⁶ George Appleyard, *Light of the East: A Guide to Eastern Catholicism for Western Catholics*, (Pittsburg, Ukrainian Catholic Diocese of St. Josaphat in Parma, 2000), 11.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 11.

refute Arianism once and for all, Western theologians slowly “began to insert a single compound Latin word, *filioque*, into the Nicean creed.”⁴⁸

In a vast simplification of the issue at hand, the Eastern Church protested this movement “on two grounds: that no one could tamper with a creed produced by an ecumenical council and that the theological implications of such a statement were heretical.”⁴⁹ A significant amount of this debate was based in language differences, as the words in Latin and Greek that precede the *filioque* insertion hold different implicit meanings that change the significance of the word being added. However, the emphasis on supreme authority of the pope as supreme pontiff, and therefore on the supreme authority of Rome, also became a significantly divisive issue. In 1054, by way of mutual excommunication, The Great Schism was made official at a hierarchical level. Ultimately, however, it was the sacking of Constantinople in the thirteenth century by the Fourth Crusade that finalized the split for the average citizen.

From that Schism and the disagreements preceding it arose what we now refer to as the Orthodox Churches. The Orthodox Churches are well-known for their emphasis on history and tradition and remain unaltered from their early forms in many ways. Additionally, as will be addressed in greater detail in the next chapter, language and cultural differences between Eastern and Western Christianity over time led to some meaningful theological differences.

⁴⁸ George Appleyard, *Light of the East*, 12.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 12.

Many of the Eastern Catholic Churches listed above branched off from these Orthodox Churches for various reasons and maintain counterparts in the Orthodox tradition to this day. For example, over time the Assyrian Church of the East developed a practice wherein the patriarchal throne was being consistently passed through one family from uncle to nephew, on and on, resulting in the election of several untrained children into the position.⁵⁰ In the mid-15th century CE, a certain group of bishops refused to accept the newest patriarch and chose to elect a reluctant abbot as their own patriarch, sending him to Rome to seek union with the Catholic Church. After his eventual execution and about 200 years of unrest, the offshoot those bishops started because officially known as the Chaldean Catholic Church.⁵¹

As a result of these close connections to the Orthodox Churches, though the Eastern Catholic Churches are full members of the Catholic Communion, their theology and ways of thinking about various issues often tend to be more in line the Orthodox tradition than the Latin Catholic tradition. This is important to keep in mind as we proceed to the theological segment of this thesis, as even in some of the most seemingly simple issues, East and West look at things from completely different frameworks and perspectives.

⁵⁰ Ronald Roberson, *The Eastern Christian Churches*, 147.

⁵¹ Ibid, 147.

Chapter 4: Byzantine Theology

As has been mentioned previously and will be examined in greater depth in my final chapter, my experience with the Russian Greek Catholic Community of SS. Cyril and Methodius on Regis University's campus has played an instrumental role in my understanding of Eastern Catholicism. This community, as was touched upon in the previous chapter, is an offshoot of the Eastern Orthodox tradition and is a member of the Byzantine Catholic Rite. The following chapter will take an in depth look at several aspects of Byzantine theology in an effort to grasp the framework through which many Eastern Catholics view their Catholic faith, and thus provide insight into their worldview on the whole.

In 1999, the U.S. Bishops' Committee on the Relationship between Eastern and Latin Catholic Churches published a document with the goal of promoting "a greater understanding of the experience of Eastern Catholics in this country."⁵² This book is filled with quotes and insights from all sorts of church documents, but the key purpose of the document was to help guide Latin Catholic priests in how to best serve their immigrant Eastern parishioners. Specifically, this text (and many of the others I have read over the course of this project) claims that we must be aware of the differences between the Eastern and Western Catholic Churches, not to deepen division, but to grow in greater understanding of one another and ourselves through distinction.

⁵² Committee on the Relationship between Eastern and Latin Churches National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Eastern Catholics in the United States of America*, (Washington D.C., United States Catholic Conference, 1999), 39.

Whereas both Western Catholicism and Eastern Catholicism hold the same overall doctrinal beliefs, the tone and tint of those beliefs varies from culture to culture. What I have encountered and understood from my American Latin Catholic background is going to be different than what someone raised in America, but within one of the Eastern Churches is going to recognize. Some of these differences are easily noticeable. For example, though the vestments used in the Eastern Churches originated from the same robes as the West, the two evolved differently. Similarly, “in an Eastern church the air is usually heavy with incense” and most would have “no statues but an array of stylized holy pictures called icons.”⁵³

Other differences are only noticeable when you investigate practices further than a surface level. This can be seen in the different perspectives around Confirmation, or Chrismation as it is called by the Byzantine Churches. In my own faith education, there was a significant amount of emphasis placed on Confirmation as being your full induction into the Catholic Church. Performed by a bishop, this sacrament marks you as a mature and educated member of the Church. This is not the case in the East, where Chrismation, “signifying the imparting of the first of the Holy Spirit, always took place immediately after the baptismal bath of rebirth” and can be performed by a priest.⁵⁴ This was initially the same case in the West, but over time the Latin Church “adopted the practice of having a bishop come around to “confirm” initiated Christians at a later date.”⁵⁵ Since bishops are a bit harder to get ahold of than your regular parish priest, time

⁵³ George Appleyard, *Light of the East*, 3.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 20.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 20.

would often occur between the availability of the sacrament, and thus certain qualifications became attached to the process.

Even more difficult to ascertain than these first examples are the theological undertones that flow through Eastern practices and teachings. In the same text compiled by the American bishops mentioned earlier, the committee makes a claim that “priests of the Latin Church hearing the confession of members of Eastern Churches should exercise particular care, as the perception of failing towards God and one’s neighbor is deeply formed, and expressed, in terms drawn from one’s own liturgical and religious experience.”⁵⁶ While this claim might initially seem a bit obscure or perhaps tentative, it makes sense when one examines the drastic differences found between the Latin and Byzantine understandings of sin, death, and salvation.

One of the first and most important things to realize about the differences between Eastern and Western Catholic theology stems from their historical development. Notably, Western Europe was entering and struggling to survive the Dark Ages, while Constantinople was flourishing. As a result, Byzantine theology “became expansive, glorious and triumphal” while “the Latin...become increasingly succinct, somber and watchful.”⁵⁷ While these claims are suitably backed up when one looks at much of the artwork and liturgical aspects of the East when compared to the West, they can also be seen in the actual theological differences as well.

⁵⁶ George Appleyard, *Light of the East*, 29.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 41.

With regard to the Eucharist, undoubtedly one of the most important aspects of the Catholic faith, the Latin Church “places more emphasis on the Eucharist as the sacrifice of Christ and offers it daily for the salvation of all people,” while the Byzantine Church “sees it as the triumph of the Lord and reserves its celebration to non-penitential days.”⁵⁸ Although this quote is specifically dealing with how the two Churches think about the Eucharist, those words “sacrifice” and “triumph” really summarize the differences I have seen between the Western and Eastern Catholic Churches, respectively.

Similarly, the treatment of the sacrament of penance is viewed slightly differently in the Western and Eastern Churches. Historically, the “East and West began to diverge as the West began to include more and more acts in its catalogue of offences that required the intervention of the Church’s authorities.”⁵⁹ Though the treatment of sins, and therefore the sacrament of penance, was altered significantly in the Latin Church following Vatican II, a far more negative perspective persists in the West than in the East. This is most likely due to the Western tendency to “use a juridical or legal model in its practice.”⁶⁰ In other words, “Sin is breaking a law of God;” therefore, a “priest-confessor judges the seriousness of the sin and imposes the appropriate penance before forgiveness is granted.”⁶¹ According to Appleyard, “The East tends to use a medical model for the sacrament. That is, a spiritual guide discerns spirits, the way a physician would examine

⁵⁸ George Appleyard, *Light of the East*, 35.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 22.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 23.

⁶¹ Ibid, 23.

symptoms, and prescribes remedies for the spiritual illness if needed.”⁶² This is specifically clear when one looks at those permitted to conduct the sacrament of penance, as when at all possible in the Eastern Churches, “the ministry of reconciliation is entrusted to those who prove themselves skilled at it,” as opposed to each and every ordained priest.⁶³

In an attempt to examine this difference in the treatment and understanding of sin, death, and salvation, I have chosen to focus specifically on the cultural perspectives surrounding Baptism in Eastern and Western Catholicism. At the broadest of levels and with a risk of drastically oversimplifying the issues at hand, these cultural influences could be summarized as follows: The Western Church tends to focus on Baptism as a removal process for the guilt of original sin, whereas the Eastern Church puts a far greater emphasis on Baptism as an overcoming of death which came as a result of mankind’s first sin.

As was previously expressed, the twenty-three Eastern Catholic Churches and the Western Latin Church are all full members of the Catholic Communion, and therefore, all abide by the doctrine of the Catholic Church as laid out in the Catechism of the Catholic Church and other Vatican doctrinal works. This being said, the vast array of cultural, historical, and translational differences across these various Catholic rites means that the forms and particulars about how these doctrines are taught and acted out differ greatly.

⁶² George Appleyard, *Light of the East*, 23.

⁶³ Ibid, 23.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) refers to a significant text put forth into the Catholic Church in an effort to sum up her beliefs. It was undertaken in 1985 at the request of John Paul II and, after several years of work, was promulgated by the Pope on 11 October 1992, the 30th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council. Referencing works from both Augustine and Aquinas, the Catechism defines sin as “an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience” and as “a failure in genuine love for God.”⁶⁴ Baptism, within the Catholic Church, is intended for the remission, forgiveness, of sins. In this, the various rites of Catholicism are in accord. However, the Catechism, drawing back to the Council of Florence, also states that “By Baptism all sins are forgiven, original sin and all personal sins, as well as all punishment for sin.”⁶⁵ It is at this point, however, that things begin to get a bit confusing.

Within Byzantine theology, which accounts for a large percentage of the Eastern rites, but not all, there is a key emphasis on the idea of sin as being a personal act. According to Eastern theologian John Meyendorff, this is because “when the human person...by rebelling against God and nature misuses its freedom, it can distort the ‘natural will’ and thus corrupt nature itself.”⁶⁶ Despite this, “sin is always a personal act, never an act of nature.”⁶⁷ In other words, the inherent humanness of a person does not incline them towards sin. This is in stark opposition to the Western Catholic understanding of concupiscence. Concupiscence is defined in the Catechism as “an

⁶⁴ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed, (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2012), no. 1849.

⁶⁵ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1263.

⁶⁶ John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes*, (New York, Fordham University Press, 1999), 143.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 143.

inclination towards evil” which is a direct result of “original sin.”⁶⁸ This difference in theological angles is a direct result of the Augustinian influence upon the Western Church. This is a significant point of contention within Christianity as a whole specifically because Augustine is a contested character within Christian theology.

For those within the Western Catholic Church, Augustine is regarded as a great theologian and saint. Within the Orthodox Eastern tradition, many thinkers revile both Augustine and his teachings. This leaves many of the Eastern Catholic Rites in a rather uncomfortable position since although they are Catholic in every definition of the word, they are also Eastern, and as a result, have much in common with the theological and cultural perspectives of other eastern Christian sects. In the section of the Catechism addressing “the consequences of Adam’s sin for humanity,” the writers indicate that “The Church’s teachings on the transmission of original sin was articulated more precisely in the fifth century especially under the impulse of St. Augustine’s reflections against Pelagianism.”⁶⁹ This is certainly true, but complicated by Meyendorff’s claim that, “In the Byzantine world, where Augustinian thought exercised practically no influence, the significance of the sin of Adam and of its consequences for mankind was understood along quite different lines.”⁷⁰

One important difference caused by this Augustinian divide can be seen in the Eastern Church’s emphasis on the personal nature of sin. Within Byzantine theology, there is “no place...for the concept of inherited guilt...although it admits that human

⁶⁸ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 405.

⁶⁹ Ibid, no. 406.

⁷⁰ John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 143.

nature incurs the consequences of Adam's sin."⁷¹ To give you a bit of insight into some of the rationale behind these differences, I want to take a moment to look at a tiny translational issue in Paul's letter to the Romans which sparked much of this controversy. In the Greek version of Paul's letter to the Romans line 5:12 states, "As sin came into the world through one man, and through sin, death, so death spread to all men *because all man have sinned* [*eph ho pantes hemarton*]."⁷² Meyendorff explains that in the Latin Vulgate translation of the text, those final four words were translated as "*in quo omnes peccaverunt* ('in whom [i.e., in Adam] all men have sinned')."⁷³ That slight switch from 'because' to 'in whom' makes quite the difference inasmuch as it directly points to the issue of humanity's potential guilt for Adam's sin. Therefore, Latins tend "to view the relationships between sin and death in a more juridical sense. That is, death is punishment."⁷⁴ In Appleyard's words, "This led Saint Anselm to say that the purpose of the Incarnation was to produce a suitable victim for a sacrifice which would appease the justice of God. Through his death Jesus pays the ransom for our offenses."⁷⁵ Many of the cultural differences seen between Eastern and Western treatment of Adam's sin, and therefore the meaning of Baptism and Christ's resurrection, to small translational issues like this one, as well as larger theological treatises like the writings of Augustine. In the most basic sense, Latins chose one, and Byzantines chose the other.

⁷¹ John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 143.

⁷² Ibid, 144.

⁷³ Ibid, 144.

⁷⁴ George Appleyard, *Light of the East*, 45.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 45.

Obviously, these are complex theological issues that have been examined in extreme depth by members of the Church hierarchy over the years. Otherwise the Eastern and Western Catholic Churches would not be in full communion. If you examine the Catechism in great detail and with a decent understanding of this Latin/Byzantine context, you can see where the confusion and variance have been worked out over the last several hundred years. For example, in the same section we have been examining, the Catechism, referencing the Council of Trent, specifies that Adam “committed a *personal sin*,” which “is why original sin is called ‘sin’ only in an analogical sense: it is a sin ‘contracted’ and not ‘committed’ – a state and not an act” and goes on to say that “original sin does not have the character of personal fault in any of Adam’s descendants.”⁷⁶

As a result of this doctrinal accordance, the sacrament of Baptism within all rites of the Catholic Church is synonymous, meaning it does the same thing for the same theological reason. That does not mean, however, that the actual ritual aspects and the cultural understandings of said sacrament are identical across rites. This reality is shown implicitly in the Catechism, wherein it outlines the “essential rite of the sacrament” and the “most expressive way” in which it can be performed, but goes on to note some of the more obvious differences seen in Eastern and Western practices of the sacrament. For example, in the Latin Church, the baptismal minister says, “[Name], I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”⁷⁷ In contrast, “in the Eastern

⁷⁶ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 404-405.

⁷⁷ Ibid, no. 1240.

liturgies the catechumen turns toward the East and the priest says: "The servant of God, [Name], is baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."⁷⁸ This direct avoidance of active verbiage by the Eastern Catholic Church is interesting, in that it seems to implicitly place God as the conductor of the sacrament, as opposed to the priest himself. In other words, by avoiding saying "I," the Eastern baptismal tradition points directly towards God in a way that remains more implicit in the Latin tradition.

The cultural differences I have been speaking of with regard to baptism are a little harder to pin down, but just as important to my argument. Meyendorff helps summarize the Eastern context when he claims that in Byzantine theology, "the Church baptizes children, not to 'remit' their yet nonexistent sins, but in order to give them new and immortal *life*, which their mortal parents are unable to communicate to them. The opposition between the two Adams is seen in terms not of guilt and forgiveness, but of death and life."⁷⁹ Though much of Meyendorff's writing has a significantly anti-Western tone, his claim that Western Christianity focuses more on the issue of "guilt and forgiveness" than on the issue of "life and death" has proven true in my own experience. Indeed, the popular colloquial term, Catholic Guilt, says quite a bit about how sin, and therefore baptism, are viewed within the overwhelmingly predominant Western Catholic Church.

⁷⁸ Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1240.

⁷⁹ John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 146.

Chapter 5: Reflection and conclusion.

This final chapter, in my estimation, is both the most limited in scope and the most personally meaningful. My developing and ongoing relationship with the Catholic Community of SS. Cyril and Methodius is one of the most important and influential faith experiences I have ever had. Though I had attended several Divine Liturgies over the past several years, as part of my thesis research I decided it would be beneficial for me to fully immerse myself in the community during their 2019 Pascha week. Taking place the week after the Latin Church's Easter week, SS. Cyril and Methodius' Pascha week was truly a life-changing experience for me in several ways.

When I first became interested in the Eastern Catholic Church, I had no idea what to expect from such a community. I have always loved visiting different places of worship and encountering religious traditions that differ from my own, but I am also extremely nervous every time I attempt to make such an encounter. Most of the experiences I have had in the past visiting mosques or other such locations were done in a group with a pre-planned visit and some kind of tour. Because most of the work I was planning to do with the community of SS. Cyril and Methodius was going to be entirely by myself, I had no idea what to expect going in.

The community at SS. Cyril and Methodius is one of the most welcoming I have ever encountered. Whether this is simply an aspect of their community in particular or the Eastern Catholic Churches at large I cannot say, but what I do know is that I have never walked into a community more excited to meet me than this one. The community, at its

largest, cannot be more than thirty persons, including the many small children present. Thus, when a new person walks in to be a part of the Divine Liturgy, everyone is well aware. Generally Lisa, a woman very involved in the running of the community who seems to be a chaplain of sorts, will come over to greet you and hand you a large pamphlet on the Divine Liturgy, so you can follow along. She assures you to “just ask” if you have any questions.

After their regular Sunday Divine Liturgy, there is always a meal. Valentina’s teenage sons roll out a few folding tables and chairs. Everyone will have brought something to share, anything from sushi to stuffed Ukrainian meat rolls, to bottles of Stella Artois. The priest, the deacon and everyone else in attendance will sit down to catch up with one another, and if you are new, get to know you. When I have brought friends in the past, the first question Ralf wants to ask is whether they are Roman Catholic. From there, no matter your answer, he will then proceed to ask whether they have ever heard of Byzantine Catholics before and then launch into a long speech on a whole host of interesting topics.

During their week of Pascha, I was able to attend four of the six available prayer services. On Wednesday evening, we participated in the Matins and Holy Unction of Holy Thursday. This event was an hour and a half of psalms, odes, hymns, litanies, and several readings, all sung, with a large focus on the coming role of Judas. As I had an 8 a.m. final the next morning, I snuck out rather quickly after this one.

I attended another smaller service from 8:00 to 9:45 Friday morning. When I first arrived, the only others present were Fr. Chrys and the choir. Thankfully, a handful of

other community members made it, and I was able to follow along. This service consisted predominantly of twelve readings, none of which were abbreviated as far as I could tell, and a short hymn sung between each. Before and after each reading, the congregation participated in a full body prostration, kneeling and dropping one's forehead to the floor. Although repetitive at times, I found great beauty and an almost meditative quality in this practice.

Friday evening my friend Alexis and I were blessed to participate in a Good Friday ritual I have never before seen. As part of the chanting and singing with which I have become familiar, there was also a procession with the ceremonial burial shroud. Alexis and I were asked to help carry two corners of the shroud, as the entire congregation processed out of the chapel and made a circuit of the patio outside. Though we were small in number and our procession was rather limited, I could not help thinking of how beautiful such a procession must be in Eastern Europe, where the Russian Greek Catholic communities are far larger and likely process all through their towns and villages. Next we were asked to hold the shroud up high, as all the attendees passed under it and back into the chapel.

Though these experiences were beautiful and significantly different than my typical Easter week, the really powerful event occurred on Sunday morning. My alarm went off at 4:45am, which allowed me to arrive at about 5:31am for the 5:30 sunrise service. We began with songs and chants, as usual and conducted another procession around the patio, this time chanting, "Christ is risen from the dead, / trampling down death by death, / and on those in the tombs bestowing life!" This short verse, repeating

over and over as we made out circuit, drew me back to my initial question for this thesis: what can the Western Catholic Church learn from her Eastern sister Churches? And this was my answer: the joy I experienced during this nearly three hour Easter service was astounding. At various points, Fr. Chrys would call out “Christ is Risen!” in a variety of languages and the whole community would respond in the same language, “Indeed he is Risen,” each time with the most authentic excitement. Unlike the Easter Masses I have attended over the years where people pile in to get seats so they can leave as soon as possible, or even the Easter Vigil Masses where people start to nod off about ninety minutes in, everyone there was absolutely thrilled to be there and witness the triumph of the Christ.

Part way through the service (which was a long series of vespers followed by a Divine Liturgy), Fr. Chrys invited us all to participate in the Kiss of Peace. In my own Latin Catholic upbringing, this typically consists of shaking hands with three or so people and then waving awkwardly at people you can’t easily reach. This was not the case on Pascha. We all filed into a single file line and brushed cheeks three times (right, left, right) with every person in attendance. Though initially uncomfortable, this practice really summarizes the experience I have had with the Russian Greek Catholic Community at Regis. Everyone is welcomed fully, joyfully, and authentically to be a part of the worship and community.

When the Divine Liturgy was concluded, Alexis and I received some ribbing for having “made it through the whole thing,” but were invited specifically by no more than six people to come to the breakfast being hosted by one of the families immediately after.

After a quick stop to buy some strawberries to contribute, we arrived at the party and stayed for the next three hours. Here we were asked questions, but were also told various stories of how different members found the community and how much it means to them.

Though most of the members are officially Latin Catholics, a few converted from Russian Orthodoxy, and all the children (eight under the age of six) are officially Byzantine Catholic. Several of the members are going through the process of getting Archbishop Aquila's permission to officially transition into the Russian Greek Catholic Church. They fed us, gave us celebratory vodka, and made sure we were involved in the conversations being held.

As I said previously, I cannot say whether their welcoming nature simply reflects this particular community or the Eastern Catholic Churches at large. What I do know is that, after spending this past week with them, I will be coming back next year, and when I eventually move, they are going to be the thing I miss most about Denver.

Looking back towards Diana Eck alongside whom I began this journey, I am struck by both how similar and how different our journeys turned out to be. While Eck traveled across the world to encounter a tradition completely foreign to her own, I only traveled a relatively short distance and encountered simply another facet of my own religious tradition. I think Eck would agree with me in saying though that neither of these journeys was better or more meaningful than the other.

Interfaith, or intrafaith as the case may be, is not something you can practice from behind a desk. Rather, as has been taught to me over the past four years at Regis and experienced more fully through this thesis, you must make yourself part of the change. I

have learned so much from the Eastern Catholic tradition, and I am deeply grateful for this opportunity to grow in my own faith. I can only hope going forward that I have the availability to share what I have learned with other Western Catholics who need to learn the same things I have.



Illustration 2 – Good Friday



Illustration 3 – Pascha Sunday

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