

## EASTERN CHRISTIANS IN NORTH AMERICA

During the workshop Petro B.T. Bilaniuk read the introductory remarks under the title "A Cultural Pseudomorphosis: The Latinization of the Eastern Catholics." The Rt. Rev. Archimandrite Boniface Luykx, Abbot of the Holy Transfiguration Monastery in Redwood Valley, California, S.T.D. from Louvain, and a *peritus* during Vatican II in the area of liturgy, ecumenism, and Eastern Churches, read a paper, "The Inculturation of Eastern Christian Monasticism in North America." A lively and extended discussion ensued after the Archimandrite's paper. A synopsis of both papers follows.

Bilaniuk commenced his remarks with a definition of "culture" based on reputable authors and the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World of Vatican II, especially section 53. Culture is central to all branches of human knowledge, creativity, ethos, *Weltanschauung*, religion, politics, etc. It seems that the best definition to date is that of A.L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (New York: Vintage Books, 1952; reprint 1963) 357:

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (that is to say historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action.

The process of inculturation is in a danger of *pseudomorphosis*. *Pseudomorph* (from Greek *pseudomorphos*, from *pseudēs* false and *morphē* form) is an irregular, deceptive, false or unclassifiable form, especially a mineral having the outer appearance, characteristic, or form, which is proper to another species of mineral, which it has replaced by chemical action, as, limonite which occurs as a pseudomorph after pyrite. *Pseudomorphosis* is the process by which a pseudomorph comes into being.

In culturology a *pseudomorphosis* designates an encounter of two disparate cultures, which are alien to each other and show a sign of incompatibility. Their encounter is artificial, lacks an organic fusion or growth, and produces a culture which is empty inside, but exhibits external characteristics of another culture.

As a result of a false inculturation, or cultural *pseudomorphosis*, many Eastern Catholic Churches developed pro-Latin and pro-Western orientation in theology, spirituality, liturgical practices and church art. Thus in many Eastern Catholic Churches there appeared the Way of the Cross. The *Akaphistos* and other services to the Holy, Honourable and Life-giving Cross started to recede into oblivion in spite of their liturgical beauty, profound theological content and superb spiritual

significance. There appeared also the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in Latin-type monstrances, which was accompanied by the so-called "supplication prayers." Those who were introducing these innovations were not aware that there is a blessing with the Most Holy Eucharistic species during the Byzantine and other Divine Liturgies after the Holy Communion. Thus came about an introduction of a certain divorce between the Divine Liturgy and the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, which is completely alien to the Eastern Christian mentality, understanding, and perception of mystery, especially in its liturgical dimension. Besides there appeared the rosary, which soon replaced the "chotki" and the recitation of the Jesus Prayer: "Jesus Christ, the Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner (or on us the sinners)." Further, the devotions to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and different types of novenas were shifting the devotion of the faithful from the spiritual to the more material realm, and from the liturgical and public worship to the private and "a-liturgical" or even "anti-liturgical" devotions. Thus the qualitative and spiritual perception of sacred reality shifted to quantitative and visible reality. The best example of this was introduction of the "Gregorian Masses," that is to say a series of thirty Masses over a period of thirty consecutive days, and an obligation to start again the series of thirty Masses if for any reason the sequence was interrupted. Also a pathological search for indulgences (plenary or otherwise) became an obsession of many Eastern Catholics, both laity and clergy, evidently to the tune of scandal and dismay of our Orthodox sisters and brothers. Therefore, these latinizing practices and influences of the Christian West were an ecumenical disaster, which prompted both Eastern Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox to drift apart culturally.

The same phenomenon of latinization and westernization occurred in all other areas of culture, for example Eastern Catholics started to abandon the traditional Byzantine form of architecture and started to follow into the footsteps of their Latin counterpart. The churches, consisting of a rectangle with a regular cross inscribed into it and covered by cupolas or rotundas, started to be "baroquecised" and then to disappear in favour of Western forms of architecture like romanesque, gothic, and especially rococo. Thus one of the most noble and aesthetic forms of architecture started to disappear. We must remember that the Byzantine architecture consisted of a rectangle with a regular cross inscribed into it. The roof was fashioned of cupolas or rotundas of which the central was the largest, the one uniting centre of the whole structure. Inside the main rotunda, a mosaic or a fresco of Christ the All-Ruler was placed. It constituted the central point of the whole church; and upon it all the other decorations converged, that is, frescos and icons were geared towards the central point in the main cupola. The church, shaped like a cross and covered with a dome, symbolized earth and heaven, or the cosmos supernaturally transfigured and divinized in the Holy Spirit. All the columns, which were crowned by marvellous capitols, were made of marble and decorated with inlays; further, mosaics, frescos, painted ornamentations, arabesques and sculptured reliefs created a harmonious whole, which presented one with a solemn and majestic atmosphere of life in the Holy Spirit.

With the loss of the understanding of the liturgy, architecture and iconography, which was replaced by Western religious art or paintings, came also the loss of the consistency and unity of the natural and the supernatural, of the heavenly and the earthly, of the divine and the human, of the eternal and the temporal, and

so on and so forth. The whole cultural and religious outlook or *Weltanschauung* of the Eastern Catholics started to change and assume a form of "uniatism," that is of an Eastern Catholic, who culturally is no longer orthodox, but who imitates Western and Latin-rite culture and becomes a "hybrid," that is to say unintelligible to the West, despised by the East, and totally uncertain about himself or herself.

Archimandrite Boniface started his paper with a distinction between "culture" and "civilization." This distinction is quite current in Europe, but not generally accepted in North America. "Culture" is primarily based on a spiritual world of ideas, values, morality, spirituality, religion, etc. It relies on tradition and patrimony. All symbols, artifacts and expressions of culture are positive in their value.

On the other hand, "civilization" is primarily a material aspect of human existence trying at all costs to liberate the human being towards an easy, free and comfortable life. Here little account is taken of the purity of nature, personal holiness and morality or other spiritual values. Thus civilization pollutes nature, exaggerates technological achievements, disregards social and cultural consequences, etc.

In fact, Americans are known all over the world for their imposition of an American civilization on others and their lack of culture. Paradoxically, many Americans are quite open to other cultures because of their sincerity and honesty.

In this scenario, a monastic Byzantine life is quite an important cultural institution, for it tries to transfigure, transform, and divinize the world. First of all, in everyday life we meet with secular sadness, which Eastern monasticism tries to transform into genuine Christian hope and joy. During the monastic exercises and life an Eastern monk or nun tries to live in the life of the Divine Truth and worship; to express the genuine Christian love and ontological goodness; to appreciate and create Beauty, which is a reflection of the infinite and Divine Beauty. All this leads one to the unspeakable and divine joy and a vision of reality, which no teacher can teach and no book can describe. This is the mystical experience which operates intuitively, without intermediate concepts or images, and which is a direct union with the Triadic God. Especially the preparation for death is an overcoming of fear and an expectation of "the falling asleep in the Lord" as the supremely joyous and liberating experience.

Today most Western monks and nuns are deeply involved in teaching, publishing, serving the community, peace and justice movements, etc. On the other hand, an Eastern monk or a nun is simply there for the divine and angelic life, for a total openness to the Triadic God. Eastern monasticism is free, constantly improvised, and not a strict institution governed by rules and regulations. The search for the presence and glorification of the Most Holy Trinity is the supreme goal and meaning of Eastern monastic existence.

In this context the Divine liturgical worship and the Holy Icons play the most important role. Thus the Holy Icons are "the doors to eternity," "windows of heaven," "the channels of the Divine graces," "theology in colour," etc. In fact they represent the angels and saints in heaven and make a meaningful dialogue with them possible, especially during the incensation which is an official meeting with them during the divine worship.

All this gives a special meaning to life, for monastics are trying to discover the eternal decrees of God the Father as the Creator and the Giver of Grace; the Lordship of the Risen and Exalted Lord Jesus Christ, the All-Ruler and the Saviour; and the mighty activity of the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of love of the charismata, gifts, and fruits.

The decay of culture is the loss of meaning. Therefore, Eastern Christian monasticism is a struggle to retain the meaning of life and culture by ascetic practices, fasting, silence, work, worship, and, finally, death. The ascetic practices and fasting, as instituted by the early church, are meant to glorify the Lord and exercise control over body and soul. Silence helps to hear clearly the voice of the Lord. Creative work or a labour in the field, or in the workshop, is an immediate effort to sanctify the whole of reality. Death is a mystery of joy, for it makes the union with the resurrected Lord possible. Here we have a mystical identification with the Lord in its eschatological dimension.

Eastern monasticism is based on memory and tradition. It stands in the continuity with the wisdom of the Fathers of the church and it is a reenactment of the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the God-man and Saviour. Here one must stress the importance of the Jesus prayer, which is a prayer of the heart based on love and an internal discipline (which is not military!).

The monastic community is there to share the mysteries of Christianity with others. It is also a congregation of privileged souls, for they are part of the Divine Family. Here the motherhood of the Theotokos Mary plays an important role, for it teaches the monastics of the right respect for women as mothers and virgins. Here an abbot or an abbess are spiritual father or mother.

There must be in Eastern monasticism a cosmic sharing with the Angels and Saints, as well as a positive attitude towards all creatures of God. Thus monks and nuns must have a great respect towards environment and nature.

During the lively discussion Archimandrite Boniface praised Byzantine and Eastern Christian music that lifts up the heart of the human being to God. Further, he classified the American human material as very good for Eastern monastic life. There are some difficulties, however, for Americans find it difficult to obey and are expecting instant results. They lack patience and endurance. Once they overcome these initial difficulties, they can become excellent monks and nuns.

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