

Concerning Ritual Matters

Metropolitan Andrew Sheptytsky

April 13, 1931

By the grace of God and the blessing of the Apostolic See, The Metropolitan of Halych, to the Clergy of the Province of Halychyna:

Two very important events in the development of our Church, that have occurred in recent times, compel us to speak on a matter that not only must, to a great degree, concern all the priests of our Province, but from the correct addressing of which, as well, will directly depend the entire future of our Rite and the entire labor which we will be able, with the help of God's grace, to perform in the apostolate of the return of our separated brethren to the bosom of the Holy Catholic Church.

The first event is the appointment of an Apostolic Visitor for all the parishes of the Oriental Rite within the boundaries of Poland, with the exclusion of our ecclesiastical Province, in the person of the Most Reverend Kyr Nicholas Charnetsky, a monk of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (Redemptorists), a former priest of our ecclesiastical Province. This appointment of an Apostolic Visitor and, no less importantly, the choice of person to whom the Holy Father has entrusted this most important office, we regard as a new and significant proof of the Vicar of Christ's affection for us. The very fact that the Holy Father wishes to be directly and most fully informed about the entire situation of the Union in Poland is, for us all, a great comfort, and confirms in us the hope that the matter of the Holy Union will be so addressed and resolved by the Apostolic See as the true good of our Church and our people demand.

Bishop Nicholas is a religious who is completely dedicated to the matter of Union, a man who has long worked beyond the bounds of our ecclesiastical Province, who understands, in God's way and light, the needs and the difficulties of work for Church Union among the Ukrainian and the Belorussian people, and who, without doubt, will be able to fulfill worthily the office of Visitor entrusted to him.

His office, as was mentioned, does not apply to our ecclesiastical Province; and so, though we give expression to our joy at his appointment, we do not have the possibility of welcoming him among us, while at the same time we do not have a reason to express the hope and the desire that this new turn in the development of the Union in Poland will bring any benefits to our ecclesiastical Province.

Our participation in the matter of Union beyond the bounds of our Province does not change because of the appointment of the Apostolic Visitor, and it is not likely that it will change in the near future. The affairs of our ecclesiastical Province belong in Rome, to the competence of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches, and the affairs of the Union in Poland beyond the boundaries of our Province belong to the competence of the Commission "Pro Russia," that is, for

the territories which once belonged to the Russian empire. However, the appointment as Visitor of a man who, before his entrance into religious life, belonged to the clergy of our ecclesiastical Province, is an event that is very comforting to all of us; but it is also an event that forces us to re-examine the conditions under which we can eventually contribute to the return to church unity of our separated brothers in the areas of Volhynia, Podliasha, Polisia, and Belorussia. Bishop Nicholas belonged always to those priests who know how to evaluate appropriately the traditions of the Union and the work of long generations of our clergy in this matter; a man who vividly understood how precious and important are these traditions of the Union; a man who devoutly preserves all our ritual, ecclesiastical, and national customs, which are the heritage of the first centuries of Christianity among our people. Bishop Nicholas was always a "ritualist" of the best kind: attached to all the traditions, he appreciated their significance, but he also understood their relative weight or value in pastoral work. When, already as a monk, he was, in religious obedience, assigned to work in Volhynia, he, together with his confreres of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, was immediately ready to adapt himself, in all ritual details, to the needs of the people for whom he was to work. He realized that some of our more recent customs in Halychyna were such that they might prove detrimental to this work.

The second of the events that are, for us, very significant is that we authentically learn that in Rome they have recognized as to the purpose to observe the Eastern Rite in its entirety beyond the boundaries of Halychyna, while the form of the Rite practised in Halychyna has been judged too constricting and unsuitable for work among the Orthodox. We knew that the missionaries of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, who have been working for a long time in Volhynia, had been observing most faithfully and most meticulously all the rituals exactly as they were practiced in that territory by the clergy and the people of Volhynia, in no way introducing anything whatsoever, even the least of those modifications which from the times of the Union, by law and without law, were introduced among us. Whether or not the Redemptorist Fathers were following, in this matter, guidelines given them by Rome, this We did not know. Though their work was very close to Our heart, We did not, on principle, interfere in it, not having, after the conclusion of the Concordat, any canonical authorization for it, and not wishing by any, even allowable, participation whatsoever, to bring down on myself or on them any kind of suspicion. In any case, the Redemptorist Fathers, adapting themselves in Volhynia, in everything, to the local Rite used in the churches of the so-called Orthodox Church, acted correctly; and they could not, nor ought they have, acted otherwise, even if they had no instructions or guidelines from Rome: Catholic doctrine, being the doctrine of Christ's Gospel and of the Universal Church, is a doctrine for the whole world, destined for all nations and all times; and the preachers of this doctrine, perhaps more so in the East than anywhere else, must avoid identifying Christ's doctrine with, or limiting it to, any kind of national or ritual principles whatsoever.

We say "more so in the East than anywhere else" because it is precisely mostly the Eastern people and the Eastern Churches, and nations educated by those

Churches, that lack the understanding of the universality of Christ's doctrine. To them it appears that only their own form is the true form of Christianity, and that Catholicism, in its essence, is bound up with the Latin Rite and with the West. In their understanding, to become a Catholic is not that which it is in reality: to receive the universal doctrine of Christ and to acknowledge the universal authority of the Pope, but is to accept the Western Rite and, in addition to that, to accept some sort of western national mentality. In our parts, to become Catholic is, for the Orthodox, to become Polish.

The first thing to bring them closer to, or to win them over for, the Catholic Church, is to help them understand that they do not have to change anything of their ecclesiastical or ritual or national traditions and customs — that they can become Catholics and observe in everything their rites, as they have observed them until now, without any changes whatsoever.

This was always the mode of conduct on the part of Rome with regard to the Eastern peoples who submitted to the authority of the Apostolic See.

However, Orientals, Eastern Christians, after they have accepted the universal faith and submitted to the authority of the Universal Pontiffs, retain something of the false impressions that they had before re-union. They sometimes still consider that the Latin Rite, in whole or in part, is connected essentially with the Catholic Faith. Under the influence of this, their false impression — and also under the influence of the similarly false impression of certain Catholics and Latin-Riters who live among Eastern Christians and with all their strength attempt to force upon the Orientals either the whole or at least some portion of the Latin Rite — the Eastern Catholics remain suspended, as it were, in mid-journey; and just as they did before Union, so also they do in Union: they attach to Catholic doctrine some particular customs borrowed from Latinity. To these particular customs they falsely attribute, not catholically, a dogmatic significance, and in this way they make judgments about Rites and about people uncatholically.

If, among those who have already acknowledged the authority of the Universal Pontiff and have received the universal faith — i.e., among Catholics who are called Uniates or Unitists, the opinion is formed that to the essence of their union with Rome belong certain ritual forms accepted from the Latin Rite, just as, in accord with the unstable thinking of the disunited, the Eastern Rite belongs to the essence of disunion, then such an opinion of theirs, which flows from the ancient false conception that supposedly the Latin Rite belongs in essence to the Catholic Church, does not correspond either to the spirit of the Catholic Church in regard to the Eastern Christians, or to the catholic spirit of the Eastern Christians and this error is, at least, most essential in all the so-called Uniates. Not infrequently, misunderstanding the Catholic spirit and the Catholic Church, they submit to the influences of the Latin Rite, or to the national ideals or customs of some Western nation, and begin gradually to consider as matters inseparably connected with Catholic doctrine certain customs or practices or rites which have absolutely nothing in common with Catholic teaching. There are, for example, people who are ready to consider as a matter of some dogmatic significance the recitation after Divine Liturgy of the "Hail Mary" three times, or something similar.

Evidently, by so doing, they create a caricature of Catholic doctrine, and this false judgment they incorporate into all their labor. For them, to be Catholic does not mean to accept the universal doctrine of Christ and submit to the authority of the Supreme Pontiffs, but merely to observe such particular, provincial, parochial customs, which hold sway, virtually, under one solitary belfry. Obviously, such a narrowness of perspective on their part makes them completely inappropriate for the work of Union, and often causes them to be, even, detrimental to this work; and they should not be allowed to do this work, because how can they guide people to the universal spirit of the Catholic Church if they themselves do not have that same universal spirit?

This does not mean that we should condemn all the legitimate changes which the Provincial Synods introduced into our ecclesiastical Province in accord with the needs of the time and of the people. However, such ritual modifications, introduced lawfully by the Synods of Zamostia and Lviv, are not many. But, on the other hand, there are, in our life, very many ritual customs that are unlawfully introduced and unaccepted by all — or, what is worse, much ritual carelessness — which make of our Rite a caricature. Therefore, in a system that dogmatizes every change and modification, it becomes indispensable that people of this type not be allowed to work for Union. Our Church Province has come to this, that narrowmindedness in the understanding of certain rites, and on unchurchly and uncatholic spirit in their application, has become a general danger. Without a new provincial Synod there can be no talk about abrogating and removing those decisions of the Synods of Zamostia or Lviv, by which our Church Province lawfully introduced certain ritual modifications.

If there are any other generally accepted customs—perhaps approved by ecclesiastical authority in no other way than by mere silence, customs that met with the approval and acceptance of the people, to which the people have become accustomed and which they treasure, then, evidently, they cannot be changed or abrogated by the priest himself, because such customs can, by the licit approval of Church authority, become lawful customs. Nevertheless, in all other matters we must conscientiously and carefully observe every rite, even the tiniest, and as much as possible adapt them to traditional Eastern forms which, with us, it is sad to say, are slowly being lost through carelessness. Catholic spirit, obedience to the Catholic Church, and the need to be ready for the call when the time comes to work for our separated brothers and sisters, demand of us that we all be ritualist, and not merely observe faithfully what has been until now prescribed and obligatory, but also revitalize our characteristically unique traditional customs which, either totally or in part, are being lost. To observe the Rite in this way is mandated even by liturgical and scientific considerations alone.

It is neither reasonable nor respectful to disregard the minute rubrical prescriptions, nor, also, to make of the Rite some grotesque hodge-podge which has no sense whatsoever, neither liturgical nor scientific. One cannot, for example, condone such Latinization as has in recent times been introduced in the territory of Kholmschyna by certain priests who kneel during the Divine Liturgy, give absolution in Latin, and strive to approximate as much as possible the Latin

Rite. And it is, then, simply sinful to disregard the prescribed form merely because it is more convenient not to observe it. Anyone who on principle always blesses himself with the whole hand and always only once, anyone who consistently, without any reason whatsoever, refuses to use the kopia, or spear, during proskomedia, anyone who before the Divine Liturgy does not recite the prayers in front of the iconostas, or commits other such similar omissions and carelessness — whose number is countless — such a one sins through carelessness, by not observing the prescriptions, and makes of our Rite a sorry caricature.

But it is not the consideration of the beauty of the Liturgy and the dignity of the Divine Service, nor the consideration of the style of the Rite, nor even the consideration of the individual prescriptions which must be conscientiously observed, but incomparably loftier and broader motives that demand from us such a sense of Rite — a Ritualism, or Rite-fullness. This sense of Rite on our part is necessary for the sake of the Catholic Church, because without it we can not only not serve the Catholic Church in the work of bringing our separated brethren back to union with the Church, but we will simply hinder the Church in this work. Ritualism is necessary, too, for ourselves as well: we must absolutely cease imitating, copying; we must be ourselves, be what we are, because only thus can we give something to the Church, do something for It.

It may be that there are many Catholics who would like nothing better than to see that we are not allowed to work for Union. Many might wish to see us confined and restricted to Halychyna, preoccupied with internal dissensions, sentenced to an eternal unfruitfulness, and inactive in matters that pertain to the Universal Church. However, in no way does this lie in our interest or the interest of the Catholic Church to provide these our friends with the strongest argument, that we really are such as they would wish to see us — i.e., incapable of work for Union and detrimental to it.

We must faithfully preserve all our ancient ritual and ecclesial traditions. This does not mean that we must accept some kind of unfamiliar and foreign to us rites of the Russian Synodal Church. But when, among our ancient and worthy traditions, are found certain customs that are preserved also in the Synodal Church, then this must not be the reason for us to neglect these our own ancient customs.

And we cannot go to our own people with a program of scorn, or even ridicule, for all that is native, all that is Eastern, all that is ours, all that is unique to us, all that our ancestors passed on to us; because by such a representation of the matter we would make the truth of Christ's teaching odious to them. Even less can we go with such a program to our separated brothers and sisters, because they might value their ritual customs more highly than their faith.

Of course, they must be brought to an understanding that they should place their faith in first place. But will we achieve this by ridiculing their customs? Or rather will we not run the risk that they will also hate us and the doctrine which we would wish to transmit to them?

For that matter, it is incorrect to put faith in contradistinction with Rite. Rite is the profession of faith, and, evidently, without faith, Rite has no value; but, then, faith without a profession of that faith — without that most important work of faith which is solemn profession — is also dead and without meaning. The separation of the celebration of divine services from faith, and the setting of one in opposition to the other, is a Protestant idea.

The program of Saint Paul — "to become everything to everyone" — compels us. Thus, in order to gain the Orientals for God and Church, we must ourselves be Orientals, Eastern Christians, or become Eastern. Evidently, the more we will be concerned about the ritual traditions of our people, the more intensely will we have to work at giving our people a Catholic awareness, i.e., an awareness of belonging to the Universal Church and an attachment to, and a love for, that Church and Its visible Head, the Roman Pontiff, to all the laws and teachings of the Church.

To this Catholic awareness and this attachment to the Catholic Church we must strive by all possible means. If this awareness and this attachment among our people is increased by devotion to the Most Sacred Heart, to the Immaculate Virgin Mary, then we will boldly encourage our people to this devotion and love; but in this devotion to the Heart of Christ we will avoid a blind imitation only of that which we see in the kostely, the Latin churches. Devotion to the Heart of Christ or to the Immaculate Conception can equally well take a Western as well as an Eastern form. Why not adapt them to our Rite? Why not give them Oriental-Byzantine forms?

Our Rite more and more often is called, both by the Roman Curia as well as by theologians of the Catholic world, the Byzantine Rite. This name is justified by the fact that Byzantium gave our Rite its definitive form and that we received this Rite from Byzantium. And if it is so, can we, then, use the term Byzantinism only for that which is not good in the tradition of the Byzantine Church? Of course, among those traditions are the schisms of Photius and Cerularius; in those traditions are the too-far-going demands of Caesaro-Papism. All that, evidently, we reject and we condemn. But can we direct that condemnation and rejection to the entire Rite and by the same token reject both, the Rite with the schism?

In the traditions of Byzantinism there are not a few things which we cannot approve, precisely as, in the West, too, and in the history of the Western Churches, there are certain tendencies contrary to the spirit of the Catholic Church — such as Gallicanism, Josephinism, Americanism — with which we cannot agree. Above all, such evil and false Byzantinism is the dogmatization of ritual, the ascribing of dogmatic significance to ritual forms. It appears strange, at times, how people who step out most against Byzantinism turn out to be the most obstinate Byzantinists themselves in ascribing dogmatic significance to petty — and sometimes unlawful — customs that have neither legal nor pastoral foundation, and in proclaiming as schismatics the best of Catholics only because they, in their Creed, or profession of faith, refuse to insert uncanonical additions.

Anyone who attaches inordinate, almost dogmatic significance to any kind of minute ritual practices does not differ much from the Orthodox batiushka-priest of Tsarist times who with pathos asserted that the broad cuffs of his riassa robe have "dogmatic significance" — dogmaticheskoje znachenije. Evidently, such an assertion is absurd Byzantinism at its worst. Nonetheless, to cure such a person, one must begin with more important matters: one must guide him to the universal faith and submission to the authority of the Pope — and then, maybe not even knowing when, such a man will understand that one can wear narrow cuffs and still be pleasing to God. For when, against Byzantinism with broad cuffs and bearded, one goes into battle with exactly the same type of Byzantinism, but with narrow cuffs and clean-shaven — then rarely, if ever, will one convince him of the authenticity of Catholic doctrine! If we are going to fight, with stubborn insistence on petty details — against the two-meter-long sign of the cross of the Old Ritualists, the double alleluia, such and such fasts — then we shall multiply difficulties to the extent that we will be unable even to think of coming to any kind of unity. Only the breadth of Christ's perspective, only His universality of doctrine can become the healing balsam, or miro, for Byzantinism both Eastern and Western.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of You! Amen.

Given at Our Arch-Cathedral Church of the Great and Holy Martyr George, on April 13, 1931, on the second day of the Feast of the Resurrection of Christ,

ANDREW, Metropolitan