

History and Theology: Fr. Philip Gilbert

Come & See Series – February 13, 2026

I. Reframing the Question: Moving Beyond “What Are the Differences?”

Fr. Philip opens by challenging the most common Western framing of Eastern Christianity: “What are the differences?” He argues that this question assumes Roman Catholicism as normative and Eastern Catholicism as deviation. Instead, he insists that both Roman and Byzantine traditions emerge from the same apostolic foundation. The correct starting point is not comparison but history—specifically the Great Commission.

Key Clarifications

- Eastern Christianity is not a variant of Roman Catholicism.
- Both traditions are apostolic.
- Cultural diversity developed organically.
- Comparison without history leads to distortion.

“What is the difference between Italian food and Chinese food?”

The metaphor illustrates:

- Both are authentic.
- Both share basic elements.
- Neither is derivative of the other.
- Cultural context shapes development.

Section Summary

Fr. Philip reframes the discussion: Eastern Catholicism must be understood through apostolic history and cultural development, not through deviation from Latin norms.

II. Apostolic Foundations: The Three “C’s”

Christian diversity begins with Christ's command in Matthew 28:19. After Pentecost (Acts 2), the Apostles dispersed across the Mediterranean and beyond, carrying not uniform liturgical books but a living tradition.

Apostolic Missions

- **St. Peter & St. Paul** – Rome (martyred under Nero)
- **St. Andrew** – Black Sea region, linked to Byzantium
- **St. Mark** – Alexandria
- **St. Thomas** – India
- **St. James** – Spain
- **St. Bartholomew** – Armenia
- **Sts. Cyril & Methodius (9th c.)** – Slavic lands

The Three “C’s”

Creed

- The apostolic proclamation of Christ.
- Trinitarian faith.
- Living memory before textual codification.

Cult

- Eucharist.
- Baptism.
- Anointing.
- Confession.
- Corporate worship.

Code

- Christian moral life.
- Martyrdom.
- Visible holiness.

“They did not bring a liturgical book... They carried the Gospel in their hearts.”

Section Summary

The Apostles transmitted faith, worship, and life—not uniformity. Diversity began at the missionary frontier.

III. The Baptism of Culture

Christianity does not erase culture; it transfigures it. This process of inculturation explains the emergence of ritual families.

Examples

- Copts retained Coptic language.
- Syriacs developed poetic Semitic theology.
- Greeks articulated theology philosophically.
- Slavs received the Glagolitic alphabet (Cyril & Methodius).

“The culture was baptized.”

Section Summary

Liturgical diversity is not fragmentation but the fruit of evangelization.

IV. Patriarchates and the Development of Rites

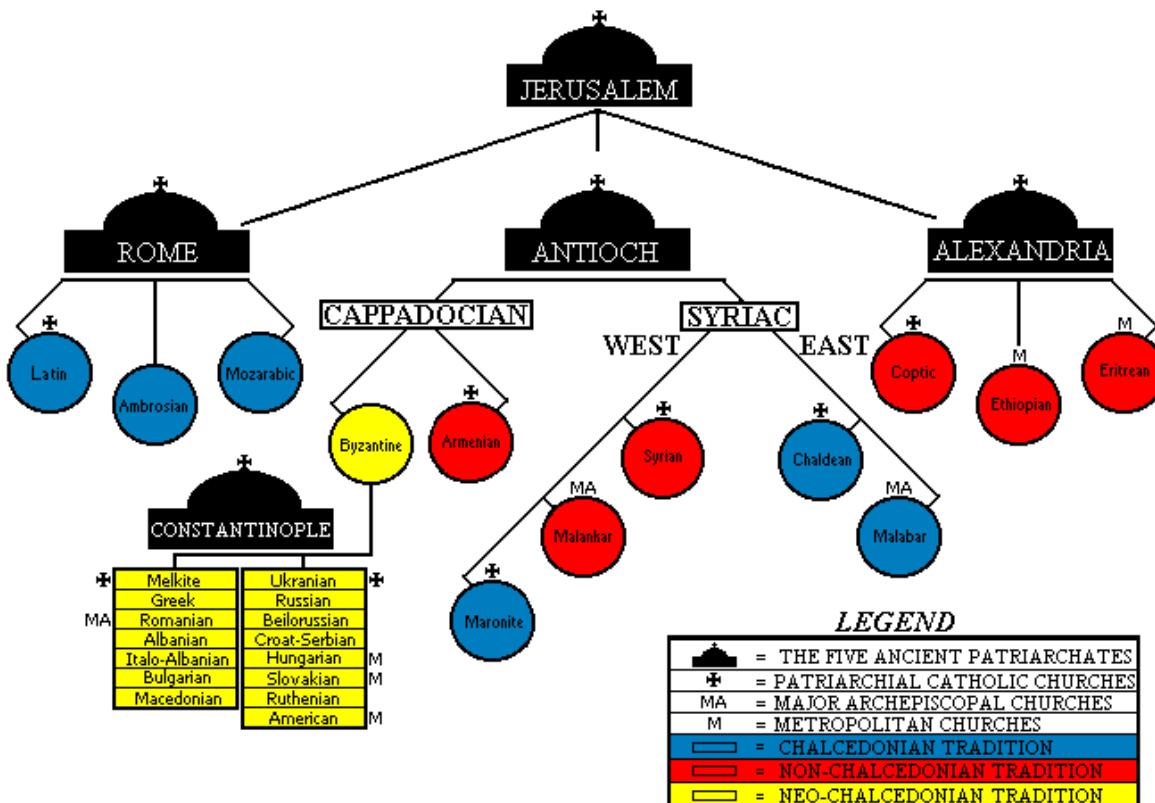
As Christianity expanded, major cities became ecclesial centers.



The Five Patriarchates

1. Rome
2. Constantinople (New Rome, founded by Constantine)
3. Alexandria
4. Antioch
5. Jerusalem

Each developed distinctive theological and liturgical traditions.



J. D. G.

Definition of Rite (Eastern Canon Law)

A rite includes:

- Liturgical patrimony
- Theology
- Spirituality
- Discipline
- Historical and cultural circumstances

Today the Catholic Church consists of 24 sui iuris Churches, including:

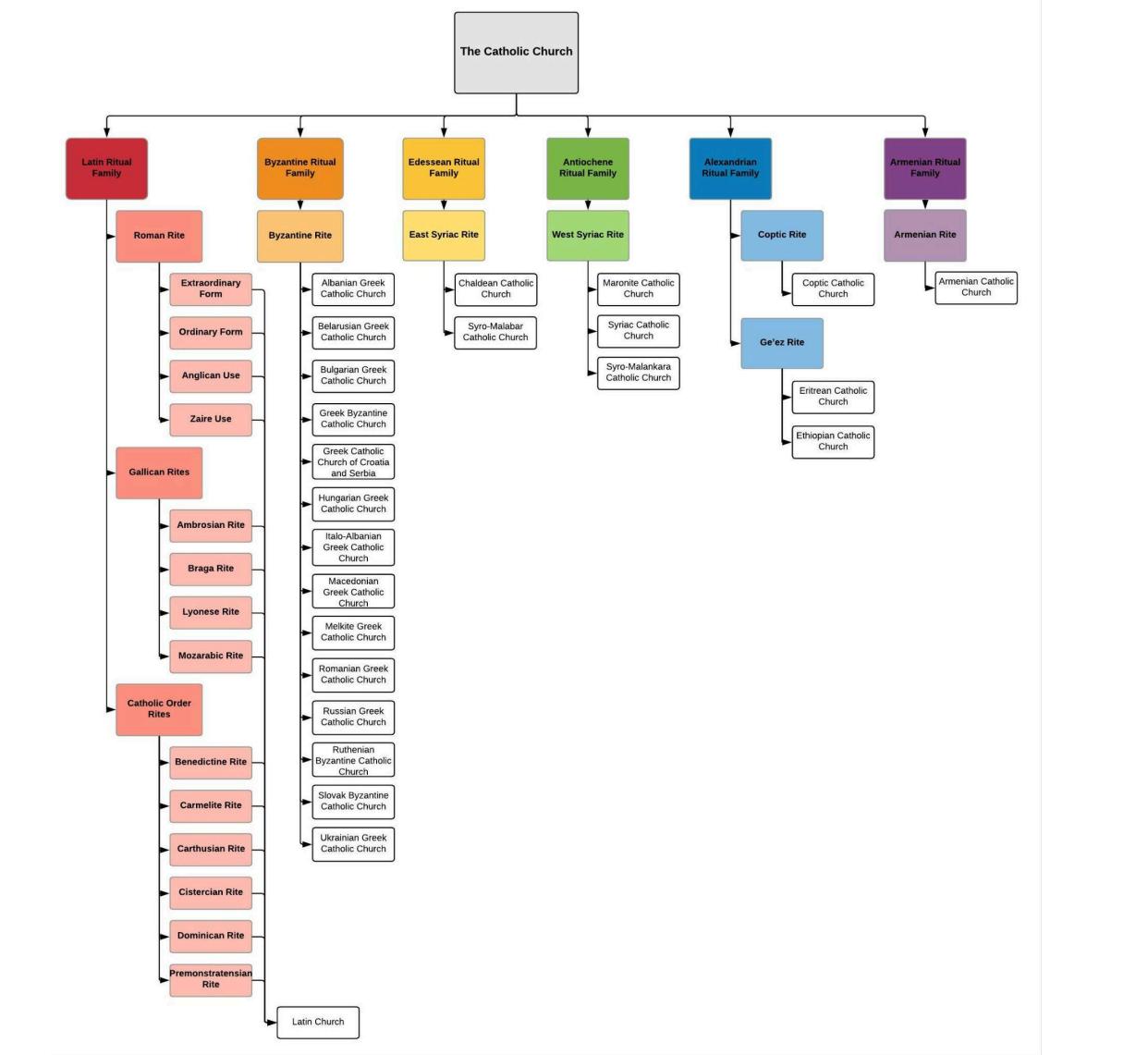
- Roman Catholic

- Ukrainian Greek Catholic
 - Ruthenian Byzantine Catholic
 - Melkite Greek Catholic
 - Maronite Catholic
 - Armenian Catholic
 - Coptic Catholic
 - Chaldean Catholic
 - Syro-Malabar

All are equal in dignity.

Section Summary

The Catholic Church is a communion of Churches—not a single ritual expression.



V. Ecumenical Councils and Early Schisms

Theological precision and cultural tension led to ecumenical councils.

Council of Nicaea (325)

- Refuted Arianism (Arius of Alexandria).
- Affirmed Christ's divinity.

Council of Constantinople (381)

- Affirmed divinity of Holy Spirit.

Council of Chalcedon (451)

Defined Christ:

- One Person
- Two natures
- Without confusion, change, division, separation

Some Alexandrian Christians rejected Chalcedon → formation of Oriental Orthodox Churches.

Section Summary

Doctrinal precision, language differences, and political realities combined to produce schisms.

VI. The Greek–Latin Schism and the Filioque

The schism was gradual. The 1054 event between Cardinal Humbert and Patriarch Michael Cerularius symbolized deeper tensions.

The Filioque

Original Creed:

- "Who proceeds from the Father."

Latin addition:

- "And the Son."

Greek word *ekporeusis* = source-origin.

Latin *procedere* = broader.

The Greek translation implied two sources in the Trinity.

"The Latin version was not [heretical]; the Greek version was."

Section Summary

The schism was linguistic, political, and cultural—not merely theological.

VII. Union Attempts and Eastern Catholic Identity

Council of Florence (1439)

- Attempted reunion.
- Signed by most Greek bishops.
- Rejected by monastic resistance.

Metropolitan Isidore of Kyiv

- Accepted union.
- Imprisoned in Moscow.

Union of Brest (1596)

- Ukrainian bishops entered communion with Rome.
- Preserved Byzantine rite.

Union of Uzhhorod (1646)

- Ruthenian clergy joined communion.
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Latinizations

Caused by:

- Post-Reformation defensiveness.
- Council of Trent codification.
- Social pressures in Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.
- Soviet suppression (1946).

Example:

- St. Alexis Toth rejected by Bishop John Ireland → thousands entered Orthodoxy.

Section Summary

Eastern Catholic identity developed amid tension, survival, and political pressure.

VIII. Theology of Theosis and Resurrection

Eastern theology emphasizes transformation.

“God became man that man might become God.” — St. Athanasius

Theosis means:

- Participation in divine life.
- Healing of the damaged icon (Genesis).
- Incarnation as restoration.

Eastern spirituality emphasizes:

- Resurrection
- Transformation
- Sanctification of matter
- Incarnational worldview

Section Summary

Theosis frames Eastern spirituality as participation rather than legal satisfaction.

IX. Eucharistic Theology and Devotion

One of the most significant questions concerns why Eastern Catholicism traditionally lacks Eucharistic adoration or Benediction.

Historical Development in the Latin West

Eucharistic adoration developed particularly in the High Middle Ages (11th–13th centuries).

Historical context:

- Controversies over Real Presence (e.g., Berengar of Tours).
- Scholastic clarification of transubstantiation.
- Fourth Lateran Council (1215).

- Institution of Corpus Christi (1264, Pope Urban IV).

Developments included:

- Elevation of the Host.
- Eucharistic processions.
- Benediction.
- Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.

These practices served as:

- Catechetical reinforcement.
- Defense against disbelief.
- Visible affirmation of doctrine.

Eastern Development

The East did not experience comparable Eucharistic disbelief crises.

Key points:

- Real Presence never seriously contested.
- Theology expressed as mystery (mysterion).
- Eucharistic reverence embedded within Divine Liturgy.

Eastern Eucharistic spirituality emphasizes:

- Participation in Communion.
- Liturgical encounter.
- Communal worship.
- Eschatological mystery.

The iconostasis reinforces:

- The sanctity of the altar.
- Heaven-earth meeting.
- The Eucharist as mystery, not spectacle.

Reservation of the Eucharist:

- For the sick.
- For Presanctified Liturgies.
- Not for public exposition.

Integrated Theological Conclusion

Western Eucharistic devotion developed partly as a response to disbelief and doctrinal controversy.

Eastern Eucharistic reverence remained embedded within liturgical life because such controversies did not arise.

This difference is historical—not doctrinal.

Eastern Catholics affirm:

- Real Presence
- Sacrificial nature of the Eucharist
- Transformative communion

But express this theology differently.

X. Sacraments and Confession

Initiation:

- Baptism
- Chrismation
- Eucharist together

Confession:

- Therapeutic model.
- Healing over legal minimalism.

“Penance is not a punishment. Penance is a medicine.”

Mortal vs venial:

- Distinction acknowledged.
 - Not reduced to checklist mentality.
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XI. Liturgical Posture

Council of Nicaea (Canon 20):

- No kneeling on Sundays.
- No kneeling Pascha–Pentecost.

Standing = Resurrection posture.

XII. Visiting a Byzantine Liturgy

Expect:

- Different lectionary.
- Few changeable parts.
- Communion under both species via spoon.
- Standing posture.
- Immersive chant and iconography.

“Go in, put the book down, and be.”

Final Ecclesial Vision

Fr. Philip concludes by quoting Patriarch Sviatoslav Shevchuk:

“We are an Orthodox Church with Orthodox theology... that chooses to manifest this orthodoxy in communion with Rome.”

Eastern Catholicism exists as:

- A lived expression of first-millennium unity.
 - A sign of Christ’s prayer “that they may be one.”
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