

in worship. Our style of worship in the Eastern churches reflects the presence of the risen Christ among us in glory and joy. All the senses take part in our worship to express this glory. We see icons, vestments and candles, we hear continual singing, we taste blessed foods are use physical gestures such as bowing, prostrating and crossing ourselves to express our wonder at the glory of God. Another important aspect of our community life is our joy in each other's company, expressed in the frequent meals and social times we share. Finally, we open ourselves to support one another in the trials of daily life. In this way the unity we celebrate at the Eucharist is lived out day by day.

A secret life of prayer, fasting and sharing

Besides a public Christian life, we also stress a personal spiritual life "in secret, so that your Father, who sees all in secret, will reward you" (Matthew 6:6). Chief of these is personal prayer in the silence of our own hearts, where we can speak honestly with God. Thus, one of the most popular prayers in the Christian East is the Jesus Prayer, which sums up our need for God's love: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner". In addition we are called to fast and to share our goods in secret as Jesus commended (Matthew 6:1-8). By refusing to gratify ourselves endlessly, we recall our need to continue our conversion day by day.

A need for Spiritual encounter

Though we were called to be divinized, we realize that this process is long: "the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life" (Matthew 7:14) the most difficult obstacle to our growth is the weakness of our personalities. This is why we are called to engage in a spiritual encounter in the arena of our hearts, learning to subject our weakness to the divinizing power of the Holy Spirit working within us. We are urged to conduct this "warfare" with the help of a spiritual guide.

All of these beliefs and customs date from the earliest days of Christianity in the Holy Land. By

continuing to observe them, we maintain a living connection with the early Church. We cherish our tradition as a continuous stream flowing from the first Christians to us under the guidance of the Holy Spirit: truly "the old-time religion" in a new land.

How holy is Tradition?

Not everything is helpful for salvation is written in the Bible. John said he could have written a lot more about Jesus (John 21:25). Surely other accounts about Jesus and His teachings would be helpful and life giving but the fullness of His teachings was never written recorded in the Gospel (Acts 20:35) and it was surely not the only one.

We believe by faith, that the Church is the temple of God, the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, who guides the Church to all truth (John 16:12-13). Authentic Tradition reflects the guidance of the Holy Spirit by its coherence and continuity. It does not contradict Scripture and is consistent with what has been upheld by the Church from the beginning.

Tradition is the voice of the Spirit in the life of the Church. To reject Tradition is to reject a most vital work of the Spirit. Therefore, we should be careful not to accept the biblical interpretations of those who cut themselves off from the treasures of Holy Tradition. Scripture and the other form of Holy Tradition are one. God continues to dwell in His people and shape them. He does not contradict Himself, and neither does He limits Himself as to the means by which He shapes us.

Source: Melkite Catholic Eparchy of Australia & New Zealand

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Origins and Beliefs of the Melkite Catholics

The doctrines of the Catholic Church were established in the first seven Ecumenical Councils. These councils were Nicea (325 AD), Constantinople I (381 AD), Ephesus (431 AD), Chalcedon (451 AD), Constantinople II (553 AD), Constantinople (680 AD) and Nicea II (787 AD).

Many churches denominations were formed over these years because not all Christians agreed on points of doctrine, theology and church structure.

Those Christians who accepted the teaching of the council of Chalcedon (451 AD) – that Jesus was both human and divine in nature – were called Melkites. The name Melkite is derived from the Syriac word melek, which means king. Marcian, the Byzantine Emperor of the new Roman Empire at the time, also accepted the teachings at Chalcedon. Those who claimed that Jesus had one nature, the Monophysites, rejected the teaching at Chalcedon.

The Monophysites first used the name Melkites to refer to those Christians who shared the same Christian beliefs as the Byzantine Emperor. Eventually, however, the name Melkites became less derogatory and was finally adopted by those loyal to the teachings of Chalcedon as their own name.

The Melkites originally formed the Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. They spoke Greek because this was the main language of the Middle East at the time. The Melkites has strong ties with Rome and Constantinople and for almost 200 years used the Antiochian rite of worship. Eventually, the Copts formed the Patriarchate of Alexandria. The Patriarchate of Jerusalem remained Melkite.

From the seventh century onwards Antioch suffered at the hands of Islamic oppression and persecution. The Melkites were targeted because of their Christian faith and their loyalty to the

Byzantine Emperor. These events forced many Melkites to live in exile. For many years the Patriarchate of Antioch was battered, but not lost. However due to the Melkites' presence in Constantinople (which used the Byzantine rite of worship) and because of repeated attempts made by the Patriarchate of Constantinople during 960 and 1085 AD to Byzantinise Antioch, the Melkites eventually adopted the Byzantine rite in their Liturgy.

The persecution, oppression and massacring of the Melkites continued throughout the Mameluke regime (1250 to 1516) and for many years during Ottoman rule (1516-1918). The language and culture of Melkites also become Arabic. During the Ottoman conquest the Sultan ruled over all the Middle East. The Melkites had no political role nor did they have any legal rights. All Christians were subjected to the authority of their patriarch. The Ottomans, however didn't consider the Melkites to be members of the Patriarch of Antioch and made them subject to the Patriarch of Constantinople. Also during the Ottoman period, the Melkites became more involved in Medicine and other Professions. Many also translated into Arabic volumes of philosophical, medical and scientific works of ancient Greece.

In 1501, there was a split between Patriarchates of Rome and Constantinople. The Melkites, however, did not follow the Patriarchate of Constantinople into Schism with Rome. The Melkites maintained contact with Rome, although this was made difficult with Antioch's ties with Constantinople and with the oppressive Islamic occupation in the Middle East.

The Movement for Union

The relationship between Antioch and Rome was heightened from the seventeenth century onward. In 1625 Latin missionaries entered the Middle East. They came in under the patronage of the French consulates.

Eftimios Al Saifi, the Melkite Archbishop of Tyre and Sidon from 1682 to 1723, and his

followers favored unity with Rome. Al Saifi, with the help of his followers and the Latin missionaries managed to form a Melkite community. They followed the rule of St Basil who founded eastern monasticism and established the Monastery of the Holy Saviour, which housed many Basilian Salvitorian monks; the largest Melkite community at the time. Other Melkite monks who also favored union with Rome established the Monastery of St John the Baptist.

In the eighteenth century, the Melkites were divided. In 1724, The Patriarch of Antioch, Athanasius III, had passed away. He recommended that his former deacon, a 28 year-old Greek monk named Sylvester, succeed him. Some of the clergy and people of Antioch were not pleased with recommendation and elected Al Saifi's nephew, Seraphim Tanas, a Patriarch Kirilos VI. However, the Turks upheld the decision of the Greek Patriarch of Constantinople for Sylvester to be the new Patriarch of Antioch. Kirilos VI, however a Melkite Catholic who studied in Rome, maintained ties with the pope in Rome. Since then there have been two branches of Melkites: The Melkite Greek Catholics and the Orthodox Melkites.

For many years the Melkite Greek Catholics were in conflict with the Turks and the Orthodox Melkites. In 1848, the Patriarch Maximos III Mazloum led the Melkite Greek Catholic to independence. In that year, the Sultan granted the Melkite Catholic Church civil and ecclesiastical rights and identity of their Patriarchate.

Other pioneers in the Melkite Greek Catholic Church include Gregorias II Youssef and Maximos IV Sayegh.

With the help and guidance of God, they shepherded our church with wisdom and care. They permitted the fulfillment of its mission and its aims, especially that of understanding between East and West.

Today the Melkite Church has many bishops, priests, monks, nuns and deacons around the world. It is estimated that there are 3.5 millions Melkite Catholics worldwide. These include

Lebanese, Syrians, Jordanians, Palestinians, Iraqis, Sudanese and other Middle Eastern and non-Middle Eastern origins.

Tradition of the Melkite Catholic Church

Over the course of almost 2000 years, a variety of traditions have developed throughout Christendom. As Eastern Christians and as Melkite Catholics we profess, among other beliefs:

A belief in our call to be divinized

Our most important belief is that we are called to become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4), not just to be saved from sin. We see ourselves as invited to live the very life of God, to become intimately related to God, to be physically united to Christ and to have the Holy Spirit dwell in us. The church Fathers saw this as the reason for Christ's coming: "God became man so that man might become God" (St Athanasius).

Union with God through the Holy Mysteries (Sacraments)

This relationship comes about when we receive in faith the Holy Mysteries (or the sacraments, as they are known in the West). In Baptism, we are made one with Christ as we re-enact His burial and resurrection. This reliving takes place when we are buried (immersed) into water and are raised from it. In Chrismation (confirmation), we immediately receive the gift of the Holy Spirit "the first of God's gifts" (Romans 8:23). In receiving the Eucharist, we recognize that our mortal bodies are united to the body of Christ as a token of the life to come, when we shall be united to Him in glory forever. Thus, we see these Mysteries, not merely as pious devotions, but as encounters with God, actually producing the effects they symbolize.

A Public life of worship, fellowship and service

As members of God's family, we belong to one another, and so we live an active community life as church. Most important, we join one another