

# *A Short History of the Western Rite Vicariate*

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**T**HE Western Rite Vicariate of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America was founded in 1958 by Metropolitan Antony Bashir (1896–1966) with the Right Reverend Alexander Turner (1906–1971), and the Very Reverend Paul W. S. Schneirla. The Western Rite Vicariate (WRV) oversees parishes and missions within the Archdiocese that worship according to traditional Western Christian liturgical forms, derived either from the Latin-speaking Churches of the first millenium, or from certain later (post-schismatic) usages which are not contrary to the Orthodox Faith.

The purpose of the WRV, as originally conceived in 1958, is threefold. First, the WRV serves an *ecumenical* purpose. The ideal of true ecumenism, according to an Orthodox understanding, promotes “all efforts for the reunion of Christendom, without departing from the ancient foundation of our One Orthodox Church.”<sup>1</sup>

Second, the WRV serves a *missionary and evangelistic* purpose. There are a great many non-Orthodox Christians who are “attracted by our Orthodox Faith, but could not find a congenial home in the spiritual world of Eastern Christendom.”<sup>2</sup>

Third, the WRV exists to be witness to Orthodox Christians themselves to the universality of the Orthodox Catholic Faith – a Faith which is not narrowly Byzantine, Hellenistic, or Slavic (as is sometimes assumed by non-Orthodox and Orthodox alike) but is the fulness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for all men, in all places, at all times. In the words of Father Paul Schneirla, “the Western Rite restores the normal cultural balance in the Church. The pre-schismatic condition is restored between East and West in symbol and potentiality. A primary result of this reunion is that the Church proclaims her catholicity. She demonstrates that she is the Oecumenical Church, not a tribal religion.”<sup>3</sup>

The WRV, while existing within the bosom of the Eastern Orthodox Church, has an entirely “Western Catholic” liturgical life, as it includes translated and adapted Latin liturgical texts for the Divine Office, the Mass (Divine Liturgy), the Sacraments, and various Blessings; forms for the observance of the Western Church Year and the old Roman sanctoral kalendar; the use of Gregorian chant as well as other forms of traditional Western church music and hymnody; ceremonial acts, vestments, architecture, ecclesiastical arts, popular piety and ethos.

The basis for the WRV’s eucharistic texts may be found in two seminal documents: (1) the *Liturgia Missae Orthodoxo-Catholicae Occidentalis*<sup>4</sup> (drawn up by J. J. Overbeck and approved by the Russian Synod in 1869, and by Constantinople in 1882), and (2) the 1904 response of the Russian Synod to Archbishop (now Saint) Tikhon concerning the 1892 American *Book of Common Prayer*.<sup>5</sup> Forms for the various other

1. “Edict on the Western Rite.” *The Word*, Vol. 2, No. 9 (September 1958), p. 23.

2. *Ibid.*

3. “The Significance of the Western Rite.” *The Word*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (April 1962), p. 2.

4. The Latin and English text of Overbeck’s Mass was first published in 1871 in London. A rare copy resides in the Newberry Library, Chicago. A facsimile of this edition is found in G. H. Thomann’s *The Western Rite in Orthodoxy* (Claremont, CA: Anglican Theological Seminary, 1995), pp. 50–74.

5. An English translation of the Holy Synod’s response, *Russian Observations upon the American Prayer Book*, was translated by Wilfrid J. Barnes, edited by W. H. Frere, and published by the Alcuin Club in 1917. The text is available online at Project Canterbury, <<http://justus.anglican.org/resources/pc/alcuin/tract12.html>>.

Sacraments, Rites and Blessings of the Church (including Baptism and Confirmation/Chrismation) are derived from the *Rituale Romanum*, as originally blessed by Metropolitan Gerassimos (Messarah) of Beirut for English use in 1912, and later revised at the WRV's inception.<sup>6</sup>

The modern Western Rite movement within Orthodoxy (beginning in the late 19th century) sees itself as a restoration of the ancient Western expression of the Orthodox Catholic Faith, which existed in communion with the Orthodox Churches of the East in the first millenium of Christian history. There were, from the beginning, a number of local liturgical families, centered around important sees of East and West, developed from the very beginning. In the words of Father Alexander Turner, "As the Holy Spirit moved the hearts and souls of various races, each responded according to its own endowments, to develop our present liturgical families."<sup>7</sup>

The many Churches of the Orient and the Occident, even while differing widely in liturgical and cultural matters, were nonetheless united by the common profession of one Orthodox Catholic Faith. The early history of the Church reveals that credal unity within liturgical and cultural diversity is the natural state of the Orthodox Catholic Church. In fact, Byzantine liturgical uniformity in Orthodoxy is a late and unnatural development, which came about not by the will of God but by historical accident.

The venerable Liturgies of the Western Churches (those of Rome, Milan and Spain) were lost to the unity of the Orthodox Church due to the tragedy of schism. Most of the venerable Liturgies of the Eastern Churches (those of Alexandria and Antioch) were also lost to Orthodoxy, due to political machinations and ecclesiastical imperialism. By the 13th century, Orthodoxy was reduced to but one of her historic liturgical expressions, that of Byzantium, as the last vestiges of communion with the West disappeared, and the ancient sees of Antioch and Alexandria succumbed to pressure from Constantinople to adopt Byzantine usages exclusively.<sup>8</sup> This tragic historical situation has, in practice, obscured the Catholicity of the Orthodox Church, although essentially the Orthodox Catholic Faith (by its very definition) does not "belong to or depend upon any particular nation or language or civilization."<sup>9</sup> Therefore, Western Rite Orthodoxy exists, in part, to bring this theory into practice – that is, to manifest the Catholicity of the Church in her historic Western expression.

According to Father John Meyendorff, "The Orthodox Church has never considered its liturgy to be frozen once and for all in the limited cultural forms of tenth-century Byzantium."<sup>10</sup> Likewise, in the words of Father Alexander Schmemmann, "The unity of rite in the Orthodox Church is comparatively a late phenomenon and the Church never considered liturgical uniformity a *conditio sine qua non* of her unity. No one who knows the history of Christian worship will deny the richness of the Western liturgical tradition, that especially of the old and venerable Roman liturgy."<sup>11</sup> In the opinion of these highly respected Orthodox theologians, there can, therefore, be no objection (at least in theory) to the restoration of a "Western Orthodoxy" (this is why many Eastern Orthodox critics of the Western Rite, including Schmemmann have limited themselves to arguments concerning the mere *feasibility* or *practicality* of the restoration of Western Orthodoxy).

The idea of Western Rite Orthodoxy, as currently embodied in the WRV, is based on two fundamental Orthodox ecclesiological affirmations – first, that the Church of Christ, the very "Ark of Salvation," exists full and perfectly only within the historic Orthodox Church, and (2) that this Church is Catholic,

6. Fr. Paul Schneirla, "Report of the Western Rite Vicariate – 1978", *The Word*, Vol. 22, No. 9 (November 1978), p. 32.

7. "The Western Rite: Its Fascinating Past and its Promising Future", *The Word*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (April 1962), p. 5.

8. *Ibid*, pp. 5-6.

9. H. A. Hodges, *Anglicanism and Orthodoxy: A Study in Dialectical Churchmanship*. (London, 1955), p. 52ff.

10. "A Debate on the Western Rite." *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (1980), p. 254.

11. "Notes and Comments: The Western Rite." *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Fall 1958), pp. 37-38.

meaning Whole, Complete and Universal, for all men and all cultures. It also rests on a historical view that the Western Churches truly departed from the fulness of the Orthodox Faith, and that (in the words of Professor H. A. Hodges) for the West, the return to “a sound mind and a healthy life” means a return to Orthodoxy. The essential idea of Western Rite Orthodoxy, according to Father Paul Schneirla, is as follows:

Western Orthodoxy is the rediscovery of the Orthodoxy which withered in the west, and its revitalization, not through the transferral of eastern Patristic thought and devotional attitudes, but by the patient searching out, assembly and coordination of the supratemporal factors which created and characterized pre-schismatic occidental Christianity in its essence, and the careful selection of valid survivals in contemporary western thought and culture.<sup>12</sup>

Or, to quote Professor H. A. Hodges, who decades ago called for union with Orthodoxy as the only sure future for the Anglican Communion:

The Orthodox Faith must be capable of expression in terms of the life and thought of western peoples . . . Western Orthodoxy cannot be constituted merely by planting colonies of Orthodox people from the East in Western countries . . . True western Orthodoxy is to be found by bodies of western people, members of western nations, coming with all their western background, their western habits and traditions, into the circle of the Orthodox Faith. Then we should have an Orthodoxy which was really western because its memory was western – a memory of the Christian history of the West, not as the West now remembers it, but purged and set in perspective by the Orthodox Faith.<sup>13</sup>

Over the centuries since the schism, there have been a number of interesting attempts on the part of groups of Western Christians separated from the Church of Rome to return to Western Orthodoxy. One of the first known such reunion attempts came in 1452 from conservative anti-Roman churchmen in Bohemia (i.e. the “Utraquist” Hussite Church of Bohemia).<sup>14</sup> Others would come over the centuries from France and England. One scheme of reunion is particular is worth mentioning here.

In 1712, a group of High Church Anglicans separated from Canterbury, called the “Non-Jurors,” began a very interesting correspondence with the Patriarchate of Alexandria, and later Jerusalem and Constantinople. Proposals for union were drawn up, and Czar Peter the Great (who always sought closer ties with the West) became a great champion of the idea.<sup>15</sup> While for various reasons the plans failed, it is interesting that in the course of conversations the Eastern Patriarchs expressed a willingness to consider allowing the Non-Jurors to continue their revised version of the Anglican Liturgy. They wrote:

As for matters of Custom and Ecclesiastical order, and for the form and discipline of administering the Sacraments; they will be easily settled when once a Union is effected. For, it is evident from Ecclesiastical history, that there both have been and now are different customs and regulations in different places and Churches; and yet the Unity of Faith and Doctrine is preserved the same . . . it is necessary we should both see and read [the Non-Juring English Rite]; and then either approve of it as right, or reject it as disagreeable to our unspotted Faith. When therefore we have considered it, if it needs correction we will correct it; and if possible, will give it the sanction of a genuine form.<sup>16</sup>

12. “The Western Rite in the Orthodox Church.” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Spring 1958), p. 35.

13. *Anglicanism and Orthodoxy*, p. 52ff.

14. Thomann, *The Western Rite in Orthodoxy*, pp. 13-14.

15. The story, as well as the text of the correspondence, may be found in George Williams, *The Orthodox Church of the East in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Rivingtons, 1868).

16. Quoted in Schneirla, “The Western Rite in the Orthodox Church”, pp. 22-23.

A more significant reunion scheme was to come from England more than a century later, but not from an Anglican. Dr. Joseph J. Overbeck (1821-1905) was “the first man to venture practical expression to the vision of a restored West.”<sup>17</sup> A native German and former Roman Catholic priest turned married Lutheran layman, he converted to Russian Orthodoxy in 1865 in London after years of study in church history and patristics. Soon thereafter he began to promote his scheme for the establishment of a “Western Orthodox Church” of Western Europe, using a revised Roman Rite, as approved by Orthodox authorities.

So with considerable support, in 1869 he forwarded a formal petition to the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Synod, while apparently enthusiastic and supportive of Overbeck’s plan, prudently suspended final judgment and practical action until the other autocephalous Orthodox Churches could be contacted and give their assent. The See of Constantinople in 1882 handed in a favourable judgment, but when the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece protested, the plan was abandoned in 1884. It is not known exactly why Athens disapproved, although it has been suggested that Overbeck’s enemies in the established Church of England exerted pressure on the Greek Church.<sup>18</sup>

And so, Overbeck’s scheme ultimately failed. The dream of a restored Western Orthodoxy was not fulfilled in his time. Yet, as Father Georges Florovsky wrote, Overbeck’s powerful (albeit impractical) vision “was not just a fantastic dream. The question raised by Overbeck was pertinent, even if his own answer to it was confusedly conceived. And probably the vision of Overbeck was greater than his personal interpretation.”<sup>19</sup> In fact, it was Overbeck’s basic vision which brought Western Rite Orthodoxy to fruition in the 20th century.

In 1911, an Old Catholic bishop, Arnold Harris Mathew, entered into a short lived union with the Patriarchate of Antioch, under Metropolitan Gerasimos (Messarah) of Beirut. Even though this union was short-lived, it provided a model for future Western groups who would seek to return to Orthodoxy.

In 1926, the so-called “Polish Catholic National Church” (headed by Fr. Andrew Huszno) (really no more than six parishes) was received into the Polish Orthodox Church.<sup>20</sup> This group flourished until the Second World War, during which it was wiped out due to Nazi aggression.

In 1928, the foundations of the “French Orthodox Church” were laid when Metropolitan Evlogy received a small group in Paris intent on restoring a form of the ancient Gallican liturgy.<sup>21</sup> In 1953, the French Orthodox withdrew from Moscow and came under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia under the enthusiastic patronage of Archbishop (now Saint) John Maximovitch. Eventually the “French Orthodox” came under the jurisdiction of the Romanian Patriarchate, but since the 1990’s the group stands outside of the jurisdiction of any canonical Orthodox body, because of some irregularities on the part of its leadership.

In 1932, an independent Catholic prelate, Louis-Charles (Irenaeus) Winneart, was received into the Church and the Western Rite *Ukase* of Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky) was issued (the great Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky was a prominent supporter of this Western Rite effort). This *Ukase* (which

17. *Ibid*, p. 23.

18. The most detailed account of the Overbeck affair available is David F. Abramstov’s “The Western Rite and the Eastern Church: Dr. J. J. Overbeck and His Scheme for the Re-Establishment of the Orthodox Church in the West.” (M.A. Thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 1961). The text is available online at Project Canterbury, <<http://justus.anglican.org/resources/pc/orthodoxy/abramstov.pdf>>.

19. “Orthodox Ecumenism in the Nineteenth Century”, *St. Vladimir’s Seminary Quarterly*, Vol. 4, Nos. 3-4 (Spring-Summer, 1956), pp. 32-33.

20. Fr. David F. Abramstov, “A Brief History of Western Orthodoxy”, *The Word*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (April 1962), pp. 20-21.

21. *Ibid*, pp. 22-26.

would later provide the basis for the liturgical usage of the Antiochian WRV) contained fundamental principles for the establishment of Western Rite work within Orthodoxy.<sup>22</sup>

In 1937, Lucian (Dom Denis) Chambault was received into the Winneart group (distinct from the neo-Gallican “French Orthodox” group) and he began a small Orthodox Benedictine priory in Paris, using not the Neo-Gallican Liturgy but the Roman Mass and Benedictine Office translated into French.<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, the saintly Dom Denis was reputed to be a healer, and his small priory became something of a pilgrimage site for Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike. Later American Orthodox figures, such as Schneirla, Schmemmann, Meyendorff, and Archbishop Peter (L’Hullier), became familiar with the Western Rite through Chambault’s Paris priory.<sup>24</sup>

The Western Rite Orthodox movement existed in North America before its approval in the Antiochian jurisdiction in 1958. In 1890, the first North American Western Rite Orthodox community, the Swiss Old Catholic parish of Green Bay, Wisconsin, pastored by Father Joseph Rene Vilatte, was received by Russian Orthodox Bishop Vladimir (Sokolovsky). This parish fell out of Russian oversight a couple years later because its pastor, Vilatte, received a shady consecration from some Syrian Jacobite bishops in Ceylon.<sup>25</sup>

Saint Tikhon (Bellavin), in his time as head of the Russian mission in America, came into contact with many sympathetic Episcopalians, some of whom apparently inquired about the possibility of joining the Orthodox Church while keeping much of their Anglican liturgical usages. Tikhon enquired of the Holy Synod of Russia about the possibility of such a scheme. He sent a copy of the 1892 American *Book of Common Prayer* for critical examination. In 1904 the Holy Synod returned a fascinating response to Archbishop Tikhon’s enquiry, admitting the theoretical possibility of such a scheme, while very clearly noting how Prayer Book forms must first be revised in an Orthodox manner. While it is believed that Tikhon did not actually receive any Episcopalians who used revised Anglican forms, this synodal response nevertheless later served as an important guide for the establishment of the WRV’s basic liturgical life in 1958, and the approval of the Anglo-Catholic “Liturgy of Saint Tikhon” in 1977.

The Western Rite Vicariate of the North American Antiochian Archdiocese has, by far, been the most successful of all the modern Western Rite Orthodox movements. The group which was received into the Syrian Antiochian Archdiocese in 1961, on the basis of Metropolitan Antony’s edict of 1958, was the Society of Saint Basil (SSB). This Society had its origin in the work of Bishop Aftimios (Ofiesh) in the 1930’s. In the words of Father Alexander Turner:

It was . . . during the tempestuous days following the Bolshevik Revolution that the Society had its inception as a missionary organ of the nascent federation of American Orthodox colonies under Russian suzerainty, though of local Syrian administration. With the collapse of that plan and the submission of the ethnic groups to the churches of their homelands, the Society was left in isolation.<sup>26</sup>

In 1932, Bishop Aftimios of the Syro-Arab mission in the Russian Archdiocese, consecrated an Episcopalian priest, Ignatius (William Albert) Nichols, as his auxiliary “bishop of Washington” specifically for Western Rite work. This was part of Aftimios’s plan to lay the foundations of an “American Orthodox Catholic Church” transcending nationality and language.<sup>27</sup> Sadly, the vision of Bishop Aftimios was not

22. *Ibid*, pp. 22-23.

23. *Ibid*, p. 23.

24. From interviews with Fr. Paul Schneirla (November 12, 2003 and December 7, 2003).

25. Thomann, “The Western Rite in Orthodoxy”, p. 18.

26. “Western Orthodoxy: A New Era,” *Orthodoxy* (Society of Saint Basil periodical), Vol. 9, No. 1 (Summer 1961), p. 5.

27. Schneirla, “The Western Rite in the Orthodox Church,” pp. 34-35.

shared by his fellow Orthodox bishops. Eventually by 1934, Ofiesh's group, including the newly consecrated Bishop Ignatius Nichols, would find itself outside mainstream Orthodoxy in "canonical limbo."

Bishop Ignatius Nichols founded the Society of Saint Basil, a devotional society for clergy and laity based on the daily recitation of the Western Breviary (Divine Office). Nichols' successor as head of the SSB was Alexander Turner. Turner was consecrated as bishop by Nichols in 1939 (before this Turner had been brought up Episcopalian, and was an ordained Old Catholic priest). He presided over a small parish, Saint Sophia, in Mount Vernon, New York, which he founded in 1946. Bishop Nichols reposed in 1947, leaving Turner as the sole leader of the Basilian Fathers.<sup>28</sup>

Turner eventually came to the conclusion that there was no future for his little flock outside of canonical Orthodoxy, and through his friend Father Paul Schneirla began unofficial conversations in 1952 on canonical regularization by Metropolitan Antony Bashir of the Syrian Antiochian Archdiocese of New York. Turner had been promoting the Western Rite Orthodox ideal for decades before this, and expressing his ideas through his periodical *Orthodoxy*.<sup>29</sup>

It is not much of an exaggeration to say that the WRV was born directly out of the experience and vision of Father Paul Schneirla. Schneirla's own conversion to the Orthodox Church in the late 1930's was due solely to his studies in medieval church history. Schneirla, as a young student, upon investigation of Roman Catholicism became fascinated with its devotional world and its claim to be the original Church of Christ. What attracted Schneirla was sense of a living Catholic Faith and traditional Western Catholic devotion – but he could never accept the understanding of the Papacy as put forward by the First Vatican Council. In the course of his studies, he also learned of the catholic churches of the Eastern Orthodox and became interested, not with their Byzantine expression, but with their historical claims and doctrine.

Though he eventually converted to the Orthodox Faith and became a Byzantine Rite priest of the Syrian Antiochian Archdiocese in 1942, nonetheless his love of the traditional Western Liturgy continued, and through contacts with Western Rite figures in Europe such as Dom Denis Chambault, he became convinced that the Western Rite could play a vital part in Orthodox mission in North America.<sup>30</sup>

The efforts of Schneirla and Turner came to fruition in 1958 when a letter from Metropolitan Antony, drafted by Schneirla, was sent to Patriarch Alexander III of Antioch, asking his blessing for Western Rite work in the North American Archdiocese. Father Paul Schneirla recalls that Metropolitan Antony, when first approached with the possibility of Western Rite work in America, was favorable to the idea, but had serious doubts as to whether the Patriarchate would approve it.

But, very soon after submitting his letter, Metropolitan Antony received an enthusiastic letter of official blessing from the Patriarch, dated May 31, 1958. The Patriarch enclosed an Arabic translation of the 1936 *Ukase* issued by Russian Metropolitan Sergius (Stragorodsky), and he authorized Metropolitan Antony to "take the same action, leaving to your Orthodox zeal and good judgment the right to work out the details in the local situations as you see fit."<sup>31</sup>

Metropolitan Antony's August 1958 "Edict on the Western Rite", first delivered to the General Convention of the Archdiocese in Los Angeles and printed in the September 1958 issue of the Archdiocesan magazine *The Word*, was his response to this patriarchal charge. This remarkable Edict was framed in ecumenical, pastoral and missionary terms:

28. Thomann, "The Western Rite in Orthodoxy", pp. 33-34.

29. From interviews with Fr. Paul Schneirla (November 12, 2003 and December 7, 2003).

30. *Ibid.*

31. "Edict on the Western Rite." *The Word*, Vol. 2, No. 9 (September 1958), p. 23.

You well know with what zeal we have always encouraged and supported all efforts for the reunion of Christendom, without departing from the ancient foundation of our One Orthodox Church ... For many years we have met innumerable non-Orthodox Christians in the United States and Canada who were attracted by our Orthodox Faith, but could not find a congenial home in the spiritual world of Eastern Christendom ... It occurred to us that the use of a Western Rite in the Orthodox Church in America might serve the double purpose of facilitating the conversion of groups of non-Orthodox Western Christians to the Church, and of indicating in the simplest and most direct manner to all concerned with Christian union the true basis on which the Orthodox Church is prepared and is able to consider the reunion of Christendom.<sup>32</sup>

It appears that Metropolitan Antony originally saw this new Western Rite work amongst the Syrian Orthodox as somewhat analogous to the Melkite Greek Catholic Church in his native Middle East. Hence, he viewed Western Rite Orthodoxy as “Uniatism” in the positive sense possible – as the *voluntary* reunion of separated Christians with the Orthodox Church, and as an *enrichment* of the Orthodox Church itself with a different, yet complementary, liturgical tradition. Metropolitan Antony reason that, if the Orthodox Church claims to be the Catholic Church of the Creed, such a policy is not only possible but also *necessary* to the Church’s mission:

This is not, of course, a new phenomena in the religious world. The Roman Catholic Church claims to be the whole Catholic Church and long ago permitted Eastern Orthodox to accept the Papal authority while retaining their Eastern Orthodox rites. Our Melkite brethren are Syrian examples of the policy. We Orthodox teach that we are the one, holy, Catholic Church. We must not then force the whole world to become Eastern in order to be saved! The faith must be one, and Orthodox, but its expression has always been suited to the races and nations which accepted Christ ...<sup>33</sup>

Metropolitan Antony, while seeing in this new movement great potential for Orthodox mission in North America, was nonetheless realistic, as he cautioned that “we must not expect immediate results on a massive scale. This program is simply to prepare us for possibilities, and to inform others that we are hospitably disposed ...”<sup>34</sup>

Metropolitan Antony was well aware that the Western Rite was “a work for specialists”.<sup>35</sup> The new Western Rite usage of the Archdiocese was to be guided by “a Commission of Orthodox Theologians,” an advisory committee of qualified clerics or laymen to advise the Metropolitan and determine “the mode of reception of groups desiring to employ the Western Rite, and the character of the rites to be used, as well as the authorization of official liturgical texts.”<sup>36</sup>

The first WRV Commission, convened by Metropolitan Antony in 1958, was composed of Fathers Paul Schneirla, Stephen Upson, Alexander Schmemmann and John Meyendorff. Schneirla, Schmemmann and Meyendorff in particular had observed Western Rite Orthodox directly in France, as it had been approved in the Russian *Ukase* of 1936. Schneirla recalls Schmemmann’s work in particular as being key, as he was familiar with the Liturgical Movement within the Roman Catholic and Anglican communions. Schmemmann was particularly instrumental in joining together the separate Rites of Initiation of the *Rituale Romanum* – Baptism, Confirmation and First Holy Communion – into one unified rite, according to the Orthodox understanding.<sup>37</sup>

32. *Ibid.*

33. Met. Antony’s comments to the General Convention of 1958 on the Western Rite, *The Word*, Vol. 2, No. 11 (November 1958), pp. 15-16.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*

36. “Edict on the Western Rite,” p. 23.

37. From interviews with Fr. Paul Schneirla (November 12, 2003 and December 7, 2003).

In January of 1962, the official Western Rite *Directory* was issued, “establishing liturgical usages and customs and discipline,” drawing on principles gleaned from the 1904 Moscow Synodal response to Saint Tikhon, the authorization of Western Rite offices by Antiochian Metropolitan Gerassimos (Messarah) of Beirut, and the 1932 Russian *Ukase* of Russian Metropolitan Sergius.<sup>38</sup>

In 1966, Metropolitan Antony reposed and the current North American Antiochian Metropolitan, Philip (Saliba), was consecrated. Metropolitan Philip, since his consecration, has wholeheartedly supported the mission of the WRV, and is admittedly very fond of the ethos and piety of the traditional Western Rite, due to his experience with the Anglican monastic Community of the Resurrection in Mirfield, while he was being educated in England.<sup>39</sup> The Western Rite Orthodox movement has grown and flourished under Metropolitan Philip’s leadership.

Father Alexander Turner, after a long illness, passed away in November of 1971.<sup>40</sup> Already in 1968, in view of Father Turner’s illness, Metropolitan Philip had already appointed Father Paul Schneirla as administrator of the WRV. In 1978, Schneirla was officially named Vicar General of the Western Rite by Metropolitan Philip.<sup>41</sup>

The increasing theological liberalization of the Protestant Episcopal Church, culminating in the 1976 decision to allow the ordination of women to the priesthood, as well as the approval of a new Prayer Book in 1979, proved to be a great catalyst for growth in the WRV. As early as 1963, alarmed by the actions and writings of California Bishop James Pike, a large group of Episcopalians in Los Altos, California (the Church of the Redeemer), was led into the WRV by Father Edwin Ellison West (1906–1965).

In 1977, the Church of the Incarnation, an Episcopalian parish in Detroit, was received into the Archdiocese, led by its rector, Father Joseph L. W. Angwin, into the WRV. Incarnation was the first parish to be received, whole and entire, into the Archdiocese.<sup>42</sup> At this time, Metropolitan Philip reiterated his support for the WRV, and promised that the hierarchy of the Archdiocese would never force any WRV parish to adopt the Byzantine Rite.

Incarnation Parish was also the first to use the Liturgy of Saint Tikhon, a revised version of the Anglo-Catholic Mass (with elements from both the 1928 American *Book of Common Prayer* and the *Missale Romanum*) and traditional Anglican Divine Office. Since then other Episcopal and continuing Anglican parishes and groups, such as Saint Andrew’s (Eustis, Florida), Saint Michael’s (Whittier, California), Saint Mark’s (Denver, Colorado), Saint Peter’s (Fort Worth, Texas), Saint Benedict’s (Wichita Falls, Texas) and Saint Nicholas (Spokane, Washington), have entered the Archdiocese using the same liturgy. In fact, currently there are more communities using the Liturgy of Saint Tikhon than the Roman Liturgy originally approved for the WRV in 1958.

In 1995, three WRV deaneries – Eastern, Central and Western – were established in order to assist the Vicar General in the administration of the rite.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, in 1996, Antiochian Bishop Basil (Essey) of Wichita, was appointed to be the episcopal overseer of the WRV. Since then, Bishop Basil has been an

38. “Report of the Western Rite Vicariate General.” *The Word*, Vol. 14, No. 8 (October 1970), pp. 18-19.

39. From interviews with Fr. Paul Schneirla (November 12, 2003 and December 7, 2003).

40. *The Word*, Vol. 16, No. 9 (November 1972), p. 16.

41. *The Word*, Vol. 22, No. 9 (November 1978), p. 32.

42. “Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese Receives Anglo-Catholic Parish.” *The Word*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (March 1977), p. 14.

43. “Report of the Western Rite Vicariate,” *The Word*, Vol. 22, No. 9 (November 1978), pp. 32-33.

44. *The Word*, Vol. 25, No. 7 (September 1981), p. 10.

45. *The Word*, Vol. 39, No. 7 (September 1995), p. 21.



enthusiastic supporter and advocate for the WRV in the Archdiocese, and the Western Rite has seen the most dramatic growth and development within his Diocese of Wichita and Mid-America.<sup>46</sup>

Also in 1995, the *Orthodox Missal* was published by the WRV's Saint Luke's Priory Press, which contains official texts used by WRV communities for the Eucharistic Liturgy. In 1996, the unofficial *Saint Andrew Service Book* (a product of Saint Andrew's parish, Eustis, Florida and Saint Michael's parish, Whittier, California) was published. Other books used in the WRV include a Gregorian chant Divine Office book called *Saint Dunstan's Plainsong Psalter* (published in 2001 by Lancelot Andrewes Press, based out of Saint Mark's Parish, Denver) and the collection of Western Rite hymns called *Saint Ambrose Hymnal* (published by S. Gregory's Mission in Washington D.C.).

Generally, the history of the WRV since its inception may be described as one of steady growth, with its share of high points and triumphs as well as low points. Until the reception of the "Evangelical Orthodox" (EOM) in the late 1980's by Metropolitan Philip, for decades the WRV represented "the only missionary effort of the Archdiocese" in the sense of adding new members and communities to the Archdiocese.<sup>47</sup> The WRV started out in 1961 with three communities from the Society of Saint Basil. However, according to one source, by 1978, the number of parishes and missions had increased to 10, and by 1983 the number had increased to 13. By 1995 the number was increased to 15 and an all time high was reached in 1999-2000 with 22 parishes and missions. It would appear that the bursts in growth in the late 70's, early 80's and late 90's was due in large part to crises for traditionalists and conservatives in the Episcopal Church.<sup>48</sup>

Currently the number of Western Rite communities stands at 20, with new mission areas in Toronto, Ontario, Canada; Tyler, Texas; and Wichita, Kansas (the latter being a group of former Episcopalians leaving their denomination over the controversial election of Bishop Robinson of New Hampshire).

Today the Western Rite Vicariate proudly continues the sacred mission given to it by Patriarch Alexander III and Metropolitan Antony – to work towards the reunion of separated Western Christians with the fulness of Orthodoxy, to witness to the Catholicity of the Orthodox Faith, and to enrich the Church by the restoration of its ancient and venerable Western heritage. The clergy and faithful of the WRV show their zeal for the Orthodox Faith and the growth of the Archdiocese in growing their parishes, founding new missions, erecting beautiful churches, and publishing liturgical books and outreach materials. The WRV has been one of the most successful missionary endeavors of American Orthodoxy, and it will continue its mission with the continued blessing and encouragement of the Patriarch and Holy Synod of Antioch, our Metropolitan Philip and the hierarchy of the Archdiocese. §

46. *The Word*, Vol. 40, No. 7 (September 1996), p. 21.

47. *The Word*, Vol. 19, No. 9, p. 33.

48. Unpublished research by Dr. Edward Oppermann (of S. Mark's Parish, Denver), retired University of Colorado professor.