

Finding the New Testament Church

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(The final version of this article should be obtained from Conciliar Press)

Introduction

IN CONTEMPORARY Christianity there is a heightened awareness of a need for a personal knowledge of Christ. This has been evidenced by such phenomena as the Jesus Movement and charismatic renewal. Most thinking Christians have come to realize something else is needed, **the rediscovery of the historic Church.**

Often, in heated reaction to dated and dead Protestant liberalism, we have heard evangelical preachers say, “All you need is Jesus!” Such statements often get rave reviews, but just a little thoughtful reflection quickly shows such a simplistic religion to be shallow and unfulfilling. More and more, that kind of reasoning is being tempered with a renewed emphasis on the whole impact of the Incarnation, the coming in the flesh of the Son of God. If all we needed was Jesus, why would Jesus have promised, *“I will build My Church...”* (Matthew 16:18) ?

The crucial question then becomes which church is the Church? The easy answer, of course, and a correct answer is, the “New Testament Church.” But this isn’t A.D. 65, and we aren’t in old Jerusalem. We are in the twentieth century, and our challenge is to find the New Testament Church in our day, being sure it is the same as the Church of the Apostles — the one Christ established.

Starting in the twentieth century with the abundance of choices available to us is difficult, for we have hundreds of denominations and sects claiming to be the New Testament Church. The Roman Catholic Church makes that claim based on its Apostolic succession. Baptist Churches are unwaveringly confident they hold to the New Testament faith. Often the sign outside a “Church of Christ” reads, “Founded in Jerusalem, 33 A.D.,” thereby staking the claim to be the original Church. And the list goes on. Granted, many groups have maintained, or even rediscovered, important aspects of the New Testament faith. But who is right? Is the pluralism crowd perhaps correct — that essentially everybody is in and ties for first place?

Back to the First Church

THERE IS A PREDICTABLY reliable way to tackle the problem of who is right. Rather than trying to decide which of the over 2,500 Christian groups in North America keeps the original faith best by studying what they are like right now, we can start from the beginning of the Church itself and work our way through history to the present.

The birthday of the Church was Pentecost, the day the Holy Spirit descended on the twelve Apostles in the Upper Room. That day some 3,000 souls believed in Christ and were baptized. When the first Christian community began, *“they continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread (Communion), and in prayers”* (Act 2:42).

From Jerusalem, the faith in Christ spread throughout Judea, to Samaria (Acts 8), to Antioch and the Gentiles (Acts 13), where we find new converts and new churches throughout Asia Minor and other countries of the Roman Empire.

From the pages of the Epistles and the book of Acts, we learn that the Church was not simply another organization in Roman society. The Lord Jesus Christ had given the promise of the Holy Spirit *“will guide you into all truth”* (John 16:13). That promise was fulfilled at Pentecost, when the Church was given birth as a divine institution far above all earthly organizations. In Ephesians (Eph. 2:21) St. Paul called it *“a holy temple of the Lord.”* The Church was a dynamic organism, the living Body of Jesus Christ. She made an indelible impact in the world, and those who became part of her were inwardly renewed.

But we also discover in the New Testament itself that the Church had her share of problems. All was not perfection. Individuals in the Church sought to lead her off the path the Apostles established, and they had to be dealt with along with the errors they invented. Even whole local communities lapsed on occasion and had to be called to repentance. The Church in Laodicea is a vivid example (Revelation ch. 3). Discipline was administered for the sake of purity in the Church. But there was growth and a maturing even as the Church was attacked from within and without. The same Spirit who gave her birth gave her power to correct and purify her members. The Church grew and became strong until she eventually covered the whole of the Roman Empire.

THE SECOND CENTURY AND ON

AS THE PROCESSION of the early Church moves from the pages of the New Testament and on into the succeeding centuries of her his-tory, it is helpful to trace her growth and development in terms of specific categories. Therefore, let us look first at a category important for all Christian people: doctrine. Did she maintain the truth of God as given by Christ and His Apostles? Second, what about worship? Is there a discernible way in which the people of God have offered a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to Him? Third, we will consider Church government. What sort of government did the Church have?

1. **Doctrine:** Not only did the Church begin under the teaching of the Apostles, but she was also instructed to “*stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle*” (II Thessalonians 2:15). The Apostle Paul insisted that those matters delivered by him and his fellow Apostles, both in person, and in the writings that would come to be called the New Testament, be adhered to carefully. Thus followed such appropriate warnings as “*in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ... withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us*” (II Thessalonians 3:6). The doctrines taught by Christ and His disciples are to be safeguarded by “*the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth*” (I Timothy 3:15) and are not open for reinterpretation.

Midway through the first century, a dispute over adherence to Old Testament laws arose in Antioch. The matter could not be settled there, and outside help was needed. The leaders of the Antiochian Church, the community which had earlier dispatched Paul and Barnabas as missionaries, brought the matter to Jerusalem for consideration by the Apostles and elders there. The matter was discussed, debated, and a written decision was forthcoming.

It was James, the *brother* of the Lord, and the first bishop of Jerusalem, who gave the solution to the problem. This settlement, agreed to by all concerned, at what is known as the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), set the pattern for the use of Church councils in the centuries ahead to settle doctrinal and moral issues that arose (in accordance with Matthew 18:17). Thus, in the history of the Church we find scores of such councils, and on various levels, to settle matters of dispute, and to deal with those who do not adhere to the Apostolic faith.

In addition to this well-known controversy, the first three hundred years of Christian history were also marked by the appearance of certain heresies or false teachings such as secret philosophic schemes only for initiates (Gnosticism), wild prophetic programs (Montanism), and grave errors regarding the three Persons of the Trinity (Sabellianism).

Then, in the early fourth century, a heresy with potential for Church-wide disruption appeared and was propagated by Arius, a presbyter in Alexandria (Egypt). He denied the eternity of the Son of God, claiming, contrary to the Apostles’ doctrine, that the Son was a created being who came into existence at a point in time and thus was not truly God. This serious error crept through the Church like a cancer. Turmoil spread almost everywhere. To solve the problem, the first Church-wide, or ecumenical, council met in Nicea in A.D. 325 to consider this doctrine. Some 318 bishops, along with priests and deacons, rejected the new teaching of Arius and his associates and upheld the Apostles’ doctrine of Christ, confirming “there never was a time when the Son of God was not,” and issued a definition of the Apostolic teaching concerning Christ in what we today call the Nicene Creed.

Between the years 325 and 787, seven such Church-wide conclaves were held, all dealing first and foremost with some specific challenge to the Apostolic teaching about Jesus Christ. These are known as the Seven Ecumenical Councils, meeting in the cities of Nicea, Ephesus, Chalcedon, and Constantinople.

For the first thousand years of Christian history, the entire Church, save for the heretics, embraced and defended the New Testament Apostolic faith. There was no division. And this one faith, preserved through all these trials, attacks, and tests, this one Apostolic faith, was called the *Orthodox* faith.

2. **Worship:** Doctrinal purity was tenaciously maintained. But true Christianity is far more than adherence to a set of correct beliefs alone. The life of the Church is centrally expressed in her worship or adoration of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It was Jesus Himself Who told the woman at the well, “*the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him*” (John 4:23).

At the Last Supper, Jesus instituted the *Eucharist*, Communion, when He took bread and wine, blessed them, and said to His disciples, “*This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me*” and, “*This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you*” (Luke 22:19-21). From New Testament books such as the Acts and Corinthians we know that the faithful received Holy Communion each Lord’s Day (Acts 20:7-11). And also from such first and second century sources as the Didache and Saint Justin Martyr, we learn that the Eucharist was at the very center of Christian worship.

And just as the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets were read in the synagogues of the Jews, so the Church also immediately gave high priority to the public reading of Scripture and to preaching in her worship, along with the Eucharistic meal.

Even before the middle of the first century, Christian worship was known by the term *liturgy*, which means literally “the common work” or “common service.” The early liturgy of the Church’s worship was composed of the two essential parts: (1) the liturgy of the word, including hymns, Scripture reading, and preaching; and (2) the liturgy of the faithful, composed of intercessory prayers, the kiss of peace, and the Eucharist. Virtually from the beginning, the liturgy had a definable shape or form which continues to this day.

Modern Christians advocating freedom from the liturgy in worship are usually shocked to learn that such spontaneity was never the practice in the ancient Church! A basic pattern or shape of Christian worship was observed from the start. And as the Church grew and matured, that structure matured as well. Hymns, Scripture readings, and prayers were intertwined in the basic foundation. A clear, purposeful procession through the year, honoring in word, song, and praise the birth, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, and marking crucial issues in Christian life and experience, was forthcoming. The Christian life was lived in reality in the worship of the Church. Far from being routine, the worship of the historic Church participated in the unfolding drama of the richness and mystery of the Gospel itself!

Further, specific landmarks in our salvation and walk with Christ were practiced. Baptism and Chrismation were there from the first day of the Church. Marriage, Anointing of the sick, Confession of sins, and Ordination to the ministry of the Gospel were recognized and practiced. The Christians understood these to be great mysteries in which grace and power from God were being given to people according to the individual need of each person. The Church saw these events as holy moments in her life and called them her mysteries or sacraments.

3. **Government:** No one seriously questions whether or not the Apostles led the Church at her beginnings. They had been given the commission to preach the Gospel (Matthew 28:23) and the authority to forgive or retain sins (John 20:23). Theirs was by no means a mission of only preaching. They built the Church itself under Christ’s headship! To govern it, three definite and permanent offices, as taught in the New Testament, were in evidence.

a. The office of **bishop**. The Apostles themselves were the first bishops in the Church. Even before Pentecost, after Judas had turned traitor, Peter declared in applying Psalm 109:8, “*Let another take his office (bishopric)*” (Acts 1:20). The word office or *bishopric* refers to the office of a bishop, and its use obviously indicates a role of the Apostles as bishops. Some have mistakenly argued that the office of

bishop was a later, “human” invention. Quite to the contrary, the Apostles were the New Testament bishops, and they appointed bishops to succeed them to oversee the Church in each locality.

Occasionally, the objection is still heard that the office of bishop and presbyter were originally identical. It is true that the terms are sometimes used interchangeably in the New Testament while the Apostles were present, but it was the understanding of the entire early Church that, with the death of the Apostles, the offices of bishop and presbyter were distinct. Ignatius of Antioch, consecrated bishop by A.D. 70 in the church from which Paul and Barnabas had been sent out, writes just after the turn of the century that bishops appointed by the Apostles, surrounded by their presbyters, were everywhere in the Church.

- b. The office of **presbyter**. Elders or presbyters are mentioned very early in the life of Church in the book of Acts and in the Epistles. It is evident that in each place a Christian community developed, elders were appointed by the Apostles to pastor the people.

As time passed, presbyters were referred to as “priests,” in view of the fact that the Old Covenant priesthood had been fulfilled in Christ and that the Church is corporately a priesthood of believers. The priest was understood as an intermediary between God and the people and as a dispenser of grace.

- c. The office of **deacon**. The third order or office in the government of the New Testament Church was the deacon. At first the Apostles fulfilled this office themselves. But with the rapid growth of the Church, seven initial deacons were selected, as reported in Acts 6, to help carry the responsibility of service to those in need. It was one of these deacons, Saint Stephen, who became the first martyr of the Church.

Through the centuries, the deacons have not only served the material needs of the Church, but also have held a key role in the liturgical life of the Church. Often called “the eyes and ears of the bishop,” many deacons have become priests and ultimately entered the episcopal office.

The authority of the bishops, presbyters, and deacons was not understood in those early centuries as being apart from the people, but always from among the people. But the people of God were called to submit to those who ruled over them (Hebrews 13:17, I Peter 5:5), and they were also called to give their agreement to the direction of the leaders for the Church. On a number of occasions in history, that “Amen” was not forthcoming, and the bishops of the Church took note and changed course. Later in history, some Church leaders departed from the ancient model and usurped authority for themselves. This brought the ancient model into question. However the problem was not in the model but in the deviation from it.

It should also be mentioned that it was out of the ministry and life of the Apostles that the people of God, the laity, were established in the Church. Far from being a herd of observers, the laity are vital in the effectiveness of the Church. They are the recipients and active users of the gifts and grace of the Spirit. Each one of the laity has a role in the life and function of the Church. Each one is to supply something to the whole (I Corinthians 12:7). And it is the responsibility of the bishops, the priests, and the deacons to be sure that this is a reality for the laity.

The worship of the Church at the close of its first 1,000 years had substantially the same shape from place to place. The doctrine was the same. The whole Church confessed one creed, the same in every place, and had weathered many attacks. The government of the Church was recognizably one everywhere. And this One Church was the Orthodox Church.

After a Thousand Years - a Parting of the Ways

TENSIONS BEGAN to mount as the first millennium was drawing to a close. They were reaching the breaking point as the second 1000 years began. While numerous doctrinal, political, economic, and cultural factors began to work to separate the Church in a division that would be the East and the West, two giant issues ultimately emerged above

others: (1) the claim by the Pope of Rome to have authority over all other bishops of the Church; and (2) the addition of a novel clause to the Church's creed.

1. The Papacy: Among the Twelve, Saint Peter was early acknowledged as the first among equals. He was a spokesman for the Twelve before and after Pentecost. He was the first bishop of Antioch and later bishop of Rome. No one challenged his role.

After the death of the Apostles, as leadership in the Church developed, the bishop of Rome came to be recognized as first in honor, even though all bishops were equals. But after nearly 300 years, the bishop of Rome slowly began to assume to himself a role of superiority over the others, ultimately claiming to be the only true successor to Saint Peter. The vast majority of the other bishops of the Church never questioned Rome's primacy of honor, but they patently rejected its claim as the universal head of the Church on earth. This claim became one of the major factors leading to the tragic split between the Western and Eastern Church which we will soon be considering.

2. The Addition to the Creed: A disagreement about the Holy Spirit also began to develop in the Church. Does the Holy Spirit proceed from the Father? Or, does He proceed from the Father and Son?

In John 15:26 our Lord Jesus Christ asserts, *"When the Helper (Comforter) comes, Whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me."* This is the basic statement in all of the New Testament about the Holy Spirit "proceeding," and it is clear: He "proceeds from the Father." Thus when the council at Constantinople in A.D. 381, during the course of its conclave, reaffirmed the Creed of Nicea (A.D. 325), it expanded that Creed to proclaim these familiar words: (we believe) *"in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father, who together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified."*

But two hundred years later, at a local council in Toledo, Spain (A.D. 589), King Reccared declared that "the Holy Spirit also should be confessed by us and taught to proceed from the Father and the Son." The King may have meant well, but he was changing the Apostolic teaching about the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately the local Spanish council agreed with his error.

Because of the teaching of the Holy Scriptures as confessed by the entire Church at Nicea and at Constantinople and for centuries beyond, there is no reason to believe anything other than that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. Period!

But centuries later, in what was looked upon by many as a largely political move, the Pope of Rome unilaterally changed the wording of the creed. Such an independent action was bound to evoke a strong response by the Eastern bishops. They saw it as a flagrant violation of the long established practice that no universal creed could be altered or changed apart from the corporate action of an ecumenical council. Though initially rejected in both East and West, even by some of Rome's closest neighboring bishops, the Pope eventually convinced the Western bishops to capitulate to this change. Although this change may appear small, the consequences have proven disastrous — both from a theological and an historical perspective. This issue represented a major departure from the Orthodox doctrine of the Church. It became another instrumental cause leading to the separation of the Roman Catholic Church from the Eastern Orthodox Church.

The Schism

Conflict between the Roman Pope and the East mounted — especially in the West's dealings with the Patriarch of Constantinople. It was even asserted that the Pope had the authority to decide who should be the bishop of Constantinople — something that violated historical precedent and that no Orthodox bishop could endure. The net result of this assertion was that the Eastern Church, and in fact the entire Christian Church, was seen by the West to be under the domination of the Pope.

A series of intrigues followed one upon the other as the Roman papacy began asserting an increasing degree of unilateral and authoritarian control upon the rest of the Western Church. Perhaps the most antagonistic of these

political, religious, and even military intrigues, as far as the East was concerned, occurred in the year 1054. A cardinal, sent by the pope, slapped a document in the altar of the church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople during the Sunday worship, excommunicating the Patriarch of Constantinople from the Church!

Rome, of course, was flagrantly overstepping its bounds by this action. Some very sordid chapters of Church history were written during the next decades. Ultimately, the outcome of these tragic events was a massive split that occurred between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church. While some disagree that the West departed the New Testament Church at this point, the reality remains that the schism was never healed.

As the centuries passed, conflict continued. Attempts at union failed and the split widened. Orthodox Christians agree that in departing from the tradition of the Church, the West deviated from historic Christianity and, in so doing, set the stage for countless other dogmatic errors and church divisions which were to follow.

The West: Reformation and Counter-reformation

DURING THE SUCCEEDING centuries after AD. 1054, the growing distinction between East and West was indelibly marked in history. The East maintained the full stream of New Testament faith and practice. The Western, or Roman Catholic, Church, after its schism from the Orthodoxy, bogged down in many complex problems. Then, centuries after Rome committed itself to its unilateral spirit of doctrine and practice, another upheaval was festering — this time not next door to the East, but inside the Western gates themselves.

Though many in the West had spoken out against Roman domination and practice in earlier years, in the sixteen century a little-known German monk named Martin Luther inadvertently launched an attack against certain Roman Catholic practices that ended up affecting world history. His famous Ninety-Five Theses were nailed to the church door at Wittenburg in 1517. In a short time those theses were signaling the start of what came to be called in the West the Protestant Reformation. Luther sought an audience with the Pope but was denied, and in 1521 he was excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church. He had intended no break with Rome. Unresponsive to Luther's many legitimate objections concerning the novel practices of the now-separated Western Church, Rome refused to budge or bend. The door to future unity in the West slammed shut with a resounding crash.

The protests of Luther were not unnoticed. The reforms he sought in Germany were soon accompanied by the demands of Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich, John Calvin in Geneva, and hundreds of others all over Western Europe. Fueled by complex political, social, and economical factors, in addition to religious problems, the Reformation spread like a raging fire into virtually every nook and cranny of the Roman Catholic Church. Its Western ecclesiastical monopoly was greatly diminished, and massive division replaced its artificial unity. The ripple effect of that division continues on even to our day.

If trouble on the Continent were not trouble enough, the Church in England was in the process of going its own way as well. Henry VIII, amidst his marital problems, replaced the Pope of Rome with himself as head of the Church of England. For only a few short years would the Pope ever again have ascendancy in England. And the English Church itself would be shattered by great division.

As decade followed decade in the West, the many branches of Protestantism took various forms. There were even divisions that insisted they were neither Protestant nor Roman Catholic. All seemed to share a mutual dislike for the bishop of Rome and the practice of his Church, and most wanted far less centralized forms of leadership. While some, such as the Lutherans and Anglicans, held on to a basic form of liturgy and sacrament, others, such as the Reformed Churches and the even more radical Anabaptists and their descendants, questioned and rejected many biblical ideas of hierarchy, sacrament, historic tradition, and other elements of historic Christian practice, no matter when and where they appeared in history, thinking they were freeing themselves of Roman Catholicism. To this day, many sincere, modern, professing Christians will reject even the biblical texts that speak of historic Christian practice, simply because they think those practices are "Roman Catholic." To use the old adage, they "threw the baby out with the bathwater," without even being aware of it.

Thus, while retaining in varying degrees portions of original Christianity, neither Protestantism nor Catholicism can lay historic claim to being the true New Testament Church. In dividing from the Orthodox Church, Rome forfeited its place in the Church of the New Testament. In the division of the Reformation, the Protestants — as well meaning as they might have been — failed to return to the New Testament Church.

The Orthodox Church Today

DESPITE ALL THE persecutions and oppressions during its 2,000 years of history, the Orthodox Church, the Church of Peter and Paul and the other Apostles, miraculously exists today and carries on the same faith and life of the original Church. Although organically it was always one, on the practical level the Church developed and grew in its “branches” — the local Orthodox Churches. The subdivisions are dictated by differences in language and culture.

Presently there are fifteen local Orthodox Churches: the Church of Constantinople (Istanbul, Turkey), the Church of Alexandria (Egypt), the Church of Antioch (with headquarters in Damascus, Syria), the Church of Jerusalem, the Church of Russia, the Church of Serbia, the Church of Romania, the Church of Bulgaria, the Church of Cyprus, the Church of Greece, the Church of Albania, the Church of Poland, the Church of Czechoslovakia, and the Church of America. There are also “autonomous” churches (retaining a token canonical dependence upon a mother see) in Crete, Finland, Japan and Sinai. Among the autocephalous churches, the first nine are headed by patriarchs, the others by archbishops or metropolitans. These leadership titles are strictly honorary. The total membership of the Orthodox Church today is about 225 million. Among the various Churches there is, as can be seen, an enormous variation in size, with Russia at one extreme and Sinai at the other.

This family of self-governing Orthodox Churches is held together not by a centralized organization, but by the bond of unity in faith and communion in the sacraments. The decentralized system of independent local Churches has the advantage of being highly flexible and is easily adapted to changing conditions. Local Churches can be created, suppressed, and then restored again, with very little disturbance to the life of the Church as a whole.

In North America, the Orthodox Church until recently has been largely limited to ethnic boundaries, not spreading much beyond the parishes of the committed immigrants that brought the Church to the shores of this continent. But the Holy Spirit has continued His work, causing new people to discover this Church of the New Testament. People have begun to find Orthodox Christianity both through the writings of the early Church Fathers, and through the witness of Orthodox Christians.

What does this identity of the Orthodox Church with the New Testament Church mean as far as the other churches in Christendom? Many have retained much of the truth of Orthodox Christianity. But groups which possess some or much of the truth are one thing; the New Testament Church is yet another.

What is it that’s missing in the non-Orthodox Churches — even the best of them? **Fullness!** By fullness is meant the keeping of the Truth, the keeping of the grace of the Holy Spirit, and the preservation of all that the Apostles gave to the Church. The fullness of the New Testament faith and mysteries is to be found only in the New Testament Church. Attending an Orthodox service doesn’t guarantee you will receive the advantage of the fullness of the Church. But this fullness is there for those who seek it.

For those who seriously desire the fullness of the New Testament faith, there must be a **return to Orthodoxy**. Being aware of this ancient Church is not enough. Let me make these specific suggestions that will provide you with a tangible means to look into Orthodox Christianity and to decide for yourself whether or not it is the Church for which you have searched.

Visit: Look up “Orthodox” or “Eastern Orthodox” in the “Church” section of your Yellow Pages. Ask for the whereabouts of the nearest Orthodox parish. Pay a visit, several visits. Meet the priest and ask him to help you study and learn. And be prepared to be patient. Often much of the Liturgy is not in English! But a service book at the church’s entrance will help out here.

Read: There are a number of books and periodicals immensely helpful to people seeking to learn about the Orthodox Church. Let me mention a few: *The Orthodox Church* by Timothy Ware (Bishop Kallistos) , *Introducing the Orthodox Church* by Anthony M. Conaris, *These Truths We Hold* by Saint Tikhon's monastery; *The Orthodox Faith* by Father Thomas Hopko (4 volume set); *Feed My Sheep* by Metropolitan Philip Saliba (Saint Vladimir's Press), *The Living God*, (a catechism in two volumes) and *The Incarnate God*, edited by Catherine Aslanoff. Catalogs of Orthodox books, pamphlets, icons and periodical publications can be obtained from the following publishing houses and bookstores:

Holy Trinity Monastery Orthodox Life Jordanville, NY 13361 (315) 858-0940	Holy Cross Bookstore 50 Goddard Ave, Brookline, MA 02146 (617) 731-3500	Light and Life Publishing Co. 4836 Park Glen Rd Minneapolis, MN 55416 (612) 925-3888
OLOGOS Mission P.O. Box 5333 St. Louis, MO 63115 (314) 721-4342	Living Orthodoxy 1180 Orthodox Way Liberty, Tn 37097	The Shepherd P.O. Box 743 Rye, NH 03870
St. Nectarios Press 10300 Ashworth Ave North Seattle, WA 98133-9410	St. Vladimir's Bookstore 575 Scarsdale Rd Crestwood, NY 10707-1699 (914) 961-8313	<i>Orthodox America</i> P.O. Box 383 Richfield Springs NY 134-0383 (508) 448-5592
Conciliar Press Deacon Ray Zell P.O. Box 76, Ben Lomond, CA 95005 (408) 336-5115	Sarov Press Nicholas A. Kosar P.O. Box 13 Stanford, CT 06497	St. John of Kronstadt Press 1180 Orthodox Way Liberty, TN 37095-9720 Fr. Gregory Williams

To any God-seeking person it is extremely important to understand that the original Apostolic Church still exists in our days, and, as Jesus Christ has promised, will exist until the end of the world. On doctrinal and historical grounds it can be proven that the Orthodox Church is the same Church which the Apostles preached. As it did two thousands years ago, it still zealously holds on to the treasures which Jesus Christ gave it in the beginning: the Truth and the Grace of the Holy Spirit. The Orthodox bishops are direct successors of the Apostles of Jesus.

The Church's duty is to bear witness to the Apostolic faith. Today in the West there are many, both on the Catholic and on the Protestant side, who are trying to shake themselves free of the 'crystallization of the sixteenth century' and who desire to 'get behind the Reformation and the Middle Ages.' It is precisely here that the Orthodox can help. Orthodoxy stands outside the circle of ideas in which Western Christians have moved for the past eight centuries; it has undergone no scholastic revolution, no Reformation and Counter-Reformation, but still lives in that original Christian Tradition which so many in the West now desire to recover.

Conclusion

TODAY THERE ARE over a thousand churches and religions that claim to be the Church founded by Jesus Christ, or at least the direct descendants of it. Since they hold to different beliefs and contradict each other, most of them, or actually all of them except one, are not true churches of Jesus Christ. The Scriptures teach that the true Church of Jesus Christ can be only one, and, as we know from history, for the first thousand years the Church was essentially one. There were no Baptists, Pentecostals, Jehovah Witnesses or any other of the modern-day denominations. For administrative reasons the Church subdivided into five Patriarchal centers — Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Alexandria, and Constantinople — which formed a cohesive whole and were in full communion with each other. There were occasional heretical or schismatic groups going their own way, to be sure, but the Church was unified until the 11th century. Then, in events culminating in A.D. 1054, the Roman Patriarchate pulled away from the other four, pursuing its long-developing claim of universal headship of the Church.

Today, nearly a thousand years later, four of the original five Patriarchates remain in full communion, maintaining that Orthodox apostolic faith of the inspired New Testament record. Other national churches, like the Russian, the Serbian, the Bulgarian, for a total of 15 altogether, have since been added to them.

Addendum: A Time Line of Church History

- 33 Pentecost — The Holy Spirit descends on the Apostles and gives birth to the Church.
- 33-100 Apostolic age — Rapid spread of the Church throughout the Roman Empire and beyond.
- 49 Apostolic Council at Jerusalem abolishes the Mosaic law.
Gradually Sunday (called the *Lord's Day*) replaces the Sabbath as the day of worship.
- 45-80 Apostles Paul, Peter, James, John and Judas write their epistles. About the same time the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke are written.
- 64-67 Persecution of Christians in Rome under Emperor Nero. Sts. Peter and Paul become martyrs.
- 70 Destruction of Jerusalem, as foretold by Jesus (Matt. ch. 24).
- 96-98 Persecution of Christians under Emperor Domitian. Apostle John is exiled to Patmos where he writes the Book of Revelation. Later, circa 100-105 A.D., he writes his Gospel.
- 60-180 Several Gnostic sects appear which attempt to infiltrate Christian communities.
- †110 St. Ignatius Bishop of Antioch, the author of several important epistles, is (†) martyred at Rome.
- 150 St. Justin Martyr writes books in defense of the Christian faith, describes how Baptism and Liturgy were performed in his time.
- †202 St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, author of several books against heresies is martyred.
- 215-290 The rise of Christian schools in Alexandria and Antioch.
- 244-49 The Roman Emperor Decius persecutes Christians.
- †258 St. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, author and theologian, is martyred.
- 300 Christianization of Britain; †303 St. Alban is martyred.
- 300-305 The Emperor Diocletian vows to vanquish Christianity. Thousands of Christians, including St. George, St. Barbara, and St. Catherine are martyred.
- 313 Emperor Constantine ends persecution of Christians and gives them the right to freely exercise their faith.
- 325 The First Ecumenical Council in Nicea defends the co-eternality of the Son with the Father, condemns Arius and promulgates the Creed.
- 326 Empress Helena finds the Cross of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem. Later she builds the Church of the Resurrection on the place of Christ's Resurrection, where each year on the Orthodox Pascha (Easter) the Holy Fire descends.
- 330 Beginning and spread of monasticism in Egypt: St. Anthony and Pachomius.

- †343 St. Nicholas, Bishop of Myra in Lycia.
- 330-410 Period of the great Fathers of the Church: Sts. Athanasius, Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, Ambrose of Milan, John Chrysostom and others.
- 381 The Second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople reaffirms the need to have five Patriarchates: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem.
- 410 Alaric, leader of the Germanic Visigoths, takes Rome
- 451 The Fourth Ecumenical Council affirms apostolic doctrine of two natures in Christ.
- 563 The Great Church, Hagia Sofia, consecrated in Constantinople.
- 484 St. Sabba founds his monastery in the Judean wilderness, where later the Typicon for church services is developed.
- 589 A local synod of the Roman Catholic Church in Toledo, Spain, adds *filioque* to the Nicene Creed. This error causes division between the Eastern and the Western Churches.
- 630 First the Persians, then the Arabs threaten the Byzantine Empire, persecute Christians and destroy churches.
- 685 The spread of monasticism on Mt. Athos begins.
- 726 Emperor Leo the Isaurian starts his campaign against the veneration of ikons.
- †780 St. John Damascene the author of the *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* and of many canticles for Sundays and feast days.
- 771 Arabs invade Spain.
- 787 The Seventh Ecumenical Council at Nicea sanctions the veneration of ikons.
- 864 The Prince Boris of Bulgaria is baptized. About this time Sts. Cyril and Methodius spread the Orthodox faith among Slavic nations.
- 988 Prince Vladimir is baptized and begins conversion of the Rus (Russians) to Christianity.
- 1051 Sts. Anthony and Theodosius found their monastery near Kiev.
- 1054 The Great Schism between the Eastern and Western Churches begins.
- 1095 The Crusades, begun by the Roman Church, weaken the Eastern Orthodox churches in Palestine and Syria. Constantinople is sacked by the Crusaders in 1204, further estranging the East and the West.
- †1263 Russian Prince St. Alexander Nevsky, the great defender of the Orthodox faith.
- †1392 St. Sergius of Radonezh, famous founder of the Holy Trinity monastery near Moscow.
- 1438 St. Mark of Ephesus defends the Orthodox faith at the Council of Florence.
- 1453 Turks overrun Constantinople; Byzantine Empire ends.
- 1455 Gutenberg prints the first Bible.

- 1517 Protestant Reformation starts with Martin Luther nailing his Ninety-Five Theses on the door of the church in Wittenberg.
- 1529 Church of England begins pulling away from Rome.
- 1794 Russian missionaries, St. Herman and others, arrive on Kodiak Island in Alaska; introduce Orthodoxy to North America.
- †1833 St. Seraphim of Sarov.
- †1879 St. Bishop Innocenty, Apostle of Alaska.
- †1891 St. Ambrosy, elder of Optina.
- †1908 St. John of Kronstadt, great Saint and miracleworker.
- †1911 St. Bishop Nicholas, Apostle of Japan.
- 1917 The revolution in Russia begins. Christians are persecuted and martyred. Emigres from Russia and Eastern European countries spread Orthodoxy throughout the world.
- 1918 Bishop Tikhon of San Francisco becomes Patriarch of Russia.
- †1966 St. John of Shanghai and San Francisco.
- 1988 The millennium of the Baptism of the Rus is celebrated.
- 1990 Beginning of renewal of Orthodox Christianity in Russia.
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The Creed

I BELIEVE in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only-begotten, begotten of the Father before all ages; Light of Light: true God of true God; begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father, by Whom all things were made; Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man; And was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried; And arose again on the third day according to the Scriptures; And ascended into Heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of the Father; And shall come again, with glory, to judge both the living and the dead; Whose kingdom shall have no end. And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life; Who proceeds from the Father; Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; Who spake by the prophets. In One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. I confess one baptism for the remission of sins. I look for the resurrection of the dead, And the life of the age to come. Amen

Missionary Leaflet 43E
Published by Holy Protection Church
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