

One should become an Orthodox Christian because, on the basis of Holy Scripture and the continuous history of two thousand years of Christianity, the Orthodox Church represents the fullest and most correct expression of the original Faith taught by our Lord Jesus Christ and inaugurated by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

In the past, when traditional Christians were considering becoming members of a church, they either knew nothing about the Orthodox Faith, or believed that its cultural associations were too foreign for them. While it is true that some Orthodox Christians continue to identify with their past cultural heritage, it is also true that Orthodoxy has, increasingly, become a part of American cultural life. Culture, however, in whatever form, is not the substance of the Church which was founded on the day of Pentecost. The substance of the Church is the Way, the Truth, and the Life of Jesus Christ. We need to start with Jesus, if we twenty first century seekers for truth are to discover the Church He founded.

Jesus' active public ministry lasted fewer than three years. During that time, He established the beginnings of the Church, giving the apostles authority to represent Him. After His Ascension into Heaven and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples at Pentecost, the apostles strove to build up the Church, extending the authority of Jesus to others who succeeded them in teaching, worship, and leadership. In the Acts of the Apostles (2:42) we read that the early Church, devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and the prayers.

As time went on, these four qualities of the Christian community life took the forms of:

- the New Testament and the Nicene Creed,
- the apostolic ministry of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons,
- celebrating the Eucharist, and
- other sacramental actions which strengthened their union with God.

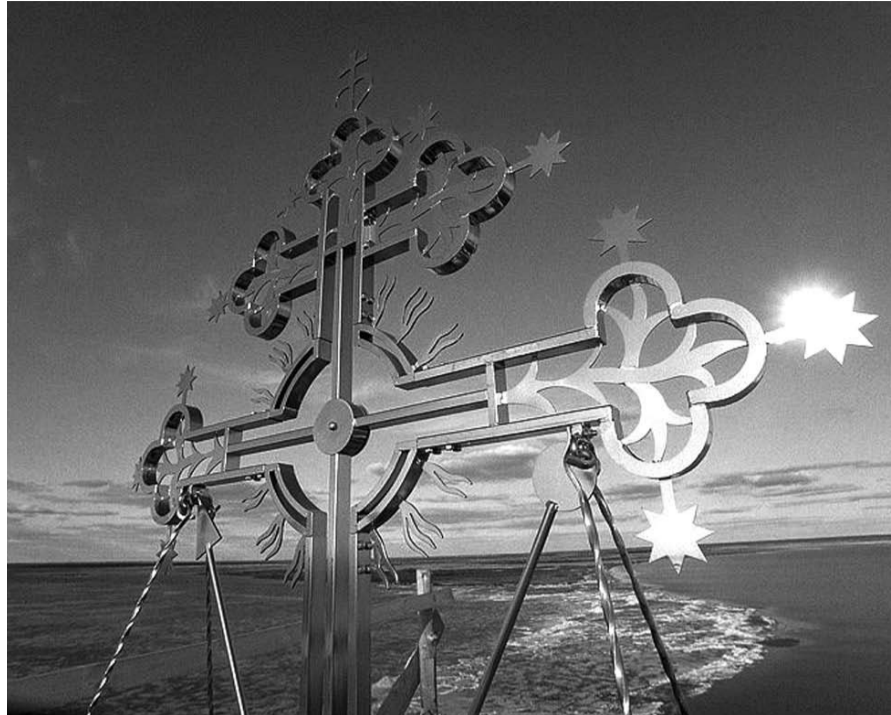
For centuries, wherever in the world the Christian Faith spread, there existed a basic continuity and consistency in the life and teachings of the unified Church. After the first thousand years of the Christian Era, however, two major disruptions, originating in the West, shattered the unity of Christendom. The first disruption was caused by the insistence of the Roman Papacy that it had universal jurisdiction over the entire Church, a claim which violated the concept of collegial leadership which characterized early Christianity. The resultant separation of the Papacy from the traditional Church, led later, in subsequent centuries, to its unilateral promulgation of new and previously unknown doctrines. This, in turn, resulted in the second disruption to Christian unity, known as the Protestant Reformation. The Roman Church's excesses and unscriptural claims caused an over-reaction on the part of the Protestant Reformers resulting in doctrinal distortion and subtraction from the original and traditional body of Christian beliefs and practises.

Only the Orthodox Church was able, through the grace of God, to retain the fullness of Christian Faith, worship and life through the centuries without addition, subtraction or distortion.

Today, in America, the Orthodox Church is represented by various jurisdictions.

At a time when so many traditional Christians are unhappy and confused by the moral and doctrinal changes taking place within their churches, when so many denominations seems to be rewriting and adjusting their theology in order to comply with contemporary social attitudes and trends, Orthodox Christianity offers an alternative.

The Church can only be the Church if it is in real, literal, historical continuity with the Apostles. There is a 'body' in history that has one faith, one worship, a traceable development and continuity which began historically with the Apostles. If there is no Church which has the fullness



WHY SHOULD I BECOME AN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN?



of grace and truth, the fullness of Christ's presence, then Jesus failed and the world hasn't been saved. We believe and proclaim to this day that there is a Church in which the fullness of grace and truth, which resides in Christ, is made accessible to human beings. The Church is salvation; the Church is eternal life in its deepest and fullest sense. This salvation is in the Orthodox Church.

As you read this, you are being invited to consider the saving life offered by God within the Orthodox Church. Twenty first century Christianity, to be fully valid, must have unbroken links with First century Christianity. Only in the Orthodox Faith can be found the continuity and consistency which preserve these links.

You are encouraged to join others as they begin their pilgrimage into God's Kingdom by becoming one with His Church. There is one Body and one Spirit... one Lord, one Faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all. Ephesians 4:4-6

Three questions are put to those who are looking at their options. They are as follows:

— Does the Church in which I wish to be sustained guarantee me the continual grace and comfort of the sacraments as they were instituted by Christ?

— Does my choice work for the building-up and the unity of the Church or its further disintegration?

— Is it a Church into which I wish to inculcate my children and grand-children because I am convinced of its future and its ability to convert others?

In Holy Orthodoxy we can give a most vigorous Yes! to each of these questions.

Is the Orthodox Church the perfect church? Of course not. It is filled with sinners. It has many problems. But the faith is not one of them. Bishop Kallistos (formerly Timothy Ware, a convert from Anglicanism and author of *The Orthodox Church and The Orthodox Way*) writes that as the Western denominations progressively lose their grasp on the fundamentals of Christianity, more and more people must turn to the Orthodox Church to find simple Christianity.

Orthodox life emphasizes the love and joy of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the reunion of a fallen humanity with its God, and the victory of the Resurrection. The Orthodox Church views salvation less as occurring at one specific «born again» instant and more as a continuous process of «being born again». From its earliest days, the Church recognized that even mature Christians fail; perfect living is a worthy goal, but it is beyond human achievement. Orthodoxy therefore sees salvation as a gift from God as we turn our hearts to Him; it is a process of nurturing spiritual growth and renewal through time; it comes as the fruits of love, repentance, prayer, worship, and service in Christ's Holy Church.

Orthodoxy sees the Church as the organic, living Body of Christ, who is its only Head on earth and in Heaven. As the Body of Christ, the repository of Faith, the community of the Faithful, and the dispenser of Sacraments, the Church is essential for the salvation of its members, and its members are essential for the salvation work of the Church.

In conformity with the first century Church, Orthodox worship focuses on celebrating the Eucharistic Mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ's Sacrifice with hymns, Psalms, prayers, and teaching. The Divine Liturgy remains the forms and prayers of the early Church, having changed little in the last fifteen centuries.

As so we say again to everyone: Come home to Orthodoxy! Why stay in Egypt when God offers you a land where you can be free? Why remain in a post-Christian denomination, when you could live in peace, propagate the faith, and leave a Christian heritage to your children? God bless you for your faith, your courage, your hope and your intentions. Don't waste them.

