

The so called "Pentarchy" consisted of the five ancient patriarchates of the undivided Church of the first millennium of her history, including the Churches of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. Since the end of the 4th century, the five patriarchates had indeed been the most prominent centres of the universal Christian church, enjoying a de facto primacy based on such empirical factors as the economic and political importance of their cities and countries.

These major centers of early Christianity, founded by the apostles, were looked to by their respective regions as leaders in Church life, and eventually their bishops came to be regarded as the primates of their areas. The members of the Pentarchy all participated in some form in the first eight Ecumenical Councils, from 325 to 880. Their relationship with each other, despite various periods of rivalry and dispute, was generally in terms of fraternal equality.

After the Ascension of Jesus Christ, the apostles dispersed to preach Christianity to the world. They each founded different patriarchates. Some of the most prominent disciples of Jesus founded the patriarchates that made up the Pentarchy. Jerusalem – James, Antioch and Rome – Peter, Alexandria – Mark, Constantinople – Andrew.

After the seventh-century Arab conquests and the Byzantine loss of the Rome-Ravenna corridor, only Constantinople's patriarchate remained securely within the capital of the Roman Empire—the Pope at Rome was independent, Jerusalem and Alexandria were under Muslim rule, and Antioch was on the front lines of hundreds of years of recurring border warfare between the Byzantine Empire and the Arab Caliphate. Also during the Middle Ages, the center of gravity of Christendom had shifted northward, and the majority of Christians in Muslim-ruled Egypt and Syria were Non-Chalcedonians who refused to recognize the authority of either Rome or Constantinople. Together, these historical-political changes meant that the original ideal of five great co-operating centers of administration of the whole Christian Church grew ever more remote from practical reality.

The Church of Jerusalem is the «Mother of all Churches» of all of Christendom, because it was in Jerusalem that the Church was established on the day of Pentecost with the descent of the Holy Spirit on the disciples of Jesus Christ. From Jerusalem the gospel of Christ was spread to the world.

As Christianity spread, and the persecutions of the Jews by Roman authorities in their homeland increased, causing the dispersion of many of the Christians from Jerusalem, the import of this church and its impact on the ongoing life of the whole Church diminished.

ANCIENT PATRIARCHATES OF JERUSALEM, ANTIOCH, AND ALEXANDRIA TODAY

As other churches gained ascendancy, namely the Churches of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, and Antioch, the Church of Jerusalem was accorded a place of honour with them among the five original Christian patriarchates of the Christian world (Pentarchy).

The Church of Jerusalem remains the custodian of many of the holy sites in Jerusalem and environs, sometimes jointly with Roman Catholic or Coptic or Armenian Christians, including the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

The Church of Antioch today it is one of the autocephalous Orthodox churches. In English translations of official documents, the Church of Antioch refers to itself as the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East. The Church of Antioch is the continuation of the Christian community founded in Antioch by the Apostles Peter (who served as its first bishop) and Paul, who are its patron saints. In terms of hierarchical order of precedence, it currently ranks third among the world's Orthodox churches, behind Constantinople and Alexandria.

The seat of the patriarchate was formerly Antioch (Antakya), in what is now Turkey. Now it is in Damascus, Syria, located on the «street called Straight.»

The Holy Synod of Antioch includes the patriarch and all the ruling bishops. Meetings are held each year in Spring and Autumn at the patriarchate to consider church-wide issues, and to elect the patriarch and other bishops as needed. The patriarch and Holy Synod govern the Church of Antioch to preserve the true faith, to maintain ecclesiastical order, and to carry out the commandments of Christ. In addition to the synod itself, a general consular body meets twice a year to see to the financial, educational, judicial, and administrative matters of the patriarchate. It is composed of members of the synod and of lay representatives. When a new patriarch is to be elected, this body selects three candidates from whom the Holy Synod chooses the new patriarch.

The current patriarch is His Beatitude Patriarch Ignatius IV (Hazim) of Antioch and all the East, elected in 1979. Patriarch Ignatius has been particularly active in strengthening ties with other Christian communions, but particularly with those whose roots are in Antioch. His Beatitude and the holy synod of Antioch were enthusiastic for the

Church of Antioch to participate in general talks between representatives of all the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches.

At Anba Bishoy in Egypt and at Chambesy in Switzerland, plenary talks were held resulting in agreements in 1989, 1990 and 1993. All official representatives of the Eastern Orthodox and the Oriental Orthodox there present reached agreement in these dialogues that the Christological differences between the two communions are more a matter of emphasis than of substance. Although elements in a number of the Eastern Orthodox Churches have criticized the apparent consensus reached by the representatives at Anba Bishoy and Chambesy, the patriarch and holy synod of the Antiochian Orthodox Church welcomed the agreements as positive moves towards a sharing in the Love of God, and a rejection of the hatred of insubstantial division.

As recommended in the Agreement of 1990, the Antiochian (Eastern) Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius IV formally met with the Syriac (Oriental) Orthodox Patriarch, Ignatius Zakka I, on July 22, 1991. At that formal meeting, the two patriarchs signed a pastoral agreement which called for «complete and mutual respect between the two churches.» It also prohibited the passing of faithful from one church to the other, envisaged joint meetings of the two holy synods when appropriate, and provided for future guidelines for intercommunion of the faithful and Eucharistic concelebration by the clergy of the two churches. The Church of Antioch expects these guidelines to be issued when the faithful of both churches are ready, but not before.

Patriarch Ignatius has also overseen participation in a bilateral commission with the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, which is exploring ways of healing the 18th century schism between the Melkite Catholics and the Antiochian Orthodox. In an unprecedented event, Melkite Patriarch Maximos V addressed a meeting of the Orthodox holy synod in October 1996.

The members of the Holy Synod of Antioch continue to explore greater communication and more friendly meetings with their Syriac, Melkite, and Maronite brothers and sisters, who all share a common heritage.

Extensive 20th and 21st century Arab immigration to the New

World has further increased the size, vigour and influence of the Church of Antioch, and the majority of Antiochian faithful now reside outside the Middle East and include numerous non-Arabic converts to the Orthodox Christian faith. As a result, besides its Middle Eastern territories in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Kuwait, Iran, the Arabian Peninsular, and parts of Turkey, the Church of Antioch also includes missionary dioceses in Central, North, and South America, in Europe, and in Australia and the Pacific. The archdiocese with the largest population is North America. It is also the only one with internal dioceses. The archdiocese with the largest area is Australia and New Zealand. Estimates of the membership of the patriarchate range from 750,000 to over 1,000,000 in Syria alone.

The Church of Alexandria is one of the autocephalous Orthodox Churches. Its primate is the Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, the successor to the Apostle Mark the Evangelist, who founded the Church of Alexandria in the 1st century. It is one of the five ancient patriarchates of Pentarchy.

In recent years, a considerable missionary effort was enacted by Pope Petros VII. During his seven years as patriarch (1997-2004), he worked tirelessly to spread the Orthodox Christian faith in Arab nations and throughout Africa, raising up native clergy and encouraging the use of local languages in the liturgical life of the Church. Missions spread and thrived in Kenya, Uganda, Madagascar, Cameroon, and elsewhere across the African continent.

Particularly sensitive to the nature of Christian expansion into Muslim countries, His Beatitude worked to promote mutual understanding and respect between Orthodox Christians and Muslims. His efforts were ended as the result of a helicopter crash on September 11, 2004, in the Aegean Sea near Greece, killing him and several other clergy, including Bishop Nektarios of Madagascar, another bishop with a profound missionary vision.

Today, some 300,000 Orthodox Christians comprise the Patriarchate of Alexandria, the highest number since the Roman Empire. The current primate of the Church of Alexandria is His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa.

Editorial article

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3. «Melchites». *Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. 1913.
4. *stsharbelpeoria.org | The Evolution of the Patriarchate of Antioch*

