

## **THE ORTHODOX CHURCH TODAY**

Originally the early Church consisted of the five ancient Patriarchates: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. These cities constituted the chief centers of Christianity in the early days. Between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries Rome became separated from the other Patriarchates due to the latter's insistence on its supremacy. The other ancient patriarchates considered the bishop of Rome "first among equals," granting him a primacy of honor but not of jurisdiction. Constantinople then rose to primacy among the other Patriarchates since it was the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire. The primacy of Constantinople, however, has always been a primacy of honor - not of jurisdiction.

Through the years new Orthodox churches were established in many lands through missionary work so that the present family of Orthodox Churches covers the globe as shown in the outline listed below:

### **A. Ancient Patriarchates**

1. Constantinople which includes Turkey, Crete, the Dodecanese Islands and the Diaspora.
2. Alexandria which includes Egypt and the rest of Africa.
3. Antioch which includes Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, and the Diaspora.
4. Jerusalem which includes Palestine and Jordan.

### **B. National Churches (some of which are newer Patriarchates)**

1. The Church of Russia
2. The Church of Cyprus
3. The Church of Greece
4. The Church of Bulgaria
5. The Church of Romania
6. The Church of Serbia
7. The Church of Albania
8. The Church of Georgia
9. The Church of Czechoslovakia
10. The Church of Poland
11. The Church of Sinai

### **C. Missionary Churches**

1. Korea
2. Uganda and Kenya
3. China
4. Australia
5. South America
6. Western Europe
7. North America

### **D. Churches in the Diaspora**

1. The Antiochian Orthodox Church in North America (Self Rule)
2. The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America
3. The Orthodox Churches in the U.S.A., including the OCA whose autocephalous status is to be clarified at the forthcoming Ecumenical Council.
4. Japan
5. Finland
6. China
7. Macedonia

Fr. Kallistos Ware writes,

"In the East there were many Churches whose foundation went back to the Apostles; there was a strong sense of the equality of all bishops, of the collegial and conciliar nature of the Church. The east acknowledged the Pope as the first bishop in the Church, but saw him as the first among equals. In the west, on the other hand, there was only one great see claiming apostolic foundation - Rome - so that Rome came to be regarded as the Apostolic see . . . the Church was seen less as a college and more as a monarchy - the monarchy of the Pope."

The insistence on the monarchy of the Pope aggravated by the atrocities the Crusaders inflicted on the population of Constantinople in 1204 led to a lamentable estrangement and separation of the Eastern Churches and Rome which we pray will be healed in time since the two Churches are apostolic and have so much in common.

## **WHAT IS THE CHURCH**

The early Jews believed that God dwelled in a box which they called the tabernacle. They carried the box with them always. The box, of course, contained the stone tablets on which God had written the ten commandments. No one was ever to touch this sacred box. Once, a man did touch it by accident and was immediately struck dead. At another time when the box was captured by the Philistines, the Jews felt it was the end for them because they had lost their God. Later, they built a tent to house this box. Still later when Solomon built his famous temple in Jerusalem, the box or tabernacle was placed in the holy of holies.

Ever since Solomon built the Temple to house the tabernacle people have had the impression that the Church is a building. Yet when Solomon dedicated his Temple he said in his prayer of dedication: "But will God dwell indeed with man on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain Thee; how much less this house which I have built" (2 Chron. 6:18). How can God live in a building when even the whole universe is not big enough to contain Him? Solomon knew that God cannot be boxed in a house, no matter how magnificent it is. God is everywhere, in the streets, in factories, in schools, on lonely roads, in rooming houses. He cannot be contained or limited to a temple or a church. The whole universe is His Church.

God does not need this building we call a church, but we do. We need places that are specially dedicated to God, where people meet together with the one purpose of praising God and seeking to know His will. Of course, we can worship God on the golf course but we don't. We need a house of worship where everything: architecture, icons, music, vestments, chalices, sermon, incense, candles conspire to help us worship by bringing God into focus. A woman called a church one day and asked, "Will the President be in your church tomorrow?" The answer she received was, "I don't know if the President will be here, but God will." Truly, God is always present in His Church. He speaks through the Scripture readings. He offers Himself to us through Holy Communion. It is indeed His house. The ever-present danger, however, is that we will confine God to this house, imprison Him there and feel that the building is the only place where God is present, that it is His only house. It is not.