

## **A History of the Orthodox Church**

The history of the Orthodox Church actually begins in the Acts of the Holy Apostles, with the Descent of the Holy Spirit: When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1-4). As the text further tells us, on that same day, after St. Peter had preached to the gathered people, those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls (Acts 2:41), thus constituting the first Christian community at Jerusalem.

This first community of Christians, headed by St. James, the Brother of the Lord the first Bishop of the city was later scattered by the persecutions which followed the stoning of the first martyr of the Christian Church, St. Stephen: And on that day a great persecution arose against the church in Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria, except the Apostles (Acts 8:1).

At the same time, faithful to the Lord's command to go...and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19), the Apostles went out and preached wherever they went, first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles, so that in a surprisingly short time, Christian communities had sprung up in all the main centers of the Roman world and beyond. Their exploits are recorded in the Acts, as well in the inner tradition of the Orthodox Church.

### **The Holy Apostles.**

#### **St. Andrew the First-Called.**

St. Andrew was a Galilean fisherman of Bethsaida and was the first called of the Apostles of Christ (John 1:37-40), to whom he brought his brother Simon, called Peter. According to Church tradition, he suffered martyrdom at Patras in Achaia on an X-shaped Cross (St. Andrew's Cross). Another tradition says that he visited Russia as far as the city of Kiev (while yet another Novgorod). His Feast Day is November 30.

#### **St. Bartholemew.**

In Holy Scripture, St. Bartholemew is to be identified with the Nathanael of John 1:45-51, of whom the Lord Himself witnessed, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile (John 1:47). According to Church tradition, he preached the Gospel in Lycaonia, India and Armenia, where he was martyred by being flayed alive. His Feast Day is June 11.

#### **St. James the Elder.**

St. James the Elder (so-called to distinguish him from the other Apostle, St. James the Younger) and his brother, John (the Evangelist), were fishermen the sons of Zebedee. This James, along with his brother and St. Peter, were especially beloved of the Lord. According to the Acts, he was beheaded by King Agrippa in Jerusalem (Acts 12:2), after first having preached in Spain. His Feast Day is April 30.

#### **St. James the Younger.**

St. James the Younger (so-called to distinguish him from the other Apostle of the same name;

sometimes called the Son of Alphaeus), was the brother of St. Matthew. In St. Mark's Gospel he is said to be the son of Mary, one of the Holy Myrrhbearing Women (Mark 16:1). According to Church tradition, he labored in Judea and then accompanied St. Andrew to Edessa, preaching the Gospel. Later he traveled to Gaza (on the southern seacoast of Palestine), and from there to Egypt, where he was martyred by crucifixion. His Feast Day is October 9.

#### **St. John.**

St. John the Evangelist (also the Theologian or the Divine), was a son of Zebedee and brother of St. James the Elder. In Holy Scripture he is referred to as the disciple, whom Jesus loved (John 13:23), and who leaned on his Master's breast at the Last Supper. To him was entrusted the Most-Holy Theotokos by Our Lord as He was dying on the Cross (John 19:26), and it was at St. John's house that her Holy Dormition occurred. St. John occupied an important place in the Apostolic ministry and, according to St. Paul, he, together with Peter and James were seen to be pillars of the Church in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:9). According to Church tradition, he was the last of the Apostles to die, ca. 100 A.D., and while exiled on the Isle of Patmos, he wrote the Apocalypse (or Revelation). To him is also attributed the Gospel and the three Epistles that bear his name. His Feast Days are May 8 and September 26.

#### **St. Jude.**

This Apostle, the brother of James the Just (both being half-brothers or perhaps, cousins, of the Lord), is also called Thaddaeus or Lebbaeus (John 14:22; Matt. 10:3). To him is attributed the Epistle of St. Jude. According to Church tradition, he preached in Syria and Edessa, eventually being martyred in Persia with his fellow Apostle, Simeon Zealotes. His Feast Day is June 19.

#### **St. Lebbaeus.**

[See St. Jude].

#### **St. Matthew.**

St. Matthew (also called Levi the son of Alphaeus (Mark 2:14)) was a brother of St. James the Younger and was a tax collector. The First Gospel is attributed to him, and, according to many scholars, was first written for the Hebrews. According to Church tradition, St. Matthew preached to the Jews first, and then traveled to Ethiopia, Macedonia, Syria and Persia, dying a natural death, according to one tradition, or by martyrdom, according to another. His Feast Day is November 16.

#### **St. Matthias.**

According to the Acts, St. Matthias was chosen by lot to fill the place among the Twelve Apostles left vacant by the Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:15-26). According to Church Tradition he is said to have preached in Ethiopia and Armenia, eventually suffering death by crucifixion. His Feast Day is August 9.

#### **St. Nathanael.**

[See St. Bartholomew].

#### **St. Peter.**

St. Peter was a brother of St. Andrew, and, together with him, was a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee. Called by the Lord to become a fisher of men (Matt. 4:19), he was originally named Simon, but later his name was changed to Peter (in Aramaic Cephas, meaning rock) by the Lord. This was in response to Peter's declaration: You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God (Matt. 16:16), for the Lord then said to him, You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18). Holy Scripture amply witnesses to the fact that Peter occupied a primary place among the Apostles, although not to the extreme claimed by the Roman Catholic Church. His activities after the Resurrection are witnessed to in the Acts and, according to Church tradition, he was later martyred in Rome, being crucified upside down at his own request, since he felt himself not worthy to die in the same manner as the Lord Himself. The two Epistles of St. Peter are ascribed to him and he is celebrated, together with the other chief Apostle, St. Paul, on June 29.

### **St. Philip.**

St. Philip, like Peter and Andrew, came from Bethsaida in Galilee (Matt. 10:3) and was called early in the Lord's earthly ministry, bringing Nathanael with him (John 1:43ff.). According to Church tradition, he was a missionary in Phrygia and died there (by martyrdom, according to some) at Hierapolis. His Feast Day is November 14, the next day being the beginning of the Nativity Fast (for which reason it is often called St. Philip's Fast).

### **St. Simeon Zealotes.**

St. Simeon Zealotes (or the Zealot; sometimes the Canaanite), according to Church tradition, traveled through Egypt and Africa, then through Mauretania and Libya, preaching the Gospel of Christ. Later he is said to have traveled to Britain, where he was martyred by the Romans on a Cross. Another tradition says that he was martyred with St. Jude in Persia. His Feast Day is May 10.

### **St. Thaddaeus.**

[See St. Jude].

### **St. Thomas.**

St. Thomas, called Didymus (or the Twin, John 11:16), appears several times in St. John's Gospel, which gives a good impression of the sort of man he was: ready to die with the Master (John 11:16); skeptical about the Resurrection, yet, when the Risen Christ manifested Himself to him, is whole-hearted in his belief (John 20:24-28). According to Church tradition, St. Thomas preached in Parthia (Persia), Edessa and India, where he is held in great veneration as a founder of the Church there, eventually suffering martyrdom. According to Church tradition, his remains were buried in Edessa. His Feast Day is October 6 and also the Sunday following Holy Pascha (St. Thomas Sunday).

### **Judas Iscariot.**

This disciple, forever a symbol of treachery, the son of Simon, was from the town of Kerioth (from Kerioth Iscariot). According to the Gospel, he stole from the common treasury of which he had charge (John 12:5-6) and ultimately betrayed his Lord for thirty pieces of silver (Matt. 26:14-15). After the Crucifixion of Jesus, in deep remorse, Judas cast the pieces of silver into the Temple before the Chief Priests and Elders, later going out and hanging himself. With the money, now considered blood money, a potter's field was bought to bury strangers in (Matt. 27:3-10).

### **St. Paul.**

St. Paul was a strict Pharisee, having studied under the respected Rabbi Gamaliel at Jerusalem (Acts 22:3). At a young age he had learned the trade of a tent-maker (Acts 18:1-3) and had inherited Roman citizenship from his father (Acts 22:28). The young Saul (as he was known before his conversion to Christianity) was zealous for Judaism and consented to the stoning of St. Stephen, later actively joining in the persecution of the Christians (Acts 8:3). While on the way to Damascus, to persecute the Christians there, he had a sudden vision of the Lord, Who rebuked him for his persecution, and later he converted to the Christian Faith (Acts 9:1-22). After this conversion experience, St. Paul went on to become one of the greatest of the Apostles, zealously bringing the Light of Christ to the Gentiles, eventually going to Rome where he received martyrdom by beheading. During his missionary journeys, amply attested to in the Acts, he wrote letters of encouragement to various congregations and individuals along the way, and thirteen of them (fourteen, if the Epistle to the Hebrews is accepted as of Pauline origin) have been accepted as part of the New Testament. Together with St. Peter, he is commemorated on June 29.

### **Other Apostles.**

#### **St. Barnabas.**

St. Barnabas, a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith (Acts 11:24), was a Jew from Cyprus, closely associated with the work of St. Paul. It was Barnabas who was sent to the Christians at Antioch, fetching Paul from Tarsus to help him. Later, he and Paul were sent on the first missionary journey, which began on the island of Cyprus, of which Church St. Barnabas is said to have founded. According to Church tradition, he was martyred on Cyprus at Salamis. He commemorated together with St. Bartholomew on June 11.

#### **St. James the Brother of the Lord.**

St. James was a half-brother (or perhaps a cousin) of the Lord, and was the first Bishop of the Church at Jerusalem, being called by St. Paul a pillar of that Church, together with Peter and John (Gal. 2:9). At the first general Church council, the Council of Jerusalem, James is depicted as having a leading role (Acts 15:12-21). Having ruled the Church in Jerusalem wisely (for which reason he is often called the Just), St. James was martyred there. Being taken to the top of the Temple wall, he was commanded to convince the people to turn away from Christ, which he refused to do, speaking to them in quite the opposite manner. Thereupon he was thrown down from that high point to the ground, where he was stoned and beaten to death. The Epistle of St. James is attributed to him and his Feast Day is celebrated on October 23.

#### **St. Luke.**

St. Luke, the Beloved Physician (Col. 4:14), is the author of the Gospel bearing his name, as well as the Acts of the Apostles. He was a Gentile convert, probably a Greek, and was a companion of St. Paul in his later missionary journeys, concerning which he related in the Acts. According to Church tradition, St. Luke was an iconographer and wrote the first Icon of the Most-Holy Theotokos. St. Luke died, unmarried, in Greece, at the age of eighty-four, and is commemorated on October 18.

#### **St. Mark.**

The Second Gospel is attributed to this Apostle, who some say was the young man who fled away naked at the arrest of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:51-52). In the Acts, he

is called John Mark (Acts 12:12; 15:37), the son of Mary, at whose house in Jerusalem the early Christians stayed (Acts 12:12), and he was a cousin of the Apostle Barnabas (Col. 4:10). He figures several times in the Acts, at one point being the source of a temporary rift between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:36-40), but later he was with Paul during his first imprisonment at Rome (Col. 4:10). In his 1st Epistle, St. Peter mentions Mark as being with him, styling him my son (1 Pet. 5:13). According to Church tradition, St. Mark wrote his Gospel at the request of the brethren in Rome, who asked him to relate what he had learned from St. Peter. He is said to have preached the Gospel at Alexandria, Egypt, and was its first Bishop, being martyred there during the reign of the Emperor Trajan. His Feast Day is April 25.

## **The Persecutions.**

After these humble beginnings, Christianity spread far and wide throughout the known world, but the Good News of Christ aroused intense opposition, and the first three centuries of the Church were characterized by sporadic, but bloody, persecutions. Church tradition is full of the lives of these early martyrs for the faith, and one cannot but admire the courage and perseverance of these heroes who willingly gave up their lives rather than denounce Christ. Among these were Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, burned at the stake when over eighty years old, Justin the Martyr, and Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, as well as many other men and women martyrs, who are commemorated in the Church Calendar.

These persecutions were often local in character and of limited duration, and although there were long periods of de-facto toleration, the threat of persecution was always there. Christians knew that at any time the threat of persecution could become a very present reality and the idea of martyrdom held a central place in the spiritual outlook of these warriors for Christ. Later, when persecution and martyrdom ceased to be a major concern of the Christians, the idea, nonetheless, did not disappear, but took other forms. Chief among these was the monastic life, regarded by many as a form of martyrdom equal to bodily death.

In 312, however, a momentous event occurred, for in that year, seeing, in a vision, a Cross in the sky with the inscription, In this sign conquer, and placing the Cross on the shields of his army, the Emperor Constantine defeated a rival army and ultimately became the first Roman Emperor to embrace Christianity. In 313, Constantine and his fellow Emperor Licinius issued the Edict of Milan, which proclaimed the official toleration of the Christian faith. Fifty years later, the Emperor Theodosius carried this policy even further when he legislated Christianity as the only accepted religion of the Empire, while outlawing paganism.

In 324, Constantine moved his imperial capital from Rome to Byzantium, on the shores of the Bosphorus, where he built a new capital, Constantinople (dedicated in 330). From here, in 325, he summoned to Nicea what was to be the first of the Seven Ecumenical Councils.

## **The Seven Councils.**

The conciliar principle of deciding matters of doctrinal and disciplinary importance began with the Council of Jerusalem, described in Acts 15, where the Apostles met to decide whether Gentile converts should be subject to the Mosaic Law. (They were not!). With this Council in mind, and the various local councils which met at diverse parts of the Empire in the period prior to Nicea, the Church established an important principle: In council, the members of the Church, so to speak, can together claim an authority which individually none of them possess. The Seven Ecumenical Councils which met in the period from 325 to 787 performed two basic tasks: 1) They formulated the visible, ecclesiastical organization of the Church, setting the ranking of the Five Patriarchates; and 2) they defined, once and for all, the teachings of the Church on faith, formulating the basic

dogmas concerning the Trinity and the Incarnation.

### **Nicea I (325).**

This Council condemned the heresy of Arianism, which had contended that the Son was inferior to the Father and was, in fact, created. The Fathers here declared that the Son is one in essence (homoousios) with the Father, and formulated the first part of what eventually became the Creed the Symbol of Faith. In addition, three great Sees were singled out Rome, Alexandria and Antioch (Canon 6), and the See of Jerusalem, although still subject to the Metropolitan of Caesarea, was given the next place in honor after Antioch (Canon 7).

### **Constantinople I (381).**

This Council expanded the Nicene Creed, developing the teachings concerning the Holy Spirit, who proceeds from the Father; Who, with the Father and Son, is worshipped and glorified..., against the heresy of the Pneumatomachi (Spiritsmashers) and the Macedonians (followers of Macedonius), who could not accept the Third Person of the Trinity as equal to the other Two. It was in this period that we see the activities of the great Cappadocian Fathers, St. Gregory Nazianzus (the Theologian), St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory of Nyssa, as well as the great Alexandrian Father, St. Athanasius the Great. The First Council of Constantinople also decreed that Constantinople, the new capital, should hold the next place of honor after Rome, since it was now the New Rome (Canon 111).

### **Ephesus (431).**

This Council met to discuss the heresy of the Nestorians, who could not accept that God and Man had been united in one Person, Christ, refusing to call the Virgin Mary, Theotokos (or Birthgiver of God). Supported primarily by St. Cyril of Alexandria, this Council affirmed that Mary was truly Theotokos, since, as the Evangelist had proclaimed, the Word was made flesh (John 1:14), and the Virgin had borne a single and undivided Person Who is, at the same time, God and Man.

### **Chalcedon (451).**

This Council met to discuss the heresy of the Monophysites who held that in Christ the human nature had been merged into the divine, so that there was, after the divine union, only one nature. The Bishops of this Council accepted the so-called Tome of Pope St. Leo the Great of Rome, which affirmed the belief that the one and the same son, perfect in Godhead and perfect in manhood, [is] truly God and truly man...acknowledged in two natures unconfused, unchanged, undivided and inseparable. In addition, the place of Constantinople after that of Rome was confirmed, as was that of Jerusalem in the fifth place of honor.

A tragic result of this Council (and that of Ephesus prior) was the splitting apart from the main body of a large group of Christians adhering to either the Nestorian or Monophysite view. The Nestorians were found basically in Persia and Mesopotamia, and were especially decimated by the Islamic and Turkish onslaughts, whereas the Monophysites were strong in Africa (Egypt and Ethiopia the present Coptic Church), Armenia, and India (the Jacobite Church).

### **Constantinople II (553).**

This Council met to further reinterpret the decrees of Chalcedon, seeking to explain how the two natures of Christ unite to form a single person. It affirmed that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is one of the Holy Trinity, one and the same divine Person (hypostasis), Who has united personally (hypostatically) in Himself the two natures of God and Man, without fusing them together and

without allowing their separation. Certain teachings of Origen, including his teaching concerning the pre-existence of the soul, among other things, were also expressly condemned.

### **Constantinople III (681).**

This Council met to condemn the Monothelite heresy which held that in the union of the two natures in Christ, the human will was merged into the divine as one will, since the two natures were united into one person. The Council, however, held that if Christ has two natures, he also has two wills human and divine.

### **Nicea II (787).**

This Council met to affirm the belief of the Orthodox that veneration of the Holy Icons was proper and necessary for a correct understanding of the Incarnation of Christ, against those who held that Icon-veneration was idolatry and that all Icons should be destroyed (Iconoclasts). This Seventh Council was also the last of the Ecumenical Councils accepted as such by the Orthodox Church, although the possibility does exist that, in principle, more could be convened. The Iconoclast controversy did not end until after another rising of the heretics beginning in 815, which was finally suppressed by the Empress Theodora in 843. This final victory of the Holy Icons in 843 is known as the Triumph of Orthodoxy, and is commemorated on the First Sunday of Great Lent. Thus, with the resolution of the Iconoclast controversy, the Age of the Seven Councils came to an end.

During this same period, there were two other major currents that were to have a profound effect on the Byzantine Empire and Orthodoxy. The first of these was the rise of monasticism. It began as a definite institution in Egypt in the 4th Century and rapidly spread across the Christian world. It literally began at a time when the persecutions had ended, and the Monks, with their austere life, were, in a real sense, martyrs when martyrdom of blood had virtually ceased. At a time when people were in danger of forgetting that life in the world the earthly kingdom was not the Kingdom of God, the Monks and their withdrawal from society, reminded Christians that God's Kingdom, in fact, is not of this world.

The second major current in this period was the rise and rapid spread of Islam, the most striking characteristic of which was the speed of its expansion. Within fifteen years after the death of Mohammed in 632, his followers had captured Syria, Palestine and Egypt, and in fifty years, they were already at the gates of Constantinople. Within 100 years, they had swept across North Africa and through Spain. The Byzantine Empire lost the Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem, and until the actual fall of Constantinople in 1453, the Empire was never free from attack.

### **The Great Schism.**

In 1054 occurred one of the greatest tragedies of the Christian world the Great Schism between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Churches. Officially proclaimed at Constantinople in that year by the Papal Legate, Cardinal Humbert, it was, in a sense, the culmination of a process that had been taking place for several centuries, ultimately centering on two major controversies: Papal authority and the Filioque.

Originally the two branches of Christendom had begun to drift apart because of cultural and language differences. Then, in 800, we see a political split with the proclamation of Charlemagne as the Holy Roman Emperor there were now two! The hegemony of the Arabs over the Mediterranean and their expansion into the Balkans made direct contact difficult, if not impossible, between East and West. And even in theology the two branches of Christendom

began to differ in their basic approaches, with the Latins being more practical, the Greeks more speculative; the Latins more influenced by legal ideas nurtured by the basic concepts of Roman law, while the Greeks were influenced by worship and the Holy Liturgy; the Latins were more concerned with redemption, the Greeks with deification. These different approaches, practiced in greater isolation from each other, eventually led to the two main theological problems outlined earlier.

The first problem was that of Papal authority. The Greeks were willing to ascribe to the Pope of Rome a primacy of honor, considering him to be the first among equals, whereas the Pope believed his power of jurisdiction to extend to the East as well as the West, the Greeks jealously guarding the autonomy of the other Patriarchates. The Pope saw infallibility as his sole prerogative, whereas the Greeks insisted that in matters of faith, the ultimate decisions belonged to an Ecumenical Council consisting of all the Bishops of the Universal Church.

The second great problem was the Filioque (Latin and the Son), first inserted into the Creed at the Council of Toledo in Spain in 589 and later adopted by the whole Western Church. Whereas the original wording of the Creed ran, and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father..., the Latin insertion changed it to read, and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father and the Son\_\_ The Orthodox objected to this insertion on two grounds: 1) the Ecumenical Councils had expressly forbidden any changes to be introduced into the Creed, and 2) this insertion disturbed the balance between the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity, leading to a false understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in the world.

Prior to the Schism of 1054, there had been another breach, the so-called Photian Schism, in the 9th Century, but it had been officially terminated in the latter years of the reign of Patriarch Photius. The breach of 1054, however, although not universally applied at first, was never healed, even after several attempts to do so, most noticeably at the Council of Lyons in 1274 and the Council of Florence in 1438-9, when the Turks were already threatening Constantinople, but these reunion attempts were doomed to failure. Probably the deciding factor in the permanence of the Schism had been the capture and sack of Constantinople by the Latin Crusaders in 1204, which forever after remained indelibly imprinted on the consciousness of the Orthodox.

In 1453, a crucial event occurred in world Orthodoxy, with the Fall of Constantinople to the Turkish Sultan, Mohammed II. The Greek-speaking Churches fell under the heavy yoke of Islam, and for nearly 500 years labored in servitude, only emerging again with the Balkan Revolutions of the 19th Century and World War I. In the meantime, the focus of Orthodoxy shifted to the North, to the domains of the Most Pious Tsars of Russia.

## **Notable Fathers of the Early Period.**

### **St. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage ( 258).**

St. Cyprian, commemorated on August 31, was Bishop of Carthage during the persecutions of the Emperor Decius (250). He died as a martyr in 258, and among his many writings concerning Church life, the most important is *On the Unity of the Catholic Church*, which sets forth the role of the Bishop in the ecclesiastical structure.

### **St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch ( 107).**

St. Ignatius was the second Bishop of Antioch and is commemorated on December 20 and January 29. Martyred in the Arena at Rome, while on his way to martyrdom, he wrote seven letters to Christian communities, as well as to St. Polycarp, which contain valuable information on

the dogmas, organization and liturgy of the early Church.

### **St. Irenaeus of Lyons ( 202).**

St. Irenaeus, who is commemorated on August 23, was a disciple of St. Polycarp, and, as a Westerner, he succeeded St. Photinus as Bishop of Lyons. His major doctrinal work is *Against Heresies*, which defends Orthodoxy against the Gnostics, borrowing heavily on both human reason and Holy Scripture and Tradition, serving as an important witness to Church traditions of his time.

### **St. Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna ( 167).**

St. Polycarp was a disciple of St. John the Theologian and is commemorated as a martyr on February 23. The account of his martyrdom, the earliest detailed account of a martyr, gives an excellent picture of his character and the steadfastness of his Christian faith.

## **Notable Fathers of the Early Byzantine Period.**

### **St. Anthony the Great ( 356).**

St. Anthony, commemorated January 17, is considered to be the Father of monasticism, and *The Life of St. Anthony*, by St. Athanasius, presents him as a truly inspiring example of monastic ascetical perfection. During the Arian controversies, he risked his life defending the Orthodox teachings of St. Athanasius in Alexandria.

### **St. Athanasius the Great, Patriarch of Alexandria ( 373).**

St. Athanasius, commemorated January 18 and May 2, was a great defender of the Orthodox faith during the Arian controversies and was exiled five times for his labors. Among his major writings are *The Incarnation of Christ* and *The Life of St. Anthony*, which serve as major inspirations for Orthodox theology and monastic spirituality.

### **St. Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia ( 379).**

St. Basil, commemorated January 1 and January 30, was a notable theologian and spiritual writer of the 4th Century and is noted for his many writings on numerous theological and spiritual subjects, as well as commentaries on Holy Scripture. During the Sundays of Great Lent, as well as on his Feast Day (Jan. 1), the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great is served, although probably only the prayers are actually of this Saint.

### **St. Cyril, Patriarch of Alexandria ( 444).**

St. Cyril, commemorated on January 18 and June 9, was the leader in the defense of Orthodoxy against the Nestorians, and was a firm defender of the veneration of the Virgin Mary as Theotokos. He was especially prominent in the deliberations of the Third Ecumenical Council.

### **St. Ephraim the Syrian ( 373-9).**

St. Ephraim, commemorated January 28, was a major spiritual writer and hymnographer of the 4th Century, and is especially noted in Orthodox liturgical life for, among other things, his inspiring work, *The Lenten Prayer of St. Ephraim the Syrian*, which is said at all of the weekday services of

Great Lent.

**St. Gregory the Theologian, Archbishop of Constantinople ( 389).**

St. Gregory, commemorated January 25 and 30, was a fellow student and friend of St. Basil the Great and was a leading opponent of the Arians. He has been honored by the Church with the title Theologian, being one of only three, so honored (the others being St. John the Evangelist, and St. Simeon the New Theologian), primarily because of his Five Theological Orations.

**St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa (4th Cent.).**

St. Gregory was the younger brother of St. Basil the Great and is commemorated on January 10. He is especially known for his spiritual writings, as well as various dogmatic works, including his Great Catechism.

**St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople ( 407).**

St. John Chrysostom (the Golden-mouth), commemorated January 27 and 30 and November 13, was one of the greatest preachers of his time (late 4th Century) and was known for his zeal for Orthodoxy and his passionate defense of the poor, boldly exposing the vices of his age, for which reason he was eventually deposed and exiled. The bulk of his works are sermons on Holy Scripture, especially the Epistles of St. Paul, as well as other ascetical and pastoral works, including his On the Priesthood. To St. John is attributed the usual Divine Liturgy, although, as in the case of that of St. Basil the Great, probably only certain prayers are properly his.

**Notable Fathers of the Later Byzantine Period.**

**St. Gregory the Dialogist, Pope of Rome ( 604).**

St. Gregory the Dialogist, commemorated March 12, was Pope of Rome in the 7th Century and was noted for his many literary works, including his Dialogues on the monastic Saints of Italy. To him is ascribed the writing-down of the beautiful Gregorian Chants as well as the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, during which he is specially commemorated.

**St. Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica ( ca. 1360).**

St. Gregory, commemorated on November 14 and the Second Sunday of Great Lent, was a pious Monk of Mt. Athos, and later was elected to the See of Thessalonica as its Bishop. He is noted for his defense of the contemplative life of hesychasm (inner silence), teaching concerning the uncreated Light of Tabor and the Divine Energies of God, through which man can have true communion with God.

**St. John of Damascus (Damascene ( 776)).**

St. John, commemorated December 4, was noted for his Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith, a major dogmatic work, as well as his zealous defense of the Holy Icons, for which he suffered the severing of his hand (miraculously restored by the prayers of the Mother of God). He is also noted for his many sermons on Feast Days, as well as numerous hymns, extensively used in Orthodox liturgical services.

**St. Mark, Archbishop of Ephesus (15th Cent.).**

St. Mark, commemorated January 19, accompanied the Byzantine Emperor to the Council of Florence, and single-handedly defended the Orthodox faith against the Latins. His brilliant defense of Orthodoxy and his letters after the Council were largely responsible for the Orthodox rejection of this false Council.

### **St. Photius the Great, Patriarch of Constantinople ( 891).**

St. Photius, commemorated February 6, was a zealous defender of Orthodoxy against the Latin error of the Filioque, for which he suffered much. He wrote on the Procession of the Holy Spirit and was responsible for the commissioning of Sts. Cyril and Methodius for the conversion of the Slavs.

### **St. Simeon the New Theologian ( 1021).**

St. Simeon, commemorated March 12 and October 12, was noted as a brilliant spiritual writer, whose works hold a place of honor in the Philokalia, a major monastic spiritual work. For this reason he endured persecution and also received the veneration of the Orthodox Church which honors him as the New Theologian.

## **The Conversion of the Slavs.**

Of major importance in the history and development of Orthodoxy was the conversion of the Slavs and the shifting of the focus of the Church to the northern regions of Bulgaria, Serbia, Moravia, Romania, and then Russia. In the middle of the 9th Century, Patriarch Photius initiated large scale missionary labors in these regions by sending out the two brothers Constantine (in monasticism Cyril 1869) and Methodius (885 both are commemorated May 11), first to the Khazar State north of the Caucasus (this was largely unsuccessful) and then to Moravia (Czechoslovakia) in 863.

The Prince of Moravia, Rostislav, desired that his people hear the Word of God in their own language and the two brothers were apt missionaries in this respect as they had developed an alphabet, adapted from the Greek, which later was called Cyrillic (after St. Cyril). Using a local Macedonian dialect which they had heard near their birthplace of Thessalonica, the brothers began translating the liturgical books, Holy Scripture, etc., into this dialect, using the new alphabet which they had developed. This new liturgical language Church Slavonic became of crucial importance in the extension of the Orthodox faith into the Balkans and ultimately to Russia. This was so, since, unlike the Roman Catholic Church, which continued to insist on the use of Latin, the use of Church Slavonic allowed the new converts to hear the Gospel and the services in a language they could understand.

The Mission to Moravia was ultimately doomed to failure because of the jealousy and persecution of German missionaries working in the same area. The brothers traveled to Rome (where St. Cyril died) and placed themselves under the protection of the Pope, but this was not honored by the Germans in Moravia and after the death of St. Methodius in 885, his followers were expelled from the country.

The missionary labors of Cyril and Methodius were not in vain, however, for their disciples were successful in Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria. Led by St. Clement of Ochrid (commemorated November 25), the missionaries were successful and in 869, Tsar Boris of Bulgaria himself was baptized. The Bulgarian Church grew rapidly and about 926, under Tsar Simeon, an independent Patriarchate was established there, recognized by Constantinople in 927 (although later suppressed), and the Bulgarian Church became the first national Slavic Church.

The missionaries were likewise successful in Serbia and with the baptism of Prince Mutimir ( 891), Serbia became officially Christian. After a period of vacillation between East and West, Serbia came under the sway of Constantinople. Under St. Sava ( 1237 commemorated January 12), the Serbian Church became partially independent with his consecration in 1219 as Archbishop of Serbia, and in 1346 a Serbian Patriarchate was established with the consecration of Bishop Ioannikios, recognized by Constantinople in 1375.

Missionaries from Bulgaria traveled to the Romanian lands and by the end of the 9th Century portions of the Romanian people had been Christianized, adopting the Slavonic Liturgy, but it was not really until the rise of the Wallachian Moldavian principalities in the 14th Century that the Church actually began to thrive. In 1359 a Wallachian Metropolitan was appointed by Constantinople to the new See of Argesin the foothills of the Transylvanian Alps and in 1401, the Romanian Metropolitan of Suceava in Moldavia was recognized by Constantinople.

The missionaries had also penetrated into Croatia, Dalmatia, Illyria, Bosnia and Montenegro, but these areas were, for the most part, under the influence and control of the Latin West during this period.

### **The Conversion of Russia The Russian Orthodox Church.**

Missionaries penetrated into Russia during this period and the Russian Princess Olga was converted to Christianity in 955, although the effective Christianization of Russia actually received its greatest impetus with the conversion of Olga's grandson, Vladimir, in 988. According to Russian tradition, Grand Prince Vladimir of Kiev decided that an official religion was necessary for his country and he was unsure which to choose: the Islam of the Volga Bulgars, the Judaism of the Khazars (on the lower Volga), the Latin Christianity of the Germans, or the Orthodox faith of the Greeks. Accordingly he sent envoys to the various regions to enquire of their faiths and to make a report to him.

The envoys fulfilled their appointed mission and then reported to Vladimir:

When we journeyed among the Bulgarians [of the Volga region], we beheld how they worship in their temple, called a mosque, while they stand ungirt. The Bulgarian bows, sits down, looks hither and thither like one possessed, and their is no happiness among them, but instead only sorrow and a dreadful stench. Their religion is not good. Then we went among the Germans, and saw them performing many ceremonies in their temples; but we beheld no glory there. Then we went on to Greece, and the Greeks led us to the edifices where they worship their God, and we knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth. For on earth there is no such splendor or such beauty, and we are at a loss how to describe it. We know only that God dwells there among men, and their service is fairer than the ceremonies of other nations.... [From the Russian Primary Chronicle].

After receiving the report of the envoys, Vladimir went to war with the Byzantine Empire and laid siege to the Greek city of Kherson. He promised to accept Christianity if he was successful in this campaign and after the capture of the city, he did, in fact, embrace Orthodoxy and was given in marriage Anna, the sister of the Byzantine Emperors Basil and Constantine. Returning to his capital of Kiev, Vladimir ordered that all pagan idols be destroyed. The people were exhorted to renounce paganism whereupon they embraced the Orthodox faith and received Baptism in 988. From this date Russia became officially Christian.

With the conversion of Vladimir (later canonized by the Russian Church commemorated July 15), Orthodoxy spread rapidly and already, within fifty years, the Russian Church had her first canonized Saints, the martyred brothers Boris and Gleb ( 1015 commemorated together on July

24). In 1051 the first Russian Monastery (The Monastery of the Caves) was founded in Kiev by St. Anthony ( 1073 commemorated July 10), later reorganized by St. Theodosius ( 1074 commemorated May 3 and August 14; he and St. Anthony are commemorated together on September 2). In 1037, Theopemptos was consecrated Metropolitan of Kiev and all but two of the Metropolitans of this period were Greeks, appointed by Constantinople. (The first Russian Metropolitan was Hilarion in 1051, and the other Clement in 1147). To this day, the Russian Church still sings in Greek the greeting to a Bishop, *Eis polla eti, Despota*, in recognition of the debt owed by the Russian Church to Greek Byzantium.

Disaster befell the Kievan State in 1237 with the onslaught of the Mongols, who ruled until 1480, and during this period only the Church kept alive national consciousness, much as was later done by the Greek Church under the Turkish yoke. The primary See of the Russian Church was moved from Kiev to Moscow by St. Peter, Metropolitan of Kiev ( 1326 commemorated December 21), and henceforth ceased to be the city of the chief Hierarch.

Three important Saints shone in this period: St. Alexander Nevsky, Prince of Novgorod ( 1263 commemorated August 30 and November 23), who preserved the political structure of his Principality (alone unharmed by the Mongols in their invasion) against the Swedes, Germans and Lithuanians; St. Sergius of Radonezh ( 1392 commemorated September 25 and July 5), founder of the famous Trinity St. Sergius Monastery at Sergiev Posad (Zagorsk) near Moscow, (from which Monks spread out through all of Northern Russia), probably one of Russia's greatest national figures (as was St. Sava in Serbia); and St. Stephen, Bishop of Perm ( 1396 commemorated April 26) who, in a sense, was the first of the long line of missionaries who were eventually to come to Russian America.

After the Council of Florence in 1440, Constantinople had accepted union with the Roman Catholic Church and Russia could not accept a Metropolitan from there. Finally, in 1448, a council of Russian Bishops elected their own Metropolitan and from this date the Russian Church has reckoned her independence. In 1453 Constantinople fell to the Turks and from this date the Russian Church remained the sole free branch of Orthodoxy. Men began to see Moscow as the Third Rome, and the Grand Duke of Moscow assumed the titles of the Byzantine Emperors Autocrat and Tsar the earthly protector of Orthodoxy. Accordingly, with the rising power of Russia, in 1589, the head of the Russian Church was raised to the rank of Patriarch (the first being Patriarch Job), ranking fifth after Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem.

The Russian Church was not without its own turmoils however. In 1503 came the beginnings of a split in the monastic ranks between the Non-Possessors (followers of St. Nilus of Sora ( 1508 commemorated May 7)), who argued for monastic poverty, and the Possessors (followers of St. Joseph of Volokolamsk, 1515, commemorated September 9), who defended monastic landholding. The Non-Possessors were more lenient and gentle concerning the treatment of heretics, considering it to be solely a Church matter, while the Possessors, great supporters of the idea of the Third Rome, believed in a close association between Church and State in such matters (and many others as well). In this struggle the Possessors were victorious, but recognizing the sanctity of both leaders, the Church has enrolled both Joseph and Nilus in the Calendar of Saints.

In the mid-17th Century there occurred in the Russian Church a major split due to the liturgical reforms of Patriarch Nikon (1605-1681) who attempted to correct certain corruptions in the liturgical books and liturgical practice. The result was the splitting off of the Old Believers, who resisted the changes (many of which were ill-founded), as well as their persecution, and this schism has endured to the present day. The leaders of the Old Believers, including the Archpriest Avakkum, were burned at the stake and Nikon himself suffered persecution, since the Council of

Moscow, which met in 1666-7, endorsed his reforms, but deposed him from his Patriarchal Office

because of his intemperance and arrogance.

A third major event which was to have a profound effect on the Russian Church, was the abolition of the Patriarchate by Tsar Peter I (the Great) in 1721. The Patriarch had died in 1700 and Peter, wishing no more Nikons, refused to allow the appointment of a successor. Accordingly, in 1721 he issued his celebrated Spiritual Regulations, and the Russian Church was placed under an uncanonical Synodal System, whereby a Synod of twelve members, drawn from the Bishops, Abbots and secular Clergy appointed by the Government ruled the Church. However, all meetings were attended by a government functionary, the Chief Procurator, representing the Tsar, and all decisions had to be approved by the Sovereign. At the same time monasticism was severely restricted and later in the Century more than half the monasteries were closed by Empress Catherine II (the Great 1762-96) and their lands confiscated.

This Synodal Period, which lasted until 1917, was a period of spiritual low for the Church, although there were a few bright spots. Missionary activity, always a strong feature of the Russian Church, expanded throughout Siberia and Central Asia, eventually reaching Alaska. Certain monasteries were revitalized, including the famous center of Valaam, and the spiritual traditions of Mt. Athos, especially popularized by Paisius Velichkovsky and his Philokalia, reached Russia, through the efforts of Metropolitan Gabriel of Moscow and his disciple, Nazarius, Abbot of Valaam. A special system of spiritual direction, eldership (or starchestvo) developed, especially popularized at the Optino Hermitage under the Elders Leonid, Macarius, Amvrosy and Joseph, and a few Saints shone during this time, especially St. Tikhon of Zadonsk ( 1783 commemorated August 13), a revitalizer of pastoral life, and St. Seraphim of Sarov ( 1833 commemorated January 2 and July 19).

Finally, in 1917, with the Fall of the Monarchy, the Patriarchate was re-established and Tikhon, Metropolitan of Moscow, was elected Patriarch by the All-Russian Council of that year. Sadly, however, the Church was soon engulfed in the fires of the Bolshevik Revolution of that year and the unprecedented persecutions which followed. The Russian Orthodox Church since 1917 has endured sufferings without parallel, contributing a new rank of Martyrs to the Church Triumphant, yet despite the severe decimation of her faithful, clergy, and institutions, she still remains a powerful spiritual and moral force in the Orthodox world, confirming that the Church of Christ is built upon a rock, for in the words of the Savior, the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18).

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