

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

Among the current speculations taking place in some corners of Christendom about the Second Coming of Christ and how it will happen, it is comforting to know that ***the ancient beliefs of the Orthodox Church are basic.***

Orthodox Christians ***confess with conviction*** that Jesus Christ "will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead" and that "his Kingdom will have no end."

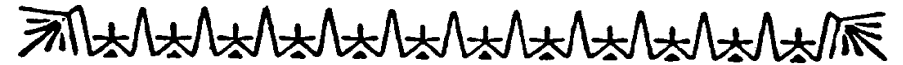
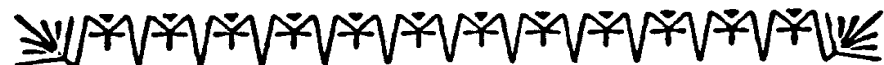
Orthodox preaching ***does not attempt to define God's prophetic scheme***, but ***rather encourages Christian people to live their lives in order so that they can be confident when He comes.*** (1 John 2:28).

*And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come
(Mat. 24:14).*



Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

*Mat 24:36 But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh
(Mat. 24:35-36;42;44).*



IN THIS WE BELIEVE IV

THE APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION



It has been a decisive issue since the second century, not as a mere dogma, ***but as crucial to the preservation of the faith.***

Some false teachers entered the scene and insisted that they were authoritative representatives of the Christian Church. They claimed to have received authority from God by appealing to special revelations, some even invented supposed lineages of teachers who were descended from Christ or the Apostles.

In response, ***the early Church insisted on the existence of an authoritative apostolic succession that had been handed down from generation to generation.*** They had recorded that royal lineage, which showed how their clergy had been ordained by those chosen by the successors of the Apostles chosen by Christ Himself.

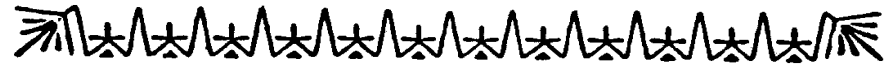
Apostolic succession is an indispensable factor in preserving the unity of the Church. Those who possess the succession are responsible for it, and you have an obligation to ensure that all the teachings and practices of the Church are in conformity with its apostolic foundations.



The mere personal conviction that one's teaching is correct can never be considered an adequate test of truthfulness. Today, ***the critics of apostolic succession are those who stand outside that historical succession*** and claim for themselves identification with the primitive Church.

The growing number of denominations in the world can only be explained, to a large extent, by the rejection of apostolic succession.





THE COUNCILS OF THE CHURCH

A monumental conflict (recorded in Acts 15) arose in the early Church over legalism: obedience to Jewish laws by Christians, as a means of salvation. "Then the apostles and presbyters met together [in council] to discuss this matter" (Acts 15:6).

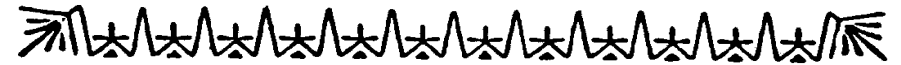
This council, meeting in Jerusalem, **set the precedent for convening subsequent councils in which to solve problems.** Hundreds of such councils – local and regional – have been held for many centuries in the history of the Church, and seven councils specifically designated as **Ecumenical**, that is, **considered applicable to the entire Church.**

Aware that **God has spoken through the Ecumenical Councils**, the Orthodox Church regards them especially as authoritative teaching regarding the faith and practice of the Church.

THE CREED OR SYMBOL OF FAITH

Creed comes from the Latin *credo*, meaning "I Believe." From the earliest days of the Church, **creeds have been living confessions of what the Christian believes** and not formal or academic pronouncements of the Church. Such confessions of faith appeared as early as the New Testament itself, where, for example, St. Paul quotes a creed to remind Timothy that "*God was manifested in the flesh*" (1 Timothy 3:16, KJV).

Creeds **were approved** by Church Councils, usually **to give a concise statement of truth** in the face of the encroachment of heresy. The most important of the creeds in Christendom is the **Nicene Creed**, the product of two Ecumenical Councils that took place in the fourth century. Delineated in the midst of a life-and-death controversy, it contains the essence of the New Testament's teaching about the Holy Trinity, **safeguarding life-giving**



truth against those who changed God's true nature and reduced Jesus Christ to a created being, rather than God in the flesh.

The creed gives us a safe interpretation of the Scriptures against those who distort them to support their own religious schemes. Called the "Symbol of Faith" and confessed in many Church services, the Nicene Creed **constantly reminds the Orthodox Christian of what he personally believes and helps him/her keep his/her faith on track.**



SPIRITUAL GIFTS



When the young Church got going, **God poured out His Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and their followers**, giving them **spiritual gifts** to build up the Church and to serve one another. Among the **specific gifts** of the Spirit mentioned in the New Testament are: apostleship, prophecy, evangelism, pastoral, healing, relief, stewardship, knowledge, wisdom, tongues, interpretation of tongues.

These and other spiritual gifts **are recognized by the Orthodox Church.** The need for them varies with the times.

The gifts of the Spirit are made more evident in the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church.

*Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues
(1 Cor. 12:27-28).*

