

# A Message from the Patriarch of the Apostolic Orthodox Church

This is the first of many (God willing) messages it will be my privilege to write to an unseen and unknown “audience” in cyberspace. Why have you come to our website? Are you like millions of others who look for that illusive *something* in their lives, something that is missing, that they find hard-pressed to label? Are you merely curious as to what phrase “Thomasene Tradition” is all about? Were you intending to go to another site but clicked your mouse on us by mistake? No matter—welcome to all!

Even if you ended up here by mistake, I hope you’ll take a bit of time to browse around the site. You may find an interesting tidbit or two, may decide you want nothing to do with us—or may want to learn more about the AOC. The *Reading Room* will help you to understand who and what we are, so let me take a moment to tell you what we *are not*.

We are not “just another independent Church.” Indeed, we are independent of the established Patriarchates, but “just another” Church? Not at all. We are not bound to the emotional sentimentality of the West, but rather to the mystical discipline of the East, and therefore demand a great deal of our members. They must be fully committed to their own spiritual development, must diligently study the theology of the Church and the Sacred Tradition, must give freely of their time to the Church and must tithe monetarily. In short, the Church must come first in their lives.

We are not impressed with quantity, rather by quality, hence, do not accept members readily. Although all are welcome to attend the Mystical Worship and other Services, one does not attain membership merely by asking for it. A period of the time called the “Catechuminate” must be successfully completed before membership is granted. During this time, the Catechumen lives his or her life as a member of the AOC, with all its incumbent duties. It is a time of testing, of evaluation, culminated by a rigorous oral examination conducted by the Clergy. Only after the successful completion of the Catechuminate is the boon of full membership granted. Strict? Yes. Why? Another “not.”

We are not a Church that views itself or its members in the hazy light of modern Western thought, but in the brilliant Light of the ancient Orient. We see ourselves for what we truly are: the *Church*, the *ekklesia* (ἐκκλησία), the *called out* of the world. We are not elitist in the social sense of the word, but perhaps are, I must confess, in the spiritual sense. We do not look upon the world as a place of “sweetness and light,” as many of the “New Age” gurus propound, but as a place, according to Saint Paul of spiritual warfare, where only the strong and those properly prepared may successfully “fight the good fight.” And, like the United States Marine Corps, we are always looking for “a few good men and women” to fight at our side.

Your questions and comments are always welcome, even if they are negative. We realize that our view is not shared by all—what a dull world it would be if we all thought alike! Please visit us often, as this message will be changing regularly, the *Q&A Forum* almost daily, and the other pages of our site from time to time. And whether we travel together or apart, may the Light of Lights enfold you.

Mathias Mar Yusef, Patriarch

January, 1999