

A Statement of Principles

of the

Apostolic Orthodox Church

Purpose

The Apostolic Orthodox Church exists to further the work of Jesus Christ, to administer the Holy Mysteries, to teach, to establish Congregations, Religious and Secular Orders and Spiritual Communities and to promote the spiritual welfare of all. The Church encourages its contacts to cease thinking only of a Christ Who lived 2,000 years ago, but to strive also to recognize the eternal Christ dwelling in every soul, echoing the words of Saint Paul, “Christ *in you*, the hope of glory.” (Col. 1:27)

Origin

The Apostolic Orthodox Church was constituted in the West on October 16, 1994, with the approval and encouragement of the descendants of the original disciples of Saint Thomas the Apostle currently living in India. It is a completely autonomous Christian body, yet a part of the holy universal apostolic Church of Jesus Christ; beyond that, it is one in spirit with all religions which seek to teach, inspire, and lead mankind to a deeper understanding of the mystical Truths of existence. Tracing its Apostolic Succession through many sources, including that of Saint Thomas, the Church holds to the ancient Oriental tradition, both written and oral. (Further information may be obtained in the publication, *An Introduction to the Apostolic Orthodox Church*.)

Structure

The Church is hierarchical, with all spiritual and ecclesiastical power residing in, and proceeding from, the Patriarch; all temporal and material power resides in, and proceeds from, the Board of Trustees. It is also collegial, with decisions affecting the Church in general being made by the Synod consisting of a House of Bishops and a House of Delegates from the clergy and laity.

Ministry

The Church’s ministry can be divided into four basic areas: pastoral, mystagogical (sacramental), contemplative and educational. The Church approves and encourages the formation of Spiritual Communities as well as secular Congregations to fulfill these ministries, each having its own Bishop Ordinary who determines the qualifications and suitability of an individual for ordination. Consecration of Bishops and appointment of Ordinaries rests with the Patriarch alone, who takes into consideration advice from the Synod. Ranks other than that of Bishop, Priest and Deacon exist both for utilizing the talents of those concerned in the service of the Church, and for the development of the individual.

Spiritual Life

As the spiritual life of its members is of the utmost concern, the Church places great emphasis on instruction and guidance. Members are encouraged to pursue the search for Truth through

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private study, to expand their knowledge and understanding of things spiritual, to discuss their beliefs with others, to not count their experiences as less of inferior to others, to learn from those further along the Path which leads home to the Father and to teach those who follow behind them. Members are always assured that their questions and concerns will fall upon attentive and caring ears, for the Church believes that the concerns of one are the concerns of all.

Religious Orders

For those who wish to devote themselves more full to the Spiritual Life and to their own spiritual evolution, there exist two Religious Orders of the Church: the *Thomasene Order* for men and the *Order of Saint Thecla* for women. These Orders follow the ancient principle upon which Christianity was founded, that of having a personal spiritual advisor, with every member being assured of attention from his or her Abbot or Abbess.

Secular Order

Many yearn for the benefits of a spiritual advisor, yet are not inclined to lead their lives as members of a Religious Order. They wish to “be in the world, but not of it,” working, raising a family, etc. Responsive to their needs, the Apostolic Orthodox Church has constituted the *Order of Mar Gregorios*. Members may be married or single, male or female, and may choose to live communally or separately, all following a daily spiritual discipline of prayer and devotion. Each member is assigned a spiritual advisor with whom they may communicate either personally or through correspondence.

Worship

The altar, not the pulpit, is the center of the Church, since it is the celebration of the Divine Mysteries and the pleasant duty of adoration, not preaching, which form the basis of the Church’s worship. The Church welcomes to its mystagogical life all that approach the altar with sincerity and devotion.

Teachings

In the tradition of Saint Thomas the Apostle, the Church does not active proselytize, but encourages individuals to come to their own understanding of Truth; yet, it supports a set of general teachings known as the *Precepts of Religion*. The Church also expresses its faith the Divine Truth is progressively making itself known and understood among all religions. Because the basic approach to spirituality is a positive, uplifting attitude toward God, self and others, the Church discourages many negative practices that mark so much of Christianity. The Church maintains no exclusive ownership of Truth or of Salvation; it therefore permits its members to join secular organizations which may further their spiritual evolution and knowledge.

Ethics

The Apostolic Orthodox Church places strong emphasis upon the development of conscience by refinement of ethical behavior. The outer indicator of inner spiritual development is one’s behavior toward other beings, human and non-human alike. Love, consideration and responsibility are the foundation both of the spiritual life and what constitutes an exemplary

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human being, while service and the setting aside of self is the path of spiritual development, as where there is less of self, there is more of Christ, which is the divine life and essence of, and in, us all.

Mysticism

There are as many Paths to God as there are people to tread them, and all must be free to pursue their own. God dwells within all human beings and reveals Himself to those souls open to Him. The Church accepts that there are spiritual Truths that have been revealed by the Mystics of all religions that are Universal Mysteries. In Christianity, these Mysteries center upon Christ as the Hidden Dweller in each of us, perpetuating His spiritual presence through the Holy Mysteries (Sacraments), visible signs of invisible grace bestowed by God, especially the Holy Eucharist and the Mystical Worship which centers around it. The mystagogical path is one of devotion, worship, self-discipline and ethical living, the Mysteries being the instruments that unfold and reveal the Christ within.