

# The Orthodox Churches

by Sebastian R. Fama

The Orthodox Churches claim that: "The Patriarch (bishop) of Rome broke away from the other four Apostolic Patriarchates (Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem), by unilaterally altering the Nicene Creed and considering himself to be the universal head of the Church." The argument is then given that before this time all the bishops shared power equally. They further claim to have preserved the teachings of the early Church. However, unlike the Orthodox Churches, the Early Church believed in the primacy of Rome. Church Fathers from two of the four Patriarchates that split with Rome attest to this:

## Clement of Alexandria

**[T]he blessed Peter, the chosen, the preeminent, the first among the disciples**, for whom alone with himself the Savior paid the tribute [Matt. 17:27], quickly grasped and understood their meaning. And what does he say? "Behold, we have left all and have followed you" [Matt. 19:27, Mark 10:28] (*Who is the Rich Man That is Saved?* 21:3-5 [A.D. 200]).

## Cyril Bishop of Jerusalem

In the power of the same Holy Spirit, Peter, both **the chief of the apostles** and the keeper of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, in the name of Christ healed Aeneas the paralytic at Lydda, which is now called Diospolis [Acts 9 :3 2-3 4] (*Catechetical Lectures* 17;27 [A.D. 350]).

Church Fathers from the west agreed with their eastern brothers:

## Irenaeus Bishop of Lyon

...the greatest and most ancient church known to all, founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles. Peter and Paul, that church which has the tradition and the faith which comes down to us after having been announced to men by the apostles. **With that church, because of its superior origin, all the churches must agree, that is, all the faithful in the whole world**, and it is in her that the faithful everywhere have maintained the apostolic tradition (*Against Heresies* 3:3:2 [inter A.D. 180-190]).

## Cyprian Bishop of Carthage

With a false bishop appointed for themselves by heretics, they dare even to set sail and carry letters from schismatics and blasphemers to **the Chair of Peter and to the principal church [at Rome], in which sacerdotal unity has its source**" (*Epistle to Cornelius* [Bishop of Rome] 59:14 [A.D. 252]).

The "Filioque Clause" is a phrase in the Creed that states that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the father and the Son. The Orthodox Church believes that the Holy Spirit only proceeds from the Father. Once again, the Orthodox Churches are at odds with their own tradition. Listen to what these eastern fathers had to say:

## St Epiphanius of Salamis

For the Only-Begotten Himself calls Him "the Spirit of the Father," and says of Him that "He proceeds from the Father," and "will receive of mine," so that He is reckoned as not being foreign to the Father nor to the Son, but is of their same substance, of the same Godhead; He is Spirit divine... of God, and He is God. For he is Spirit of God, Spirit of the Father and Spirit of the Son, not by some kind of synthesis, like soul and body in us, but in the midst of Father and Son, of the Father and of the Son, a third by appellation. ... The Father always existed and the Son always existed, and **the Spirit breathes from the Father and the Son**; and neither is the Son created nor is the Spirit created (*The Man Well Anchored* [A.D. 374]).

## St. Cyril of Alexandria

Since the Holy Spirit when He is in us effects our being conformed to God, and **He actually proceeds from Father and Son**, it is abundantly clear that He is of the divine essence, in it in essence and proceeding from it. [Thesis 34] (*Treasury of the Holy and Consubstantial Trinity* [A.D. 424])

The east was the birthplace of several heresies such as Arianism, Nestorianism and Monophysitism. Severus, a prominent Monophysite was Patriarch of Antioch. Nestorius, the originator of the Nestorian heresy was Archbishop of Constantinople. How can these bishops be considered equal in authority with Rome when their official teachings were erroneous?

The Orthodox Churches dispute the existence of Purgatory. Once again, they part company with the Early Church:

## Clement of Alexandria

The believer through discipline divests himself of his passions and passes to the mansion which is better than the former one, passes to the greatest torment, taking with him the characteristic of repentance for the faults he may have committed after baptism. He is tortured then still more, not yet attaining what he sees others have acquired. The greatest torments are assigned to the believer, for God's righteousness is good, and His goodness righteous, and though **these punishments cease in the course of the expiation and purification of each one**, "yet" etc . . . (*Patres Groeci*. IX, col. 332 [A.D. 150-215]).

## John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople

Let us help and commemorate them. If Job's sons were purified by their father's sacrifice [Job 1:5), why would we doubt that our offerings for the dead bring them some consolation? **Let us not hesitate to help those who have died and to offer our prayers for them** (*Homilies on First Corinthians* 41:5 [A.D. 392]).

The Bible and the early fathers (both east and west) condemn divorce and remarriage. For instance:

## Justin Martyr

In regard to chastity, [Jesus] has this to say: If anyone look with lust at a woman, he has already before God committed adultery in his heart. "And, whoever marries a woman who has been divorced from another husband, commits adultery." **According to our Teacher, just as they are sinners who contract a second marriage, even though it be in accord with human law**, so also are they sinners who look with lustful desire at a woman. He repudiates not only one who actually commits adultery, but even one who wishes to do so; for not only our actions are manifest to God, but even our thoughts (*First Apology* 15 [A.D. 151]).

## Clement of Alexandria

That Scripture counsels marriage, however, and never allows any release from the union is expressly contained in the law: "You shall not divorce a wife, except for reason of immorality." **And it regards as adultery the marriage of a spouse, while the one from whom a separation was made is still alive. "Whoever takes a divorced woman as wife commits adultery,"** (*Miscellanies* 2:23:145:3 [A.D. 208]).

Once again, the Orthodox Churches allow the practice. The more we learn about the Orthodox Churches the less tenable is the claim that they are the champions of doctrinal purity. The Catholic Church alone has remained unchanged in her teachings. And as the Orthodox Churches will tell you, that is the mark of the true Church.