

# The Voice of the Church

Volume 2:7 (July, 2009)

## **From the Editor**

In this issue, we finish the essay on the Catholicity of the Orthodox Church by Fr. Nathaniel Irvine. In this final portion of his essay, he discusses the vestments and how the Orthodox Church is a Church and not a political body. Next month, we will feature an entry for the Feast of the Dormition.

Editor

## **“Greek Orthodox Catholicity: Religion of Syria, Greece, Russia, etc.”**

### **Robes, etc.**

We may go a step further: As we notice the robes of the clergy, ornaments of the altar and whole edifice, and the ceremonies, we may lawfully ask why all such display? What meaneth all this? Indeed, we need only go to the Bible to get our answer. God is the author of robes, ornaments and ceremonies. Our first parents adopted withering, changing leaves of fig trees (Genesis iii, 7,) for a covering. It was God who gave to Adam the woolly skin of the first Sacrificial Lamb to be a robe. (Genesis iii, 21.) No one but God could have suggested to Abel the sacrificing of a Lamb upon an Altar (Gen. iv, 21,) emblematic of “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” CHRIST. (Rev. xiii, 28.) Around that one act the Prophetic Sacrifice of old – the memorial, unbloody sacrifice now – have grown up by divine suggestion and command all the elaborate, yet helpful to devotional life and reverential approach to God, robes, ornaments and ceremonies. And, oh, how wise and blessed have been all of these suggestions and commands of God! Indeed, He saw the ever-changing, and sometimes ridiculous, fashions of mankind and how inappropriate they would be to a dignified worship of the Divine Majesty. He, therefore, suggested changeless robes for His priests. The priestly “alb” of the Christian church is after the fashion of that prescribed by God Himself.

Unless, then, we are ready to ignore both the fact of the Bible being the Word of God, early history and sacred tradition being trustworthy, we must agree to certain points after reading carefully and prayerfully, viz., that:

First. Robes, ornaments, and ceremonies are ordained of God.

Second. That our Blessed Lord when He became man for our salvation, in no shape, form or manner rebuked the use of them, but by His presence and use of them, and also by His disciples’ presence and use of them in the Jewish church, gave His and their sanction.

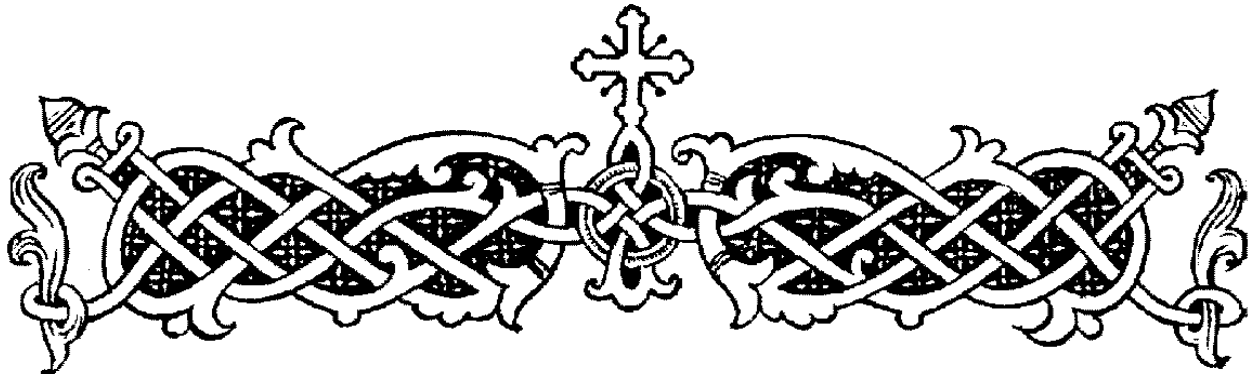
Third. That His disciples after our Blessed Lord’s Ascension regularly attended for twelve years the services of the Temple and joined in all excepting the Bloody Sacrifice – the Holy Communion in their “Upper Room” or first Christian church, having taken the place of this latter. And here it must be noted that Christ must have given His Apostles very minute instructions about all these during the “Great Forty Days” which intervened His Resurrection and Ascension. We are told by St. Luke that He spoke “to them of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God” (Acts i, 3) – the Kingdom and Church of Christ are synonymous terms.

Fourth. That when the Apostles scattered hither and thither after the martyrdom of St. Stephen the Deacon, they adopted as far as necessary and applicable to Christianity the very robes, ornaments and ceremonies of the Jewish Church of Shadow, and of which the Kingdom of God or Church of Christ was the Substance.

Fifth. When representatives of the Christian Church throughout the world met in Jerusalem under the Presidency of St. James the Apostle, and again at the first General Council of Nicea, A.D. 325, there never was one word uttered against the then existing ceremonies and robes. All was taken for granted, though men had come from the ends of the earth to Nicea. Ceremonial certainly there was, robes certainly there were, but those who came from Jerusalem, or Constantinople or Alexandria or Far-off India or Africa or Rome or Hesperalia, or Gaul or Britain, all were agreed on the ancient usages and the expediency of them.

And so, Sixth, the Holy Eastern Church to-day with her robes, ornaments and ceremonies has no excuse to offer. Each has its meaning. One and all point us up to heavenly things and away from what is earthly and changeable..

Those who desire to follow up this subject ought to read the Books of Exodus and Leviticus and then weigh well St. Paul’s Epistle to the Hebrews, and from thence note



# The Voice of the Church

Volume 2:7 (July, 2009)

how, as I have said, our Blessed Lord and His Apostles never in one jot or tittle deprecated those things. Remember the Birth of the Christian Church was on the Day of Pentecost, for it was then the Holy Ghost descended and filled her waiting soul with life, light, power and immortality. We must not expect Ritual Rules in the fourfold Gospel. We must, therefore, understand the meaning of St. Paul's words about the Services, "Let everything be done decently and in order," I. Cor. xiv, 40, as referring to ceremony, and when he commands St. Timothy to bring "the cloke" – "the books" and "parchments" (II Tim, iv, 13), as referring to things which he had need of in the conducting of public worship.

Surely if the Church Militant is but a stepping-stone to the Church of Paradise, as we read in the first chapter of the Revelation of St. John the Divine and scan the chapters thereafter, there need no more be said on this point.

Sometimes the Orthodox Church is criticized for the use of ornaments. But here again she falls back on the Scriptural teaching and example. It was God who commanded Moses to place the images of the Cherubim over the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of holies (Ex. xxv, 18-23). She only uses the emblem of the Cross and pictures as reminders of Redemption and the virtues and nearness of the Saints, and as helps of devotion. Her one and only highest object of adoration and worship is the Triune God. Her one and only immediate Mediator, Advocate and Intercessor with the Eternal Father is Jesus Christ (I Tim. ii, 5). The Blessed Virgin and Saints at most only help to save us by their prayers

and intercession to Jesus. Christ alone is both their salvation and ours by His Redeeming Blood as the God Man.

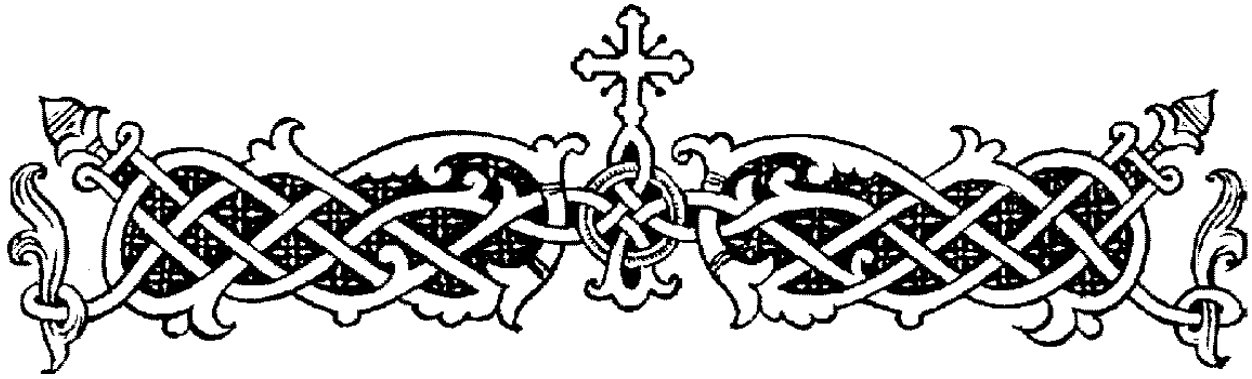
*The Voice of the Orthodox Church* is published by St. Nicholas Orthodox Church in Fargo, ND  
([www.stnicholasfargo.org](http://www.stnicholasfargo.org))  
Editor: Fr. Oliver Herbel ([froliverherbel@cableone.net](mailto:froliverherbel@cableone.net))

## **The Church not Political**

The Orthodox Church is not a political body. She draws a distinction between her mission to help all men and that domineering spirit of the West to subject all men under a human head and curia at Rome. The Orthodox Church's kingdom, like her only Head, Christ, – "is not of this world" (John xviii, 36). She proclaims "the Faith once for

all delivered to the Saints." Her sons are willing to die now as through all the ages of the past rather than either add to, take from or deny that Faith, for their Mother the Church, has been intrusted with the guardianship of that Divine Treasury for the salvation of all mankind, and it is their duty to hand down from age to age the Truth as they have received the same from Christ, His Apostles and the days of the early undivided Church.

Rome is handing down to us in her imperial power – I except her spirituality, of course – the old pagan Roman system of supremacy and universality. Circumstances connected with the dismemberment of the Western Empire afforded her the temptation. If all her popes were like Gregory the Great it would not have been so. He ignored such teachings and protested against it, but the weakness of kings helped to create the strength of popes not spiritually minded, and so has grown up, in contradistinction to ancient Rome during the first four centuries, with her long and great list of Saints, the Italian Curia, which like malice weed over-clouds her great goodness in every land, and saps the spirituality of her as a great organization. It has changed her from a portion of the Body Mystical of Christ into an ecclesiastical machine of human invention. Her Patriarchal See has become the extinguisher of the dignity and importance of an Apostolic Episcopate, and her creation of a Cardinalate a matter which neither Christ nor His Apostles ever foretold, an institution which neither Bishops, Priests, Deacons, nor Laity outside the City of Rome had ought to say as to its necessity. It is as purely human as the Roman Papacy, and its temporal pomp and grandeur are rebuked by the Founder of the Holy Catholic church, Who "made Himself of no reputation" (Philippians ii, 7) for us; Who while the foxes had "holes and the birds of the air nests" (Matt. vii, 20) had not where to lay His Royal, Incarnate Head; Who instructed His followers, saying "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest for your souls" (Matt. xi, 29); who even after His Resurrection became again the Servant to His poor tired Fisher-Disciples, having prepared for them a meal on the shores of Galilee (John xxi, 9.)



# The Voice of the Church

Volume 2:7 (July, 2009)

The Orthodox Church is the True Witness against Rome's false claims, as well as her temporal power and human inventions.

Men to-day are looking for the Truth as it is in Jesus. "The Holy Orthodox Catholic Apostolic Church" promulgates to the world, that being the Body Mystical of her Lord and her God, – she like Him is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever" (Heb. xiii, 8) in doctrine and fellowship.

Fr. Nathaniel Irvine