

Why Independent?

Many people might ask, "Why on earth would a church be independent, isn't that different to the historical church?" Actually, it is not so different. In the early Christian church, all local churches were independent and there was no chief governing head as you see it today. These church communities would be ministered to by, what we call today, Bishops and Deacons. The rank of priest came later, about the mid second century as the church expanded.

The Early Church

Beginning in about the second century as the church moved from the cities and into the rural areas' churches were led by priests. These groups of churches led by a number of priests in a given area were looked over or governed by a local Bishop. In this situation the bishop would be the head of what is called a diocese. As the church grew and more diocese were put into place they were looked over by a Metropolitan or Archbishop, usually located in the major cities. This form of church governance permitted better organization and supervision of orthodoxy. The Metropolitan and Archbishops did not rule but only supervised and every Bishop was to only worry about his own diocese unless orthodoxy was violated. Diocesan Bishops were to remain completely autonomous and were free to run their own jurisdictions as long as they stayed true to the faith.

Five Great Christian Sees

All the churches in a diocese were organized under the principal guidance and leadership of a Patriarch. Patriarchs were heads of some of the largest and most important dioceses in the world. By the fifth century the great Christian sees of the Roman (that is the Byzantine) Empire came to number five: one Latin-speaking (Rome) in the West, and four Greek-speaking in the East: Constantinople, Alexandria (founded by St. Mark the Evangelist), Antioch (founded by Peter even before foundation of the see of Rome), and Jerusalem, whose sanctity needs no demonstration since Christ Himself lived and died there. Special honor was given to Rome and Constantinople because their sees were the seats of imperial Roman Government. All these were equal in authority and had no power except in their own churches. The great importance in this early period of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem was, however, soon to be diminished by their permanent conquest by the Islamic Arabs in the seventh century. Henceforth, though Orthodox patriarchs continued to exist there (and still do today), ecclesiastical primacy over the Orthodox East inevitably passed to the capital city, Constantinople. Today the Patriarch of Rome is known as the Patriarch of the West, or the Pope and the Patriarch of Constantinople is of the East, or head of the Eastern Orthodox Churches.

Patriarchalism

Even though great honor was given to the five patriarchies, there is no Orthodox Canon or doctrine requiring that every canonical, local or world-wide jurisdiction must be in full communion with the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople (Istanbul), Turkey, or any other Patriarch. Though the Patriarch in Constantinople of times long passed has the historic title of **"first among equals"** among all Orthodox Patriarchs, serving many times as its spokesman, but at no time exercising "temporal jurisdiction" over all Orthodox dioceses around the globe. Canonically, he is merely the 270th successor of the Apostle Andrew.

The Great Schism

A separation occurred on or about the year 1054 A.D. when the Patriarch of Rome asserted his power over the other Patriarchs claiming leadership rights and Papal authority over the whole Christian Church. This is known as the Great Schism. The end result of this schism was the beginning of the western *Roman Catholic Church* and the *Eastern Orthodox Church*. Today if one looks to the east, better known as the Russian, Greek, Oriental and Coptic Orthodox churches, you will see how these independent jurisdictions are organized and maintained as in ancient times. While in the west we see the Pope in Rome heading over the



Roman Catholic Church as one supreme, infallible Papal leader. We know this to be an incorrect way of leading our Lord's Church. If we look to history, we see that every time Papal supremacy has been exerted, we have splits within the Church starting the major one in 1054 A.D. Since then there have been many more smaller splits and schisms specially in the west. We have seen the errors which have led to the Reformation, we have seen the Anglican Split and also in the 1860's we see the beginning of Independent Catholicism with the emergence of the Old Catholic Church of Utrecht, Holland when once again during Vatican I, it was declared that the Pope was infallible. It seems that every time the Pope makes an affirmation of his authority a split occurs in our Lord's Body. This authoritarian approach to Church governance is an error, we have seen it only led to heartbreak and destruction of our Church. Our Lord's prayer in Holy Gospel of St John was for Unity, not necessarily conformity! Jesus wants us all to express our Love for Him however it may move a Tradition within Orthodoxy and the fullness of the Sacramental Faith.

Independent Catholicism

Independent Catholics along with us the "**Independent Catholic Orthodox Church**" continues to follow the example of the early ancient church pioneers. Although Independent Catholicism has its roots in the Roman Catholic Church, it follows the faith held by those in the

ancient Church as expressed in the creeds and the early ecumenical councils. Some Independent Catholic Churches, like us, also have apostolic succession through the Eastern Orthodox Church lines as well. This allows us to worship in both the western and eastern liturgical traditions handed down to us while keeping our faith orthodox. While there are divisions among us and although many on both sides of the fence are holding grudges, we realize that we are all human and have made mistakes. We continue to pray for unity among all Catholic and Orthodox brethren, as well as all Christians. We strive to develop relations with all jurisdictions who profess the true faith given to us by the Apostles. That is why we like to say we are Catholic Orthodox Christians.

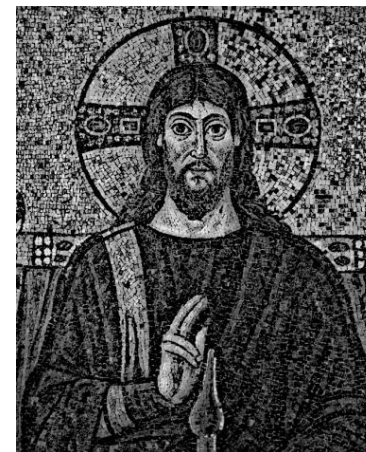
If you have any questions about Independent Catholicism or wish to join us in worship of our Lord and God please contact us. We love to hear from people who may be searching or are just curious. Hopefully, people who hold authority with our other Catholic families will reach out. God Bless.



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Independent Catholicism



*The Early Church model
for today's world!*



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