

Spirituality of Our Coptic Church Rituals I

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The Church:

Many Christian people believe that the Church denotes simply the building that contains the altar, icons, chairs, etc. However, this is only a superficial consideration of what the Church actually is.

The word “*church*” is derived from a Greek word “*Ekklesia*” which was derived from the word “*Ekalo*” which means, “*invite.*” So therefore the word refers to “*gathering of many persons in one place for a specific goal.*” Later, it also came to refer to a gathering of a specific group of persons such as rulers who met to examine a civil issue, as in the Holy Book of Acts 19:41. If the gathering referred to a religious issue it was called Church as in the Holy Book of Acts 2:47.

The specific meaning of Church includes:

- A) All Christians in all the countries of the world who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 16:8 and Acts 5:11)
- B) The Christians in each city or parish who meet to worship the Lord as the Church of Jerusalem (Acts 15:4)
- C) The place of meeting in which Christians are gathering together for worship (Acts 11:26)

One of our Fathers said that the Church is the gathering of saints who have the orthodox belief and who desire the orthodox spiritual life. Another Father said that the Church is the true Christian people who have a true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They must have a strong, orthodox, one faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and are united together in one unity through the Church Sacraments under a leadership of legal shepherds whose head is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

The word “*church*” can be utilized to specify specific denominations from other Christian denominations, although this is not true and right. In conclusion, the Church has two specific meanings of which one is spiritual (meaning the Christian population in general) and the other literal (meaning the building used for worship services).

Finally the Church includes the striving or visible church and the victorious or not visible Church. The visible Church is the Christian believer on the earth (Matthew 18:18) and the second refers to the saints in Heaven (Revelations 4, 5, 7, 8, 19).

The Names and Symbols of the Church:

The Church of the Lord Jesus Christ has several names and many symbols including:

- 1) The Bride of the Lord Jesus Christ, because the Lord is the Church’s bridegroom (Song of Solomon 4:12, Psalm 45:11, Ezekiel 16:9, and II Corinthians 11:22)
- 2) The Body of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Head of this Body is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself (Matthew 25:5-6, John 4:29, I Corinthians 12:27, and Colossians 1:24)
- 3) Congregation and Congregation of God (Acts 20:28, and I Peter 5:2-3)
- 4) Church of God (I Corinthians 10:32, II Corinthians 1:1, and Galatians 1:13)

- 5) The House of God. This title was derived from Bethel (Genesis 28:17-19) and then utilized for the Temple of Jerusalem (Ephesians 2:19, I Thessalonians 3:15, Hebrews 10:21, and I Peter 4:17)
- 6) The Temple or Altar of God which means presence of the Living God in between His Congregation as was in the past in The Tabernacle and The Temple of Jerusalem (I Corinthians 3:16-17 and II Corinthians 6:16)
- 7) From its symbols: Ark of Noah (Genesis 6:14 and I Peter 3:12); The Holy City (Revelation 21:2); The Heavenly Jerusalem (Galatians 4:26); Secret Garden, Walled Garden and A Private Spring (Song of Solomon 4:12); The Only Dove (Song of Solomon 2:14, 5:2); Vineyard (Isaiah 5:1); The Boat (Luke 5:2); The Net Catching All Kinds of Fish Good and Bad (Matthew 13:47); The Field (Matthew 13:21) and The Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 13:11).

Antiquity of the Church:

As commonly known, the Church is the gathering of all believers in the world not only those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, but also those who believe in God including our Fathers before Moses and the people who believed in the Torah by Moses the Great Prophet. So, the “*church*” includes all the believers in God and the Lord Jesus Christ since the beginning till the end of times. Therefore the word “*church*” is utilized as a symbol of the Israelites in the Holy Book of Acts 7:38, and the Holy Book of Hebrews 2:12.

By this understanding, the Church is very old and dates back to the beginning and the creation of the world. Further, the belief in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior, began since the creation of the world (Genesis 3:15, 49:1, Hebrews 11:2-10, I Peter 1:5-13 and Revelation 13:5).

Through the centuries, the Church progressed through three stages:

Stage 1: From Adam to Moses

Stage 2: From Moses to the Lord Jesus Christ

Stage 3: From the Lord Jesus Christ until the end of the world

The first stage encompasses the Church governed by the natural law “*conscience*” and verbal traditions of the Patriarch Fathers, which was transmitted from each generation to another generation until the time of Moses. Through these oral traditions, Adam and his children offered sacrifices to the Lord (Genesis 4:3, Hebrews 11:4). Also they built altars to the Lord as mentioned by Noah (Genesis 8:20) Abraham (Genesis 12:7-9) Isaac (Genesis 26:25) and Jacob (Genesis 33:20).

Also through these traditions we are made aware of vows for the Lord (Genesis 14:20, 28:22) and sanctification of Sabbath (Exodus 16:23,29,30). Explaining that all the sacrifices were a symbol for the Lord Jesus Christ and further a sign of belief that their offerings were in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior (Luke 10:24 and John 8:56)

The second stage entails the Church governed by written law that was given to Moses containing all the moral, civilian, and ritual laws. These laws were a magnified sign for the conscience that had become spoiled as a result of the moral corruption of man. God gave man this law to correct the corruption (Romans 8:3, Galatians 2:22, and 3:24). The cornerstone of the Law was the Lord Jesus Christ, the Hope of the world and for whom all nations were awaiting (Haggai 2:7, Malachi 3:1).

The third stage is the era of grace (Luke 1:17) and the time of mercy and perfection (Hebrews 7:1) that had begun with the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Christian Church therefore is “*the last stage*”

established on the Day of Pentecost following the Glorious Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. At this time the Holy Spirit sanctified our holy Apostles who were chosen by the Lord to preach the Holy Gospel to all the world (Mark 16:15) and now we must follow in their holy footsteps and worship God according to the Holy Gospel, not under the law but under grace (Romans 6:14, I Corinthians 13:10). This final stage will remain in effect until the passing away of the world and the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 15:24).