

**BELIEVERS
EASTERN CHURCH**

*“We believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.”
(Nicene Creed)*

Other Books in This Series

A JOURNEY WITH JESUS TO THE CROSS

BECOMING AN EPISCOPA

BIBLE READING CALENDAR

CELIBACY AND CHURCH LEADERSHIP

CENSING IN WORSHIP

CORE VALUES

DON'T CALL ANY MAN FATHER

EUCHARIST

HEAD COVERINGS

HOLY UNCTION

HOURS OF PRAYER

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

SIGN OF THE CROSS

THABLITHA

THE PLUMB LINE

THE SEASONS OF LENT

THE WORSHIP OF THE CHURCH

**BELIEVERS
EASTERN CHURCH**

adheres to the orthodox faith

Moran Mor Athanasius Yohan Metropolitan

faith and tradition series

BELIEVERS EASTERN CHURCH
Faith and Tradition Series
English

by
Moran Mor Athanasius Yohan Metropolitan

Copyright © Believers Eastern Church
All rights reserved.
No portion of this booklet may be reproduced in any form
without priour written permission from the publisher.

First Impression 2017
Second Impression 2018

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated,
are taken from the Holy Bible, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION
©1973, 1978, 1984 Biblica. Used by permission of Zondervan.
All rights reserved.

Produced by
Liturgical Commission Authorised by The Metropolitan

Published by
Believers Eastern Church Synod Secretariat
St Thomas Nagar, Thiruvalla - 689 103
Kerala, India.

Printed in India
Website: www.bec.org.

Price: ₹ 70.00

BEC-FTS - 011 E - '17

PLEASE READ

In the Episcopal Synod of the church held from 28 November to 5 December 2016, it was decided to change the name of 'Believers Church' to 'Believers Eastern Church'. This decision was based on more than two years of deliberation by various councils of the church. We chose to do this because we, as a church, adhere to the ancient orthodox biblical faith and godly traditions.

Contents

Preface	9
Introduction	11
The Beginning	15
<i>Persecutions</i>	
<i>Defending the Faith</i>	
Marks of the True Church	21
<i>The Timeless Church</i>	
<i>Fathers of Faith/Church Fathers</i>	
Historical Episcopacy	29
<i>Church in India</i>	
<i>The Malankara Christians</i>	
Believers Eastern Church	35
<i>How Does a Leader Become an Episcopa</i>	
<i>The Journey Continues</i>	
Appendix 1	41
Appendix 2	43
Appendix 3	45
Appendix 4	49
Notes	53

Preface

*In the name of the Father, the Son
and the Holy Spirit ✠*

*O*ur faith and tradition are the two major factors that define our identity in Christian living. Faith stands for what we believe as a church and tradition denotes how we live according to our faith.

As a church, the faith of Believers Eastern Church is deeply rooted in the Holy Bible, which is the foundation of our life and spirituality. Our tradition is the practices of what the apostles, the composers of the New Testament showed and later was perfected by the vision of the early church fathers.

My hope is that the *Faith and Tradition series* will bring renewal and life to our Christian life and our church, to know Jesus, who gave His life and loved us, more intimately.

✠The blessings of the Triune God be with you all forever.

Synod Secretariat
April 15, 2017

✠Moran Mor Athanasius Yohan
Metropolitan

Introduction

Some people may think of the worship of Jesus Christ and practices of the church in the context of 100, 300 or 500 years in the past. The faith and practices of many only go back to Martin Luther's Reformation. We need to be reminded that the church has two thousand years of history!

Without understanding history, we lose our way. Why is history important? We will never understand the "true church" without understanding the history that shaped it from the beginning and gave meaning to the church's faith and holy traditions.

Thomas Oden, a world renowned theologian and author, puts it this way: "Biblical faith itself not only recounts a history; it is a history. To separate faith from its history would be, as Will Herberg said, 'like paraphrasing poetry'."¹

With thousands of Christian denominations in the world and many more emerging every day, is there a way for most of us to understand the church? What

happened between Christ, the apostles and the church today?

God is the creator and sustainer of history. The Passover² kept the Jewish people bound together as one from generation to generation. Even today, it is not something confined in and consigned to the past, but instead it is a living event. Its effect and consequence has lasted through the ages, and even now lends stability, value, faith, meaning, and a sense of belonging and hope.

This is true of the Christian faith. What Jesus did, the apostles taught, the church fathers and early church believed and protected, all became the life and meaning behind living out our faith, just as Passover became for the Jewish people of God. Our life also becomes meaningful when that kind of faith develops in and enhances us.

Ignorance of Christian history can have grave consequences. It can cause many to fall into cultish teachings. It can breed pride and arrogance through charismatic, persuasive teachings based on interpretation and beliefs rooted in subjective experience. The subjective and individual interpretations and practices of faith in this way can result in erroneous, biased and arrogance-filled applications of faith and practices.

A closed mindset keeps us from a true biblical understanding of the Kingdom of God and

from having unity in diversity, the foundation as members of the Body of Christ.³ It is important to gain a historical perspective of the ancient faith, traditions and practices of the church, especially in today's convergence culture. The church is both a living movement and an institution.

For any society or nation to function properly, there must be established rules, like a constitution, along with quality leadership to implement them. The same is true of the church. The Holy Church has always had its constitution and canon laws that kept unity and faith in a changing world.

Think of the church in terms of a train. If the spiritual life is based on God's Word and worship of the church is the engine of the train, then the railway tracks are the constitution and the holy traditions of the church.

Historical episcopacy and liturgical worship are important elements of the church. It is imperative for the church to remain authentic.

The aim of this material is to help the reader understand the timeless church that had its beginning in the Acts of the Apostles and is still alive and well under the authority of Christ.



For more information on this topic download the book on "*The Worship of the Church*" for free visit: www.bec.org.

1

The Beginning

The New Testament is the fulfilment of the Old Testament. Throughout the Old Testament, God spoke through types, shadows and prophecies regarding the coming of the Messiah into the world to be the Saviour and redeemer.

The gospel writers begin with the birth of Jesus Christ from the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem. The incarnation of Jesus Christ, thirty-three years of His earthly ministry, His proclamations (teachings and instructions), miracles, Crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension back to heaven are the major narratives of the gospels. God sent the Holy Spirit upon Christ's waiting disciples,¹ empowering them to take the Gospel to the ends of the world.

Jesus selected His twelve disciples² and then later seventy.³ While He lived with them, He taught and trained them to lead His church. It was their duty to carry on the vision and to be the continuation of the mission He had come to fulfil.

It is not known to us where all the apostles went preaching the Gospel. But we do know of St Paul and his companions' journeys leading to the establishment of the churches as recorded in Acts 13–28.

All 27 books of the New Testament became part of the Bible; all were written in the first century. churches were established in Syria, Europe, Asia Minor, Greece, Egypt, Armenia and India.

The church in Antioch emerged as more prominent, compared to the Jerusalem church. St Paul and St Barnabas went there to teach and established them in faith. It was in Antioch that the followers of Christ were first called 'Christians'.⁴ This church became a sending church by sending St Paul and St Barnabas on their first missionary journey.⁵

We know that St Peter and St Paul went to Rome, since it was there that they were both martyred under Emperor Nero in AD 67.

The church began with Jewish converts, but soon gentiles (non-Jews) were received into the church. St Peter's visit to Cornelius and his household

became proof of God's plan for His church for all peoples on earth.⁶ This decision was officially taken in the first council in Jerusalem, under St James who was the first bishop of Jerusalem.⁷

The church was founded as a local community and often met in private homes.⁸ These early church gatherings were led by bishops who had received the laying of hands (ordination) from the apostles.⁹

Persecutions

As the church spread everywhere, opposition to the gospel and persecution of Christians became common. Christian faith and worship were seen as anti-national and Christianity was considered an illegal religion! Christians obeyed and prayed for their authorities,¹⁰ but they refused to worship the rulers of the nation, which their rulers considered to be rebellion. Many early church fathers became martyrs for their faith. St Clement of Rome (AD 102), St Ignatius of Antioch (AD 110) and St Polycarp of Smyrna (AD 157) are among many who gave their lives for Christ and His church.

Although we don't have the details of all the apostles and early church fathers' travels and ministries, we do know that St Thomas came to India to preach, and he planted seven churches and ordained clergies to lead the church in the southern part of India.

Defending the Faith

Within the first generation of the Holy Church, there arose much falsehood and heresy. If not for the writings of the apostles and the church fathers' defence of the faith, we would have lost the true faith of the church.

The apocryphal writings, Gnosticism, Montanism, Arianism and dozens of minor and major heretical teachings led to the first Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (AD 325), under the leadership of Emperor Constantine. And thank God for St Athanasius and his brilliant scholarship that led the way to protect the authentic faith of the Holy Church at the church council meeting in Nicaea! Even now, the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church worldwide accepts and recites the Nicene Creed as the absolute declaration of the orthodox faith of the Holy Church. We at Believers Eastern Church do so too.

It was during these first four hundred years of the early church that the liturgy of worship and the holy traditions of the church were developed. The second Council of Constantinople (AD 381) and the third Council of Ephesus (AD 431) all affirmed the Nicene Creed as the plumb line, the criterion of authentic Christian church faith. Our church too officially accepts these councils as the establishers of the rules of faith and practices for Christian life. And interestingly, it was only in AD 397, seventy years

The Beginning

after the establishment of the Nicene Creed, that the 27 books of the New Testament were canonised by the church.

The Nicene Creed affirms, completely, the teaching of the entire Bible and the Word of God supports every word that is found in the Nicene Creed.

So, it is reasonable to say that like the constitution of a nation which may just be a one-page document, the Nicene Creed has become the plumb line or touchstone to test the faith and witness of the authentic church in any generation.

2

Marks of the True Church

“*I*dentification, please!”

How often have we heard this request at airports, train stations, shopping malls, banks and dozens of other places? Proof of identification has become a necessary evil in our world. If proving one's identity is important for our survival while dealing with this temporal world, how much more significant is it when it deals with our eternity!

The church we talk about belongs to God Almighty. He is its founder and the Word of God has much to say about the marks of an authentic church. There are an endless number of churches and denominations that may look right. But a closer examination will reveal that many of these churches lack authenticity.

Written by the most important church council convened in AD 325, the Nicene Creed ¹ kept the church from falling into the heresies that cropped up throughout the history of the church, especially about Christology and the Trinitarian worship of the Holy Church. While it was in AD 325 that the Nicene Creed officially became the creed of the church, allusions to the concept can be found in the writings of the second century early church fathers and Bishop Ignatius of Antioch.

It is within the Nicene Creed that the church is described thus: “And I (We) believe in *one, holy, catholic and apostolic* Church.” The four adjectives — *one, holy, catholic, apostolic* — give us the four major, non-negotiable characteristics of the biblical and historical church. We do not attempt to discuss each one of these words (features) individually. We need to understand that none of these words is meant to stand alone. They are meant to be intertwined and melted together as one to be a complete description of the Holy Church.

Both the Council of Constantinople (AD 381) and the Council of Ephesus (AD 431) affirmed the significance of the Nicene Creed for Christian faith. The Nicene Creed functions as the defender of Christian faith and doctrines from heretical teachings, Trinitarian and christological controversies, and other erroneous doctrines that arise from time to time.

The Nicene Creed description of the church has one overwhelming focus. It focuses on the oneness and unity of thought within the church. In the context of the diverse liturgical variations in the pre-Nicene period, this focuses on the fact that the church has one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and the salvation one experiences cannot be altered by time or space, which are all notable and should guide us in our focus as well.

The Timeless Church

No matter where a church is found, if they believe and adhere to the cardinal doctrines and holy traditions of the church, they are part of the church. There may be variations in their liturgies, but the faith the church proclaims is the same.

The Eucharist it celebrates is the same though the words, actions, and rituals may vary.

The meaning and purpose of the Eucharist remains the same. The

mystery of the Holy Sacrament is never denied.



To free download the book on "*Eucharist*" visit: www.bec.org.

The church's shepherds, priests, clergies and bishops share the same worldwide and indivisible episcopate, as St Cyprian of Carthage wrote: "The episcopate is one, in which individual bishops hold individual shares as owners of a common

property.”²

The unity of the church is a spiritual reality manifested through the Holy Spirit, through believers united to Christ, who is united to His Father. Thus, the church that participates in this divine Trinitarian unity of the Holy Trinity is one with the body of Christ. The result of such a mystical union of the people of God with God is made holy by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

The church is called to live as Christ lived.³ The emphasis here in the Creed is not simply the individual Christian's personal godly living, though that is important. But this wholesome life is characterised by the church as a whole. The church is the salt, light and the transforming agent in this dark world.

God's way to reconcile the world to Himself is through His Son. And His Son is the head of the church, and the church is His body visible in this world. The church is called out of the world to bring the world to the Father. And, the church is catholic, that is, universal.

The word *catholic* is not talking about the Roman Catholic Church. It is derived from the Greek word *katholike* which means, whole, complete, and universal.

The church in the first century is equally part of the

church in the twenty-first century because Christ never changes and those who abide in Christ share the same life and purpose. St Ignatius of Antioch who died in AD 107 said, “Wherever Christ Jesus is, there is the catholic church.”⁴

Believers Eastern Church, today, is present in fourteen nations and represents people from almost 325 different languages and dialects. And yet, we are one in unity and love with all true churches that adhere to “one, holy, catholic and apostolic” church. We, Believers Eastern Church, are part of the church worldwide.

Then too, the church that is authentic, regardless of where or what century they live in, is apostolic. The church is built upon the teaching of the apostles. This differentiates the true church from the Gnostic and other cults that were built on the teaching of the various false teachers.

Fathers of Faith/Church Fathers

To call the church apostolic is an affirmation that the grounding of the church's doctrines, teaching and holy traditions comes from the apostles, as found in the New Testament and oral traditions. Throughout the past two thousand years of church history, hundreds of different views of life and morality came and went, but the unchanging Word of God kept the church on her path, continuing her

journey with apostolic (orthodox) faith given to her by Christ and His apostles.

Being apostolic also means that the church maintains the apostolic succession; that is, the bishops derive their authority through the direct line of laying of hands from the apostles.

In the New Testament, there is only one specific, clear example given concerning the structure of church government. That is rule by the bishops.⁵ The Greek word for bishop is *episkopos*. This type of rule reflects how God called and appointed Moses to lead His people: one individual in leadership with leaders under him to help guide the people. Sheep never lead the sheep; it is the shepherd who leads the sheep.

It is as the church continues in the teaching of the apostles and through their successors in the shepherd's role that she is sanctified and guided by the apostles. The Council of Bishops, assisted by clergy/priests in union with successors of St Peter, the chief apostle appointed by Christ, lead the church.

At the time of Peter's confession of Christ, he said, "You are the Son of God, the Messiah."⁶ Jesus replied, "Upon this rock, I will build my church." In St John 21:15–17, we see again the supremacy of St Peter as the leader of the church. Eusebius, the first church historian, recorded that St Peter went

to Antioch in AD 37, built a church and established the church. Later, St Peter and St Paul went to Rome and established the church in Rome. St Peter, being given the “key” for the kingdom, speaks of authority.⁷

The apostles were called by Jesus to go into the world, just as Jesus Himself was sent by His Father.⁸ The apostles were the “ministers of the new covenant”, “servants of God”, “ambassadors of Christ”, “servants of Christ” and “stewards of the mysteries of God.”⁹

“The one aspect of the apostles that cannot be transmitted: to be the chosen witness of the Lord's resurrection and so the foundation stones of the church. Their office also has a permanent aspect. The divine mission entrusted by Jesus to them will continue to the end of time, since the Gospel they handed on is the lasting source of all life for the church.”¹⁰

From the very beginning of the church, we know the apostles appointed successors to lead the church by their laying on of hands.¹¹ As they did, we continue to do, keeping that line of divine authority, originally bestowed by Christ Himself, unbroken.

3

Historical Episcopacy

The Holy Church has always believed that the apostolic succession protects and guards the faith of the church. The New Testament does imply a personal apostolic succession from St Paul to Timothy and Titus. For example, there are documents of the early church, like the First Epistle of Clement (AD 97)¹ which was highly valued by the early church and has been preserved to the present day, that present definite proof of the doctrine of apostolic succession. Clement explicitly states that the apostles appointed bishops as successors and directed that these bishops should in turn appoint their own successors.² All evidence shows that the undivided early church practised this diligently until the division and split that resulted in the establishment of the church of east (those that

maintain the orthodox lineage) and the church of the west (Roman Catholic Church) in 1205. Later on, the Church of England (Anglican Church) came into existence from within the Roman Catholic Church.

According to the authentic documents of the church,³ only a reigning bishop who is the supreme head and the spiritual father of the church with the lineage of historic episcopacy has the authority to consecrate another bishop. Normally, at least three ruling bishops were involved in the ceremony of consecrating another bishop. In the “one, holy, catholic and apostolic church”, it is unthinkable to have a self-declared bishop.

We see from the letters of St Ignatius ⁴ that by the early second century, the celebration of the Eucharist was assigned to the bishop alone, and the others he authorised. In his epistle to the Smyrneans, he extolled the office of bishop as the centre of the church, a symbol of unity and a guardian of the faith.⁵

Church in India

In India, the Church of North India, the Church of South India and the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church are part of the Anglican Communion.

The Anglican Church (Church of England) emerged from the Roman Catholic Church in 1534. The bishops who became leaders of the

Anglican Church were all consecrated from the Church of Rome, and thus they were able to maintain the apostolic succession and lineage of the church. That is how the Church of South India in 1947 and the Church of North India in 1970 became part of the historical and episcopal churches, with the consecration of bishops by the Anglican Church.

The Church of South India (CSI) was formed in 1947 when Anglicans, Congregationalists and Presbyterians in southern India accepted an episcopal form of church administration. The Church of North India (CNI) formed in 1970 and is a union of the Council of Baptist Churches in Northern India, Church of the Brethren in India, Disciples of Christ, Church of India, Methodist Church and United Church of Northern India.

While the bishops of the Church of South India and the Church of North India were consecrated from the Anglican Church, the Malankara Syrian Churches had their bishop consecration from the eastern tradition or the orthodox lineage. But, whether from the west or east, all historic and constitutional episcopacy traces to the apostles in Jerusalem, and from there to Antioch, Constantinople and Rome.

The Malankara Christians

The church St Thomas started in Kerala grew to become a large church and came to be known as

the 'Malankara Church.' Until Mar Thoma I became the Metropolitan in 1665, the bishops from western Asia led the Indian church. In AD 325,⁶ at the Council of Nicaea, Bishop John represented both Indian and Persian churches.

Then after 1599 with the Catholic Church's influence, the Malankara Christians who had until then been part of the church, found themselves divided into two: one, the Roman Catholic, and the other, those who remained loyal to their St Thomas traditions and St James Liturgy, known as the 'Malankara Syrian Church.' The split was marked with the famous 'Coonan Cross' in 1653. The twelve priests who lead the Malankara Syrian Church were eager to maintain their autonomy as an eastern church. They joined together to raise Archdeacon Thomas to the Episcopate, and he was called Mar Thoma I.

In 1665, at the request of the Malankara Syrian Church, Mar Gregorios Metropolitan of Jerusalem, who was under the Patriarch of Antioch, was sent to Kerala, and he duly consecrated Mar Thoma I as bishop. Thus the episcopal continuity was restored with Mar Thoma I as the first Indian metropolitan.⁷

Since then, there have been many significant events that sustained the episcopal stability for the church in Kerala, as there will be many more crises in the future. The Malabar Independent

Syrian Church (Thozhiyur Sabha) had a significant role in the history of the Saint Thomas Christian community. On several occasions, bishops of the Malabar Independent Syrian Church have stepped in to consecrate bishops for other churches when their episcopal succession was in danger.

For example, in 1893 Metropolitan Thomas Mar Athanasius of Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church suddenly passed away. Since he had been the only bishop and metropolitan of the church, the Malabar Independent Syrian Church, Metropolitan Joseph Mar Athanasius consecrated Titus I Mar Thoma (1893–1909) as bishop for the apostolic succession for the church. The Orthodox Church had the same experience in their church history. Mar Philoxenos II Kidangan (1811–1829), the Metropolitan of the Malabar Independent Syrian Church, consecrated three successive bishops in the Malankara Church: Mar Dionysius II on 22 March 1816, Mar Dionysius III on 19 October 1817, and Mar Dionysius IV on 27 August 1825.⁸

In apostolic succession, grace is transmitted during an episcopal consecration by the laying on of hands by bishops previously consecrated within the apostolic succession. This lineage of ordination derives from the twelve apostles, thus making the church the continuation of the early apostolic Christian church. This is how one of the

four non-negotiable marks (one, holy, catholic and apostolic) that define the true church and legitimise the ministry of the clergy remains true through the ages. This is the reason why, in churches that follow the ancient lineage of apostolic succession, only a bishop within the succession can perform valid ordinations, and only bishops and priests ordained by bishops in their apostolic succession can validly celebrate the sacraments.

Believers Eastern Church

*B*elievers Eastern Church is part of the universal church that follows the apostolic teaching, traditions, and faith and practices of two thousand years of Christian church. Our church is strongly rooted in the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Scriptures, and functions with a constitution, and is indigenous and self-governed.

Just like the dozens of denominations that emerged throughout the two thousand years of church history are in the lineage of the apostolic succession (like the Church of South India, the Church of North India, the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church, the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church), Believers Eastern Church is a Christian church with historical and constitutional episcopacy.

It was at the beginning of the year two thousand when the Executive Council of our church formed a commission to research and come up with recommendations for the future governance of our church. It was resolved that the commission would seek the advice and help of church leaders of major denominations that function with constitutional episcopacy. After nearly two years of consistent work, they presented their findings to the Executive Council of the church, which was held on 1 January 2002 at our seminary campus, Thiruvalla, Kerala. The recommendation was that Believers Church should become a church with constitutional episcopacy for the permanence and stability of the church. We are deeply grateful for all the advice and help received from many church leaders.

How Does a Leader Become an Episcopa

From the painstaking research that we undertook, we realised that consecrating a bishop for our church would only be possible if done by another church with historical episcopacy and apostolic continuation and succession.



To free download the book on "*Becoming an Episcopa*" visit: www.bec.org.

At this meeting, it was decided that our church should approach The Most Rev. Dr K.J. Samuel, who was then the Moderator of the Church of South India (the largest non-Catholic Church in the

sub-continent with historic episcopacy), and request him to consecrate the first bishop of our church.

When the commission approached the Most Rev. Dr K.J. Samuel, his first response was negative, but he promised to pray about it. The Moderator studied thoroughly the theology, constitution, liturgy, worship, faith and traditions of our church, after which he came to the conclusion that this was a subject that needed to be placed before the Synod Working Committee of the Church of South India (CSI) for discussion and approval.

On 13 December 2002, 120 members of the Executive Council of Believers Church held the council meeting at our seminary chapel in Nagpur, India. After three days of deliberation, it was unanimously decided that the church should embrace episcopal governance; and that Rev. Dr K.P. Yohannan would be duly consecrated as the first bishop and installed as the Metropolitan of the church.

Meanwhile, the Moderator, The Most Rev. Dr K.J. Samuel had many rounds of talks with their working committee and executive committee. Finally, the Council of Bishops gave their consent for the Moderator to preside and for other bishops to be part of the consecration service.¹

It was on 6 February 2003 that, with the consent of CSI Bishop's Council, The Most Rev. Dr K.J. Samuel acted as the chief celebrant of the consecration service of Believers [*Eastern*] Church's first episcopa, Dr K.P. Yohannan. Rt. Rev. Dr J.W. Gladstone, the then bishop of the Trivandrum Diocese, and Rt Rev. Dr Devakadaksham, the then bishop of Kanyakumari Diocese (both of whom became moderators later), were the co-celebrants of the consecration service.

Also, Rt Rev. Dr Victor Premsagar (former Moderator of CSI), Bishop B.N. Naik (Church of North India), Bishop Prem Kumar B. Dhotekar (Church of North India), the Most Rev. Dr Mar Aprem Metropolitan (Chaldean Syrian Church) and Dr Rajaratnam (Lutheran Churches in India) blessed this historical event with their presence. In truth, we were following the same patterns as the Church of South India and other churches that became episcopal in history.

The Journey Continues

On the occasion of the tenth Episcopal Day celebrations of the Believers Eastern Church, the main celebrant of the first consecration the Most Rev. Dr K.J. Samuel said these words:

I did my research to make sure the Believers [*Eastern*] Church had their constitution, the

doctrinal statements and liturgies. Then too, I was glad to learn that Dr K.P. Yohannan did have his theological education done in USA from a prestigious seminary and that he was ordained as a priest and was a clergy for four years of a church in Dallas, Texas, USA.

“So, when they [Believers Eastern Church] decided to accept the episcopal governance, I was convinced that they're qualified for it. I was assured that the church had emerged from the will of God and was qualified by all means to be encouraged and be entrusted with the development of the society and the expansion of the kingdom of God. And it was this realisation that led me to agree with their entering into the episcopal church identity; and the Most Rev. Dr K.P. Yohannan was consecrated in accordance with all the rules and regulations of the church and apostolic tradition. And by the authority of God entrusted to me and with all solemnity, it became a solemn service of which heaven approves. And its spiritual signs became visible to all in this one decade of mission work after the consecration of the Metropolitan Dr K.P. Yohannan.”²

In the years of 2006, 2010, 2017 and 2018, the episcopal consecrations of new episcopas of our church were held. Today, the church has thirty godly and able episcopas including the Metropolitan who

oversees all the ministries and projects of the church in every diocese, along with the vicar general, diocesan secretary and a diocesan council.

The church is proactively and constructively involved in nation-building, and humanitarian and charitable projects of all kinds. Projects that provide care and education for children, social and literacy projects, hygiene and sanitation projects focused on the needs of the communities and villages, skill development and trade-oriented empowerment, rehabilitation projects and relief activities, and women's empowerment projects are only part of the church's involvement in development and social change.

Believers Eastern Church is deeply invested in spreading the light of God's love through its quest for human rights, for caste reconciliation, for peace and justice, for equality and social justice-envisoning a new generation of hope and tolerance, with the aim of leading the world into true compassion. Thus, the mission of the church is, in reality, a continuation of the ministry of Jesus Christ our Lord and His apostles in the first century: peace on earth and good will for all.

May the blessings of the Holy Trinity be continually strengthened and multiplied in us, and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ lead us.

Appendix 1

Mission Statement of Our Church

*T*he mission of our church is to glorify God—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—by following in the footsteps of the ancient orthodox faith and practice of the Holy Church, to worship God as He desires, to grow together in love and unity, to instruct and equip the people of God for the work of the ministry and to fulfil the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus by all means through word and deed.

Appendix 2

Core Values of Our Church

1. Knowing the Lord Jesus more fully and intimately.
2. Being a people of integrity and excellence.
3. Living in obedience to God's Word.
4. Being a people of faith.
5. Being a people committed to worship and sacramental life.
6. Having a servant lifestyle.
7. Being a people of grace and love.
8. Serving sacrificially.
9. Being a people committed to obey the Great Commission of Christ.
10. Being a people that serve God and people with the Body of Christ.

Appendix 3

The Emblem of Our Church



*T*he early church fathers chose the symbol of the cross as a reminder of all that Christ had done for them. Its two bars were already a cosmic symbol from remote antiquity, representing the axis between heaven and earth. Their choice had a specific explanation. They wished to commemorate one thing as central to their understanding of Jesus: not His birth nor His youth, neither His teaching nor His service, neither His resurrection nor His reign,

nor the gift of the Spirit, but rather His crucifixion and His death.

Richard Hooker, a sixteenth century theologian, applauded the fact that the early church fathers, in spite of heathen scorn at the sufferings of Christ, “chose rather the sign of the cross than any other outward mark, whereby the world might most easily discern always what they were”.¹

The Cross and the Circle

While the *circle* in the logo represents *eternity*, the cross is not enclosed or contained within the circle. It extends beyond the circle, implying that the cross is the centrality of our faith and that its significance transcends eternity. It represents the Lord Jesus Christ and the redemption He wrought for us on the cross.²

So it is the supreme priority of our church to enable God's people to know Jesus more fully and intimately and hunger to become like Him. Thus they will manifest Christ's life as they die to themselves through the cross and follow in His footsteps.³

The four emblems within the circle stand for the emphases we have in Believers Eastern Church.

Book

The book represents the Word of God.⁴ We believe the Bible is the only and absolute authority over

our faith and conduct. No tradition, no matter how good it may be, should ever violate the Word of God. The sole authority for the faith and practice of the church is the Bible and nothing else.

Teaching through the Word, verse by verse, to feed the sheep is emphasised in Believers Eastern Church. We give great emphasis and supreme priority to the teaching of God's Word in our worship services and other Bible study gatherings, for our aim is for believers to grow into Christ's likeness.⁵

Dove

The dove symbolises the Holy Spirit.⁶ We give biblical emphasis to the working of the Holy Spirit as it is described in the New Testament. Without the power of the Holy Spirit, no one can live a victorious Christian life; hence, we give biblical emphasis to the filling of the Holy Spirit, gifts of the Holy Spirit and fruit of the Holy Spirit in a Christian's life.

Heart

The heart represents agape love. We believe that love is the most important trait of a follower of Christ, without which we have no right to call ourselves Christians. We prioritise teaching about the unity of the body of Christ and in living out love in practical terms, thus expanding the kingdom of God.⁷

Fish

During the severe persecution of the early church, Christians used the noncommittal painting of a fish to identify and greet one another, and it was a symbol only known to the believers themselves. The *ichthys* (fish) was an acronym for *Iesus Christos, Theou Huios, Soter* (Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour). But it did not remain the Christian sign because this association between Jesus and the fish was purely acronymic, with no visual significance.

The fish sign in the Believers Eastern Church logo is used differently. We refer to the mission of the church as Christ Himself explained: “Follow Me and I will make you ‘fishers’ of men.” Therefore, we acknowledge our commitment and passion to fulfil the Great Commission—our call from Christ, who is the head of the church.⁸

Thus, the unique character of Believers Eastern Church is expressed in the design of the logo—a people deeply committed to the faith and practice as revealed in the Word.

Appendix 4

Faith of Our Church

*B*elievers Eastern Church accepts the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments—66 books containing all things necessary for salvation—as the supreme and foundational standard of faith. We believe in the absoluteness of the Scripture. We believe that the Bible, Old and New Testaments in the original autographs, is the inspired, infallible Word of God: a complete and final written revelation of God.¹

We believe in all the fundamental doctrines of ancient biblical Christianity. We accept and confess the historic Creed of Nicaea, Constantinople and Ephesus. We believe and practice the holy sacraments followed by the historical church.

We believe in one personal, transcendent and holy God, the creator of all, who is eternal, and who manifests Himself in three separate persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.²

We believe that Jesus Christ, though fully God, became a human, that He is the promised Messiah, was born of Virgin Mary, lived a sinless life, provided for the atonement of our sins by His death on the cross, was bodily resurrected by the power of the Holy Spirit, ascended back to the right hand of God the Father, and ever lives to intercede for us.³

After Jesus ascended to heaven, He poured out the Holy Spirit onto the believers in Jerusalem, enabling them to fulfil His command to preach the Gospel to the entire world, an obligation shared by all believers today.⁴

We believe that all people are, by nature, separated from God and responsible for their own sin, but salvation, redemption and forgiveness are generously offered to all by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁵

We believe that when people believe in Jesus Christ as their Saviour, their sins are forgiven, and they become the children of God.⁶

We believe in the person and work of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in, seals and empowers all believers, baptising them into the body of Christ.

Appendix 4

We believe that the Holy Spirit fills all believers who ask in faith, enabling them to communicate the Gospel in power.⁷

We also believe that all the gifts of the Holy Spirit mentioned in the New Testament are for today and should be exercised within the scriptural guidelines.⁸

We believe that agape love is more important than all the gifts, and without this love, all exercise of spiritual gifts is worthless.⁹

Believers Eastern Church prioritises guiding each believer along an intimate walk with Jesus and being formed anew in His image.¹⁰

We believe in the Second Coming of Christ, His living with His saints, and the rapture of church. It will be personal and visible.¹¹

We seek to teach the Word of God in such a way that its message can be applied to an individual's life, leading that person to greater maturity in Christ.¹²

We believe in the resurrection of the body unto eternal life for the redeemed and unto eternal punishment for the unredeemed.¹³

Notes

Introduction

1. Thomas C. Oden, *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy: Signs of New Life in Christianity* (USA: HarperCollins, 2003), p. 17.
2. Exodus 3:8.
3. St John 13, 17.

Chapter 1

1. Acts 2.
2. St Mark 10:2–4.
3. St Luke 10:1.
4. Acts 11:19–30.
5. Acts 13:1.
6. Acts 10, 11.
7. Acts 15.
8. 1 Corinthians 16:19, Romans 16:3–5.
9. Acts 14:23.
10. Romans 13:1–7.

Chapter 2

1. This booklet is not a full exposition of the Nicene Creed; we are only looking at the four distinctive marks of the true Church found in the Creed.
2. St Cyprian of Carthage, *The Unity of the Catholic Church*, Chapter 5.
3. 1 John 2:6.
4. St Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Smyrna*, Chapter 8.
5. 1 Timothy 3:2.
6. St Matthew 16:16–20.
7. Revelation 1:18.
8. St John 20:21.
9. 1 Corinthians 4:1, 2 Corinthians 3:6, 6:4, 5:20.

10. The Catechism of Catholic Church, 860 (http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p123a9p3.htm).
11. St Matthew 28:20.

Chapter 3

1. Introductory notes to First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians, www.biblestudytools.com.
2. Clement I, *The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, Chapters XLII, XLIV.
3. Hippolytus in *apostolic tradition 9, First Council of Nicaea*, Can 4.
4. <https://www.ewtn.com/library/PATRISTC/IGNATIUS.HTM> citing Patrick J. Hamell, *Handbook of Patrology* (NY: Alba House, 1968).
5. Smyrna Chapters 8 and 9.
6. M. Thomas Antony, *Patriarchate of India citing Alphonse Mingana, Early Spread of Christianity in India*, The Journal of the John Rylands Library Vol. 10 p. 496 ([www.nasrani.net/.../patriarchate-of-india-evolution-hierarchy-among-thomas-christian of Malabar](http://www.nasrani.net/.../patriarchate-of-india-evolution-hierarchy-among-thomas-christian-of-Malabar))
7. Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan, *The Marthoma Church: Heritage and Mission* (Thiruvalla: Christava Sahitya Samithi, 1985), pp. 18 & 19.
8. Rev. K.C. Varghese, *History of Malabar Independent Syrian Church* (1972), p. 62.

Chapter 4

1. Official communication of the Moderator, *Church of South India* dated 15 January 2003.
2. Most Rev. Dr K.J. Samuel in his article 'The Church Emerged out of the will of God' (Malayalam) appeared in Sabhavartha January-February 2014, pp. 11-17.

Appendix 3

1. Richard Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book V, chapter IXV 20, "Of the Cross in Baptism."
2. Galatians 2:20, 6:14; Colossians 1:15–20; Ephesians 2:11–16.
3. Galatians 2:20, 6:14; 1 Peter 2:21.
4. Isaiah 40:8, 55:10–11; St Matthew 7:24–25; St John 20:31; Acts 2:42, 6:4; Galatians 1:8–12; 2 Timothy 3:15–17, 4:2; Hebrews 4:12; Revelation 22:18–19.
5. 2 Corinthians 3:1–18.
6. St Matthew 3:11; St Luke 11:13, 12:12; St John 4:24, 7:38–39, 15:26; Acts 1:8, 2, 4:8, 4:31, 8:15, 11:15–16, 13:2–4, 13:9, 13:52, 16: 6–7, 19:2–5; Romans 8:1–27; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 5:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:19.
7. St John 13:14–17, 13:31–35, 15:12–13; Romans 13:8; 1 Corinthians 1: 8; 1 Corinthians 13; Galatians 5:13–26; Ephesians 5:2; Philippians 1: 9; 1 Timothy 1:5; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 2:10, 3:11–23, 4:7–21.
8. St Matthew 28:19; St John 4:35–38, 15:27, 20:23; Acts 1:21, 10:42, 16: 4, 18:9–10, 20:28; Romans 10:13–15, 12:6–8; 1 Corinthians 9: 16–17; 2 Corinthians 4:1–5, 5:14–17, 6:3–10; Ephesians 4:11, 6:20; 2 Timothy 4:1–5.

Appendix 4

1. 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20–21; St Matthew 5:18; St John 16:12–13.
2. Deuteronomy 6:4; St Matthew 28:19; St John 1:1–2; 2 Corinthians 13:14; Philippians 2:6.
3. St John 1:1; St Matthew 1:20–23; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 1:3, 10:12; St John 16:7–11; St Matthew 19:28, 25:31; 2 Timothy 2:8.
4. St Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8, 4:8, 4:31.
5. Genesis 3; Romans 3:23, 5:12; 1 John 1:8; Ephesians 2:3–10.
6. Ephesians 1:7, 2:1–10; St John 1:12.
7. 1 Corinthians 12:13; 2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; St Matthew 28:16–20; Acts 1:8.
8. 1 Corinthians 12, 14.

Believers Eastern Church

9. 1 Corinthians 13.
10. Romans 8:29; Philippians 2:1–7; 2 Corinthians 3:18.
11. Titus 2:13; 1 Corinthians 15:51–52; Acts 2:38–47;
1 Thessalonians 4:13–18; 1 John 3:2–3; 1 Corinthians
11:23–26.
12. Isaiah 28:13; Acts 20:27; Nehemiah 8:8; St Matthew 7:24;
St James 1:22–24.
13. Revelation 20; Acts 24:25; St John 5:28–29; St Luke 16:19–31;
2 Corinthians 5:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:14–17; 1 John 3:2.



BELIEVERS EASTERN CHURCH

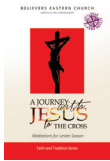
Believers Eastern Church has its faith and practices rooted in God's Word, the apostolic doctrines, the Nicene Creed, and holy traditions of the ancient church. We are thoroughly evangelical in nature, eastern in worship, democratic in function and episcopal in governance.

Our church represents more than three hundred languages, ministering inter-culturally, near-culturally and cross-culturally. We represent the orthodox faith in a relevant way, never compromising with the culture, but actively bringing Christ's love to all of humanity in word and deed, regardless of caste, creed or religion.

We follow the liturgical tradition of worship established by the Church Fathers, with Holy Communion as the central rite of regular worship. Worship should be Spirit-filled and personal. Simultaneously, the Spirit breathes life into the rites of community worship and unites us to worship Jesus as one Body. Believers Eastern Church believes that the sacraments are a means to receiving grace and are essential to the spiritual growth of God's people.

We are episcopal in governance, which means we affirm the ancient and traditional form of church leadership of episcopas, priests (presbyters) and deacons as demonstrated in the Book of Acts and brought to maturity by the church fathers.

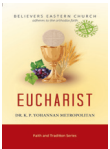
FAITH AND TRADITION SERIES Believers Eastern Church



Price Rs 140

A Journey with Jesus to the Cross

Season of Lent is a journey to spiritual growth, renewal and an opportunity to know the Lord Jesus more intimately and closely. We must hear the Lord speaking to us all along the way as the journey continues so that our heart-attitude will become more like His. The way to attain this is by deliberately choosing an attitude of confession, denying of self, fasting, meditation, prayer and supplication. And, the life is enriched with humility of Christ and service to others. This daily devotional will do just that: bringing the focus upon Jesus and enabling spiritual renewal in our walk with the Lord.



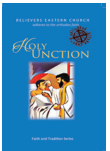
Price Rs. 80

Eucharist

Eucharist is one of the Sacraments of the Holy church that the Lord Jesus told us to do.

Of the many sacraments of the Holy church, the sacrament of Eucharist is the most important. Known as the crown of sacraments, Holy Communion is one of the holy mysteries of the apostolic church, which was instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ.

In this booklet, we will explain this unexplainable and awesome mystery to the extent that we can understand it.



Price Rs 30

Holy Unction

There are times in our life when we need God's help desperately. The Holy Unction is one of the sacraments meant to meet our needs during times of sickness, to bring hope and healing for body, soul and spirit through prayer and through anointing with holy oil.



Price Rs 120

The Worship of the Church

The break-up of the church is one of the darker aspects of the Protestant Reformation during 1500 under Martin Luther of Germany. Now there are forty-two thousand denominations, each of which claims to be the true and authentic church in their faith and practice!

In this brief booklet, the authour tries to help the reader travel back in time to the first five hundred years of the early orthodox faith of the church, to help us answer questions about a crisis of the modern-day church. The booklet explores how man has become the centre of worship instead of God, who should be the audience in our worship, and the follies of this new way.



Price Rs 20

Sign of the Cross

In the history of the world, there is one event that stands above all others. That event is the crucifixion of Christ. He gave His life for our salvation. From the beginning of the church, the Sign of the Cross has been the symbol of Christian faith and hope. Making the Sign of the Cross is a ritual that binds us together as people of God. In this booklet, you learn the depth of meaning behind this symbol, and how this ritual can bring you blessing and hope.

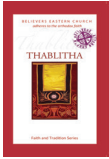


Price Rs 40

Hours of Prayer

The faith and holy traditions of the Believers Eastern Church go back to the directions and rituals that the Apostles handed down to the church fathers, and the church fathers to us.

The Hours of Prayer is one of the most significant aspects of the personal and co-operative spiritual lives of the people of God. This booklet explains the significance of the Hours of Prayer and how we can become part of this beautiful journey year after year.

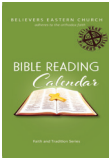


Price Rs 20

Thablitha

The symbols and godly traditions of our Holy Faith help us to retain our identity, which is based on the One Holy church.

The Thablitha is an important symbol and component of the celebration of the Eucharist, which speaks of the Cross of Christ and His eternal sacrifice for our redemption.



Price Rs. 20

Bible Reading Calendar

Reading and meditating on God's Word is like oxygen for our spiritual life. Accordingly, this must become a daily habit for each individual and family.

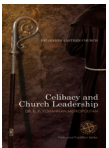
This Bible Reading Calendar will help you read through the entire Bible in a year, and be your guide on your journey through the seasons of the church year.



Price Rs 40

The Seasons of Lent

What is Lent? Why does the church observe Lent? How do we benefit by adhering to the Lenten faith? Are there practical guidelines for observing Lent? Questions like these and many more, find their answers in this booklet.



Price Rs 40

Celibacy and Church Leadership

Why some Eastern Churches mandate celibacy for their bishops? It is a reasonable question to ask since 'Believers Eastern church' adheres to the Eastern 'lineage of the church', and in most of these churches, bishops are required to be celibate (that is, they don't marry). Another question is regarding the official ceremonial outfit that bishops wear, specifically the skull cap or masanapsa. Is it connected to this mandate of celibacy? What does the Bible say about bishops' celibacy? Is there a holy tradition of the church to support this view?



Price Rs 80

The Plumb Line

Our faith is based solely on the Word of God. While the Nicene Creed is not part of the Holy Bible. Its importance is second only to that of the Holy Bible itself. Every believer should endeavour to be able to recite it from memory. The Nicene Creed is a short and condensed one-page version of the Holy Scriptures. This creed contains the non-negotiable fundamental truths and doctrines of the bible, and it covers God's revelation from eternity past to eternity future. This book gives a brief explanation of the importance of the Nicene Creed and the meaning behind each its statements. It is important to understand the background and uniqueness of this creed for the sake of our faith, both individually and as a body of believers.