The Eastern Orthodox Church, also officially called the Orthodox Catholic Church [1] and commonly referred to as the Eastern Orthodox Church,[2] is considered to be the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church established by Jesus Christ and his Apostles almost 2,000 years ago, respectively. In other words, the Faith and practices of the Church have continued to this day virtually unchanged since apostolic times.

The Orthodox Church is composed of several self-governing ecclesial bodies, each geographically and nationally distinct but theologically unified. Each self-governing (or autocephalous) body, often but not always encompassing a nation, is shepherded by a synod of bishops whose duty, among other things, is to preserve and teach the Apostolic and patristic traditions and related church practices. As in the Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Church, Assyrian Church of the East, Oriental Orthodoxy and some other churches, Orthodox bishops trace their lineage back to the Apostles through the process of Apostolic Succession.

The Orthodox Church claims to trace its development back through the Byzantine or Roman empire, to the earliest church established by St. Paul and the Apostles. It practices what it understands to be the original ancient traditions, believing in growth without change. In non-doctrinal matters the church had occasionally shared from local Greek, Slavic and Middle Eastern traditions, among others, in turn shaping the cultural development of these nations.

The goal of Orthodox Christians from baptism, is to continually draw near to God throughout life. This process is called theosis or deification and is a spiritual pilgrimage in which each person strives to become more holy and more "Christ Like" within Jesus Christ.[3]

The Biblical text used by the Orthodox includes the Greek Septuagint and the New Testament. It includes the seven Deuterocanonical Books which are generally rejected by Protestants and a small number of other books that are in neither Western canon. Orthodox Christians use the term "Anagignoskomena" (a Greek word that means "readable", "worthy of reading") for the ten books that they accept but that are not in the Protestant 39-book Old Testament canon. They treat them on the same level as the others and use them in the Divine Liturgy.[4] Orthodox Christians believe scripture was revealed by the Holy Spirit to its inspired human authors. The scriptures are not, however, the source of the traditions associated with the Church but rather the opposite; The biblical text came out of that tradition. It is also not the only important book of the Church. There are literally hundreds of early patristic writings that form part of Church tradition.

Icons can be found adorning the walls of Eastern Orthodox churches and often cover the inside structure completely.[5] Most Orthodox homes have an area set aside for family prayer, usually an eastern facing wall, on
which are hung many icons.

**Definition**

Almost from the very beginning, Christians referred to the Church as the "One, Holy, Catholic [from the Greek καθολική, or universal] and Apostolic Church".[6] Today, in addition to the Orthodox Church, a number of other Christian churches lay claim to this title (including the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Communion, the Assyrian Church and the Oriental Orthodox Church); however, the Orthodox Church considers these other churches to be schismatic and, in some cases, heretical. In the Orthodox view, the Assyrians and Orientals left the Orthodox Church in the first few centuries after Christ, and the Roman Catholics became the largest group to do so, as the result of the East-West Schism, traditionally dated in 1054.

*Orthodox* translates from the Greek to mean “correctly believing” or "correctly glorifying" (from the adjective *orthos* = correct, right and the verb *dokein* = seem (to be the case) and thus by extension "believe" or the noun *doxa* = belief) and was adopted by the Church in order to distinguish itself from what was becoming a larger and larger body of non-orthodox Christian denominations.[7]

Several other ancient churches in Eastern Europe, Western Asia and North Africa also use *Orthodox*, but are distinct from the Orthodox Church as described in this article.

**Typica**

What unites the Orthodox is theology. All members of the Church profess the same beliefs regardless of race or nationality. In practice and traditions, however, there are variations in style depending on country of origin and/or local custom. These local customs are referred to as differences in typica and are accepted by church leaders since they are not perceived to conflict theologically with basic Orthodox teachings.

Thus it is that many Orthodox Churches adopt a national title (e.g. Albanian Orthodox, Bulgarian Orthodox, Georgian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Macedonian Orthodox, Romanian Orthodox, Serbian Orthodox, Ukrainian Orthodox etc.) and this title serves to distinguish which language, which bishops, and which of the typica is followed by that particular congregation. In the Middle East, Orthodox Christians have also been often referred as Roman (or *Rum*) Orthodox, because of their historical connection with the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire.[8]

Members of the Church are fully united in faith and the Sacred Mysteries with all Orthodox congregations, regardless of nationality. Differences in *praxis* (practice) tend to be slight; they involve such things as the order in which a particular set of hymns are sung or what time a particular service is performed. In general, an Orthodox Christian could travel the globe and feel familiar with the services even if he or she did not know the language in which they were celebrated.

**Organization and leadership**

The permanent criteria of church structure for the Orthodox Church today, outside of the New Testament writings, are found in the canons (regulation and decrees) of the first seven ecumenical councils; the canons of several local or provincial councils, whose authority was recognized by the whole church; the so-called Apostolic Canons (actually some regulations of the church in Syria, dating from the 4th century); and the "canons of the Fathers” or selected extracts from prominent church leaders having canonical importance.[9]
The Orthodox Church considers Jesus Christ to be the head of the Church and the Church to be His body. Thus, despite widely held popular belief outside the Orthodox cultures, there is not one bishop at the head of the Orthodox Church; references to the Patriarch of Constantinople as a leader equivalent or comparable to a pope in the Roman Catholic Church are mistaken. It is believed that authority and the grace of God is directly passed down to Orthodox bishops and clergy through the laying on of hands—a practice started by the apostles, and that this unbroken historical and physical link is an essential element of the true church (Acts 8:17, 1 Tim 4:14, Heb 6:2). However, the church asserts that Apostolic Succession also requires Apostolic Faith, and bishops without Apostolic Faith, who are in heresy, forfeit their claim to Apostolic Succession.[10]

Each bishop has a territory (see) over which he governs. His main duty is to make sure the traditions and practices of the Church are preserved. Bishops are equal in authority and cannot interfere in the jurisdiction of another bishop. Administratively, these bishops and their territories are organized into various autocephalous groups or synods of bishops who gather together at least twice a year to discuss the state of affairs within their respective sees. While bishops and their autocephalous synods have the ability to administer guidance in individual cases, their actions do not usually set precedents that affect the entire Church. Bishops are almost always chosen from the monastic ranks and must remain unmarried.

There have been a number of times when alternative theological ideas arose to challenge the Orthodox faith. At such times the Church deemed it necessary to convene a general or "Great" council of all available bishops throughout the world. The Church considers the first seven Ecumenical Councils (held between the 4th and the 8th century) to be the most important; however, there have been more, specifically the Synods of Constantinople, 879–880, 1341, 1347, 1351, 1583, 1819, and 1872, the Synod of Iaşi (Jassy), 1642, and the Pan-Orthodox Synod of Jerusalem, 1672, all of which helped to define the Orthodox position.

The ecumenical councils followed a democratic form; with each bishop having one vote. Though present and allowed to speak before the council, members of the Imperial Roman/Byzantine court, abbots, priests, monks and laymen were not allowed to vote. The primary goal of these Great Synods was to verify and confirm the fundamental beliefs of the Church as truth, and to remove as heresy any false teachings that would threaten the Church. The Pope of Rome, at that time, held the position of "first among equals". And while he was not present at any of the councils he continued to hold this title until the East-West Schism of 1054 AD.

According to Orthodox teaching the position of "First Among Equals" gives no additional power or authority to the bishop that holds it, but rather that this person sits as organizational head of a council of equals (like a president). His words and opinions carry no more insight or wisdom than any other bishop. It is believed that the Holy Spirit guides the Church through the decisions of the entire council, not one individual. Additionally it is understood that even the council’s decisions must be accepted by the entire Church in order for them to be valid.

One of the decisions made by the First Council of Constantinople (the second ecumenical council, meeting in 381) and supported by later such councils was that the Patriarch of Constantinople should be given equal honor to the Pope of Rome since Constantinople was considered to be the "New Rome". According to the third Canon of the second ecumenical council: "Because it is new Rome, the bishop of Constantinople is to enjoy the privileges of honor after the bishop of Rome." This means that both enjoy the same privileges because they are both bishops of the imperial capitals, but the bishop of Rome will precede the bishop of Constantinople since Old Rome precedes New Rome. The 28th canon of the fourth ecumenical council clarified this point by stating: "For the Fathers rightly granted privileges to the throne of Old Rome because it was the royal city. And the One Hundred and Fifty most religious Bishops (i.e. the second ecumenical council in 381) actuated by the same consideration, gave equal privileges to the most holy throne of New Rome, justly judging that the city which is honored with the Sovereignty and the Senate, and enjoys equal privileges with the old imperial Rome, should in ecclesiastical matters also be magnified as she is."

The Pope of Rome would still have honorary primacy before Constantinople if the East-West Schism had not occurred. Because of that schism the Orthodox no longer recognize the legitimacy of the pope.
therefore, like the Pope before him now enjoys the title of “first among equals”. This is not, however, meant to imply that he is the leader of the Orthodox Church. Also, this is not an official title of any sort, just a way of describing the seniority of the “imperial” bishops with respect to all other bishops.

**Number of adherents**

Based on the numbers of adherents, Orthodoxy is the second largest Christian communion in the world after the Roman Catholic Church.\[11\] The most common estimates of the number of Orthodox Christians worldwide is approximately 300 million.\[12\]

Orthodoxy is the largest single religious faith in Belarus (85%), Bulgaria (83%), Cyprus (80%), Georgia (89%), Greece (95%), Moldova (98%), Montenegro (74%), Romania (87%), Serbia (84%), Russia (80%), Republic of Macedonia (65%) and Ukraine (80%).\[13\]

The number of Orthodox adherents represents about 36% of the population in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosnian Serbs). In Albania the adherents number around 25% out of a 40% Christian population (Greek Minority), the others being Roman Catholic. As the dominant religion in northern Kazakhstan, it represents 40% of Kazakhstan, and 4% of Lithuania, 9% of Latvia, and 13% of the Estonian population. Large Orthodox Christian communities exist in the Mediterranean countries of Syria (80% of Christian population), Lebanon (40% of Christian population) and 10% of the whole Lebanese population, Jordan (80% of Christian population), Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Palestinian Christians) with some families able to trace their ancestry to the earliest Christians of the Holy Land. Small numbers of Eastern Orthodox minorities live in Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Turkey and Azerbaijan.

In addition, there are also significant Orthodox communities in Western Europe (including the transplanted Greek, Romanian, Serbian, Macedonian, Albanian, Bulgarian and Russian communities), Africa, Asia (see the Orthodox Church of China and Orthodox Church of Japan), Australia, North America (most notably introduced by Russian missionaries to Alaska under Russian rule and the USA), and South America through the pattern of immigration from Eastern Europe and the Middle East in the last 400 or some years.

The numerous Protestant groups in the world, if taken all together, outnumber the Orthodox,\[18\] but they differ theologically and do not form a single communion.\[19\]

**Beliefs**

**Trinity**

Orthodox Christians believe in the Trinity. The Father is the cause or origin of the Godhead, from whom the Son is begotten eternally and also from whom the Holy Spirit proceeds eternally. The Holy Trinity is three, distinct, divine persons (*hypostases*), without overlap or modality among them, who share one divine essence (*ousia*)—uncreated, immaterial and eternal.\[20\] Orthodox doctrine regarding the Holy Trinity is summarized in the Nicene Creed (Symbol of Faith).\[21\]

In discussing God's relationship to His creation, Orthodoxy used the concept of a distinction between God's eternal essence which is totally transcendent and His *uncreated energies* which is how He reaches us. The God who is transcendent and the God who touches us are one and the same (i.e. These energies are not something that proceed from God or that God produces, but rather they are God himself: distinct, yet inseparable from, God's inner being).\[22\]
**Sin, salvation and the incarnation**

At some point in the beginnings of human existence man was faced with a choice, to learn the difference between good and evil through observation or through participation. The biblical story of Adam and Eve represents this choice by mankind to participate in evil. This event is commonly referred to as “the fall of man” and it represents a fundamental change in human nature. When Orthodox Christians refer to Original Sin what they mean is this adoption of evil into human nature. They reject the Augustinian position that the descendants of Adam and Eve are actually guilty of their sin. As a result of this sin, mankind was doomed to be separated from God. This was mankind’s ultimate dilemma. The solution to this problem was for God to effect another change in human nature. Orthodox Christians believe that Christ Jesus was both God and Man absolutely. He was born, lived, died, and rose again by the power of the Holy Spirit. Through God’s participation in humanity, human nature is changed thus saving us from the fate of hell (Orthodox reject the idea that Christ died to give God "satisfaction," as taught by Anselm, or as a punitive substitute as taught by the Reformers). The effective change included all those who had died from the beginning of time – saving everyone including Adam and Eve. This process, to Orthodox Christians is what is meant by "Salvation". The ultimate goal is theosis – an even closer union with God and closer likeness to God than existed in the Garden of Eden. This very process is called Deification or "God became Man that Man might become God".

**Resurrection**

The Resurrection of Christ is the central event in the liturgical year of the Orthodox Church and is understood in literal terms as a real historical event. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was crucified and died, descended into Hades, rescued all the souls held there through sin; and then, because Hades could not restrain the infinite God, rose from the dead, thus saving the human race. Through these events, Christ released us from the bonds of Hades and then came back to the living as both man and God. According to Orthodox tradition, each human being may partake of this immortality, which would have been impossible without the Resurrection; it is the main promise held out by God in the New Testament.

Every holy day of the Orthodox liturgical year relates to the Resurrection directly or indirectly. Every Sunday is dedicated to celebrating the Resurrection and the triune God. In the liturgical commemorations of the Passion of Christ during Holy Week there are frequent allusions to the ultimate victory at its completion.

**Bible, holy tradition and the patristic consensus**

The Orthodox Church regards itself as the historical and organic continuation of the original Church founded by Christ and His apostles. The faith taught by Jesus to the apostles, given life by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and passed down to future generations uncorrupted, is known as Holy Tradition. The primary and authoritative witness to Holy Tradition is the Bible, texts written by the apostles or those in the Early Church, and approved by Church leaders under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Bible reveals God's will, the relationship between the Israelites and God, the wonders of Christ and the early history of the Church. As the Bible has an inspired origin it is central to the life of the Church.

Scriptures are understood to contain historical fact, poetry, idiom, metaphor, simile, moral fable, parable, prophecy, and wisdom literature. Thus, the Scriptures are never used for personal interpretation, but always seen within the
context of Holy Tradition, which gave birth to the Scripture. Orthodoxy maintains that belief in a doctrine of *sola scriptura* would lead most to error since the truth of Scripture cannot be separated from the traditions from which it arose. Orthodox Christians therefore believe that the only way to correctly understand the Bible is within the Church.\[^{27}\]

Other witnesses to Holy Tradition include the Liturgy of the Church, its iconography, the rulings of the Ecumenical councils, and the writings of the Church Fathers. From the consensus of the Fathers (*consensus patrum*) one may enter more deeply and understand more fully the Church's life. Individual Fathers are not looked upon as infallible, but rather their whole consensus will give one a proper understanding of the Bible and Christian doctrine.\[^{28}\]

**Territorial expansion and doctrinal integrity**

During the course of the early church, there were numerous followers who attached themselves to the Christ and His mission here on Earth, as well as followers who retained the distinct duty of being commissioned with preserving the quality of life and lessons revealed through the experience of Jesus living, dying, resurrecting and ascending among them. As a matter of practical distinction and logistics, people of varying gifts were accorded stations within the community structure – ranging from the host of agape meals (shared with brotherly and fatherly love), to prophecy and the reading of Scripture, to preaching and interpretations and giving aid to the sick and the poor. Sometime after Pentecost the Church grew to a point where it was no longer possible for the Apostles to minister alone. Overseers (bishops)\[^{29}\] and assistants (deacons and deaconesses) were appointed\[^{30}\] to further the mission of the Church.

The ecclesia recognized the gathering of these early church communities as being greatest in areas of the known world that were famous for their significance on the world stage – either as hotbeds of intellectual discourse, high volumes of trade, or proximity to the original sacred sites. These locations were targeted by the early apostles, who recognized the need for humanitarian efforts in these large urban centers and sought to bring as many people as possible into the ecclesia – such a life was seen as a form of deliverance from the decadent lifestyles promoted throughout the eastern and western Roman empire.

As the Church increased in size through the centuries, the logistic dynamics of operating such large entities shifted: patriarchs, metropolitans, archimandrites, abbots and abbesses, all rose up to cover certain points of administration.\[^{31}\]

As a result of heightened exposure and popularity of the philosophical schools (haereseis) of Greco-Roman society and education, Synods and Councils were forced to engage such schools that sought to co-opt the language and pretext of the Christian faith in order gain power and popularity for their own political and cultural expansion. As a result, ecumenical councils were held to attempt to rebuild solidarity by using the strength of distant orthodox witnesses to dampen the intense local effects of particular philosophical schools within a given area. While originally intended to serve as an internal check and balance for the defense of faulty local doctrine against the doctrine developed and spread by the apostles to the various sees, at times the church found its own bishops and emperors falling prey to local conventions – at these crucial moments in the history of the church, it found itself able to rebuild on the basis of the faith as it was kept and maintained by monastic communities who subsisted without reliance on the community of the state or popular culture and were generally unaffected by the materialism and rhetoric that often dominated and threatened the integrity and stability of the urban churches.

In this sense, the aim of the councils was never to expand or fuel a popular need for a clearer or relevant picture of the original apostolic teaching. Rather, the theologians spoke to address the issues of external schools of thought who wished to distort the simplicity and neutrality of the apostolic teaching for personal or political gain. The consistency of the Orthodox faith is entirely dependent on the Holy Tradition of the accepted corpus of belief – the decisions ratified by the fathers of the seven ecumenical councils, and this is only done at the beginning of a consecutive council so that the effects of the decisions of the prior council can be audited and verified as being both conceptual sound and pragmatically feasible and beneficial for the church as a whole.
Theotokos and saints

The Orthodox Church believes death and the separation of body and soul to be unnatural; a result of the Fall of Man. They also hold that the congregation of the Church comprises both the living and the dead. All persons currently in heaven are considered to be saints, whether their names are known or not. There are, however, those saints of distinction whom God has revealed as particularly good examples. When a saint is revealed and ultimately recognized by a large portion of the Church a service of official recognition (glorification) is celebrated. This does not ‘make’ the person a saint, it merely recognizes the fact and announces it to the rest of the Church. A day is prescribed for the saint’s celebration, hymns composed and icons are created. Numerous saints are celebrated on each day of the year. They are venerated (shown great respect and love) but not worshiped, for worship is due to God alone. In showing the saints this love and requesting their prayers, it is believed by the Orthodox that they thus assist in the process of salvation for others.[32]

Pre-eminent among the saints is the Virgin Mary, the Theotokos (“God-bearer”). In Orthodox theology, the Theotokos is the fulfillment of the Old Testament archetype revealed in the Ark of the Covenant, because she carried the New Covenant in the person of Christ; thus, the Orthodox consider her the Ark of the New Covenant, and give her the respect and reverence as such. The Theotokos was chosen by God and freely co-operated in that choice to be the Mother of Jesus Christ, the God-man. The Orthodox believe that the Christ Child from the moment of conception was both fully God and fully Man. She is thus called 'Theotokos' as an affirmation of the divinity of the One to whom she gave birth. It is also believed that her virginity was not compromised in conceiving God-incarnate, that she was not harmed and that she remained forever a virgin; scriptural references to “brothers” of Christ are interpreted as kin, given that the word 'brother' was used in multiple ways, just as the term “father”. Due to her unique place in salvation history, Mary is honored above all other saints and especially venerated for the great work that God accomplished through her.[33]

Because of the holiness of the lives of the saints, their bodies and physical items connected with them are regarded by the Church as also holy. Many miracles have been reported throughout history connected with the saint’s relics, often including healing from disease and injury. The veneration and miraculous nature of relics continues from Biblical times.[34]
Eschatology

Orthodox Christians believe that when a person dies the soul is temporarily separated from the body. Though it may linger for a short period on Earth, it is ultimately escorted either to paradise (Abraham's bosom) or the darkness of Hades, following the Temporary Judgment. Orthodox do not accept the doctrine of Purgatory which is held by Roman Catholicism. The soul's experience of either of these states is only a "foretaste"—being experienced only by the soul—until the Final Judgment, when the soul and body will be reunited.\[35\] The Orthodox believe that the state of the soul in Hades can be affected by the love and prayers of the righteous up until the Last Judgment.\[36\] For this reason the Church offers a special prayer for the dead on the third day, ninth day, fortieth day, and the one-year anniversary after the death of an Orthodox Christian.

There are also several days throughout the year that are set aside for general commemoration of the departed, sometimes including nonbelievers. These days usually fall on a Saturday, since it was on a Saturday that Christ lay in the Tomb.

While the Orthodox consider the text of the Apocalypse (Book of Revelation) to be a part of Scripture, it is also regarded to be a mystery. Speculation on the contents of Revelation are minimal and it is never read as part of the regular order of services. Those theologians who have delved into its pages tend to be amillennialist in their eschatology, believing that the "thousand years" spoken of in biblical prophecy refers to the present time: from the Crucifixion of Christ until the Second Coming. Whilst it is not usually taught in church it is often used as a reminder of God's promise to those who love Him, and of the benefits of avoiding sinful passions. Iconographic depictions of the Final Judgment are often portrayed on the back (western) wall of the church building to remind the departing faithful to be vigilant in their struggle against sin. Likewise it is often painted on the walls of the Trapeza (refectory) in a monastery where monks may be inspired to sobriety and detachment from worldly things while they eat.

The Orthodox believe that after the Final Judgment:

- all souls will be reunited with their resurrected bodies
- all souls will fully experience their spiritual state
- having been perfected, the human race will forever progress towards a deeper and fuller love of God, which equates with eternal happiness
- hell, though often described in metaphor as punishment inflicted by God, is in reality the soul's rejection of God's infinite love which is offered freely and abundantly to everyone.
Traditions

Art and architecture

Church buildings

The church building has many symbolic meanings; perhaps the oldest and most prominent is the concept that the Church is the Ark (as in Noah's) in which the world is saved from the flood of temptations; therefore, most Orthodox Churches are rectangular in design. Another popular configuration, especially for churches with large choirs is cruciform or cross-shaped. Architectural patterns vary in shape and complexity, with chapels sometimes added around the main church, or triple altars; but in general, the symbolic layout of the church remains the same. Each church is created with specified qualifications based on what the apostles said in the Holy Bible. These qualifications include how big the holy temple should be.

The Church building is divided into three main parts: the narthex (vestibule), the nave and the sanctuary (also called the altar or holy place). The narthex is where catechumens and non-Orthodox visitors were traditionally asked to stand during services. It is separated from the nave by "The Royal Gate". On each side of this gate are candle stands (menalia) representing the pillars of fire that went before the Hebrew people escaping from Egypt. The nave is where most of the congregation stand during services. Traditionally, men stand on the right and women on the left. This is for a number of reasons: (1) Considering the family unit of past centuries the husband was dominant; thus, standing the same distance from the altar, equality is emphasised. (2) The idea of separating the sexes was inherited from the Jewish tradition of doing so within synagogues (3) Separation of sexes also followed the practice of choirs in which different levels of voice are placed in groups to facilitate harmony.

In general, men and women dress respectfully, typically wearing their "Sunday best" to enter the church. Often, women cover their heads as prescribed by Paul (1 Cor. 11:13). Children are considered full members of the Church and stand attentive and quiet during services. There is often a choir area at the side or in a loft in back. In addition to the Choir, a Chanter is always present at the front of the church to chant responses and hymns that are part of the Divine Liturgy offered by the Priest. There is usually a dome in the ceiling with an icon of Christ depicted as Ruler of the Universe (Pantocrator).

Everything in the Orthodox Church has a purpose and a meaning revealing God's revelation to man. At the front, or Eastern end of the church, is a raised dais with an icon-covered screen or wall (iconostasis or templon) separating the nave from the sanctuary. In the center of this wall is the entrance to the altar known as the "Royal Doors" through which only the clergy may pass. There are also a right and left side door on the front of the iconostasis, one depicting the archangel, Michael and the other Gabriel. The priest and altar boys enter and exit through these doors during appropriate parts of the Divine Liturgy. Immediately to the right of the main gate you will always find icon of Jesus Christ. Other icons depicted on the iconostasis are the Mother of God, John the Baptist and the Saint after which the church is named.
In front of the iconostasis is the Bishop's Chair, where a visiting Bishop or Metropolitan will often sit as a place of honor during the Divine Liturgy. Orthodox priests, when standing at the altar face toward the altar (facing East) so that both the Priest and congregation are praying to God in Heaven together.

The sanctuary contains the Holy Altar, representing the place where Christ was laid in the tomb and on the third day, rose. A cross stands behind the altar. On the altar are the items used to sanctify the bread and wine for communion, including a gold chalice, a communion spoon, and a star, which is a star shaped piece of metal the priest uses when sanctifying holy gifts. Also found on the altar table is the Antimins. The antimins is a silk cloth used during the sanctification of the Divine Gifts. The antimins may contain the relics of a Saint. When a church is consecrated by a Bishop, there is a formal service or prayers and sanctification in the name of the Saint that the church is named after. The Bishop will also often present a small relic of a Saint to place in or on the altar as part of the consecration of a new church.

The Divine Liturgy may only be performed once a day on any particular Antimins. Thus a second Liturgy on the same Altar Table that same day would require the use of a second Antimins, typically from another Orthodox church. This means that any parish or congregation is able to celebrate only one Eucharist per day, in order to express the Catholicity of the Church by avoiding "private masses".

There is also a book of the four Gospels on the altar table. The Orthodox read specific verses of this Gospel on each different day.
Icons

The term 'icon' comes from the Greek word *eikona*, which simply means image. The Orthodox believe that the first icons of Christ and the Virgin Mary were painted by Luke the Evangelist. Icons are filled with symbolism designed to convey information about the person or event depicted. For this reason, icons tend to be formulaic, following a prescribed methodology for how a particular person should be depicted, including hair style, body position, clothing, and background details. Icon painting, in general, is not an opportunity for artistic expression, though each iconographer brings a vision to the piece. It is far more common for an icon to be copied from an older model, though with the recognition of a new saint in the church, a new icon must be created and approved. The personal and creative traditions of Western European religious art were largely lacking in Orthodox iconography before the 17th century, when Russian iconography began to be strongly influenced by religious paintings and engravings from both Protestant and Roman Catholic Europe. Greek iconography also began to take on a strong western influence for a period and the difference between some Orthodox icons and western religious art began to vanish. More recently there has been a trend of returning to the more traditional and symbolic representations.

Free-standing statues (three dimensional depictions) are almost non-existent within the Orthodox Church. This is partly due to the rejection of the previous pagan Greek age of idol worship and partly because icons are meant to show the spiritual nature of man, not the sensual earthly body. Bas reliefs, however, became common during the Byzantine period and led to a tradition of covering a painted icon in a silver or gold 'riza' in order to preserve the icon. Such bas relief coverings usually leave the faces and hands of the saints exposed for veneration.
Icons are not considered by the Orthodox to be idols or objects of worship. The parameters of their usage were clearly spelled out by the 7th ecumenical council. Justification for their usage utilises the following logic: before God took human form in Christ, no material depiction was possible and therefore blasphemous even to contemplate. Once God became incarnate, depiction was possible. As Christ is God, it is justified to hold in one's mind the image of God-incarnate. Likewise, when one venerates an icon, it is not the wood or paint that are venerated but rather the individual shown, just as it is not the paper one loves when one might kiss the photograph of a loved one. As Saint Basil famously proclaimed, honour or veneration of the icon always passes to its archetype. Following this reasoning, the veneration of the glorified human saint made in God's image, is always a veneration of the divine image, and hence God as foundational archetype.

Icons can be found adorning the walls of churches and often cover the inside structure completely. Most Orthodox homes have an area set aside for family prayer, usually an eastern facing wall, where are hung many icons. Icons have been part of Orthodox Christianity since the beginning of the church.

Icons are often illuminated by a candle or oil lamp. (Beeswax for candles and olive oil for lamps are preferred because they are natural and burn cleanly.) Besides the practical purpose of making icons visible in an otherwise dark church, both candles and oil lamps symbolise the Light of the World, who is Christ.

Tales of miraculous icons are not uncommon, though it has always been considered that the message of such an event was for the immediate faithful involved and therefore does not usually attract crowds. Some miraculous icons whose reputations span long periods of time nevertheless become objects of pilgrimage along with the places where they are kept. As several Orthodox theologians and saints have explored in the past, the icon's miraculous nature is found not in the material, but in the glory of the saint who is depicted. The icon is a window, in the words of St Paul Florensky, that actually participates in the glory of what it represents.

See also icons.
Iconostasis

An iconostasis, also called the templon, is a wall of icons and religious paintings, separating the nave from the sanctuary in a church. Iconostasis also refers to a portable icon stand that can be placed anywhere within a church. The modern iconostasis evolved from the Byzantine templon in the 11th century. The evolution of the iconostasis probably owes a great deal to 14th-century Hesychast mysticism and the wood-carving genius of the Russian Orthodox Church. The first ceiling-high, five-leveled Russian iconostasis was designed by Andrey Rublyov in the cathedral of the Dormition in Vladimir in 1408. The separation between sanctuary and nave accomplished by the iconostasis is not mandatory, albeit it is common practice. Depending on circumstance, the role of the iconostasis can be played by masonry, carved panels, screens, curtains, railings, a cord or rope, plain icons on stands, steps, or nothing at all.

The Cross

Depictions of the Cross within the Orthodox Church are numerous and often highly ornamented. Some carry special significance. The Tri-Bar Cross, as seen to the right, has three bars instead of the single bar normally attached.

The small top crossbar represents the sign that Pontius Pilate nailed above Christ's head. It often is inscribed with an acronym "INRI", meaning "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews"; however, it is often replaced or amplified by the phrase "The King of Glory" in order to answer Pilate's statement with Christ's affirmation, "My Kingdom is not of this world".

There is also a bottom slanting bar. This appears for a number of reasons. Claims of evidence indicate that there was a small wooden platform for the crucified to stand on in order to support his weight; in Jesus' case his feet were nailed side by side to this platform with one nail each in order to prolong the torture of the cross.

Implied evidence for this comes mainly from two sources within Holy Tradition, the Bible (in order to cause the victim to die faster their legs were broken so they could not support their weight and would suffocate) and iconography (all early depictions of the crucifixion show this arrangement, not the later with feet on top with single nail). It has also been pointed out by some experts that the nailed hands of a body crucified in the manner often shown in modern secular art would not support the weight of the body and would tear through. A platform for the feet would relieve this problem.

The bottom bar is slanted for two reasons, to represent the very real agony which Christ experienced on the cross (a refutation of Docetism) and to signify that the thief on Christ's right chose the right path while the thief on the left did not. Other crosses associated with the Orthodox Church are the more traditional single-bar crosses, budded designs, the Jerusalem cross (cross pattée), Celtic crosses, and others.
Services

The services of the church are properly conducted each day following a rigid, but constantly changing annual schedule (i.e., parts of the service remain the same while others change depending on the day of the year). Services are conducted in the church and involve both the clergy and faithful. Services cannot properly be conducted by a single person, but must have at least one other person present (i.e. a Priest cannot celebrate alone, but must have at least a Chanter present and participating). Usually, all of the services are conducted on a daily basis only in monasteries and cathedrals, while parish churches might only do the services on the weekend and major feast days. On certain Great Feasts (and, according to some traditions, every Sunday) a special All-Night Vigil (Agrypnia) will be celebrated from late at night on the eve of the feast until early the next morning. Because of its festal nature it is usually followed by a breakfast feast shared together by the congregation.

“...The journey is to the Kingdom. This is where we are going—not symbolically, but really.”

—Fr. Alexander Schmemann, For the Life of the World

“...We knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth.”

—Ambassadors of Kievan Rus (10th Century), Apocryphal quote from conversion of Kievan Rus.

Services, especially the Divine Liturgy, can only be performed once a day on a single altar (some churches have multiple altars in order to accommodate large congregations). Each priest may only celebrate the Divine Liturgy once a day. From its Jewish roots, the liturgical day begins at sundown. The traditional daily cycle of services is as follows:

- Vespers – (Greek Hesperinos) Sundown, the beginning of the liturgical day.
- Compline (Greek Apodeipnon, lit. "After-supper") – After the evening meal prior to bedtime.
- Midnight Office – Usually served only in monasteries.
- Matins (Greek Orthros) – First service of the morning. Usually starts before sunrise.
- Divine Liturgy – The Eucharist service (see below)
- Hours – First, Third, Sixth, and Ninth – Sung either at their appropriate times, or in aggregate at other customary times of convenience. If the latter, The First Hour is sung immediately following Orthros, the Third and Sixth prior to the Divine Liturgy, and the Ninth prior to Vespers.
The Divine Liturgy is the celebration of the Eucharist. Although it is usually celebrated between the Sixth and Ninth Hours, it is not considered to be part of the daily cycle of services, as it occurs outside the normal time of the world. The Divine Liturgy is not celebrated on weekdays during the preparatory season of Great Lent and in some places during the lesser fasting seasons either. Reserve communion is prepared on Sundays and is distributed during the week at the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts.

This daily cycle services are conceived of as both the sanctification of time (*chronos*, the specific times during which they are celebrated), and entry into eternity (*kairos*). They consist to a large degree of litanies asking for God's mercy on the living and the dead, readings from the Psalter with introductory prayers, troparia, and other prayers and hymns surrounding them. The Psalms are so arranged that when all the services are celebrated the entire Psalter is read through in their course once a week, and twice a week during Great Lent when the services are celebrated in an extended form.

**Chanting**

Orthodox services are sung nearly in their entirety. Services consist in part of a dialogue between the clergy and the people (often represented by the choir or the Psaltis Cantor). In each case the prayers are sung or chanted following a prescribed musical form. Almost nothing is read in a normal speaking voice, with the exception of the homily if one is given. Because the human voice is seen as the most perfect instrument of praise, musical instruments (organs, guitars, etc.) are not generally used to accompany the choir. The church has developed eight Modes or Tones, (see Octoechos) within which a chant may be set, depending on the time of year, feast days, or other considerations of the Typikon. There are numerous versions and styles that are traditional and acceptable and these vary a great deal between cultures. It is common, especially in the United States, for a choir to learn many different styles and to mix them, singing one response in Greek, then English, then Russian, etc. It should also be noted that in the Russian tradition there have been some very famous composers of Church music such as Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff; and many Church tones can likewise be seen influencing their music.
Incense

As part of the legacy handed down from its Judaic roots, incense is used during all services in the Orthodox Church as an offering of worship to God as it was done in the Jewish First and Second Temples in Jerusalem (Exodus chapter 30). Traditionally, the base of the incense used is the resin of Boswellia thurifera, also known as frankincense, but the resin of fir trees has been used as well. It is usually mixed with various floral essential oils giving it a sweet smell. Incense represents the sweetness of the prayers of the saints rising up to God (Psalm 141:2, Revelation 5:8, 8:4). The incense is burned in an ornate golden censer that hangs at the end of three chains representing the Trinity. Two chains represent the human and Godly nature of the Son, one chain for the Father and one chain for the Holy Spirit. The lower cup represents the earth and the upper cup the heaven. In the Greek and Syrian traditions there are 12 bells hung along these chains representing the 12 apostles (usually no bells in Slavic tradition). There are also 72 links representing 72 evangelists. The charcoal represents the sinners. Fire signifies the Holy Spirit and frankincense the good deeds. The incense also represents the grace of the Holy Trinity. The censer is used (swung back and forth) by the priest/deacon to venerate all four sides of the altar, the holy gifts, the clergy, the icons, the congregation, and the church structure itself.

Mysteries

According to Orthodox theology, the purpose of the Christian life is to attain theosis, the mystical union of man with God. This union is understood as both collective and individual. St. Athanasius of Alexandria, wrote concerning the Incarnation that, "He (Jesus) was made man that we might be made god (θεοποιηθῶμεν)". See Peter 2 1:4, John 10:34–36, Psalm 82:6. The entire life of the church is oriented towards making this possible and facilitating it.

In the Orthodox Church the terms "Mystery" or "The Mysteries" refer to the process of theosis. While it is understood that God theoretically can do anything instantly and invisibly, it is also understood that he generally chooses to use material substance as a medium in order to reach people. The limitations are those of mankind, not God. Matter is not considered to be evil by the Orthodox. Water, oil, bread, wine, etc., all are means by which God reaches out to allow people to draw closer to him. How this process works is a "Mystery", and cannot be defined in human terms. These Mysteries are surrounded by prayer and symbolism so that their true meaning will not be forgotten.

Those things which in the West are often termed Sacraments or sacramentals are known among the Orthodox as the Sacred Mysteries. While the Roman Catholic Church numbers seven Sacraments, and many Protestant groups list two (Baptism and the Eucharist) or even none, the Orthodox do not limit the number. However, for the sake of convenience, catechisms will often speak of the seven Great Mysteries. Among these are Holy Communion (the most direct connection), Baptism, Chrismation, Confession, Unction, Matrimony, and Ordination. But the term also properly applies to other sacred actions such as monastic Tonsure or the blessing of holy water, and involves fasting, almsgiving, or an act as simple as lighting a candle, burning incense, praying or asking God's blessing on food.

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Baptism

Baptism is the mystery which transforms the old, sinful man into the new, pure man; the old life, the sins, any mistakes made are gone and a clean slate is given. Through baptism one is united to the Body of Christ by becoming a member of the Orthodox Church. During the service water is blessed. The catechumen is fully immersed in the water three times in the name of the Holy Trinity. This is considered to be a death of the "old man" by participation in the crucifixion and burial of Christ, and a rebirth into new life in Christ by participation in his resurrection.[42] Properly a new name is given, which becomes the person's name.

Children of Orthodox families are normally baptized shortly after birth. Converts to Orthodoxy (even converts from other Christian denominations) are usually formally baptized into the Orthodox Church though exceptions are sometimes made. Those who have left Orthodoxy and adopted a new religion, if they return to their Orthodox roots, are usually received back into the church through the mystery of Chrismation.

Properly, the mystery of baptism is administered by bishops and priests; however, in emergencies any Orthodox Christian can baptize.[43] In such cases, should the person survive the emergency, it is likely that the person will be properly baptized by a priest at some later date. This is not considered to be a second baptism, nor is it imagined that the person is not already Orthodox, but rather it is a fulfillment of the proper form.

The service of baptism used in Orthodox churches has remained largely unchanged for over 1500 years. This fact is witnessed to by St. Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386), who, in his Discourse on the Sacrament of Baptism, describes the service in much the same way as is currently in use.

Chrismation

Chrismation (sometimes called confirmation)[44] is the mystery by which a baptized person is granted the gift of the Holy Spirit through anointing with Holy Chrism.[45] It is normally given immediately after baptism as part of the same service, but is also used to receive lapsed members of the Orthodox Church.[46] As baptism is a person's participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, so Chrismation is a person's participation in the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.[47]

A baptized and chrismated Orthodox Christian is a full member of the Church, and may receive the Eucharist regardless of age.[47]

The creation of Chrism may be accomplished by any bishop at any time, but usually is done only once a year, often when a synod of bishops convenes for its annual meeting. (Some autocephalous churches get their chrism from others.) Anointing with it substitutes for the laying-on of hands described in the New Testament, even when an instrument such as a brush is used.[48]

Fasting

The number of fast days varies from year to year, but in general the Orthodox Christian can expect to spend a little over half the year fasting at some level of strictness. There are spiritual, symbolic, and even practical reasons for fasting. In the Fall from Paradise mankind became possessed by a carnal nature; that is to say, he became inclined towards the passions. Through fasting, Orthodox Christians attempt to return to the relationship of love and obedience to God enjoyed by Adam and Eve in Paradise in their own lives, by refraining from carnal practices, by bridling the tongue (James 3:5–6), confession of sins, prayer and almsgiving.

Fasting is seen as purification and the regaining of innocence. Through obedience to the Church and its ascetic practices the Orthodox Christian seeks to rid himself or herself of the passions (The desires of our fallen carnal nature). All Orthodox Christians are expected to fast following a prescribed set of guidelines. They do not view fasting as a hardship, but rather as a privilege and joy. The teaching of the Church fixes both the times and the amount of fasting that is expected as a minimum for every member. For greater ascesis, some may choose to go without food entirely for a short period of time. A complete three-day fast at the beginning and end of a fasting
period is not unusual, and some fast for even longer periods, though this is usually practiced only in monasteries.

In general, fasting means abstaining from meat and meat products, dairy (eggs and cheese) and dairy products, fish, olive oil, and wine. Wine and oil—and, less frequently, fish—are allowed on certain feast days when they happen to fall on a day of fasting; but animal products and dairy are forbidden on fast days, with the exception of "Cheese Fare" week which precedes Great Lent, during which dairy products are allowed. Wine and oil are usually also allowed on Saturdays and Sundays during periods of fast. In some Orthodox traditions, caviar is permitted on Lazarus Saturday, the Saturday before Palm Sunday, although the day is otherwise a fast day. Married couples also abstain from sexual relations on fast days, that they may devote themselves to prayer (Corinthians I 7:5).

While it may seem that fasting in the manner set forth by the Church is a strict rule, there are circumstances where a person's spiritual guide may allow an Economy because of some physical necessity (e.g. those who are pregnant or infirm, the very young and the elderly, or those who have no control over their diet, such as prisoners or soldiers).

The time and type of fast is generally uniform for all Orthodox Christians; the times of fasting are part of the ecclesiastical calendar, and the method of fasting is set by the Holy Canons and Sacred Tradition. There are four major fasting periods during the year:

- The Nativity Fast (Advent or "Winter Lent") which is the 40 days preceding the Nativity of Christ (Christmas), beginning on November 15 and running through December 24. This fast becomes more severe after December 20, and Christmas Eve is observed as a strict fast day.
- Great Lent which consists of the 6 weeks (40 Days) preceding Palm Sunday, and Great Week (Holy Week) which precedes Pascha (Easter).
- The Apostles' Fast which varies in length from 8 days to 6 weeks. It begins on the Monday following All Saints Sunday (the first Sunday after Pentecost) and extends to the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul on June 29. Since the date of Pentecost depends on that of Pascha, and Pascha is determined on the lunar calendar, this fast can disappear completely under New Calendar observance (This is one of the objections raised by opponents to the New Calendar).
- The Dormition Fast, a two-week long Fast preceding the Dormition of the Theotokos (repose of The Virgin Mary), lasting from August 1 through August 15.

In addition to these fasting seasons, Orthodox Christians fast on every Wednesday (in commemoration of Christ's betrayal by Judas Iscariot), and Friday (in commemoration of Christ's Crucifixion) throughout the year. Monastics often fast on Mondays (in imitation of the Angels, who are commemorated on that day in the weekly cycle, since monastics are striving to lead an angelic life on earth, and angels neither eat nor drink).

Orthodox Christians who are preparing to receive the Eucharist do not eat or drink at all from vespers (sunset) until after taking Holy Communion. A similar total fast is expected to be kept on the Eve of Nativity, the Eve of Theophany (Epiphany), Great Friday and Holy Saturday for those who can do so. There are other individual days observed as fasts (though not as days of total fasting) no matter what day of the week they fall on, such as the Beheading of St. John the Baptist on August 29 and the Exaltation of the Holy Cross on September 14.

Strict fasting is canonically forbidden on Saturdays and Sundays due to the festal character of the Sabbath and the Resurrection, respectively. On those days wine and oil are permitted even if abstention from them would be otherwise called for. Holy Saturday is the only Saturday of the year where a strict fast is kept.

There are also four periods in the liturgical year during which no fasting is permitted, even on Wednesday and Friday. These fast-free periods are:

- The week following Pascha (Easter), also known as Bright Week
- The week following Pentecost
- The period from the Nativity of Christ up to (but not including) the Eve of Theophany (Epiphany). The day of Theophany itself is always fast-free, even if it falls on a Wednesday or Friday.
• The week following the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee (one of the preparatory Sundays before Great Lent). This is fast-free to remind the faithful not to boast like the Pharisee that he fasts for two days out of the week (Luke 18:12).

When certain feast days fall on fast days, the fasting laws are lessened to a certain extent, to allow some consolation in the **trapeza** (refectory) for the longer services, and to provide an element of sober celebration to accompany the spiritual joy of the feast.

It is considered a greater sin to advertise one's fasting than not to participate in the fast. Fasting is a purely personal communication between the Orthodox Christian and God. If one has health concerns, or responsibilities that cannot be fulfilled because of fasting, then it is perfectly permissible not to fast. An individual's observance of the fasting laws is not to be judged by the community (Romans 14:1–4), but is a private matter between him and his Spiritual Father or Confessor.

**Almsgiving**

"Almsgiving" refers to any charitable giving of material resources to those in need. Along with prayer and fasting, it is considered a pillar of the personal spiritual practices of the Orthodox Christian tradition. Almsgiving is particularly important during periods of fasting, when the Orthodox believer is expected to share the monetary savings from his or her decreased consumption with those in need. As with fasting, bragging about the amounts given for charity is considered anywhere from extremely rude to sinful.

**Holy Communion**

The Eucharist is at the center of Orthodox Christianity. In practice, it is the partaking of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ in the midst of the Divine Liturgy with the rest of the church. The bread and wine are believed to become the genuine Body and Blood of the Christ Jesus through the operation of the Holy Spirit. The Orthodox Church has never described exactly how this occurs, or gone into the detail that the Roman Catholic Church has in the West. The doctrine of transubstantiation was formulated after the Great Schism took place, and the Orthodox Churches have never formally affirmed or denied it, preferring to state simply that it is a "Mystery". Communion is given only to baptized and chrismated Orthodox Christians who have prepared by fasting, prayer and confession. The priest will administer the Gifts with a spoon, called a "cochlear", directly into the recipient's mouth from the chalice. From baptism young infants and children are carried to the chalice to receive Holy Communion. Because of the Orthodox understanding of man's fallen nature in general those who wish to commune prepare themselves in a way that reflects man in paradise. First, the individual prepares by having his confession heard and the prayer of repentance read over him by a priest. The person will increase their prayer rule adding the prescribed prayers in preparation for communing. Finally, the person will fast completely from food and drink from the evening of the previous day (usually sunset on Saturday if communing on Sunday).
**Repentance**

Orthodox Christians who have committed sins but repent of them, and who wish to reconcile themselves to God and renew the purity of their original baptisms, confess their sins to God before a spiritual guide who offers advice and direction to assist the individual in overcoming their sin. Parish priests commonly function as spiritual guides, but such guides can be any person, male or female, who has been given a blessing to hear confessions. Spiritual guides are chosen very carefully as it is a mandate that once chosen, they must be obeyed. Having confessed, the penitent then has his or her parish priest read the prayer of repentance over them.

Sin is not viewed by the Orthodox as a stain on the soul that needs to be wiped out, or a legal transgression that must be set right by a punitive sentence, but rather as a mistake made by the individual with the opportunity for spiritual growth and development. An act of Penance (*epitemia*), if the spiritual guide requires it, is never formulaic, but rather is directed toward the individual and their particular problem, as a means of establishing a deeper understanding of the mistake made, and how to effect its cure. Though it sounds harsh, temporary excommunication is fairly common. Because full participatory membership is granted to infants, it is not unusual for even small children to confess; though the scope of their culpability is far less than an older child, still their opportunity for spiritual growth remains the same.

**Marriage**

Marriage in the Orthodox Church is the joining of one man and one woman into one flesh. In order to fully understand the Orthodox concept of marriage one has to understand the Orthodox view on man's true and fallen state and his ultimate state at world's end. Man was originally created to commune with God but because of his fall from grace man was cut off. Man's curse was that life itself would be hard on him. As a consolation, God allowed man to have temporary companionship here on earth. When Christ was asked the hypothetical question about a woman who married a series of seven brothers – each after her preceding husband had died – whose wife she would be in the resurrection, Christ responded that in the resurrection people are no longer married but their relationship is with God (Matthew 22:24–30, Mark 12:19–25, Luke 20:28–36). And so, first and foremost this joining is seen as a dispensation allowed by God for the mutual comfort and support of the individuals involved. While procreation and the perpetuation of the species is seen as important, what is more important is the bond of love between the husband and wife as this is a reflection of our ultimate union with God. Virginity, however, is seen as a higher state since one participates in the immediate relationship with God and is not distracted by having to serve a wife or husband (1 Corith:7 esp.32–33)

The Church does recognize that there are rare occasions when it is better that couples do separate, but there is no official recognition of civil divorces. For the Orthodox, the marriage is indissoluble as in it should not be broken, the violation of such a union, perceived as holy, being an offense resulted from either adultery or the prolonged absence of one of the partners. Thus, permitting remarriage is an act of compassion of the Church towards sinful man. In the U.S., according to 2001 statistics, 14% of Orthodox marriages ended in an ecclesiastical divorce; a figure that, since it took no account of how many of the couples who entered such marriages took out a civil divorce, is not comparable with the figure of 43% given at that time for the proportion of all marriages that ended in a civil divorce, but which has been argued as indicating a probable total of only 15% of marriages celebrated in an Orthodox church led to any form of divorce. Divorced individuals are usually allowed to remarry though there is usually imposed on them a fairly severe penance by their bishop and the services for a second marriage in this case are more penitential than joyful. Widows are permitted to remarry without repercussion and their second marriage is considered just as valid as the first. One exception to this rule is the clergy and their wives. Should a married priest die, it is expected that his wife will retire to a monastery as soon as their children are out of the house. Widowed priests are not allowed to remarry and also frequently end up in monasteries.

The service of Marriage in the Orthodox Church has two distinct parts: The Betrothal and The Crowning. The Betrothal includes: 1. The exchange of the rings, (it has always been the tradition of the Church to place the wedding
ring on the right hand of the couple based on biblical references. This is seen very clearly in one of the prayers in the Betrothal Service. A portion of the prayer refers to the biblical references: "For You, O Lord, have declared that a pledge is to be given and held inviolate in all things. By a ring Joseph was given might in Egypt; by a ring Daniel was exalted in Babylon; by a ring our heavenly Father showed compassion upon His prodigal son, for He said, 'Put a ring upon his right hand, kill the fatted calf, and let us eat and rejoice.' Your own right hand, O Lord, armed Moses in the Red Sea. By word of Your truth were the Heavens established and the earth set upon her sure foundations; and the right hands of Your servants shall be blessed by Your mighty word, and by Your uplifted arm." As we see, it was scripturally the practice to wear rings on the right hand, the hand of authority and power completing the pledge of commitment. The power and authority comes from the right hand of God. 2. The procession, the declaration of intent, and 3. The lighting of candles.

The Crowning includes: The readings from the epistle and gospel, the Blessing of the Common Cup, and the Dance of Isaiah (the bride and groom are led around the table 3 times), and then the Removal of the Crowns. There is no exchange of vows. There is a set expectation of the obligations incumbent on a married couple, and whatever promises they may have privately to each other are their responsibility to keep. The ceremony ends with the reading of Benedictions to and the Greeting of the Couple.

At the Sacrament of Marriage the crowns are placed on the bride and groom’s heads as the following prayer is recited three times, "The servant of God, (groom’s name), is crowned to the handmaid of God, (bride’s name), in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" three times. It is then repeated three times as the bride is crowned to the groom. We witness the groom and bride being crowned (visibly proclaimed) as the king and queen, respectively, of a new family, entrusted by God with the authority to rule their family in faith and love and harmony with Christ. They both share in this responsibility and privilege as a newly married couple. This is not simply being declared by the priest or even the Church, but by God Himself, as the following hymn is chanted three times: "O Lord, our God, crown them with glory and honor." The crowns are then switched back and forth between the groom and bride’s head, signifying that they completely share their lives together.

The crowns also serve as a reminder of the crowns that await them in heaven, if they live their lives in faithfulness to God and each other. Fr. John Meyendorff in his book, Marriage: An Orthodox Perspective, writes: "According to St. John Chrysostom, the crowns symbolized victory over the 'passions'." In the service of a second marriage the crowns are not to be used, but if it is a second marriage for only one of the two who are marrying and a first marriage for the other, the usual rite is followed.[53]

Many couples keep the wedding crowns in a case and display them near their icon corner or in the couple’s bedroom. They serve as a reminder that God has united them to each other and to himself and that he has bestowed his grace upon them to live in unity, faith and love.

The church understands marriage only as the union of one man and one woman, and certain Orthodox leaders have spoken out strongly in opposition to the civil institution of Same-Sex Marriage[54][55]
Monasticism

All Orthodox Christians are expected to participate in at least some ascetic works, in response to the commandment of Christ to "come, take up the cross, and follow me." (Mark 10:21 and elsewhere) They are therefore all called to imitate, in one way or another, Christ himself who denied himself to the extent of literally taking up the cross on the way to his voluntary self-sacrifice. However, laypeople are not expected to live in extreme asceticism since this is close to impossible while undertaking the normal responsibilities of worldly life. Those who wish to do this therefore separate themselves from the world and live as monastics: monks and nuns. As ascetics par excellence, using the allegorical weapons of prayer and fasting in spiritual warfare against their passions, monastics hold a very special and important place in the Church. This kind of life is often seen as incompatible with any kind of worldly activity including that which is normally regarded as virtuous. Social work, school teaching, and other such work is therefore usually left to laypeople. Ascetics of Orthodox Church are recognized by their long hair, and in case of male monks long beards.

There are three main types of monastics. Those who live in monasteries under a common rule are coenobitic. Each monastery may formulate its own rule, and although there are no religious orders in Orthodoxy some respected monastic centers such as Mount Athos are highly influential. Eremitic monks, or hermits, are those who live solitary lives. It is the yearning of many who enter the monastic life to eventually become solitary hermits. This most austere life is only granted to the most advanced monastics and only when their superiors feel they are ready for it. Hermits are usually associated with a larger monastery but live in seclusion some distance from the main compound. Their local monastery will see to their physical needs, supplying them with simple foods while disturbing them as little as possible. In between are those in semi-eremitic communities, or sketes, where one or two monks share each of a group of nearby dwellings under their own rules and only gather together in the central chapel, or katholikon, for liturgical observances.

The spiritual insight gained from their ascetic struggles make monastics preferred for missionary activity. Bishops are almost always chosen from among monks, and those who are not generally receive the monastic tonsure before their consecrations.

Many (but not all) Orthodox seminaries are attached to monasteries, combining academic preparation for ordination with participation in the community's life of prayer. Monks who have been ordained to the priesthood are called hieromonk (priest-monk); monks who have been ordained to the diaconate are called hierodeacon (deacon-monk). Not all monks live in monasteries, some hieromonks serve as priests in parish churches thus practicing "monasticism in the world".
Cultural practices differ slightly but in general, Father is the correct form of address for monks who have been tonsured, while Novices are addressed as Brother. Similarly, Mother is the correct form of address for nuns who have been tonsured, while Novices are addressed as Sister. Nuns live identical ascetic lives to their male counterparts and are therefore also called monachi (monastics) or the feminine plural form in Greek, monachai, and their common living space is called a monastery.

**Holy Orders**

Since its founding, the Church spread to different places and its leaders in each region came to be known as episkopoi (overseers, plural of episkopos, overseer—Gr. ἐπίσκοπος), which became "bishop" in English. The other ordained roles are presbyter (Gr. πρεσβύτερος, elder), which became "prester" and then "priest" in English, and diakonos (Gr. διάκονος, servant), which became "deacon" in English (see also subdeacon). There are numerous administrative positions among the clergy that carry additional titles. In the Greek tradition, bishops who occupy an ancient see are called metropolitans, while the lead bishop in Greece is the archbishop. (In the Russian tradition, however, the usage of the terms "metropolitan" and "archbishop" is reversed.) Priests can be archpriests, archimandrites or protopresbyters. Deacons can also be archdeacons or protodeacons. The position of deacon is often occupied for life. The deacon also acts as an assistant to a bishop.

With the exception of bishops, who remain celibate, the Orthodox Church has always allowed priests and deacons to be married, provided the marriage takes place before ordination. In general it is considered preferable for parish priests to be married as they often act as counsel to married couples and thus can draw on their own experience. Unmarried priests usually are monks and live in monasteries, though there are occasions when, because of a lack of married priests, a monk-priest is temporarily assigned to a parish. Widowed priests and deacons may not remarry and it is common for such members of the clergy to retire to a monastery (see clerical celibacy). This is also true of widowed wives of clergy, who do not remarry and become nuns when their children are grown. There is serious discussion about reviving the order of deaconess, which fell into disuse in the first millennium; the deaconesses had both liturgical and pastoral functions within the church. Although it has fallen out of practice (the last deaconess was ordained in the 19th century) there is no reason why deaconesses could not be ordained today.

**Unction**

Anointing with oil, often called "unction", is one of the mysteries administered by the Orthodox Church and it is not reserved only for the dying or terminally ill, but for all in need of spiritual or bodily healing. In Greece, during the Ottoman occupation, it became the custom to administer this mystery annually on Great Wednesday to all believers; in recent decades, this custom has spread to many other locations. It is often distributed on major feast days, or any time the clergy feel it necessary for the spiritual welfare of its congregation.

According to Orthodox teaching unction is based on the Epistle of James:

> Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord
will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.—James 5:14–15

History

Early Church

Christianity spread rapidly throughout the Roman Empire. Some have attributed this in part to the use of Greek as a lingua franca. Paul and the Apostles traveled extensively throughout the Empire, including Asia Minor, establishing Churches in major communities, with the first Churches appearing in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, then in Antioch, Ethiopia, Egypt, Rome, Alexandria, Athens, Thessalonica, Illyricum, and Byzantium, which, centuries later would become prominent as the New Rome. Christianity in the Roman Empire was met with some resistance as its adherents would refuse to comply with the Roman state (even at the threat of death) in offering sacrifice to the pagan gods. Despite being under persecution, the Church spread. The persecution dissipated upon the conversion of Emperor Constantine I in 324 AD. By the 4th century Christianity had spread in numerous countries. A number of influential schools of thought had arisen, particularly the Alexandrian and Antiochian philosophical approaches. Other groups, such as the Arians, had also managed to gain influence however their positions caused theological conflicts within the Church, thus prompting The Emperor Constantine to call for a great ecumenical synod in order to define the Church's position against the growing, often widely diverging, philosophical and theological interpretations of Christianity. He made it possible for this council to meet not only by providing a location, but by offering to pay for the transportation of all the existing bishops of the Church. This synod is commonly referred to as the First Council of Nicaea or more generally as First Ecumenical Council and is considered of major importance by most modern Christian Churches.

Ecumenical councils

Several doctrinal disputes from the 4th century onwards led to the calling of Ecumenical councils. There are seven councils authoritatively recognized as Ecumenical:

1. The First Ecumenical Council was convoked by the Roman Emperor Constantine at Nicaea in 325 and presided over by the Patriarch Alexander of Alexandria, with over 300 bishops condemning the view of Arius that the Son is a created being inferior to the Father.
2. The Second Ecumenical Council was held at Constantinople in 381, presided over by the Patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch, with 150 bishops, defining the nature of the Holy Spirit against those asserting His inequality with the other persons of the Trinity.
3. The Third Ecumenical Council is that of Ephesus in 431, presided over by the Patriarch of Alexandria, with 250 bishops, which affirmed that Mary is truly "Birthgiver" or "Mother" of God (Theotokos), contrary to the teachings of Nestorius.
4. The Fourth Ecumenical Council is that of Chalcedon in 451, Patriarch of Constantinople presiding, 500 bishops, affirmed that Jesus is truly God and truly man, without mixture of the two natures, contrary to Monophysite teaching.
5. The Fifth Ecumenical Council is the second of Constantinople in 553, interpreting the decrees of Chalcedon and further explaining the relationship of the two natures of Jesus; it also condemned the teachings of Origen on the pre-existence of the soul, etc.
6. The Sixth Ecumenical Council is the third of Constantinople in 681; it declared that Christ has two wills of his two natures, human and divine, contrary to the teachings of the Monothelites.
7. The Seventh Ecumenical Council was called under the Empress Regent Irene of Athens in 787, known as the second of Nicaea. It supports the veneration of icons while forbidding their worship. It is often referred to as "The Triumph of Orthodoxy"
Some Orthodox consider the following council to be ecumenical, although this is not agreed upon:

8. The Fourth Council of Constantinople was called in 879. It restored St. Photius to his See in Constantinople and condemned any alteration of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381.

9. The Fifth Council of Constantinople was actually a series of councils held between 1341 and 1351. It affirmed the hesychastic theology of St. Gregory Palamas and condemned the philosopher Barlaam of Calabria.

In addition to these councils there have been a number of significant councils meant to further define the Orthodox position. They are the Synods of Constantinople, 1484, 1583, 1755, 1819, and 1872, the Synod of Iaşi (Jassy), 1642, and the Pan-Orthodox Synod of Jerusalem, 1672.

Roman/Byzantine Empire

Eastern Christian culture reached its golden age during the high point of the Byzantine Empire and continued to flourish in Russia, after the fall of Constantinople. Numerous autocephalous churches were established in Eastern Europe and Slavic areas.

In the 530s the Church of the Holy Wisdom (Hagia Sophia) was built in Constantinople under emperor Justinian I.

Early schisms

The Church in Egypt (Patriarchate of Alexandria) split into two groups following the Council of Chalcedon (451), over a dispute about the relation between the divine and human natures of Jesus. Eventually this led to each group anathematizing the other. Those that remained in communion with the other patriarchs (those who accepted the Council of Chalcedon) were called "Melkites" (the king's men, because Constantinople was the city of the emperors) [not to be confused with the Melkite Catholics of Antioch]. Those who disagreed with the findings of the Council of Chalcedon are today known as the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria, currently led by Pope Shenouda III. There was a similar split in Syria (Patriarchate of Antioch) resulting in the Syriac Orthodox Church.

Those who disagreed with the Council of Chalcedon are sometimes called "Oriental Orthodox" to distinguish them from the Orthodox, who accepted the Council of Chalcedon. Oriental Orthodox are also sometimes referred to as "non-Chalcedonians", or "anti-Chalcedonians". The Oriental Orthodox Church denies that it is monophysite and prefers the term "miaphysite", to denote the "joined" nature of Jesus (two natures joined into one). Both the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches formally believe themselves to be the continuation of the true church, although over the last several decades there has been some reconciliation. Both Churches agree there to have been a misunderstanding between the two in 451, that is to say that each side's terminology basically meant the same thing.

As well, there are the "Nestorian" churches, which are Eastern Christian churches that keep the faith of only the first two ecumenical councils, i.e., the First Council of Nicaea and the First Council of Constantinople. "Nestorian" is an outsider's term for a tradition that predated the influence of Nestorius. Thus, "Persian Church" is a more neutral term.
Conversion of East and South Slavs

In the 9th and 10th centuries, Christianity made great inroads into Eastern Europe, including Kievan Rus'. This work was made possible by the work of the Byzantine-Era Macedonian saints Cyril and Methodius. When Rastislav, the king of Moravia, asked Byzantium for teachers who could minister to the Moravians in their own language, Byzantine emperor Michael III chose these two brothers. Cyril and Methodius translated the Bible and many of the prayer books. As the translations prepared by them were copied by speakers of other dialects, the hybrid literary language Old Church Slavonic was created. Originally sent to convert the Slavs of Great Moravia, Cyril and Methodius were forced to compete with Frankish missionaries from the Roman diocese. Their disciples were driven out of Great Moravia in AD 886.\[^{67}\]

Some of the disciples, namely Saint Clement of Ohrid and Saint Naum who were of Bulgarian descent, were of great importance to the Orthodox Faith in Bulgaria, as St. Clement was officially the first Bulgarian Bishop. In a short time, the disciples of Cyril and Methodius managed to prepare and instruct the future Bulgarian clergy into the biblical texts and in AD 893, proclaimed the first organized Church on the Balkan Peninsula. The success of the conversion of the Bulgarians facilitated the conversion of East Slavic peoples, most notably the Rus', predecessors of Belarusians, Russians, and Ukrainians.\[^{68}\]

The work of the Thessaloniki brothers Cyril and Methodius and their disciples had a major impact to Serbs as well.\[^{69}\] However, they accepted Christianity collectively by families and by tribes (in the process between the 7th and the 9th century). In commemoration of their baptisms, each Serbian family or tribe began to celebrate an exclusively Serbian custom called Slava in a special way to honor the Saint on whose day they received the sacrament of Holy Baptism. It is the most solemn day of the year for all Serbs of the Orthodox faith and has played a role of vital importance in the history of the Serbian people. Slava is actually the celebration of the spiritual birthday of the Serbian people which the Church blessed and proclaimed it a Church institution.\[^{70}\]

The missionaries to the East and South Slavs had great success in part because they used the people's native language rather than Greek, the predominant language of the Byzantine Empire or Latin as the Roman priests did.\[^{71}\] Today the Russian Orthodox Church is the largest of the Orthodox Churches followed by the Romanian Orthodox Church.

Great Schism

In the 11th century what was recognised as the Great Schism took place between Rome and Constantinople, which led to separation from the Church of the West, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Eastern Byzantine Churches, now the Orthodox. There were doctrinal issues like the filioque clause and the authority of the Roman Pope involved in the split, but these were greatly exacerbated by political factors of both Church and state, and by cultural and linguistic differences between Latins and Greeks. Prior to 1054, the Eastern and Western halves of the Church had frequently been in conflict, particularly during the periods of Eastern iconoclasm and the Photian schism.\[^{72}\]
The final breach is often considered to have arisen after the capture and sacking of Constantinople by the Fourth Crusade in 1204; the final break with Rome occurred circa 1450. The sacking of Church of Holy Wisdom and establishment of the Latin Empire as a seeming attempt to supplant the Orthodox Byzantine Empire in 1204 is viewed with some rancour to the present day. In 2004, Pope John Paul II extended a formal apology for the sacking of Constantinople in 1204, which was importantly also strongly condemned by the Pope at the time (Innocent III, see reference at end of paragraph); the apology was formally accepted by Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople. Many things that were stolen during this time—holy relics, riches, and many other items—were not returned and are still held in various Western European cities, particularly Venice.\[^{73}\] [^4]\[^{74}\]

Reunion was attempted twice, at the 1274 Second Council of Lyon and the 1439 Council of Florence. The Council of Florence did briefly reestablish communion between East and West, which lasted until after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. In each case, however, the councils were rejected by the Orthodox people as a whole, and the union of Florence also became very politically difficult after Constantinople came under Ottoman rule, so in both cases came to fail. Some local Eastern Churches have however renewed union with Rome in time since (see Eastern Catholic Churches). Recent decades have seen a renewal of ecumenical spirit and dialogue between the Churches\[^{75}\]

**Age of captivity**

In 1453, the Byzantine Empire fell to the Ottoman Empire. By this time Egypt had been under Muslim control for some seven centuries, but Orthodoxy was very strong in Russia which had recently acquired an autocephalous status; and thus Moscow called itself the Third Rome, as the cultural heir of Constantinople.

Under Ottoman rule, the Greek Orthodox Church acquired substantial power as an autonomous *millet*. The ecumenical patriarch was the religious and administrative ruler of the entire "Greek Orthodox nation" (Ottoman administrative unit), which encompassed all the Orthodox subjects of the Empire.

As a result of the Ottoman conquest of the Byzantine Empire in 1453, and the Fall of Constantinople, the entire Orthodox communion of the Balkans and the Near East became suddenly isolated from the West. For the next four hundred years, it would be confined within Islamic world, with which it had little in common religiously or culturally. The Russian Orthodox Church and the Orthodox Churches from Wallachia and Moldavia were the only part of the Orthodox communion which remained outside the control of the Ottoman Empire. It is, in part, due to this geographical and intellectual confinement that the voice of Orthodoxy was not heard during the Reformation in 16th century Europe. It should not be surprising that this important theological debate often seems strange and distorted to the Orthodox; after all, they never took part in it and thus neither Reformation nor Counter-Reformation is part of their theological framework.

**Russian Orthodox Church under Tsarist rule**

Up until 1666, when Patriarch Nikon was deposed by the tsar, the Russian Orthodox Church had been independent of the State.\[^{76}\] In 1721 the first Emperor Peter I abolished completely the patriarchate and so the Church effectively became a department of the government, ruled by a Most Holy Synod composed of senior bishops and lay bureaucrats appointed by the Emperor himself. Since 1721 until the October Revolution of 1917, the Russian Orthodox Church was essentially transformed into a governmental
agency, a tool used to various degrees by the tsars in the imperial campaigns of Russification. The Church was allowed by the State to levy taxes on the peasants. Therefore, the Church, along with the imperial regime, to which it belonged, came to be presented as an enemy of the people by the Bolsheviks and the other Russian revolutionaries.[77] The revolution brought, however, a brief period of liberation for the Church: an independent patriarchate was reestablished briefly in 1917, until Lenin quashed the Church a few years later, imprisoning or killing many of the clergy and of the faithful. Part of the clergy escaped the Bolshevik persecutions by fleeing abroad, where they founded an independent church in exile, reunited with the Russian one in 2007.

**Russian Orthodox Church under Communist rule**

The Orthodox Church clergy in Russia were seen as sympathetic with the cause of the White Army in the Civil War (see White movement) after the October Revolution, and occasionally collaborated with it; Patriarch Tikhon's declared position was vehemently anti-Bolshevik in 1918. This may have further strengthened the Bolshevik animus against the church.

Before and after the October Revolution of November 7, 1917 (October 25 Old Calendar) there was a movement within the Soviet Union to unite all of the people of the world under Communist rule (see Communist International). This included the Eastern European bloc countries as well as the Balkan States. Since some of these Slavic states tied their ethnic heritage to their ethnic churches, both the peoples and their church were targeted by the Soviets.[78] [79]

The Soviets' official interpretation of freedom of conscience was one of "guaranteeing the right to profess any religion, or profess none, to practice religious cults, or conduct atheist propaganda",[80] though in effect atheism was sponsored by state and was taught in all educational establishments.[81] Public criticism of atheism was unofficially forbidden and sometimes led to imprisonment.[82]

The Soviet Union was the first state to have as an ideological objective the elimination of religion. Toward that end, the Communist regime confiscated church property, ridiculed religion, harassed believers, and propagated atheism in the schools. Actions toward particular religions, however, were determined by State interests, and most organized religions were never outlawed. Some actions against Orthodox priests and believers along with execution included torture being sent to prison camps, labour camps or mental hospitals.[83] [84]

The result of this militant atheism was to transform the Church into a persecuted and martyred Church. In the first five years after the Bolshevik revolution, 28 bishops and 1,200 priests were executed.[85]

The main target of the anti-religious campaign in the 1920s and 1930s was the Russian Orthodox Church, which had the largest number of faithful. Nearly all of its clergy, and many of its believers, were shot or sent to labor camps. Theological schools were closed, and church publications were prohibited. In the period between 1917 and 1940, the number of Orthodox Churches in the Russian Republic fell from 59,584 to fewer than 500. Between 1917 and 1935, 130,000 Orthodox priests were arrested. Of these, 95,000 were put to death, executed by firing squad.
After Nazi Germany's attack on the Soviet Union in 1941, Joseph Stalin revived the Russian Orthodox Church to intensify patriotic support for the war effort. By 1957 about 22,000 Russian Orthodox churches had become active. But in 1959 Nikita Khrushchev initiated his own campaign against the Russian Orthodox Church and forced the closure of about 12,000 churches. It is estimated that 50,000 clergy had been executed between the revolution and the end of the Khrushchev era. Members of the church hierarchy were jailed or forced out, their places taken by docile clergy, many of whom had ties with the KGB. By 1985 fewer than 7,000 churches remained active.\[85\]

In the Soviet Union, in addition to the methodical closing and destruction of churches, the charitable and social work formerly done by ecclesiastical authorities was taken over by the state. As with all private property, Church owned property was confiscated into public use. The few places of worship left to the Church were legally viewed as state property which the government permitted the church to use. After the advent of state funded universal education, the Church was not permitted to carry on educational, instructional activity of any kind. Outside of sermons during the celebration of the divine liturgy it could not instruct or evangelise to the faithful or its youth. Catechism classes, religious schools, study groups, Sunday schools and religious publications were all illegal and or banned. This persecution continued, even after the death of Stalin until the Fall of Communism in 1991. This caused many religious tracts to be circulated as illegal literature or samizdat.\[83\]

Among the most damaging aspects of Soviet rule, along with these physical abuses, the Soviet Union frequently manipulated the recruitment and appointment of priests, sometimes planting agents of the KGB within the church to monitor religious persons who were viewed – simply for not being atheists – as suspicious and potential threats to Soviet communism. The recovery of religious beliefs in Russia after the fall of communism, part of a significant religious revival, has been made more challenging as a result of those leaders forced involuntarily upon the church by the KGB during Soviet times.
Other Orthodox Churches under communist rule

Albania was the first and only state to have declared itself officially fully atheist. In some other communist states such as Romania, the Orthodox Church as an organisation enjoyed relative freedom and even prospered, albeit under strict secret police control. That, however, did not rule out demolishing churches and monasteries as part of broader systematization (urban planning), and state persecution of individual believers. As an example of the latter, Romania stands out as a country which ran a specialised institution where many Orthodox (along with people of other faiths) were subjected to psychological punishment or torture and mind control experimentation in order to force them give up their religious convictions. However, this was only supported by one faction within the regime, and lasted only three years. The Communist authorities closed down the prison in 1952, and punished many of those responsible for abuses (twenty of them were sentenced to death).

Diaspora emigration to the West

Emigration from Greece, Russia and the Near East during the 20th century has created a sizable Orthodox diaspora in Western Europe, North and South America, and Australia.

Virtually all the Orthodox cultures are represented in the United States. Nearly half of the clergy of the Orthodox Church in America and Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America are of a convert background.

Relations with other Christians

Orthodoxy represents the majority of Eastern Christianity. The Orthodox trace their bishops back to the apostles through apostolic succession, venerate saints, especially Mary the Mother of God as the Theotokos, pray for the dead, and continue the ancient Christian practice of monasticism. Some, if not all, of these practices are rejected by the majority of Protestant groups, although they are partly retained in some of the earliest liturgical Protestant movements, such as the original German form of Lutheranism. They are also retained by some within the Anglican tradition as Anglicanism is generally considered to be a via media (middle way) between the Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions. Orthodoxy does not openly promote statuary, although it is not expressly condemned, instead limiting itself primarily to two-dimensional iconography. The Western theological concepts of original sin, predestination, purgatory, and particular judgment have had far less influence in Orthodoxy and are generally rejected by traditional Orthodox theologians.

The Orthodox understand themselves to be the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church; the true Church established by Jesus Christ and placed into the care of the apostles. As almost all other Christian groups are in indirect schism with the Orthodox Church, mostly as a result of the Great Schism with the Roman Catholic Church at the turn of the second Christian millennium (prior to the additional schisms of the Protestant Reformation), these other groups are viewed as being Christian, but who in varying degrees lack full theological orthodoxy and orthopraxy. As such, all groups outside of the Orthodox Church are not seen as being members of the Church proper, but rather separated brethren who have failed to retain the fullness of the Christian faith and theology, as was given to the apostles by Jesus Christ. These deviations from orthodoxy have traditionally been called heresy, but due to the term's immediately pejorative connotations, some prefer the more technical designation of the term heterodoxy.
Church today

The various autocephalous and autonomous synods of the Orthodox Church are distinct in terms of administration and local culture, but for the most part exist in full communion with one another. The Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) has recently united with the Moscow Patriarchate (MP); these two branches of the Russian Orthodox Church had separated from each other in the 1920s due to the subjection of the latter to the hostile Soviet regime (see Act of Canonical Communion).

Tensions exist in the philosophical differences between those who use the Revised Julian Calendar ("New Calendarists") for calculating the feasts of the ecclesiastical year and those who continue to use the traditional Julian Calendar ("Old Calendarists"). The calendar question reflects the dispute between those who wish to synchronize with the modern Gregorian calendar, which its opponents consider unnecessary and damaging to continuity, and those who wish to maintain the traditional ecclesiastical calendar (which happens to be based on the Julian calendar), arguing that such a modern change goes against 1900 years of Church tradition and were in fact perpetrated without an ecumenical council, which would surely have rejected the idea. The dispute has led to much acrimony, and sometimes even to violence. Following canonical precepts, some adherents of the Old Calendar have chosen to abstain from clerical intercommunion with those synods which have embraced the New Calendar until the conflict is resolved. The monastic communities on Mount Athos have provided the strongest opposition to the New Calendar, and to modernism in general, while still maintaining communion with their mother church.

Some latent discontent between different national churches exists also in part due to different approach towards ecumenism. While the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, the Orthodox bishops in North America gathered into the Standing Conference of the Canonical Orthodox Bishops in the Americas (SCOBA), Romanian bishops, and others are fairly open to dialog with the Roman Catholic Church, both conservative and moderate Old Calendarists, many of the monks of Mount Athos, several bishops of Russian, Serbian, and some of Greek and Bulgarian churches regard ecumenism as compromising essential doctrinal stands in order to accommodate other Christians, and object to the emphasis on dialogue leading to inter-communion; believing instead that Orthodox must speak the truth with love, in the hope of leading to the eventual conversion to Orthodoxy of heterodox Christians.

Proponents of ecumenism are currently engaged in discussing key theological differences such as the Filioque, Papal primacy, and a possible agreement on rapprochement and eventually full communion with the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches.

Eastern Orthodox churches in communion

The Orthodox Church is a communion of 14 autocephalous (that is, administratively completely independent) local churches plus the Orthodox Church in America which is recognized as autocephalous only by the Russian, Bulgarian, Georgian, Polish, and Czech-Slovak Churches. Each has defined geographical boundaries of its jurisdiction and is ruled by its Council of Bishops or Synod presided by a senior bishop — its Primate (or First Hierarch). The Primate may carry the honorary title of Patriarch, Metropolitan (in the Slavic tradition) or Archbishop (in the Greek tradition). Each local church consists of constituent eparchies (or, dioceses) ruled by a bishop. Some churches have given an eparchy or group of eparchies varying degrees of autonomy (self-government). Such autonomous churches maintain varying levels of dependence on their mother church, usually defined in a Tomos or
Below is a list of the 14 (15) autocephalous churches in their order of precedence (seniority) with constituent autonomous churches and exarchates. The Liturgical title of the Primate is listed in italics.

- **Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople** (Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome and Ecumenical Patriarch)
  - Autonomous Orthodox Church of Finland (Archbishop of Karelia and All Finland)
  - Autonomous Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church (Metropolitan of Tallinn and All Estonia) [Autonomy not recognized by the Church of Russia]
  - Self-governing Orthodox Church of Crete (Archbishop of Crete)
  - Self-governing Monastic Community of Mount Athos
  - Exarchate of Patmos (Patriarchal Exarch of Patmos)
  - Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain (Archbishop of Thyateira and Great Britain)
  - Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Italy and Malta (Orthodox Archbishop of Italy and Malta and Exarch of Southern Europe)
  - Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (Archbishop of America)
  - Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia (Archbishop of Australia)
  - Exarchate of the Philippines (Exarch of Philippines)
  - Patriarchal Exarchate for Orthodox Parishes of Russian Tradition in Western Europe (Archbishop of Komana)

- **Orthodox Church of Alexandria** (His Most Divine Beatitude the Pope and Patriarch of the Great City of Alexandria, Libya, Pentapolis, Ethiopia, all the land of Egypt, and all Africa, Father of Fathers, Shepherd of Shepherds, Prelate of Prelates, Thirteenth of the Apostles, and Judge of the Æcumene)

- **Orthodox Church of Antioch** (Patriarch of Antioch and all the East)
  - Self-governing Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America (Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of All North America)

- **Orthodox Church of Jerusalem** (Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem and all Palestine, and of Syria, Arabia, beyond the Jordan River, Cana of Galilee, and Sacred Zion)
  - Autonomous Church of Mount Sinai (Archbishop of Choreb, Sinai, and Raitha)

- **Orthodox Church of Russia** (Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia)
  - Autonomous Orthodox Church of Japan (Archbishop of Tokyo and Metropolitan of All Japan)
  - Autonomous Orthodox Church of China (defunct)
  - Autonomous Orthodox Church of Ukraine (Metropolitan of Kiev and all Ukraine)
  - Self-governing Orthodox Church of Moldova (Metropolitan of Chisinau and all Moldova)
  - Self-governing Orthodox Church of Latvia (Metropolitan of Riga and all Latvia)
  - Self-governing Estonian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate) (Metropolitan of Tallinn and all Estonia) [Autonomy not recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate]
  - Self-governing Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (Metropolitan of Eastern America and New York, First Hierarch of the Russian church abroad)
  - Exarchate of Belarus (Metropolitan of Minsk and Slutsk, Patriarchal Exarch of All Belarus)

- **Orthodox Church of Georgia** (Archbishop of Tbilisi and Mshketi, Patriarch and Catholicos of all Georgia)

- **Orthodox Church of Serbia** (Archbishop of Peć, Metropolitan of Belgrade and Karlovi, Patriarch of the Serbs)
  - Autonomous Archdiocese of Ohrid (Archbishop of Ohrid and Metropolitan of Skopje)

- **Orthodox Church of Romania** (Archbishop of Bucharest, Metropolitan of Ungro-Valachia, and Patriarch of All Romania)
  - Self-governing Metropolis of Bessarabia (autonomy not recognized by the Church of Russia)
Eastern Orthodox Church

- **Orthodox Church of Bulgaria** (*Metropolitan of Sofia and Patriarch of All Bulgaria*)
- **Orthodox Church of Cyprus** (*Archbishop of New Justiniana and all Cyprus*)
- **Orthodox Church of Greece** (*Archbishop of Athens and all Greece*)
- **Orthodox Church of Poland** (*Metropolitan of Warsaw and all Poland*)
- **Orthodox Church of Albania** (*Archbishop of Tirana and all Albania*)
- **Orthodox Church of the Czech lands and Slovakia** (*Archbishop of Prague, the Metropolitan of Czech lands and Slovakia or the Archbishop of Presov, the Metropolitan of Czech lands and Slovakia*)

Some Orthodox do not acknowledge the following Church as autonomous & autocephalous:

- **Orthodox Church in America** (*Archbishop of Washington, Metropolitan of All America and Canada*)
  [Autonomy not recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate and most churches of the Eastern communion]

Note, that the Russian Church recognized a different order of seniority, in which the Georgian church comes after the Church of Russia and the Albanian Church — after the Church of Greece. The Church of Cyprus also has a different list featuring herself immediately after the ancient Patriarchates and before that of Moscow.

The jurisdiction of the Sinai peninsular could be Autocephalous but is disputed because it consists solely of a monastery and its *metochia* and its Archbishop is the Abbot who must be ordained by the Patriarch of Jerusalem.[89]

**Orthodox Churches and communities not in communion with others**

The following is list of some of the organizations that use the term "Orthodox" in their name but do not maintain communion with any of the 14 (15) autocephalous churches and thus are not typically considered part of the Orthodox Christian communion.

Old Calendarists are groups that do not maintain communion with the 14 (15) autocephalous churches as a result of the use of the Revised Julian Calendar.

- Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece, so-called "Matthewites"
- Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece, so-called "Florinates"
- Orthodox Church of Greece (Holy Synod in Resistance), so-called "Cyprianites"
- Old Calendar Romanian Orthodox Church
- Old Calendar Bulgarian Orthodox Church
- Russian Orthodox Church in America

Old Believers are groups that do not accept liturgical reforms carried out in the Russian Orthodox Church by Patriarch Nikon in the 17th century.

- Russian Orthodox Old-Rite Church (Belokrinitskaya Hierarchy)
- Lipovan Orthodox Old-Rite Church (Belokrinitskaya Hierarchy)
- Russian Old-Orthodox Church (Novozybkovskaya Hierarchy)
- Pomorian Old-Orthodox Church (Pomortsy)

Episcopi vagantes are entities that have carried out episcopal consecrations outside of the norms of canon law or whose bishops have been excommunicated by one of the 14 (15) autocephalous churches.

- Belarusian Autocephalous Orthodox Church
- Bulgarian Alternative Synod
- Holy Orthodox Church in North America
- Macedonian Orthodox Church
- Montenegrin Orthodox Church
- Orthodox Church in Italy
- Russian True Orthodox Church
- Turkish Orthodox Church
- Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kiev Patriarchate)
Eastern Orthodox Church

- Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church
- Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church Canonical

Defunct churches
- Chinese Orthodox Church

Notes

[1] The Orthodox Church considers itself to be both orthodox and catholic. In earlier and patristic usage, the Church usually referred to herself as the "Catholic Church". The encyclopedia of Christianity (http://books.google.com/books?id=7ly4DgT3L1kC&pg=PA867&dq=&lr=#v=onepage&q=Catholic%20Church%20was%20the%20name%20preferred%20by%20the%20elder%20councils&f=false) ISBN 978-90-04-12654-1 The Confession of the Orthodox Patriarch Dositheus of Jerusalem (http://books.google.com/books?id=saFgRjajPwC&pg=PA886&dq=Confession+Dositheus+OR+Dositheos+%22Catholic+Church%22&lr=#v=onepage&q=Confession%20Dositheus%20OR%20Dositheos%20%22Catholic%20Church%22&f=false) ISBN 978-0-8042-0526-9 whose faith was the "Orthodox faith". Such usage is still reflected today in the Orthodox liturgy, e.g. "unite them to your Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church" (from the litany of the catechumens, Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom). Current convention however, favors the name "Orthodox Church", perhaps partly to avoid confusion with the Roman Catholic Church, especially its Eastern rites. But, especially in official contexts, the Orthodox Church continues to use the title "Catholic Church", and Orthodox authorities such as Saint Raphael of Brooklyn have asserted that the full name of the church includes the term "Catholic" as in "Holy Orthodox Catholic Apostolic Church" (http://books.google.com/books?id=oeKOUb6Og4C&pg=PA101&dq=The+Church+of+the+East+has+never+feel+the+first+been+known+by+any+other+name+than+Catholic,+nor+has+she+set+aside+this+title+in+any+official+document."&lr=). The Church is referred to as the "Orthodox Catholic Church" in official church documents and some books. Bishop Kallistos (Ware), "About Orthodoxy" (http://doepa.org/about_orthodoxy.html), The Orthodox Church. The Diocese of Easter Pennsylvania, Orthodox Church in America.

"About Orthodoxy" (http://www.orthodoxdelmarva.org/about_orthodoxy.html). Christ the Saviour Orthodox Church.

"About Orthodoxy" (http://www.proromanianchurch.com/about_orthodoxy.html). "Saints Michael and Gabriel" Romanian Orthodox Church.

Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the USA - Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (http://www.stvladmiris.net/)

Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Church, Stroousburg, Pennsylvania (http://www.fornimistry.com/USPAGOARCHCOC/ElderAimilians/)

"The Orthodox Church - An Introduction" (http://orthodoxinfo.com/general/orthodoxy.aspx). Orthodox Christian Information Center.


"Orthodox Church" (http://www.forgodiswithus.org/). Orthodox Church of Dover, Florida.

Orthodox Churches of New Castle and Lawrence County, Pennsylvania (http://www.orthodoxynewcastle.org/)

Monks at Dečani Monastery in Kosovo. "The Eastern Orthodox Church" (http://www.orthodoxlife.net/easternchurch/theorthochurch.html). Orthodoxlife.net.


"Orthodoxy" (http://saratoga.serbian-church.net/orthodoxy-0). Saint Archangel Michael Serbian Orthodox Church.

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Our Church is also spoken of as the "Eastern Church" to distinguish it from the Churches of the West. "Eastern" is used to indicate that in the first millennium the influence of our Church was concentrated in the eastern part of the Christian world and to show that a very large number of our membership is of other than Greek national origin. Thus, Orthodox Christians throughout the world use various ethnic or national titles: "Greek", "Russian", "Serbian", "Romanian", "Ukrainian", "Bulgarian", "Antiochian", "Albanian", "Carpatho-Russian", or more inclusively, as "Eastern Orthodox" (Rev. Alciviadis C. Calivas, Th.D. "The Greek (Eastern) Orthodox Church. What's in our name?"). (http://www.goarch.org/ourfaith/ourfaith7061)

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[39] Ware, p. 238
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[77] President of Lithuania: Prisoner of the Gulag a Biography of Aleksandras Stulginskis by Afonsas Eidintas Genocide and Research Center of Lithuania ISBN 9986-757-41-X / 9789986757412 / 9986–757–41-X pg 23 "As early as August 1920 Lenin wrote to E. M. Skliansky,
President of the Revolutionary War Soviet: “We are surrounded by the greens (we pack it to them), we will move only about 10–20 versty and we will choke by hand the bourgeoisie, the clergy and the landowners. There will be an award of 100,000 rubles for each one hanged." He was speaking about the future actions in the countries neighboring Russia.


[80] Article 52 of the 1977 Constitution of the USSR


[82] Sermons to young people by Father George Calciu-Dumitreasa. Given at the Chapel of the Romanian Orthodox Church Seminary, The Word online. Buchacev "Calciu Christ Calling" (http://www.orthodoxresearchinstitute.org/resources/sermons/calciu_christ_calling.htm).


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External links

• The Orthodox Study Bible (http://orthodoxstudybible.com/)
• An Online Orthodox Catechism (http://orthodoxeurope.org/page/10/1.aspx) published by the Russian Orthodox Church
• OrthodoxWiki
  • Comprehensive list of seminaries at OrthodoxWiki
  • Timeline of Church History
  • Prerogatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate
• Church Jurisdictions (Orthodox) (http://www.dmoz.org/Society/Religion_and_Spirituality/Christianity/ Denominations/Orthodox/Church_Jurisdictions/) at the Open Directory Project
• The Idea of Primacy in Orthodox Ecclesiology (http://www.aoiusa.org/main/page.php?page_id=128)
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• Ecumenical Patriarchate: American 'Diaspora' must submit to Mother Church (http://www.aoiusa.org/blog/2009/03/ecumenical-patriarchate-american-diaspora-must-submit-to-mother-church/) March 18, 2009
• Prologue from Ohrid – (Saints of the Orthodox Church Calendar) (http://www.westsrbdio.org/prolog/prolog. htm/)
• A repository with scientific papers on various aspects of the Byzantine Orthodox Church in English and in German (http://www.oeaw.ac.at/byzanz/repos.htm)


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