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Introduction The Orthodox Church, like all Christian Churches had their beginning as the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. The Early Church, which on earth, begin with the Pentecost event. Note the use of the term “on earth”, which for the Orthodox indicates that the Church as the Body of Christ has existed eternally. This is why the Orthodox will use the term Church different from the term church. Many have confused the difference and see the “church” as a fallen institution and fallible. However, the eternal Church is pure and represents the Truth of the Christian faith. It is not by accident that the language of the Orthodox refer to Christ as the Bridegroom and the Church as His Bride, just as St. Paul said to the Ephesians.

“...but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church for we are members of his body...This is a profound mystery, but I am talking about Christ and the church.” (Eph. 5:29-32)

While the Orthodox Church has had a long history, and with the great amount of literature available for a complete history of Orthodoxy, this catechism will only briefly touch upon the history of the Early Church through the Byzantine Empire, Ottoman occupation, and then focus on the establishment of Orthodoxy in the United States.

1. Timeline of the Orthodox Church

Early Church

33-100 AD While Orthodox theology believes that the “Church” as the Body of Christ has co-existed with the Holy Trinity, the birth of the Church on earth is celebrated with the event of Pentecost (see Acts 2) with the Apostles serving as the first presbyters fulfilling the commandment given to them by Christ. (Matt 28:18-20)

During this time the Apostles spread this command of Christ to areas outside of Rome which included evangelism to the Asian lands of India, China, and Eastern Turkey.

100-313 AD The late 1st century and 2nd century saw a brutal persecution of Christians which resulted in early Christians worshipping in secret “house churches” using a liturgical rite similar to the description of the Lord’s Supper described in the New Testament. However, this does not mean that there were not any instructions. One of the earliest documents which provided basic instructions on the practice of worship and sacraments was the Didache (translated as “instruction” also known as *The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations* written in the later part of the 2nd century. In addition to including guidance on basic Christian traditions such as baptism, fasting and the Lord’s Prayer, the Didache provided guidance on the practice of the Lord’s Supper.

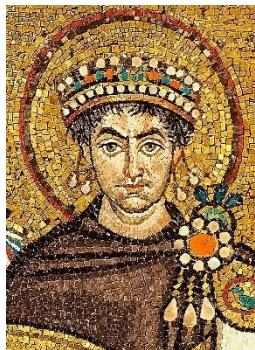
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Byzantine Era, Crusades, and the Ottoman Occupation

313-325 AD By this time the persecutions of the Christians began to subside. The ruling Emperor of the Eastern Empire, Constantine (figure 1) issued the Edict of Milan legalizing Christianity making it the state religion and ending the period of the formal persecution of Christians. He began construction on the original St Peter's Basilica in Rome over the tomb of the saint of Rome, St. Peter. In 330 AD Constantine moved his imperial residence in the ancient town of Byzantium there and renamed it Constantinople. (figure 2)



325-787 AD This time represents the period of the Great Ecumenical Councils of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church. Constantine was influential in the original gathering of bishops throughout the Empire to discuss matters of faith, theology, practices and liturgical rites. Although there are nine (9) Ecumenical Councils recognized by the Orthodox Church, this period resulted in seven (7) Ecumenical Councils and formed the basic structure by which both the Orthodox and Catholic Church operate. Presently both Churches and most Protestant Churches still accept these seven Ecumenical Councils as valid.



This period also saw the final version of Divine Liturgy by St. John Chrysostom. Although his Divine Liturgy was based on the previous liturgies of St. James and St. Basil, it is this liturgical form by St. John Chrysostom that is used by all Orthodox Churches in the world. In 532 AD Emperor Justinian (figure 3), with 10,000 workers, began construction on the famous church of Hagia Sophia (Holy Wisdom)



on the site where the former church started by Constantine. Hagia Sophia was completed in the remarkably short time of 5 years, completed in 537 AD. Justinian also contributed to the establishment of the Pentarchy in his Novella 131. In 692 AD, the Quinisext Council gave formal recognition to the Pentarchy and ranked the 5 great Patriarchates of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem.

988 AD Conversion of the Rus (Russia) by Greek missionaries from Constantinople, Saints Cyril and Saint Methodius. They developed the Cyrillic alphabet and translated parts of the Bible into Church Slavonic language.

1054 AD Although there had already been tensions, both theological and political existing between the Eastern (Greek Orthodox) and Western (Roman Catholic) churches, the Great Schism, which resulted in both Churches excommunicating one another. This was the final act

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of separation between the Eastern Church under Patriarch Michael Cerularius of Constantinople and the Western Church under Pope Leo IX of Rome.

1095–1290 The Period of the Crusades

First Crusade (1095-1102 AD)

Second Crusade of (1147-1149 AD)

Third Crusade (1189-1192 AD)

Fourth Crusade (1202-1204 CE) resulting in the sacking of the Capital city of the Byzantine Empire, Constantinople.

The remaining crusades were not as organized and occurred sporadically throughout the time from the 4th Crusade up until about 1290 when the call for further crusades diminished.

1453-1825 The Ottoman overrun Constantinople ending the Byzantine Era. During this time the Orthodox Church operated under the captivity of various sultans of the Ottoman Empire.

1672 The Synod of Jerusalem is held. This synod produced the Confession of Dositheus, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, to refute the position of Cyril Lucaris, who was the Patriarch of Constantinople, and had purportedly published a Confession which expressed Orthodox beliefs in terms of the predestination beliefs of Calvinism and sought to adjust Orthodox teachings to align with some of the doctrines of the Protestant.

Orthodoxy Expansion Outside the Byzantine Empire

1715-1994 The first Orthodox mission in China was established in Beijing by the priestmonk Hilarion. Russian missionaries, including St. Herman of Alaska, arrive at Kodiak Island, bringing Orthodoxy to Russian Alaska.

1898-1900 The Boxer Rebellion in China targets Christian missionaries and Chinese converts resulting in the slaughter of 222 Orthodox Chinese, including Chinese born Father Mitrophan. The Church celebrates this on June 24 as the Holy Martyrs of China.

1895-1904 Fr Raphael Hawaweeny is sent by Bishop Nicholas of Russia to establish the first Antiochian parish in America in Manhattan, NY to serve the Syrian Orthodox population. Fr Raphael is consecrated "Bishop of Brooklyn" at St. Nicholas Church in NY becoming the first Orthodox bishop of any nationality to be consecrated in North America.

1908 Patriarch of Constantinople gives temporary care of American Greek parishes to the Archdiocese of Greece.

1918 Bolshevik Revolution throws the Church of Russia into chaos, which leaves the fledgling Russian mission in America stranded which then organizes into the Metropolia.

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1922 Church of Greece transfers control of Greek parishes in America back to the Church of Constantinople, which then creates the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

1930-1931 Bishop Athenagoras becomes Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. The Holy Synod and the Church of Romania proclaim the establishment of the Romanian Orthodox Episcopate of America located in Ohio.

1937-1938 Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Theological School founded in Pomfret, Connecticut. Founding of St. Vladimir's Russian Orthodox Theological Seminary (Crestwood, New York) and St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary (S. Canaan, Pennsylvania).

1946 Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Theological School moves to Brookline, MA.

1955-1959 Orthodoxy officially recognized as major faith by U.S. government. Bishop Iakovos is appointed by Patriarch Athenagoras to become Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. Iakovos is the longest standing Archbishop from 1959-1996.

1970 Church of Russia grants autocephaly to the Metropolia. The Metropolia is renamed as the Orthodox Church in America (OCA). Constantinople ceases all official contact with the OCA and declares it uncanonical.

2009 The 14 Autocephalous Orthodox Churches establish the Assembly of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of North and Central America to allow the Orthodox Diaspora the authority to propose administrative structures for their respective regions.

2016 Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church is held in Crete to discuss six (6) important and relevant issues. This is the first time in 1200 years that 14 autocephalous Orthodox churches met in this forum, although some Churches did not attend.

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2. Church Structure

Church and churches

From the Orthodox perspective, the Church (capital C) is one, even though she is manifested in many places. Orthodox ecclesiology operates with the idea of *diversity in unity and unity in diversity*.

No attempt should be made to *subordinate the many to the one* (the Roman Catholic model) nor *the one to the many* (the Protestant model).

This model allows each Orthodox church to express their cultural heritage and even incorporate it into the liturgical and sacramental services, *diversity in unity*. Examples include the use of olive branches as crowns in a Greek Orthodox wedding service and actual metal crowns in a Russian Orthodox wedding service, or the use of palm branches on Palm Sunday in in a Greek Orthodox service and pussy willows in a Russian Orthodox wedding service.

However, the words of each Orthodox service and the rubrics (or form) of the services are the same for any Orthodox church regardless of cultural heritage, *unity in diversity*.

Christ is the head of the Church and the Church is His body. As the hymns of Holy Week state, we have Christ as the Bridegroom and the Church as the Bride. The one Church of Christ is equally and fully present in each church because we are all the one Body of our Lord. In this way the Orthodox church is a local church, and yet, united through the bishop, is one Church.

Each individual Orthodox church has a bishop who serves as the Eucharistic president, represented by the presbyter (priest), assisted by the deacon, and participated in by the people (laity). Each of these working together constitute the whole Church.

The 5 Patriarchates

The original Church, as founded by Christ, and sanctified through the Holy Spirit through the event of Pentecost, evolved through the evangelism of the apostles and each of the apostles carried out Christ's commandment to spread the Christian faith throughout all nations. Some of the more prominent of Jesus' apostles founded specific geographical regions that became known as Patriarchates. These patriarchates, as a whole, were known as a Pentarchy¹ and consisted of,

Jerusalem – founded by the Apostle James

Rome and Antioch – founded by the Apostle Peter

Alexandria – founded by the Apostle Mark

¹ Πενταρχία - Greek for "five ruling areas"

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Constantinople – founded by the Apostle Andrew

The pentarchy was first legally expressed by Emperor Justinian I, in his Novella² 131 written in about 556 AD. Later in 692 AD, Canon 36 of the Quinisext Council (or Council of Trullo) formally recognized and ranked the Patriarchates or Sees³ in order of preeminence.

Canon 36

Renewing the enactments by the 150 Fathers assembled at the God-protected and imperial city, and those of the 630 who met at Chalcedon; we decree that the see of Constantinople shall have equal privileges with the see of Old Rome, and shall be highly regarded in ecclesiastical matters as that is, and shall be second after it. After Constantinople shall be ranked the See of Alexandria, then that of Antioch, and afterwards the See of Jerusalem.

American Jurisdiction

Within the United States there are ten (10) jurisdictions each of which fall under the obedience of one of the five Patriarchates and are:

Greek	Albanian
Carpatho-Russian	Ukrainian
Antiochian	Serbian
Romanian	Bulgarian
Russian Church outside of Russia (ROCOR)	Orthodox Church of America (OCA)
Jerusalem	

It should be noted that while the *Orthodox Church of America* grew out of the Church of Russia it was granted status as an autocephalous church in 1970.

The Greek Orthodox jurisdictions in America are obedient to the Patriarchate of Constantinople and are further divided into nine (9) geographical regions referred to as dioceses or Metropolises each ruled by a bishop or Metropolitan.

New York	San Francisco
Chicago	Denver
Detroit	New Jersey
Pittsburgh	Boston
Atlanta	

A situation that is unique to America, due to its multicultural and multi-religious nature is the condition of Phyletism. This is the principle of churches organized under national or ethnic lines

² The term novella, or novels, was used as early as the 4th century A.D. as a term for constitutions or collections of Laws issued by an Emperor.

³ The word "See" comes from the Latin word sedes, meaning 'seat', referring to the episcopal throne. The term "Apostolic See" can refer to any See founded by one of the Twelve Apostles.

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rather than geographical areas. It arose after the destruction of Constantinople in 1453 and gave autonomy to the various churches of the Byzantine Rite.

Canon 12 of the Fourth Ecumenical Synod viewed this as heretical and expressly forbids the establishment of two metropolitans within the same geographical area. Even so, there are many examples in America where there are multiple overlapping Orthodox jurisdictions each with their own bishop and has caused the Orthodox Church in America great turmoil as the politics of nationalism affect the sacramental and spiritual aspect of church life.

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3. Church Governance

One of the difficulties in understanding the governance of the Orthodox Church is understanding the relationship between each of the Orthodox clerical ranks. In the Roman Catholic model there is a specific hierarchy both ecclesiastically and administratively of responsibility and authority. In Canons 331-332 of the Roman Catholic Church, it states that,

The bishop of the Roman Church, in whom continues the office given by the Lord uniquely to Peter, the first of the Apostles, and to be transmitted to his successors, is the head of the college of bishops, the Vicar of Christ, and the pastor of the universal Church on earth. By virtue of his office, he possesses supreme, full, immediate, and universal ordinary power in the Church, which he is always able to exercise freely. The Roman Pontiff obtains full and supreme power in the Church by his acceptance of legitimate election together with episcopal consecration.

In this sense there is a simple and direct “chain of command” (figure 4) from the highest authority, the Pope, down through to the deacon. Directives, edicts, clerical assignments, disciplinary actions, and appeals are at the full authority and discretion of the Pope and must be adhered to by all clergy without exception as the Pope “*possesses supreme, full, immediate, and universal ordinary power in the Church.*”

In the Orthodox Church this “command structure” is truncated so that the highest level of authority is the rank of bishop and each bishop is equal without one having authority over the other. In this way we cannot say that the Ecumenical Patriarch (of Constantinople) Bartholomew “*possesses supreme, full, immediate, and universal ordinary power in the Church.*” We can only say that he is *first among equals*. (figure 2)

This is not to say that there is no *supreme, full, immediate, and universal ordinary power in the Church* in the Orthodox Church. This authority, rather than residing in an individual resides with the Ecumenical Synod⁴.

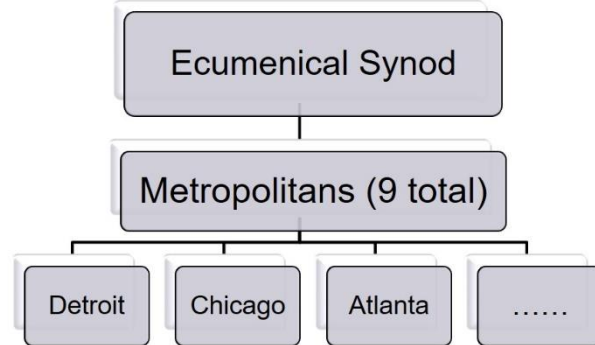
In the Early Church, the synod was a gathering of bishops which did not meet on a regular schedule but met as conditions arose which affected the essential condition and function of the ἐκκλησία church community and was not meant as a permanent institution. A synod was appointed and led by the Emperor and each bishop who possessed status as spiritual head of his Metropolis or “Church” entitled him to take part in the synod. The published results of these synods, not the patriarch, were binding on all canonical jurisdictions. The original seven Ecumenical Councils are the documented results of these synods. Thus, the synod became the expression of unity and unanimity in the Church and continues until today to be the model of governance in the Orthodox Church. (figure 5)



⁴ In Greek synod translates to συν-οδος – together on a single path.

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Except for the presence of an Emperor this same situation exists today. In contrast to the Pope, the Patriarchate or the Archbishop does not have any dogmatic or doctrinal authority over any other bishop or Metropolitan for any issue not covered in the synodal decisions but acts only in an advisory capacity. Today the Holy Synod is permanent and consists of twelve (12)



members, presided over by the Ecumenical Patriarch (currently His Eminence Bartholomew). Members include active metropolitans whose sees belong to the patriarchate. The term of service on the Holy Synod is one year, half the membership being replaced every six months.

It is important to note that the Orthodox Church, unlike the Roman Catholic Church only views decisions as binding when they are made by the entire Pentarchy, that is all five Patriarchates. Therefore, the Orthodox Church does not recognize as universal any councils or synods which have occurred after the Great Schism between the East and West Churches in 1054 AD.

Another area where the Synodal system of government can be problematic is when the Church is responding to various moral, ethical, and societal issues. In the Roman Catholic Church when issues arise that are not covered by existing Ecumenical Councils, the Papal Office can issue edicts addressing the churches stance on the particular issue. Unfortunately, in the synodal system for issues not covered by the canons, unless there can be no universal position but only recommendations which then creates a wide discrepancy of viewpoints among various jurisdictions or Metropolises.

Terms and Definitions

Autocephaly (Greek αυτο - κεφάλι self-headed)

A church is autocephalous when an ecumenical council, patriarch or other primate, releases an ecclesiastical province from the authority of that bishop. That church continues to be in full communion with the Patriarchate from which it once belonged.

An example is the Cypriot Orthodox Church was granted autocephaly by the Council of Ephesus and is ruled by the Archbishop of Cyprus, who is not subject to any higher ecclesiastical or administrative authority, although his church remains in full communion with the other Eastern Orthodox churches.

Other examples include: Church of Greece, Poland, and Albania, and Ukraine.

Autonomy (Greek Αυτο - Νόμος self-legislated)

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A church that is autonomous has its highest-ranking bishop, such as an archbishop or metropolitan, appointed by the patriarch of the Mother Church, but is self-governing in all other respects. It is one step short of autocephaly. Examples include the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, Finland, and Japan.

Infallibility An often-misunderstood difference exists in the definition and application of the term “infallibility.” There is the mistaken idea, even among the Orthodox faithful, that the Orthodox Church does not have the concept of infallibility. While the concept of Papal Infallibility is rejected by Eastern Orthodoxy it does not mean that the Orthodox Church does not recognize the idea of infallibility.

First, we should define *infallibility* from the Roman Catholic perspective as defined in Catholic Canon 749 §1 and 2.

By virtue of his office, the Supreme Pontiff possesses infallibility in teaching when as the supreme pastor and teacher of all the Christian faithful, who strengthens his brothers and sisters in the faith, he proclaims by definitive act that a doctrine of faith or morals is to be held.

The college of bishops also possesses infallibility in teaching when the bishops, gathered together in an ecumenical council exercise the magisterium as teachers and judges of faith and morals who declare for the universal Church that a doctrine of faith or morals is to be held definitively...

This canon grants to the singular person of the Pope (and the College of Bishops) the ability to proclaim infallible teachings and doctrines on behalf of the entire Catholic Church.

For the Orthodox there is the concept of infallibility, but only in a synodal manner.

*“It is possible, however, for the bishops to be intolerant, fallible in judgment, and distorting of the truth. But since Christ will never desert his Church, we remain confident that ultimately the Holy Spirit will lead Christ's Church to all truths and unity. **By the grace of the Holy Spirit the Church is infallible when it meets in synods** to clarify the Church's understanding of the central truths of salvation once these synods have been recognized by the people of God as true and catholic expressions of the apostolic faith⁵.*

Each Patriarch, therefore, exercises his ministry not in isolation but in collegial association with his brother bishops of each of the 5 ancient patriarchates.

Diocese - The district or churches under the jurisdiction of a bishop. This term has been replaced in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America by the term Metropolis.

Metropolitan – The title for a bishop who has been granted authority, both ecclesiastically and semi-administratively over a specific geographic area. The proper title for a Metropolitan is “Your Eminence” while all other bishops are addressed as “Your Grace.”

⁵ Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission - ARCIC-18, Meeting in Venice, 21-28 September 1970

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Orthodox-Catholic Comparison

The most significant action to heal the wounds created by the Great Schism is the Common Declaration between Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I, (figure 6). In this declaration, signed on December 1965 both patriarchs signed a joint statement to,

"...remove from memory and from the Midst of the Church the excommunication of 1054. We regret the offensive words, the reproaches without foundation, and the reprehensible gestures which, on both sides, have marked or accompanied the sad events of this period."

The lifting of the excommunication has resulted in a renewed energy of reconciliation between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches and our current Patriarch Bartholomew has had, and continues to have, a warm and brotherly relationship with both current and past pontiffs.



While there are some doctrinal differences such as papal infallibility, the filioque, and the authority and title of pope, most differences are minor (non-dogmatic) and include the following.

The Orthodox and Catholic Churches recognize in each Church the validity of all seven sacraments; however, the Orthodox Church does not permit Catholic faithful to receive Holy Communion in the Orthodox Church, nor Orthodox faithful to commune in a Catholic Church.

Both Churches recognize the Wednesday and Friday fasts, Wednesday to remember the betrayal of Jesus and Friday to remember His crucifixion. Fasting during the Lenten periods is more severe in the Orthodox Church as most Catholic churches observe only Friday fasting during the same Lenten periods.

Orthodox deacons and priests may marry before ordination; Roman Catholic deacons can marry, priests remain celibate. Both Orthodox and Catholic Bishops must remain celibate.

During worship services Orthodox clergy face towards the East; Roman Catholics, not necessarily.

Calculation of the date of Easter is different.

In the Orthodox Liturgy, the "bread" of the Eucharist is leavened (ζύμη); while in the Roman Catholic Mass it is "unleavened" (ἀζυμη).

The Orthodox faithful receive both species⁶ of Christ in Holy Communion; Roman Catholics are permitted to receive only one species.

⁶ The term species refers to the Body and the Blood of Jesus Christ offered at the Eucharist.

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The manner and positioning of the fingers when making the sign of the cross is different between the Orthodox and Catholic.

Orthodox begin Great Lent with Clean Monday as opposed to the Catholics who begin with Ash Wednesday.

Cremation is conditionally accepted by the Catholic Church while fully rejected by the Orthodox Church.

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4. Clerical Offices

Clerical Roles through History

As today, during the Apostolic period there existed the offices of

ἐπίσκοπος (bishop) [Acts 1:20]

πρεσβύτερος (presbyter) [Acts 15:6]

διάκονος (deacon) [1 Tim 3]

Originally the bishop performed many of the liturgical functions such as ordaining other clergy by the laying on of hands (1 Tim 4:14, 5:22), preaching and teaching their congregations (1 Tim 5:17), and administering of sacraments (James 5:13-15)

St. Paul's writings indicated bishops were above the office of presbyter evidenced by the style of his letters to Titus and Timothy, who were two examples of bishops in the Apostolic Age (Titus 1:5 & 1 Timothy 5:17-22). In his letter to Timothy Paul wrote of the importance of discerning the selection of presbyters and deacons and provided instructions for their selection.

With the death of the original Apostles, there arose more distinction between the offices of bishop, presbyter (priest), and deacon.

The bishop was understood mainly as the president of the council of presbyters, and the presbyters derived their authority from the bishop. This was evident in the writings of St. Ignatius of Antioch, who uses the terms to refer to two different offices (along with deacon).

Originally when congregations were fewer and smaller each Church had its own bishop. Eventually, as the Church grew in size and number it became difficult for each parish to be adequately served directly by the bishop.

Bishop of large cities would appoint a presbyter to pastor the flock and celebrate the sacraments as his delegate. Over time these procedures (or rites) for the ordination of bishop, priest, and deacon became more formalized.

The Sacrament of Ordination

The Orthodox Church appoints two classes of clerical offices, Major Orders and Minor Orders.

Major orders are performed through the sacrament of Ordination and apply to the ranks of bishop, presbyter (priest) and deacon. The Greek term used is χειροτονία; a two-word composition of χεῖρο – τεινω – to put forth or stretch out. An example of the usage of this term is seen in Matt 8:3 where Jesus "...ἐκτεινάς τὴν χεῖρα ἠψάτο αὐτοῦ." This then is the concept of a "laying on of the hand" upon the candidate who is being ordained. For the Orthodox ordination to either priest or deacon is performed by a canonical bishop. Ordination, or more properly *elevation* to bishop must be performed by three (3) canonical bishops.

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Minor orders are appointments, referred to as tonsuring. In Greek the term is χειροθεσία; again a compound word χεῖρο and θεσία with the second word defined as “seat” or “position.” In the case of minor orders, the candidate is being appointed to a particular position such as altar server, reader, chanter, acolyte, or subdeacon. As with ordination the ability to tonsure someone is the exclusive right of the canonical bishop.

Role of the Clergy

Who is the Bishop?

The role of Bishop evolved to represent the catholicity, or universality) of the one Church for each church within the bishop’s geographic authority or diocese. He represented the fullness and unity of the eschatological community. According to Hippolytus of Rome the bishop serves two distinct and vital functions.

- The Bishop is *alter Christus* as portrayed in the Eucharist as the presence of the Church [in unity].
- The Bishop is *alter Apostolus* as he maintains the continuity of the Apostolic teachings.

The first, *alter Christus*, is recognized in the Orthodox Church when one looks at the icon that is placed in the bishop’s throne. The icon is of Christ wearing the bishop’s miter indicating that the bishop is *alter Christus*.

The second, *alter Apostolus*, is in the Divine Liturgy when, after the Epiclesis or Consecration, the priest exclaims,

Among the first remember, Lord, our Archbishop (Name); grant him to Your holy churches in peace, safety, honor, and health, unto length of days, rightly ὀρθοτομοῦντα (dissecting) the word of Your truth.

It is the bishop who, by his role as *alter Apostolus*, resolves issues of faith in the parish when there is a dispute regarding ecclesiastical or sacramental issues.

By virtue of an unbroken chain of Apostolic Succession each bishop’s laying on of hands” to successive generations of bishops maintains a historical continuity of the Church in time. This continuity is directly traceable to one of Jesus’ apostles and through this each bishop, as Metropolitan, is following the Great Commandment given by Jesus to His apostles when He said, “...and teach (διδασκοντες) them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matt 28:20)

Bishop’s Role Through History

Up until the 4th century the Bishop was the sole administrator of the sacrament of Eucharist.

During the Middle Ages Western theology began to foster the idea of a distinction or autonomy between the body of the Eucharist, body of the historical Christ and the mystical body of the Church.

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By the 17th century the size of many dioceses became so large that one bishop could not manage them by himself which resulted in the bishop celebrating the Eucharist less frequently.

Decree 10 of the Synod of Jerusalem (1672) confirms that:

the dignity of the Bishop is so necessary in the Church, that without him, neither Church nor Christian could either be or be spoken of. For he, as a successor of the Apostles, having received in continued succession by the imposition of hands and the invocation of the All-holy Spirit the grace that is given him of the Lord of binding and loosing, is a living image of God upon the earth, and by a most ample participation of the operation of the Holy Spirit, who is the chief functionary, is a fountain of all the Mysteries [Sacraments] of the Catholic Church, through which we obtain salvation.

The Orthodox View on Papal Primacy

Bishop John Zizioulas, Metropolitan of Pergamum, offers a very succinct commentary on how the Orthodox Church views the doctrine of Papal Primacy stating,

“From that point of view all bishops are equal: each local Church guided by them are Churches in the full sense. For that reason, no institution, such as synod, council or the primate should act in such a way as to compromise or cancel the full nature of the local Church.”

The difficulty concerning the Petrine (Papal) primacy lies in the fact that it entails universal jurisdiction whereby the Pope can interfere in a local Church.

If we can find a way in which to see the universal primacy of the pope that doesn't encroach on the full nature of the local Church, we could accept it.”

Role of the Priest

A priest is an ordained ministry with the responsibility to minister to a parish or congregation and serves under his appointed hierarch or bishop as a representative or delegate of the bishop. According to St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch; *“Wherever there is a Bishop there is a Church, but presbyters are the image of the Apostles.”*

Unlike the Catholic church where the priest is *“in the person of Christ”* Orthodox priests act *“in the stead”* of the bishop, who as we have seen, is the *alter Christus*)⁷. Therefore, an Orthodox priest must receive permission to perform the sacrament of Liturgy from the Bishop. The



Figure 7

⁷ This is partly the basis for the Roman Catholic Church's stance on maintaining celibate priesthood.

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authority to do this is present in the Metropolitan's signature on the Antimesion (Αντιμεσιον) which is present on the altar of every canonical Orthodox church. (figure 8)

Currently the office of priesthood, as it is for bishops, is reserved to males only. Major duties of the priest include:

- Celebrating the services of the Orthodox Church such as Vespers, Matins, and Divine Liturgy.
- Celebrating other sacraments such as baptisms, marriages, funerals and Holy Unction.
- Hear confessions, although this privilege is typically not immediately granted but is authorized by the bishop after examining the pastoral character of the priest.



A priest may be assigned as a chancellor (assistant to the bishop). This position includes pastoral advice to younger priests, preaching, and administration of priest assignments throughout the Metropolis.

Role of the Deacon

The role of Deacon has remained identical to the original purpose proposed by the Apostles in.

*“The Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God to **διακονειν** (serve tables). Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will appoint these duties to them so that we can give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word [priesthood].”*

Acts 6

Deacon's Role Through History

Deacons were appointed by the original apostles of the Early Church as was evidenced by Luke in chapter 6 of Acts.

The continuing development of the role of deacon is found in Paul's writings to Timothy (1 Timothy 3), where we find his instructions concerning deacons. In fact, women also served as deacons as we have St Paul introducing Phoebe as deacon of the church. (Romans 16:1)

“...συνιστημι δε υμιν Φοιβην την αδελφην ημων ουσαν διακονον της εκκλησιας.

The importance of the deacon continued in the Church, as reflected in the 1st century text of the Didache (item 15:1)

“Appoint for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord”. A divine institution indeed.”

SESSION 1 The Structure of the Orthodox Church

Deacons also served to aid and comfort those who were in prison and those awaiting persecution. An example of this is evident in the account of The Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas.

Tertius and Pomponius, those blessed deacons who were ministering to us, paid for us to be removed for a few hours to a better part of the prison and refresh ourselves.

Historically, one difference is that women also served as deacons, as opposed to today where ordination to deacon, similar to priest and bishop, is reserved for males only.

St Paul, writes of women deacons when he introduces Phoebe as deacon of the church, referring to them in the masculine form. (Romans 16:1)

“...συνιστημι δε υμιν Φοιβην την αδελφην ημων ουσαν **διακονον** της εκκλησίας.

Canon XV of the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) even includes the role of women as deaconess stating that,

“A woman shall not receive the laying on of hands as a deaconess under forty years of age, and then only after searching examination.”

Relationship of the Priest and the Deacon

The deacon maintains the pastoral link between the priest and the people as his liaison serving the physical needs of the Church. His duties typically include,

- visiting the sick and tending to the needs of the parishioners
- distributing Holy Communion to the sick and absent (*a task identified by Justin Martyr in his Apology, chapter 67*)
- distributing the Church’s alms
- overseeing the Church’s social programs

This link between the priest and deacon is also visibly present in the services of the Church as it is the deacon who intones the litanies which refer to the parishioners’ needs, (e.g. the petitions for the sick and suffering) since he was the one visiting them and learning of these needs during the week.

In fact, the Divine Liturgy was written by St John Chrysostom as a “conversation” between the Deacon and the priest, with the people responding with either *Lord have mercy, Grant this O Lord, or Amen.*

Although the deacon cannot perform sacramental acts (such as consecration, baptism, marriage, etc.) he is the one who proclaims (reads) the Gospel and distributes Holy Communion during the Divine Liturgy.

SESSION 1 The Structure of the Orthodox Church

During the Byzantine Era it was the deacon who collected the bread and wine from the parishioners before the beginning of the Divine Liturgy. Having collected these offerings from the faithful, the deacon(s) prepared those elements necessary for the Holy Communion in the Diaconicon or Skeuophylakion.

This was a separate room outside the church where the bread and wine were prepared for the Liturgy.⁸ Having completed the preparation of bread and wine for communion, the deacons left the diaconicon, entered the Church, and proceeded to the altar where they presented these gifts to the priest or bishop after which the Divine Liturgy would begin. This act is remembered today in the Divine Liturgy as the **Great Entrance**.



The Skeuophylakion of Agia Sophia

The Ecumenical Patriarch

The title of Ecumenical Patriarch is not another clerical rank but a position of honor who holds the titles of First Among Equals, Archbishop of Constantinople, and New Rome.

The current Ecumenical Patriarch is His All Holiness, Bartholomew (figure 8) and he is the 270th successor of the 2,000 year-old Christian Church founded by St. Andrew.

As Patriarch he occupies the First Throne of the Orthodox Christian Church and presides as first among equals among all the other Orthodox Patriarchs.

Aside from his ecclesiastical duties as the first among equals for all Orthodox Synods he also works to advance reconciliation between Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Orthodox communities, and is supportive of peace-building measures to diffuse global conflict in those regions.

His extensive work in the area of Environmental and Ecological issues has resulted in HOH Bartholomew to be named as the Green Patriarch.



⁸ The Skeuophylakion was a separate room outside the church where the bread and wine were prepared for the Liturgy.