

## ORTHODOXY IN A NEW EUROPE: PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES

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Many people associate Europe mainly with the Catholic and Protestant traditions. Recently Islam, a religion that has attracted much attention in mass media, has been added to this list, and attempts are often made to predict the results of its growth in European countries. Little, however, is spoken of Orthodoxy and its role in the formation of the European identity, and the very term "Orthodox" is more frequently associated with Judaism than with Christianity.

Orthodox Christianity comprised, and continues to comprise, an integral part of the European identity over the course of many centuries. This is confirmed not only by the number of Orthodox believers living in the Old World, but also by the contribution which Orthodox Christianity has made and continues to make to the development of European culture and spirituality.

### Statistics

There are fifteen autocephalous Local Orthodox Churches, whose total membership comprises, according to some statistics, approximately 226,500,000 faithful.<sup>1</sup>

Patriarchate of Constantinople	7000000	Turkey, Thrace, Aegean Islands, parts of the diaspora
Patriarchate of Alexandria	350000	Egypt and all Africa
Patriarchate of Antioch	1500000	Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, parts of the diaspora

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<sup>1</sup>The statistics mentioned here and afterward are taken from the book: *L'Ortodossia nella nuova Europa. Dinamiche storiche e prospettive*. A cura di Andrea Pacini. Roma: Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, 2003):

Patriarchate of Jerusalem	156000	Palestine, Israel, Jordan
Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate)	160000000	Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldavia, Baltic and Central Asian countries, parts of the diaspora
Serbian Orthodox Church	8000000	Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenia, Croatia
Romanian Orthodox Church	20000000	Romania, parts of the diaspora
Bulgarian Orthodox Church	8000000	Bulgaria
Georgian Orthodox Church	3000000	Georgia
Orthodox Church of Cyprus	500000	Cyprus
Orthodox Church of Greece	10000000	Greece
Orthodox Church of Poland	1000000	Poland
Orthodox Church of Albania	700000	Albania
Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia	74000	Czech Republic, Slovakia
Orthodox Church in America	1000000	USA

Three of the Churches listed above (those of Alexandria, Jerusalem and America) are not represented in European territory. Together, however, they make up only 6 percent of the total number of Orthodox in the world. The remaining 94 percent - 209,000,000 faithful - live in Europe, and in 11 of the European countries most believers belong to the Orthodox tradition: Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldavia, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro, Greece, Cyprus, Macedonia and Georgia. Orthodox believers also form a significant minority in many other European countries such Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Albania.

The greatest number of Orthodox Christians live in Eastern Europe. Only two of the western European countries are Orthodox - Greece and Cyprus. However, no less than two million faithful reside in the non-Orthodox Western European countries. The following table shows data on the number of Orthodox in the main Western European countries:

Germany	800000
United Kingdom	350000
France	250000
Austria	150000
Sweden	100000
Switzerland	80000
Spain	20000
Belgium	40000
Italy	250000
the Netherlands	10000

### **The Structure of the Orthodox Church**

In the West there exists an opinion that the Orthodox Church is structurally a kind of eastern analogy to the Catholic Church. Thus, the Patriarch of Constantinople is viewed as someone corresponding to the Pope of Rome or as an "Eastern Pope". The Orthodox Church, however, has never had a single first hierarch. It has always been comprised of autocephalous Local Churches, in prayerful and canonical communion with one another but with each Church enjoying administrative independence. The Patriarch of Constantinople has the primacy of honour among the 15 primates of the autocephalous Local Churches. Until 1054 the right of primacy in the Universal Church was enjoyed by the bishop of Rome, while the bishop of "Second Rome" (Constantinople) occupied the second place in the diptychs. After the division of Churches the primacy in the Orthodox world went to the Patriarch of Constantinople, to whom the title of "Ecumenical Patriarch" was granted from Byzantine times - a title which, however, does not have any administrative implications and does not indicate any kind of universal jurisdiction.

The lack of a single administrative center in the Orthodox Church can be explained both historically and theologically. Historically it is connected with the fact that none of the first hierarchs of the Local Orthodox Churches either in Byzantine or in post-Byzantine times enjoyed such rights as the Roman Pope had in the West.

Theologically, the lack of a single head is explained by the principle of catholicity, which is active in the Orthodox Church at all levels. This principle assumes, among other things, that each bishop administers his diocese not independently, but in harmony and cooperation with the clergy and laity. In accordance with the same principle the head of a Local Church, who as a rule also chairs the bishop's council, governs the Church not by himself, but in cooperation with the council.

Needless to say, the absence of a single administrative system in the Orthodox Church also has its negative sides. One of the problems created by this is the lack of the possibility of appealing to a higher authority in cases of conflict between two Local Churches.

Another problem that arises due to the lack of a single administrative center is the impossibility of settling differences between Churches over the pastoral care of the so-called "diaspora", i.e. Orthodox believers living outside of traditionally Orthodox countries. The essence of this problem can be described as follows. Basing their view on the 28th canon of the Council of Chalcedon, which grants the bishop of "New Rome" the right to ordain bishops for the "barbarian lands", the Patriarchate of Constantinople pretends to the right of Church jurisdiction in countries which do not belong to the Orthodox tradition. Other Local Churches, however, have their own diaspora in and beyond Europe. For example, the Russian diaspora is comprised of hundreds of thousands of believers, most of whom belong to the Moscow Patriarchate. In addition to the Russian and Greek diasporas, there are also those of Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria, which are under the pastoral care of bishops and clergy from their respective Local Churches.

The problem of pastoral care of the diaspora can be solved only by a Pan-Orthodox Council. Although intensive preparations for such a Council were made over the course of 30 years (beginning with the 1960s and continuing until the early 1990s), they have come to a halt at the present time due to differences between Churches. We nevertheless hope that this Pan-Orthodox Council may still take place and that the question of pastoral care of the diaspora will be solved to the mutual harmony and benefit of the Orthodox Churches.

## **Church Divisions**

In addition to the canonical (i.e. lawful) Orthodox Church, there are also a good number of alternative structures that call themselves Orthodox. In church vocabulary these structures are called "schismatic". At the current time the most numerous structures alternative to the canonical Orthodox Church are the so-called "Old Calendarists" in Greece and the group headed by "Patriarch" Philaret (in Russian: "Philaretovtsy") in the Ukraine, while the Ukrainian "autocephalists" are significantly smaller in number. The schism in Bulgaria, as well as the 80-year division among believers of the Russian Orthodox diaspora should be mentioned separately.

The term "schism" is absent from the contemporary political lexicon just as the idea of "canonicity" or "non-canonicity" is from Church parlance. The secular state (of which all European countries are examples) in most cases does not differentiate between canonical and non-canonical Churches, granting both of them equal rights to existence and the possibility of solving their interior problems without hindrance.

However, in modern European history there have been cases of direct support of schismatics by secular authorities. For example, the schism of Philaret in the Ukraine was supported by former president L. Kravchuk, a fact which allowed it to acquire significant numbers. Bulgarian schisms in the early 1990s were also supported by authorities at the time. In both cases, state support for the schisms had deleterious consequences for the religious situation. The atmosphere in the Ukraine to this day remains extremely tense, while in Bulgaria, on the contrary, the schism has almost been completely overcome. This result was achieved, firstly, by the ceasing of support by secular authorities, and secondly by the coordinated action of the Local Orthodox Churches, whose representatives at the Council in Sophia in 1998 convinced the schismatics to repent and return to the fold of the canonical Church.

Although the state can be harmful when it intervenes in the interior problems of Churches and supports schisms, it can nevertheless be very beneficial and effective when it acts as an independent and disinterested mediator in conflicts between Churches. For example, during his visit to the USA in October 2003, the Russian

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President Vladimir Putin presented an invitation from His Holiness the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia Alexy to Metropolitan Laurus, first hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, to visit Russia in order to discuss ways of healing the schism that began in the 1920s due to political factors. Similar invitations to dialogue were sent to the leaders of the Church Abroad earlier but remained unanswered. In this case, however, the invitation was accepted with gratitude. On 18-19 November, 2003, an official delegation of the Church Abroad visited Moscow and met with the Patriarch and other leading hierarchs of the Moscow Patriarchate. In spring 2004 Metropolitan Laurus will come to Moscow for official negotiations on re-uniting with the Mother Church. Such events seemed unthinkable just a few years ago, and we hope that these talks will lead to the complete restoration of Eucharistic communion between the two "branches" of the Russian Church.

### **Orthodoxy and the Growth of the European Union**

At the present time new possibilities are opening up for the Orthodox Church in connection with the growth of the European Union. Until now the EU had only one traditionally Orthodox member state - Greece, which Samuel Huntington in his widely-discussed book *The Clash of Civilizations* characterized as an "anomaly", an "Orthodox outsider among western organizations".<sup>2</sup> With the further growth of the EU Orthodoxy will stop being an outsider in the Union, when three more countries of the Orthodox tradition - Romania, Bulgaria and Cyprus - will become members. Moreover, countries with significant Orthodox diasporas such as Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovakia, will also join the Union. All of this will strengthen the position of Orthodoxy in the EU and will significantly increase the possibilities of Orthodox testimony in the New Europe. After these countries join the European Union the number of Orthodox communities existing in EU territory will number among the tens of thousands and the number of believers in the tens of millions. In the distant (perhaps even very distant) future there is also the possibility of several

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<sup>2</sup>Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York, 1996, p. 162-162.

other Orthodox countries joining the EU: Ukraine, Moldavia, Georgia, Armenia, Serbia and Albania.

It is important that the Orthodox actively participate now in the dialogue with European political structures, at a time when the identity of the New Europe is still in the process of formation and when legislation which will define the face of the European Union is being created. It is also important to prevent the monopoly of one world-view which might dictate its conditions to all residents of the EU, including those belonging to traditional religious confessions.

At the present time there exists a real threat that liberal western ideology will be declared the only legitimate model for governing society in the United Europe. This ideology does not assume the active participation of Churches and religious organizations in social and political life, viewing religion as an extremely personal affair of separate individuals which should in no way influence their behavior in society. Such an understanding, however, contradicts the missionary imperative of the majority of religions, including, of course, Christianity. Christ founded the Church not only so that people might practice their faith at home, but also so that the faithful might be active members of society defending traditional spiritual and moral values. Therefore, a constant dialogue between religions and the secular world is necessary, a dialogue in which the Orthodox Church can play a significant role.

It is very important that the rights of Churches and religious organizations to regulate their inner affairs in accordance with their traditions and ordinances be guaranteed, even if the latter contradict liberal western standards. The forcing of secular norms on religious communities is inadmissible. For example, if a Church does not allow women to the priesthood, sanctions aimed at changing its traditional stance should not be imposed. If a Church condemns homosexual "marriages" as sinful and contradictory to the Holy Scriptures, it should not be accused of a lack of tolerance and instigation of hatred. If a Church opposes abortion or euthanasia, it should not be branded as out-of-date or opposing progress. There are many other areas in which the views of traditional Churches (above all the Orthodox and Catholic) will differ from those of the liberal West, and in all instances the rights of Churches to preach those values traditional for them should be guaranteed.

In order to make this point clearer I would like to point to the example of a discussion that stirred the Orthodox world after the European Parliament in 2003 voted in favor of abolishing the ban on women from visiting the Holy Mountain Athos, a semi-autonomous monastic republic in northern Greece which no woman has entered in a thousand years. This ban, according to the resolution of the European Parliament, violates the "universally accepted principle of equality of genders", as well as laws governing the free movement of all EU citizens within its territory. Commenting on the Parliament's decision, the Greek Minister of Culture E. Venizelos compared the status of Athos with that of the Vatican, noting that the latter, although a member of the Council of Europe, is represented in it exclusively by men. He stressed that "the ban on women from visiting Athos and the administrative regulations of the Catholic Church, as well as the ordinances of other Churches and all similar matters, are elements of a tradition which the EC should regard with tolerance and the pluralistic attitude characteristic of European civilization".

The Russian Orthodox Church observes the development of the "European project" with interest and actively participates in it through its Representation to the EU in Brussels. Being a trans-national Church represented in the territory of the European Union by several dioceses, hundreds of parishes and hundreds of thousands of believers, the Moscow Patriarchate attributes great significance to the process of European integration, which in our view should lead to the creation of a multi-polar Europe in which the rights of religious communities will be respected. Only in this case will Europe become a true home for its Churches and religious organizations, including the Orthodox Church.

***English materials on the Web Site of the Representation of the Russian Orthodox Church to the European Institutions*** ([www.orthodoxeurope.org](http://www.orthodoxeurope.org))

*Catechism*

An Online Orthodox Catechism

*Theology and Spirituality*

Bishop Hilarion Alfeyev: Orthodox Theology on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century

Bishop Hilarion Alfeyev: The Patristic Heritage and Modernity

Fr John Jillions: Love and Curses. Searching St. Paul for a Vision of Christian Unity

Bishop Kallistos Ware: How to Read the Bible

Bishop Hilarion Alfeyev: Christ the Conqueror of Hell

Bishop Kallistos Ware: The Orthodox Church. Faith and Worship (excerpts)

Margaret Barker: Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?

Margaret Barker: Paradise Lost

*Liturgy and Prayer*

Protopresbyter Alexander Schmemmann: Worship in a Secular Age

Bishop Hilarion Alfeyev: Orthodox Worship as a School of Theology

Bishop Hilarion Alfeyev: Prayer in St Isaac of Nineveh

The Formation of Epiphany according to Different Traditions

The Meaning of Water in Christianity

Liturgical Texts of the Orthodox Church