

Historical Introduction to the Orthodox Church

The Orthodox Church consists historically of the local Churches of the Eastern Roman empire, including Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem, as well as the Churches that came into being as a result of their missions. During the first millennium of Christianity, this communion included the Church of Rome.

In the Orthodox understanding, the Church has always existed as 'Churches' in the plural, as in the Christian East today. In ancient and Orthodox usage, a Church is defined by geography, referring originally to a community gathered around a bishop. In the third to fourth centuries, dioceses were grouped into metropolitan areas; the metropolitan bishop was first among equals, charged with preserving unity. In the fifth century, these areas in turn were organised into the five Churches of Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem – the so-called pentarchy – and their bishops later came to be known as patriarchs. Rome enjoyed a recognised primacy among the local Churches, although the understanding of this primacy varied over the centuries and developed very differently in Rome and in the East.

1. Defining Christian Faith

The first three centuries -> **persecution** at the hands of a pagan, largely hostile state.

A profound effect, the cult of the martyrs => the cult of the saints

313 -> Milan Edict, ending the persecutions

But also: submitting more the Christians to the Emperor, an slow but irreversible process started, building of churches and giving building to Christians, laws etc, MOST IMPORTANT -> Imperial supervision on Doctrinal Councils.

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| First Council of Nicaea | 325 (May 20-June 19) | Emperor Constantine I | Hosius of Corduba (and Emperor Constantine) | 318 | Arianism, the nature of Christ, celebration of Passover (Easter), ordination of eunuchs, prohibition of kneeling on Sundays and from Easter to Pentecost, validity of baptism by heretics, lapsed Christians, sundry other matters. |
| First Council of Constantinople | 381 (May-July) | Emperor Theodosius I | Timothy of Alexandria, Meletius of Antioch, Gregory Nazianzus, and Nectarius of Constantinople | 150 | Arianism, Apollinarism, Sabellianism, Holy Spirit, successor to Meletius |
| Council of Ephesus | 431 (June 22-July 31) | Emperor Theodosius II | Cyril of Alexandria | 200-250 | Nestorianism, Theotokos, Pelagianism |
| Council of Chalcedon | 451 (October 8-November 1) | Emperor Marcian | Papal legates Paschasinus, Lucentius and Boniface ^[5] | 520 | The judgments issued at the Second Council of Ephesus in 449, the alleged offences of Bishop Dioscorus of Alexandria, the relationship between the divinity and humanity of Christ, many disputes involving particular bishops and sees. |
| Second Council of Constantinople | 553 (May 5-June 2) | Emperor Justinian I | Eutychius of Constantinople | 152 | Nestorianism Monophysitism Origenism |
| Third Council of Constantinople | 680-681 (November 7-September 16) | Emperor Constantine IV | Patriarch George I of Constantinople | 300 | Monothelitism, the human and divine wills of Jesus |
| Second Council of Nicaea | 787 (September 24-October 23) | Constantine VI and Empress Irene (as regent) | Patriarch Tarasios of Constantinople, legates of Pope Adrian I | 350 | Iconoclasm |

The Assyrian Church (IIIrd Ecumenical Council)

The Coptic and Syrian Church – Oriental Orthodox (a substantial part of the Alexandrian and Antiochian Patriarchates) (IVth Ecumenical Council)

The Arab Conquest of Syria and Egypt in first half of the VIIth Century, territories lost for the Byzantine Empire => Constantinople – the undisputed center of the Eastern Christianity

2. Division between East and West

395 – died Emp. Theodosius, last to rule over the entire Roman Empire

476-480 – the fall of the Western Roman Empire under the Germanic tribes

IX-X Century – tensions over *Filioque* and Primacy (Apostolicity and History versus Political Relevance)

858-886 – Patriarch Photius and the controversy over the Byzantine and Latin missions to Slavic lands

1054 – mutual excommunications

1202-1204 – IV Crusade, 1204 – the sack of Constantinople + 60 years (the true seal of division)

1274 – unionist Council of Lyon

1438-9 – unionist Council of Florence-Ferrara

X-IV century – a monastical revival of the spiritual life

- X century – first monasteries of Mount Athos
- Spiritual life => a living encounter with God (the theology of the light St. Simeon the New Theologian)
- St. Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) – the encounter with God=> through the Divine energies => Hesychasm (ἡσυχία)
- The Hesychasm movement with its monastic and Jesus Prayer aspects spread all over the Eastern world

3. The Church and the Ottoman Empire

The “fallings”:

Serbia – 1389

Bulgaria – 1396

Constantinople – May 29, 1453

The conquering Turks recognised no distinction between religion and nation: the Christians were therefore treated as a subject people with the Patriarch of Constantinople as its ‘**ethnarch**’. This enabled Constantinople to claim an authority over all the other Churches within the empire, which in practice entrenched Greek domination of other local Churches, including the other ancient patriarchates. Paradoxically, this is the period of maxim expansion of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The Christians were second-class citizens, poll-taxes, child-levy and humiliating social conditions => many conversions.

4. The Church in Russia

1439 – after the Florence-Ferrara Council, Metropolitan Isidor of Kiev was arrested

A new Metropolitan, this time in MOSCOW, without the assent of the Ecumenical Patriarchate

1589 - An official Moscow Patriarchate, having the approval of the Ecumenical Patriarchate

1721 – Peter the Great abolished the Patriarchate, Holy Synod, a period of Westernization

1917 – recreated

5. *Uniate* Churches and Protestant Sympathies

1581 – founding of the College of Saint Athanasius by Pope Gregory XIII

- To educate Westerners in the Eastern rite in order to promote union with Rome

1596 - Union of Brest-Litovsk (Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church)

1698 – Union of Alba-Iulia (Transilvanian Romanian Greek-Catholic Church)

1724 – the creation of the Melkite Church when a Patriarch of Antioch officially declared union with Rome

1573 – correspondence between Tübingen Theologians and Patriarch Jeremias II of Constantinople

1629 – the *Confession* of Patriarch Cyril Loukaris of Constantinople – influenced by Calvinism, later condemned in the Orthodox Church

1642 – the Council of Iași, Petru Mogila’s *Confession*

6. Return to the Sources, a Final Identity

VIIIth Century – “The Greek Enlightenment” , in the Church -> the return to the Sources, especially Patristic sources.

St. Nikodim of Mount Athos (1749-1809) – a collection of ascetic works *Philokalia* containing the life and the saying of the ancient Desert Fathers + Symeon the New Theologian and Gregory Palama, Eastern Canon Law and + Ignatius of Loyola !!!! Spiritual Exercises.

7. The Autocephaly

1922 – The Fall of the Ottoman Empire

Four ancient patriarchates

1. Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople (independence in 330 AD, elevated to the rank of autocephalous Patriarchate in 381, elevated 451 to second see, became first see due to departure of See of Rome in Great Schism)
2. Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria
3. Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch
4. Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem (independence in 451 AD, elevated to the rank of autocephalous Patriarchate in 451)

The four ancient Eastern Orthodox Patriarchates, along with the See of Rome, formed the historical Pentarchy. Remaining in communion with each other after the 1054 schism with Rome. The concept of the Pentarchy and the title of "Patriarch" itself, as opposed to Archbishop or Exarch, is attributed to St Justinian in AD 531.

National patriarchates

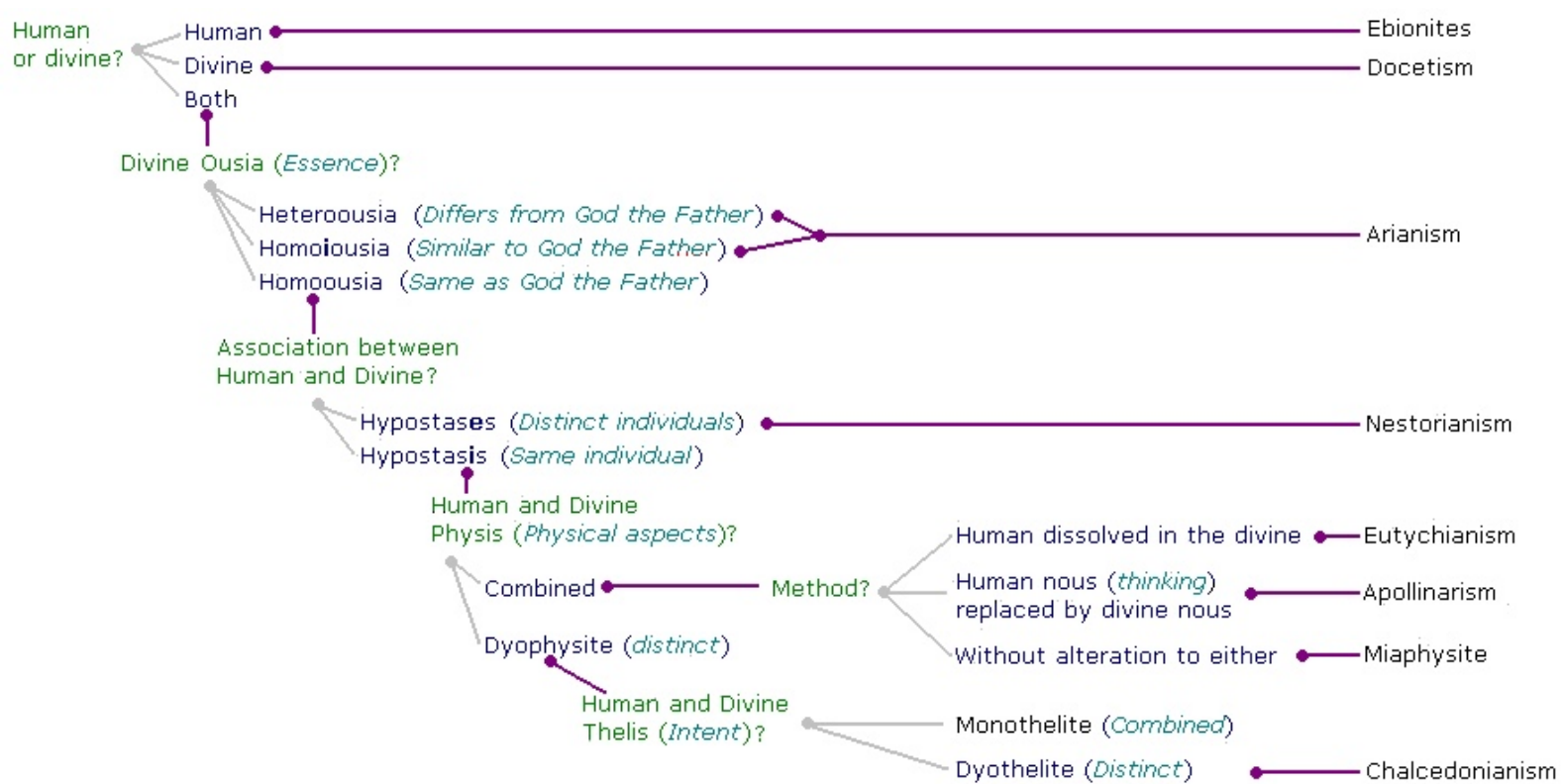
1. Bulgarian Orthodox Church (870, Patriarchate since 918/919, recognised by the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 927)
2. Georgian Orthodox Church (Patriarchate since 1010)
3. Serbian Orthodox Church (1219, Patriarchate since 1346)
4. Russian Orthodox Church (1448, recognised in 1589)^{[21][a]}
5. Romanian Orthodox Church (1872, recognised in 1885, Patriarchate since 1925)

Autocephalous archbishoprics

1. Church of Cyprus (recognised in 431)
2. Church of Greece (1833, recognised in 1850)
3. Albanian Orthodox Church (1922, recognised in 1937)
4. Macedonian Orthodox Church (1967, recognised in 2022)

Autocephalous metropolises

1. Polish Orthodox Church (1924)
2. Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia (1951)



East-West Schism (1054)

- Orthodox Church
- Catholic Church

