

Russian Orthodox Church

The **Russian Orthodox Church (ROC)** is the largest autocephalous (*is independent of external and especially patriarchal authority —used especially of Eastern national churches*) Eastern Orthodox Christian church. It has 194 dioceses inside Russia. The primate (*a title or rank bestowed on some important archbishops in certain Christian churches*) of the ROC is the Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus' (*Old East Slavic, Modern Belarusian, Russian, Rusyn, and Ukrainian*). The Christianization of Kievan Rus', widely seen as the birth of the ROC, is believed to have occurred in 988 through the baptism of the Rus' prince Vladimir and his people by the clergy of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

The ROC currently claims exclusive jurisdiction over the Eastern Orthodox Christians, irrespective of their ethnic background, who reside in the former member republics of the Soviet Union, excluding Georgia. The ROC also created the autonomous Church of Japan and Chinese Orthodox Church. The ROC eparchies in Belarus and Latvia, since the fall of the Soviet Union in the 1990s.

The ROC should also not be confused with the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia (*or ROCOR, also known as the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad*), headquartered in the United States. The ROCOR was instituted in the 1920s by Russian communities outside the Soviet Union, which had refused to recognize the authority of the Moscow Patriarchate that was de facto headed by Metropolitan Sergius Stragorodsky. The two churches reconciled on 17 May 2007; the ROCOR is now a self-governing part of the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Christian community that developed into what is now known as the Russian Orthodox Church is traditionally said to have been founded by the Apostle Andrew, who is thought to have visited Scythia and Greek colonies along the northern coast of the Black Sea.



The three-barred cross of the Russian Orthodox Church. The slanted bottom bar represents the footrest, while the top is the titulus (often "INBI") affixed by the Roman authorities to Christ's cross during his crucifixion.

History

Christianity was apparently introduced into the East Slavic state of Kievan Rus by Greek missionaries from Byzantium in the 9th century. An organized Christian community is known to have existed at Kiev as early as the first half of the 10th century, and in 957 St. Olga, the regent of Kiev, was baptized in Constantinople. This act was followed by the acceptance of Christianity as the state religion after the baptism of Olga's grandson Vladimir I, prince of Kiev, in 988. Under Vladimir's successors, and until 1448, the Russian church was headed by the metropolitans of Kiev.

As Kiev was losing its political, cultural, and economical significance due to the Mongol invasion, Metropolitan Maximus moved to Vladimir in 1299; his successor, Metropolitan Peter moved the residence to Moscow in 1325.

In 1439, at the Council of Florence, some Orthodox hierarchs from Byzantium as well as Metropolitan Isidore, who represented the Russian Church, signed a union with the Roman Church, whereby the Eastern Church would recognise the primacy of the Pope. However, the Moscow Prince Vasili II rejected the act of the Council

of Florence brought to Moscow by Isidore in March 1441. Isidore was in the same year removed from his position as an apostate and expelled from Moscow.

Peter the Great (1682–1725) had an agenda of radical modernization of Russian government, army, dress and manners. He made Russia a formidable political power. Peter was not religious and had a low regard for the Church, so he put it under tight governmental control. He replaced the Patriarch with a Holy Synod, which he controlled. The Tsar appointed all bishops. A clerical career was not a route chosen by upper-class society. Most parish priests were sons of priests, were very poorly educated, and very poorly paid. The monks in the monasteries had a slightly higher status; they were not allowed to marry. Politically, the church was impotent. Catherine the Great later in the 18th century seized most of the church lands, and put the priests on a small salary supplemented by fees for services such as baptism and marriage.

In the aftermath of the Treaty of Pereyaslav (*an official meeting that convened for ceremonial pledge of allegiance by Cossacks to the Tsar of Russia in the town of Pereiaslav, in central Ukraine, in January 1654*), the Ottomans (*supposedly acting on behalf of the Russian regent Sophia Alekseyevna*) pressured the Patriarch of Constantinople into transferring the Metropolitan of Kiev (*was a title of the Eastern Orthodox metropolitan bishops of the Metropolitanate of Kyiv under the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople*) and all Rus' from the jurisdiction of Constantinople to that of Moscow. The handover brought millions of faithful and half a dozen dioceses under the ultimate administrative care of the Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus'.

The late 18th century saw the rise of starchestvo (*is an elder of an Eastern Orthodox monastery who functions as venerated adviser and teacher*) under Paisiy Velichkovsky and his disciples at the Optina Monastery (*is an Eastern Orthodox monastery for men near Kozelsk in Russia. In the 19th century, the Optina was the most important spiritual centre of the Russian Orthodox Church and served as the model for several other monasteries*). This marked a beginning of a significant spiritual revival in the Russian Church after a lengthy period of modernization.

NOTE: In the Russian Orthodox Church, the clergy, over time, formed a hereditary caste of priests. Marrying outside of these priestly families was strictly forbidden; indeed, some bishops did not even tolerate their clergy marrying outside of the priestly families of their diocese.

In 1914, there were 55,173 Russian Orthodox churches and 29,593 chapels, 112,629 priests and deacons, 550 monasteries and 475 convents with a total of 95,259 monks and nuns in Russia. The year 1917 was a major turning point in Russian history, and also the Russian Orthodox Church.[28] In early March 1917 (O.S.), the Tsar was forced to abdicate, the Russian empire began to implode, and the government's direct control of the Church was all but over by August 1917. In early February 1918, the Bolshevik-controlled government of Soviet Russia enacted the Decree on separation of church from state and school from church that proclaimed separation of church and state in Russia, freedom to "profess any religion or profess none", deprived religious organizations of the right to own any property and legal status. Legal religious activity in the territories controlled by Bolsheviks was effectively reduced to services and sermons inside church buildings. The Decree and attempts by Bolshevik officials to requisition church property caused sharp resentment on the part of the ROC clergy and provoked violent clashes on some occasions.

The church was caught in the crossfire of the Russian Civil War that began later in 1918, and church leadership, despite their attempts to be politically neutral (from the autumn of 1918), as well as the clergy generally were perceived by the Soviet authorities as a "counter-revolutionary" force and thus subject to suppression and eventual liquidation. In the first five years after the Bolshevik revolution, 28 bishops and 1,200 priests were executed.

The Soviet Union, formally created in December 1922, was the first state to have elimination of religion as an ideological objective espoused by the country's ruling political party. The Communist regime confiscated church property, ridiculed religion, harassed believers, and propagated materialism and atheism in schools. Actions toward particular religions, however, were determined by State interests, and most organized religions were

never outlawed. Orthodox clergy and active believers were treated by the Soviet law-enforcement apparatus as anti-revolutionary elements and were habitually subjected to formal prosecutions on political charges, arrests, exiles, imprisonment in camps, and later could also be incarcerated in mental hospitals.

Between 1917 and 1935, 130,000 Eastern Orthodox priests were arrested. Of these, 95,000 were put to death. Many thousands of victims of persecution became recognized in a special canon of saints known as the "new martyrs and confessors of Russia".

In the 1929 elections, the Orthodox Church attempted to formulate itself as a full-scale opposition group to the Communist Party, and attempted to run candidates of its own against the Communist candidates. Article 124 of the 1936 Soviet Constitution officially allowed for freedom of religion within the Soviet Union, and along with initial statements of it being a multi-candidate election, the Church again attempted to run its own religious candidates in the 1937 elections. The support of multicandidate elections was retracted several months before the elections were held and in neither 1929 nor 1937 were any candidates of the Orthodox Church elected.

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. A new patriarch was elected, theological schools were opened, and thousands of churches began to function. The Moscow Theological Academy Seminary, which had been closed since 1918, was re-opened.

A second round of repression, harassment and church closures took place between 1959 and 1964 when Nikita Khrushchev was in office. The number of Orthodox churches fell from around 22,000 in 1959 to around 8,000 in 1965;^[41] priests, monks and faithful were killed or imprisoned and the number of functioning monasteries was reduced to less than twenty.

By 1987 the number of functioning churches in the Soviet Union had fallen to 6,893 and the number of functioning monasteries to just 18. In 1987 in the Russian SFSR, between 40% and 50% of newborn babies (depending on the region) were baptized. Over 60% of all deceased received Christian funeral services.

Beginning in the late 1980s, under Mikhail Gorbachev, the new political and social freedoms resulted in the return of many church buildings to the church, so they could be restored by local parishioners. A pivotal point in the history of the Russian Orthodox Church came in 1988, the millennial anniversary of the Christianization of Kievan Rus'. Throughout the summer of that year, major government-supported celebrations took place in Moscow and other cities; many older churches and some monasteries were reopened. An implicit ban on religious propaganda on state TV was finally lifted. For the first time in the history of the Soviet Union, people could watch live transmissions of church services on television.

In 1990, after 70 years of repression, approximately 15,000 churches had been re-opened or built. According to official figures, in 2016 the Church had 174 dioceses, 361 bishops, and 34,764 parishes served by 39,800 clergy. There were 926 monasteries and 30 theological schools.

Structure and organization

Ecclesiastically, the ROC is organized in a hierarchical structure. The lowest level of organization, which normally would be a single ROC building and its attendees, headed by a priest who acts as Father superior. All parishes in a geographical region belong to an eparchy. Eparchies are governed by bishops. There are 261 Russian Orthodox eparchies worldwide.

Since 2007 the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia is fully autonomized. The Chinese Orthodox Church and the Japanese Orthodox Churches were granted full autonomy by the Moscow Patriarchate, but this autonomy is not universally recognized.

The highest level of authority in the ROC is vested in the Local Council (Pomestny Sobor), which comprises all the bishops as well as representatives from the clergy and laypersons. Another organ of power is the Bishops' Council. In the periods between the Councils the highest administrative powers are exercised by the Holy Synod

of the Russian Orthodox Church, which includes seven permanent members and is chaired by the Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, Primate of the Moscow Patriarchate. Although the Patriarch of Moscow enjoys extensive administrative powers, unlike the Pope, he has no direct canonical jurisdiction outside the Urban Diocese of Moscow, nor does he have single-handed authority over matters pertaining to faith as well as issues concerning the entire Orthodox Christian community such as the Catholic-Orthodox split.



St. Basil the Blessed

After World War II, the Patriarchate of Moscow unsuccessfully attempted to regain control of the groups which were located abroad. After it resumed its communication with Moscow in the early 1960s, and after it was granted autocephaly (property of being self-headed) in 1970, the Metropolia became known as the Orthodox Church in America. The Patriarchate of Moscow renounced its former canonical claims in the United States and Canada; it also acknowledged the establishment of an autonomous church in Japan in 1970.

The Revolution of 1918 severed large sections of the Russian church—dioceses in America, Japan, and Manchuria, as well as refugees in Europe—from regular contacts with the main church. On 28 December 2006, it was officially announced that the Act of Canonical Communion would finally be signed between the ROC and ROCOR.

The autonomous churches which are part of the ROC are:

- Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), a special status autonomy close to autocephaly
- Self-governed churches (Estonia, Latvia, Moldova)
- Belarusian Orthodox Church
- Pakistan Orthodox Church
- Metropolitan District of Kazakhstan
- Japanese Orthodox Church
- Chinese Orthodox Church
- Archdiocese of Russian Orthodox churches in Western Europe

Worship and practices

Canonization

In accordance with the practice of the Orthodox Church, a particular hero of faith can initially be canonized only at a local level within local churches and eparchies. Such rights belong to the ruling hierarch and it can only happen when the blessing of the patriarch is received. The task of believers of the local eparchy is to record descriptions of miracles, to create the hagiography of a saint, to paint an icon, as well as to compose a liturgical text of a service where the saint is canonized. All of this is sent to the Synodal Commission for canonization which decides whether to canonize the local hero of faith or not.

Icon painting

The use and making of icons entered Kievan Rus' following its conversion to Orthodox Christianity in AD 988. As a general rule, these icons strictly followed models and formulas hallowed by Byzantine art, led from the capital in Constantinople. Russian icons are typically paintings on wood, often small, though some in churches and monasteries may be much larger. Some Russian icons were made of copper. In Russian churches, the nave is typically separated from the sanctuary by an iconostasis, or icon-screen, a wall of icons with double doors in the

centre. Icons are considered to be the Gospel in paint, and therefore careful attention is paid to ensure that the Gospel is faithfully and accurately conveyed.

Bell ringing

Bell ringing, which has a history in the Russian Orthodox tradition dating back to the baptism of Rus', plays an important part in the traditions of the Russian Orthodox Church. The ringing of bells is one of the most essential elements of an Orthodox church. Church bells are rung to:

- Summon the faithful to services
- Express the triumphal joy of the Christian Church
- Announce important moments during the services both to those in church and to those who are not able to be physically present in the church, so that all may be united in prayer
- Strengthen Christians in piety and faith by its sound, which Orthodox Christians believe is "alloyed with divine grace to disperse and destroy the forces of cruelty and of demonic suggestion.
- Proclaim important events, such as the death of a member of the church; the arrival of an important person, such as the bishop or civil ruler; an emergency such as fire or flood; or victory in battle (as dramatically recreated in the triumphant conclusion of the 1812 Overture).

The use of bells is not only practical, but is also considered to be spiritual. Bells are sometimes referred to as "singing icons", because they establish the acoustic space of an Orthodox temple just as painted icons and hymnography define its visual and noetic space, respectively. Icons are considered "scripture in image" as bells are "scripture in sound".

Membership

The ROC is often said, *(because the ROC does not keep any formal membership records the claim is based on public polls and the number of parishes. The actual number of regular church-goers in Russia varies between 1% and 10%, depending on the source. However, strict adherence to Sunday church-going is not traditional in Eastern Orthodoxy, specifically in Russia)*, to be the largest of all of the Eastern Orthodox churches in the world. Including all the autocephalous churches under its supervision, its adherents number more than 112 million worldwide—about half of the 200 to 220 million. Among Christian churches, the Russian Orthodox Church is only second to the Roman Catholic Church in terms of numbers of followers.

Up to 65% of ethnic Russians, as well as Russian-speakers from Russia who are members of other ethnic groups (Ossetians, Caucasus Greeks etc.) and a similar percentage of Belarusians and Ukrainians identify themselves as "Orthodox".