

**Orthodox Churches**

Orthodox prayer rope ©

The Orthodox Church is one of the three main Christian groups (the others being Roman Catholic and Protestant). Around 200 million people follow the Orthodox tradition.

It is made up of a number of self-governing Churches which are either 'autocephalous' (meaning having their own head) or 'autonomous' (meaning self-governing).

The Orthodox Churches are united in faith and by a common approach to theology, tradition, and worship. They draw on elements of Greek, Middle-Eastern, Russian and Slav culture.

Each Church has its own geographical (rather than a national) title that usually reflects the cultural traditions of its believers.

The word 'Orthodox' takes its meaning from the Greek words *orthos* ('right') and *doxa* ('belief'). Hence the word Orthodox means correct belief or right thinking.

The Orthodox tradition developed from the Christianity of the Eastern Roman Empire and was shaped by the pressures, politics and peoples of that geographical area. Since the Eastern capital of the Roman Empire was Byzantium, this style of Christianity is sometimes called 'Byzantine Christianity'.

The Orthodox Churches share with the other Christian Churches the belief that God revealed himself in **Jesus Christ**, and a belief in the incarnation of Christ, his crucifixion and resurrection. The Orthodox Church differs substantially from the other Churches in the way of life and worship, and in certain aspects of theology.

The Holy Spirit is seen as present in and as the guide to the Church working through the whole body of the Church, as well as through priests and bishops.

**Are Orthodox Churches the same as Eastern Orthodox Churches?**

Not all Orthodox Churches are 'Eastern Orthodox'. The 'Oriental Orthodox Churches' have theological differences with the Eastern Orthodox and form a separate group, while a few Orthodox Churches are not 'in communion' with the others.

Not all Churches in the Eastern tradition are Orthodox - Eastern Churches that are not included in the Orthodox group include the Eastern Catholic Churches.

### **The Eastern Orthodox Churches**

The nominal head of the Eastern Orthodox Churches is the Patriarch of Constantinople. However, he is only first among equals and has no real authority over Churches other than his own.

There are 15 'autocephalous Churches', listed in order of precedence.

Churches 1-9 are led by Patriarchs, while the others are led by Archbishops or Metropolitans:

1. Church of Constantinople (ancient)
2. Church of Alexandria (ancient)
3. Church of Antioch (ancient)
4. Church of Jerusalem (ancient)
5. Church of Russia (established in 1589)
6. Church of Serbia (1219)
7. Church of Romania (1925)
8. Church of Bulgaria (927)
9. Church of Georgia (466)
10. Church of Cyprus (434)
11. Church of Greece (1850)
12. Church of Poland (1924)
13. Church of Albania (1937)
14. Church of Czech and Slovak lands (1951)
15. The Orthodox Church in America (1970)

The Orthodox communion also includes a number of 'autonomous Churches':

- Church of Sinai
- Church of Finland
- Church of Estonia\*
- Church of Japan\*
- Church of China\*

- Church of Ukraine\*
- Archdiocese of Ohrid\*

**\* indicates a Church whose autonomy is recognised by only some of the other Churches**