

# Journeying with the Orthodox Church(es) in England

CTE

All Ecumenical Representatives Conference

Fr Dragos Herescu

30 Sept 2025

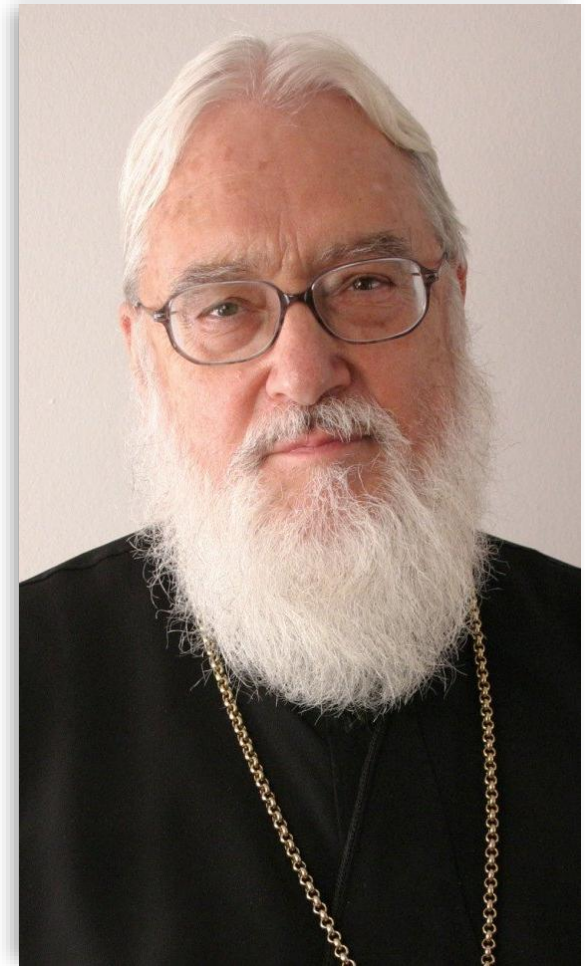
# About the Orthodox Church

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- History (very brief)
- Faith outlook (what gives Orthodoxy its 'y')
- Issues facing the Orthodox today – the Orthodox Church(es) in the UK



- 'Orthodoxy is not just a kind of Roman Catholicism without the Pope, but something quite distinct from any religious system in the west'.
- 'The Orthodox Church is a family of self-governing Churches. It is held together not by a centralised organisation, not by a single prelate wielding absolute power over the whole body, but by the double bond of unity in the faith and communion in the sacraments'.
- 'The Orthodox theology of the church is above all else a *theology of communion*.'



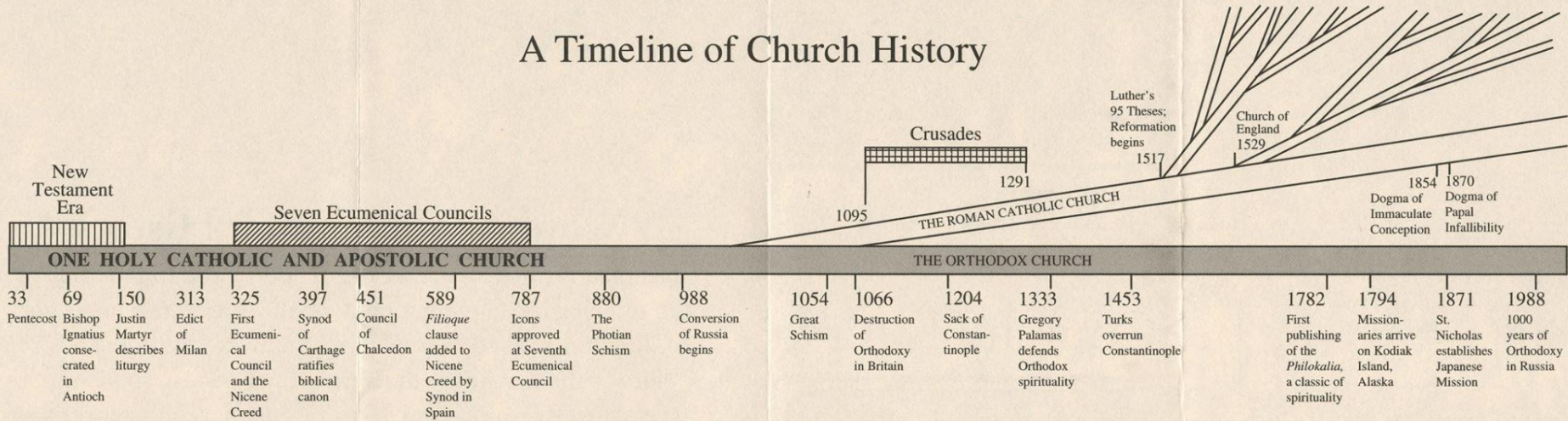
Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (1983, p. 9, 15, 250)

# Quick History

- Fragmented Christendom: 3 generic stages
  - 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> century: 'Eastern' and 'Oriental' Churches (Chalcedonian / non-Chalcedonian – Council of Chalcedon 451)
  - 1054: Rome v. Constantinople
  - 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation (1517)
- In the East:
  - 863: St Cyril & Methodius – Apostles to the Slavs → 988 Christianization of Kievan Rus
  - 1453: Fall of Constantinople
  - 19<sup>th</sup> century: formation of European nation states



# A Timeline of Church History



- 33 Pentecost (A.D. 29 is thought to be more accurate).
- 49 Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15) establishes precedent for addressing Church disputes in Council. James presides as bishop.
- 69 Bishop Ignatius consecrated in Antioch in heart of New Testament era—St. Peter had been the first bishop there. Other early bishops include James, Polycarp, and Clement.
- 95 Book of Revelation written, probably the last of the New Testament books.
- 150 St. Justin Martyr describes the liturgical worship of the Church, centered in the Eucharist. Liturgical worship is rooted in both the Old and New Testaments.

- 313 The Edict of Milan marks an end to the period of Roman persecution of Christianity.
- 325 The Council of Nicea settles the major heretical challenge to the Christian Faith posed when the heretic Arius asserts Christ was created by the Father. St. Athanasius defends the eternity of the Son of God. Nicea is the first of Seven Ecumenical (Church-wide) Councils.
- 451 Council of Chalcedon affirms apostolic doctrine of two natures in Christ.
- 589 A synod in Toledo, Spain, adds the *filioque* to the Nicene Creed (asserting that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son*). This error is later adopted by Rome.

- 787 The era of Ecumenical Councils ends at Nicea; the Seventh Council restores the centuries-old use of icons to the Church.
- 988 Conversion of Rus' (Russia) begins.
- 1054 The Great Schism occurs. Two major issues include Rome's claim to a universal papal supremacy and her addition of the *filioque* clause to the Nicene Creed. The Photian Schism (880) further complicates the debate.
- 1066 Norman conquest of Britain. Orthodox hierarchs are replaced with those loyal to Rome.
- 1095 The Crusades begun by the Roman Church. The Sack of Constantinople (1204) adds to the estrangement between East and West.

- 1333 St. Gregory Palamas defends the Orthodox practice of hesychast spirituality and the use of the Jesus prayer.
- 1453 Turks overrun Constantinople; Byzantine Empire ends.
- 1517 Martin Luther nails his 95 Theses to the door of the Roman Church in Wittenberg, starting the Protestant Reformation.
- 1529 Church of England begins pulling away from Rome.
- 1794 Missionaries arrive on Kodiak Island in Alaska; Orthodoxy introduced to North America.
- 1870 Papal Infallibility becomes Roman dogma.
- 1988 One thousand years of Orthodoxy in Russia, as Orthodox Church world-wide maintains fullness of the Apostolic Faith.



**4 ancient Orthodox Patriarchates:** Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem

**16 Autocephalous Churches:** ("self-headed")

- Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople / Patriarchate of Alexandria / Patriarchate of Antioch / Patriarchate of Jerusalem
- Patriarchate of Moscow / Patriarchate of Serbia / Patriarchate of Romania / Patriarchate of Bulgaria / Patriarchate of Georgia / Church of Cyprus / Church of Greece / Church of Poland/ Church of Albania / Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia
- *Orthodox Church in America (autocephaly recognized by Moscow, Bulgaria, Georgia, Poland, and the Czech Lands and Slovakia)*
- *Orthodox Church of Ukraine (autocephaly recognized by Constantinople, Alexandria, Cyprus and Greece)*

Eastern  
Orthodox  
'Commonwealth'



**Autonomous Churches:** ("self-ruled") = the primatial bishop is confirmed by one of the autocephalous Orthodox Churches. In all other respects, an autonomous church is entirely self-governing.

## Eastern Orthodox 'Commonwealth'

- Church of Sinai, Church of Finland
- *Church of Estonia (autonomy recognized by Constantinople but not Moscow)*
- *Church of Japan (autonomy recognized by Moscow but not Constantinople)*
- *Church of China (virtually non-existent, autonomy recognized by Moscow but not Constantinople)*
- *Archdiocese of Ohrid*
- ***UKRAINE: The Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU), recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate // The Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC), was historically affiliated with the Moscow Patriarchate but declared its independence in 2022.***

Overall, the Eastern Orthodox Church numbers between 260-300 million worldwide

**Autonomous, under Antioch**

- Antiochan Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America

**Autonomous, under Russia**

- Belarusian Orthodox Church
- Latvian Orthodox Church
- Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow) ★
- Metropolis of Chişinău and All Moldova ★
- Orthodox Church in Japan ★
- Chinese Orthodox Church ★
- Russian Orthodox Church outside of Russia
- Archdiocese of Russian Orthodox Churches in Western Europe ★

**Ancient Patriarchates**

- Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople →
- Greek Orthodox Church of Alexandria
- Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch →
- Greek Orthodox Church of Jerusalem →

**Junior Patriarchates**

- Russian Orthodox Church →
- Serbian Orthodox Church →
- Romanian Orthodox Church →
- Bulgarian Orthodox Church
- Orthodox Church of Georgia

**Autonomous, under Constantinople**

- Monastic Republic of Mount Athos
- Orthodox Church of Finland
- ★ Estonian Apostolic Orthodox Church

**Autonomous, under Jerusalem**

- Orthodox Church of Mount Sinai

**Autonomous, under Serbia**

- Orthodox Ohrid Archbishopric

**Autonomous, under Romania**

- Romanian Orthodox Archdiocese in the Americas ●
- ★ Metropolis of Bessarabia

**KEY**

- Autocephalous Churches** (pink background)
- Autonomous Churches** (green background)
- Churches that attended 2016 Pan-Orthodox Council** (yellow background)
- ★ Not Recognized by Ecumenical Patriarchate
- ★ Not Recognized by Russian Orthodox Church
- ★ Not Recognized by Romanian Orthodox Church
- Churches in America

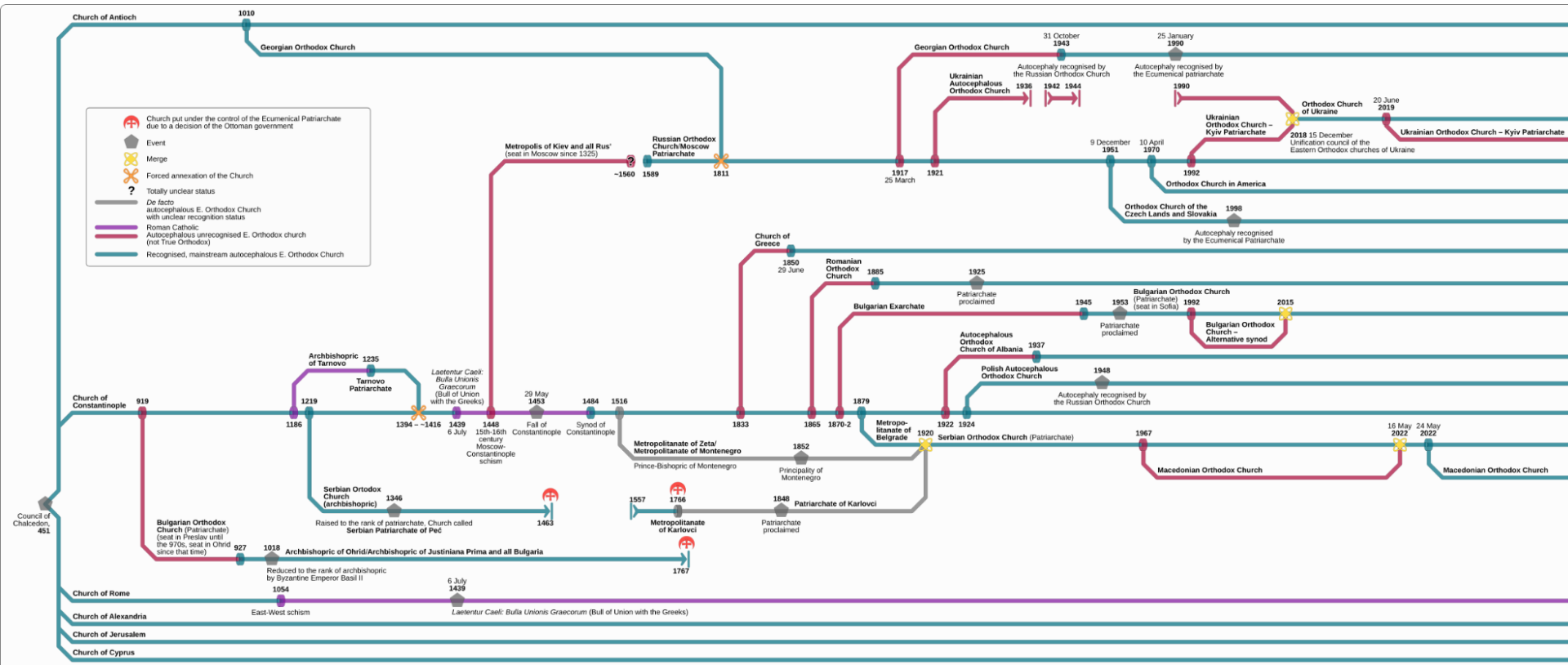
**Autocephalous Archbishoprics and Metropoles**

- Church of Cyprus
- Church of Greece
- Orthodox Church of Albania
- Polish Orthodox Church
- Orthodox Church of the Czech Lands and Slovakia

*Autocephaly partially recognized*

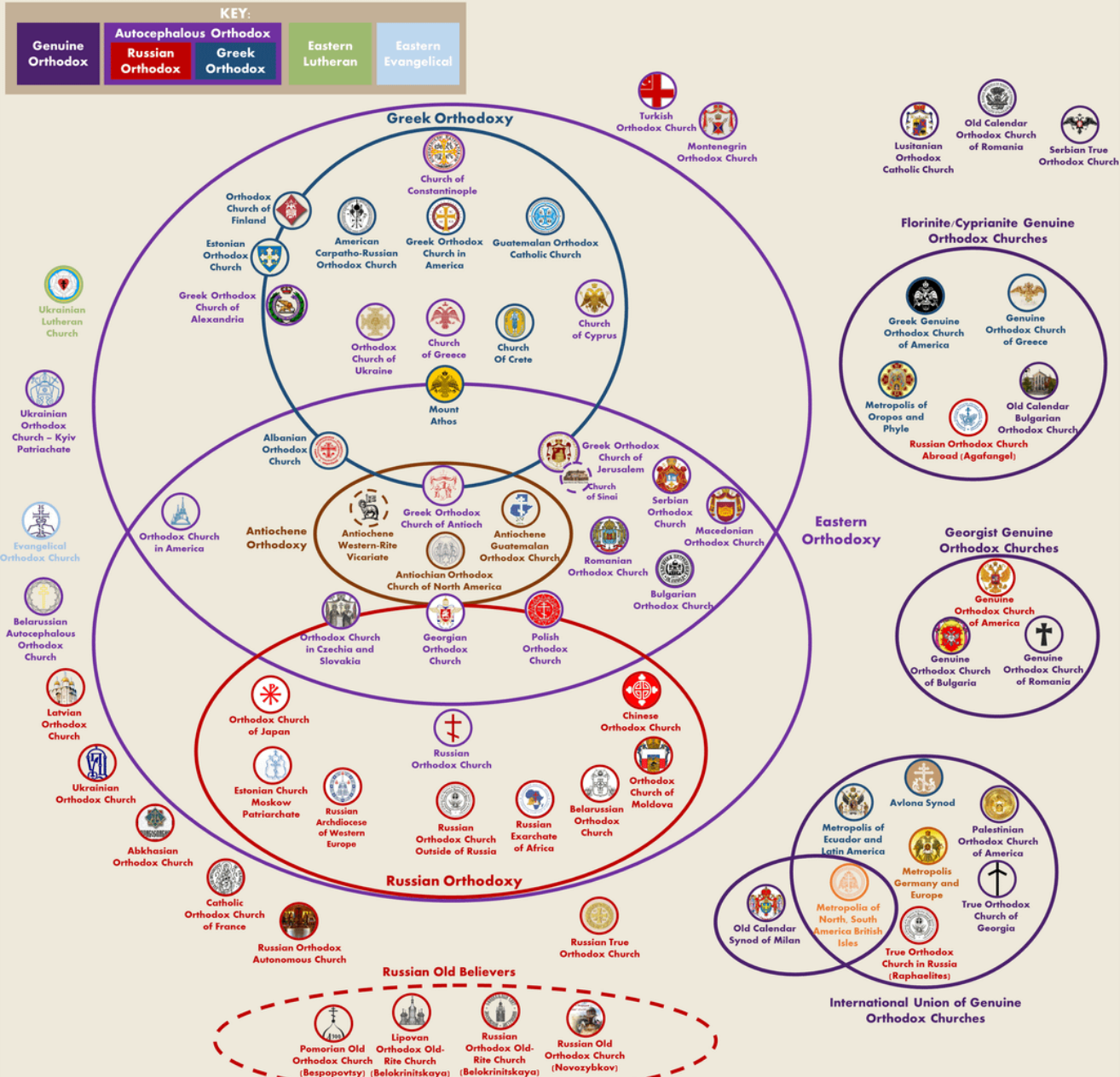
- Orthodox Church in America ★
- Orthodox Church of Ukraine ★

# Timeline of the establishment of various local Orthodox Churches, post 451



# Eastern Orthodoxy

@Vinxenzo1



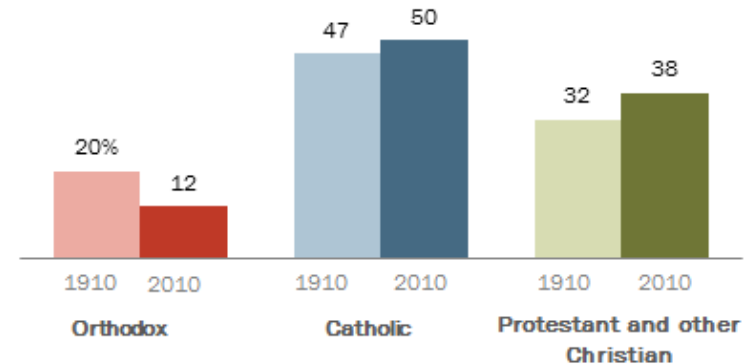
# The (Eastern) Orthodox in world context

- **57% of people living in the region of Central and Eastern Europe identify as Orthodox.**
  - large majorities in 10 countries, including Russia, Ukraine, Greece, Romania and several others. Significant minorities in Bosnia (35%), Latvia (31%) and Estonia (25%).
- “Concentrated in Europe, Orthodox Christians have declined as a percentage of the global population” (PewForum)
- Today, **just 12% of Christians around the world are Orthodox**, compared with an estimated 20% a century ago. And **4% of the total global population is Orthodox**, compared with an estimated 7% in 1910
  - connected with demographic trends in Europe
- **Today, nearly four-in-five Orthodox Christians (77%) live in Europe**
  - In the USA between 3-6mil *adherents* (0.4%?)
- By contrast, only about one-quarter of Catholics (24%) and one-in-eight Protestants (12%) now live in Europe, down from an estimated 65% and 52%, respectively, in 1910.

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## Among Christians globally, Orthodox share falling, Catholic, Protestant shares increasing

% of world Christians who are ...



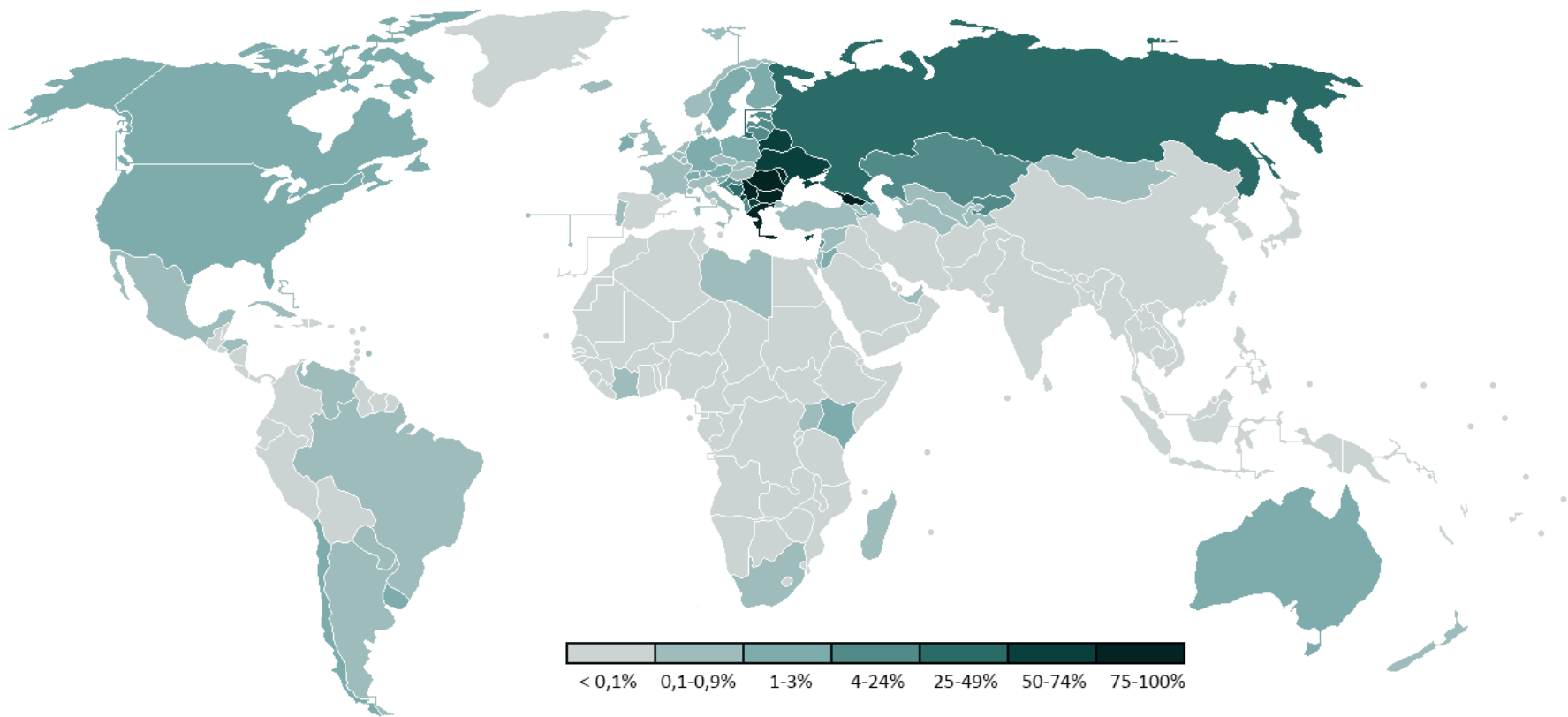
Note: "Protestants and other Christians" includes Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Scientists and other small Christian groups.

Source: 1910 data from World Religion Database. 2010 data from Pew Research Center analysis of censuses and surveys, originally published in 2011 report "Global Christianity." "Orthodox Christianity in the 21st Century"

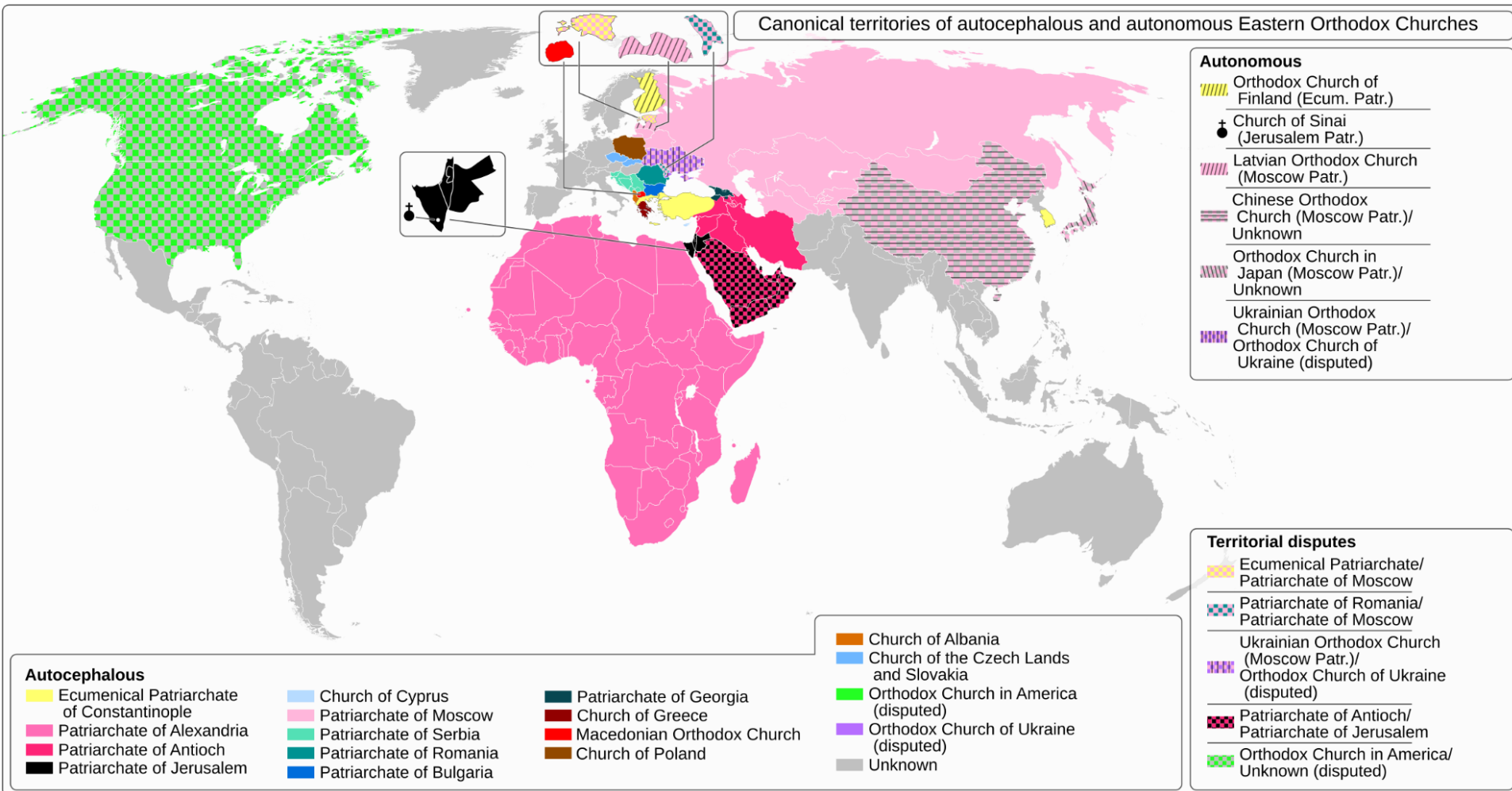
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# The Eastern Orthodox in world context



# Canonical territories of autocephalous and autonomous Eastern Orthodox Churches



# Oriental Orthodox 'Commonwealth'

- Syriac Orthodox Church
- Coptic Orthodox Church
- Armenian Apostolic Church
- Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church
- Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church
- Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church

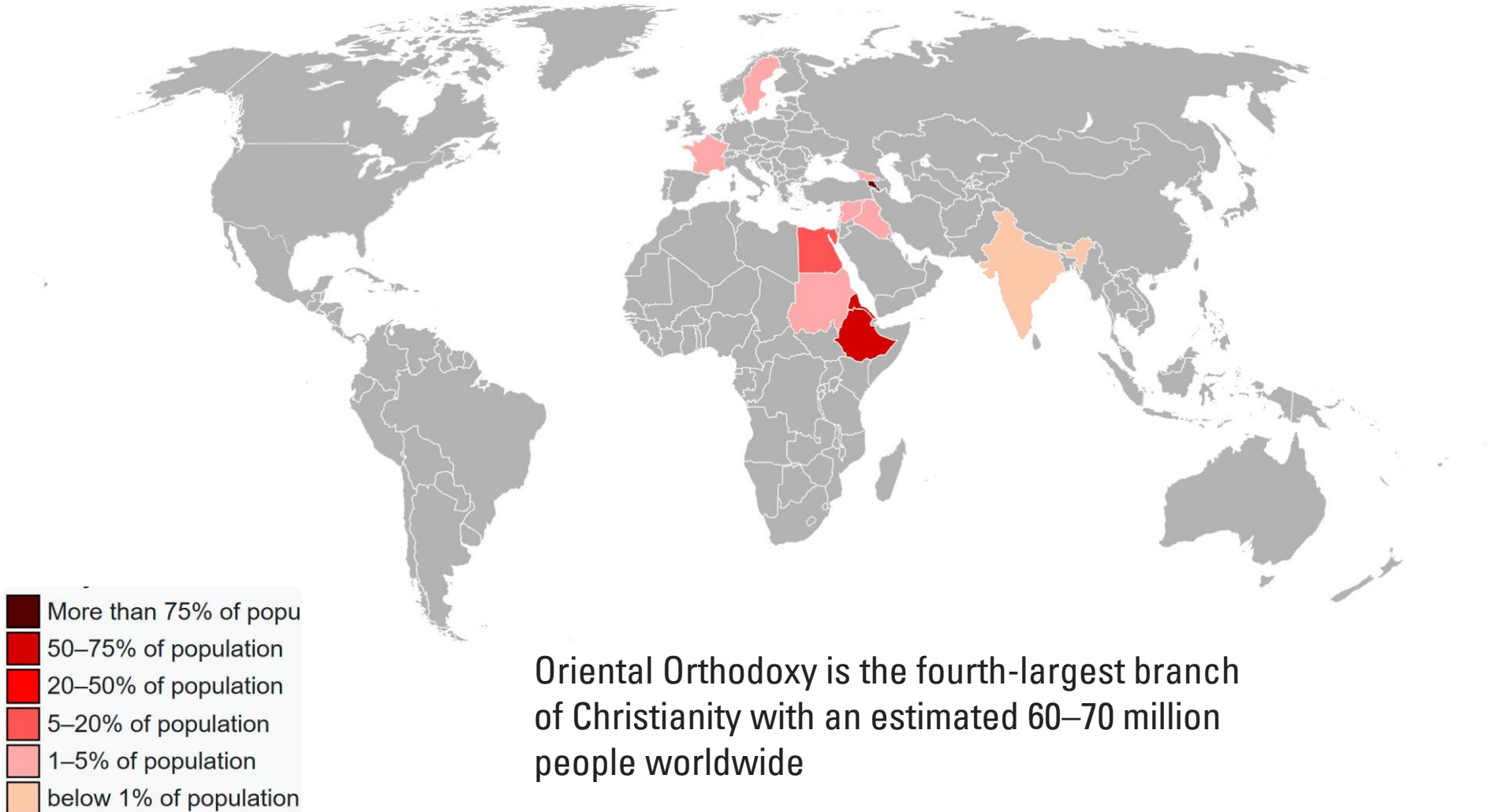


Oriental Orthodox churches in the Middle East celebrate 17 centuries since Council of Nicaea, in Cairo, May 2025

His Holiness Patriarch Mor Ignatius Aphrem II, His Holiness Pope Tawadros II and His Holiness Catholicos Aram I with participants of the celebration.

Photo: Armenian Church, Holy See of Cilicia, WCC

# Distribution of Oriental Orthodox Christians in the world by country:



# Eastern-Oriental Orthodoxy dialogue

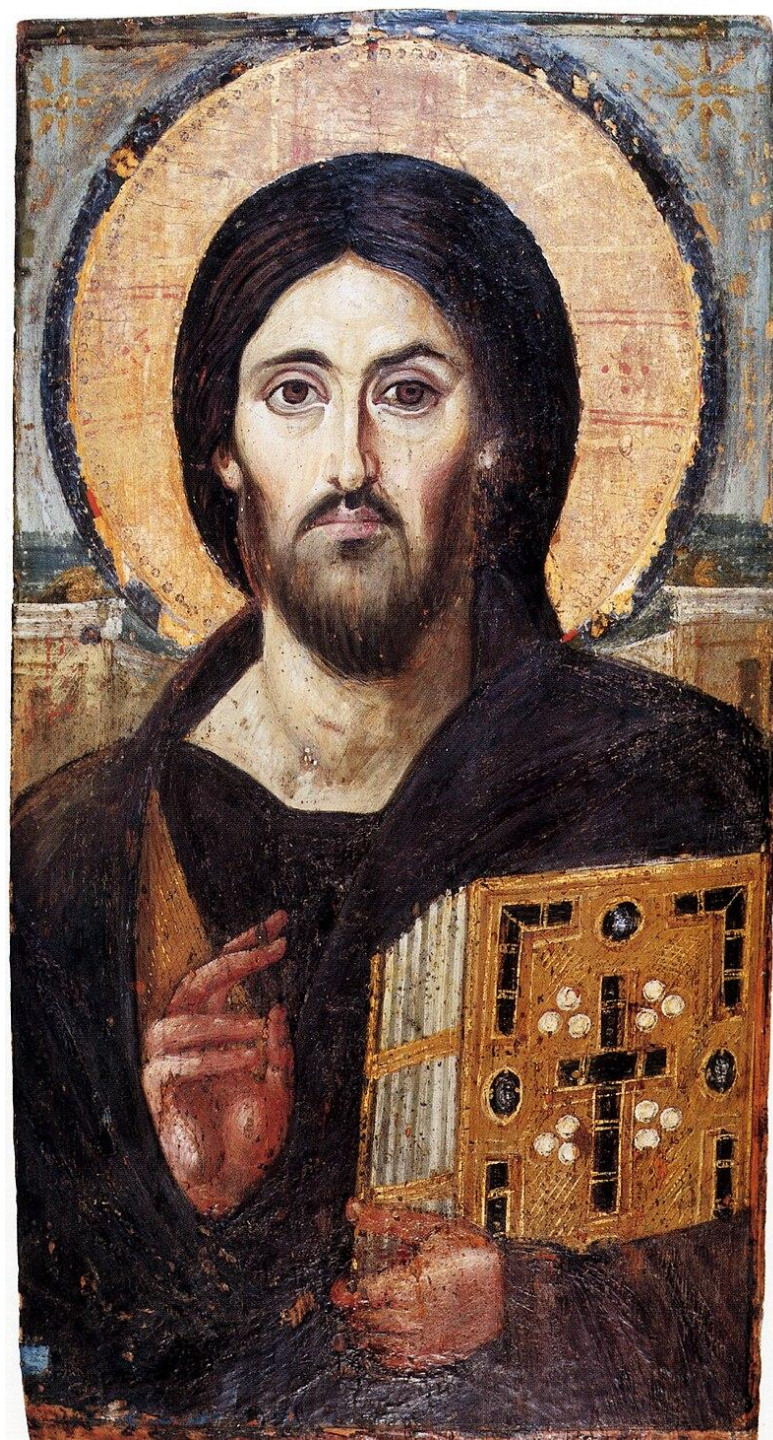
- “The name of “Eastern” and “Oriental” Orthodox Churches is a **convention** recently established for distinguishing between the two Church traditions of Eastern Christianity. In 1985, at the beginning of their official Dialogue, the first part of the discussions centred on the appellation of the two families of Churches: Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox.”

(Christine Chaillot (ed.), *Introduction, 'The Dialogue Between the Eastern Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches'*, Volos, 2016)

- **The Joint Commission of the Theological Dialogue Between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Church**
  - Aarhus (1964), Bristol (1967), Geneva (1970), Addis Ababa (1971)
  - **Geneva (1985), First Agreed Statement, Egypt (1989), Second Agreed Statement, Geneva (1990), Geneva (1993)**
  - **2005: the Inter-Orthodox Theological Committee for Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and the Oriental Orthodox Churches was held in Chambésy, Geneva**

# Eastern-Oriental Orthodoxy dialogue

- The Christological formula of Chalcedon (451): Jesus Christ = **one person** in **two natures**, **divine** and **human**, without confusion, change, division, or separation.
- The Christology of the Oriental Orthodox Churches is based on St. Cyril of Alexandria's phrase: "*mia physis tou Theou logou sesarkomene*" ("the one physis of God's Word incarnate").
  - Miaphysite Christology  $\neq$  Monophysite Christology
- The contemporary dialogue clarified that for St Cyril of Alexandria, and for the Oriental Orthodox, this composite nature ("mia physis") is equivalent to Chalcedon's "person" (hypostasis).



# Eastern-Oriental Orthodoxy dialogue

Geneva 1993:

- “In the light of our four unofficial consultations (1964, 1967, 1970, 1971) and our three official meetings which followed on (1985, 1989, 1990), we have understood that both families have loyally maintained the authentic Orthodox Christological doctrine, and the unbroken continuity of the apostolic tradition, though they may have used Christological terms in different ways.”
- Proposals for Lifting of Anathemas:
  - restoration of full communion
  - no past condemnation, synodical or personal

# Eastern-Oriental Orthodoxy dialogue

**Sept 2024: meeting at Monastery of Saint Bishoy, Egypt**





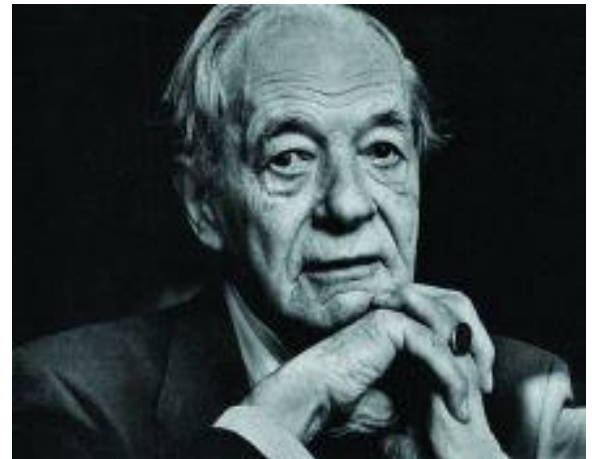
# Faith outlook

(what gives  
Orthodoxy its 'y')

- Sacraments
- The Eucharist
- The Divine Liturgy
- The Creed
- Fasting
- Easter > Christmas
- Monasticism
- Icons

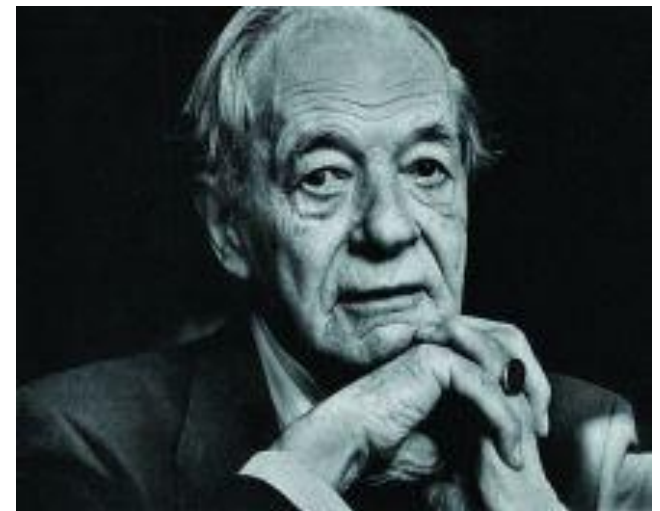
# Faith outlook (what gives Orthodoxy its 'y')

- Orthodoxy as a 'different timeline'.
- Different patterns of **historical becoming** => specific type of social, cultural, and religious conditioning in Central and E. Europe and the Middle East
  - Delayed modernity – The Ottoman and Russian Empires
  - Delayed modernity on account of religious differences: Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox.
- Steven Runciman's 'The Orthodox Churches and the Secular State' (1971, OUP)



- **'In the West** when we speak of the **Church**, we usually mean the **ecclesiastical organisation**. To the Easterner the Church always means the whole body of the faithful, the "holy catholic church" of the Creed, or at least the faithful of his own persuasion.
- ... Not unnaturally the **clergy** were considered to be a **class of the elite**, a holy class separate from and superior to the laity. They became in ordinary parlance "the Church".
- ...in the West...the Church, in order to carry out its high role, had to be **well organised** and had to aim at **unity**, at a monolithic structure...
- It liked not only a tidy organisation but also **clear-cut decisions** in matters of faith. It liked fixed and binding formulae that would elucidate belief. It stood for **unity and precision**; and it felt a certain disdain for the boorish lay powers which were so dependent upon its help.' (Runciman, 1971, pp.14-15)
- **'In the Eastern half of the Roman Empire**... the bureaucracy, the law and higher education all remained in secular hands. ... The clergy were specially trained to perform the mysteries, ...and though their ordination gave them a special grace it did not set them entirely apart from their flocks.
- In the East, as the **Emperor** was the symbol of **unity**, there was no need for a monolithic Church organisation. ...the Western provinces were all part of the Patriarchate of Rome, **in the East** there were **four Patriarchates**, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem.' (p. 15)
- 'The basic **attitude of the Orthodox towards doctrine** was, and is, ... **apophatic** or negative. The cataphatic theologian makes positive statements about doctrine. The apophatic theologian only knows that he knows nothing, for if he knew all about God he would be God's equal.' (p. 16)

- 'To the Orthodox, **many doctrines are better left a mystery**. This **imprecision**, together with the use of 'economy', gives the Orthodox believer an **elasticity** in his belief which the Westerner with his liking for precision and certainty finds hard to understand and suspects of lacking integrity.' (p. 18)
- 'The relations between Church and State in Byzantium were thus **undefined and imprecise**. They depended upon tradition, sentiment and good sense. Fundamentally **Church and State were considered to be integrated**, the ecclesiastical organisation being an important part of the administration, indeed, the more important. The Patriarch... ranked next to the Emperor, and to a certain extent could control the Emperor.' (p. 20)



# Sacraments

- ...“in the Orthodox ecclesial experience and tradition, a sacrament is understood primarily as a **revelation of the genuine nature of creation**, of the world, which, however much it has fallen as “this world,” will remain God’s world, awaiting salvation, redemption, healing and transfiguration in a new earth and a new heaven.
- In other words, **in the Orthodox experience a sacrament is primarily a revelation of the sacramentality of creation itself**, for the world was created and given to man for conversion of creaturely life into participation in divine life.”

Fr Alexander Schmemmann, 2003, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom*

- “... the Mysteries are the means through which **[the] union of human beings with Christ is brought about**”.

Fr Dumitru Staniloae, 2012, *The Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 5, *The Sanctifying Mysteries*, Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press)

Baptism  
Chrismation (*Confirmation*)  
Eucharist  
Confession (Penance)  
Matrimony  
Unction of the sick  
Priesthood



# The Eucharist

- “The purpose of the Eucharist lies not in the change of the bread and wine, but in the partaking of Christ, who has become our food, our life, the manifestation of the Church as the body of Christ. This is why the gifts themselves never became in the Orthodox East an object of special reverence, contemplation, and adoration, and likewise an object of special theological 'problematics': how, when, in what manner their change is accomplished.”

Fr Alexander Schmemmann, 2003, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom*

- “In the plan of His grace, He spreads Himself to every believer by means of that Flesh, the substance of which is from wine and bread, blending Himself with the bodies of believers, so that by this union with the Immortal, man, too, may become a participant in incorruption. These things He bestows through the power of the blessing which transforms the nature of the visible things to that [of the Immortal].”

St Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*



# The Divine Liturgy

- “The Divine Liturgy is an image of the Kingdom of God, an image of the last times. There is nothing so clear as this in the Orthodox liturgy. Our liturgy begins with the invocation of the Kingdom, continues with the representation of it, and ends with our participation in the Supper of the Kingdom, our union and communion with the life of God in Trinity.”

Metropolitan John Zizioulas, 2011, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*

- “The Divine Liturgy occurred one time forever. It has eternal-ity. Every time the Divine Liturgy is celebrated, we rise up to its height. ... We follow the Divine Liturgy, because we do not live it, or until we live it. [...] The Divine Liturgy teaches us to live with the heart.

Saint Sophrony Sakharov (of Essex) in “From I Knew A Man In Christ: The Life and Times of Elder Sophrony, the Hesychast and Theologian, by Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafaktos and Agiou Vlasiou.



# Icons

- “We do not possess any likeness of Christ, and we are not trying to reproduce His earthly features as accurately as possible. An icon painter displays in an icon the knowledge of the Church of God about the word of God incarnate in human features; what is to be conveyed to us in lines and colours is not the historical likeness of Jesus of Nazareth, but the vision of the divine presence in human features.
- ...an icon is ... blessed and hallowed, it becomes within the Church a real focus of presence. This is why we bow to the icons, we venerate them, we kiss them, not only as likenesses, not only as images that reveal the invisible but as a dwelling place of divine grace and divine power.
- Icons...speak of the incredible closeness of God Who unites Himself to man and makes history His own but also unites Himself to the very matter of this world... [for it] to become pervaded with divine presence, to be filled with it.
- It is a message of great hope not only about men but about all things around us...”

Metrop. Anthony Bloom, Sermon on the Sunday of Orthodoxy



# Issues facing the Orthodox today

- Challenges:
  - Communist legacy (State-Church relations, religious illiteracy, inner divisions – see Ukraine)
  - Modernity: Pluralism + Secularisation + Migration (diaspora)
    - jurisdictional frictions + insularity no longer an option
  - Ethno-nationalistic metanarratives
  - ‘Believing in belonging’ – nominalism
  - The of rending of ‘sobornost’, of the embracing unity, of the Orthodox ‘theology of communion’
- Opportunities:
  - Migration (diaspora)
  - Pluralism
  - Life in ecumenical dialogue

# The Orthodox in the UK today

Between 475,000 and... 3,000,000?

## Eastern Orthodox Parishes

- Thyateira – 138
- Romanian – 81 (EN) (95 UK)
- SOUROZH – 53
- Antiochian – 21
- ROCOR – 21
- Serbian – 9
- Georgian – 6
- Bulgarian – 2
- Macedonian – 1
  
- Approx. 346

## Oriental Orthodox Parishes

- Coptic Orthodox – 32
- Armenian – 4
- Syriac Orthodox Church – (at least) 9 parishes
- Indian (Malankara) Orthodox Syrian Church – 50 parishes
- Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church – 40 parishes
- Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church – N/A
  
- Approx 135

# First (ever) gathering of Eastern Christian Bishops in the UK at IOCS Cambridge, 9 Sept 2025

