

# What Is A Greek Orthodox? What Our Religions Are

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This is the third and final part of the two-part series written by Arthur Douropoulos who is director of the office of information of the Greek Archdiocese of North and South America.

When should the Orthodox receive Holy Communion? Each communicant may decide for himself when he is worthy. Communion may be received every Sunday, and on every day that the liturgy is celebrated.

Custom holds that every member of the church should have communion at least four times a year, after proper fasting and adequate spiritual preparation: on Christmas, Easter, and Commemoration of the Apostles on June 29, and the Assumption of the Virgin Mary on Aug. 15.

Does the confession precede Communion in the Orthodox Church? Strictly speaking, yes. Confession (together with repentance) is a sacrament, through which the sinful man is cleansed, and by which the regeneration of the human soul is achieved.

Most Orthodox priests, however, will not refuse to administer to those who have not confessed — if by the communicant himself feels that his conscience allows him to be worthy of the Holy Eucharist. But confession at least once a year is considered a prerequisite to communion in most Orthodox churches.

**Confession Differences**  
How does Orthodox confession differ from Roman Catholic? The practice of confession in Orthodox is more personal. The communicant is encouraged to choose a confessor — priest, who knows him personally, even intimately, and who is acquainted with, and sympathetic to, his problems. The confessional is held in the open, not in a recessed booth, usually facing the altar of the church. If the communicant wishes more privacy for his confession, he may ask the priest to receive him in private.

How do the Orthodox regard the Virgin Mary? The Orthodox honor her most of all the saints, but do not consider her a deity. They venerate her especially for her supreme grace and the call she received from God. Though not exempt from original sin, in which she was cleansed at the time of the Annunciation, it is believed that by the Grace of God she committed no actual sin.

**Icons Venerated**  
Do the Orthodox venerate icons and relics? Yes. Veneration of sacred icons and relics is a part of the Orthodox tradition. But in accordance with the decree of the Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicaea, in 787 A.D., the veneration is directed not to the images, as such, but to the holy persons whom they represent.

The Orthodox, therefore, venerate flat, two-dimensional icons, they do not pray to them as if they were three-dimensional statues, as do other religious groups, because these representations may become too realistic and may become in themselves idols of veneration.

There are three orders of service: deacon, priest and bishop. Those holding the higher ranks—metropolitans, archbishops and patriarchs—are, in effect, bishops.

A metropolitan is the head of an ecclesiastical district; an archbishop is the head of a church; a patriarch is the head of a see, which may also be a separate church. Metropolitans, archbishops and patriarchs are elected by a holy synod of a church and assume office by enthronement.

**Monasteries—Convents**  
Are there monks and nuns in the Eastern Church? Yes. Monasteries and convents are widespread within the old Eastern Churches, but are few in America (and wherever Orthodox has spread in modern times) mainly because priests are urgently needed for the active ministry.

Orthodox monasticism has three main divisions: (1) robe wearers (rassoi), who are on trial, can leave at any time, and can even marry, if they are not already ordained;

(2) the small-gowned (mikroskoi) monks who are ordained; and (3) the large-gowned (megaloskoi), who can enter the office of monk only after 30 years of pious service.

Orthodox nuns are also divided into ordained and lay groups; the latter active in philanthropy and charitable deeds.

**Priest Vestments**  
The traditional Orthodox clergyman wear a full-length, caucase-like robe, black or deep blue in color, which is known as the "rassa." In the United States and in modern cities, priests often adopt the usual clerical garb and wear the traditional vestments, archbishops and patriarchs never use modern dress.

The traditional headgear of the Orthodox clergy is the "kamilivka," a cylindrical-like hat, which is black with a white braiding flat top. Over this, there is a black mitre, which is as well as the episcopal rank, as well as the archbishop and patriarch, wear a black mitre, which falls backward over the forehead.

When officiating at liturgical services, hierarchs wear a golden miter, often glittering with jewels. They also wear the "engolpion," a relicarium with representations of the saints. In the celebration of the liturgy, Orthodox priests and bishops wear multi-colored vestments, embroidered in gold and silver.

**Bearded Priests**  
Until very modern times, all Orthodox priests were bearded. In America, most priests are clean-shaven. However, hierarchs of the church, as well as monastic tonsured priests, usually have beards.

An Orthodox clergyman is permitted to marry before ordination into the priesthood. Clergymen may not become bishops. Unmarried priests may attain the rank of archbishop, but not the rank of patriarch. Bishops are usually chosen from the archbishops.

Marriages within the faith are preferred and encouraged, but mixed marriages are permitted — if the non-Orthodox has been baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity (even in another Christian denomination), and if he or she agrees to baptize the children of the Orthodox Church.

An Orthodox who marries outside the church enters into a civil marriage, but is not allowed to be a sponsor at an Orthodox wedding or baptism.

**Divorce Permissions**  
Though Orthodox Churches believe in the essential indissolubility of marriage, divorce is permitted as a last resort, in certain cases, and after all attempts for reconciliation by the clergy have failed.

Typical are the canons of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, which allows divorce only for the following reasons: adultery, fornication or immoral acts; treacherous oaths and threats against life by either of the spouses; abortion without the consent of the husband; and incest, existing prior to marriage, and continuing for two years; abandonment of a wife or husband for more than two years; apostasy and the falling into heresy; or incurable insanity, lasting four years after marriage.

Remarriage of the innocent party is permitted, though not more than three marriages are allowed. In addition to the civil divorce of the land, a church separation is granted in an ecclesiastical court of an archdiocese, is required.

**Birch Control**  
Though birch control is not mentioned in the binding seven ecumenical councils, it has been repeatedly disapproved by Orthodox synodical and patriarchal pronouncements and encyclicals.

May Orthodox priests participate in interreligious services? Orthodox priests cannot take part in interreligious services without violating church doctrine.

**Mission Centers**  
Eastern Orthodoxy was, from its beginnings, a missionary church. Its highest level of missionary activity was reached in the ninth century, when the Christian faith was brought to the Slavic and other ethnic groups in Central and Northern Europe.

When Constantinople came under Ottoman rule in 1453, Greek Orthodoxy was faced with the question of survival. It could no longer send out missionaries to the West.

However, continued missionary activities in Japan, Korea and the Far East. Recently, the Greek Orthodox Church has initiated missionary activities in Africa and Asia.

Orthodoxy does not approve of the practice of proselytizing other Christian denominations. But genuine converts are accepted and welcomed.

**Saint Canonization**  
How are the Orthodox saints canonized? An Orthodox saint is canonized by the holy synod of a patriarchate, or an autonomous church, after he or she has been accepted as such by the people. It is the Orthodox faithful who, in fact, make the canonization process official by verifying ecclesiastical bodies later on.

When do Eastern Orthodox Churches celebrate Christmas and Saints' Days on dates different from those in the West? Because they retain the Julian calendar, instead of the Gregorian calendar used in the Western churches. The Gregorian calendar has been adopted by some of the Eastern churches, as well as the Julian calendar occur 13 days later than those of the Gregorian calendar.

**Orthodox Easter**  
Differences exist between the date of Easter among the East and the West as early as the second century. The date of Orthodox Easter was finally fixed by the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., which decrees that Easter should be celebrated on the Sunday immediately following the first full moon after the vernal equinox (the first day of spring), but always after the Hebrew "Passover."

The more important are the Armenian, the Coptic and Ethiopian of Africa, the Church of India, and certain Syrian groups. Their communicants are called "monophysites" (from the Greek words meaning "a single nature") since they reject the dual nature of Christ, which Orthodox accept, and believe that He was divine all times, rather than mortal on earth. The ancient Oriental churches are not bound by the seven ecumenical councils.

Some of them recognize only the first council. These Eastern churches, however, are not Roman Catholic Churches. They should not be confused with other churches of the East that do owe allegiance to the Vatican, such as the Greek Catholic Church (also known as the Byzantine Rite or the Uniate Church).

**Church Architecture**  
Is there a distinctive architectural form for an Orthodox Church? Yes. Orthodox churches follow the form of the cross, with a dome over the center. The interior of an Orthodox church is divided into three main parts: the sanctuary, or the narthex, or entrance.

The sanctuary should be at the eastern end of the church building. The altar, "the holy table," is divided from the main church, which is occupied by the congregation, by a screen, called the "iconostasis," where icons (two-dimensional paintings) are placed, depicting the sacraments of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, Saint John the Baptist, and other saints and martyrs.

The sanctuary is reached by three entrances, the central one of which is known as the royal or holy gate (when the Eucharist is celebrated, the

holy girls are brought forth through it).

Through unordained men may go into the sanctuary, they are not permitted to enter it through the holy gates. No women, except girls less than 6 years of age, are permitted to enter the altar, which is flanked by two wooden leaves or panels, representing the entrance to heaven. These are closed off, at solemn moments during the Divine Liturgy, by a curtain of silver material.

The openings to the left and right of the congregation are called the northern door and the southern door. On these doors are painted the archangels Michael and Gabriel, the guardians of paradise.

Over the holy gate is placed a cross, which is used to honor the preparation of the Holy Eucharist on the holy table. The holy table is covered first, with a cloth of linen, symbolizing the swaddling clothes that wrapped Jesus after His birth, and the winding sheet that enveloped the body of Jesus in the tomb.

Over this cloth, a rich material is spread to reflect the glory of the king of heaven. Under and in the holy table, relics of saints are placed to honor the holy fathers and martyrs. A light, signifying the eternity of the faith, always burns above the holy table.

Are there Eastern churches which are not Orthodox churches? Strictly speaking, yes. Autonomous churches, among the Orthodox, are not bound by the seven ecumenical councils. Some of them recognize only the first council.

These Eastern churches, however, are not Roman Catholic Churches. They should not be confused with other churches of the East that do owe allegiance to the Vatican, such as the Greek Catholic Church (also known as the Byzantine Rite or the Uniate Church).

**Ecumenical Participation**  
Does the Orthodox Church participate in the ecumenical movement? "Ecumenical," from the Greek word oikoumene, means "for all the world." In this movement, a hope and plan for the eventual union of all Christian Churches, Orthodoxy has long played a leading part. Dr. Francis House, associate secretary of the World Council of

Churches, has written as follows: "The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople has been found in many centuries of concern... for unity among Christians. A thousand years ago the patriarchs were already distinguished for their concern for unity and their missionary zeal. In spite of the economic communication of the Patriarch by the Pope in 1054, and of the terrible injuries caused to the relations between Eastern Orthodox and Western Christians by the sack of Constantinople by the Crusaders in 1204, the Ecumenical Patriarchs made many friendly contacts with Western Christians, especially after the Reformation."

In 1929, the church of the Patriarchate of Constantinople issued a call "to the churches of Christ everywhere" to create a World Council of Churches, established in 1948, which includes Eastern Orthodox churches.

Over 20 Orthodox groups are represented in America. Most of them are under old-country ecclesiastical jurisdictions, although some are now independent of foreign ties. Their communicants total about four million. The Greek Orthodox Church in North and South America, the largest of the American bodies, has almost 1,500,000 members.

There are three leading Russian branches, totaling over 800,000. (By far the largest of these is the Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church of America, which was independently established here after the Russian Revolution, with about 750,000 worshippers.)

Other Orthodox bodies include the Serbian (200,000), Ukrainian (130,000), Carpatho-Russian (100,000), Syrian (8,000), Bulgarian (50,000), and Russian branches of national extractions including the Lithuanian, Estonian, Latvian, Bulgarian and others.

Editor's Note: Next week in this column "We Are Jehovah's Witnesses?"

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# In Our Churches

PAGE-3 HERALD AND NEWS, Klamath Falls, Oregon Friday, Feb. 12, 1965

## Evangelist Scheduled At First Baptist Church

Rev. Harlan Harris, D.D., a well known revival minister throughout the United States in the Southern Baptist Convention, will be speaking here in Klamath Falls on Friday, Feb. 12, Saturday, Feb. 13, and Sunday, Feb. 14, at the First Baptist Church, North Eighth and Washington streets.

Rev. Harris is a native of Oregon having been born in Salem, and was a former resident of Klamath Falls. His ministry studies were taken with the Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1946 and he received his Doctor of Divinity degree from Wayland Baptist College in 1956 of which he is a trustee. During his studies, Rev. Harris was also a classmate of Billy Graham and was

**Change Notice**  
Beginning this Sunday, Feb. 14, Hope Lutheran Church, 1400 S. Main, will conduct worship services at 9 a.m. and the Sunday School will be at 10:15 a.m. The change in schedule will enable pretempor pastor, Chaplain William A. Thoresen of the Kingsley Field Chapel, to conduct Hope Lutheran's worship service and the chapel's service.

Confirmation class will be taught by Rev. Malcolm Unsteth of Klamath Lutheran Church.

## Youth Plan Conference

"Heart To Heart With Christ" is the theme of the youth meet which is scheduled to take place at the First Christian Church on Saturday, Feb. 13.

The conference will involve teenagers from 10 churches in Southern Oregon and Northern California with some coming from as far away as Coos Bay and Crescent City. The conference schedule begins with registration at 10 a.m. followed by a breakfast; 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., a recreation period at Fremont School in the gymnasium; 1:30-2 p.m., a half-hour free time; a "Sing-Spiration" under the direction of Barbara Sturgeon will be held at 2 p.m.; "Buzz" sessions with Rev. Lee Shafer of the Shasta Way Christian Church at 2:30 and at 4 p.m.; a banquet for the visiting youth, ending the day's activities, with the speaker Rev. Andrew Jarvis, minister of Mt. Zion Presbyterian.

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**RELIGIOUS PRESENTATION** — The Heritage Players, a group of dramatists from Northwest Christian College in Eugene, will present the play "Armour of Light" on Friday, Feb. 19, at 8 p.m. in the First Christian Church. The play's action consists of light comedy and hard hitting drama centered around a 20th Century family and a visit from St. Paul. The public is invited.

## Religious Play Slated At First Christian

The light religious drama "Armour of Light" will be presented by the Heritage Players on Friday, Feb. 19, at 8 p.m. in the First Christian Church, Rev. Robert John, pastor, has announced. The public is invited to attend the play and young people of the area, who are interested, may visit with the actors prior to the performance.

The Heritage Players, now in their seventh year of touring, is made up of dramatics students from Northwest Christian College in Eugene, where they are preparing for church vocations. The troupe is directed by Ronald Coulter, drama instructor at the college.

"Armour of Light" was previously presented on the television program "Look Up And Live," and combines light hearted comedy with some real hard hitting drama when St. Paul pays a visit to a 20th century family.

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