

The Orthodox Church

The Orthodox Church

*An Introduction to its History,
Doctrine, and Spiritual Culture*



JOHN ANTHONY McGUCKIN

© 2008 by John Anthony McGuckin

BLACKWELL PUBLISHING

350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA

9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK

The right of John Anthony McGuckin to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the UK Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, except as permitted by the UK Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act 1988, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Designations used by companies to distinguish their products are often claimed as trademarks. All brand names and product names used in this book are trade names, service marks, trademarks, or registered trademarks of their respective owners. The publisher is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold on the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering professional services. If professional advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

First published 2008 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd

1 2008

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

McGuckin, John Anthony.

The Orthodox Church : an introduction to its history, doctrine, and spiritual culture / John Anthony McGuckin.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4051-5066-8 (hardcover : alk. paper) 1. Orthodox Eastern Church. I. Title.

BX320.3.M34 2008

281.9—dc22

2007049377

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Set in 10/12pt Minion

by SPi Publisher Services, Pondicherry, India

Printed and bound in Singapore

by Utopia Press Pte Ltd

The publisher's policy is to use permanent paper from mills that operate a sustainable forestry policy, and which has been manufactured from pulp processed using acid-free and elementary chlorine-free practices. Furthermore, the publisher ensures that the text paper and cover board used have met acceptable environmental accreditation standards.

For further information on

Blackwell Publishing, visit our website at

www.blackwellpublishing.com

*For Bill and Maria Spears
two extraordinary patrons of Orthodox theology in the New World*

Contents



Preface	xi
List of Illustrations	xiii
List of Abbreviations	xiv
Note on Sources	xv
Introduction: Strange Encounters	1
1 The Pilgrimage of the Orthodox through History	5
A Brief History of the Orthodox from the Apostolic Era to the Middle Ages	5
<i>Perspectives of history</i>	5
<i>Earliest Christian foundations</i>	7
<i>The development of ecclesiastical centres</i>	12
<i>The age of the Fathers</i>	14
<i>Creeds and councils</i>	17
<i>East and West: the parting of ways</i>	20
<i>The Slavic mission</i>	23
The Organization of the Orthodox Churches from Medieval to Modern Times	24
<i>The extension of the Orthodox Church</i>	24
<i>Synopsis of the organization of the Orthodox churches</i>	30
<i>The ancient patriarchates</i>	31
<i>The Orthodox Church of Cyprus</i>	44
<i>The Church of Sinai</i>	46
<i>The Russian Orthodox Church (patriarchate of Moscow)</i>	47
<i>The wider Russian heritage</i>	55
<i>The Orthodox Church of Greece</i>	61
<i>The patriarchal Church of Bulgaria</i>	62
<i>The patriarchal Church of Serbia</i>	65

<i>The patriarchal Church of Romania</i>	66
<i>The Church of Georgia</i>	70
<i>The Church of Poland</i>	71
<i>The Church of Albania</i>	72
<i>The Church of the Czech lands and Slovakia</i>	73
<i>The three autonomous Orthodox churches</i>	73
<i>The various Orthodox diaspora communities</i>	76
<i>The Orthodox Church in America</i>	80
2 The Orthodox Sense of Tradition	90
The Holy Tradition	90
Sources of Authority in Orthodoxy	100
Orthodoxy's Reading of the Scriptures	102
<i>An ecclesial reading</i>	103
<i>The principle of consonance</i>	106
<i>The principle of authority</i>	108
<i>The principle of utility</i>	109
Patristic and Conciliar Authorities	110
The Symbolical Books	111
The Pedalion (Holy Canons)	115
Tradition and Revelation	116
3 The Doctrine of the Orthodox Church I:	
The Glory of the Lord	120
The Christian God	120
The Holy Spirit	126
The Lord Jesus	141
The Immortal Father	158
The Holy Trinity	166
4 The Doctrine of the Orthodox Church II:	
The Economy of Salvation	182
Humanity and its Sufferings	182
Salvation and the Call to Ascent	198
The Song of Creation	204
The Blessed Theotokos: Joy of All Creation	210
The Dance of the Blessed: The Angels and the Saints	222
Outside the Gates: Demonology and the Enigma of Evil	234
The Church: Bride of the Lamb	238
5 The Holy Mysteries and Liturgies	277
Greater and Lesser Mysteries	277
<i>The mystery of baptism</i>	282

<i>The mystery of chrismation</i>	285
<i>The mystical supper: communion in the Holy Eucharist</i>	288
<i>The eucharistic liturgy</i>	296
<i>The mystery of metanoia</i>	300
<i>The mystery of the great anointing</i>	306
<i>The mystery of marriage</i>	309
<i>The mysteries of ordination</i>	323
<i>The lesser blessings of the church</i>	335
<i>The services of prayer</i>	336
<i>The Trisagion prayers</i>	338
<i>The daily offices</i>	339
<i>Personal prayers</i>	346
Traditions of Orthodox Prayer and Spirituality	346
<i>Methods of prayer</i>	347
<i>Prayer of the heart</i>	349
<i>The Jesus Prayer</i>	351
<i>Hesychasm</i>	352
<i>Fasting and feasting</i>	353
The Holy Icons: Doors to the Kingdom	354
<i>Sacred art</i>	354
<i>The Orthodox vocabulary of worship</i>	356
<i>Icons and iconoclasm</i>	357
<i>Icons of the Lord</i>	361
<i>Icons of the Virgin</i>	362
<i>Icons of the saints</i>	363
6 ‘The God-Beloved Emperor’: Orthodoxy’s Political Imagination	380
Caesaro-Papist Caricatures	380
Byzantine Models of Godly Rule	381
The Ambiguity of Scriptural Paradigms of Power	384
The Concept of the Priestly King	388
Dominion as Apostolic Charism	390
Patristic Ideas on <i>Symphonia</i>	391
New Polities in the Aftermath of Byzantium	395
7 Orthodoxy and the Contemporary World	399
The Poor at the Rich Man’s Gate	399
The Grace of Peace and the Curse of War	402
Freedom in an Unfree World	408
A New Status for Women	411
Biological and Other New Ethical Environments	415
Sexual Ethics and Pastoral Care	420

Ecumenism and the Reunion of the Churches	424
Religious Pluralism in the Global Village	426
Evangelism in a New Millennium	430
Glossary of Orthodox Terminology	436
Select Bibliography	443
Index	453

Preface



In the course of my own winding, pilgrim's, road to Orthodoxy it was the tangible sense of beauty that served as a constant allure. It was the radiant kindness of a few luminous souls, several of them bishops and priests, that made flesh for me what I had been searching for, not so much the zealotry that many were eager to offer me as their witness to the truth. Years later I came across a saying of St Symeon the New Theologian to the effect that a candle can only be lit from the flame of another living candle, and it struck me as exactly apposite. When Truth is a living person, we can no longer try to make it synonymous with mere accuracy. What is at stake is more a question of authenticity. Orthodoxy is often approached by those outside it as a system of doctrines. But it is far more than this, and this is why a book of systematic theology does not quite capture the reality. Orthodoxy is the living mystery of Christ's presence in the world: a resurrectional power of life. It cannot be understood, except by being fully lived out; just as Christ himself cannot be pinned down, analysed, digested, or dismissed, by the clever of this world, whom he seems often to baffle deliberately.¹ His message is alive in the world today as much as when he first preached it. The Orthodox Church is, essentially, his community of disciples trying to grow into his image and likeness, by their mystical assimilation to the Master who abides among them.

This book is an attempt to explain that mystery of church in a variety of approaches: theological, historical, liturgical, spiritual, political, and moral. The union of all these avenues is difficult to effect intellectually, but is much easier to accomplish organically. Indeed it is clear that the Christian life itself, in its deepest and most authentic manifestations, is exactly a matter of this synthesis: this 'coming together' or 'coming home' that is sought after as the life of virtue that brings peace to the soul and the mind. The Fathers of the Church tended to refer to the Christian faith as 'our philosophy', which exactly caught the aspect of Christianity as a fundamental lifestyle; a way of being, as much as a way of thinking. This book, then, has been designed to assist Orthodox to a renewed appreciation of their faith, at once 'ever ancient and ever new', as well as to introduce it in a way that could be of benefit to readers who are not overly familiar with Orthodox life and practice. The book's imagined readership is a double one: English-speaking readers who have come to Orthodoxy by the grace of God and wish to learn more of their own tradition; and those who have an ecumenical interest in the

Orthodox Church, and wish to question it about a range of concerns. I hope this volume will serve as a useful dialogue partner on the pilgrimage trails of each of its readers. The book is deeply concerned with theological doctrine, but not to the exclusion of other important matters. There are some very good treatises of Orthodox theology available.² A common denominator among them is that they are all heavily based on the Scriptures and the Fathers,³ and I hope that this study will also pass that litmus test. It has been arranged in three chief divisions: the historical context of the church in its long pilgrimage (chapter 1), the theological task proper, namely the doctrine of God (chapters 2 and 3), and finally the several aspects of the economy of salvation; that is, the impact of God's Kingdom in the world, and among the communion of the saints (chapters 4 through 7).

I am grateful to the Henry Luce III Foundation of America for its generous award of the Luce Fellowship in 2006 which allowed me the space to complete such a large project. I am also indebted to a number of readers, all of them skilled commentators in Orthodox theology and ecclesiastical affairs, and friends of long standing, whose advice, disagreements, and encouragement have helped me make this better than it was. Orthodox faith is one and harmonious. It is my trust that this book conforms to that unity of the faith. Such was my constant intention. Orthodox culture, however, is, like any family: subject to many discussions, and often loud disagreements, over the interpretation of many things. My brothers and sisters who have dialogued with me are examples of how such a conversation can be conducted in love and mutual respect, for the greater clarification of the truth. It is a rare charism in a loud and aggressively superficial world.

FR. JOHN A. MCGUCKIN
Feast of St Basil the Great
 New York, 2007

Notes

1 Matt. 11.25.

2 Beginning with the two most outstanding patristic exemplars: St Gregory of Nazianzus' *Five Theological Orations*, and St John of Damascus' *Orthodox Faith*, both of which are accessible online. In terms of modern literature one can think of Staniloae (1998, 2005), Popovitch (1997), Pomazansky

(1997), Tsirpanlis (1991), Lossky (1978), and Yannaras (1991) as six easily accessible examples in differing tonalities, and with varying depths of profundity.

3 A word that designates the early generations of saints and theologians (often bishops) who defended the Orthodox faith and articulated its inner spirit.

Illustrations



1	St Cyril of Alexandria	16
2	St Tikhon of Moscow	50
3	The Divine Liturgy	101
4	<i>Deisis</i> icon of Christ Pantocrator, from the church of Hagia Sophia	156
5	Icon of the Trinity: St Andrei Rublev, <i>Hospitality of Abraham</i>	242
6	Hesychasterion of a Romanian Orthodox nun	350
7	Transfer of the relics of St Gregory the Theologian	387
8	Rohia monastery, Romania	431

Abbreviations



LXX	Septuagint
OCA	Orthodox Church in America
PG	<i>Cursus Completus Patrologiae Graecae</i> , ed. J. P. Migne, 162 vols. Paris: Garnier, 1857–66
PL	<i>Cursus Completus Patrologiae Latinae</i> , ed. J. P. Migne, 222 vols. Paris: Garnier, 1844–64
ROCOR	Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia
SCOBA	Standing Conference of Orthodox Bishops in America

Note on Sources



PATRISTIC WRITINGS

Throughout this book there are extensive references to patristic writers and texts from the early Christian centuries. Readers will find a guide to the authors, the contents of major treatises, and the availability of the best editions and translations in J. A. McGuckin, *The A-Z of Patristic Theology* (London: Student Christian Movement, 2005), and J. Quasten, *Patrology*, vols. 1–3 (Antwerp: Spectrum, 1972–5).

PSALM NUMBERING

Orthodoxy follows the psalm numbering of the Septuagint (Greek) Bible, whereas the Western world, by and large, follows the numbering of the Hebrew Bible. Roman Catholicism used to follow the Septuagintal system, but (except in liturgical altar-books) has now largely gone over to the Hebrew numeration. The table of equivalence is as follows:

Greek Septuagint	Hebrew
1–8	1–8
9	9–10
10–112	11–113
113	114–15
114–15	116
116–45	117–46
146–7	147
148–50	148–50

For most of the psalms, then, the LXX numbering will be one psalm behind the Hebrew. The LXX also frequently begins the verse numbering with the psalm title (if it is more than a few words long), which in the Hebrew is not counted as part of the verses. In such cases verse 1 in the Hebrew numbering system will be verse 2 in the LXX.

Introduction

Strange Encounters



The Orthodox (generally) do not regard themselves as exotic. If they have come to Orthodoxy from other forms of Western Christian tradition, or from secular atheism, they often are tempted to regard themselves as exotic for a while, but it soon wears off. Apparently, however, many external observers do still retain that perspective, and it can often tempt the Orthodox to live up to it by ‘posing’ as exotic: a dangerous state of affairs which postcolonial theory has put its finger on already as ‘subalternism’, or that state where a small group with a residual minority consciousness tries to live up to expectations foisted on it by the dominant hegemonic powers of the age.¹ The Christian Orthodox, as they have been encountered relatively rarely, ‘in the flesh’, in the ordinary experience of most Western Christians, are certainly a ‘strange encounter’. The root presuppositions, and the basic style of worship and attitude that are so familiar in many forms of Western Christian practice, seem different here. If the Orthodox feature in the public eye of the media at all, it is usually with a view to the ‘strange’ rituals of a church that has a very ancient liturgical style, and often uses languages that outsiders do not remotely understand.

The temptation to categorize the Eastern Orthodox as romantically exotic is a powerful one, and is often a fate wished on them by those who hold them in kind regard and who value many of the things Orthodoxy represents in Christian history, such as faithfulness to tradition, endurance under suffering, and reverence in worship. Those who are less enamoured of Orthodoxy look at it from the perspective of their own philosophies, ideologies, and orthodoxies, and sometimes censure it as reactionary, exclusive, patriarchal, rigid in its doctrines and liturgy. Rarely, however, do either its critics who dislike it, or its non-Orthodox friends who cherish it,² have much awareness of the wider context of what an Orthodox articulation of the church and society would be on its own terms. This book tries to set out such a vision. It is offered as a sustained essay in Orthodox history, theology, and culture, and offered as much to the Orthodox reader who wishes to enter into a discussion of his or her own tradition as it is to a general reader who might simply wish to gain a deeper understanding of where the Orthodox came from, and what they claim to represent.

But running throughout all the sections of this book is the message that ‘exotic, the Orthodox Church is not’; rather, it is a full-blooded community of the faithful

who have their feet planted firmly in the earth, and their eyes raised joyfully to heaven. In its own understanding it is simply the catholic heart of the Christian witness; not peripheral but at the very core of the Christian endurance throughout history. Notions of 'Eastern' or 'Western' Christianity have often been far too heavily overdone in the past. Is Russia the 'East' any more? Is Greece, any longer, a journey too far for a 'Western' traveller? Those terms 'Western Christianity' and 'Eastern Christianity' have been retained in these pages as convenient shorthand for distinguishing Orthodox forms of thought from the more familiar Roman Catholic and Protestant worlds of discourse that have so massively dominated English-language Christian literature to date. But the present author is always lost for words (a rare state of affairs) whenever anyone asks him to speak as an 'Eastern Christian'. Being an Irish, English-born, Romanian Orthodox priest teaching and ministering in America may not be a very common position; but it is surely not an unusual state of affairs any more to have an ethnic and cultural weave of many different colours in our histories, minds, and hearts in this era of the global village. This book is an attempt to present Orthodoxy in such a way that English-speaking readers may be able to gain a sense of an ancient theological tradition that does not see itself as 'strange' or 'closed off' or as 'having nothing to say to postmodernity', but one that has only relatively recently been released from a long nightmare of oppression, and which will, in the immediate future, be a voice that will be raised again in the counsels of world Christianity.

Because of the nature of this book as a 'learned introduction', sometimes I have had to cover immense ground very quickly. This leads to a species of didactic writing that is necessary if one wishes to draw up an honest guide to the terrain, but is a difficult medium to make shine. If one stops too long and discusses the depth and detail of history, it would become something wholly other than an introduction. This aspect of the book, what we could call the mode of the 'Grand Levantine Tour', is nonetheless important for what it reveals about our general presuppositions about things. How obsessively, it seems, all available church history has been written out of the Reformation experience. Orthodoxy did not know there had been a Reformation until the late seventeenth century. It is still true to say that it sees more or less nothing through the lens of that experience. Its view of the history of the church still tends to be dominated by older constructs: who was it that was oppressing us yesterday, and what was it about this time? I am not saying that this is a good thing, necessarily. The aftermath of extensive persecutions (and Orthodoxy has suffered considerably and relentlessly in the course of the last five centuries, most especially in the last one) often marks the survivors with deep traumas that need generations of sunlight to heal. I am saying only that it makes for a very different perspective on what really matters in telling a history of the church: endurance, community, and shared story.

Another thing that one learns very quickly about English-language books on Orthodoxy (not that the bookstores are overloaded with them, one has to say) is that they are relatively recent, and almost inevitably written by non-Orthodox scholars. There are only four written by cradle Orthodox that I can think of immediately: those of Meyendorff, Bulgakov, Zankov, and Zernov, all Russians coming out of the diaspora scattered as a result of the Soviet revolution. They try to offer a general introduction, mainly aimed at non-Orthodox who want a broadly based guide to the Orthodox world. In the geographical and social context from which they originate, that means they were written chiefly to imaginary audiences from the Anglican (Episcopalian) or

Roman Catholic worlds, and were often concerned to present Orthodox ideas ‘in terms of their differences’ from post-Reformation contexts. In contrast, I have here been more concerned to speak simply as an Orthodox, and not worry too much about how other traditions have approached things, knowing that the bookstores are indeed groaning with their articulations on their own terms. His Grace Bishop Kallistos Ware’s popular book on Orthodoxy set a new bar when it first appeared in 1963. Written primarily to explain Orthodoxy to the outside, it has since become a cherished vade mecum for almost all English-speaking Orthodox, who have often had great difficulty accessing balanced and cultured discussions of their faith and history.

Nevertheless, the majority of scholarly ‘Introductions to Orthodoxy’ in the English language have not been written by Orthodox at all, but by learned Roman Catholic clergy. Invariably these demonstrate two warring principles in the breast of their authors: the first a deep respect for the Eastern Church and its venerable customs and catholic spirituality; the second a progressive impatience with the Orthodox, mounting at times to a barely concealed desire to castigate them for their indifference to the advances of the early stirrings of Catholic ecumenism. Here, I am speaking especially of the first forty years of the twentieth century, before matters changed dramatically after the Second Vatican Council. Some of these books remain as valuable sources, but they are now showing their age, and their biases.

This introduction, therefore, tries to do something different; something, I hope, that is new and valuable, in so far as that is possible in what sets out to be a faithful iteration of what it is to be Orthodox. This approach to the subject is heavily invested in theological investigations. It is biblical and patristic in tonality (how could it not be if it were to be Orthodox?), but it is not solely an essay in the history of theology but always an attempt to see how the living word of the evangelists, apostles, and Fathers can speak to the present moment, in and through the experience of the Orthodox. It is a theology written from the perspective of how Christianity functions as a way of life, as a progressive seduction into beauty and simplicity.

Christian Orthodoxy, as it once more emerges into a public role in eastern Europe, and grows deeper roots in western Europe, Oceania, and America, is faced with many problems, not few of which derive from the lack of functioning theological schools for many generations past. In the context of a severe purge of leaders of intellectual acuity over the past generation, the Orthodox Church today is offered many temptations to take refuge in an authoritarianism learned from decades of hostile oppression, or to pose as the subaltern ‘other’ to the alleged norms of Roman Catholicism or Protestantism. I believe that both are ill-fitting responses: the first counteracts the Orthodox Church’s potential role as a paradigmatic model for new freedoms and traditions of constructive, and open-ended engagement with a post-Christian society; the other betrays the Orthodox Church’s spirit of catholic universality by the adoption of alien agendas, and subalternisms of various types, or the ill-advised encouragement of dangerous new nationalisms and ethnic phyletisms.

Then who is it that this book addresses? Well, in the first place: you who have this text in your hands, and have been brought to it not accidentally (for the Orthodox do not believe in such a notion) but by the gracious providence of the Lord of Wisdom who delights in discussion, learning, and mutual enlightenment. My ‘proposed readership’ is a pastoral audience of English-speaking Orthodox, and those Christian men and women of good will who are interested in understanding more of Orthodoxy,

and in entering into fruitful dialogue with it, in an age of relativities and secularism that have weakened a divided Christendom. The potential vocation of Orthodoxy to facilitate mutual dialogue between the divided churches of the West is a motive that has not been far from my mind.

Throughout its long history, and especially so in times when it was free and had assets, and could design its own programmes of outreach, Orthodoxy has always been a church that has valued communion, communication, freedom, and developmental initiatives to reshape the Gospel *kerygma* in terms accessible to contemporary culture. This deeply evangelical sensitivity has consistently renewed Orthodoxy after long seasons of political and economic decline or social reversals. In the present era, when I hope the Orthodox churches are emerging from recent nightmares into a 'New Spring', this book may help to enable the wonderful conversations that could result for the glory of the Lord and the extension of his blessed Kingdom among us.

Notes

- 1 For more see McGuckin 2005c.
- 2 And how much Orthodoxy in western Europe has been supported by the gracious help of the Anglican Church is an untold story.

Chapter 1

The Pilgrimage of the Orthodox through History



A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ORTHODOX FROM THE APOSTOLIC ERA TO THE MIDDLE AGES

Perspectives of history

It is a basic premise of Orthodox theology that the history of Orthodoxy is synonymous with the history of the church. Historians may puzzle over that, thinking of all the concerns, developments, and controversies that constitute church history that seem to have no bearing on the history of the Orthodox (the Avignon Papacy, the Inquisition, the Reformation, the Oxford Movement, the ordination of women, to name only a few), but Orthodox generally regard the church world-wide up to the Middle Ages as ‘their church’, with divisions and separations only becoming a chronic and permanent state of affairs as the high medieval West introduced more and more patterns of behaviour that were in conflict with the ancient procedures, and doctrines, established in patristic times. The Orthodox, at large, see the Latin church of the first millennium to be substantially in harmony with the Orthodox tradition, so that there was one church only in its validly distinct Eastern and Western forms. Accordingly, the Orthodox to this day in countries such as England, Italy, or France honour the ancient saints of the local churches there as entirely Orthodox. The Orthodox, when they find Anglican or Catholic churches in Europe that contain the relics of the ancient saints, will usually make a point of going to venerate them (sometimes having some confusion when they find the holy reliquaries of fathers and martyrs set up in glass museum-cases in sacristies rather than upon the altars).

Ordinary readers may also find this understanding of the church’s history a strange perspective because in so many of the commonly available church histories that one reads, the Orthodox Church hardly features. If it does make an appearance, for the period of the first 500 years, it mysteriously tails off into invisibility as the story of the rise of the medieval West is undertaken, something that tends to push away all else to the side. Most English-language church histories, if they were properly labelled, should admit that they are largely the history of the Western Church as it developed after the great shock wave of the Reformation. Because of this, Reformation apologetics still heavily condition the way the story of the church is told. Until the latter part of

the twentieth century the same attitude of neglect (and often scorn) attached itself to secular history of the eastern Roman empire. Byzantine studies, though now enjoying a revival, were traditionally looked down upon. Historians such as Gibbon and others following him had caricatured the history of the Greek Christian East as a long and dismal chronicle of barbarism and autocracy.

Both from the Roman Catholic viewpoint and from Protestant perspectives, Eastern Orthodox history was not something to linger over. For Roman Catholicism the Greek Orthodox (and all other Orthodox churches in communion with them) were stubborn schismatics who had always resisted the eirenic advances of Rome, and had thrown off Roman order and clarity. To Protestant critics the Orthodox were often seen as stranger versions of all that they hated in medieval Catholicism: relic veneration, icons, devotion to the saints and the Virgin Mary, sacraments, and priesthood. Each side of the Western Reformation divide saw the Orthodox through a distorting lens of its own concerns. From the viewpoint of the Orthodox, both forms of Western Christianity, Catholic and Reformed, seemed very much alike: two similar but variant forms of development of the same premises with the same styles of theologizing and closely related patterns of worship. Studies of the Orthodox Church by external commentators tended to resonate with those aspects of Orthodoxy that 'conformed' to their Western Catholic, or Protestant, expectations, depending on the ecclesial starting point, and allegiance, of the various authors.

This relative neglect, however, was not simply due to the vagaries of the European press. History had something to do with it too. As the story of the Western Church grew to the 'interesting point' of its early medieval ascendancy (the time princes of the church started to become real power-brokers in Western politics), so the history of the Christian East started a long twilight time, pressed and harried by the relentless westward advance of Islam. The Byzantine and Slavic Christian worlds, along with their own histories and perspectives on the Christian Church, simply did not fit the common picture, and so were easily ignored or fitted into the more dominant Western archetypes of historiography. Nevertheless, it is still something of a shock for Orthodox readers to find, in many religious education books in western European schools, phrases describing the Orthodox Church as a schismatic branch of Christendom that broke off union with the pope in the medieval period. Such a view may be part and parcel of a particular Roman ideology of church history, but it is, obviously, not a perspective that is acceptable to the Orthodox, either in terms of theology of the church, or in terms of simple accuracy in the historical record.

Orthodoxy does not give up the title 'catholic'. It regards itself as the catholic church (the marks of the church are to be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic) and catholicity in this sense demands that any Orthodox church cannot be Greek, Russian, Romanian, American, or English in its fundamental 'character', but on the contrary is fundamentally catholic and universal in its being and its spiritual ethos. Its national characteristics are legitimate variations of its catholicity, but must not obscure it. Orthodoxy in some parts began to call itself 'Greek Catholic'¹ in reaction to the way in which 'Roman Catholic' started to appear as a designation of the larger part of the Western Church; but these terms are not ancient, and not part of the original deposit of Christianity. Instead they show signs of the 'denominational' mentality that had grown up as part of post-Reformation apologetics in western Europe. When they speak of themselves the Orthodox never evoke denominationalism as a legitimate mark of

church identity. For the Orthodox 'denominationalism' is the heart of ecclesiological heresy, and rises only out of the ruin of ecclesial order.

For many centuries the lack of regard for Orthodox history in the West did not much matter. The universities and schools of the Orthodox had been progressively reduced to rubble all over the Eastern world, where centres of the ancient Christian ascendancy such as Damascus, Alexandria, or Constantinople were overwhelmed by Islamic armies, and where oppressive rulers restricted Christian rights in a severe and often bloody manner. The few books of Orthodox-focused history that were still produced in the remaining free territories of the Orthodox world such as Russia were, as far as Protestant and Catholic European readers were concerned, in 'obscure languages' that never made it into translation. It is only when Orthodox accounts began to appear in European languages in modern times that the clash of values became apparent more widely to the Western churches.

So much for history as an ideological battle ground for apologetics. What would it be for the Orthodox to tell the tale of the rise of Christianity from their perspective? It is a hopeless expectation to imagine such a short chapter as this could ever hope to do justice to the complexity of the Christian story. The only merit of this rapid survey will be to signal some of the 'turning points' that the Orthodox think are seminal. It may be surprising to Western readers to see how many of the familiar episodes of their own history are not part of that story, and what a difference to the overall topography that might make in reimagining Christian origins.

Earliest Christian foundations

When the Orthodox think about the Church, they instinctively understand that it is the living communion which contains the angelic orders, as well as the prophets and saints before the historical advent of the Lord who were liberated to become the heavenly church as a grace of the Resurrection,² and also the countless generations who have gone before us, and those which may possibly come after us. Thus, when we speak of the 'beginning' of the church in this chapter, it is taken to mean the earthly church after the Incarnation. Orthodox Christianity begins at several sacred 'moments' within history, that have been prepared by the great pre-history of the scriptural revelation, and are rooted in the great plan of God's creation ordinance.³ Within that nexus of moments, however, there are certain key events that constitute the beginning of the Church historically speaking. Orthodoxy would place the first great epiphany in the Incarnation of the Holy Word. The icon of the Nativity of the Saviour features, prominently, the arrival of the Magi as symbols of the enlightened nations. More narrowly, the earthly church is said to have been brought together with Jesus' commissioning of his apostles and, ultimately, with their consecration as his witnesses to the world at the great experience of Pentecost.⁴ It is the pentecostal descent of the Spirit that leads the apostles into the fullness of the truth of Jesus, and energizes their mission to evangelize others and draw them consciously into a life-giving relation with God, through his Christ. The pentecostal Spirit energizes the 'Great Commission' to evangelize the world,⁵ a grace that itself is part of the Resurrection life poured out over history, to sanctify it. The church, from that time onwards, has had the duty of preserving fidelity to the Lord's Gospel commission, and it has always been propagated

in the same 'pneumatic' way: namely, by the charismatic grace of the Lord passing through generations, embodied in the pentecostal proclamation of the Gospels and the celebration of the sacramental mysteries, under the care of the apostles and their successors.

Orthodoxy regards the episcopal ranks, the senior order of priesthood in the church, as the chief example of the successors to the original apostolic order. All those, however, who share the vitality of the faith with others, especially those who lead others deeper into the experience of Jesus, are seen to be endowed with an apostolic charism in a missionary sense. Some great saints of the past, such as Thekla the Megalomartyr, Nina of Georgia, or Vladimir of Kiev, are called apostles figuratively in the Orthodox liturgical tradition, because of the great effect they have had in evangelizing nations and regions. Even on a lesser scale, parents and grandparents who transmit the faith with loving care to their children serve in the apostolic role as propagators of the faith, under God. This 'lesser' role is the standard way whole generations of believers are born, passing from their natural birth to a new spiritual consecration as disciples in a baptismal experience mediated to them by their parents, who have treasured the faith and wish to hand it down their family. Of course, because it is a charism, passing on the faith cannot be guaranteed, or mechanically presumed, even across a family that has been steeped in the life of the church for centuries past. All men and women must make their choice freely, and personally, each in their own lifetime. The gift cannot be presumed (though it will always be offered), and faith only shines in true brightness when it is freely affirmed and voluntarily embraced. It is the basic task of the church to ensure that in each generation the call of the Gospel can be heard clearly, and purely, and that the church communion itself is an accurate, living, and gracious icon of Christ, acting to attract men and women to the Lord of Love.

The apostles served the Lord while he lived, and after his resurrection, so church traditions recount, travelled far and wide preaching the Good News that he had entrusted to them. The form of the apostolic *kerygma* is impressed at several instances on the scriptural record. Acts 2.14–40 gives a stylized example of the shape of one of the earliest apostolic *kerygmata*, and it was with sermons and appeals such as this that the first missionaries of the church made their way through the ancient agoras, synagogues, and odea of the Graeco-Roman world in late antiquity. In the generation after them the apostolic preachers, and the itinerant prophets we hear about in ancient texts such as the *Didache*, left behind churches, that is, communities of committed believers, which they had established by their kerygmatic proclamation, and already before the end of the second century we have records of how those earliest communities began to organize themselves for the times ahead, when they would be without the authorities of the great leaders of the first generation. The pastoral epistles of the New Testament give an account of how the communities were settling down, and learning to regulate themselves and organize their patterns of worship.

One major factor in this the earliest period of the apostolic and immediate post-apostolic generation was the organization of worship. The Christian *cultus* centred around the celebration of Jesus' salvific life and death and resurrection, as the fulfilment of the scriptural hope (the 'Old Testament' as they soon began to call the ancient prophetic narratives) and as the promise of new life in the present moment. The Eucharist served to gather Christians together regularly for the shared 'recounting' of the Lord's saving death and resurrection that was epitomized by the eucharistic meal.

In the course of the Eucharist, the concept of the New Testament as a body of apostolic writings that served to explain and orientate the prophetic writings first arose.⁶ The canon is merely the formalized recognition of what was, and ought to be, read in the course of worship. Along with the formal readings of sacred texts, the role of the eucharistic president expanded significantly. These, the earliest bishops, were heirs of the apostles, not least because they continued the prophetic office in the church of 'interpreting' and explaining the Scriptures, how they related to Jesus and to contemporary life, to their congregations. It would be several centuries before the task of preaching extended also to the bench of presbyters. At first the 'breaking of the word of God' to the people was quintessentially an episcopal function, and thus it synopsized their status as heirs of the apostles.

The first Christian communities often began as offshoots, or minority groups, attached to the Jewish synagogues in the Mediterranean world, but tensions rising with the majority groups following from the exalted praise the Christians gave to Jesus as Son and Wisdom of God, led soon enough to regular schisms among the Judaeo-Christian settlements, and already by the time of the Gospel of John (which reflects the tension in its text⁷), that is, towards the end of the first century, Christians were finding themselves increasingly 'separate' and learning to affirm their distinct identity with a growing sense of wonder and expectation. This separation into a distinctly organized existence was accompanied by much apologetical conflict. The records of the New Testament and the earliest Christian writings are charged with the sense of conflict between the nascent Christian movement and groups variously described, but which we might sum up as: Judaism, the many varieties of pagan cult, and the more frightening encounters with mob violence and official state sanctions against illicit religions in the empire. By the time that the wider world realized the separate existence of the Christians, now distinct from the Jews, who had enjoyed the status of a protected religion under the Roman system, punitive measures were being taken against them. This particularly began to happen at the end of the second century and into the fourth. We now look back on this early period of the church as the 'age of persecutions', often forgetting that even today an estimated 175,000 Christians are assassinated each year for their faith (greater numbers than ever suffered in the past).⁸

By the mid second century, therefore, the churches across the Mediterranean world were 'growing up'. They had a good degree of unity, provided by their common faith in Jesus and their shared interest in attaching themselves to the great teachers of the first generations. It is for this reason that the canon of the New Testament had more or less already established itself as 'good practice' for worshipping Christian communities far and wide, long before it had ever attracted to itself a theory of why it should be adopted. The Gospels were given pride of place, and, despite their differences of perspective, each of the four canonical texts shows a substantial reliance on the structure of the ancient apostolic preaching: the kerygmatic proclamation that Jesus' life and saving death were the liberating forces that had redeemed the world under God. For this reason the Orthodox regarded the New Testament as the quintessential record of the apostolic tradition. To this day the concept 'apostolic faith' means primarily an accordance with the apostolic doctrine of the sacred Scriptures. The details of each and every apostle, and his historical ministry, might not be available to the record of ecclesiastical history, just as everything that Jesus himself said and did is not recorded. What matters is that in the New Testament texts we have a substantive

and faithful account of the ‘song of the apostles’ that they raised in honour of Jesus: interpreting him to the generations that would follow, and doing so with careful regard to allow the Master himself to speak as much as, if not more than, themselves. In all Orthodox thought, the apostolic tradition gives pride of place to John, Paul, and Peter’s doctrine, but sees all the apostolic utterance as collectively synopsized in the canon of New Testament writings, whether or not these were actually written by the hand of an apostle or transmitted through a disciple of an apostle.

The idea of the canon of the New Testament has been a notion over which recent generations of scholars have fought, arguing that it does not fully represent the diversity of the early Christian experience as lived throughout the first 300 years. Of course it does not. It was meant to represent the apostolic tradition that was to be held on to as authentic and faithful to Jesus as he was portrayed through the first apostolic preaching, and to rule out of consideration among the mainstream churches that burgeoning library of texts, and weltering array of religious speculations, that were being produced by other thinkers (history tends to sum them up as Gnostics or the like). Many of these heterodox texts depicted a Jesus who was not fully embodied (ancient religious philosophers tended to regard embodiment as equivalent to defilement, and so several teachers thought that by projecting a docetic, non-corporeal, Jesus they were defending his honour). The acknowledgement of a universally recognized canon of Scripture was a decisive reaction to close out books that did not fit into the ‘diverse harmony’ that is represented by the church’s present canon of New Testament writings. All of the canonical Scriptures represent different perspectives, but together they make a many-veined harmony of voice that fills out and rounds off the earliest picture of the experience of Jesus in the church. Certain doctrines and claims about Jesus, however, clash with this harmony, and many (in the past, just as today) are incompatible with it. It is obvious that the canon is not a ‘representative cross-section’ of all the voices that could be heard in the ancient communities. It is the pure distillation of what was offered by the Spirit-led, as the essence of the apostolic tradition. The tradition, and the sum total of voices, are not the same at all. Orthodoxy is interested in the former, not in being an archival record of things antiquarian.

It was the early generation of bishops in the larger churches – generally men who were educated in the wider perspective of how other Mediterranean churches were conducting themselves – that first began to call for some system of common governance: to preserve doctrinal orthodoxy and rule out extreme heterodox movements. The bishops of Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome feature prominently in this part of the story. Important bishops, such as St Ignatius, Dionysios, or Pope Clement, have left behind them a body of literature that is afforded great respect in the Orthodox tradition, as giving evidence of some of the earliest post-apostolic models of governance. The writings of St Ignatius the God-Bearer (of Antioch), dating to approximately AD 107, show that already the principle of the single presiding episcopate is spreading through the churches as the preferred model for good order. Ignatius speaks of the bishop as the icon of Christ governing the church. ‘No one is permitted’, Ignatius writes, ‘to do anything that concerns the church, without the bishop.’ Ignatius describes the bishop as the focal point of unity, because around him the church is enabled to gather eucharistically: and Christ himself is the unity of the communion.⁹

What Christians did in these great and early churches, which were the capital cities of the Roman empire of the time, determined what other communities wanted to do

as well. Good practice was always a dominating factor in how the wider community of churches in the ancient world emulated, and learned from, one another. Eventually this system of common awareness and respect became enshrined in the important principle of mutual episcopal recognition. Bishops who were ordained were acknowledged by 'letters of peace' as they introduced themselves to neighbouring bishops and gave an account of their standard of Christian teaching. By the late second century it is clear that the bishops had also begun to organize the churches by reliance on province-wide meetings of bishops. These meetings, known as synods (a Greek word meaning 'coming together'), were arranged to discuss common affairs and decide on common policy in the face of perceived threats to Christian coherence. It is in one of the very earliest of synods in Asia Minor that the enthusiast movement of Montanism was first censured as a threat to church order. So it was by practical methods achieving results of elevating the best practice, and local bishops ensuring heterodox texts were ruled out from local church worship, that by the end of the second century a system of guarding orthodoxy was practically elaborated. Its chief elements were threefold: the upholding of a canon of Scripture to serve as an authoritative paradigm of the apostolic teaching; the putting forward of the senior priests (the bishops) as the successors of the apostles, and affording them the authority to govern the churches according to this apostolic standard; the setting up of a system of synods of bishops (at first province-wide, then growing in a wider international remit) to ensure common teaching and harmonious traditions among all the local churches.¹⁰

Early episcopal theologians such as St Irenaeus reflected on the problems occurring in the local community with heterodox groups who were producing a veritable outpouring of 'alternative' Gospel literature. These, the so-called apocryphal Gospels, were refused admittance to the worship services of the early Orthodox communities. When one reads examples of these texts today, alongside the sober and inspiring message of the canonical Gospels, the Orthodox do not regard the early bishops as having been 'oppressors' at all, but saviours of the purity of the faith. The apocryphal Gospels, in the main, are trivializations of the solemnity of the apostolic teaching, or they lead it out into elitist metaphysical speculations that have little bearing on Jesus and his heavenly message that was so deeply rooted in the soil of reality. This clash with speculative heterodoxy marks the last pages of the New Testament record¹¹ just as much as it does the writings of the second-century Fathers. Irenaeus, and other theologians of this early period, articulated more details as time went on about how to recognize and protect the system of Orthodoxy and avoid heterodox opinions that falsified the authentic Gospel. In addition to the canon of the Scripture, the concept of apostolic succession of the bishops, and the concept of synodical harmony, Irenaeus also pointed to the manner in which practices of worship enshrined the true belief of the people. This process was described in the Latin text of Irenaeus as the principle of the *Regula Fidei* (Rule of Faith). What it soon came to be summed up by was the manner in which candidates for baptism presented their 'confession of faith' before the sacrament. The confession was generally taught to them by the local bishop, and so this 'Creed' was an active summation of the whole belief of that church. Creeds, and the theological attitudes manifested by the practice of the rituals of prayer and worship (the hymns, the liturgical prayers, and details of the sacramental rites) all accumulated, in Irenaeus' view, to presenting a veritable dossier of authentic Christianity that was not dependent on the intelligentsia to articulate it. It was a lived

theology of the whole church, not a theoretical religion for the highly educated. From ancient times to the present day, therefore, Orthodoxy has held to that principle, and it is the people as a whole in the Orthodox Church who hold to the tradition of belief they have received from earlier times. Orthodoxy is much less susceptible than are many Western churches to the theological writings of contemporary theologians among it. The wider church, the ordinary faithful as well as monks and bishops, expect modern theologians to conform their doctrine to the writings of the apostles and Fathers, and to the liturgical tradition they themselves received at baptism. An Orthodox theologian who departs from fundamentals of the Rule of Faith is, *de facto*, no longer an Orthodox theologian at all.

The development of ecclesiastical centres

The patterns laid out in the New Testament literature and the earliest of the patristic writings were records of the church in its infancy. They are informative, even determinative of some things, but not prescriptively unalterable as methods of church governance. Orthodoxy does not agree with, and strongly resists the reductionism of, some forms of Protestantism that argue that unless something is to be found in the explicit writings of the New Testament it cannot be a constitutive part of authentic church life. Orthodox understanding of Christian tradition is much wider and deeper than this. By the third century the great spread of Christianity around the Mediterranean basin, and in the vast heartland of Asia Minor, led to pressing needs to organize the local churches on more formal models. From this period many forms of governance that are still used today in churches were elaborated in Christian public life.¹² At this stage the great capital cities, such as Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch, began to serve as models of emulation for Christian communities world-wide. Later in the fourth century we can see this process of 'great centre imitation' working clearly as liturgical ideas that were first tried out in Jerusalem, Antioch, Constantinople, or Rome (focal points for pilgrim interest) made their way all over wider Christendom. In the great capital cities of Roman late antiquity the bishops of these large centres were assisted by a cohort of elders, and the pattern of establishing a single presiding bishop with a larger circle of presbyters became a standard mode of governance. Deacons were, historically, always seen as the helpers of the bishops, and remained an order more attached to the episcopate than the presbyterate. By the later third century when the very size of the Christian communities led to the need to establish several churches in each diocese¹³ (it had been an old ideal to have one church, one bishop, and one eucharistic celebration, for each town before that), it was the presbyters who went out to form separate churches. These were still under the presidency of the presiding diocesan bishop (the Orthodox now speak about a 'ruling' bishop), but the pattern that would endure was coming into force: an episcopal cathedral church,¹⁴ and a variety of parish churches served by presbyters, with the possible assistance of a smaller number of deacons and deaconesses.

The imperial authorities at this time were frequently hostile to the church, and often the bishops became the target for focused attack. Many of the ancient martyrs were victims of persecutions from this period in the third and early fourth centuries. It is also clear, however, from the more extensive writings that the early bishops began to

leave behind them, that 'good order' in doctrine and practice was something that was powerfully moving them. In the third century the system of international correspondence between bishops is developed extensively. The great churches tended to keep an eye on the smaller and more provincial communities, ensuring that Christian life developed in a harmonious commonality (allowing for cultural differences in many regions) and that serious doctrinal divergences, or liturgical differences, were smoothed out as best as possible. The Asia Minor churches which observed Pascha on the fourteenth of the month of Nisan (an equivalent to April) regardless of the day of the week on which it fell, were publicly censured from Pope Victor's Rome for not observing the common tradition of observing Pascha on a Sunday (as an all-night Saturday vigil).¹⁵ There were many differences, of course, and some scholars have compared the church of this period to a 'quarrelsome kind of union', but by virtue of the authority of larger sees, the appeal to good practice, and the use of synodical meetings of bishops, the older ideas established in the preceding centuries were faithfully developed in the new circumstances of the growing church. Episcopal governance was, at this period, a very strong force for ensuring the concept of ecclesial 'communion'. On the wider front this was done by each local bishop keeping an eye on neighbouring bishops' teachings and conduct, and, on the local scene, by the bishop keeping a close eye on the good order of the diocesan eucharistic celebrations, where faith was lived and taught on a weekly basis. At the end of the third century, monasticism also began to make a strong appearance in the church.

The monastic life had a real flowering in the early fourth century, in both Syria and Egypt, before spreading to Rome, Constantinople, Armenia, and Cappadocia, and eventually all over the Christian world. The early monks, known also as 'zealots' or 'ascetes' (athletes) were dedicated to the living out of Christian values in an uncompromising way. They too became zealous defenders of the tradition of theology they held up as the ancestral faith. At times the monks' stubbornness was problematical for the Orthodox bishops, as for example when they attached themselves to dissident positions (such as the anti-Chalcedonian ascetics in Egypt, or Palestine), but generally they were so popularly venerated as defenders of the faith against encroachments by imperial compromisers that by the end of the fifth century almost all the bishops were selected exclusively from the ranks of monastics. It is a practice which Orthodoxy adheres to even in the present, though the very early bishops in the Scriptures were meant to be married before they could be chosen,¹⁶ and some of the great Fathers (such as Gregory of Nyssa) were married men. From the later fourth century, the Orthodox Church developed as a single structure with double pillars of support: the diocesan level of churches administered from the cathedral church and bishop's chancery, and also the ringing of monasteries constituting the ascetical life of a province. At the best times of the church's life, the two systems have been in close harmony, one refreshing the other.

The fourth century is often seen as a sea-change for the affairs of the church. With the vision of the Emperor Constantine (now revered by Orthodoxy as Constantine Among the Saints and Equal to the Apostles) in the prelude to his battle¹⁷ with the pagan Emperor Maxentius for control of the western empire, Constantine was convinced that the God of the Christians had enabled his rise to power. He was, accordingly, a defender and patron of the Christian movement (also enjoying its support for his administration) and eventually was baptized on his deathbed by Bishop Eusebios of Nicomedia. For the church, emerging from generations of bloody

persecution, his patronage seemed like a dream come true. Soon local bishops were given administrative powers within the empire, and to them was handed over the role of local judgement of matters concerning Christians. Many of the provincial bishops became virtually synonymous with Roman imperial administration (other than that regarding tax returns and military defence), as they were frequently the most educated people of the region. By the end of the fifth century a working relationship had been established, that the church would recognize the 'God-loving Christian emperor' as having a sacred right to rule, and the emperor would guard the peace of the church. The ritual of the anointing of the Christian emperors¹⁸ underlined their sacramental office, and envisaged it as something along the lines of a New David, set over the New Israel.

The relation between the Christian imperium and church affairs was described in the patristic writings (not without perennial struggle breaking out in times of stress and conflict) as ideally being a 'symphony' of relations of powers. The political affairs of the empire were God-blessed, as long as they followed the Gospel dictates; but the spheres of religion and politics were separate.¹⁹ The emperor could look over the good order of the churches, but he was not to intervene in matters of doctrine or conduct, which were part of the sacred tradition of the church, and were to be supervised by the priesthood. Often this ideal 'symphonic balance' was tipped too far one way (usually by imperial pressure on the church) but generally it worked throughout the long ages of the Byzantine empire (up until the mid fifteenth century). Monastics were always at the front of dissent from imperialist over-control. Many examples of this abound in church history, such as the manner in which the emperor's policy of iconoclasm was rejected by popular dissent, or the way in which the Paleologan state's attempts to impose unity with Rome were decisively rejected.

After the fall of Byzantium to Islam, the imperial model of governance of the state was exported to Russia, where the tsars saw themselves as continuing the office as church protectors. Even where it was resisted, as in the medieval West, where separate nationalist dreams were always more alluring than the concept of a trans-national imperium of the Christians, it was often followed in default.

The age of the Fathers

The final victory of the Emperor Constantine, and his assumption of sole monarchical control over the Roman empire in 323, coincided with his decision to bring healing and order back into the affairs of a Christian East that had been so disrupted by the brunt of the fourth-century persecutions. He paid the church compensation for much of the property it had lost, gave several buildings for its use (the Lateran basilica in Rome for example), and commanded several new churches to be built (such as Bethlehem, the old St Peter's basilica, and the church of the Anastasis, or Holy Sepulchre). He also commanded the bishops of the Eastern Church to come together and end the dissensions that had compromised their unity. This they did, at his own palace at Nicaea in Asia Minor in the year 325. This large synod of bishops was to become a great moment in church history, featuring as the first of the ecumenical (world-wide) synods that the church has looked back on as being of monumental importance in settling universal matters of the Orthodox faith. There are now seven ecumenical councils which the Orthodox regard as the supreme legislative assembly of

the church on earth. Roman Catholicism continued the process of holding universal councils (the last being Vatican II in the 1960s) but the Orthodox have only regarded the first seven as authentically ecumenical, when all the ancient ‘popes’²⁰ were represented. The decisions of an ecumenical council are seen by the Orthodox as having the authoritative blessing of the Holy Spirit, affirming the judgement of all the assembled bishops as to substantial matters of faith and discipline. This is why the vote of the bishops at ecumenical councils was not taken as a ‘majority’ prospectus. If a matter of faith was at stake, it was presumed that all the assembled bishops, as vessels of the Spirit who had been formed in the Orthodox faith, would be able to ‘recognize’ it without difficulty, not search for it laboriously among a welter of possibilities. The apostolic teaching was (and is) taken with utmost seriousness: ‘We have the mind of Christ.’²¹ If a bishop dissented from the unanimous vote of an ecumenical council, therefore, or resisted it once it had been proclaimed, he was inevitably regarded as resisting the Spirit, and was always deposed from his office as bishop by the vote of the assembly.

The decrees of the Council of Nicaea strongly proclaimed the divinity of the Word of God, and laid the foundations of the doctrine of the Trinity. Nicaea, and the creed of faith it issued, has always been regarded by the Orthodox as the foundation stone of theological truth after the Scriptures, and an example of how the Orthodox tradition (almost in every generation) has to recognize the challenges that present themselves (Arianism in the time of Nicaea) and defend the truth in harmony with the received tradition of the past. This ministry of harmonious consensus in faith, and vigorous defence of truth, still remains the quintessential role of the Orthodox bishop. In this period of the church the writings of numerous episcopal theologians became widely accepted as authoritative, either because they formed part of the significant context of an ecumenical council (such as the writings of SS Athanasios, or Gregory the Theologian, or Cyril of Alexandria) or because their spiritual wisdom carried a large weight and reputation with it (such as the writings of the monastic saints and ascetics²²).

The pastoral works of such theologians as Basil of Caesarea, or the historical works of such writers as Eusebios of Caesarea, or the liturgical instructions of Cyril of Jerusalem, all accumulated to form a very rich and extensive body of literature on exegesis, doctrine, liturgy, and spirituality, which is still read to this day in the Orthodox communion. These writers, especially those of unquestioned authority and ancient status, are given the title of the ‘Fathers of the Church’. The phrase primarily signified the ancient office of bishop-theologian. There were ‘Mothers of the Church’ too (*Ammas*): such great saints and teachers as Macrina of Cappadocia, Olympias of Constantinople, Melania of Rome, Syncletica the Ascetic, and many others. They did not have an ordained role as teacher, as the Fathers who were bishops did, (though some of them were deaconesses) but the stature of their lives and the quality of their ascetic witness has given them a pre-eminent status as early Christian women theologians. Orthodoxy affords deep respect to the writings of the Fathers and Mothers, as an example of the Spirit-filled (*pneumatophoroi*) who can teach the church the authentic message of the Spirit of God in any given age or era. For this reason Orthodoxy does not restrict the age of the Fathers and Mothers to a dead past. Those who are Spirit-bearers in the present age are also the authentic theologians of God, even though not all of them may have the duty of public teaching in the church, and many of them may not have academic qualifications. The writings of each Father



Figure 1 St Cyril of Alexandria, fifth-century archbishop and major patristic theologian. The icon is in the style of Athonite wall frescoes of the eighteenth century, its vigorous rendering suggesting the energy and sense of élan that Cyril himself brought to his church life in the defence of Orthodoxy against Nestorianism. As one of the traditional ‘liturgical doctors’ of Orthodoxy (saints who traditionally composed eucharistic liturgies), Cyril’s icon often features in the apse of churches in the company of the other doctors. Each bears a phrase from the liturgy typically associated with their work. Here, St Cyril carries a scroll relating to his defence of the Theotokos (Mother of God) title as this was enshrined in an exclamation of the Eastern liturgy after the consecration. It reads: ‘We remember especially our all holy, most blessed Mother of God and ever-Virgin Mary.’

Modern icon by Eileen McGuckin

individually considered, however, are not afforded any level of infallibility. It is how the patristic writings merge with the harmony of the great tradition that affords them their apostolic quality of truth. Some of the individual Fathers were great men of faith, but raised theories and ideas that the church, in relation to its wider tradition, rejected and discountenanced. Orthodoxy venerates St Augustine, for example, but

regards much of his work as seriously flawed, and as a source of much disunity that would follow after him, between the respective Latin and Orthodox readings of the church's tradition on important issues. Origen of Alexandria is a writer whose biblical exegesis, and much of his thought, has inspired generations of saints, but whose 'overall system' was severely censured by the Orthodox ecumenical tradition, and he has been denied patristic status accordingly.

In the fourth and fifth centuries there were so many great writers, defending the tradition and establishing the tenor of the conciliar teachings, that it has ever afterwards been regarded as 'the Golden Age of the Fathers'. For the fourth century, SS Athanasios, Gregory the Theologian, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose of Milan, John Chrysostom, and Ephrem the Syrian stand out as the great defenders of the Nicene faith. For the fifth century there were such giants as Cyril of Alexandria, Pope Leo I, and St Augustine. There has hardly been a century since, in all the long annals of Orthodoxy, where great spiritual teachers and theologians have not appeared. The whole Orthodox tradition is marked by these luminaries: writers of patristic status reaching out of the classical ages of the church and into the medieval period and beyond. Notable among them are St Maximos the Confessor, St John of Damascus, St Symeon the New Theologian, St Gregory Palamas, and St Gregory of Sinai. In every instance their teaching has formed a seamless union with the quality of their lives. In doctrine the saint-theologians of Orthodoxy are faithful to the apostolic tradition, and in their life they represent the charism of the Spirit-filled. Without both characteristics visibly present, Orthodoxy does not afford such high recognition to any teacher; when both are present it recognizes them as manifesting the 'mind of Christ'. It is an enduring ecumenical sadness that their lives and works are so little known in Western Christianity.

Creeds and councils

After Nicaea in 325, there was a series of great councils that received ecumenical status in retrospect. A council can often be called together, intending to be of ecumenical significance, but may be rejected by the general sentiment of the faithful over the course of time. In such cases the Orthodox regard those councils as never having had the spiritual charism to assume the role of authoritatively binding the church at large and, as such, not deserving the title 'ecumenical'. One clear example of that failure was the attempt at church reunion initiated by the Byzantine emperors in the fifteenth century. The Council of Florence (1438–9) is regarded by the Latin Church as having ecumenical significance; but when the Orthodox delegates returned home to Byzantium the general sentiment of the people rejected their proclamation of union with Rome, and so this council is not listed as authentic in the annals of Orthodoxy. What is at issue here is the very important concept of the conscience of the church at large; what is known in the West as *sensus fidelium*. There is no doubt that it is the Council of Nicaea and its credal exposition of Orthodox faith that holds pride of place in Orthodoxy.²³ The council declared for the full and coequal deity of the Word of God, personally incarnate in the Lord Jesus. It stood against the arch-heretic Arius, who had argued that Jesus was a creature, and the Word of God merely an elevated angelic being, not possessed of deity except in a nominal way. Nicene faith is the

affirmation that, in Christ, God himself came to save us. It is the pillar that holds up the roof of the holy Orthodox tradition. St Alexander of Alexandria and his deacon (then successor) St Athanasios of Alexandria, along with Bishop Hosius of Cordoba were the Orthodox (Greek and Latin) leaders of the Nicene cause. The council's extensive canons also set out patterns of church governance in terms of the arrangement of sees,²⁴ provincial meetings of synods, and the precedence to be held in matters of appeal by the larger capital sees.

The Council of Nicaea ending in 325 did not bring peace to the church for a long time. The entire generation after it was filled with synods and counter-synods, where the Arians continued to fight long and hard against the Nicene theologians. It was a bitter period of international Christian division and disunity, but one in which the leading Orthodox Fathers never ceased to argue single-mindedly for the preservation of the faith defined by the Orthodox Fathers of Nicaea. In doing this they resisted every attempt at political 'compromise', a path that was advocated by the sons of Constantine who then occupied the imperial throne.

Nicaea was followed by the second ecumenical council, which took place at Constantinople in 381, and which served as a 'capstone' to the council of 325. It brought an end to a long period of Arian ascendancy, coinciding with the death of the last emperor (Valens) who had protected and advanced Arian theologians in the court. With the removal of state patronage the Arian movement soon lost ground (though some have called it a perennial Christian heresy). The Council of Constantinople declared the full deity of the Holy Spirit, and thus set out a more explicit theology of the Holy Trinity. Its doctrine is enshrined in the Creed which is today recited at all Orthodox eucharistic liturgies. This Creed is often called the 'Nicene', but it is in fact the Constantinopolitan. They are synonymous in all respects, except that the clauses on the Holy Spirit are more extensive in the latter. The Spirit of God is divine, the Creed teaches, and his worship alongside the Father and the Son, which has always been part of the ancient faith of Christians, demonstrates this truth sufficiently.

The third ecumenical council was gathered at Ephesus in 431 under the presidency of St Cyril of Alexandria.²⁵ It taught the necessity of recognizing the inner unity of Christ the Lord, despite the recognition of his two natures (divine and human). The Divine Word of God was not mediated to the world through a man called Jesus of Nazareth. On the contrary, Jesus was the Eternal Word of God, now made manifest incarnated within history. The Incarnation is the great and life-giving paradox of the Word made flesh. To fix this in the common imagination in the simplest way possible, the conciliar Fathers at Ephesus insisted that the Blessed Virgin Mary should rightly be celebrated and called the 'Mother of God' (Theotokos). Their opponents, who in various forms wished to create some form of 'baffle' so as to avoid the implication of the immediate immanency of God within the flesh, argued that Mary should only be called the 'Mother of Jesus'. The Christology of the council, with its profound sense of joy that Jesus is none other, and no less, than God made flesh among us, has always been at the heart of Orthodox thought and spirituality ever since.

The fourth and fifth ecumenical councils were more precise elaborations of the Christology set out at the third, making a clearer exposition of its terms. The fourth was held at Chalcedon (a suburb of Constantinople) in 451, the fifth at the capital itself in 553. Both meetings were held in the cause of unity because of extensive arguments over the person and work of the Saviour. In the aftermath of the Council of Chalcedon,

which declared the rightfulness of asserting two natures (divine and human) inhabited by the single divine person (hypostasis) of the Word, and Lord, Jesus, the Divine Son of God, several sections of the Eastern Church left the unity of the Greek and Latin communion of the church. These communities endure to this day and are commonly known as the Non-Chalcedonian Orthodox. Among them are the Coptic, Ethiopian, Armenian, and Assyrian churches. Their tradition of life and spirituality is both immensely venerable and very close to the Orthodox, but because of the theological divisions, and the difference in admitting the decrees of the councils after Ephesus 431, they do not share in the eucharistic communion of the Orthodox.²⁶

The sixth ecumenical council was held in Constantinople in 681. Its immediate cause was another Christological heresy of the period, teaching that Christ only had one will, and that a divine one. In each instance of Christological dissent, the conciliar Fathers from Ephesus 431 to Constantinople (III) 681 doctrinally insisted that Christ was at one and the same moment fully and authentically human, and wholly divine: God from God, and man among us. All attempts to fudge the issue of Jesus' person, or to blur the impact of his real humanity in the cause of diminishing it in the face of his deity, were consistently rejected by the Orthodox councils of the church. In 692 another synod was held in Constantinople, and is now known as the Quinisext Council. It was designed to serve as reformist synod, tightening the discipline of the church with extensive canons, or rules, for good behaviour. It added these canons retrospectively to the fifth and sixth ecumenical councils, but did not want to stand independently apart from them, and so has been 'included in' the numbering of seven councils.

The latest, seventh ecumenical council was held at Nicaea in 787, to teach the importance for correct faith of the veneration of icons. Many non-Orthodox have regarded this as a decline in the significance of the matter dealt with by the general councils, but the Orthodox tradition has insisted that the discernible trend in parts of the wider Christian experience, to turn away from imagery and concreteness in the spiritual life, or to resist the principle of God's encounter with his people through sacramental material forms, is a perennial heresy that weakens the true spiritual life. Those in the medieval Greek Church who argued that images and icons and relics ought to be destroyed violently, on the pretext that they separated believers from Christ rather than drawing people nearer to the Lord in devotion and piety, were resisted by the conciliar Fathers. Their iconoclasm was exposed as a form of Platonism, or abstract spiritualism that resisted the path of incarnation that God took towards his people. Many Orthodox thinkers have since argued that iconoclasm, in the many forms in which it still exists within Western Christianity (the rejection of a full range of sacraments, or a distaste for the veneration of the saints, or a refusal to honour the icons of the Lord, the Virgin, or the saints) signals a serious matter of theological divergence, a different conception of what the communion of Christ is, and is not something that is peripheral or an incidental difference in the faith.

The whole teaching of the seven ecumenical councils is a very significant, and substantial part of the Orthodox tradition of faith. Orthodoxy clings to the Bible, the writings of the Fathers, and the decrees and creeds of the councils as some of its foundational and most important articulations of Christian truth. It regards the doctrine of the seven councils as an organic whole; a coherent mindset that is in harmony with the scriptural revelation, and with the living springs of spiritual life today. The harmony of the councils is one example (and a major one at that) of the

harmony of the Orthodox tradition as a whole. Orthodox saints who have taught after the age of the councils, such as St Photios (810–95) or the Hesychast Fathers such as St Gregory of Sinai or St Gregory Palamas, in the fourteenth century, have been very careful to guide all of their writing and reflection on the apostolic standards of the Scriptures, the patristic consensus, and the conciliar tradition. In this way they have secured their Orthodoxy in line with that of the saints from times past. It remains a mark of authentic Orthodox theologization.

St Photios, known as ‘the Great’ in Orthodox tradition, is an important theologian who stands as a bridge between the ancient and medieval ages of the church. In the course of a council, held at Constantinople in 867 when he was patriarch of the capital city, Photios’ arguments against papal supremacy (the first time the Orthodox world had faced up to the issue, although it had long been uneasy about the development) and the untraditional nature of the Latin *Filioque* theology,²⁷ resulted in the synodical condemnation of the pope. The ultimate alienation of the Byzantine and Roman churches has often been posited as happening in 1054, but the work of Photios marked the first time (there had been many prior incidental divisions and would be several others after) that the Eastern and Western churches officially and instinctively drew apart on profoundly significant theological issues, especially those related to the manner in which papal authority was felt by the Easterners to have changed the ancient pattern of the Christian ecumene.²⁸ The rift that yawned open at that time between the Latins and the Orthodox, on the understanding of the Trinity, was not a separate ‘doctrinal’ matter distinct from the ecclesiological tensions then in evidence; rather it was something, Photios argued, that was part of a general tendency of the medieval West, the ongoing alteration of the ancient tradition in the name of ‘development’. His treatise *On the Holy Spirit* became a foundational study for later Eastern Orthodox theology, and one that for centuries to come focused the mind of the Byzantine world on why it held Latin Catholicism in suspicion, both in terms of ecclesiastical organization and in relation to its understanding of Christian doctrine.

East and West: the parting of ways

After the last council in 787, the political affairs of the Byzantine empire went into a long decline, largely because of the pressure of the advance of Islam in the form of the Seljuk and Ottoman Turks. The emperor’s role in the gathering together of the synodical bishops, and his supervision of the proclamation of their decrees as part of Christian law for the Eastern churches, was progressively hindered by the political reality that saw more and more parts of the ancient Christian lands now under the control of Islamic rulers, the caliphs, and then the sultans. The weakened position of the Eastern Christians was exacerbated even more as a result of the Crusades. From the late eleventh century onwards western armies, inspired by the appeal of the pope for Christian soldiers to liberate the holy sites in Palestine, were regarded as a mixed blessing by the Christian emperors in Constantinople. Only forty years before the beginning of the First Crusade there had been a particularly bitter ‘falling out’ between the Papacy and the Constantinopolitan patriarchate. Pope Leo IX had, with the emperor’s support, sent legates, among them Cardinal Humbertus, to resolve the

several differences between the Latin and Greek churches that were currently causing friction. The list of problems included the *Filioque* clause, and the extent to which the pope was entitled to a jurisdiction of power over churches outside his immediate territory, but also included the sense of the widening gap that had grown up between Greek and Latin liturgical life and spiritual customs.

Far from being resolved, the argument between Humbertus and patriarch Michael Caerularios flared to new heights. It ended with the cardinal leaving a decree of excommunication against the patriarch on the altar of Hagia Sophia, in July 1054, and the Holy Synod of Constantinople, in return, excommunicating the papal legates. This was not an exchange of excommunications between the churches in any sense, but it had the effect of being a public severance of unity, and it is often cited as a significant 'moment' in the story of what was to become the long separation of the Orthodox and Latin catholic churches. Increasingly from that time onwards, the Papacy regarded the Greeks as having become 'schismatic' by having refused the rights of papal jurisdiction, and the Orthodox regarded the Western Church as having lapsed into heresy for elevating the Papacy to such extraordinary heights, while tampering with the ancient deposit of the faith in such matters as adding the *Filioque* to the Creed, and using unleavened bread in the Eucharist. Mutual respect, by the high Middle Ages, was at a low ebb. By 1190, the sense among the Orthodox that the long alienation had actually become a schism becomes apparent in the great Orthodox canonist Theodore Balsamon, the patriarch of Antioch, who wrote:

For many years now, the western church has been divided in spiritual communion from the other four patriarchates and has become alien to the Orthodox... so no Latin should be given communion unless he first declares that he will abstain from the doctrines and customs that separate him from us, and that he will be subject to the canons of the church in union with the Orthodox.²⁹

The sense of separation, even at this late date, however, was such that it could be 'repaired' by a simple statement of assent. Today there is a sense that things have gone further astray; and a simple individual statement of faith is not generally felt to be sufficient remedy to initiate intercommunion.

The worst fears of the Byzantines, in regard to the crusading movement, however, were realized in 1204, during the infamous Fourth Crusade, when the crusading fleet turned aside from their goal of Jerusalem, and settled into several days of looting after their involvement in the toppling of the incumbent Byzantine emperor. The behaviour of the Crusaders, who looted the Orthodox churches of their relics,³⁰ suggested to the Orthodox observers that not only were the Latins more hostile to them than their Islamic foes, but they clearly had little respect for them as fellow Christians. The invading force desecrated the altars and monasteries of the Byzantine capital, and even though the behaviour of the Crusaders was censured by the pope, it left an abiding sense among the Greeks that Latin Christianity had changed, substantively, had adopted a new attitude to fundamental matters of religion that, to them, now appeared alien and hostile to the churches of the East. From the time of the Fourth Crusade onwards there is clearly a sharp frost in the air in relation to all issues of Orthodox dialogue with the Western Church. There is in addition a pervasive sense (still discernible among many Orthodox in eastern Europe to whom one might talk to

this day) that the hostility of the Western Church, and its designs against Orthodoxy, were part of the reason why the Orthodox Church fell so heavily before the might of the Ottoman armies in 1453.

From that time onwards, most of the Orthodox world was to know subjection for centuries to come. It carried on its Christian life, for the most part, under sufferance of non-Christian powers. From this time to the nineteenth century the Orthodox Church lists a massive list of neo-martyrs and confessors among its ranks. There were attempts to broker reunion, and these were especially led by the Byzantine emperors of the day who were desperate to secure the political support of the Western Christian states (and thus needing the pope's blessing) as Islam advanced more and more aggressively against the East-Roman Christian empire. The first reunion council was that of Lyons in 1274. The Orthodox delegates then present agreed (though in as vague a way as they could) to recognize papal claims to supremacy, and also to recite the Creed with the *Filioque* added. Their 'acceptance' of these ideas led to their wholesale repudiation among the Orthodox at large. The emperor's sister is reputed to have replied to the news of Lyons with the words: 'Better my brother's empire should perish, than the unity of the Orthodox faith.'³¹ When the empire was once more in critical need of military aid, Emperor John VIII made a passage to the west, and personally attended the unionist Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438–9). The discussions at Florence were much more substantial than anything that had occurred since the time of the patriarch Photios in the ninth century.

The Orthodox delegates at Florence all signed the Act of Union, with the exception of Markos Eugenikos, the archbishop of Ephesus, who has since gained the title of 'Pillar of Orthodoxy'. But the terms of the union were never accepted by the Orthodox back in the home countries, and remained a policy adopted by a tiny minority of court clerics in the capital city. John, and his successor Emperor Constantine IX, the last of the Byzantine emperors, tried to act as if it were an accomplished fact, but it was indicative that the imperial court did not even proclaim publicly that the Act of Union had been signed until 1452, one year before the city's conquest. Many of the Orthodox signatories revoked their names as soon as they left Florence. In the West, by contrast the decree of union was widely announced as a 'return of the schismatic Greeks', and the subsequent evidence of the ineffectiveness of the union was equally widely interpreted as a sign of Orthodox perfidy. At this time, and having little hope that any promised military assistance would ever be forthcoming anyway, the Constantinopolitan Grand Duke Loukas Notaras is reported to have said: 'I would rather see the Muslim turban in the heart of the city, than to see the Latin mitre here.'³² The political end came quickly for the eastern Roman empire. The forces of Mehmet II, Ottoman sultan, attacked the capital on 7 April 1453, and despite a courageous defence of the Great Walls, broke through on 29 May. At dawn on that day, the last Christian Eucharist was celebrated in the great cathedral of Hagia Sophia. Faced with the prospect of death or enslavement, Latins and Greek Orthodox alike stood together to receive the holy gifts.

In the same period that Constantinople suffered her long decline, Russia rose to political eminence and, along with other eastern European states that retained some degree of free action (such as Wallachia and Moldavia, the precursors of modern Romania), they gave princely help to the wider Orthodox world, and acted as the patrons of Orthodoxy. One of the greatest casualties of the long decline was the

great diminution of the schools of the Orthodox at the very time the Renaissance was starting to take effect with the boom of knowledge and literacy in the West. Orthodoxy still suffers from the destruction of its schools to the present, and only in the late twentieth century did the signs change, promising a revival, and good new things for the future, as theological studies once more flourish in Russia and eastern Europe after decades of suppression.

The Slavic mission

When Byzantium was at its zenith, it expanded its sphere of influence by a vast system of federation and alliances with outlying states and peoples.³³ To be adopted by the emperor or to be married into the imperial family was a way in which a political web of treaty and interdependence was extended far and wide as a form of kinship relation of princes all looking to the Byzantine emperor as the centre. This inevitably involved the transmission of Christianity itself into the new regions with which Byzantium came into contact. With the exportation of books and literacy came Christianization of eastern European tribes, and their incorporation into the federation of the Christian imperium. One mission that would have a far-reaching effect was the evangelization of the pagan Slavs, who lay to the north and north-west of the Byzantine borders: the tribes of the Moravians, the Bulgars, Serbs, and Rus, all precursors of great Christian nations to come. Patriarch Photios of Constantinople inspired the Slavic mission and blessed two Greeks from Thessalonica to organize it: Constantine (826–69) and his brother Methodios (c.815–85). They are more commonly known as SS Cyril and Methodios.³⁴ As children they had already encountered Slavic tribes around their city and had gained familiarity with their language. Inventing a script, based upon Greek letters but with extra sound-signs added, Cyril and Methodios prepared extensive translations of church service books and Gospel translations into this dialect. It would have a vast transmission as ‘Church Slavonic’ and is still the common ecclesiastical language of Russia, Bulgaria, and Serbia.

When the two brothers left Constantinople they disseminated the literature, the language, and the spiritual culture of Orthodoxy wherever they went. Their mission was hampered by a conflict with the German missionaries who were also at work Latinizing Moravia and Bulgaria. Issues of divergence between the two Christian traditions soon led to acrimony, and the brothers appealed to the Papacy to limit the range of the hostile German preachers, and to allow them to use their vernacular method of spreading the Gospel. Pope Hadrian II gave them his support, but Cyril died in Rome, and when Methodios returned he found papal support actually counted for little on the missionary field. His work was hindered at every turn by German ecclesiastics in Moravia, and after his death his followers were expelled. However, the dramatic failure of the Byzantine-Slav mission in Moravia was not the case elsewhere. The work took root in Bulgaria, Serbia, and among the Rus, the ancestors of Russia. At the very end of the reign of Tsar Simeon (893–927) Bulgaria was recognized as an autonomous patriarchal church, the first national Christian church of the Slavs. Serbia became progressively Christianized in the later ninth century. The multi-patterned picture of the rise of Slavic Christian Orthodoxy is told below, under the rubric of the later ‘organization’ of the Orthodox churches.

Whether or not the general view of the ‘fall’ of the Christian East as partly caused, or at least hastened, by the abandonment of the Christian West is correct, it became a deep part of how the Orthodox in the late Middle Ages and into the present had the story of their decline recounted to them. But, as they declined, the Western Church grew in power and status, until the extraordinary events of the multiple scissions among it that are known to us today in the West as the Reformation. Orthodoxy was not able to repair the breach with the West before that extensive fragmentation happened. Even in the present day, its dialogues with Western Christianity are haunted by the suspicion that Western Christians have ‘ulterior motives’, and even now the relations between the patriarchate of Moscow and the Roman Papacy have been troubled by this ongoing issue, in the form of why the Vatican, after the end of communist control, restored an independent catholic hierarchy within the territory of Russia, at the same time as the pope called for restoration of communion between Western Catholicism and Orthodoxy. Issues that are for many Western Christians things long forgotten, or mere dim memories, are often to the fore of the collective memory and sense of identity of the Orthodox, most of them rooted in a church history which European textbooks still tend to neglect as too obscure for general issue. It will take a long time and much mutual honesty before dialogue can really flower into mutual understanding and reconciliation. The relations of the Orthodox with the Roman Catholic and Protestant worlds, in the meantime, are often badly served by the rhetoric and ceremonial of an ecumenics that sometimes tries to dispense with the laborious task of hearing one another clearly.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCHES FROM MEDIEVAL TO MODERN TIMES

The extension of the Orthodox Church

In the course of the twentieth century Christianity, demographically speaking, became the most extensive and universal religion known to human history.³⁵ At the beginning of the third millennium there were a total of 2,000 million Christians on earth – one-third of the entire world’s population. Among that number the Orthodox are present as 210 million souls bearing witness to the history of the Church, its active present, its anticipated future. One of the important aspects of that witness is the complete unanimity in the faith of all of the Orthodox believers, and their common allegiance to the self-same spiritual ethos of their theological tradition. It is this unanimous bonding and spiritual unity which constitutes their very identity as those who possess the *phronema Christou* (mind of Christ), and share the ancient faith of the apostles and martyrs, who handed it on to them authoritatively and charismatically.

The term ‘Orthodox’ originally came into popular usage in the Eastern Christian world as a descriptor of the church communities in the sixth century, to distinguish those who accepted the decrees of the Council of Chalcedon (451) from those who refused them.³⁶ It grew up as a party term, therefore, meant to distinguish the Byzantine Christians (and the Latins along with them) from those dissenting from the Christological settlement of Chalcedon. In subsequent times the anti-Chalcedonian churches of the East have also adopted the epithet, applying it in its wider patristic