

Why do we call ourselves "Catholic Orthodox" and not just Christians?

The words *catholic* and *orthodox* were used by the ancient fathers of the Church who traditionally are the Christian writers of the first few centuries. They used these words to describe the church as it related to its place, mission and message to the world.

Ignatius of Antioch was the first to use the Greek word **katholikos** (καθολικός), meaning "universal", "complete" and "whole" to describe the church. It is from this word *katholikos* ("according to the whole") that we get the word **catholic**. When Ignatius wrote the Letter to the Smyrnaeans in about the year 107 and used the word *catholic*, he used it as if it were a word already in use in his time. This has led many scholars to conclude that the title *Catholic Church* with all its connotations may have been in use as early as the last quarter of the 1st century.

The word *orthodox* was first used early on to distinguish the faith from various different belief systems that were quite different from the original message. It is a combination of the two Greek words **orthos** and **doxa**. *Orthos* means "straight" or "correct"; *doxa* means "glory", "worship" as well as "doctrine". So the word *orthodox* signifies both "proper worship" and "correct doctrine". Just as Jesus Christ, true Orthodox Christians are not defined by the company they keep, but by living the faith. The important thing to remember is that both words were used to describe the church's place, mission and message to the world way before they were used as objective titles of particular churches, as they are only understood to this day. In order to fully understand their original meaning and use in the early church, we will proceed by asking a few questions so that we can better understand what it means to be orthodox.

What makes one Orthodox?

Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos of Nafpaktis Greece, a modern-day church Father, summarizes it this way: What makes man an

Orthodox is not only the persistence on the external aspects of tradition, but **the experience of its inner life**, which is the ascetic method - purification, illumination and theosis. This method, these stages of spiritual life are the foundation of the dogmas, the basis of ecclesiastical art, but also the creative cause of the ethos and customs of our people; because this theology saturated our forefathers prior to our westernization. For this reason we must struggle to keep this inner aspect of tradition, the method of Orthodox piety, through which we are healed. Then we are truly zealots of patristic traditions. For, even if we have the best intentions; outside of this ascetic, therapeutic method, we run the risk of becoming enemies and adversaries of Orthodoxy.

What is not orthodox?

Seeking worldly recognition in the eyes of men and a corrupted society by merely understanding the administrative, legal unity of the church (instead of true, mystical unity which only can exist in the authentic orthodox way of life) is spiritually detrimental, utterly false and not at all Orthodox. The forming of self-styled organizations in mutual recognition with the purpose of denouncing others as being "not canonical" or in proclaiming themselves as the only "legitimate" ones, constitutes the grave sin of "*condemning one's brother and sister*"! (St.Ephraim; *Matthew 20:25-28*)

How do we seek a life of holiness?

In the seventh century St. Isaac the Syrian wrote the following in regards to living the Christian life:

"Let yourself be persecuted, but do not persecute others. Let yourself be crucified, but do not crucify others. Let yourself be insulted, but do not insult others.

Let yourself be slandered, but do not slander others. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

Such is the sign of purity. Suffer with the sick. Be afflicted with sinners. Exult with those who repent. Be the friend of all.

But in your spirit remain alone. Spread your

cloak over anyone who falls into sin and shield him. And if you cannot take his fault on yourself and accept punishment in his place, then do not destroy his character."

What is the meaning of salvation?

"I believe, along with the Church and according to the Tradition of the Church that everyone who believes in Christ in an orthodox manner, who fulfills His commandments, and who is cleansed from his transgressions of the commandments through repentance, will be saved."

[St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, Collected Letters, Moscow, 18, On love, mental prayer and repentance]

What is a church?

"The church has no need of external bonds to be one. It is neither a pope nor a patriarch nor an archbishop which unites the church. The local church is something complete. Besides, the relations of the churches are relations between churches, and not relations which belong exclusively to their bishops ... - A bishop cannot be conceived of without a flock or independent of his flock." [Dr. Kalomiros, in *Against False Union*, 1967]

Does patriarchalism define the church?

There is no Orthodox Canon or doctrine requiring that every canonical, local or world-wide jurisdiction must be in full communion with the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople (Istanbul), Turkey, or any other Patriarch. Though the Patriarch in Constantinople of times long passed has the historic title of "**first among equals**" among all Orthodox Patriarchs, serving many times as its spokesman, but at no time exercising "temporal jurisdiction" over all Orthodox dioceses around the globe. Canonically, he is merely the 270th successor of the Apostle Andrew.

What is "canonical"?

The essence of being canonical constitutes following the teachings of Jesus Christ in:

1. The dogmatic proclamations and the doctrines of the Seven Ecumenical Councils;

2. A diocese or church body being in communion (whether formally or not) with all jurisdictions or branches which have remained faithful to the Orthodox Christian way of life in both teaching and practice;
3. The bishops having a legitimate Orthodox Apostolic Succession and Tradition. This means that Apostolic Succession is always rooted in Apostolic Tradition, not a mere independent laying on of hands.

In all due respect, being part of a particular branch or Synod obviously does not make one canonical. This is especially crucial, as certain parts of Orthodoxy in modern times seem to have changed the Orthodox understanding of 'canonical' into a new version of papacy. Their definition of 'canonical' is focused on being recognized, for instance, by the Patriarch of Constantinople, as if he were some sort of Eastern pope. They appear to have adopted the ecclesiology of Roman Catholicism by making legitimacy or canonicity dependent upon recognition by a particular Patriarch or Pope. It is as if by being in communion with a particular segment of Orthodoxy, whether Patriarchal or not, somehow would make one Orthodox. This "neopapal" concept has no historical precedent in Holy Orthodoxy and contradicts centuries of Orthodox tradition back to the times of the Holy Apostles (*Luke 9:49-50*).

What is Catholic Orthodox Unity?

Today, if one looks to the Eastern Orthodox, you will see pretty much how the early churches were governed and run independently of each other. The eastern churches better known as Russian, Greek, Coptic, Etc. Orthodox still maintain much of the way they were organized in ancient times. While in the west we see the Pope in Rome heading over the Roman Catholic Church as one supreme, infallible Papal leader. We know this to be an incorrect way of leading our Lord's Church. If we look to history we see that every time Papal supremacy has been exerted we have splits within the Church, only just starting in 1054 A.D. Since then there have been many more small ones. We have seen the errors which have led to the Reformation, we have seen the Anglican Split and also in the 1860's we see the beginning of Independent Catholicism with the

emergence of the Old Catholic Church of Utrecht, Holland when once again during Vatican I, it was declared that the Pope was infallible. It seems that every time the Pope makes an affirmation of his authority a split occurs in our Lord's Body. This authoritarian approach to Church governance is an error, we have seen it only lead to heartbreak and destruction of our Church. Our Lord's prayer in Holy Gospel of St John was for Unity in love, not just conformity! Jesus wants us all to express our Love for Him however it may move a tradition within orthodoxy and fullness of the sacramental faith.

How do I join the Independent Catholic Orthodox Church?

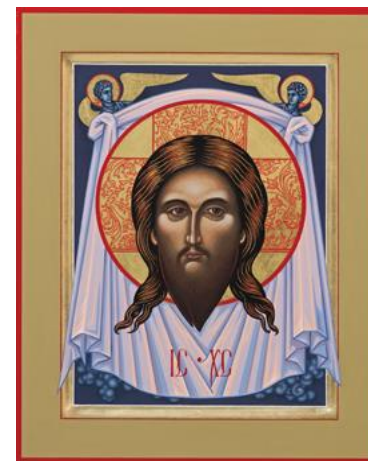
If you are a baptized or dedicated Christian, all you need to do is come to Church and introduce yourself to the priest or deacon, and tell one of them that you wish to join. If you have not been baptized the priest or deacon will start you on instruction and meet with you regularly until your baptism. Adults and children old enough to understand fully what they are doing, will be Baptized, Confirmation and receive the Eucharist all in the same ceremony. All priests in our diocese are delegated to Confirm as in the Eastern Orthodox Church. There are times and situations that an infant will be Baptized, Confirmed and receive the Eucharist as practiced in the early church.

Daily Prayer

Let us pray that we will not allow the negative state of others to transform our hearts, but rather that we be conformed by the love of Christ. May we always recognize the love of God in and among us, and stand firm in our opposition to any form of hatred, bigotry and malice. In the challenges of life, let us always remember that our struggle is spiritual. It is not flesh and blood that we wrestle against, but principalities and powers, rulers of darkness in this world. We so much desire, that we may be gentle, yet firm ministers or servants to others, and that we always will be protected by God and His holy Angels from all evil. Amen!



True Orthodoxy



**Christianity
or
Churchianity?**



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