

EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCHES

GENERAL STATEMENT¹

History.—The Eastern Orthodox Catholic Churches, known historically as the “Eastern Church,” and in modern times as the “Greek Orthodox Church,” the “Eastern Catholic Church,” the “Holy Orthodox Catholic Apostolic Church,” and popularly as the “Greek Church,” are the modern representatives of the Catholic Church of the Byzantine Empire. As the distinction between the Eastern and Western Roman Empires developed, there also grew up differences between the ritual and doctrinal positions held in the church in its original eastern homelands and those which developed in the daughter church in the Latin West and centered in the Roman Papacy. Toward the ninth century these became still more evident and culminated, in 1054, in complete separation between the Patriarch or Bishop of Rome and the four Eastern Patriarchs. The Eastern Church at that time comprised four ecclesiastical units, the Patriarchates of Constantinople, Jerusalem, Antioch, and Alexandria. These were and are coordinate in authority, though honorary precedence was and is accorded to the Patriarch of Constantinople as holder of the ecclesiastical throne of the imperial city of the Eastern Empire, just as the Pope of Rome had been similarly honored as holder of the ecclesiastical throne of the imperial city of the earlier, world-wide, Roman Empire.

With the capture of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453, and the assumption by the Turkish Government of the right of approval in the election of the Patriarchs, there developed a diversity of ecclesiastical organization. The Patriarchs of Jerusalem, Antioch, and Alexandria, while still according a certain precedence of honor to the Patriarch of Constantinople, preserved their ecclesiastical independence. With the development of the Russian Empire, the Russian Church, hitherto nominally subordinate to the Constantinople Patriarchate, organized its own ecclesiastical government, first, about the year 1589, in the form of a Russian Patriarchate, and later, in 1721, under the supreme authority of a Holy Governing Synod, with headquarters at St. Petersburg (now Leningrad). Similarly, after Greece had become independent, the Church of Greece established, in 1833, the Holy Synod of Greece at Athens. Various other metropolitan sees have also claimed and acquired independence, including those of Serbia, Roumania, Bulgaria, Albania, and Cyprus. Since the World War, independent national Orthodox Churches have been proclaimed in Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Finland, and Czechoslovakia; but the permanent status of these is not yet definitely agreed upon.

These different organizations, although independent of each other ecclesiastically, agree in doctrine, and, essentially, in form of worship, and together constitute what is called the “Eastern Orthodox Catholic Churches.”

Of these churches, seven have been represented in the United States by regular church organizations. These are the Russian Orthodox, the Greek Orthodox (Hellenic), the Serbian Orthodox, the Syrian Orthodox, the Albanian Orthodox, the Bulgarian Orthodox, and the Roumanian Orthodox. Only one of these, the Russian Orthodox Church, had a general ecclesiastical organization previous to

¹This statement was furnished by Rev. Boris R. Burden, editor, *The Orthodox Catholic Review*.

the World War. To that Russian Mission all the Orthodox Churches in America were nominally subject, although they had their own administrators under the Russian archbishop.

Following the World War and the Russian Revolution the various racial and linguistic groups broke away from the Russian jurisdiction in America and set up separate national missions in this country corresponding to the national churches in their ancestral homelands. Rival groups and leaders appeared corresponding to the political factions and divisions in the chaotic European situation.

The Russians have four different factions each claiming that its prelate is the true Russian Archbishop of America. The Greeks have two and the Syrians three divisions in similar situations. The Serbians have a bishop governing part of their parishes in this country. In every group there are numerous independent parishes and clergy which refuse to recognize any of the rival bishops. Each of the national churches or missions has reported separately, but in each group there are many local churches not included, owing to the chaotic conditions prevailing at the present time.

In an effort to unite all the Orthodox Catholic people in America and develop a single American organization of the church in this country, as well as to provide for the next American generation of Orthodox people, the five Russian bishops in America, headed by the Metropolitan Platon, ordered the establishment of an independent American Orthodox Catholic Church under the name of "The Holy Eastern Orthodox Catholic and Apostolic Church in North America." This body has been chartered by both civil and ecclesiastical authorities in America (as a religious corporation under the laws of the State of Massachusetts, December 1, 1927) and is proceeding gradually to unite under its North American Holy Synod the members and clergy of various racial and national origins who desire to enter an independent American Orthodox Catholic Church. Its North American Holy Synod has published in English and foreign languages its charter, constitution, and other important documents and also publishes in English a bimonthly organ, *The Orthodox Catholic Review*, from its temporary headquarters in Brooklyn.

Doctrine.—The doctrine of the Eastern Orthodox Churches is founded on the Holy Scriptures, the Holy Traditions, and the dogmatic decisions of the seven Ecumenical Councils. The Holy Scriptures are interpreted strictly in accordance with the teachings of the seven Ecumenical Councils and the Holy Fathers. The Niceo-Constantinopolitan Creed is held only in its original authoritative form without the Roman-Latin addition of the "Filioque" phrase. Recognizing Christ as the only head of the earthly as well as the heavenly church, they do not accept the dogma of the Pope as the special representative or Vicar of Christ on earth, and the infallible head of His earthly church. According to their teaching, infallibility belongs to the whole assembly of true believers, to the "Ecclesia," or Church, which is represented by its council legally called together and whose decisions are confirmed by the consensus of the church.

They believe in the procession of the Holy Ghost from the Father alone; honor Mary as the Mother of God, and honor the nine orders of angels and the saints; do not define as dogma the doctrine of the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary, but hold the true Catholic doctrine of the virgin birth of Christ. They reject the doctrine of the surplus merits of the saints and the doctrine of indulgences. They reverence relics of the saints, pictures of holy subjects, and the cross, but forbid the use of carved images. They accept seven sacraments, baptism, anointing (confirmation or chrismation), communion, penance, holy orders, marriage, and holy unction. Baptism of either infants or adults by three-fold immersion is recognized as the only proper form, although other forms are accepted of necessity or in the case of converts who have previously been

baptized. The sacrament of anointing with "chrism," or holy oil, is administered immediately after that of baptism and the chrismated infant or adult is thereafter a full communicant in the Eucharist.

The doctrine of transubstantiation is taught. In the Eucharist, leavened bread is used, being consecrated and soaked in the consecrated chalice and then received by all members of the Eastern Orthodox Churches after confession and absolution. Children under 7 years of age, however, receive the sacrament without confession. Holy unction is administered to the sick, and not alone to those in danger of death. The Church rejects the doctrine of purgatory, but believes in the beneficial effect of prayer for the dead by the living and for the living by the dead. It rejects the doctrine of predestination and considers that for justification both faith and works are necessary.

In the Eastern Orthodox Catholic Church, membership has two distinct but frequently confused meanings. All persons who have been baptized in the church and received the sacrament of chrismation (confirmation) which immediately follows baptism, are communicant members of the church, participating in the sacrament of the Eucharist. Parish membership, however, is counted more frequently by families than by communicants, because the head of each family is the voting member of the parish congregation. This fact gives rise to confusion and uncertainty of statistics of all Eastern Orthodox Churches.

Organization.—There are three orders of the ministry—deacons, priests, and bishops. The deacons assist in the work of the parish and in the service of the sacraments. Priests and deacons are of two orders, secular and monastic. Marriage is allowed to candidates for the diaconate and the priesthood, but is forbidden after ordination. The episcopate is, as a rule, confined to members of the monastic order. A married priest, should his wife die, may enter a monastery and take the monastic vows, and is eligible to the episcopate. The parishes are, as a rule, in the care of the secular priests.

Monks and nuns are gathered in monastic establishments or are scattered out in missionary work. In some monastic colonies the members live in communities, while in others they lead a secluded, hermitical life, each in his own cell. There is but one order, and the vows for all are the same, obedience, chastity, prayer, fasting, and poverty.

The organization for the general government of the different Eastern Orthodox Churches varies in different countries. In general, there is a council at the head of which, as president, is a bishop elected by the ecclesiastical representatives of the people. Historically, and at present in some cases, this presiding bishop is called the Patriarch, and has special colleagues and officers for the purpose of governing his flock. The largest or most important of the bishoprics connected with the patriarchate, or synod, are called "metropolitan sees," though the title now carries with it no special ecclesiastical authority. In early times, both the clergy and the laity of the local churches had a voice in the election of bishops, priests, and deacons, but of late that right has been much restricted, and at present the priests and deacons are usually appointed by the bishops, and the bishops are elected by the clergy.

The service of the Eastern Orthodox Churches is solemn and elaborate. It is essentially that of the earlier centuries of Christianity, and is most fully and completely observed in the monasteries. There are no sculptured images and no instrumental music, although there are pictorial representations of Christ, the apostles and saints, and scenes in Bible history. The most important service is the divine liturgy, the chief part of which is the celebration of the Eucharist. There are three liturgies, those of St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil the Great, and St. Gregory, the last called the "Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts," for which the holy gifts are prepared at a preceding service. There are no so-called "silent

liturgies" or "private masses," and two liturgies are not allowed to be performed in the same church simultaneously, nor can a liturgy be performed by the same priest, or on the same altar, twice a day. A "corporal," otherwise known as an "antimins," a cloth with a particle of the holy remains of some saint sewed into it, and especially blessed by a bishop for every church, is necessary to the performance of the liturgy. Moreover, a priest may perform it only when he is fasting. Besides the liturgy, the church has vespers, vigils, matins, hours, and special prayers for various occasions and needs. The several services named consist of readings from the Old and New Testaments, supplicatory prayers, thanksgiving, glorifying hymns, etc.

Statistics.—The churches grouped under Eastern Orthodox Churches in 1926, 1916, and 1906 are listed below, with the principal statistics as reported for the three periods. It will be noted that three churches presented in 1916 and 1926—Albanian, Bulgarian, and Roumanian—were not reported in 1906.

Certain small groups or movements which have sprung from the Old Catholics in America must not be confused with the Eastern Orthodox Churches. Some of these Old Catholics use the word "Orthodox" in their names (e. g., African Orthodox Church), but none of them has any relation with Eastern Orthodox Catholic Churches either in orders or sacraments.

SUMMARY OF STATISTICS FOR THE EASTERN ORTHODOX CHURCHES, 1926, 1916, AND 1906

DENOMINATION AND CENSUS YEAR	Total number of churches	Number of members	VALUE OF CHURCH EDIFICES		EXPENDITURES DURING YEAR		SUNDAY SCHOOLS	
			Churches reporting	Amount	Churches reporting	Amount	Churches reporting	Number of scholars
1926								
Total for the group.....	446	259,394	397	\$11,789,108	423	\$2,044,415	198	14,195
Albanian Orthodox Church.....	9	1,993	5	66,000	9	14,850	.....	.....
Bulgarian Orthodox Church.....	4	937	3	32,000	3	5,230	1	55
Greek Orthodox Church (Hellenic).....	153	119,495	131	5,011,718	145	958,809	73	5,796
Roumanian Orthodox Church.....	34	18,853	30	621,500	32	92,124	18	1,370
Russian Orthodox Church.....	199	95,134	187	4,883,515	195	838,453	90	5,770
Serbian Orthodox Church.....	17	13,775	16	272,000	15	67,978	7	497
Syrian Orthodox Church.....	30	9,207	25	902,375	24	66,971	9	707
1916								
Total for the group.....	301	249,840	263	3,576,884	283	856,968	151	9,118
Albanian Orthodox Church.....	2	410	.....	.....	2	2,482	.....	.....
Bulgarian Orthodox Church.....	4	1,992	4	18,500	4	5,051	.....	.....
Greek Orthodox Church (Hellenic).....	87	119,871	59	1,115,464	74	230,288	17	1,088
Roumanian Orthodox Church.....	2	1,994	1	18,000	2	11,520	2	123
Russian Orthodox Church.....	109	99,681	164	2,137,713	165	549,776	116	6,739
Serbian Orthodox Church.....	12	14,301	10	106,700	12	29,353	8	653
Syrian Orthodox Church.....	25	11,591	25	180,507	24	28,498	8	515
1906								
Total for the group.....	411	129,606	75	964,791	.....	.....	7	509
Greek Orthodox Church.....	334	90,751	19	385,800	.....	.....	4	371
Russian Orthodox Church.....	59	19,111	46	484,371	.....	.....	1	75
Serbian Orthodox Church.....	10	15,742	8	62,460	.....	.....	1	13
Syrian Orthodox Church.....	8	4,002	2	32,160	.....	.....	1	50

SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

STATISTICS

The data given for 1926 represent 30 active Syrian Orthodox churches, all reported as being in urban territory. The total membership was 9,207, comprising 4,725 males and 4,482 females. The classification of membership by sex and by age was reported by all of the 30 churches, including 29 which reported members under 13 years of age.

The membership of the Syrian Orthodox Church is of two types, communicant members, or all persons, including infants, baptized and confirmed in the church, and parish members, or the families of the congregation, the head of the family being the voting member.

Comparative data, 1906-1926.—Table 1 presents, in convenient form for comparison, a summary of the available statistics of this church for the censuses of 1926, 1916, and 1906. It is probable that the decrease in membership is accounted for in part by differences in the method of reporting, as well as by a decrease in immigration.

TABLE 1.—COMPARATIVE SUMMARY, 1906 TO 1926: SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

ITEM	1926	1916	1906
Churches (local organizations).....	30	25	8
Increase over preceding census:			
Number.....	5	17	
Per cent ¹			
Members	9,207	11,591	4,002
Increase ² over preceding census:			
Number.....	-2,384	7,589	
Per cent.....	-20.6	189.6	
Average membership per church.....	307	464	500
Church edifices:			
Number.....	29	26	2
Value—Churches reporting.....	25	25	2
Amount reported.....	\$902,375	\$180,507	\$32,160
Average per church.....	\$36,095	\$7,220	\$16,080
Debt—Churches reporting.....	17	16	
Amount reported.....	\$122,550	\$70,779	
Parsonages:			
Value—Churches reporting.....	7	6	
Amount reported.....	\$37,200	\$14,500	
Debt—Churches reporting.....	3		
Amount reported.....	\$11,000		
Expenditures during year:			
Churches reporting.....	24	24	
Amount reported.....	\$66,971	\$28,498	
Current expenses and improvements.....	\$59,268	\$24,288	
Benevolences, missions, etc.....	\$7,703	\$4,210	
Average expenditure per church.....	\$2,790	\$1,187	
Sunday schools:			
Churches reporting.....	9	8	1
Officers and teachers.....	31	31	1
Scholars.....	707	515	50

¹ Per cent not shown where base is less than 100.

² A minus sign (—) denotes decrease.

State tables.—Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5 present the statistics for the Syrian Orthodox Church by States. Table 2 gives for each State the number and membership of the churches and the membership classified by sex. Table 3 gives for

selected States the number and membership of the churches for the three censuses from 1906 to 1926, together with the membership for 1926 classified as under 13 years of age and 13 years of age and over. Table 4 shows the value of church edifices and the debt on such edifices, for 1926 alone. Table 5 presents, for 1926, the church expenditures, showing separately the amounts expended for current expenses and improvements, and for benevolences, etc., and also gives the data for Sunday schools. Separate presentation in Tables 4 and 5 is limited to those States in which three or more churches reported the principal items shown (values or expenditures), in order to avoid disclosing the financial statistics of any individual church. The States omitted from these tables can be determined by referring to the complete list which appears in Table 2.

TABLE 2.—NUMBER AND MEMBERSHIP OF CHURCHES, AND MEMBERSHIP BY SEX, BY STATES, 1926: SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

GEOGRAPHIC DIVISION AND STATE	Num-ber of churches	Number of members	MEMBERSHIP BY SEX		
			Male	Female	Males per 100 females ⁽¹⁾
United States.....	30	9,207	4,725	4,482	105.4
New England:					
Massachusetts.....	3	1,218	700	518	135.1
Rhode Island.....	1	235	110	125	85.0
Connecticut.....	1	177	101	76	-----
Middle Atlantic:					
New York.....	3	1,506	725	781	92.8
New Jersey.....	1	355	170	185	91.9
Pennsylvania.....	9	2,603	1,377	1,226	112.3
East North Central:					
Ohio.....	1	234	110	124	88.7
Indiana.....	1	39	21	18	-----
Michigan.....	1	233	126	107	117.8
West North Central:					
Iowa.....	2	524	280	244	114.8
Kansas.....	1	73	38	35	-----
South Atlantic:					
District of Columbia.....	1	105	65	40	-----
West Virginia.....	1	550	200	350	57.1
Georgia.....	1	161	78	83	-----
East South Central:					
Mississippi.....	1	44	24	20	-----
West South Central:					
Oklahoma.....	1	850	450	400	112.5
Texas.....	1	300	150	150	100.0

¹ Ratio not shown where number of females is less than 100.

TABLE 3.—NUMBER AND MEMBERSHIP OF CHURCHES, 1906 TO 1926, AND MEMBERSHIP BY AGE, 1926, BY STATES: SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

[Separate presentation is limited to States having 3 or more churches in either 1926, 1916, or 1906]

STATE	NUMBER OF CHURCHES			NUMBER OF MEMBERS			MEMBERSHIP BY AGE, 1926		
	1926	1916	1906	1926	1916	1906	Under 13 years	13 years and over	Per cent under 13
United States.....	30	25	8	9,207	11,591	4,002	2,755	6,452	29.9
Massachusetts.....	3	4	3	1,218	3,930	1,200	354	864	29.1
New York.....	3	3	2	1,506	2,720	2,435	493	1,013	32.7
Pennsylvania.....	9	7	1	2,603	2,496	95	957	1,646	36.8
Other States.....	15	11	2	3,880	2,445	272	951	2,929	24.5

TABLE 4.—VALUE OF CHURCH PROPERTY, AND CHURCH DEBT, BY STATES, 1926:
SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

[Separate presentation is limited to States having 3 or more churches reporting value of edifices]

STATE	Total number of churches	Number of church edifices	VALUE OF CHURCH EDIFICES		DEBT ON CHURCH EDIFICES		VALUE OF PARSONAGES		DEBT ON PARSONAGES	
			Churches reporting	Amount	Churches reporting	Amount	Churches reporting	Amount	Churches reporting	Amount
United States	30	29	25	\$902, 375	17	\$122, 550	7	\$37, 200	3	\$11, 000
New York	3	6	3	525, 100	3	48, 400		(¹)		
Pennsylvania	9	8	8	97, 775	5	13, 850	3	17, 500	2	6, 000
Other States ²	18	15	14	279, 500	9	60, 300	4	19, 700	1	5, 000

¹ Amount included in figures shown for "Other States," to avoid disclosing the statistics of individual churches.

² The figures for value of parsonages include data for 1 church in New York.

TABLE 5.—CHURCH EXPENDITURES AND SUNDAY SCHOOLS, BY STATES, 1926:
SYRIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

[Separate presentation is limited to States having 3 or more churches reporting expenditures]

STATE	Total number of churches	EXPENDITURES DURING YEAR				SUNDAY SCHOOLS		
		Churches reporting	Total amount	For current expenses and improvements	For benevolences, missions, etc.	Churches reporting	Officers and teachers	Scholars
United States	30	21	\$66, 971	\$59, 268	\$7, 703	9	31	707
New York	3	3	11, 900	10, 400	1, 500	1	12	80
Pennsylvania	9	8	20, 931	18, 388	2, 543	2	3	144
Other States	18	13	34, 140	30, 480	3, 660	6	16	483

HISTORY, DOCTRINE, AND ORGANIZATION ¹

The churches of this body represent the immigration into the United States of communities from Syria connected with the Orthodox Patriarchates of Antioch or Jerusalem. Before the World War, although they all had priests of their own, as a body they were under the general supervision of a coadjutor bishop of the Russian Orthodox Church. In doctrine and polity they are in harmony with the Russian Orthodox Church, and their history is included in that of the Eastern Orthodox Churches and the Russian Orthodox Church.

The Syrian Orthodox Catholic parishes in America are divided in their allegiance. The Syrian Mission, founded under the Russian jurisdiction and finally developed into the Archdiocese of Brooklyn, has remained staunchly faithful to the canonical Russian authority over Orthodox churches in America. The vast majority of Syrian Orthodox people in America still adhere to that unity in which their mission was founded, but two groups have separated themselves from the Russian jurisdiction and remain independent.

¹ This statement, which is substantially the same as that published in Part II of the Report on Religious Bodies, 1916, has been revised by Rev. Boris R. Burden, editor, *The Orthodox Catholic Review*, and approved by him in its present form.