

There are many books by leading Orthodox theologians and scholars on all aspects of the Orthodox Church and this leaflet series provides some basic information in the hope that it might prompt further enquiry.

LEAFLETS IN THIS INTRODUCTION TO ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY SERIES:

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All text in these leaflets is mine except where indicated, therefore any errors of fact or in grammar are mine. I should be grateful to have those errors pointed out so that corrections can be made.

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"The Orthodox Church.....has preserved unadulterated the first and most ancient ecclesiastical tradition and teaching, has avoided innovations and personal interpretations of the Holy Scriptures and dogmas of the faith, and is administered according to the ancient synodical system under local bishops in collaboration with the faithful and successive groups of both local and broader episcopal synods, of which the highest is the Ecumenical Synod, that of the Orthodox worldwide. The basic administrative canons, the details of which are regulated according to local needs, have been determined by the seven ecumenical synods. The Church is not managed by regional states in which it resides, although it collaborates in good works when asked to do so.

Within the entire Orthodox Church there is absolute cooperation in goodwill and mutual respect. Perchance minor human problems are addressed successfully through the application of the evangelical spirit."

*Bartholomew, Patriarch of Constantinople, from
"Encountering the Mystery."
ISBN 978-0-385-51813-0*

Orthodox Community of Archangel Michael
and Holy Piran, Cornwall.
www.orthodoxincornwall.org.uk

In the Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain.
Exarchate of Western Europe and Ireland.
www.thyateira.org.uk

Ecumenical Patriarchate.
Οἰκουµενικὸν Πατριαρχεῖον.
www.ec-patr.org



Agia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) Constantinople.

Fr.N.04.15

Introduction to Orthodox Christianity: Church Buildings

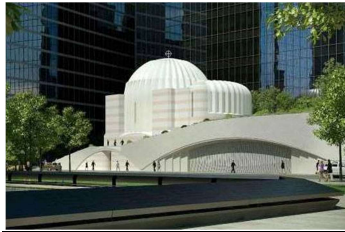


Top - simple Orthodox church on the Greek island of Alonissos and below - the church of Saint Nicholas, Cardiff.

From Apostolic times, whatever styles of architecture religious or secular may have preceded them, Orthodox places of worship took on their own distinctive style which continues to the present day. Broadly described as Roman/Greek basilican, this does not mean that every Orthodox church is identical in appearance.

With Russia's conversion to Christianity in 988AD an architectural style appeared complimenting the established and inherited Byzantine pattern, particularly in the familiar Russian 'onion' domes.

Churches may be square, oblong, or cruciform. There may be one or more domes. With an apsidal east end the three main divisions are sanctuary, nave and narthex. Some churches are of a 'modernistic' design - see proposed Saint Nicholas church, New York, below - the former church having been destroyed in the attack on the Twin Towers, in 2001. Santiago Calatrava was greatly inspired by the churches of Agia Sophia and Holy Saviour, Chora, in Constantinople in producing his design accepted by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.



In the United Kingdom it is not uncommon for existing buildings from other ecclesiastical traditions to be adapted to suit Orthodox needs.

Design, materials and finishes vary. Whilst the architecture can and often does disclose a building's Orthodoxy it is the interior which will always confirm its true identity.

Ideally the interior ceiling and walls will be decorated with icons painted (sometimes also mosaic) on the surfaces or on boards. On these and the iconostasis - the screen between nave and sanctuary - the icons will be in a familiar order and positioning. Together with the holy icons, the furnishings, often with little seating except when necessary, all add to this identity.

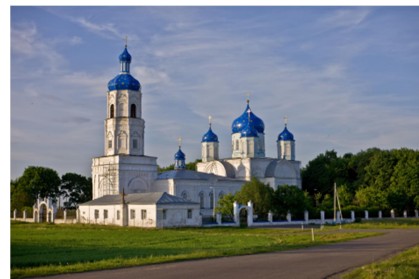
All of what is written above is of importance after it is understood that large or small, magnificent or simple, the building's purpose is that it should become a 'sacred space' set aside to house the gathered members of the Church in worship and fellowship and if whatever is contained within the building and even its architecture aids this then so much the better. Also, a building can exhibit in its features a witness to the God to whose glory it has been constructed and in due time consecrated, with holy relics sealed within the Holy Table (altar).

"A temple has sometimes a single dome, sometimes many domes. One dome serves as a symbol of the One Head of the Church, Jesus Christ. Three domes typify the three persons of the Holy Trinity. Five are symbolical of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Four Evangelists. Each dome - and where there is no dome the apex of the temple - is crowned by a Cross, the emblem of victory."

The "Hapgood" Service Book. xxviii.



One of the unique 'painted' Orthodox churches of Bucovina Region, Romania.

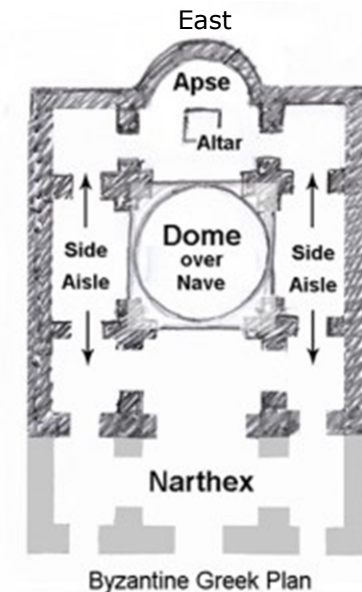


Russian five domed church with separate bell tower.

"O Lord of Hosts, listen to my prayer; O God of Jacob, be attentive." From Psalm 83, a psalm used at the consecration of a church.

"And Jacob awoke out of his sleep and said 'the Lord is in this place and I knew it not.' And he was afraid and said, 'How fearful is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.' And Jacob rose up in the morning, and took the stone he had laid there by his head, and set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it. And he called the name of that place, the House of God." Book of Genesis chapter 28.

An Orthodox church is a temple - a place set apart for the worship of the Triune God - and though it serves many needs associated with that prime purpose it is not merely a utilitarian construction.



This simple diagramme shows a square church with added narthex. Within there are special places set apart for particular purposes, i.e., table to the left (north) of the altar for the preparation of bread and wine for Communion, another to the right of the altar for storing items used in the services. There are places for those taking part in services. Other buildings may be attached to provide a meeting place and various offices. In this series **GLOSSARY** has many of the words which would be found in a detailed description of an Orthodox church.