

ORTHODOXY

BACKGROUND

The Orthodox Churches (Eastern and Oriental) form the second-largest Christian denomination, with approximately 280 million baptized members. Orthodox Christians live in Southeast and Eastern Europe, the Eastern Mediterranean, in the Middle East and in the territory of the former Soviet Union, and have played a prominent role in the local history and culture. The Orthodox Churches operate as communions of self-governed churches, each moderated by its own bishops in local councils. A significant degree of self-government and diversity exists inside local churches too.

The Church rejects all violence –including defensive acts– that are prompted by hate, racism, revenge, selfishness, economic exploitation, nationalism, or personal glory. Such motives, which are all too often the hidden springs behind the waging of so-called ‘just wars,’ are never blessed by God. Even in those rare situations in which the use of force is not absolutely prohibited, the Orthodox Church still discerns a need for spiritual and emotional healing among all persons involved.

“For the Life of the World: Toward a Social Ethos of the Orthodox Church”
Official document of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, 2020

NO VIOLENCE?

All forms of violence, terror and radicalism are condemned in the Orthodox Church. Violence is considered to be “sin par excellence” and as such is unacceptable, though there are cases where violence, as a form of self-defense, is unavoidable. Despite this official teaching, here have been cases of violence, especially in periods of war. Cases of abuse of people of different beliefs have been reported all over the centuries, and Jews have been a regular target, while, in the last years, a typical such target is refugees and immigrants that arrive from the “global south”. While most of the times such violence is denounced by the Church leaders, in some cases it has been inflamed even by members of the clergy, who consider the newcomers as a threat to the national or religious traditions.

POLARIZATION

While clearly denounced in the sacred texts, polarization has been a rather common practice in the Orthodox world in the previous centuries towards both other religions and the rest of the Christian confessions. There has been an attempt to change this attitude since the mid-20th century. “Knowing that God reveals himself in countless ways and with boundless inventiveness, the Church enters into dialogue with other faiths prepared to be amazed and delighted by the variety and beauty of God’s generous manifestations of divine goodness, grace, and wisdom among all peoples”. However, a significant part of ultra-conservative Orthodox still considers communication with different confessions and different faiths a sin. Thus, it is somehow evident that the two tendencies, polarization and reconciliation are still co-existing and contesting inside the Orthodox world, and there is a lot to be done in this direction.



CHALLENGES

Disconnection from the various forms of nationalism (while officially denounced in 1872, the problem of ethnophyletism is not resolved yet)

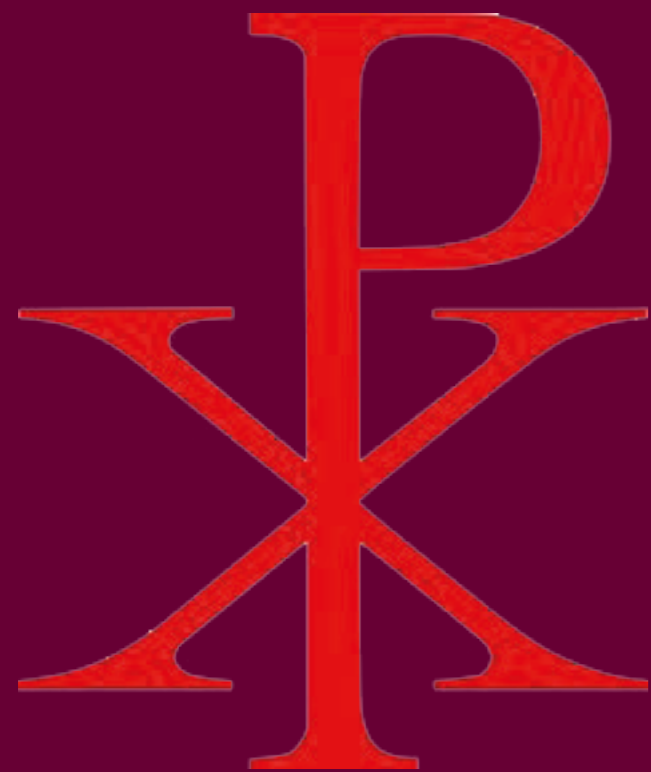
Reconciliation, better understanding and dialogue with modernity and with the other faiths and confessions

Human rights (including minority rights and gender equality) and struggle against all forms of racism; struggle for social justice

Closer approach to the problems of everyday life and of ordinary people, reduction of clericalism

Contextual understanding of the glorious past and the “tradition”

Struggle against environmental crisis



Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21, NRSV).



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