

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:**

- 1 – IN BRIEF
- ANGELS
- BUILDINGS
- CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
- CALENDAR
- CHRISMATION
- CHURCH AND STATE
- DIVINE LITURGY
- DYING, DEATH AND BEREAVEMENT
- ECUMENICAL COUNCILS
- ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH
- ESPERINOS
- FASTING
- GLOSSARY
- GREAT, HOLY WEEK AND PASCHA
- HOLY ANOINTING
- HOLY BAPTISM
- HOLY COMMUNION
- HOLY ICONS
- HOLY MATRIMONY
- HOLY ORDERS
- HOLY SCRIPTURES
- IN THE UK
- “IT’S ALL GREEK TO ME!”
- LITURGICAL YEAR
- MONKS AND NUNS
- MUSIC OF LITURGIES
- ORTHROS
- OTHER CHRISTIAN CONFESSIONS
- PRAYER AND WORSHIP
- RELIGIONS
- REPENTANCE AND CONFESSION
- SAINTS
- SOCIAL MEDIA
- SOME FOODS
- VESTMENTS
- WHEN WE COME TO CHURCH
- WHAT’S HAPPENED TO OUR SUNDAYS?
- WORLDWIDE FAMILY

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 Churchhas 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

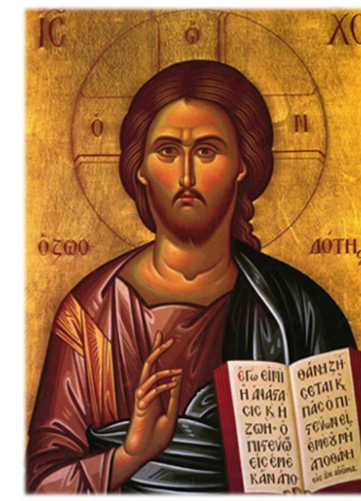
Ecumenical Patriarchate.
Οικουμενικόν Πατριαρχεῖον.
www.ec-patr.org



Agia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) Constantinople.

Fr.N.03.15

Introduction to Orthodox Christianity: The Holy Icons



“Of old, God was never depicted. Now, however, when God is seen, clothed in flesh and conversing with man, I make an image of God, of the God whom I can see. I do not worship matter, I worship the God of matter who became matter for my sake.....to work out my salvation through matter.”

St.John of Damascus (765-749)

NB: In Orthodoxy It is not permitted nor is it possible to depict, in icons, God the Father or God the Holy Spirit.

Translated ikon, eikon or more commonly icon, the Greek word for "image", icons have been part of the Church's tradition from the earliest days. In the course of time some opposition to their creation and use brought an iconoclastic ("image-breaking") period - 726-787 - which was overcome and formally ended in the eight/ninth centuries. This victory of Orthodoxy is commemorated on the First Sunday of the Great Fast (Lent) under the title The Triumph of Orthodoxy and includes a procession with icons.

In the Western Church's sphere a later but similar controversy during the Protestant Reformation and puritanical period resulted in many images whether frescoes, painted wooden panels, or statues, being destroyed, mutilated or painted over. It took a long period of time for this to be countered although some opposition to "images" still exists, be they sacred icons, religious pictures or statues. The development of western Christian art followed a pattern of originality and realism, quite different from Orthodox iconography, although there was a brief period when more "western" style icons, deviating from the established Byzantine and developed Russian traditions, appeared in some Orthodox places.

Icons have unique characteristics (quite different from religious pictures) for instance the perspectives, lack of shadow, relevance of individual colours, posture of those portrayed, texts included, etc., which are replicated by each painter. For centuries icon painters have used the same features and symbols by looking at very old icons or consulting appropriate books. This work should be executed in anonymity, for the glorification of the subject not the artist, in this way perpetuating the central purpose of drawing the viewer into a deeper relationship with God.

"What the word transmits through the ear, that painting shows through the image, and by these two means, mutually accompanying one another.....we receive knowledge of the same thing."

St.Basil the Great (379).



"Orthodox worship and spirituality appeal to all the senses. Therefore, icons, or sacred images, reflect a sense of beauty and glory, providing perhaps the most striking and most widely appreciated aspect of the Orthodox Church. The distinctiveness and diversity of icons are the fruit of a long theological reflection unique to the Orthodox world. However, icons are honoured and venerated; they are never idolized or worshipped. They are the faith depicted in colour, simultaneously constituting part of the transfigured cosmos. Since early Christian times, and particularly since the Seventh Ecumenical Council of 787, sacred icons have provided specific affirmation of the doctrine of divine Incarnation as well as general education in matters of faith. The end of a long controversy over icons in 843 is solemnly remembered each year on the first Sunday of Great Lent, also known as the Sunday of Orthodoxy."

Encountering the Mystery - Understanding Orthodox Christianity Today. His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.
ISBN 978-0-385-51813-0

"More important than being a good artist is the fact that the icon painter be a sincere Christian preparing for the work through fasting, prayer, confession, communion....The icon, like the Word, is a revelation, not decoration or illustration. It is theology in colour."

Introducing the Orthodox Church - Its Faith and Life. Anthony M. Coniaris.

It would be rare indeed if not impossible to find an Orthodox church without the icons (sometimes in mosaic form) and familiar iconostasis (icon screen) between the nave and sanctuary, all in an identifiable and familiar pattern. Similarly the Orthodox home, places of work, cars, etc., will find the icons having an important place.

Whilst painted icons are the ideal they can be expensive depending upon subject and size. For this reason woodblock mounted paper or card prints are much more affordable, being better than none at all, and form the basis for many home icon corners - the focal point for prayer - there is a saying that an Orthodox Christian home is a little church.

Among many Orthodox books on icons are:

Techniques of Icon and Wall Painting:

Egg Tempera, Fresco, Secco'

Aidan Hart. New edition 2015.

ISBN 9780852442159 Gracewing Pub'

Beauty Spirit Matter:

Icons in the Modern World.

Aidan Hart.

ISBN 9780852447826 Gracewing Pub'

Theology of Icons.

Leonid Ouspensky. Two volumes.

The Meaning of Icons.

Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky.

The Painter's Manual of Dionysius of Forna.

Translated by Paul Hetherington.

A translation of the most ancient of classic Greek-style narrative pattern and instruction texts. Painting techniques. Compiled on Mount Athos from 1730-1734.

Footnote: **In recent times especially but not only among non-Orthodox a term icon writing has been coined and frequently used. This is erroneous and something of an affectation - icons are painted.**