

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.
Οικουμενικόν Πατριαρχεῖον.
www.ec-patr.org



Agia Sophia (Holy Wisdom) Constantinople.

Fr.N.06.16

Introduction to Orthodox Christianity: Dying, Death & Bereavement



Icon of the Incredulity of Thomas

“Then Jesus said to Thomas, ‘Reach your finger here, and look at my hands: and reach your hand here, and put it into my side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.’ And Thomas answered and said to him, ‘My Lord and my God!’”

St.John’s Gospel chapter 20.

As we grow from the time of our birth we soon encounter sickness and death although it may not necessarily impinge upon our life in a personal or serious way. Sooner or later however there will be circumstances which raise questions in our mind perhaps regarding an illness in a family member leading in time to their death with the sadness seen and felt by family and friends. Dying, death and bereavement come to us all.

Terminal illness may be brief or prolonged, each requiring a great deal of care from loved ones as well as from those services provided by professional health workers. In Holy Orthodoxy, there are prayers and services for the healing of soul and body, particularly through the Mystery of Eucharion (Anointing or Unction – see leaflet in this series). Alongside these prayers there is the instinctive care which shows itself within family and among friends.

When the hospice movement began some years ago it emphasised the need to give to those near death the very best of nursing and spiritual care with an emphasis on enabling people to face death surrounded by those whose desire and skills are to make death less fearful and its approach as physically painless as possible together with supporting the family and friends of the dying. Far from being a new concept but a fresh and needed expression in the clinical world.

From time to time the question of euthanasia is raised and prompts much discussion. For the Orthodox Christian both suicide and assisted suicide are wrong although the distress that leads to the one and suggests the second are not casually judged.

In 2007 the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece Bioethics Committee publish a small booklet on this subject entitled: "*Basic positions on the ethics of Euthanasia.*" English, Greek, French and Russian in one cover.

ISBN 978-960-8373-14-3

When death comes it matters not that the person was a famous celebrity whose death is broadcast across the world or the quiet person whose life may appear to have been of little consequence, all will meet the same moment and warrant equal consideration. For a person of faith then, as in all important occasions in life, there is need to prepare, to make sure we are ready as best we are able, to follow the path laid out for us by Christ.

Even at a practical level it is important to ensure that funeral wishes according to Orthodox custom are made known within the family and instructions placed with the all important will and testament.

"Christ's Resurrection renews hope for our immortality and the continuation of our life. Death could not destroy Christ. Nor can Death destroy us. From the grave Christ emerged strong and beautiful, Light itself and Power itself, free from the limitations of space, of matter and of time. The same will happen to us. This is the meaning of what we repeat, in the Creed: 'I look for the resurrection of the dead'. This is what St. Paul taught us: The body is sown perishable, deformed, inglorious, without beauty and harmony, and it is raised a glorious Body, incorruptible, beautiful and dynamic. A physical body is sown and a spiritual body is raised (1 Corinthians 15, 41-46)."

"This is the teaching of Christ and his Church. This is the foundation of our hope which was ascertained by the resurrection of Christ and his victory over corruption and death. This is the reward of our Christian life, life adorned with faith, with worship, with love and sacrifice for the glory of God and help for man. This is what we repeat at every funeral. We are deathless as faithful Christians."

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The above two passages are taken from *Surpassing Death* by Athenagoras II (+1979) Archbishop of Thyateira and Great Britain (1951-1962), preface in the *Orthodox Services for Departed Christians*, August 1979.

Although grief expresses itself in some common ways it can only be experienced and manifest itself in the individual(s) bereaved. In families children can often be more resilient whilst adults vary in the way they deal with the loss.

From the time of illness, to death and bereavement the Church does not neglect her children and just as prayers during sickness and in the funeral services, so following these she remembers those who have died at regular intervals in the Memorial Services (Mnimosina) when the family will bring kolliva – grains and seeds emphasising new life - and bread the staple of life - to be shared among those present. Additionally, on two special Saturdays of the year there are services for all the departed. Graves will also be regularly visited, the Trisagion Prayers for the Departed will be said and the graves tended. These devotions assist the bereaved in the healing process and help confirm them in faith.

"Lord, Lord, the consolation of the afflicted, the comfort of the grieving and the help of all in distress, in your compassion console those who are afflicted by grief for the departed; heal the pain of sorrow that lies heavy on their hearts and to your servants who have fallen asleep in the hope of resurrection give rest in the bosom of Abraham. For you are the repose of your servants and to you we give glory, to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen."

