

HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN TRUE ORTHODOX CHURCH

The Early Foundation of Orthodoxy in Russia

According to tradition, St. Andrew, the first called apostle, stopped at hills of what would become the great city of Kiev while preaching the gospel. It would, however, be nearly one thousand years before Christianity would begin to take hold of the region. In 954 Princess Olga of Kiev was baptized. But it was her grandson, Prince Vladimir, whose baptism in 988 would forever establish Orthodoxy as the principal religion of Russia.

The Orthodox faith grew and flourished throughout the Russian Empire and served as a unifying force in the lives of the Russian people. Not only did the church provide spiritual strength and nourishment for its people, but it became a center of educational enrichment as well. The Russian Orthodox Church had forever become an inseparable part of the life of the people and Russia itself.

The unprecedented growth and stability of this church inevitably led to the establishment of a new patriarchate within orthodoxy, with Metropolitan Job of Moscow becoming the first patriarch of Russia in 1589. Following the death of Patriarch Adrian in 1700, the church remained without a patriarch for more than two hundred years. At the insistence of Peter I, a collective administration, known as the Holy and Governing Synod, was established in 1721. This form of governance lasted until 1917 at which time the All-Russian Council restored the patriarchal office and elected Metropolitan Tikhon of Moscow as patriarch.

Orthodoxy in Russia in the Early Twentieth Century

The joy of the election of Patriarch Tikhon would be short lived, as Russia entered a very difficult period in its history. The Bolsheviks, who had come into power in 1917, saw the Russian Orthodox Church as an enemy to be destroyed as resolutely as the tsarist institution. This period saw the repression of the church as well as the imprisonment of many of its bishops, priests, monastics and laypeople. Patriarch Tikhon was himself imprisoned a little more than a year. Upon his release he found a church embattled by division and ever-increasing persecution by the government. He continued to be a source of unification among the people and fought vigorously to uphold the faith and traditions of the church, but the strain of these years weighed heavily upon him. His death in 1925 dealt a severe blow to Russian Orthodoxy and the stability of the church.

Orthodoxy in the Post-Tikhon era

Following the death of Patriarch Tikhon unrest settled over the Russian Orthodox Church. The designated successors of Patriarch Tikhon were arrested by the civil authorities and Metropolitan Sergiy was named "locum tenens" of the patriarchate.

In 1927 Metropolitan Sergiy, in a formal declaration to all members of the church, called for loyalty toward the Soviet government. This event sparked division among the hierarchy, clergy and laity and led to the formation of the True Orthodox Church in Russia. Those who opposed Metropolitan Sergiy were not simply opposed to his political concessions, which they felt were too extreme, but were also at variance with him on a number of canonical and theological issues. His alliance with the authorities allowed him to turn over to the civil authorities all hierarchs and clergy who were at odds with him on political issues as well as purely church-related issues.

While the True Orthodox Church in Russia was never a single organization, many of its followers were labeled "Josephites", after Metropolitan Joseph of Leningrad, the leader of its largest branch.

A considerable part of the church in Russia stood in opposition to Metropolitan Sergiy and took the stand of the True Orthodox Church. The opposition, however, remained primarily on a church-related basis. The overwhelming majority of the True Orthodox Church tried to observe the Soviet laws. This, however, was not enough. The authorities had taken their stand in the church dispute and were prepared to use whatever means necessary to bring the bishops under the obedience of Metropolitan Sergiy. This tragic resolve on the part of the Soviet government caused the numerous True Orthodox Church eparchies and communities to go underground for the length of the Soviet period.

The Emergence from the Underground and the Establishment of the Russian True Orthodox Church - Metropolia of Moscow

In the period from the 1970s-80s, many of the True Orthodox Church communities had lost their last bishops and much of their clergy. Many of these groups were forced to exist and celebrate services in the absence of a priest.

After the change in political conditions in the late 1980s, the True Orthodox Church began to emerge from the underground. Various churches solved the question of their future existence in different ways. Some of the communities joined the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, which by that time had begun to open communities within Russia. Others renewed their episcopacy and clergy through arrangements made with other jurisdictions. The Russian True Orthodox Church - Metropolia of Moscow chose the latter.

In 1996 an initiative group of Russian orthodox clergy and laity approached Patriarch Dimitriy of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church, asking him to assist them in the canonical restoration of a hierarchy for the True Orthodox Church. It was decided that the name for the restored church would be the Russian True Orthodox Church. In June of 1996, with the blessing of Patriarch Dimitriy, Archbishop Roman (Balaschuk) and Bishop Mefodiy (Kudryakov, later head of the UAOC) of the UAOC ordained Hieromonk John (Modzalevsky) a bishop of the Russian True Orthodox Church in order to restore apostolic succession. In December of 1996 Bishop John and Bishop Mefodiy ordained Archimandrite Stefan (Linitzky) a bishop for the Russian True

Orthodox Church. These two bishops, John and Stefan, would pass the apostolic succession to the rest of the bishops of the Russian True Orthodox Church. In 2000 the Russian True Orthodox Church officially added "Metropolia of Moscow" to its name, in order to distinguish it from other groups within Russia. Until 2011, the church was headed by Metropolitan Vyacheslav, a saintly spiritual father, who was savagely beaten and died of his wounds in Russia.

Today, the church is led by Metropolitan Alexy. The Metropolitan is First Hierarch of The Russian True Orthodox Church-MM and Archbishop of Minneapolis and Chicago. He resides in the United States and cares for his flock throughout the world. In addition to the North American Archdiocese, there are dioceses in Russia, Ukraine, South America, and a Diocese for the Western Rite Orthodox.

The church strives to live the Gospel of Our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ through adherence to the Holy Scriptures, Holy Tradition, the canons of the Ecumenical Councils, and regulations of the Church Councils of the Orthodox Church. Its desire is to serve the needs of its faithful through spiritual nourishment and with compassion and understanding.