

Serbian Orthodox Church

Serbian Orthodox Church which has been autonomous since 1219, has played an important role in the development and preservation of the Serbian national identity.



Serbian Orthodox Church is one of the autocephalous Eastern Orthodox Christian churches.

An Orthodox Christian belongs to the Body of Christ, the Church of Christ. The Eastern Orthodox Church is organically the same ecclesia from the time of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem on Pentecost. An Orthodox Christian belongs to this Church. An Orthodox Christian is baptised in the Name of the Holy Trinity. He/she follows the ideals and beliefs of the Scriptures and Sacred Tradition. He/she believes in a living and loving God, Whose Grace protects and guides him/her in the path of salvation. He/she believes that God reveals Himself in the Bible through the Prophets and especially in the Person of Jesus Christ, His only-begotten Son who is man's Saviour. He/she especially believes in the Incarnation of Christ as God-Man, in His Crucifixion and Resurrection, in His Gospel and Commandments, and in the world to come.

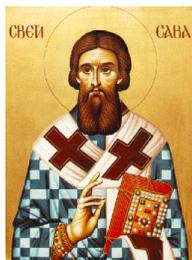
Serbian Orthodox Church is organised into metropolises and eparchies located primarily in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Croatia, but also all over the world where Serbian diaspora lives. The Church now consists of 29 home dioceses, the Autonomous Archbishopric of Ohrid/Ochrida in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, including 9 dioceses in the diaspora. There are 45 bishops making up membership of the Council of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Serbian Patriarch serves as first among equals in Church in Serbia. The current Patriarch is Irinej (Gavrilović). He became Serbian Patriarch on 22 January 2010.



The Church achieved autocephalous status in 1219 under the leadership of Saint Sava, becoming independent Archbishopric of Žiča. It's status was elevated to patriarchate in 1346 and was known

afterwards as the Serbian Patriarchate of Peć. This patriarchate was abolished by the Ottoman Turks in 1766. The modern Serbian Orthodox Church was re-established in 1920 after the unification of the Patriarchate of Karlovci, the Metropolitanate of Belgrade and the Metropolitanate of Montenegro.

The most significant figure for achieving of autocephaly status of the Serbian Orthodox Church is St. Sava, who was a Serbian prince. He took monastic vows at Mount Athos in 1192 as Sava. The youngest son of Stefan Nemanja was a Serbian ruler who established Serbian state and his monarchy in the medieval time. They asked from the Ecumenical Patriarchate for permission to take over and renovate the old monastery of Hilandar. Hilandar then become religious, cultural and spiritual centre of whole Serbian state and the nation in general.



Sava died in Trnovo, capital of the Second Bulgarian Empire in 1235. He was buried at the Cathedral of the Holy Forty Martyrs in Trnovo where his body remained until 6 May 1237, when his sacred remains were moved to the monastery Mileševa in southern Serbia. In the time of Serbian Patriarch Jovan Kantul (1592-1614), the Ottoman Turks took the holy remains of Saint Sava from monastery Mileševa to the Vračar hill in Belgrade, where they were burned by Sinan Pasha on a stake to intimidate the Serb people in case of revolts. The Temple of Saint Sava was built on the place where his holy remains were burned.



Cathedral of Saint Sava, one of the largest Orthodox building in the world, being built and renovated continuously since the end of the 1980s on the site, where relics of Saint Sava were desecrated by the Ottomans

After the World War I, all the Orthodox Serbs were united under one ecclesiastical authority, and two Serbian churches were united into the single Serbian Orthodox Church in 1920 with the election of Serbian Patriarch Dimitrije.

During the Second World War (from 1941 to 1945) the Serbian Orthodox Church suffered severely from persecutions by the occupying powers and the anti-Serbian Ustaše regime of Independent

State of Croatia, which sought to create a "Croatian Orthodox Church" which Orthodox Serbs were forced to join. Many Serbs were killed, expelled and forced to convert to Roman Catholicism. During the Serbian genocide, bishops and priests of the Serbian Orthodox Church were singled out for persecution, and many Orthodox churches were damaged or destroyed.

After the war, the Church was suppressed by the communist government of Josip Broz Tito, which viewed it with suspicion due to the Church's links with the exiled Serbian monarchy and the nationalist Chetnik movement. Along with other ecclesiastical institutions of all denominations, the Church was subjected to strict controls by the Yugoslav state.



Patriarhate od Peć

Due to the Kosovo War, after 1999 numerous Serbian Orthodox holy sites in the province were left occupied only by clergy. Since the arrival of NATO troops in June 1999, 156 Serbian Orthodox churches and monasteries have been damaged or destroyed and several priests have been killed. Thousands of Serbs were forced to move from Kosovo and Metohija due to the numerous attacks of Albanians on Serbian churches and Serbs.

Serbian Orthodox Church is in full communion with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and all of the autocephalous Eastern Orthodox Church bodies. It has been a member of the World Council of Churches since 1965, and of the Conference of European Churches.