



Good day Worthy Knights,

In this part 104, the Tabernacle 4 of 4

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### **Eastern Catholic and Orthodox Churches**

In the Eastern Orthodox Church, the holy mysteries (reserved sacrament) are always kept in a tabernacle on the altar. The tabernacle is normally wrought of gold, silver, or wood and elaborately decorated. It is often shaped like a miniature church building, and usually has a cross on the top of it. It may be opened using small doors, or a drawer that pulls out. Some churches keep the tabernacle under a glass dome to protect it and the holy mysteries from dust and changes in humidity.

The orthodox religions do not have a concept of eucharistic adoration as a devotion separate from the reception of holy communion. But the holy mysteries are treated with utmost respect, as they believe in the real presence of the body and blood of Christ. The clergy must be vested whenever they handle the holy mysteries. During the liturgy of the pre-sanctified gifts (wherein communion is received from the reserved sacrament), when the consecrated holy mysteries are brought out during the great entrance, everyone makes a full prostration.

When Orthodox Christians receive holy communion, they always receive in both species: the body and the blood of Christ. This includes communion taken to the sick. Therefore, both are reserved in the tabernacle. Typically, a sanctuary lamp is kept burning in the Holy Place (sanctuary) when the Mysteries are reserved. This may be a separate lamp hanging from the ceiling, or it may be the top lamp of the seven-branch candlestick which sits either on top of the Holy Table or behind it.

### **Lutheran Churches**

Reservation of the blessed sacrament is permitted in the Lutheran Churches, although not for the purposes of Eucharistic adoration. In Lutheran parishes that practice sacramental reservation, a chancel lamp is kept near the tabernacle.

### **Anglican and Episcopal Churches**

Only some Anglican parishes of Anglo-Catholic churchmanship use tabernacles, either fixed on the altar, placed behind or above it, or off to one side. As in Catholic churches, the presence of the reserved sacrament is indicated by a "presence lamp" – an oil or wax-based flame in a clear glass vessel placed close to the tabernacle. Normally, only ciboria (ciborium chalice with a domed shape cover) and Blessed Sacrament are placed in the tabernacle, although it is not uncommon for the wine or consecrated oils to be placed there as well.

When the tabernacle is vacant, it is common practice to leave it open so that the faithful will not inadvertently perform an act of devotion (such as bowing or genuflecting). Tabernacles are customarily lined with, if not constructed from, cedar wood, whose aromatic qualities discourage insect life.

The tabernacle should be securely fixed to the altar, but away from the wall so that the conopaeum (veil covering the outside of the tabernacle) can completely surround it. The veil may be white or varying in liturgical colour. There may be a second tabernacle but no more in the same church but if so only one should be used at any time. A lamp should remain lit nearby when the tabernacle is in use.

## Conclusion

The term "**tabernacle**", then, seems to have the general meaning of describing the locus of God's presence, both in the Judaic tradition and in the Christian tradition. However, over the centuries, the word tabernacle was variously used, in both traditions, sometimes to convey the figurative presence of God, and at other times, the literal presence of God.

Consider these quite different translations of Hebrews 9, 11:

"... Passing through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by hands, that is, not belonging to this creation..." - American Bible.

"... He has passed through the greater, the more perfect tent, not made by human hands, that is, not of this created order..." - Jerusalem Bible.

In both translations, the context seems to present Jesus of Nazareth as the new mediator of the covenant with God, rather than the tabernacle itself.

Were the translations of the scriptural texts into English perhaps too loose? What exactly is the meaning of tabernacle in sacred scripture, and in the rituals, both Judaic and Christian, as they have been handed down and evolved?

This literary problem is caused in part by taking small pieces of text and then expecting these relatively short passages to contain a full and exhaustive, well-defined, dictionary-like meaning.

In reality, to be pragmatic, it is likely that the word tabernacle in the Red Cross of Constantine Ritual is not an overly complicated usage. Rather, it seems to be somewhat figurative, rather than absolutely literal, a figure of speech, if you will, indicating the presence of a new dispensation arising from the ruins of the first temple, with the strong implication that when we do all that is within our ability to do, after we have done our best, only then can we be assured that God will bless our efforts.



Conopaeum

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