

WHAT DOES THE ORTHODOX CHURCH BELIEVE?

— AND HOW DO ROMAN CATHOLIC BELIEF & PRACTICE DIFFER? —

ORTHODOX

DOCTRINE

Basic Tenets	The Bible	Councils & Creeds	The Trinity	Sin & Salvation	Sacraments/Liturgy
All Orthodox doctrine is founded on the written Word of God (the Bible), the creeds of the Seven Ecumenical Councils, the canons, and the Holy Tradition (as expressed in the Church's hymnography, iconography, or otherwise passed on within the Church from the Apostles to the present day). Holy Tradition is the very life of the Church as inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit. Orthodoxy's basic attitude towards theology stresses mystery and the experience of the incomprehensible.	The Bible is the central written source of doctrine and belief, inspired in its writing by the Holy Spirit. However, the Holy Scriptures must be accepted and interpreted in accordance with the belief which has been handed down by the Holy Fathers and which the Holy Orthodox Church has always held and does now hold. The Canon of the Scriptures includes the Old Testament (including several "Deuterocanonical" books), and the New Testament.	The major creedal statement of the Orthodox Church is the Nicene Creed (literally, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, drawn up by the First Ecumenical Council in Nicea [325] and the Second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople [381]). The Orthodox Church has not altered this creed in any way over the centuries, and objects to any additions to it. The most important councils, which received universal approval of the entire Church in all places, are called the Seven Ecumenical Councils.	The prime doctrinal dogma of the Trinity defines God as One God (one Divine Nature, with one Divine action and will) in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God the Father is the Fountainhead and source of the Trinity. God the Son is eternally begotten of the Father. Through His Incarnation and the <i>hypostatic</i> union, Christ is one Divine Person, but has two natures; He is both fully God and fully Man. The Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father (the phrase "and the Son" [<i>filioque</i>] is not added).	Sin is an unnatural state of man, brought about by the distortion of God's original creation. After the Fall of Adam, all men became subject to an ancestral curse and were made subject to death. It is the goal of human life not to sin, and to be restored to our original "god-likeness." But, in fact, all people <i>do</i> sin. It is only possible to be freed from sin by the saving work of Christ, who forgives the sins of the world through His abundant mercy. By His Resurrection, Christ defeated our ultimate enemy, death. Salvation is a lifelong process, involving active cooperation with the work of Christ. There is an intermediate state of the soul between death and the final day of judgment, during which souls benefit from the prayers of the faithful.	All of life is recognized as mystical or sacramental. There are seven sacraments that are the principal manifestations of Christ's grace: baptism, chrismation, the Eucharist, confession, ordination, marriage, and anointing with oil. Through their operation and reception, we obtain grace and blessings from on high. Worship and prayer in the Orthodox Church are liturgical. The celebration of the Holy Eucharist is called the Divine Liturgy. The sacraments of initiation (baptism, chrismation, and first Eucharist) are normally administered at the same time.

ROMAN CATHOLIC

The basic foundations of Catholic theology are essentially the same, except that the general attitude towards theology stresses precise definitions and a process of deduction based upon human reason (Scholasticism or rationalism rather than mysticism).	The basic belief regarding the Bible is essentially the same, except that there are differences in interpretation of the Scriptures in several areas, and differing traditions accepted by the two Churches. There are also a few differences in which Deuterocanonical books are included in the Old Testament canon.	All of the Seven Ecumenical Councils are accepted, but the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed was changed by the addition of the <i>filioque</i> clause (see "Trinity" section). The Roman Catholic Church accepts as binding the decrees of several later councils which are not recognized by the Orthodox Church, and <i>vice versa</i> . Papal decrees have in some instances been set above or against the decisions of earlier councils and creeds.	In regards to the dogma of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father, the Roman Catholic Church, in about the ninth century, added the <i>filioque</i> clause. (This addition contradicts the precise revelation of Scripture [John 15:26] and confuses the inner relations of the Persons of the Trinity.)	According to the Roman understanding of "original sin," a stain of inherited guilt is passed down from Adam, as a result of his sin, to the rest of the human race. Even after a sinful action is forgiven, there sometimes remains a temporal punishment due to that sin which must be expiated. Those who die with their sin forgiven but not expiated, must spend time after death in purgation (purgatory). Infinite merits earned by Christ and the saints can be passed on to another individual by the Church through "indulgences."	The Catholic Church's view of sacrament and liturgy is primarily the same. The celebration of the Holy Eucharist is called the Mass. There have always been some differing liturgical practices, but in recent years there has been an accelerated amount of liturgical change and new practices introduced. The sacraments of initiation are most often performed separately, and in a different order (infants are baptized; First Communion comes at a later age; and confirmation or chrismation at a still later age).
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WORSHIP

The Eucharist	The Virgin Mary	Saints	Icons	Foundations	Bishops/Patriarchs	Priests & Deacons
In the Divine Liturgy, under the mystical forms of the holy bread and wine, the faithful truly partake of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, unto the remission of sins, and unto life eternal. The exact manner of the Real Presence of Christ in the eucharistic elements is held as a "mystery." During Holy Communion, both the consecrated bread and wine are given to lay communicants.	Mary is venerated as Ever-Virgin Mother of God. She is given the title "Theotokos," meaning "God-bearer," because He who is born of her is from all eternity God. Her human nature is in every way the same as that of other men and women. Believers request the special prayers and intercession of Mary, as one who was and is close to Christ in a unique manner. Feast days celebrated in her honor include: Conception, Nativity, Presentation, Dormition (falling Asleep), and the Annunciation.	It is proper to reverence and invoke the saints who reign on high with Christ; their prayers and intercessions before God avail with God unto our salvation. It is well pleasing in the sight of God that we should give homage to the relics of the saints, glorified through incorruption, as memorials of their virtue. It is proper to pray for the repose of their souls and for their salvation.	Images of Christ, of the Ever-Virgin Mother, and of the other saints are worthy of being possessed and honored—not as idols, but so that, through contemplation of them, we may be incited to piety and the emulation of the deeds of the holy persons represented by the images. Icons are painted in such a way as to show a divine reality, and are not meant to be "realistic" portrayals.	The Foundation, Head, and Great High Priest and Chief Shepherd of the Universal Church is our Lord Jesus Christ. Bishops, pastors, and teachers are appointed by Him to rule the Church. The Guide and Pilot of this Church is the Holy Spirit. The government of the Church is hierarchical. All major Church decisions are made on a conciliar basis (by council). General decisions of councils are handed down as creeds (doctrinal decisions) and canons (norms or rules of Church practice or ethics, not laws in a modern sense).	The Holy Apostles received from our Lord equal spiritual power. All bishops are equally the successors of the Apostles. The bishops of Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem—governing the five ancient Christian centers—were given special honor and the title of patriarch, and the patriarch of Rome was given status as the "first among equals." (The bishop of Constantinople is now given a special title of "Ecumenical Patriarch" of all Orthodox Churches.) No individual bishop is superior to the Ecumenical Councils, nor is any bishop considered infallible.	The priesthood was established by Christ Himself. In the apostolic era, it was organized into three ranks or degrees (bishop, priest, deacon). The clergy are ministers of God's grace through all of the sacraments. Following the practice of the ancient Church, celibacy is not imposed as a requirement for ordination to the diaconate or priesthood (however, marriages are not performed after ordination). Bishops, drawn from the ranks of monastics, may not marry. The priesthood (all three ranks) is confined to men.
The Catholic Church, in regards to the doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, holds to a belief in transubstantiation (a legalistic, medieval explanation for how the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ). Traditionally, during Communion lay people receive only the consecrated bread, not the wine (however, practices are in transition).	The Roman Catholic Church shares with the Orthodox Church a deep love for and veneration of the Virgin Mary. There is, however, one significant difference in emphasis and belief. In Catholic belief, from the first moment of her conception, the Virgin Mary was, by the singular grace of God, kept free from all stain of original sin (the Immaculate Conception). There is also an understanding that <i>all</i> graces flow from God through Mary, as "Mediatrix."	Because of the diverging history of the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church after the Schism, the more recent saints recognized in one Church are not recognized in the other, and <i>vice versa</i> . In addition, there is a very different approach to the official canonization of saints.	Icons are also accepted and used in the Catholic Church. Statues are more commonly used than in Orthodoxy. In general, there is a more "realistic" or "romantic" style of art used in the Catholic Church than in the Orthodox Church.	Traditionally, the Catholic Church has had more of a structured, hierarchical administrative style, a greater emphasis on law, and a greater stress on obedience than in Orthodoxy. (However, the Church is now in a period of transition in which there is less emphasis on obedience and a greater degree of independence.)	In the Roman Catholic view, the Apostle Peter is seen as having been uniquely chosen by Christ to be the head of the Church, and the bishop or patriarch of Rome is seen as his unique successor. On this basis, the bishop of Rome is given pre-eminent authority and superiority over all of Christianity down to this day (supremacy of the Pope). Official statements made by the Pope <i>ex cathedra</i> (from the throne) are considered infallible, and the whole Church is bound by these teachings (infallibility of the Pope).	In the Catholic Church it is compulsory for priests to remain celibate. The priesthood is presently confined to men; however, a growing movement is pushing for women's ordination.