

The Orthodox Churches

I. Nature

A. “Orthodox”

1. “Straight doctrine”
2. Not “*Eastern Orthodox*”
3. “Citadel”: Characterized by preserving, not innovating

B. “Greek Catholic”

1. Useful older term, but flawed
2. Stresses Greek character, origin in Greek Roman Empire

C. Organization

1. Patriarchate: Rule by patriarchs
 - a. Patriarch of Constantinople respected leader but has no official authority
 - b. Constantinople: *Primus inter pares*—“first among equals”
2. Autocephalous: “Self-governing”—13 national Orthodox churches (Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox) which cooperate while remaining independent
3. Caesaropapism: Role of secular rule in the church

II. Doctrinal Emphases

A. Authority

1. Apostolic succession
2. Authority of the Church: Infallible voice of the Spirit when speaking with united voice in ...
 - a. Scripture
 - b. Tradition: “There exists in Tradition elements which, although not mentioned in the New Testament as they are in the Church today, are indispensable to the salvation of our souls” (Archbishop of Greek Archdiocese of North and South America)
 - c. Ecumenical councils and creeds

B. Mysticism

1. Basically the desire to experience God directly
2. “Fuzzy”—not as defined as RCism (E.g., the Orthodox do not believe in purgatory as such, but they believe in an improvement beyond death that can be helped by the prayers of the faithful)
3. Apophatic (“negative”) theology: Cannot define what God *is*, only what God is *not*

C. Orthopraxy

1. Correct *practice* (worship) as important as correct doctrine
2. “Correct rituals” leads to mindless conservatism
3. Assumes tradition of past is correct—doesn’t test by Scripture

D. Icons

1. Icons: Painted images of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the saints (usually not the Father)
2. Style is flat & unrealistic: Stress the unworldly aspect of the saints

E. Trinitarian Subordination (discussed later)

F. *Theosis*

1. Translates as “deification” but closer, in some ways, to sanctification (being conformed to Christ’s image)—How man achieves the state intended for him at creation

2. Theosis is by grace—but grace is “energy,” or action, of God, not an attitude toward people
 - a. Holy Spirit uses this grace to carry out the process of Theosis
 - b. Means of this grace are the sacraments and good works
 - c. Salvation is sanctification w/o justification; it is a *process*.
 - d. Note too that the effect is that there is no salvation outside of the church, through which alone the Spirit gives access to these “energies.”
3. Theosis, as a process, continues beyond death
4. Justification in Orthodoxy
 - a. *Not* God declaring the sinner righteous
 - b. Negative, freeing from power of sin so that one may positively grow in the process of Theosis
5. Greatest difference Protestants have with Orthodoxy—nature of the gospel and salvation

III. Controversies

A. With Roman Catholicism

1. Differences
 - a. *Filioque* in Nicene Creed
 - b. Rule & infallibility of the pope
2. Similarities
 - a. Apostolic succession
 - b. Sacramental
 - c. Authority of church & tradition
 - d. Mediation of Mary & the saints
3. Great Schism (1054)
 - a. Representatives of the pope and of the patriarch of Constantinople excommunicated each other—the *official* split
 - b. Merely confirmed a growing divide
 - c. Excommunications rescinded in 1965

B. Iconoclastic controversy (700s)

1. Emperor Leo III (717-41) launched iconoclastic (“icon-breaking”) movement
 - a. Motives debated
 - 1) Reaction to Muslim views of Christian “idolatry”?
 - 2) Icons violated the Second Commandment & commands on idolatry
 - 3) Icons could not portray the whole Christ
 - b. An example of “Caesaropapism”
 - c. Maintained elements of superstition
2. Defending the icons
 - a. Defenders: iconophiles or iconodules
 - b. Chief defender: John of Damascus
 - 1) Argument: Christ’s incarnation permitted portrayal of holy persons
 - 2) Key Distinction
 - a) One may *worship* only God alone
 - b) One may *venerate* sacramental channels (e.g., icons)
 - c. Church relied heavily on popular piety in defense

3. Course
 - a. Led to anti-monastic actions & monk-led revolts (quashed)
 - b. Vindication of icons
 - 1) Empress Eirene (Irene) fought to restore
 - 2) Images affirmed at Second Council of Nicea (787)
 - 3) Final “Triumph of Orthodoxy” (843)

C. *Filioque*

1. Fight over adding *filioque* (“and the Son”) to Nicene Creed by Western Church
2. Orthodox: We may not add words to an ecumenical creed
3. Unity of the Trinity
 - a. Orthodox: Unity of the Godhead found in the person of Father
 - b. Catholics: Unity found in essence of the Trinity
4. Procession of the Spirit
 - a. Orthodox: Double procession confuses the Persons of the Trinity
 - b. Catholics: Single procession divides the unity of the Godhead
5. Critics: Orthodox unduly subordinate the Son

IV. Confession of Dositheus

A. Response to Confession of Cyril Lucar

1. Pro-Protestant Patriarch of Constantinople (1600s)
2. Dositheus refutes point by point (like Trent)

B. Place in Orthodox Theology

1. Not an official confession
2. Accused of being influenced by Western (RC) theology, such as specific number of sacraments
3. But a fair summary, especially in contrast to Protestantism