

The Eastern Orthodox Churches

1. Who Are They?

The Communion of Churches which accept the Council of Chalcedon and 3 subsequent Ecumenical Councils and adhere to Orthodox theology and Eastern rite worship.

2. Where are they?

These Churches are decentralized in organization according to local/national boundaries. Included in this are the Churches of Constantinople/Greece, Russia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, et cetera, as well as parallel Byzantine Churches in Antioch, Alexandria, and Jerusalem.

3. Do we share in Communion?

No, while we agree that they profess Orthodox Faith, we are separated from Communion because the historical schism still remains.

4. Byzantine Empire/Constantinople-

Eastern half of the Roman Empire which succeeded the Roman Empire in power and influence following Rome's fall. Flourished as the cultural and military power in the East from the time of Constantine to the fall of Constantinople in 1455 A.D.

5. The Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.)-

“Fourth” Ecumenical Council which embraced the Tome of Leo and the “two nature” theology of the Incarnation of Christ. The Council anathematized the Church Father St. Dioscorus who preached the same theology of St. Cyril of Alexandria of the Council of Chalcedon. This Council is not accepted by the “Oriental” Orthodox.

6. The Great Schism-

Rather than one clean break, the Roman Church and the Eastern Church Schism can be attributed to at least three events:

- a) **1054 A.D.**- Mutual Excommunication of both Roman Pope and Patriarch of Constantinople over amongst other things, the Eastern refusal to use Filioque Clause
- b) **1205 A.D.**- Siege and Sacking of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade
- c) **1453 A.D.**- Fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks and ultimately the end of the Byzantine Empire

7. Sacraments-

Byzantine/Eastern Orthodox practice the same Sacraments as in the Oriental Tradition including baptism (of infants as well as adults), eucharist (real presence), priesthood, et cetera.

8. Scriptures-

Byzantine and Oriental share the same canon of Scripture including the Deuterocanonical books. Also, Scripture is interpreted in light of Holy Tradition.

9. Monasticism-

The Byzantines have a rich tradition of monasticism including anchoritic (solitary) as well as cenobitic (communal- both large and small) practices. Also, Bishops (but not priests) are generally chosen from among the ranks of the monastics.

10. Liturgical Traditions-

Most Eastern, non-Oriental Churches, follow Byzantine rites. Eucharistic Liturgy is derived from the Antiochian-Jerusalem rite and is usually celebrated in the local language. Hymns are sung in the Eight Tone system.

11. Iconography-

Icons, and not statues, are venerated in the Eastern tradition and occupy a prominent place in the Church; the Iconostasis. The Seventh Ecumenical Council (The Triumph of Orthodoxy) decisively elaborated the theology of the Icon.

12. Synodal/National Structure-

Churches developed and are organized geographically. A particular region/nation has an autonomous and independent Holy Synod which is headed by a Patriarch who is considered the first among equals with respect to his fellow bishops. Each Synod operates independently from each other but remains in the Communion of Faith.

- 13. Mysticism/Hesychasm-** An emphasis within Byzantine monasticism was placed on the repetition of the “Jesus prayer.” The focus is on the inward reflection of the meaning of the prayer in order to acquire inner stillness and experiential knowledge of God- including accessing the uncreated light of God through spiritual discipline.
- 14. “Eastern Catholics”-** Also known as “Uniate” Churches which follow Eastern Orthodox liturgical and mystical traditions but have joined in Communion with the Roman Catholic Church. Though they retain some measure of autonomy, they are ultimately under the Roman Pope.
- 15. Some Saints:**
- a) **St. John of Damascus-** (d. 749 A.D.) Damascene monk who elaborated the theology of the Incarnation of Christ and defended Holy Images
 - b) **St. Symeon the New Theologian-** (d. 1022 A.D.) Galatian monk and poet who wrote about the direct experience of God
 - c) **St. Gregory Palamas-** (d.1359 A.D.) Greek monk who defended Hesychasm against the claim that factual knowledge of God was more important than experiential knowledge.