

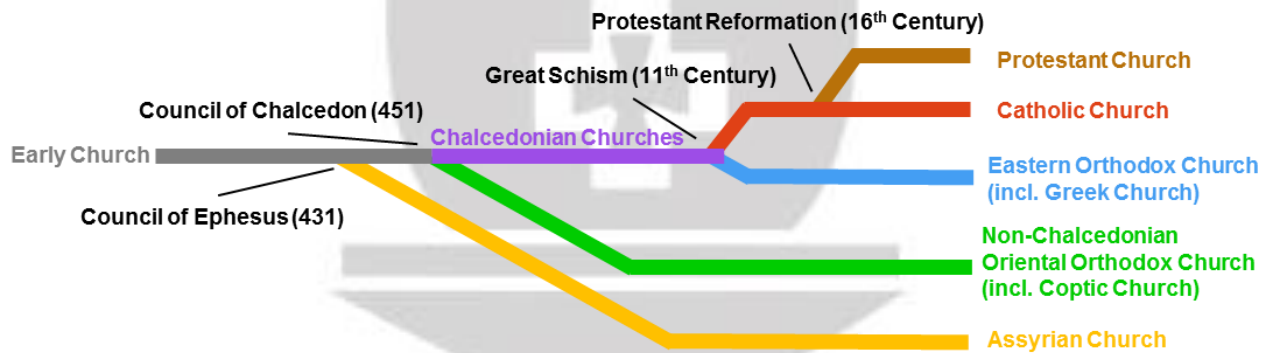
# Comparative Theology

What are the church denominations, and what are the differences between them?

- We all recognize that Christ, our God, came for our salvation. But there are clear differences between us in the faith, not only in the form of prayer and worship, but also in our beliefs.
- The Church of the New Testament was one:
  - One faith;
  - One body composed of members who are believers;
  - Its head is the Lord of Glory, Jesus Christ.
- One of the major divisions in the Church was in 451 AD, the date of the council of the bishops and patriarchs in the city of Chalcedon.
- In this meeting the one Church was divided into two groups:
  - **Group 1:**
    - Believed that the nature of Christ is one nature; and it was result of the unity of His humanity and His Divinity.
    - Under the leadership of the church of Alexandria.
    - Called Non-Chalcedonian (Oriental Orthodox) churches
  - **Group 2:**
    - Believed that Christ had two natures;
    - Under the leadership of the church of Rome
    - Called Chalcedonian churches
- In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, there was a split between the Chalcedonian churches. The resulting churches are called:
  - the Roman Catholic Church; and
  - the Eastern Orthodox Churches (including the Greek Orthodox) who followed Constantinople.

- In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Martin Luther protested against the Catholic Church.
- Resulting church was called “the Protestant reformation”
  - It was launched in Germany, where he objected to some of the teachings of the Catholic Church.
  - His followers were called the protesters, and then came the name “Protestant”.
  - Within the Protestant Church, there are now many divisions, and to this day the divisions continue, creating more protestant denominations.

### The Major Christian Church Branches:



#### *Orthodoxy:*

- A Greek word meaning “true faith.”
- This name has been used for nearly 14 centuries.
- For all this time, the church has kept the faith that has been handed down from Our Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles.
- As we receive this inheritance, we have to preserve it faithfully to hand it over to the generations that come after us, until Our Lord Jesus Christ receives His church, which He bought with His own blood.

#### *Catholicism:*

- Catholic is a Greek word meaning “universal” because it brought together all the Western churches, and this has been used since the eleventh century.

#### *Protestantism:*

- A word meaning “the protest” or “opposition”.

## Examples of differences in the sacraments and beliefs:

### *Baptism*

- ❖ Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38)
- **Orthodox** A sacrament in which the baptized receives the grace of the new birth and it is the gate to all the other sacraments. It is done through immersion using water.
- **Catholic** It is a holy sacrament but mostly is carried out through sprinkling or pouring.
- **Protestant** It is not a holy sacrament but is a symbol that can either be done through sprinkling or immersion. They believe in the baptism of the Holy Spirit

### *Chrismation*

- ❖ Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, <sup>22</sup> set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. (2 Corinthians 1:21-22)
- **Orthodox** A sacrament by which the grace of the Holy Spirit is delivered through the anointing of oil in 36 anointments across the body.
- **Catholic** A sacrament similar to the Orthodox Church but is carried out at between the ages of 7-12 and is called Confirmation.
- **Protestant** They do not believe in it.

### *Confession*

- **Orthodox** It is a sacrament where the believers receive the absolution from their sins if they have repented.
- **Catholic** It is a sacrament administered with a barrier between the priest and the confessor.
- **Protestant** They only confess to God while some denominations have confession in front of the church.

### *Communion*

- ❖ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. (John 6:54)
- **Orthodox** True Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ after the Holy Spirit transforms the bread and wine into the Holy Body and Precious Blood of Jesus Christ. We cannot use anything for communion except the Korban. There also cannot be more than one mass on the same altar except after nine hours just like the rules put by the church for those who will partake of the Holy Communion.
- **Catholic** They believe in the transubstantiation into the body and blood. Since the 11th century they have been using the wafer, however, they do not allow the congregation to partake of the Holy Blood. They also allow having more than one mass on the same altar and there is no abstinence prior to the partaking of the sacrament.
- **Protestant** They believe that there is no change that takes place but instead it is just a symbolic ritual.

### *Intercession*

- **Orthodox** We believe in the intercession of Jesus Christ for us in front of the Father and we also believe in the intercession of the saints on our behalf in front of Jesus Christ and we honour them through icons and preserve their relics. We also have them as our role models.
- **Catholic** Same ideology as the Orthodox except they use statues to honour them. Statues are not preferred by the Orthodox.
- **Protestant** They only believe in Jesus Christ's intercession and deny the saints' intercessions completely.

### *The Holy Spirit*

- **Orthodox** We believe in the Holy Spirit who comes forth from the Father.
- **Catholic** They believe that the Holy Spirit comes forth from the Father and the Son.
- **Protestant** They believe that the Holy Spirit comes forth from the Father and the Son.

### *Traditions*

- **Orthodox** We believe in the holy traditions of the apostles.
- **Catholic** They believe in the same traditions as the Orthodox with the addition of their church laws and Western church fathers teachings and internal councils.
- **Protestant** They do not believe in any church traditions hence they are sometimes called evangelical.

### *The Second Coming*

- **Orthodox** A second coming for all and with it is the end of the world.
- **Catholic** Same as Orthodox.
- **Protestant** The second coming is done in stages. The first stage is when Jesus will come on earth and rule it for 1000 years; then there will be the final judgment.

### *Final Judgment*

- **Orthodox** Eternal condemnation for the sinners and the non-repentant.
- **Catholic** They have purgatory where the believers suffer for the sins they committed so that they get purified and enter into paradise.
- **Protestant** Like the Orthodox.

### *The Holy Virgin Mary*

- **Orthodox** She inherited the first sin like all humanity and needed the salvation given through Jesus Christ. But She is the Mother of God and her glory exceeds the angels. We also believe in her everlasting virginity and Jesus Christ was her only child.
- **Catholic** She was born without inheriting the first sin and did not need the salvation through Jesus Christ. They glorify her close to the point of worship and that is not accepted by the Orthodox. They also believe in her everlasting virginity.
- **Protestant** They deny the title, 'Mother of God' and her intercession. Finally, they deny her everlasting virginity and do not give her due respect.

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### *Note:*

The comparative theology summary provided in this document applies to the majority of the numerous denominations under the umbrella of Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant churches.

The list of differences is in no way exhaustive but is only meant to provide an overall understanding of the major differences between the denominations and to help us understand our Orthodox faith.