

Q. What are the differences between Orthodox Christianity and the Roman Catholic Church?

A. The basic differences are as follows:

1. 1. **“The Doctrine of Interpolation”**- Until the late fifth century, both East and West used Greek as the principal Church language. Still, the Western Church began to think independently in a Latin (legalistic) way. The Greek Patriarchate of Aquila in Italy gave birth in the fifth century to the “Doctrine of Interpolation,” which holds that the truth evolves as we come to understand it and that such things as dogma, morals, Church Government, Liturgy, and Biblical interpretation can “grow” into new forms, as long as they can be shown to have continuity with the old beliefs and practices. This is the root doctrine behind Roman innovations, Papal authority, and the Protestant Reformation. As my old Bishop from Riga, Latvia, once said, “Why do you need an infallible person if you don’t plan to change anything?” The Orthodox tend to see the Protestant use of the Bible as a substitution of a “Paper Pope” (or thousands of paper popes) for a human one. The Eastern Church sees the scriptures as part of the Church’s living experience of “The Faith once and for all time delivered to the saints.” We don’t use the Bible to argue or prove our doctrine. We use it to remind ourselves what that doctrine is.
2. 2. **Authority**- Both the Orthodox and Roman Church have Popes (The Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria, together with the Patriarch of Rome, were designated as “Pope” by the Council of Nicea.), Patriarchs, Archbishops, Bishops, Priests and Deacons. The difference is that the Orthodox Clergy do not constitute a separate caste from the laity. Authority in the West comes from the top down, in the East from the people upward. The Holy Spirit guides the people from whom Deacons, Priests, and Bishops are chosen or elected. All clergy, except Bishops, are usually married, and it is not uncommon for a pious layman in a Greek, Syrian, or Russian Village to be chosen by the people to be their priest, examined by the Bishop, and ordained. In most of the Orthodox world, seminary professors are laity, men or women. Again, if authority is “authenticity ” (which is what the Greek meaning implies), than the laity are the chief preservers of the tradition. If a Roman Catholic Priest denied the Trinity, his bishop would investigate. If I denied the Trinity, the babas (grandmothers) would throw me out of the front door.
3. 3. **Filioque**- There are two issues about the change in the Creed made by the Roman Church in the 9th Century:
 - a. Does one “part” of the Church have the right to change a creed that was composed by councils of the entire Church?
 - b. Is it true that the Relations within the Divine Trinity are a sequence (i.e. The Father begets the Son and the Father and Son generate the Holy Spirit), or are the Relationships within the Trinity descriptions of Eternal Relations in which the

Eternal Son is described as relating to the Father as a Son to a Father and the Spirit as proceeding from the Father as the Human Spirit derives from the Human Soul? This may seem a matter of rhetoric, but it has a great deal to do with “Who” and “What” God is, and how we relate to God.

1. 4. **Anthropology**- Orthodox do not believe that humans are born with a thing called “Original Sin” within them, but are, rather, born into a fallen world in which fallenness is the consequence of Adam’s Sin. The R. C. view, which most Protestants hold, dates from Augustine in the 6th Century, and makes human nature deformed or depraved. It also casts a pall over human sexuality and marriage, which became the way in which Original Sin is passed on. The Orthodox believe that humans are able to know God Himself, through His “Uncreated Energies.” Roman Catholics hold that God could only be known through his “actions,” but by means of human reason, and that this is knowledge about God, not knowledge of God.

These are the BIG differences. All the rest are collateral.