

SERIES: THE CHURCH AND THE CHURCHES

3 The Orthodox Church

In this series of classes we want to talk about the different churches. I will briefly summarize what we have had in the last classes.

In the first class we established that the church is only one because there is only one body of Christ. This remains the case even though there are different church denominations that appear in this world. Nevertheless, Christ did not leave us in the dark about where we can find the earthly church. The church is wherever God's word is correctly proclaimed and contained therein, where the Lord's Supper and baptism are correctly administered.

Then we talked about the Roman Catholic Church. The most serious differences between the Roman Catholic Church are defined in two theological terms. The Catholic Church has a different understanding of the nature of man and a different understanding of sin. It believes that man has retained a large part of the image of God. This is also the reason why they do not understand original sin as a radical apostasy and therefore believe that man and the church must work together to achieve the salvation of the individual. In contrast, Martin Luther defined the four things where God alone is effective: the word alone, grace alone, Jesus alone and faith alone.

Today we want to talk about the Orthodox Church:

The word "orthodox" has negative connotations in modern language and means "stubborn" or "inflexible". In its original meaning, however, the term orthodox means "worshiping God in the right way". In other words, celebrating church services in the right way. This actually means "worshiping God in the right way", "celebrating church services in the right way". This makes it clear that the Orthodox Church places a lot of value on church services, which it wants to see celebrated in the right way. The Lutheran Church also sees church services as the centre of Christian life. Because we have said: "Wherever the word of God is taught correctly and where the Lord's Supper and baptism are administered correctly" there is a church. So we have many similarities with the Orthodox Church.

When it comes to the Orthodox Church, however, it must be said that there is not just one Orthodox Church, but many, which often see themselves as national churches and also distinguish themselves culturally and nationally from other churches. For example, there is the Russian Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. Likewise, the Greek Orthodox Church. The origins of the Orthodox Church also have political reasons. In history, the Roman Empire was divided into a western and an eastern part. This happened in 395 AD. Rome was the headquarters of the Western Church and Constantinople (today's Istanbul) was the headquarters of the Eastern Church. While the church in the West was shaped by the Latin language and culture, Greek-Byzantine thinking shaped the church and theology in the eastern part of the empire. Over time, this led to the churches in the east and west of the empire developing more and more independently of one another. Finally, in 1054, the Western Pope excommunicated the entire Eastern Church. The crusaders of the Western Church even plundered Constantinople in 1204. The hostility between the Roman Catholic Church and the

Eastern Church lasted until 1965. It was only then, at the Second Vatican Council, that the Roman Catholic Pope and the Patriarch of the Eastern Church lifted their mutual excommunication. Nevertheless, the relationship between the two churches is strained. The Roman Pope sees himself as the only Pope there can be. The two churches nevertheless met to establish common teachings that still exist today and are also recognized by our church: They are the following:

The Council of Nicaea in 325, where the confession of the true divinity of Christ was made,

The Council of Constantinople in 381, where the divinity of the Holy Spirit was confessed

The Council of Ephesus in 431, where the simultaneous humanity and divinity of Jesus was established

And the Council of Chalcedon in 451, where it was established that Christ has a divine and a human nature, unmixed and inseparable, the so-called "two-natures doctrine".

These council decisions were also accepted in the Western Church and thus also in the Lutheran Church. However, some oriental churches did not agree with the decisions of the Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon. This was for the simple reason that their representatives were not present. For this reason, the "Nestorian" churches arose, which were very widespread in Iran and in 451 with the so-called "Monophysite" churches, which held that Christ only had a divine nature. Only in the last twenty years have there been significant attempts at rapprochement between the "Byzantine" and the "Monophysite" churches, which made it clear how many misunderstandings had contributed to the inner-Orthodox schism in the 5th century. Nevertheless, this schism as such has not been overcome to this day. Unfortunately, the Orthodox churches subsequently became more and more national churches. For example, the Russian Orthodox Church. After the decline of Constantinople due to the spread of Islam, Moscow gained importance as the seat of the Russian Orthodox Patriarch. Nevertheless, the Moscow Patriarch never had a status similar to that of the Pope in Rome; the Orthodox national churches are rather characterized by the fact that they are each "autocephalous", that is, they are independent of other churches and are not subordinate to any other patriarch. The Patriarch of Constantinople also only has something like an "honorary presidency" among the patriarchs and archbishops of the Orthodox churches. The influence of the Constantinian Patriarch is very limited by the Turkish state. .

A characteristic of Orthodox thinking is the connection to the church and the connection to the state. Anyone who is Russian or Greek is thus automatically (practically mediated by baptism, of course) Russian Orthodox or Greek Orthodox. The Orthodox churches therefore find it very difficult to accept the idea that there could be other churches on "their" territory; According to their own understanding, these could at most be responsible for members of other ethnic groups. However, many representatives of the Orthodox Churches are fundamentally unable to view all non-Orthodox churches as churches in the true sense of the word; in practice, this often leads to Orthodox churches rebaptizing Christians who convert from another church to the Orthodox Church. Unfortunately, this still happens here in Germany, even though representatives of the Orthodox Churches signed an ecumenical declaration in Magdeburg in 2007 in which they recognized baptisms administered in the other signatory churches (e.g. in our SELK) as valid.

THE TEACHING OF THE ORTHODOX CHURCH: While the doctrine of the Trinity in the Evangelical Church is often, so to speak, integrated into the path of salvation of our God to us humans, the doctrine of the Trinity is much more central to the teaching of the Orthodox Church.

Therefore, Orthodox Churches emphasize that the Nicene Creed, as we confess it, where it says that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, must say that the Holy Spirit proceeds not only from the Father but also from the Son. This point of contention is very important for Orthodox Christians and is still the most important doctrinal difference between Roman and Orthodox Christians. In the thinking of the Orthodox Church, particular emphasis is placed on the incarnation through the birth of Jesus and the resurrection. While the Lutherans place particular emphasis on the cross. This can also be seen in the churches. In the Lutheran churches, the cross is always in the center. IN the Orthodox Church, an iconostasis is the center. An iconostasis is a wall on which various figures are depicted. The incarnation of Christ and his resurrection are emphasized there. The apostles are often depicted there too.

There was often controversy in the Orthodox Church about icons. People wondered whether people worshiped the icon or the God. The Orthodox often explain it like this: They worship Christ as if through a window. What they mean by this is that they look at the image of the icon but actually worship the God behind it. As if through a window. Mary is also venerated as the Mother of God. Just as it was established at the Council of Ephesus in 431. Mary is also respected as the Mother of God by the Lutheran Church. But in the Orthodox Church this veneration is often exaggerated, so that the veneration comes very close to prayer.

While in the Lutheran Church we are used to talking primarily about the justification of the sinner when describing the restoration of our broken relationship with God, Orthodox theology speaks in this context of "theosis", the "deification" of man: "God became man so that we might be deified" - these words of Saint Athanasius of Alexandria summarize the Orthodox doctrine of salvation very briefly. The doctrine of deification as such does not contradict Lutheran teaching at all; Luther himself can speak of God "pouring out Christ, his beloved Son, over us and pouring himself into us and drawing us into himself, so that he becomes completely human and we become completely deified." From a Lutheran perspective, however, it is difficult that Orthodox theology, just like the Roman Catholic Church, has a very positive view of man's ability to contribute to his own salvation after the Fall. The Orthodox Church also recognizes 7 sacraments. While the Lutheran Church only recognizes Holy Communion, baptism and the absolution of sins the Orthodox Church has 7 sacraments.

Baptism The newly baptized person receives Holy Communion for the first time immediately after baptism.

Myrrh anointing Receiving the Holy Spirit after baptism. In the Lutheran Church, this is understood as confirmation. The Orthodox Church therefore does not recognize confirmation. As a result, there is little instruction in the Orthodox Church.

In Holy Communion, the Orthodox Churches also believe in the real presence of Christ in Holy Communion. Another thing Lutherans have in common with the Orthodox is that Orthodox priests are also allowed to be married - however, they must have been married before being

ordained; after that, this is no longer possible. Bishops, on the other hand, are not allowed to be married; they are often former monks, priests or widowers.

The Orthodox Church sees itself as being directly linked to the first Christian church. The Church therefore has no interest in adapting to modern thinking. This is partly problematic because it does not critically examine its own history at all. It is also difficult because they still use the old languages in their services, which are not understood by the believers. For example, Old Slavonic in the Russian Orthodox Church and Old Greek in the Greek Orthodox Church. The Orthodox churches were massively suppressed partly by Islam and partly by communism. Today, the Russian Orthodox Church has turned out to be an ally of the state and supports the national interest of the Russians in expanding their territory. This has naturally led to the further split of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.