



**Study guide for  
EASTERN ORTHODOX  
THEOLOGY**

## Eastern orthodox Christianity

Date	AD 330 Emperor Constantine rename the city of Byzantium Constantinople which became the city of the leading patriarch in the great schism of 1054. The orthodox church would consider it's origins to reach into patristics and apostles.
Size	About 225 million worldwide 3-5 million USA
Scripture	The Scriptures or without air in matters of faith only scripture is to be interpreted by sacred tradition, especially the seven ecumenical council's which Matt from A.D. 325 Dash 787, the canon includes 49 old testament books (the Catholic Bible plus three more) and 27 New Testament Books.
God	The one creator and Lord of all existing internally as the Trinity (father son and holy spirit)
Jesus	The eternal son incarnate, fully God and fully man, conceived and born of the Virgin Mary died on the cross for our sins, Rose badly from the grave, ascended into heaven, and we will come again in glory to judge us all
Salvation	In Christ, God became human so that human beings might be deified (the hostess) that is have the energy of gods life in them. Through baptism and participation in the church, gods people receive the benefit of Christ's redeeming work as they persevere.
Death	At death, the soul of the faithful are purified as needed (a process of growth not punishment) then the faithful get the eternal blessing of heaven. The souls of the wicked at death do not pass go do not collect 200 dollars but Go straight to the eternal torment of hell.
The church	The church is the body of Christ and unbroken historical connection to the apostles, changelessly maintaining the faith of the undivided church as expressed in the crates. It is one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic, with the churches organized nationally (Armenian Greek Russian and so forth) They are very little centralized authority with organizational structure kept to a minimal. The laity taking a prominent role in local governments of which that of Constantinople has primacy in honor not authority.
Sacraments	Baptism initiates gods life in the one baptized usually infants. In the Eucharist bread and wine are changed into Jesus's body and blood (a mystery to be left unexplained)
Belief	Mary conceived Jesus virginal he she remains a virgin perpetually and introduction not dogma was assumed badly into heaven Icons images of Christ Mary or the saints or objects of veneration not worship through which God can be worshiped.
Social Treands	A significant portion or doctrinally conservative. Most orthodox bodies are members of the world Council of churches who is liberal leanings have a long caused concern.

# FIRST LOOK

## GREEK (OR EASTERN) ORTHODOXY

The Eastern Orthodox churches profess to hold to the doctrine of the ecumenical creeds of undivided Christendom, in particular the creeds of Nicea and Constantinople. Thus they call themselves orthodox.

They hold to the mass\* in which they believe there is a real transubstantiation. Worship is highly liturgical, with little emphasis on preaching. They hold a synergistic view of salvation. They believe tradition to be equally authoritative with Scripture and rest in the ultimate authority of the unchanging common mind of the churches, guided by the Holy Spirit.

Eastern Orthodoxy refers to the family of churches, predominant in Europe and parts of Asia, that share a common faith. To Orthodox Christians, orthodoxy refers not only to right belief but also to right worship (Greek, doxa). The Orthodox believe their faith is in continuity with that of the earliest Christians and their current leadership can be traced back to the apostles through the apostolic succession of the episcopacy.

Tensions between the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church can be traced back to centuries before they parted ways. Controversies over the preparation of the bread for the Eucharist and theological differences over the relationship between the members of the Trinity, along with tensions over the scope of the Bishop of Rome's ecclesial authority,

Rome acted like they were in charge and got real bossy. For example, Rome elevation of speculative points of theology into dogmas, making such teachings on the level of essential truth. Eastern Orthodox also deeply resented Rome's action in unilaterally deciding to put the Western belief concerning the procession of the Spirit into the Nicene Creed without the decision of an ecumenical council. Further cultural miscommunication and language barriers strained an already tense situation. All these factors culminated in a final break between the Rome and the Eastern church in the Great Schism of 1054.

# ECUMENICAL COUNCILS<sup>1</sup>

In early church history, an ecumenical council was a meeting of the bishops of the churches from across the known world. The bishops were convened in response to controversies and heresies that threatened to divide Christianity and dilute its message. Whereas many of the councils are recognized by the Roman Catholic Church, only the first seven councils are generally accepted by most magisterial branches of Christianity as being valid ecumenical councils. The seven generally accepted ecumenical councils and their decisions are as follows:

1. First Council of Nicaea (325): Affirmed that Jesus is truly God and equal to the Father, rejected Arianism, and adopted the Nicene Creed.
2. First Council of Constantinople (381): Affirmed the humanity of Christ against the Apollinarians, revised the Nicene Creed into its present form, and prohibited any alteration of the Nicene Creed without the assent of an ecumenical council.
3. Council of Ephesus (431): Affirmed against Nestorianism that Jesus is one person, proclaimed the Virgin Mary as the mother of God, and condemned Pelagianism.
4. Council of Chalcedon (451): Affirmed that in Jesus there are two distinct natures in one person that are hypostatically united “without confusion, change, division or separation,” condemned Eutychianism and Monophysitism, and adopted the Chalcedonian Creed.
5. Second Council of Constantinople (553): Reaffirmed decisions and doctrines set forth by previous councils; condemned new Arian, Nestorian, and Monophysite writings and Origenism.
6. Third Council of Constantinople (680–681): Emphasized that Jesus had both a divine and human will, and condemned Monothelitism.
7. Second Council of Nicaea (787): Renewal of the veneration of icons and ended first iconoclasm. The Nicean Council is rejected by some Protestant denominations, preferring the Council of Hieria (754), which had also described itself as the seventh ecumenical council and had condemned the veneration of icons.

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<sup>1</sup> George Bannister, “Ecumenical Councils” *The Popular Encyclopedia of Church History* ed. Ed Hindson, Daniel R. Mitchell (Eugene, Harvest House Pub 2013), 128-129

# EASTERN ORTHODOX THEOLOGY

'Eastern Orthodox' refers to the churches in communion with the patriarchate of Constantinople (Istanbul). These include the national churches of Greece, Cyprus, Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, Russia and Georgia, as well as the ancient patriarchates of Antioch, Jerusalem and Damascus. There are smaller Orthodox churches in a number of other countries, notably the USA, Britain and France, though these are composed mainly of immigrants and expatriates from Orthodox countries.

## History

The historical development of Eastern Orthodox theology can be conveniently divided into five main stages. The first of these is the pre-Chalcedonian period (to 451). During this time the foundation of later Orthodoxy was laid in the writings of the Greek Fathers, of whom the most notable are \*Athanasius, John \*Chrysostom, \*Cyril of Alexandria and the 'Three Hierarchs', known in the West as the Cappadocian Fathers. These are \*Basil the Great, of Caesarea, \*Gregory the Theologian, of Nazianzus, and Basil's brother, \*Gregory of Nyssa. These men, most of whom were virtually contemporaries, expounded the theology of the first ecumenical council, held at \*Nicaea in 325, and ensured that their interpretation would carry the day at the second (\*Constantinople, 381) and third (\*Ephesus, 431). The main influence came from the \*Alexandrian School of theology, which strongly emphasized the unity of the divine Christ, both before and after his \*incarnation. There was also a great development of \*trinitarian theology, largely thanks to Basil of Caesarea. The period ends with the fourth ecumenical council, held at \*Chalcedon in 451. There the doctrine of Christ as one divine person in two natures, one human and one divine, was upheld (see \*Christology), in spite of the objections of the Alexandrians (who favoured a doctrine of one nature in Christ), and the \*Nestorians (who regarded the person as the result, not the cause, of the incarnation). After Chalcedon these groups split off to become the Nestorian Church, now a very small body of 50,000 members, and the \*Monophysite Church, known in Egypt as \*Coptic and in \*Syria as Jacobite (after its sixth-century leader, Jacob Baradaeus). These churches still flourish, both in their countries of origin and in areas where they have spread, notably Ethiopia (Coptic) and South India (Jacobite).

The next phase was the early Byzantine period (451–843). This was dominated by Christological controversy, first against the Monophysites, and then against the \*iconoclasts. The fifth ecumenical council (Constantinople, 553) tried to reconcile the churches of Egypt and Syria, but without success, and the attempt was formally abandoned at the sixth council (Constantinople, 680). The seventh and, in Orthodox eyes, last ecumenical council (Nicaea, 787) condemned the iconoclasts. The leading theologians of this period were Leontius of Byzantium (see \*Hypostasis) and his namesake Leontius of Jerusalem (both sixth century), Maximus the Confessor and \*John of Damascus. They gave Orthodox Christology a shape which reflects a deep and sophisticated appropriation of the dogmatic pronouncements of the Council of Chalcedon. The period is also notable for the development of Orthodox spirituality,

especially the veneration of icons, the great liturgies, and the canonical regulations which govern the church's life. These were codified at the so-called Quinisext Council, or Synod in Trullo, held at Constantinople in 691–92. The canons regulated such practices as clerical marriage, and the use of leavened bread in the Eucharist, which were rejected by the Western church. Many of the visible differences between Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism can be traced to the canons of this council.

The third stage may be called the late Byzantine period (843–1452). During this time, Orthodoxy engaged in increasingly bitter polemic against Western theology and, as a counterweight to it, developed tendencies which were latent in the Eastern tradition. The main cause of dispute was the filioque clause, added to the Nicene Creed in the sixth century in Spain, and adopted officially at Rome c. 1014. The addition raised the question of papal authority in matters of doctrine, as well as the theological issue of the double procession of the Holy Spirit. Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople from 858–67 and again from 880–86, led the opposition to the filioque clause, and his views are still repeated by Orthodox theologians today. On a more positive note, the period also witnessed a remarkable spiritual revival, which bore fruit first in the conversion of the Slavs (850–1000) and then in the practice of devotional meditation. The great names whose counsels are still followed by Orthodox monks today are Symeon the New Theologian and Gregory Palamas. The latter championed a monastic movement known as Hesychasm, which practised a system of spiritual exercises not unlike yoga. This was bitterly resisted by Westernizing influences at Constantinople, but was declared to be orthodox in 1351. The Westernizers, who had been gaining in strength since the abortive union of the churches at the Council of Lyons in 1274, were now put on the defensive. A second union was promulgated at the Council of Florence in 1439, but it was never popular and was abandoned after Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453.

Ironically, it was during the period of Turkish domination (1453–1821) that Western influence reached its peak in the Orthodox world. After the Reformation, all parties courted the Eastern churches, who were able to send many of their students to be educated in the West. This did not win Orthodoxy either to Rome or to the Protestant cause, but it made Orthodox theologians much more Western in their theological method and interests. In the seventeenth century, the patriarch successively of Alexandria and Constantinople, Cyril Lucaris (1572–1638), composed a Calvinistic confession of faith, which was published at Geneva in 1629. This provoked a Catholicizing reaction, which can be seen in the Confessions of Peter Mogila (1596–1646) and Dositheus of Jerusalem (1641–1707). Both these confessions are now regarded as more faithful to Orthodoxy than that of Lucaris, but many modern Orthodox reject them because they reflect a theological method which is foreign to the Eastern tradition.

The modern period (1821 to the present) has been characterized chiefly by a recovery of the monastic traditions of Byzantine Orthodoxy and by the struggle of the church against persecution from both communism and Islam. During the nineteenth century, the established theological tradition of both Greece and Russia was almost completely

subservient to German liberal Protestantism, and this trend has continued to some extent up to the present time. There developed an Orthodox dogmatic theology modelled on the West, as can be seen in the works of Chrestos Androustos (1869–1937), J. Karmiris (1904–92) and P. N. Trembelas (1886–1977; *Dogmatique de l'église orthodoxe catholique*, 3 vols., Chevetogne, 1966–68). An almost heretical \*mysticism characterizes the leading \*Russian theologians of the period, notably Alexis Khomiakov (1804–60) and Sergei \*Bulgakov. These trends have produced a reaction, however, which is now very powerful. Beginning in the eighteenth century, with the edition of patristic texts known as the *Philokalia*, monastic ideas began to revive in the Orthodox world. These bore fruit in the twentieth-century revival of neo-Byzantinism, associated with the work of the Russians, Vladimir \*Lossky and John \*Meyendorff and with the Romanian theologian Dumitru \*Staniloae. Orthodoxy is torn between liberal and conservative tendencies, with the latter appearing to be gaining the upper hand.

### **Characteristics**

Orthodox theology differs from both Roman and Protestant teaching in a number of important respects. In general terms, it relies more on the philosophical base of Neoplatonism (see \*Platonism), which the West in the main abandoned in the thirteenth century. It has a strongly mystical flavour, and fights shy of dogmatic definition as much as it can. Its authority is derived from 'tradition', which includes both the Scriptures, decisions of the \*councils, especially the \*Nicene Creed, and the Greek Fathers. The Latin Fathers before the eleventh century are honoured as part of this tradition as well, but in practice they are ignored. Also important are the testimony of the \*liturgies, which have not changed for over a thousand years, and the veneration of icons, which is much more 'theological' in tone than any comparable devotion in the West.

The Orthodox doctrine of the \*Trinity is superficially the same as the Western one, with the exception of the filioque clause, but in conception it is very different. The Orthodox put the primary stress on the persons of the Godhead, and tend to regard the Father as the hypostatization of the divine essence. He is the unique fountainhead of Deity (*pēgē tēs theotētos*), which explains why the Orthodox cannot accept that the Holy Spirit derives his being from the Son as well as from the Father. They also place great emphasis on the energies of God, a concept which is strange to Western minds. The Holy Spirit, for example, is said to proceed from the Father but to rest on the Son, whose energy he becomes. The concept is analogous to the Catholic notion of grace, though the Orthodox insist that they do not see the divine energy as a substance which can be infused into the believer.

This naturally affects their doctrine of \*sanctification, and their sacramental theology. Orthodox believe in baptismal regeneration, and administer chrismation (confirmation) and Holy Communion to the newly baptized, including infants. They believe that the Holy Spirit descends on the elements of bread and wine by liturgical invocation (*epiclēsis*; see \*Eucharist), but resist Roman Catholic ideas of transubstantiation. The believer is called to a life of \*deification, which means transfiguration into the image and likeness of God. The supreme manifestation of this can be found in the ecstasy of

the contemplative life, which occupies a much more important place in Orthodox spirituality than it does in Roman Catholicism.

By Western standards, Orthodoxy has a weak doctrine of \*sin and \*atonement. Sin is regarded as the effect of death and finitude, not as its cause. Salvation therefore tends to be seen primarily in terms of freedom from death, not as a release from guilt. In modern times this soteriology has made a great impact on Western theologians who for various reasons have recoiled from the Reformed doctrine of the atonement, and its influence can be seen in recent liturgical revisions.

Since 1961, Orthodox churches have participated in the World Council of Churches, which has forced them to take an interest in other kinds of theology. They have established very friendly relations with the non-Chalcedonian churches of the East, and have made some moves in the direction of Rome and the Protestant churches as well. On the whole, however, they remain by far the most closed of the major branches of Christendom. At the WCC their influence has mostly been exercised in favour of a more theological approach, and against political involvement. Today creative Orthodox thinking is more vital than at any time since the fourteenth century, and it offers itself as a conservative challenge to Western Christendom. There are a number of signs that its influence may be growing, and it is certain to become a major force in ecumenical circles in the future.

G. L. Bray "Eastern Orthodox Theology," in *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic*. 2nd edit. Ed: Martin Davie, Tim Grass, Stephen R. Holmes, John McDowell, T. A. Noble, (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2016) 277-279

# **FURTHER DISCOURSE ON EASTERN DOCTRINE**

## **ON Canon Law**

The Greek word *kanōn* means a rule, and canon law comprises the disciplinary regulations of the church. These began to be formulated in the early centuries by local and ecumenical \*councils, and are distinct from the decisions which the ancient councils made on matters of belief. However, they are likewise expressions of a NT concern for order and moral discipline in the church. The common law of the Eastern church still consists essentially of the canons of the early councils (in which they include the so-called Apostolic Canons, appended to the fourth-century Apostolic Constitutions, and the numerous canons of the 692 Quinisext Council, not recognized in the West).<sup>2</sup>

## **ON Councils**

In Christian theology

Councils are summoned to settle disputes of interpretation, or to pass judgment on matters not found in Scripture, and their decisions are regarded as binding if they are 'received' by the church as being in accordance with Scripture and its traditional interpretation. A general or ecumenical or universal council is one for which universal 'reception' by the church is claimed.

This theory has a number of weaknesses, and is in fact understood in different ways.... The authority of councils is also a subject of debate. The Eastern church believes that councils are infallible because they are inspired by the Holy Spirit, who speaks not only in the unanimous voice of the bishops but also in the answering echo of the church, which must receive and find the proper application for the decisions taken. The practical difficulties with this are that dissenting bishops have had to be silenced or excommunicated in order to achieve unanimity, and that there have been notable instances of conciliar decisions which have subsequently been rejected by the church, largely on non-theological grounds.<sup>3</sup>

## **ON Eucharist**

For the Eastern churches the heart of the liturgy was the epiclesis, or invocation of the Holy Spirit to bless the bread and the wine and be present with the people of God. In a typical Orthodox Church the priest celebrates the Eucharist behind a screen, or iconostasis, with pictures of the saints. The priest's voice can be heard, but the actions

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<sup>2</sup> New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic. 2nd edit. Ed: Martin Davie, Tim Grass, Stephen R. Holmes, John McDowell, T. A. Noble, (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2016) 151

<sup>3</sup> Ibid 221

cannot be seen by the people. In the Western church the priest stood at the altar with his back to the people, and the rite was held to transform *ex opere operato* the elements of bread and wine into the body and the blood of the Lord. The Lord was present in the elements, and continued to be present in the church through the reserved \*sacrament. The faithful participated primarily through their presence, and while they were expected to be present at Mass frequently, they received the sacrament – in one ‘kind’ only – on infrequent occasions. There was an increasing tendency to concentrate attention on the elements of bread and wine rather than the rite as a whole, and to narrow down the understanding of Christ's presence in the bread and wine. This went with an underplaying of Christ's role as the host and master of the feast; his presence according to his promise whenever two or three are gathered in his name; his presence in the word; his presence in his body, the church; and his presence in the needy neighbor.<sup>4</sup>

## **ON The Fall**

Eastern Orthodox theology heightens its differences from the Augustinian tradition; it affirms that the fall (historical) entailed mortality but no guilt nor total depravity; the advantages of the pre-fall state are lowered, the fall somewhat de-dramatized, and salvation is seen primarily as deification (*theôsis*) rather than restoration.<sup>5</sup>

## **ON Grace**

The Eastern Orthodox tradition has developed a very different understanding of grace from anything found in the West. It has steadfastly refused to analyze it or separate it into different theological compartments, and despite some similarities with Roman Catholicism, it has consistently attacked the Roman doctrine (and by implication the Protestant ones as well) for holding to a doctrine of ‘created grace’ which can be quantified and dispensed in varying proportions. To the Orthodox mind, grace is fundamentally a charismatic experience of God which can take many forms, of which the highest is the beatific vision of the Lord granted to those who have been transfigured by the divine light, or ‘deified’ as Orthodox theologians somewhat misleadingly tend to phrase it. In this understanding, although grace can be given to anyone, it is most clearly present in the lives of those who have forsaken the cares of the world for a life of mystical contemplation in preparation for the perfect union with Christ in heaven. Varied though its manifestations are, the basic connection between grace and salvation remains at the core of Christian teaching even today, and at the popular level it is as visible and influential as ever. The popularity of a hymn like ‘Amazing Grace’, even outside church circles, is a clear reminder of this. More elaborate schemes remain the province of minorities, but for ordinary Christians grace is a term

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<sup>4</sup> New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic. 2nd edit. Ed: Martin Davie, Tim Grass, Stephen R. Holmes, John McDowell, T. A. Noble, (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2016) 307

<sup>5</sup> Ibid 328

associated most readily with the saving work of Christ, which remains at the heart of all Christian worship and proclamation.<sup>6</sup>

## ON Holy Spirit

### Son and Spirit in East and West

In the following centuries the \*Orthodox East and the \*Catholic West increasingly diverged in the way that they developed their trinitarian theology, not least in the way that they understood the relationship between the Spirit and the Son. This came to a head in the so-called filioque dispute, in which the East insisted that the Spirit like the Son had his eternal origin only in the Father, while the West, under the influence of St \*Augustine, insisted that the Spirit proceeded 'from the Father and the Son' (Lat. filioque). At first sight this looks like an ancient dispute without contemporary relevance, but on closer examination, we can see that it involves issues that are central to a proper understanding of the Christian gospel.

The Catholic West alleged that the position of the Orthodox East did not take adequate account of the dependence of the work of the Spirit upon the work of the Son and at least opened the door to a possibility of relating to the Spirit without at the same time relating to the Son. This could lead to an unfocused spirituality to which the person and work of Christ was not central or even to a pluralistic understanding of other religions as works of the Spirit even when they rejected Christian claims about Christ.

The East retorted that such fears were unfounded, because the confession that both Son and Spirit were homoousios with the Father, and so with each other, meant that any possibility of relating to the one without relating to the other was totally excluded.

Eastern theologians in turn alleged against the West that its filioque teaching subordinated the Spirit to the Son and was in danger of understanding the Spirit simply as the way in which the ascended Christ acted in and among his people. This could lead to a binitarian (= two person) rather than a properly trinitarian (= three person) doctrine of God.

The East claimed that the scriptural data pointed not to a one-way dependence of the Spirit upon the Son, but to a mutual interdependence in which the incarnate Son was totally reliant upon the Spirit whom he received from the Father, while the Spirit was sent into the world through and as a result of the ministry and atoning work of the Son. As the first systematic theologian, \*Irenaeus of Lyons, put it in the second century, the Son and the Spirit were the two hands of God who were sent from the Father and worked in total co-ordination to inaugurate, execute and complete his creative and saving purposes in the world.

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<sup>6</sup> New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic. 2nd edit. Ed: Martin Davie, Tim Grass, Stephen R. Holmes, John McDowell, T. A. Noble, (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2016) 378

The East-West dialogue on the relation of Son and Spirit, broken off by the schism between them, has been resumed in our own day with positive prospects and the suggestion that the legitimate claims made by both sides might be reconciled and satisfied if the disputed creedal phrase were amended to read 'who proceeds from the Father through the Son'. The point that is relevant to both evangelical and charismatic Christians in our own day is to insist that there can be no dealing with the Spirit that does not involve a dealing with the Son and no dealing with the Son that does not involve a dealing with the Spirit. <sup>7</sup>

## **On liturgy**

The word 'liturgy' is derived from the Greek leitourgia which referred to the work of the citizens' assembly in the ancient Greek city states, particularly Athens, where it connoted the representative task of citizen-legislators. It was a term that described 'good works' done for the benefit of the wider community. Leitourgia was used in the lxx to describe the service of OT priests and Levites, and it also came to be used of Christian acts of worship, especially the Eucharist. Eastern Orthodox churches have retained this tradition and use the term 'the Liturgy' to refer specifically to the Eucharist.

Liturgy and tradition Liturgy is a vital carrier of tradition, the practices and associated beliefs that centre the church upon God's loving action in Christ. Baptism and Eucharist are the two most prominent practices of the tradition.

Liturgy and doctrine The public assembly is the place where the content of the Christian vision of God is embodied and affirmed. The Orthodox tradition has affirmed that all true theology is 'doxology'; the term 'orthodoxy' means giving right glory to God. One obvious example of this is the inclusion of creedal formulae in liturgy. The Apostles' Creed was used originally by baptismal candidates as an affirmation of faith, and the Nicene Creed was introduced into worship after the fourth century as a way of countering the continuing threat of Arianism.<sup>8</sup>

## **On Mary**

The Roman Catholic Marian doctrines consists of five points of definition; Theotokos, Mediatrix, Immaculate conception, the Assumption, and Co-Redemptrix. Mary is the Theotokos and a Mediatrix, her birth was an Immaculate conception and at her death Mary had been assumed into heaven, like Enoch and Elijah minus the pyrotechnics.(ie

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<sup>7</sup> New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic. 2nd edit. Ed: Martin Davie, Tim Grass, Stephen R. Holmes, John McDowell, T. A. Noble, (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2016) 422–423

<sup>8</sup> Ibid 525

the Assumption of Mary). Theologically she is venerated as Co-Redemptrix for her “willing” part in the plans of redemption.

### *Meaning of points of definition*

#### Theotokos

In Luke 1:43 Mary is called ‘the mother of my Lord’. In the early Alexandrian tradition this was made more explicit by the term theotokos (‘one who gave birth to God’, traditionally translated ‘mother of God’). The initial concern was Christological, not Mariological, to affirm the deity of Christ and the reality of the incarnation. At the Council of Antioch in 325 the term was used to state the deity of Christ, in opposition to Arius. In the next century Nestorius attacked the term (preferring Christotokos). As a consequence, theotokos was affirmed by the Council of Ephesus in 431 as a safeguard against adoptionism.

#### Mediatrix

Mary is a mediator between the believers and Christ. Praying to Mary is a good way to have your prayers heard because Jesus got a good spot for his mama (ie. a mama’s boy). The theological logic behind this is as follows: 1) The moral law of God (10 Commandments) is eternal. 2) Jesus is and will always be perfectly obedient to God’s moral law. 3) The fifth commandment is honor your father and mother. 4) Mary will always be Jesus’ mom. 5) So if she asked him to do something he ought to consider her request with the honor a son shows to his mother. Even if the request is on behalf of others. To be clear, The Second Vatican Council does state on the matter that her role of mediation is a side hustle and should be understood in any way as to ‘neither take away from nor add anything to the dignity and efficacy of Christ the one mediator’ (62; cf. 60, 1 Tim. 2:5–6).

#### Immaculate conception

the belief that Mary had lived without sin. But when had she been delivered from sin? At conception, Mary was conceived without original sin. This belief answers the theological question of how Mary could give birth to Christ without passing on original sin and corrupting Christ’s mortal body with the stain of sin.

#### Assumption of Mary

Mary had been assumed into heaven at her death. It should be noted that the doctrine concerns more than some final episode in Mary’s personal history. It is the basis for belief in her as the mediatrix.

#### Co-Redemptrix

The Second Vatican Council did not use the term, the concept is clearly stated. When the council convened, Mary plays a (subsidiary) role in Christ’s work of redemption. The incarnation could not occur without Mary’s permission or ‘fiat’ (Luke 1:38).

### *In Conclusion*

That said, the Eastern Orthodox view of Mary rejects some of the descriptions about but is fond of the Theotokos and affirms the assumption of Mary. They also practice praying to Mary. Yet two main qualifications are often put forth by the Eastern Orthodox thinkers to set themselves apart from the Roman Catholic view. 1.) The Orthodox are hesitant about the doctrine of Mary's immaculate conception and incline towards rejecting it. 2.) They also object in principle to the Roman Catholic elevation of these beliefs and practices to the status of dogmas.

Protestants as a whole reject these doctrines. While the virgin birth is scriptural and while theotokos can be seen as an affirmation of the biblical doctrine of the incarnation, the other doctrines are seen as an example of worldliness and bad development of doctrine. The church can't allow doctrine to develop by the whims of modern sentiment or be driven by unscriptural if not pagan devotional practices. Doctrine void of a scriptural foundation, hijacked by speculative theological musings, reinforced by popular church behavior and practices become church dogmas. The marian doctrines can be seen as a striking proof of the need to test all doctrine by Scripture and of the dangers of making ecclesiastical tradition infallible

## **ON Trinity**

A constant problem in trinitarian thought was finding the right words to express both the unity and the diversity of the Godhead. It was generally agreed that as a being, God is one and unique. This was denoted by the Greek word *ousia* and by the Latin words *substantia* and later *essentia*. By declaring that the Son was *homoousios* (consubstantial) with the Father, the first council of \*Nicaea in 325 canonized this usage, which has never been seriously challenged. Finding the right way to express the 'threeness' in God was much more difficult. \*Origen used the term \**hypostasis*, which he probably got from Heb. 1:3, and Tertullian used *persona*, which he took from Roman law but which went back to Greek theatre, where it meant 'mask'. The conceptual difference between these two words is that *hypostasis* refers primarily to the manifestation of a distinct identity, whereas *persona*, at least in its legal sense, stresses the activity of a subject. Unfortunately, many Greek theologians failed to appreciate this and thought that by calling the hypostases of the Godhead *personae*, Tertullian had lapsed into modalism, because to them persons were only masks which indicated the different roles which God might play in the cosmic drama. The confusion was eventually sorted out by Basil of Caesarea, who realized that *hypostasis* and *persona* meant the same thing, a conclusion which was eventually endorsed by the council of \*Chalcedon in 451.

After the council of Chalcedon in 451 the church was generally agreed in its trinitarian doctrine, even though it was divided over Christology. Controversy did not arise until some time later and became serious only in the ninth century, when Patriarch Photius of Constantinople (d. 886) wrote a detailed refutation of the Western (Latin) doctrine.

The trouble was caused by the way in which the Eastern Church understood the role of the Father as the 'source of deity' in the Trinity. According to that way of thinking, the Son derived his divinity by being 'begotten of the Father', and the Holy Spirit derived his by 'proceeding from the Father'. The different modes of causation determined the distinct identity of these two persons, and the Father was defined as the one who was both unbegotten and uncaused. In contrast to this model, the Western church, following Augustine, understood the Trinity as a community of love. According to this way of thinking, the Father was the Lover, the Son was the Beloved and the Holy Spirit was the Love which flows between them and creates the 'bond of unity' in the Godhead. If this model is followed, it becomes evident that the Holy Spirit must not only proceed from both the Father and the Son, but that he must do so in equal measure, since otherwise their love for one another would be imperfect. In the subsequent struggle against Arianism, the Western church gradually introduced this 'double procession' of the Holy Spirit into the Nicene Creed by placing the Latin word filioque ('and the Son') in the third article. Photius thought that this created two sources of deity in God and so compromised the fundamental principle of monotheism.<sup>9</sup>

## Historical Footnote

### Dueling not ruling Confession

While confessions of faith do not play an important role in the Orthodox Church. Two orthodox confessions help clarify the historic distinction between Catholics and Protestants. They are the Confession of Faith of Cyril Lucaris and Dositheus. The Confession of Dositheus was 1672. It was the most important Orthodox confession of modern times, defining Orthodox theology against Protestantism, but showing evidence of indebtedness to Roman Catholic thought; Orthodox are thus wary of placing too much weight on it as a statement of their faith. Dositheus (1641–1707) was patriarch of Jerusalem and presided over the synod there which canonized this confession. Its specific 'Calvinist' target was Cyril Lucaris (1572–1638), the patriarch of Constantinople who was strongly attracted to Protestantism. His own Confession of Faith (Geneva, 1629; G. A. Hadjiantoniou, Protestant Patriarch, Richmond, 1961) is a thoroughly Calvinist interpretation of Orthodox doctrine.

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<sup>9</sup> New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic. 2nd edit. Ed: Martin Davie, Tim Grass, Stephen R. Holmes, John McDowell, T. A. Noble, (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2016) 922-923

# Orthodox Ethics

## The Orthodox Church

The Orthodox Church is the second-largest Christian communion in the world today, comprising approximately 225 million to 300 million adherents to the faith. While Orthodox Christians can be found throughout the world, areas in which the Orthodox Church is the primary religious community are Belarus, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Georgia, Greece, Romania, Russia, Serbia, and Ukraine. The Orthodox Church is organized into a family of autocephalous (i.e., self-governing) ecclesial bodies, which include the churches of Constantinople (Istanbul), Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, Russia, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, Cyprus, Greece, Poland, the Czech lands and Slovakia, Albania, and America.

The Orthodox Church professes itself to be the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, locating its origins in the life and work of Jesus Christ and his apostles and continuing to the present day. For Orthodox Christians, the unity of the church is located not within an office or a sacred text but instead in a common faith that unites people of different languages, ethnicities, and generations. This common faith is believed to be the pure revelation of Jesus Christ, which is possessed by the church as a fruit of the Spirit of Truth. This deposit is given expression principally through sources such as the Holy Scripture, the first seven ecumenical councils, the canons of the church, the writings of the saints, the hymnology and prayers of the church, and the holy icons.

While the Orthodox Church and those who follow the Roman Catholic faith hold a common history of the first millennium, the division between the East and West was a gradual process that culminated in the year 1054 with what is commonly referred to as the Great Schism. Important historical markers in the life of the Orthodox Church since 1054 include the fall of the Byzantine Empire to the Muslim Ottoman Empire in 1453, Greek independence in 1821 from the Muslim Ottoman Empire, the rise of communism in Eastern Europe resulting in the martyrdom of millions of Orthodox Christians in the twentieth century, and the millennial anniversary of the conversion of the Slavs in 1988. Important figures in the history of the Orthodox Church include Gregory the Theologian, John Chrysostom, Maximus the Confessor, Symeon the New Theologian, Gregory Palamas, and Nikodemus of the Holy Mountain. More contemporary figures living in the twentieth century include Silouan the Athonite, Nikolai Velimirovich, and Justin Popovich.

One particularly important contemporary point with respect to the Orthodox Church is that Orthodox ethics, in general, stands relatively independent of the theological movements of the Western Christian tradition, including Scholasticism, the Protestant Reformation, and the Enlightenment. Consequently, the Orthodox Church represents to Western Christianity an alternative approach to understanding the relationship between Scripture and ethics.

## **Deification and Ethics**

One of the most distinctive aspects of the Orthodox Church is its approach to ethics. Ethics is supported not by the strength of reason but through the pursuit of deification. Orthodox Christians understand deification as the soteriological process by which Christians undergo an ethical and anthropological transformation of the whole person, becoming all that God is by grace. As such, ethics is rooted in a personal God who is wholly transcendent and yet is disclosed to the human person through personal transformation within the liturgical and ascetical life of the church. Important here is that the liturgical and ascetical life of the church does not simply contribute to an understanding of ethics but rather forms the basis by which ethics is undertaken. Consequently, ethics is primarily the fruit of an unmediated experience of God in pursuit of deification.

Consequently, knowledge of God and knowledge of the ethical life are arrived at through a nondiscursive, noetic knowledge within the context of the transformation of the human person. For Orthodox Christianity, the nous is understood as the faculty of the soul that governs the person and mediates the person's relationship with God. The nous can also be described as the eye of the soul. Thus, an ethicist is one who through prayer, fasting, almsgiving, keeping vigil, prostrations, love of neighbor, and love of God undergoes purification and engages in a participatory knowledge of God through God's uncreated energies. It is through turning to God in repentance with an open heart that ethical knowledge is derived. At the same time, the importance of intellectual rigor is not to be denied in its ability to assist in the pursuit of deification or to provide clarity in ethical understanding. However, intellectual rigor can never form the foundation of arriving at ethical knowledge.

## **Orthodox Ethics**

At the heart of ethical living is the pursuit of deification. The phrase “God became human so that humans may become gods [by grace]”—stated in various forms by important theologians including Irenaeus of Lyon, Athanasius the Great, Gregory the Theologian, Maximus the Confessor, and Gregory Palamas—provides the framework within the Orthodox tradition for understanding the ethical life. From the beginning of creation, a pilgrimage of growth and transformation for Adam and Eve was initiated within the divine economy. The first created humans were called to engage this process of growth and transformation in paradise in an ascent to God, yet they failed. Despite God's ongoing effort to call back creation, a stronger remedy was required, which was the Word of God taking on human nature, human experience, and, ultimately, human death and making them life-giving.

Through God's own assumption and deification of our human nature, human experience, and death in Christ, the principle upon which humanity returns to God is established. Further, this work of Christ as the new beginning and the second Adam, fulfilling the work of the first Adam, sets in place the basis by which Orthodox ethics is understood. Through the putting on of Christ in baptism, persons are integrated back into the path of deification offered through the life and work of Christ. The ethical life, then, is characterized by the cultivation of the grace given at baptism in pursuit of

deification through the liturgical and ascetical life of the church. Stated differently, the ethical life is the personal appropriation of the work of Christ. The Orthodox ethical life, consequently, is aimed at holiness through right worship and right belief within the liturgical and ascetical life of the church.

Within this context, rules, goals, and virtues are reframed within the liturgical and ascetical life of the church. The ethical life is measured with respect to one's proximity to God. Virtues are understood as the uncreated energies of God in which the fruit is deification. The virtues are the result of a synergistic relationship between the human person and God and demonstrate the health of the soul. Vice, conversely, is sickness of the soul and reveals a person's spiritual distance from God. Rules, including the commandments and canons, are boundaries between life in the Spirit and spiritual death. The goal is always deification. The result is that the exemplars of Orthodox ethics are those who have made progress in the pursuit of deification through the liturgical and ascetical life of the church and that which is ethical leads to an encounter with the Truth, who is the triune God revealed in Jesus Christ.

### **Scripture and Tradition**

This understanding of ethics relocates the Orthodox Church's understanding of Scripture within the soteriological framework of deification. Consequently, sacred tradition, here, is not restricted to the teachings and practices that are passed down over time in the life of the church. Sacred tradition, in the Orthodox understanding, is more fully and properly understood as the continued union and indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the church. Sacred tradition, then, at its core possesses the deifying life of Christ that gives birth to the revelatory and deifying experience of the saints. This experience of the saints, in turn, is given expression through Scripture, ecumenical councils, canons, writings of the saints, the hymnology and prayers of the church, and holy icons.

Scripture, then, possesses in it this revelatory and deifying experience of the saints from which it is borne out and points toward. For this reason, Orthodox Christians view Scripture as a whole, unified by the same life-giving Spirit with the highest ethic revealed in Jesus Christ. Further, Scripture is the product of a synergistic relationship between the working of the Holy Spirit and the author of the text in which the text maintains the personal character of the author in light of his experience of God and his historical circumstances. This understanding also points to the fact that the Scripture itself is not the revelatory and deifying experience; rather, it witnesses to the revelatory and deifying experience of the evangelists in which all Christians are called to participate. Thus, while the scriptural text witnesses to the divine truth, it also possesses the limitations of finite reality as part of the created world. Such an approach has several important implications.

First, Scripture is iconic in that it always points beyond itself to the divine Truth—the triune God revealed in Jesus Christ. Scripture, then, fundamentally exists within a soteriological context. In John 20:30–31 the evangelist writes, “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But

these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.” Second, the Scripture arises out of the life of the church and stands in service of the church. To separate Scripture and the church would be a grave error. This point is particularly clear in the way in which the Orthodox Church has historically located its use of Scripture within the context of the liturgical worship of the church. As such, Scripture does not contain the whole of divine revelation, which can only be possessed by the church—that is, the body of Christ.

Consequently, third, it is only in the church through the living sacred tradition of the church that the Scripture can be properly understood. Because Scripture is born out of the deifying experience of the church, it is through the pursuit and acquisition of this same deifying experience that the mysteries of Scripture can be penetrated and understood. This truth is often referred to as acquiring the “mind of Christ” or the “mind of the Fathers” as a prerequisite for proper interpretation. On this point, Athanasius writes, “But for the searching and right understanding of the Scriptures there is need of a good life and a pure soul, and for Christian virtue to guide the mind to grasp, so far as human nature can, the truth concerning God the Word. One cannot possibly understand the teaching of the saints unless one has a pure mind and is trying to imitate their life” (Inc. 57).

### **Scripture in Ethics**

Scripture and ethics have as their common basis, then, an experience of God in the pursuit of deification within the liturgical and ascetical life of the church. To remove Scripture or ethics from this soteriological framework would be to distort their foundations, their proper understanding, and their proper relationship to each other. Consequently, Orthodox ethics and Scripture are born out of a participatory knowledge of God and point Orthodox Christians toward this participatory knowledge of God in pursuit of deification.

Within this context, Orthodox ethicists view Holy Scripture as a primary resource within the sacred tradition of the church for understanding how one should pursue the ethical life in light of an Orthodox ethicist's own pursuit of deification. Here, the continuity of the life of the church is maintained in which that same Holy Spirit that guided the authors of Scripture is opening the heart of the Orthodox ethicist in turning to understand the Scripture and its ethical implications for Christian living.

At the same time, Orthodox ethicists do not use Scripture as an autonomous resource that is capable of standing outside of sacred tradition. Scripture is always interpreted within the context of the sacred tradition of the church. Consequently, in interpreting Scripture, the hermeneutical principle applied to Scripture is the living sacred tradition of the church. Scripture is read and understood within the pursuit of deification in one's own Christian life in adopting the “mind of Christ” guided by the writings, hymns, and liturgical prayers of those who have been recognized by the church as authoritative.

Such an approach, however, does not suggest that the proper way to deal with contemporary ethical problems is merely to read what a particular saint said in the fourth century about a particular biblical passage and that will resolve the ethical question in our own contemporary context. Rather, the aim in using Scripture is to enter into the same stream of sacred tradition that gave birth to these writings within their own historical context. Thus, the task is to discern what writings and interpretive methods are relevant in producing a creative and authentic response to our own historical situation within this same stream of sacred tradition. This approach also means that any ethical instruction today can never contradict the teaching of Scripture.

In light of the basic hermeneutical principle of sacred tradition, some general principles of exegetical method that are generally agreed upon by Orthodox ethicists include the following:

1. The life and work of Christ are the key that unlocks the meaning of all Scripture.
2. The pursuit of purity of heart through repentance and a turning to God in the life of the church is a critical precondition for an authentic interpretation of the text.
3. The aim and purpose of interpreting Scripture is always oriented toward the ethical life, which is the same as the pursuit of deification.
4. Only within the life of the church can Scripture be fully and properly interpreted, because it is within the church that a continuity of the working of the Holy Spirit can be found.
5. Methods of interpretation can vary as long as they authenticate the aim of the ethical life, which is the pursuit of deification.
6. Authority for proper interpretation ultimately rests within the apostolic tradition, which continues in the life of the church up to the present.

Given these general principles of interpretation, Orthodox ethicists make use of a wide range of biblical texts and methods. Such methods include typological, allegorical, and literal levels of interpretation that are witnessed to throughout the life of the church. Regarding the use of specific biblical critical methods such as philological criticism, literary criticism, and other forms of biblical criticism, generally speaking,

Orthodox ethicists are open to using these methods, recognizing that these are simply tools for understanding the text that can be appropriated within an Orthodox framework. Orthodox ethicists have much work to do today in responding to the many and diverse challenges presented in the world, ranging from new technologies to growing complex economic and ecological questions, to the ever-deepening discussions in the medical community. Scripture continues to play an important role in understanding how to respond to these contemporary challenges. The challenge for Orthodox ethicists is to properly discern within the living out of the liturgical and ascetical life of the church precisely how to manifest this same divine Spirit that has

been manifested in every generation with the continued aim of the restoration and healing of the entire world.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Mark A. Tarpley "Orthodox Ethics," Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids, Baker. 2011) 568-571