



Denominations | Orthodoxy

1

Authority

- Ware: “But councils of bishops can err and be deceived. How then can one be certain that a particular gathering is truly an Ecumenical Council and therefore, that its decrees are infallible?... This is a more difficult question to answer than might at first appear, and though it has been much discussed by Orthodox during the past two hundred years, it cannot be said that the solutions suggested are entirely satisfactory. All Orthodox know which are the seven councils that their Church accepts as ecumenical, but precisely what it is that makes a council ecumenical is not so clear.”
- Khomiakov’s answer: a council is ecumenical if it is accepted by the church at large.
 - Bulgakov: “It does not mean that the decisions of the councils should be confirmed by a general plebiscite [i.e., a vote] and that without such a plebiscite they have no force. There is no such plebiscite. But from historical experience it clearly appears that the voice of a given council has truly been the voice of the Church or that it has not: that is all.”

2

What do they believe about justification?

- Despite having a doctrine of justification, the Eastern Orthodox—unlike both Protestants and Roman Catholics—are not particularly interested in discussions of justification. Even the mention of the word “justification” or “justified” in Eastern Orthodox theological literature is rare.
 - As a part of the liturgy of the Service of Holy Baptism, the priest announces over the infant who has just been baptized: “*You are justified; you are illumined.*” And taking a new sponge dipped in water, the Priest wipes his (her) head, the breast, and the rest, saying, “You are baptized; you are illuminated; you are anointed with the Holy Myrrh, you are hallowed; you are washed clean, in the Name of Father, and of Son, and of Holy Spirit. Amen.”

3

What do they believe about justification?

- Justification is part of entrance to the church and is made possible only by the death and resurrection of Jesus, who died to expiate sin and grant forgiveness and mercy to those brought into right relationship with him.

What do they believe about sanctification?

- The lack Eastern Orthodox interest in discussions of justification is largely explained by their central focus on theosis, or deification: the process of “becoming (like) God” (cf. 2 Pet. 1:4; 1 John 3:2).

4

What do they believe about sanctification?

- In Protestant terms, the organizing question of Orthodoxy and the ultimate pursuit of Orthodoxy is sanctification—how do I become like God? There are a variety of steps one passes through along the way (e.g., justification, baptism etc.), but the fundamental question is, “How do I become the kind of person that God has made me to be?”
- The Orthodox are very clear that theosis does not involve becoming a part of the divine essence, as though the Trinity is augmented or affected by individuals or that individuals will one day compromise the doctrine of monotheism. Rather, the faithful will one day come to share fully in God’s divine *energies*, not his divine *essence*.

5

What do they believe about sanctification?

- Ware: “God’s essence remains unapproachable, but His energies come down to us. God’s energies, which are God himself, permeate all His creation, and we experience them in the form of deifying grace and divine light.”
- Lossky: “Grace signifies all the abundance of the divine nature, in so far as it is communicated to men.”
 - The Orthodox strongly reject all forms of pantheism.
 - The culmination of theosis results in one having a direct experience of God’s self-revelation and glory (e.g., with his energies).

6

What do they believe about sanctification?

Asceticism

- Ascetic practices include following the Fast/Feast cycles, standing for long periods of time during service, holding vigil, a daily rule of prayer, giving alms, engaging the sacraments, church participation and obedience to a “spiritual father.”
 - Staniloae: “The ultimate goal of asceticism is to free our nature, not only from the movement of sinful appetites, but also from the ideas that appear in the mind after the cleansing of the passions. This is...to gain its independence from created things, which have enslaved our nature by the passions, and to make it long more for God.”

7

What do they believe about sanctification?

- Post-mortem opportunity/prayer for the dead/intermediate state
 - Ware: “Orthodox are convinced that Christians here on earth have a duty to pray for the departed, and they are confident that the dead of helped by such prayers. But precisely in what way do our prayers help the dead? What exactly is the condition of the souls in the period between death and the Resurrection of the Body and the Last Day? Here Orthodox teaching is not entirely clear, and has varied somewhat at different times.
 - No post-mortem suffering for the faithful
 - Suffering, but not expiatory suffering
 - Mystery—we just aren’t told

8

What do they believe about sanctification?

- Apokatastasis
 - While a minority view, dating back to the Fathers, there has always been within Orthodoxy a stream of thought either advocating for or holding out hope for universal restoration, whereby everyone achieves theosis.
- The fundamental question for Orthodoxy: How do I “become God?”
 - Ware: “If someone asks, ‘How can I become God?’ the answer is very simple: go to church, receive the sacraments regularly, pray to God ‘in spirit and in truth’, read the Gospels, follow the commandments.”

9

What do they believe about the canon?

- While the New Testament canon of the Orthodox is (almost?) identical to Protestant and Catholic canons, their Old Testament canon differs from both, as they follow the Septuagint, whose divergences from the Hebrew text they believe to be inspired changes. Thus, their OT canon includes all of the apocryphal books of Roman Catholicism, plus 4-5 more:
 - 3 & 4 Maccabees (4th Maccabees often included as an appendix)
 - Psalm 151
 - The Prayer of Mannaseh in Chronicles
 - 1 Esdras
- Traditionally, “canonical” is understood by the Orthodox to mean something like “acceptable to read in worship.”

10



What do they believe about the canon?

- The Gospel Book
 - The Gospel Book is by far the most important part of Scripture for the Orthodox and is not only venerated and placed on the altar during the service, but is ornately decorated and often covered with icons.
 - At certain times, it is processed around the church accompanied with candles.