

Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism

Purpose statement: To inform the audience about three key theological differences that distinguish the Eastern Orthodox Church from the Roman Catholic Church.

Thesis

- A. There are multiple ways church leadership differs between these traditions, but I'd like to focus on the theological supremes of each tradition: the pope in Catholicism and the bishops in Orthodoxy.
- B. A major difference regarding church leadership or structure is the primacy of the papacy. Roman Catholicism has a pope, who is the head of the entire church, while in Orthodoxy there is no equivalent pope figure. Some might point out that in Orthodoxy, the Archbishop of Constantinople seems to hold more power than the other bishops. According to Bill Wunner from CNN, this comes from his title as "first among equals." But unlike the pope, the Archbishop of Constantinople has no real theological power over the other bishops. He remains more of a spiritual leader than a power like the pope who could dictate doctrine. The real theological supreme of Orthodoxy is the Synod of Bishops, or council of Bishops. This is a body of bishops, who are naturally equal to each other, vote together and decides on church policy and doctrine.

(transition: While the difference in church leadership is important, it is not the only distinction)

II. The next major theological distinction lies with how each tradition views the Holy Spirit's position within the trinity.

- A. By "position," I mean how the Spirit relates to the other trinity members. Which in order of theological supremacy is the

the early church creeds in their worship, one of which being the Nicene Creed.

The Nicene Creed was first formulated in a dispute about each member of the trinity's role within it. However, both traditions recite a slightly different version of the creed. According to David Bell, biblical scholar from the University of Newfoundland, the Eastern Orthodox version does not contain what is called the "filioque clause" which was added two centuries after the creed was finalized.

However, the Catholic version of the creed contains the filioque clause.

C. Now what exactly is the "filioque clause?" (show picture of the clause). The filioque clause reads:

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father **and the Son** .
Who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified.

This means the Orthodox church believes that the Holy Spirit only proceeds from the Father, whereas the Catholic tradition, believes that the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son. The Orthodox standpoint tends to illustrate a higher position for the Father within the trinity, while the Catholic church has the Father and the Son playing a similar role within the trinity.

(transition: While the leadership and trinitarian theology differ, there is one more key distinction between the Orthodox and Catholic traditions that I would like to make).

III. Finally, the third major theological difference between the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church is their doctrine concerning life after death, or more specifically, the intermediate state between death and eternal destination.

- A. While both traditions believe in a permanent state in heaven, the Roman Catholic Church formally believes in an intermediate state between death and heaven in which those who go there must work for sanctification, or cleansing, before they arrive in heaven. This stage they call purgatory. Catholics traditionally believe three things about purgatory, according to Catholic Father Mike Schmitz: “there exists a place for final purification, the process is painful or involves some discomfort, and the prayers of those on earth can assist those going through this final purification process.”
- B. This is in opposition to the Orthodox belief. According to theologian and Archbishop Kallistos Ware, “most if not all Orthodox theologians reject the idea of Purgatory, at least in [Roman Catholic] form.” Many Orthodox theologians believe in an intermediate state, like purgatory, but they do not believe it entails suffering like the Catholic tradition. The Catholic belief presumes a purgatorial cleansing, while the Orthodox faith does not.

Conclusion

- I. In conclusion, three of the key theological distinctions between Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism are the differences in church leadership, theologies concerning the Holy Spirit’s position within the trinity, and theology concerning life after death.

Sources

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