Medieval Church: Eastern Orthodox Theology & Worship

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Verses to Keep In Mind

- John 15:4-5
  - Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

- James 2:24:
  - You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

- 2 Peter 1:4:
  - "[God] has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature...."
Orthodox Absolutely Reject “Sola Scriptura”

- According to the late Orthodox theologian John Meyendorff (d. 1992), "The Christian faith and experience can in no way be compatible with the notion of sola scriptura".
- To the Orthodox, Protestantism allows each person to interpret truth on his or her own and therefore is dangerous.
- The Protestant elevation of the Bible above the church, the consequence of which is private interpretation, the Orthodox call "the sin of the Reformation."

- Orthodoxy believes that the Spirit speaks through apostolic tradition, expressed through Scripture, the seven ecumenical councils, and to a lesser degree, the church fathers, liturgy, canon law, and icons.
- The Orthodox note that the church existed some 300 years before the formation of the scriptural canon, so how could everything be based on “sola Scriptura”?
- By way of contrast, converts to Orthodoxy vow to "accept and understand Holy Scripture in accordance with the interpretation which was and is held by the Holy Orthodox Catholic Church of the East, our Mother."
Revelation not limited to Church and Councils, but includes Pagans

- In the seventh-century tract known as the “Trophies of Damascus”, defended the ancient pagan Greeks as follows: “Some of the Hellenes, especially philosophers, both recognized God and said a great deal about him; if you like, I put it to you that despite being Hellenes [pagans] they knew more about God and spoke better than you, the doctor of law [Mosaic law], even though they did not reach full knowledge [of God].” [This was a standard answer of Church fathers to those who ignored the religious value of ancient Greek thought and religious quests.]
- Greek Orthodox official web site (www.goarch.org)
13 Differences Between Orthodox and Catholics

- Orthodox reject
  - primacy of the Pope.
  - Infallibility of the Pope.
  - that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son (filoque).
  - Purgatory
  - Indulgences
  - immaculate conception of Mary
  - assumption of Mary
  - baptism by sprinkling
  - unleavened bread in Eucharist
  - Catholic serving wine to the clergy only
  - Catholic rite of extreme unction, last rites given before death.
  - denial of divorces to church members.
  - celibacy for priests (but not bishops)
  - Shaved clergy!
Differences Between Orthodox and Protestants

Differences with all Protestants:

- Orthodox reject Sola Fide (justification by faith alone).
- Orthodox reject Sola Scriptura (Scripture alone).
- Orthodox reject that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son (filoque).
- Orthodox require baptism for salvation
- Orthodox reject guilt from original sin
- Orthodox teach possibility of salvation after death
- Orthodox emphasize union with God, vs. forgiveness of sins

Other Differences with Reformed Protestants:

- Orthodox reject predestination/conditional foresight
- Orthodox teach free will/man’s cooperation with God (synergy)
Orthodox and Protestant Churches Compared

• "Protestantism tends to be rational and word centered. There's an awful lot of talk in Protestant worship. The Orthodox have a liturgy that enlists beauty—in icons, hymns, and symbolism—and promotes contemplation and nurtures at a deep level the feeling that God is truly present. This was one reason Franky Schaeffer, for example, joined the Greek Orthodox Church. He felt that evangelicals didn't have sufficient appreciation for the role of art and beauty in the Christian life."

• --Harold O. J. Brown
“The Orthodox Church continuously and without interruption is the true keeper of the truths of the Undivided Church, without omissions or additions. This Church has never created or added officially any new teaching after the Great Schism of the One Undivided Church. The teachings of this Church are ecumenical in character and in fact. It has introduced no innovations. It does not believe in the primacy of any one leader of the Church, nor in the infallibility of any Church leader. It does not believe in the filioque…, nor in communion by only one element of the Holy Eucharist for the layman. It does not believe in compulsory celibacy of clergymen, purgatory, the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary, nor in other innovations proclaimed in the West after the separation of the Church. The Orthodox Church continues on the original road, keeping undefiled both the teaching and the type of administration of the venerable, Undivided and Ecumenical Church. “

Source: Official Orthodox Web Site (www.goarch.com)
Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to American Protestants: Stop Proselytizing:

- “the Protestant world … is largely ignorant of Orthodoxy. Even theologians of great credibility have passed on rather demeaning misconceptions about Orthodoxy, as if it were a liturgical, or better yet, some ritualistic fossil. Unfortunately, such misconceptions, borne out of either ignorance or even polemical intentions, have been handed down unexamined for generations…. Above all, Orthodoxy is confronted with the zeal of many Western Christians, especially from America, who, hastily attempting to fill that vacuum, are spiritually pilfering the house of their brethren. It would have been better for these zealots, their sponsors and supporters, to have spent some time studying Orthodoxy and to learn from real life experience, rather than only in theory, what it means to be a disciple of Christ and to witness the gospel in martyrdom.”
Really Tough Questions to Consider

- Is Byzantium the Final Irony? A Triumph of Hellenism over Christianity?
- If Mary is not the Theotokos/God Bearer, what exactly is she then?
- Is Christianity a “religion” or a “personal relationship with Jesus Christ”? What’s the difference?
- What do we mean when we say “Jesus is in my heart” or being “in the Spirit”?
- Are Western Christians too rational and not mystical enough? Are Orthodox too mystical?
- Are we too forensic, that is, do we excessively think of our Christian lives as sinning, repenting, asking forgiveness and serving him and rarely think of “abiding” in him? Are we missing something important?
- Should we strive to be “one with God”? What does that mean?
- Should we spend less time studying and more time contemplating and meditating? When was the last time you meditated?
- Is our worship service a “sacrifice of praise”?

Should we be Evangelizing Orthodox “Christendom”?