

Comparative Theology

Orthodoxy and Catholicism

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Orthodoxy and Catholicism are distinct bodies with significant differences. Our church traces its origins back to the apostles themselves and even the Catholic church recognizes this. In the year 451 AD in the council of Chalcedon the Church of Christ split into West and East, Rome and Alexandria. In 1054 AD the Roman Church split from Byzantine Orthodox. Ever since they assumed the primacy of the pope and the infallibility of the pope which is incorrect as we will see later.

We will discuss certain major differences between us and the Catholics. The first is the nature of Christ. Jesus Christ is God the Incarnate Word. He is the Word of God who took flesh and became Man. He possessed a Godhead and a perfect manhood. His divine nature was One with His human nature yet without mixing, or alteration. The unity of those two natures was into one nature, which is “the nature of the incarnate Word”.

The issue of the Holy Spirit coming forth or proceeding from the Father only or from the Father and Son. In the Creed we mention: Yes we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord the Life giver who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son is

worshipped and glorified. St. John reveals in Jn 15:26 “the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father” Sending is different than proceeding. “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my Name” Jn 14:26. The Latin word “filioque” meaning and the Son was added by the Roman Catholic Church to the original creed set by Council of Nicea 325 AD and Constantinople 381 AD. This concept of “double procession” was introduced at the Council of Toledo 589AD and placed in their creed. The Spirit will proceed from the Father only-but be sent by the Son. Jn 15:26/Jn 16:7 As HH Pope Shenouda says: This dogma makes two Fathers in the Holy Trinity for there would be two origins. Double procession also makes the Father’s procession of the H.S. imperfect since there was a need to be proceeded from the Son as well. This filioque clause was added without an ecumenical council and caused great division between Orthodox and Catholics for many years. It also caused dispute among Catholics themselves. It opposes the teaching of the Bible, the ecumenical councils, didaskalia of the fathers, and the Holy tradition of the church.

The next issue is the one of purgatory and the question is really whether this is biblical. It is not biblical. The Catholics believe that the soul after death has to pay off its debts for its sins that were committed for on the earth. The souls suffer for a time so they can enter heaven. The purpose of purgatory is to cleanse one of imperfections, venial sins, and faults, and to remit or do away with the temporal punishment due to mortal sins that have been forgiven in the Sacrament of Penance or are venial and not repented for. Purgatory will last only until the general judgement. One of the verses used by the Catholics is I Cor 3:15 which mentions “If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.” St. Paul was talking about ministers

and service and not the people or the faithful. God forgave us our sins, how can He go back on his word and execute punishment on sins he forgave and blotted them out. "For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more". (Jer 31:34)

Purgatory is against the redemption and salvation by our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ. A. All we like sheep have gone astray, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all(Is 53:6) B. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities.Is 53:5 C. And the Blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin (1jn 1:7) d. The only requirement for our sanctification is repentance if we confess our sins, and if we walk in the light 1Jn 1:7,9. The intermediate state in the Orthodox view is not a state between heaven and hell in which some souls must spend time before entering heaven. It is rather, a state of repose where all souls rest in anticipation of the Last Day . The Orthodox Church teaches, that these souls benefit from the prayers of the faithful. These prayers as acts of love, which comfort the souls of the departed .

Next issue is one on immaculate conception-does it concern our Lord Jesus or St. Mary? The supernatural Incarnation of the Only-Begotten Son the Word of God, of the H.S. and the Virgin Mary, is alone pure and immaculate. The immaculate conception was defined in 1854 by Pope Pius IX which asserts that from the first moment of her conception the blessed Virgin Mary was by the grace and privilege of the Almighty God and in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of mankind, kept free from all stain of original sin. In St. Mary's canticle she said "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior." My Savior is a personal savior, meaning that she needed salvation. If she were immaculately conceived, she would not need a savior, but she did and therefore she was conceived with original sin of Adam and Eve. "Behold I was

brought forth in iniquity and in sin my mother conceived Me.” Ps 51:5 “For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin”Ecc 7:20 This dogma and belief definitely concerns our Lord Jesus Christ and not St. Mary

The issue of the primacy of Peter. The catholic church assumes St. Peter was the first pope based on Mt 16:18 where Christ told Peter: “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church.” The rock is not Peter but his true confession concerning Jesus: He is Christ the Son of the Living God. It is impossible that our Lord builds His church on someone who eventually will die. St. Paul says that Christ was that Rock, in 1Cor 10:4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.” The bible shows apostle Peter as equal among equals in the synod of Jerusalem and Peter was rebuked by Paul in Gal 2:11. In fact it was Paul and not Peter who founded the Church of Rome according the bible.

(Acts 28,15;Phil 1:13) In fact Paul stayed in Rome for two years preaching. (Acts 28:30,31) The bible does not mention one verse about Peter serving in Rome, but we know that Peter was martyred in Rome during Nero’s reign in 67 AD. Most of Peter’s ministry was in the East-Judae, Antioch, Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. We acknowledge what Origen said that St. Peter came to Rome before he died about 65 AD to chase Simon the sorcerer, who offered money to him and John for the power of the Holy Spirit (acts 8:9-24) and Peter was crucified there and died. Also St. Mark worked very closely with St. Paul in Rome. Col 4:10; Philemon 1:23; II Tim 4:11. So St. Mark probably had a more a role in establishing church of Rome than St. Peter did.

On this point of primacy, we should also talk about the Catholic principle of papal infallibility. This doctrine asserts that when the pope speaks ex cathedra “from the

throne” or officially, on matters of faith and morals, he teaches infallibly. Thus the whole Church is bound by his teaching. This was defined in the 1st Vatican Council in 1870 and a faction within the Catholic church rejected this doctrine as well, giving rise to the so-called Old Catholic Churches. The Orthodox Church teaches that all bishops are equal. To be sure, there are different ranks of bishops (patriarch, archbishop, metropolitan, bishop); nevertheless, a bishop is a bishop. Such differences apply to the administration of a church or group of churches, not to the nature of the bishop. The president of a synod of bishops is called archbishop or metropolitan.

Christ did not assign any disciple to be superior. In fact when they disputed among themselves who would be the greatest, He told them, “If anyone desires to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all” The other verses the Catholic church uses for the primacy of Peter is Jn 21:15-17. “Feed my sheep.” But Christ was restoring Peter after his thrice denial to his discipleship. So Christ had to restore the fellowship and discipleship of Peter before giving him the honor of priesthood along with the other disciples. He made him a disciple once more by telling him “follow Me”. The Jerusalem Council was headed by James in the presence of Peter and Paul. Therefore the apostles did not consider St Peter as the foundation stone of the church.

The issue of facing the east is next. We build our churches and pray facing the east. God has given the east a lot of importance and this is why we face it in prayer.

1. The rising of the sun from the east is a symbol of Christ and His light for the Lord was called the sun of righteousness. Mal 4:2
2. The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden (Gen 2:8) and put Man there. Thus facing the east has become a symbol of man’s looking forward to paradise.
3. Christ was born in the East and the Magi saw his star in

the east. 4. The ever Virgin was likened to a gate facing toward the east 5. Christ was crucified in the east. 6. Religion and the church originated in the east: Jerusalem. 7. The second coming will be from the east. (Ezekiel 43: 1,2 Zechariah 14:3,4). Truly God is present everywhere but facing Jerusalem in the east has a deep meaning, a profound influence on the heart and memories that bring forth holy feelings.

The issue of baptism by immersion or sprinkling. It is clear from the bible that baptism was by immersion. Our Lord Jesus was baptized by immersion. Then Jesus when he had been baptized came up immediately from the water. Mt 3:16 The word baptism means to dye. Dying cannot be done unless you immerse the material in the color. Baptism is a death and resurrection. Therefore we were buried with him through baptism into death Rm 6:4 So we must be immersed to be buried. Baptism is a rebirth. Sprinkling does not express action of birth like immersion. The catholic church has fonts. Why would you need a font unless you used to have practice of immersion?

The issue of divorce; is it biblical? Mt 19:9- And I say to you, whoever divorced his wife, except for sexual immorality...commits adultery. Circumstances under which divorce is permitted by the Coptic Church: 1. Change of religion: 1 Cor7:15 not in unity with the Holy Spirit. 2. Adultery. Annulment is granted for deceit. The Catholics do not permit divorce at all; only annulments. The Catholic Church also believes that a Catholic may marry an unbeliever in the church and the unbeliever automatically is sanctified by the believer. But how can the H.S. descend on the unbeliever, how can he enter heaven without baptism?

The issue of the Eucharist. The church of the three ecumenical councils celebrated the Divine Eucharist for more than a thousand years throughout the East and

West with leavened bread. In the 11th century, unleavened bread was introduced. The Catholics also stopped taking the Blood in their mass-9th century. Although the bible tells the Lord's command "Drink of it all of you" Mt 26:28. The Orthodox have consistently given communion with the Body and Blood. The second Vatican council recommended restoration of Communion with both species, though still not done in a typical parish on a Sunday. Our Lord Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of Me" and we should follow his command. The Catholic Church has females as Eucharistic ministers that can give out communion. They also can have multiple masses on the same altar with the same priest per day. The priest, altar, and the utensils have to be fasting at least 9 hrs in our church in preparation for the divine liturgy.

The Orthodox church administers the sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist jointly just as the early church did. The Catholic church has baptism, then eucharist, then confirmation. The Roman Catholic church does not approve of our saints after schism and vice versa.

Other issues: 1. Catholic acceptance of homosexual orientation vs behavior.
2. Priests are married and have beards in our church.

The Orthodox Church has maintained without distorting, addition or subtraction the faith of the apostles, of the ancient church. Unfortunately ever since Vatican II 30 years ago, the gap between the Catholic and Orthodox Church became much wider and differences are harder to reconcile.