



Denominations | Orthodoxy

1

How are they organized/structured?

- Autocephalous Churches (14-17, depending on who is counting)
 - Bishops
 - Primate/patriarch/metropolitan/archbishops
 - At appointment and consecration according to apostolic succession, given special gifting (chrisma) and responsibility for 1) teaching 2) ruling 3) performing the sacraments
 - Must be unmarried, traditionally chosen from monastic communities. Unlike in Catholicism, bishops are divinely appointed teachers, but the whole church, clergy and laity, guard the faith.

2

How are they organized/structured?

- Priests (local churches)
 - Local church pastors who work as representatives and deputies of the bishop in whose diocese they operate.
 - Unlike Catholic priests, most Orthodox priests are married, but if single when ordained, may not marry without stepping out of ministry.
 - Deacons
 - Generally a stepping stone to priesthood, helps with the sacraments, readings, prayers etc.
 - Laity

3



Tradition and Authority

- Unlike in Catholicism or Protestantism, “Tradition” for the Orthodox is a broad, umbrella term describing our sources of knowledge and practice before God. They are generally considered to be:
 - Scripture, Councils, Fathers, Liturgy, Canons and Icons

4

Authority

- For the Orthodox, in the absence of anything resembling a Pope or the dogmatic pronouncements of Trent, the “Tradition” as a whole is considered authoritative, with Scripture (particularly the “Gospel Book”) as supreme, but not alone.
 - Khomiakov: “The Pope is greatly mistaken in supposing that we consider the ecclesiastical hierarchy to be the guardian of dogma. The case is quite different. The unvarying constancy and the unerring truth of Christian dogma does not depend on any hierarchical order; it is guarded by the totality, by the whole people of the Church, which is the Body of Christ.

5

Authority

- While the Orthodox understanding of preservation and infallibility presupposes the same Christ-church inter-connection as Roman Catholicism (i.e., that the OC is the living extension of the Incarnation), its “catholic” understanding of authority and infallibility more closely aligns with Protestantism’s low-church understanding of authority.
 - Timothy Ware: “The church is the extension of the Incarnation, the place where the Incarnation perpetuates itself.”
 - Because of their understanding of tradition and authority, a great deal of Orthodox theology comes from traditionalism, with the beliefs of the Eastern fathers and the content of liturgical prayers and chants frequently serving as “proof texts” for doctrine.

6

Authority

- Owing to their significantly different view of authority, tradition and Scripture, Orthodox theologians struggle to articulate what, exactly, makes a council—including the seven ecumenical councils—“ecumenical” and therefore, infallible/authoritative.
 - 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.”