

The Mystery of Baptism and the Unity of the Church

The Idea of “Baptismal Unity” and its Acceptance by Orthodox Ecumenists

Fr. Peter Alban Heers

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“The Church can be experienced and 'tasted' only from the inside and not externally: without the right faith (orthodoxy) and outside of living a life according to this faith, the Church does not exist.”

– Metropolitan Amphilohije of Montenegro,
*The Church as the Pillar and Stronghold of the Truth:
The Question of Autocephaly and the Church*

Your Eminences, Revered Fathers, Beloved Brethren in Christ, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Orthodox Church’s understanding of heterodox baptism flows from and is determined by its self-understanding of being the “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church,” which alone performs the one baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ. This is so, for the Church is known in her mysteries.² In and through the mysteries the Church exists and is continually formed, her borders are set, her members identified. “Those who live their lives outside the mysterial (sacramental) life are outside the body of Christ.”³

The “One Baptism” and the Baptism of Heretics

Holy Baptism is the portal of entry into the Body of Christ, and thus the foundation and presupposition of all subsequent mysteries. As the Lord Himself has solemnly declared: “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.”⁴ The self-understanding of the Church is expressed preeminently in the Symbol of Faith⁵, but also in the eternal words of the Apostle Paul, that “there is one body

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² St. Nicholas Cabasilas, Commentary on the Divine Liturgy, Ch. 38, P.G. 150, 452. See also: Μεταλληνου, π. Γ.Δ., *Δοκίμια Ορθόδοξης Μαρτυρίας*, «Εξ ύδατος καί πνεύματος» (Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Άθως, 2001), pp. 67-87.

³ Romanides, John S., *The Ancestral Sin* (Ridgewood, NJ: Zephyr, 2002), p. 173.

⁴ John 3:5.

⁵ “In One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. I confess one baptism for the remission of sins.” Obviously, these two articles of the Symbol of Faith were meant to be confessed one after the other for the precise reason that the latter, the “one baptism” is understood to take place exclusively in the former, the “One Church”.

and one Spirit. . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all".⁶ "To this unbroken unity belongs the Christian baptism; upon this [unity] rests the unity of the Church."⁷ The one Lord, the one faith, the one baptism – these three integrate in the meaning of the one Church and ensure her unbroken unity."⁸ "Outside of her, whatever is called "Church" is a congregation of heretics that have lost the one faith in the one Lord and consequently the baptism which is performed by them is not the Christian baptism."⁹ Hence, heretics and schismatics are received into the Church's embrace by baptism.

Ecclesiastical Economy

And, yet, as the Church is "in a full sense the steward and sovereign administrator of the sacraments . . . it falls within the scope of her stewardship and economy to make valid – if she so thinks fit – sacraments administered by non-Orthodox, although such sacraments are no sacraments if considered in themselves and apart from the Orthodox Church."¹⁰ Hence, the holy canons and holy tradition also provide for the application of "ecclesiastical economy". This therapy of anti-canoncity applies to those ailing in faith and ecclesiastical communion (i.e. heretics and schismatics), who nevertheless "preserve faith in the Trinitarian nature of God and fundamentally retain the canonical baptismal type,"¹¹ that is, "administering baptism with triune immersion and emersion according to its Apostolic and patristic form."¹³

The Place and Limits of Economy

The application of economy, however, in no way implies "recognition of the validity of non-Orthodox sacraments *per se*; it is something that concerns only the sacraments of those entering the Orthodox Church."¹⁴ This is so because heresy and schism incur disconnection from the one Church and consequently loss of apostolic succession and

⁶ Eph. 3:5-6

⁷ Παπαθανασίου, Χρήστου, *Το «Κατ' Ακριβειαν» Βάπτισμα και Οι Εξ Αυτού Παεκκλησίες* (Athens:Grigori 2001), p.258.

⁸ Ibid. p. 293.

⁹ Ibid. p. 258.

¹⁰ Bishop Kallistos Ware, *Eustratios Argenti: A Study of the Greek Church under Turkish Rule* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), pp. 83-4

¹¹ Παπαθανασίου, Χρήστου, *Το «Κατ' Ακριβειαν» Βάπτισμα*. pp.296-7.

¹³ "[F]or the conversion (i.e. entrance) to Orthodoxy of Latins and Western Christians in general, *economia* may be exercised only in such cases when a Christian confession administered baptism with triune immersion and emersion according to its Apostolic and patristic form." Fr. George Metallinos, *I Confess One Baptism* (Mt. Athos: St. Paul's Monastery, 1994), pg. 115. "Ecclesiastical economy" is not exercised in just any case, but only when formal conditions are met. "It is applied on the basis of principles which provide for it and determine it." (Παπαθανασίου, *Το «Κατ' Ακριβειαν» Βάπτισμα*, p.296.)

¹⁴ Ware, *Eustratios Argenti*, pp. 84. It should be noted that when the application of economy, which necessarily is exceptional and warranted by dire circumstance, lends toward a blurring of the line between orthodoxy and heresy or a perpetuation of misconceptions concerning heterodox rites, it is self-defeating, insomuch as economy aims at the same end as exactitude (*akriveia*), if only by other means.

canonical priesthood.¹⁵ The Church, then, always guided by pastoral concerns, exercises economy on *particular occasions* only “when this aids the reconciliation of the heterodox without obscuring the truths of the Orthodox faith.”¹⁶ Economy always moves within the spirit and will of the rule of faith and aims at the same goal, having exactitude as its measure and the principles laid down in the Gospel as its guide. “If “economy” transcends the canon, it cannot, however, in any case militate against it...[I]t can be transcendent, never, however, subversive.”¹⁷

Whether the Church, then, employs the «κατ’ ακρίβειαν» therapy of baptism or the «κατ’ οικονομίαν» therapy of Chrismation or confession of faith, it signals “no change in Orthodox ecclesiology or sacramental theology, but simply a change in disciplinary practice.”¹⁸

An Ecclesiological Framework for the Recognition of Heretical Baptism *per se*

In stark contradiction to this understanding stands a string of baptism-related documents signed and statements made by Orthodox ecumenists in Australia, America, the Vatican, Lebanon, and elsewhere. Indeed, these statements are essentially compatible with Roman Catholic ecclesiology, and appear to derive from it. This ecclesiology contains a teaching on heretical baptism that has its roots exclusively in the Latin theological world, received its clearest conciliar adoption at the council of Trent, and was given an innovative expression at the Second Vatican Council.

A Distorted Ecclesiology

Medieval Papalism “presupposes a peculiar additional mystery about itself as a worldwide organization whose jurisdiction extends beyond the continuously visible and concrete assembly of the body of Christ”¹⁹ Having lost diachronic unity with the Tradition and the Fathers, and having come to understand “catholicity as mere ecumenicity or global universality,”²⁰ with Rome as the center, Roman Catholicism “set aside the

¹⁵ See St. Basil the Great’s first canon. There the great Father of the Church agrees totally with St. Cyprian of Carthage that with schism those who depart from the Church no longer possess the grace of the Holy Spirit, the priestly gift of grace is discontinued, and the transmission of the priesthood is obstructed. Without the transmission of the priesthood, apostolic succession, those baptized by them are considered to be baptized by laymen. Consequently, “they have neither authority to baptize nor to ordain.”

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 85.

¹⁷ Παπαθανασίου, *Το «Κατ’ Ακριβειαν» Βάπτισμα*, σ.298.

¹⁸ Ware, *Eustratios Argenti*, pp. 85. Metropolitan Hierotheos (Vlachos) of Nafpaktos writes: “The Church can receive this or that heretic by the principle of economy, without any implication that She recognizes as a Church the community that previously baptized him.” *Ekklesiastike Parembase*, No. 71 (December 2001) [In Greek]. Translated by and printed from *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol XX, No 2, pp. 40-43.

¹⁹ π. Ιω. Ρωμανίδου, *Το προπατορικόν αμάρτημα*, Αθήνα 1989, σ. 173. It is precisely this horizontal, geographically-focused, secularizing universalism which also sets the tone of modern ecumenism.

²⁰ Μαντζαρίδη, Γεωργίου, *Χριστιανική Ηθική* (Θεσσαλονίκη: Πουρναρά, 2002), σ. 275.

Church's charismatic dimension and eschatological perspective,"²¹ thereby realizing "the secularization or 'religionization' of Christianity."²²

Rome Condemns St. Augustine's Teaching

Thus, perhaps it should not be a surprise that on a most crucial ecclesiological point, which simultaneously dealt with the charismatic and catholic nature of the Church, medieval Papalism sharply parted company with the West's most renowned Father. While the basic premises of Latin sacramental theology are established in St. Augustine, his important teaching of the objective validity but subjective inefficacy of schismatic mysteries was rejected. St. Augustine held – and in this he is closer to the views of St. Cyprian²³ than those of Pope St. Stephan – that while the sacraments of schismatics may be considered "valid" they are not efficacious.²⁴ The occasion for Rome's rejection of this teaching came in the seventeenth century when the Jansenists cited St. Augustine's teaching in support of their claim that outside the Church there is no grace (*extra ecclesiam nulla conceditur gratia*). Their teaching – and St. Augustine's with it – was expressly condemned by Pope Clement XI in 1713.²⁵

Pope St. Stephan and The Defense of Heretical Baptism

Modern Roman apologists declare that they follow neither St. Cyprian nor St. Augustine in their "rigorism", but are children of Pope St. Stephan "who would not allow heretical baptism to be impugned."²⁶ This rejection of the African Fathers' positions is not new, but dates back at least to the 13th century. From as early as the Lateran Council²⁷ in 1215, baptism performed by any layman, including a heretic, one unbaptized, or even an unbeliever, is accepted if it preserves the right external form and he who baptizes has the intention to perform that which the Church performs.²⁸ This position was repeated at the

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Florovsky, Fr. George, *The Boundaries of the Church* (Collected Works, Vol. XIII, pp. 36). "Strictly speaking, the theological premises of St. Cyprian's teaching have never been disproved. Even St. Augustine was not so very far from St. Cyprian. He argued with the Donatists, not with St. Cyprian himself, and he did not confute St. Cyprian; indeed, his argument was more about practical measures and conclusions. In his reasoning about the unity of the Church, about the unity of love, as the necessary and decisive condition of the saving power of the sacraments, St. Augustine really only repeats St. Cyprian in new words."

²⁴ Ibid. p. 42. For St. Augustine, this is so because "division withers love and without love salvation is impossible."

²⁵ Laux, Fr. John, *Catholic Apologetics* (Rockford, Illinois: Tan, 1990), p. 126.

²⁶ Adam, Karl, *The Spirit of Catholicism* (New York: Macmillan, 1943), p. 190. "The assertion that the Catholic Church of later centuries has developed the ideas of St. Cyprian and St. Augustine, that she has "continually sharpened the principle of exclusiveness and so continually narrowed Catholicism" (Heiler) is in contradiction with the plain facts of history. For the truth is that the later Church corrected the original rigorism of the ancient African theologians and maintained that God's grace worked even outside the Catholic body. Non-Catholic sacraments have the power to sanctify and save, not only objectively, but also subjectively." (p. 192).

²⁷ The Lateran Council declaration reads: "The mystery of baptism... provided by anyone according to the called for type of the Church, effects salvation." (Concilium Lateranense IV, cap. I, De fide catholica).

²⁸ Παπαθανασίου, *Το «Κατ' Ακρίβειαν» Βάπτισμα*, p.196n.

Council of Florence (1438-1445), while the Council of Trent (1545-1563) goes so far as to anathematize “anyone who says that the baptism performed by heretics is not valid.”²⁹ The Roman Catholic Codes of Canon Law from 1917 and 1983 likewise confirm this position.³⁰

The Theological Schism of Vatican II

This brings us to contemporary Roman Catholicism and the decisions of the Second Vatican Council.³¹ In his analysis of the decisions of Vatican II, Fr. John Meyendorf calls to our attention two aspects of Rome’s new decrees – decrees which combine to create fundamental theological discord. On the one hand, as is specified in the Decree on the Church (III, 22), those bishops which do not have communion with the throne of Rome have no dogmatic authority whatsoever. On the other hand, there exist “valid” mysteries performed outside the Church, such that it is possible to accept the idea of partial communion³² and a limited practice of sacramental communion with separated Christians. Combining these two ideas there appears “a legalistic notion of the Church, which sees it as a worldwide institution of control and dogmatic security, separating the Christ of the mysteries from dogmatic Truth.” Hence, there is created “a theological schism between the sacramental presence of Christ and His revelation as unique Truth”,

²⁹ See: The Council of Trent, Period 1, Session VII, Canon 4: where it is stated: “Si quis dixerit, baptismum, qui etiam datur ab haereticis in nomine Patris, & Filii, & Spiritus sancti, cum intentione faciendi quod facit ecclesia, non esse verum baptismum, anathema sit.” In Latin sacramental theology an important legalistic distinction is made between “the power of orders” and “the power of jurisdiction.” On the strength of this theoretical division of power Roman Catholics recognize the validity of the sacraments of schismatics and heretics “so far as their nature requires only the power of orders and not also the power of jurisdiction.” Adam, Karl, *The Spirit of Catholicism*, p. 191.

³⁰ Παπαθανασίου, *Το «Κατ’ Ακριβειαν» Βάπτισμα*, p.196n.

³¹ These decisions, in regard to the theology of baptism, are seen by Roman Catholics to be the fruit of the work of those theologians who were “making space theologically for ecumenical openness.” Scampini, Fr Jorge A, OP, ‘*We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins*’: *From the Church’s statement of faith to the challenge to accept one another just as Christ accepted us* (cf. Rom. 15:7), a lecture delivered to the Plenary Commission of the Commission on Faith and Order at their 28 July - 6 August 2004 meeting held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, note 15. In particular he cites the “contributions made prior to Vatican II by theologians associated with the ‘spiritual ecumenism’ movement, which emerged in Lyon under the inspiration of P Couturier: P Michalon, ‘L’*étendue de l’Église*’, *Irenikon* 20 (1947), pp. 140-163; L Richard, ‘*Une thèse fondamentale de l’oecuménisme: le baptême, incorporation visible à l’Église*’ in *Nouvelle revue théologique* 74 (1952), pp. 485-492. There is [also] wide recognition of the contribution made by Cardinal A Bea during the Council...”

³² See chapter 1, number 3 of the *Decree on Ecumenism*. There we read: “For men who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are put in some, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church.” And, further on, we read: “Those brethren divided from us also carry out many liturgical actions of the Christian religion. In ways that vary according to the condition of each Church or community, these liturgical actions *most certainly can truly engender a life of grace*, and, one must say, can aptly *access to the communion of salvation*. It follows that the separated Churches and communities as such, though we believe they suffer from defects already mentioned, have been *by no means deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation*. For the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation which derive their efficacy from *the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church*” (Emphasis mine). Further on, the theological schism which Fr. Meyendorf speaks of is most acutely made manifest when for purposes of expressing unity common worship is forbidden, but for purposes of obtaining grace it is commended: “The expression of unity very generally forbids common worship. Grace to be obtained sometimes commends it.” (see ch. 2 no. 8) This is so since unity is not expressed in the Eucharist but in Christ’s supposed vicar on earth, the Pope.

with “the authority of expressing dogmatic teaching [being] separated from the reality of the mysteries.”³³

The Recognition of Heretical Baptism per se by Orthodox Ecumenists

Having, thus, touched upon ecclesiological points of interest in Latin sacramental theology, we can better understand recent agreements and statements by Orthodox ecumenists. Although there were some scattered Orthodox who even before Vatican II upheld the legitimacy of heterodox baptism *per se*,³⁴ under the apparent influence of the council and its “opening up” of new possibilities, the number has risen dramatically.

As early as 1975 Archbishop Athenagoras Kokkinakis of Thyateira and Great Britain (of the Ecumenical Patriarchate) in his synodically-blessed and authorized “Thyateira Confession” declared that “all Christians believe in the same Baptism by which all have become members of His Body the Church.”³⁵ Ten years later, the then lay theologian John Zizoulis (present day Metropolitan of Pergamon), proposed speaking “of the limits of the Church on the basis of . . . baptismal unity.”³⁶ He declared that it is baptism which delineates the boundaries of the Church, and that all Christians are baptized. Thus, it

³³ *Ορθόδοξος Θεώρησης της Β' Συνόδου του Βατικανού*, Επιμέλεια Μαρίας Δ. Σπυροπούλου, Αθήναι 1967. Άρθρα που περιλαμβάνονται από τους εξής συγγραφείς: Αγουρίδου Σ., Αλιβιζάτου Α., Clement O., Evdokimov P., Zander L., Ιωαννίδου Β., Καλογήρου Ι., Καρμίρη Ι., Κνιάζεφ Α., Ματσούκα Ν., Meyendorf J., Νησιώτη Ν., Ροδοπούλου Π., Schmemmann A., Scrima A., pg. 79. As Fr. Meyendorf rightly points out, this idea that there is no essential obstacle to communion in the mysteries in “those cases in which the ‘validity’ of the sacrament in the community of another dogma is recognized” (pg. 80) is not new. Rather, it has been the reigning one in the Protestant world for centuries, which only confirms, and remarkably so, the famous claim by Alexis Khomiakov: ‘Romanism was protestant right from its birth.’”

³⁴ See, for example, Anton Kartashev († 1960), Professor of Church History at St. Sergius Theological School in Paris, France, in *Christian Unification: The Ecumenical Problem in Orthodox Consciousness* (Paris: YMCA Press, no date.) reprinted in Protopresbyter Michael Pomazansky, *Selected Essays* [“The Church of Christ and the Contemporary Movement for Unification in Christianity”] [Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1996], p. 228. Professor Kartashev writes: “Even Protestant communities, mercilessly breaking contact with apostolic hierarchical succession and the living sacred tradition of the Church, but having preserved the Sacrament of Baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity, continue through this mystagogical door to introduce their members into the bosom of the one invisible Church of Christ and to commune to them that very same Grace of the Holy Spirit. All this gives ground for posing the question of a unification of churches on the basis of their equal rights in their mystic realism, and not on the basis of ‘uniatism,’ i.e. reuniting heretics to Orthodoxy. The reunification of churches should be a manifestation and a concrete incarnation in visible reality of an already invisibly existing unity of the Church.”

³⁵ Kokkinakis, Athenagoras, *The Thyateira Confession* (London: The Faith Press, 1975), p. 62.

³⁶ Zizoulas, John D. (present-day Metropolitan of Pergamon, Ecumenical Patriarchate) *Orthodox Ecclesiology and the Ecumenical Movement* by, Sourozh Diocesan Magazine (England), August 1985, Vol. 21, page 23. “If we take into consideration the canons of the early Church, then we can speak of the limits of the Church on the basis, I would suggest, of baptismal unity. By this I mean that baptism is such a decisive point in our existence that it automatically creates a limit between the pre-baptismal and post-baptismal situation: if you are baptized you immediately cease to be what you were. You die, as St. Paul says, with regard to the past and there is therefore a new situation. Baptism does create a limit to the Church. Now with this baptismal limit it is conceivable that there may be division, but any division within these limits is not the same as the division between the Church and those outside of the baptismal limit...I think we must take seriously the baptismal limits of the Church and accept that outside of baptism there is no Church. Within baptism, even if there is a break, a division, a schism, you can still speak of the Church. Even if you take the Eucharistic model as your basis, you will see that this applies to every Christian. Let us take the Liturgy of the early Church as an example: up to the point of the reading of the Scriptures, or, as we still have in the Liturgy today, up to the kiss of peace which is the sign of unity in love and the Creed, which is the sign of unity in faith – up to this point it was conceivable that someone could take part in the Liturgy and then not be allowed to continue for various reasons (as a penance, for instance, or if he was a catechumen). He would then leave before the Sacrament. Now this suggests that we may understand divisions with the Church as taking place precisely at these points: either at the kiss of peace, or at the Creed. If we are not in a position to love one another and to confess the same faith, then there is a break in communion. But this break does not mean that one falls outside the realm of the Church. The Orthodox, in my understanding at least, participate in the ecumenical movement as a movement of baptized Christians, who are in a state of division because they cannot express the same faith together. In the past this happened because of a lack of love which is now, thank God, disappearing.”

follows that “[w]ithin baptism, even if there is a break, a division, a schism, you can still speak of the Church.”³⁷

Six years later, in Balamand, Lebanon, the now famous “Balamand Agreement” was formulated. Among its declarations, the claim of a “common baptism” stood out, and under the shadow of the importance of Vatican II:

13) . . . since the Pan-Orthodox Conferences and the Second Vatican Council, the rediscovery and the giving again of proper value to the Church as communion, both on the part of Orthodox and of Catholics, has radically altered perspectives and thus attitudes. On each side it is recognized that what Christ has entrusted to His Church—profession of apostolic faith, participation in *the same sacraments*, above all the one priesthood celebrating the one sacrifice of Christ, the *apostolic succession* of bishops—cannot be considered the exclusive property of one of our Churches. In this context it is clear that *rebaptism must be avoided* (Emphasis mine).

On the heels of the Balamand Agreement, the Primate of the Church of Constantinople likewise contributed a declaration of “baptismal unity.” In the Joint Declaration “Call to Unity” of Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Bartholomew on June 29, 1995 the following declaration was made: “A common sacramental conception of the church has emerged, sustained and passed on in time by the apostolic succession... we urge our faithful, Catholics and Orthodox, to reinforce the spirit of brotherhood which stems from the one baptism and from participation in the sacramental life.”

Metropolitan Maximos of Aenos (Ecumenical Patriarchate), a fervent supporter of the Balamand Agreement, also believes that the Orthodox teaching recognizes heterodox baptism per se. He declared the following in his diocesan journal: “When we profess faith in one Christian baptism for the forgiveness of sins, we do not mean by that Orthodox baptism, but any Christian baptism.” “Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism, the two ‘sister churches’ of old continue to recognize one another’s baptism, as well as the other sacraments celebrated in these churches.” “The rebaptism by Orthodox of baptized heterodox Christians is inspired by “narrow-mindedness, fanaticism and bigotry.” “[It] is an injustice committed against Christian baptism, and eventually a blasphemy against God’s Holy Spirit Who is at work at any Christian baptism.”³⁸

Metropolitan Maximos, Bishop Demetrios of Xanthou, Fr. Alexander Golitzin, Fr. Alkiviadis Calivas, Professor John Erickson and others were among the Orthodox representatives who signed the Agreed Statement of the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation on “Baptism and Sacramental Economy.” Issued in 1999, it was an attempt to answer critics of the Balamand Agreement as well as to issue a critique of sacramental economy. Besides labeling St. Nikodemos the Athonite an “innovator” for his contribution to the Church’s tradition regarding economy, the Consultation stated the following:

The Orthodox and Catholic members of our Consultation acknowledge, in both of our traditions, a common teaching and a common faith in one baptism, despite some variations in practice which, we believe, do not affect the substance of the

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Metropolitan Maximos of Pittsburgh, *The Journal of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, The Illuminator* [Summer 1995].

mystery. We are therefore moved to declare that *we also recognize each other's baptism as one and the same*. This recognition has obvious *ecclesiological consequences*. *The Church is itself both the milieu and the effect of baptism*, and is not of our making. *This recognition requires each side of our dialogue to acknowledge an ecclesial reality in the other*. . . In our common reality of baptism, we discover the foundation of our dialogue, as well as the force and urgency of the Lord Jesus' prayer "that all may be one." *Here, finally, is the certain basis for the modern use of the phrase, "sister churches"*³⁹ (Emphasis mine).

For our purposes here, what should be clear is the important role the Roman Catholic theory of "baptismal unity" played in this agreement. In his brief analysis of the document, Metropolitan Hierotheos (Vlachos) of Nafpaktos declares the falsity of "baptismal unity" and rightly identifies it as simply another version of the much-condemned "branch theory." He wrote that it is "obvious that [Orthodox] ecumenists understand the acceptance of the baptism of heretics (Catholics and Protestants, who have altered the dogma of the Holy Trinity and other dogmas) to mean accepting the ecclesial status of heretical bodies and, worse still, that the two "Churches," Latin and Orthodox, are united in spite of "small" differences, or that we derive from the same Church and should seek to return to it, thereby forming the one and only Church. This is a blatant expression of the branch theory."⁴⁰

An expression of the branch theory on the basis of a "common baptism" is also clearly found in text adopted and signed by Orthodox ecumenists at the Second European Ecumenical Assembly of the Council of European Churches in June of 1997. There we read: "In the baptismal water we recognise the presence of the Spirit, who is the source of all life and makes us part of the body of Christ."⁴¹ "We recommend that the churches...seek to achieve mutual recognition of baptism among all Christian churches."⁴²

Finally, in July of this year (2004), the Australian dioceses of the Patriarchates of Constantinople, Antioch, and Romania signed the so-called "Covenanting Document" of the National Council of Churches of Australia, whereby they recognize the Sacrament of Baptism administered in the heterodox communities (Roman Catholic, Non-Chalcedonian, Anglican, Lutheran, Congregationalist, and Uniting) and promote the use of a common "Certificate of Baptism."⁴³ That is to say, Orthodox hierarchs in Australia,

³⁹ *Baptism and Sacramental Economy*, An Agreed Statement of The North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation, St. Vladimirs Orthodox Seminary, Crestwood, New York, June 3, 1999

⁴⁰ *Ekklesiastike Parembase*, No. 71 (December 2001) [In Greek]. Translated by and printed from *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol XX, No 2, pp. 40-43. Metropolitan Hierotheos includes the following excerpt from Protopresbyter George Dragas' "Summary and Critique" of the Agreed Statement, in which he concludes that "this inquiry into sacramental theology is devoid of any ecclesiological basis and that it onesidedly interprets—or rather, misinterprets—the facts of Orthodox sacramental practice, and particularly vis-à-vis the heterodox at different periods in the history of the Church. These recommendations and conclusions and, indeed, the entire Agreed Statement are the epitome of Western skepticism. Their acceptance by Orthodox theologians signals a deliberate betrayal of Orthodox views and a capitulation to the outlook of Western ecumenism. This is something that we should reject."

⁴¹ Final Document 2, Basic Text, §§ A33.

⁴² Final Document 3, *Recommendations for Action*, §§ 1.1.

⁴³ The text of the "Covenanting" agreement reads: "We agree together to recognise the Sacrament of Baptism administered in each other's church, and to promote the use of the common Certificate of Baptism. Signed by: The Anglican Church of Australia, Antiochian Orthodox Church, Armenian Apostolic Church, Congregational Federation of Australia, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia, Lutheran Church of Australia, Roman Catholic Church in Australia, Romanian Orthodox Church, Uniting Church in Australia." For the complete document see the NCCA website: www.ncca.org.au/_data/page/2/A_National_Covenant_July_041.doc.

and by implication in Constantinople, Damascus and Bucharest, have recognized baptism as existing *per se* in the heterodox confessions. Although unprecedented for the Orthodox, this agreement is consistent with the Second Vatican Council declaration, namely, that “men who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are brought into a certain, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church. . .all who have been justified by faith in baptism are incorporated into Christ; they therefore with good reason are accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church.⁴⁴. . . *Baptism is, then, the sacramental bond of unity, indeed the foundation of communion among all Christians.*”⁴⁵ (Emphasis mine)

Conclusion: Call for a Return to Strictness

The views presented by these Orthodox theologians and hierarchs are clearly resonant with those held by Roman Catholic theologians, views especially pronounced and developed since the Second Vatican Council. They are views which are set against the Patristic consensus and the canons of the Church; views which compromise the integrity of the Church and hinder her mission. Above all they are views which disregard the preeminence of faith with regard to unity – every kind of unity, whether so-called “partial” or “full.” As St. John Chrysostom has stated, “When all believe alike, then unity exists.”⁴⁶

The Patristic witness on the question of heretical baptism has never been in question, despite recent claims to the contrary. St. Athanasius the Great, for example, clearly regarded right Faith as essential for the accomplishment of a genuine and grace-giving Baptism. His words succinctly express the Patristic consensus:

On this account, therefore, the Saviour also did not simply command to Baptize, but first says, ‘Teach’; then thus: ‘Baptize in the Name of the Father, and Son, and Holy Spirit’; that the right faith might follow upon learning, and *together with faith might come the consecration of Baptism*. There are many other heresies, too, which use the names only, but not in a right sense, as I have said, nor with sound faith, and in consequence the water which they administer is unprofitable, as deficient in piety, so that he who is sprinkled by them is rather polluted by irreligion than redeemed⁴⁷ (Emphasis mine).

Alas, greatly lacking is the kind of clarity and directness with which St. Athanasius speaks. This is because in the papist-ecumenist vision of baptism and the Church there is incredible inner confusion and contradiction, which we are encouraged to believe is really paradox or antinomy⁴⁸. It is not. It is just plain over-logicalness twisting reality in order to

⁴⁴ Decree on Ecumenism, chapter 1, number 3.

⁴⁵ Directory on Ecumenism, chapter 2, number 11.

⁴⁶ St. John Chrysostom, Homily on Ephesians, 11.3, P.G. 62-85.

⁴⁷ St. Athanasius the Great, Patrologia Graeca, Vol. XXVI, col 237B (Second Discourse Against the Arians, 42-43).

⁴⁸ See: Callam, Neville, *Introducing One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition of Christian Initiation* (Faverges II/Revised), a lecture likewise delivered to the Plenary Commission of the Commission on Faith and Order at their 28 July - 6 August 2004 meeting held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. There Mr. Callam, interpreting the statement on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* [BEM, Faith and Order Paper No. 111, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982] states that

conform to the dysfunctional forms of Western Christian life.⁴⁹ And, yet, “baptismal unity” represents the dominant thought in ecumenical circles – including among Orthodox ecumenists. Herein lies the great tragedy and travesty of Orthodox “witness” in the ecumenical movement. By embracing the so-called theory of “primordial unity” in the “one, common baptism” Orthodox ecumenists have pitted charity against truth and further obscured the existing “dis-union”.⁵⁰

What, then, is called for now, in the face of this infidelity? As in times past, when “leniency seemed to endanger the well-being of the Orthodox flock, exposing them to infiltration and encouraging them to indifferentism and apostasy,”⁵¹ the Church must “resort to strictness”⁵² in the reception of heterodox. As a contemporary hierarch has written – and with this I conclude my remarks: “When there is such confusion, it is necessary to adopt an attitude of strictness, which preserves the truth: that all who fall into heresy are outside the Church and that the Holy Spirit does not work to bring about their deification.”⁵³

“because baptism occurs within particular communities with a confessional identity, it is the faith of the church as expressed in that community in which a person is baptized that determines – either intentionally or as a matter of fact - the confessional identity of the baptized” (§52). Because these communities are not in full communion with one another, a paradox results, namely, that “while baptism brings Christians into the unity of Christ’s Body, which is One, at the same time, the location of baptism within a specific confessional community means that the baptized experience disunity with many other Christians”. One wants to ask Mr. Callam, how can those baptized into Christ be disunited between themselves? By this it should be clear that the “one baptism” is not also “all (so-called) baptisms”, since if these were true baptisms they would bring the believer into unity both horizontally and vertically, with Christ and with the Church. See also Scampini, Fr Jorge A, OP, *‘We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins’*: “This ‘yes’ of faith, spoken in baptism, which makes us members of Christ and of the one Church, is a universal ‘yes’...This ‘yes’ incorporates us into the one Church...[F]or a Catholic, a baptized person is not saved despite being Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed or Methodist, but through being Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed or Methodist. It is in that particular Christian community that the ‘yes’ of faith has been spoken. *The separated parts of the one Church are, despite the sin of Christians, at the service of the one mystery of salvation...*Thus, despite divisions and mutual condemnations, all communities of the baptized with a true baptism are in communion in this ‘yes’ of faith...However, *in addition to this unifying, divinely inspired and transcendent ‘yes’, which brings us into communion with Christ and into his body, another ‘yes’ intervenes, causing division and schism.* This second ‘yes’ is a response to the particular interpretations of the given revelation in the form of confessions...[T]hrough baptism we become Christians who are also Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, or whatever. The first ‘yes’ enables us to receive the reality of grace common to all Christians, but the second ‘yes’ leads to a perpetuation of the signs of division...It is thus essential for Christian communities to be more motivated by a desire for the truth than by closed passionate fixation on their confessional traditions.” (Emphasis mine) Is Fr. Scampini’s theory not a rather clear formulation of the heretical branch theory, expressed in Roman Catholic terms? Is he not telling us that Orthodoxy is just one of many confessions, and by clinging to our particular “yes” we create obstacles to unity and fight the will of God? By saying yes to the particulars of Orthodoxy we are, he claims, saying no to the unity of the Church. Hence, is he not clearly pitting the truth against an Orthodox confession of faith and Orthodox Tradition?

⁴⁹ See: Scampini, Fr Jorge A, OP, *‘We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins’*: “It does, however, seem clear to me that, while in the past the attempt has been made to respond to concrete situations, it has not proved possible to foresee all the demands that new unprecedented situations would make of us, perhaps making it necessary to draw out other aspects implicit in baptism.”

⁵⁰ Fr. Georges Florovsky was a notable exception. Fr. George “formally and firmly rejected such theories of the existing dis-union as the branch theory of many Protestants and of the primordial unity in a common baptism recently stressed in Roman Catholicism, because both of these irenic and ecumenical efforts to find a common denominator gloss over or minimize the scandal of “dis-union,” which for him was rather to be faced forthrightly and explained in terms of “the true [Orthodox] Church and secessions.” And he turned back any criticism of his somewhat more Cyprianic than Stephanic conception of ecclesiological and sacramental unity thus: ‘Intransigence is but another and deprecatory name for conviction.’ And he went on: ‘Separation is part of our cross.’ Elsewhere he wrote characteristically: ‘Charity should never be set against the truth.’” See: Williams, George H., “The Neo-Patristic Synthesis of Georges Florovsky” in *George Florovsky: Russian Intellectual, Orthodox Churchman*, Andrew Blane, Editor (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1993), p. 313.

⁵¹ Ware, *Eustratios Argenti*, pp. 85.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Metropolitan Hierotheos (Vlachos) of Nafpaktos *Ekklesiastike Parembase*, No. 71 (December 2001) [In Greek].

Epilogue: A Matter of Faith

Not many days after this paper was presented, another ecumenistic agreement was announced. The Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) – the country's main Protestant denomination – and the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople signed an agreement to recognise one another's baptisms. The agreement was summarized as follows in an article which appeared on October 6th from Ecumenical News International:

“Under the agreement announced after a September meeting in Istanbul, Christians who convert from one denomination to another will not be baptized again. The joint statement which was signed declared that ‘although church fellowship does not yet exist between our churches, we each regard the other's members as being baptized and in the case of a change of confession we reject undertaking a new baptism.’ The statement was signed by Metropolitan Augoustinos of Germany of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and Bishop Rolf Koppe, head of foreign relations for the EKD. Dr Dagmar Heller, the EKD officer responsible for ecumenism and Orthodoxy stated that “During our negotiations Metropolitan Augoustinos pointed out that the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Germany has not baptized converts for many years. But signing this paper helps to combat misunderstanding and prejudices.” A major World Council of Churches-sponsored conference earlier this year highlighted the importance of the mutual recognition of baptism, considered by some to offer currently the most promising way to promote church unity. In 2003, the then WCC general secretary, Konrad Raiser, said there would be “a ‘Copernican Revolution’ in ecumenical dialogue if churches were genuinely to recognise each other's baptism.”

There are several important matters to note and analyze here. First of all, this agreement clearly continues the path previously mentioned, namely, the recognition of heterodox baptism *per se* (in and of itself, apart from conversion to Orthodoxy) and does away with even the possibility of economy, since here economy has become the rule. For what is there to “economize” and complete if the fullness of baptismal grace already exists among the heterodox?

Secondly, unlike those agreements reached in Balamand and in the U.S.A., this agreement was reached in Constantinople, at the Phanar, and signed by the Bishop of a local Church. In the past, as a way of mollifying criticism, it has been claimed that these ecumenist decisions were only suggestions by theologians in dialogue and not decisions of local Bishops. With the pacts signed in Germany and Australia we are dealing not with commissions of theologians or theological accords which are not yet enforced, but local dioceses (Churches) under Bishops who are signing confessions of faith. They *believe* – and *confess* – that there is no difference between Orthodox and heretical baptism, that they are one and the same – the “one baptism” of the Symbol of Faith (Nicene Creed). This is a direct challenge to every Orthodox Christian's faith in the “one baptism for the remission of sins” and the belief that the “one church” of the Creed is the Orthodox Church.

Every Orthodox Christian is in essence being asked: Do you believe and confess that Orthodox and heterodox baptism are one and the same – are both the “one baptism for the remission of sins”? If, however, you accept that the “one baptism” we confess in the Symbol of Faith is the same as that “baptism” performed by the heterodox, it follows that the “one Church” is identified with a “church” to which the heterodox also belong.

Moreover, if the heterodox are baptized into Christ and into the life of Christ, have “put on Christ” in baptism, then they lack nothing of the Grace of God and surely the only thing which prevents them from sharing in Holy Communion with the Orthodox is prejudice and misunderstanding. For, if dogmatic truth is no longer a necessary criterion for membership in the Church, we will find no reasons other than prejudice and misunderstandings to refrain from union.

One can expect claims that nothing has changed, that the practice of receiving the heterodox «κατ’ οὐκονομίαν» by Chrismation was the norm for decades and it will continue to be. If the practice has not changed – a practice, which St. Nikodemos the Athonite’s interpretation calls into question –, how it is understood definitely has changed. Although nowhere in the agreement is it stated that the heterodox baptism is considered by the Orthodox as inactive or lacking, some are now justifying the decision on the grounds that the Orthodox consider heterodox baptism to be a baptism «ἐν δυνάμει» (potential), and not «ἐν ἐνεργείᾳ» (active). Besides the fact that this is stated nowhere in the agreement – and thus the Orthodox appear like Jesuits (saying one thing and thinking another) – “baptism ‘ἐν δυνάμει’” is unknown among the Fathers. What Father ever spoke of mysteries existing «ἐν δυνάμει» among the heterodox?

Dear Orthodox Christians, the canonical and patristic witness is clear. The 46th and 47th Apostolic Canons declare, respectively: “We order that a bishop or presbyter that recognized the baptism or sacrifice of heretics be defrocked. For “what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?” (c.f. 2 Cor. 6:15) and “If a bishop or presbyter baptize anew anyone that has had a true baptism, or fail to baptize someone that had been polluted by the impious, let him be defrocked, on the grounds that he is mocking the cross and death of the Lord, and fails to distinguish priests from false priests.”

More important, however, than even the anti-canonical nature of these agreements, if it be possible, is the implication that fundamental differences in faith no longer prevent us from effecting union with the heterodox. What we have here, is no less than a “false union,” plain and simple – union of the churches in the “one baptism” of the Church. A confession of faith has been posited, one which says that the “one baptism” is every baptism, whether it be performed within or outside of the Church, by an Orthodox Christian or a heterodox, according to apostolic form or not. Furthermore, by implication, this new confession of faith also holds that, since we share the “one baptism” with the heterodox, and enjoy so-called partial union with them, they too are *members of the Church* – even if, perhaps “ecclesiastically lacking” in some way.

Every Orthodox Christian – especially every Orthodox shepherd – is called upon to resist this new “confession of faith” in word and deed and “*be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh a reason of the hope that is in them*” (1 Pet. 3:15).



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