

Heresy vs. Truth: A Response to Dr. Peter Bouteneff

by Patrick Barnes

On July 16th and August 8th, 2009, Dr. Peter Bouteneff, associate professor in Systematic Theology at Saint Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, posted a two-part podcast about ecumenism for his Ancient Faith Radio series "Sweeter than Honey". The podcasts were titled "Heresy vs. Hope". In them Dr. Bouteneff criticized the "Confession of Faith Against Ecumenism," a very important document published in Greece in April, 2009. This document has since been translated into numerous languages and signed by a large number of clergy, monastics and laity, including over half a dozen Metropolitans. Dr. Bouteneff's remarks should not go unaddressed.

Dr. Bouteneff opens Part I of his two-part podcast by stating that he will be comparing two recent documents: the aforementioned Confession and the July 16, 2009 keynote address of Metropolitan Anastasios of Albania at the Conference of European Churches in Lyons, France. He wants the listeners to note "...the very sharp contrast between their respective messages and their respective spirit as they address the important issue of divided Christendom."

At the outset I must question the fairness of pitting a Confession of Faith against a homily given at an ecumenical gathering. This seems to me a classic "apples and oranges" comparison. The Confession of Faith is written in the kind of firm and uncompromising language that one would expect to find in a Confessional statement; and it is written for Orthodox Christians. Metropolitan Anastasios's audience was mostly comprised of heterodox Christians; and the theme of the conference, "Called to One Hope in Christ", hardly encourages an Orthodox participant to "speak the truth in love." If Dr. Bouteneff wants to draw comparisons between documents issued by Orthodox ecumenists and anti-ecumenists, fine. We would welcome fruitful "internal dialogue" over substantive issues, for it is rare. But to compare this Confession of Faith with an ecumenical keynote address is definitely unfair, something which he at least acknowledges in passing later in his talk.

That said, I did not disagree entirely with aspects of Dr. Bouteneff's assessment of the Confession of Faith. Although I am an anti-ecumenist, and I definitely support the efforts of those behind this document, I think it was worded imprecisely at times, unnecessarily leaving the door open to criticism. This is especially true when it comes to the document's definition of the Branch Theory. Restricting it to a definition that openly states the Orthodox Church does not have the fullness of Faith of Life in Christ—*i.e.*, one that blatantly compromises its uniqueness as the one, true Church—is unfortunate. I agree with

Dr. Bouteneff that this is not the position espoused by Orthodox ecumenists, except in perhaps isolated cases that do not represent the norm. As I hope to show, however, my agreement on this issue is a matter of semantics, not substance. The Branch Theory has subtle (and not so subtle) variations which are widely held and equally condemnable.

Before proceeding further I think it is important to define a few terms.

First, by the term “Orthodox ecumenist” I mean an Orthodox Christian who is active in the Ecumenical Movement and who at the very least subscribes to the tenets of the Toronto Statement (1950), but who most likely affirms ecclesiological principles that are even further from the Holy Fathers. I am not saying that these people are therefore “heretics”, although my criticism of their views may at times imply this. Labeling someone a “heretic” is a serious matter, one that goes beyond superficial accusations and that requires a determination of their conscious disavowal of Church dogma. Given the vague “language of diplomacy” that is so often employed in ecumenist writings (see my essay “Ecumenist ‘Double Speak’: The Ecclesiological Schizophrenia of the Orthodox Ecumenists”), accusing most ecumenists of “heresy” necessitates finding out “what they really mean when they say ____”. Who knows? Perhaps they unwittingly hold to heretical beliefs which, when exposed by the Church and challenged, they would refute. I am sure there are Orthodox ecumenists who are also heretics, but I refrain from making such judgments. If I am wrong concerning the use of the term “heretic”, I would rather err on the side of caution.

Second, Orthodox theology distinguishes between two “types” of Grace. When I use the term “Grace” I almost always mean Mysteriological Grace—*i.e.*, the special, ecclesial Grace given through the Mysteries of the Orthodox Church to those being united or already united to Her, not the more general, external Grace extended to all mankind. Archbishop Seraphim (Sobolev) of Sofia, of blessed memory—the last Hierarch of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia to be consecrated in Russia—, was invited to address a synod of Russian Bishops at the Moscow Congress of July 8-18, 1948. One of the purposes of this convocation was to consider whether to join the World Council of Churches, which was to be founded approximately one month later in Amsterdam. In his address entitled “Does the Russian Orthodox Church Need to Participate in the Ecumenical Movement?”, Archbishop Seraphim succinctly summarized the Church’s understanding of Grace:

According to the teaching of the Holy Fathers, the Grace of the Holy Spirit is manifest in two forms: firstly, as an external, providential Grace, which acts in and throughout the lives of everybody, enabling anyone to accept the True Faith; and, secondly, as an internal, salvific Grace, which revivifies, redeems, and functions solely in the Orthodox Church. Undoubtedly, in the previously cited quote by the Orthodox ecumenist [*i.e.*, Protopresbyter Tsankov—PMB], external Grace was not what he had in mind, since when it acts in the

lives of Christians of other creeds, and even in the lives of non-Christians, it does not make them Saints. It follows, then, that what he had in mind was the internal, revivifying Grace. But this Grace is either wholly absent in Christians of other creeds or is present but inactive, unable to save or to make them Saints. So neither the one nor the other type of Grace can make heterodox Christians into Saints. Subsequently, it is inappropriate for Orthodox ecumenists to speak at all about either Grace or sanctity in connection with Christians of other creeds.

Please note that in denying the presence of *ecclesial Grace* in heterodox mysteries the Church is not making any judgments about the possibility of salvation for any particular Christian believer. This and related issues I attempted to address in my 1999 book *The Non-Orthodox: The Orthodox Teaching on Christians Outside of the Church*. I ended Chapter 1, which concerns the ecclesial and eternal “status” of the heterodox, as follows:

when speaking of their *eternal status—i.e.*, the implications of this ecclesial separation—, we leave them to the mercy of God and do not judge them. Affirmation of their separation does not require belief in their damnation. (p. 8)

Orthodox ecumenists are fond of accusing their opponents of being unloving and judgmental because our views supposedly “send everyone but the Orthodox to hell” or consider “the Pope to be no different than a witch doctor.” These spurious charges are unfounded.

Third, with respect to the Holy Mysteries, especially Baptism, by the term “validity” I almost always mean the erroneous view of Orthodox ecumenists that heterodox Baptism is “valid” in the sense that it can bestow ecclesial Grace and thus unite a heterodox believer to the Church. I try to be very clear and use the phrase “validity *per se*”, which means “in and of itself, apart from and outside of the Orthodox Church”. The term “validity” can be legitimately used when speaking of a valid *form—i.e.*, trine immersion and invocation of the Name of the All-Holy Trinity. In this case “validity” does not mean “*per se*” but a “valid” (though empty) *form (i.e.*, lacking in ecclesial Grace) that the Church may, upon uniting a person to Her, accept by *economia* (more on that, below) and fill with Grace. As you will see, ecumenist theology is founded upon “valid baptism” in the former sense.

Once more, in stating that heterodox Baptism does not unite a believer to Christ and His Church, anti-ecumenists are not making any judgments on the sincerity of their love for God, on how God views them, what might happen if they died before receiving Orthodox Baptism, etc.

Introducing the Debate

The Confession of Faith defines the “pan-heresy of ecumenism” as the adoption (or acceptance) and legalization of heresies as “churches”. This definition flows from the Patriarchal Encyclical of 1920, which is a foundational document of the modern Ecumenical Movement. As the Confession of Faith points out, this encyclical was addressed “To the Churches of Christ Everywhere”, and it officially named, for the first time in history, heretical bodies as “churches”. The language of this encyclical clearly implies that heterodox Christian bodies are legitimate churches of Christ—to one degree or another, in a real, that is, not merely institutional, sense—even going so far as to call them “venerable”, and “sister churches”. The 1920 Encyclical was unprecedented in Orthodox Church history, and contributed greatly to the establishment of the World Council of Churches twenty-eight years later.

Dr. Bouteneff says that according to the Confession of Faith and its definition of the pan-heresy of ecumenism, “if you speak of a Protestant body as a ‘church’, it means you accept that body as a church in the full dogmatic sense of the word, on a par therefore with the Orthodox Church in every way.” He says this leads to a logical fallacy arising from a “false dualism”. Quoting Dr. Bouteneff, “...there is no middle ground: either you are Orthodox and believe that everything outside of the Orthodox Church is a heresy, or else, you succumb to the heresy of ecumenism, because you accept every so-called Christian body as a church just like the Orthodox Church”, that is, you adopt “a stance of complete Christian relativism, which accepts all Christians as being doctrinally on a par with each other.”

In Part 2 of his podcast series Dr. Bouteneff states that this relativistic ecclesiology is known as the Branch Theory. He claims that anti-ecumenists wrongly accuse Orthodox ecumenists of holding this theory because, again, they allow for no middle ground between the Orthodox Church—which he confesses is the one, true Church—and heterodox Christian “churches”. He thinks anti-ecumenists are rigidly simplistic, and set up straw-man arguments. Again, quoting Dr. Bouteneff:

Any Orthodox Christian will tell you, including myself, that [the Branch Theory] is of course a heretical view of the Church. *Nobody* that I’ve *ever* seen as an Orthodox Christian participating in the Ecumenical Movement—and yes, I’ve participated actively in it—nobody believes that about the Church. OK? That’s a fallacy.

One Orthodox ecumenist put it to me this way:

I don't believe this is a debate between “Orthodox ecclesiology” on the one hand, and an explicit or implicit version of “The Branch Theory” on the other. It is in fact a debate as to whether one finds anything “of the Church” outside the canonical Orthodox Church.

These are not the same question. One can believe that some kind of ecclesial reality can exist, by God's grace, outside the canonical bounds of the Orthodox Church, and at the same time emphatically deny that “The Church” is composed of different “branches” all with the same claim to ecclesiality. This, I believe, is the true arena of the discussion, even if it results in a more complicated and less dramatic picture.

We now arrive at the heart of the matter. Although Dr. Bouteneff is not so explicit in his podcast, based on his other writings, and on his recommendation of the Toronto Statement of 1950, I have no doubt that the “middle ground” which he thinks is so critical for one to acknowledge is an “ecclesial reality” outside the boundaries of the Church due to the widespread practice of recognizing heterodox baptism as “valid”, without which the concept of what he calls “different extents of separation from Orthodoxy” has no real ecclesial meaning. This idea is clearly formulated in the Toronto Statement, which Dr. Bouteneff thinks anti-ecumenists do not like to acknowledge because it supposedly threatens our “simple arguments” and renders our accusations false. But the degree to which Dr. Bouteneff subscribes to the tenets of this “baptismal ecclesiology” is neither here nor there, for in my response to his podcast I am also addressing the mainstream views of Orthodox ecumenists in general—views which are clearly understood from the many ecumenical documents that openly affirm the “validity” *per se* of heterodox baptism. For example, consider this concluding point in the document “Baptism and ‘Sacramental Economy’”, an agreement reached at Saint Vladimir’s Orthodox Seminary between the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops of America (that is, SCOBA) and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in America on June 3, 1999:

We find that this mutual recognition of the ecclesial reality of baptism, in spite of our divisions, is fully consistent with the perennial teaching of both churches. This teaching has been reaffirmed on many occasions.

Now, regarding the Toronto Statement, I can agree with Dr. Bouteneff that it does not *commit* Orthodox participants in the WCC to a particular ecclesiology, nor does it *require* them to “regard the other member Churches as Churches in the true and full sense of the word.” Additionally, it states: “In particular, membership in the World Council does not imply acceptance or rejection of the doctrine that the unity of the Church consists in the unity of the invisible Church.” This “series of negations,” as the Statement calls them, are found in Part III entitled “What the World Council of Churches Is Not”.

The most one can say about these negations is that they grant membership in the WCC without *requiring* members to adhere to an ecclesiology with which they disagree. It also makes it clear that membership in the WCC does not *imply* adherence to a particular ecclesiology. In other words, the Toronto Statement *permits* a church to remain true to its beliefs. It is up to the member churches to remain faithful to their own dogmas. Anti-ecumenists would say that Orthodox churches participating in the WCC have often not been faithful.

In fact, this lack of fidelity to Orthodox ecclesiology can be found in the very next section of the Toronto Statement. Entitled “The Assumptions Underlying the World Council of Churches”, this section begins by stating “We must now try to define the positive assumptions which underlie the World Council of Churches *and the ecclesiological implications of membership in it.*” Among these assumptions is this excerpt, which succinctly states the ecclesiology of the Orthodox ecumenists:

The member Churches recognize that the membership of the Church of Christ is more inclusive than the membership of their own Church body. They seek, therefore, to enter into living contact with those outside their own ranks who confess the Lordship of Christ.

All the Christian Churches, including the Church of Rome, hold that there is no complete identity between the membership of the Church Universal and the membership of their own Church. They recognize that there are Church members *extra muros* [i.e., outside the walls—PMB], that these belong *aliquo modo* [i.e., one way or another—PMB] to the Church, or even that there is an *ecclesia extra ecclesiam* [i.e., a church outside of the Church—PMB]. This recognition finds expression in the fact that with very few exceptions the Christian Churches accept the baptism administered by other Churches as valid.

The language is similar to that found in the Patriarchal Encyclical of 1920:

Love should be rekindled and strengthened among the churches, so that they should no more consider one another as strangers and foreigners, but as relatives, and as being a part of the household of Christ and fellow heirs, members of the same body and partakers of the promise of God in Christ.

The Toronto Statement goes on to say:

There is a place in the World Council both for those Churches which recognize other Churches as Churches in the full and true sense, and for those who do not. But these divided Churches, even if they cannot yet accept each other as true and pure Churches, believe that they should not remain in isolation from each other, and consequently they have associated themselves in the World Council of Churches.

This is the key passage to which Dr. Bouteneff refers in his podcast—the passage that anti-ecumenists are allegedly loathe to cite. I fail to see how this exonerates the ecumenists. It raises more questions than it answers. Dr. Bouteneff asserts that anti-ecumenists ignorantly, and perhaps even maliciously, accuse Orthodox ecumenists of accepting a Protestant body “as a church in the full dogmatic sense of the word, on a par with the Orthodox Church in every way.” As you will see, this is not our assertion. Nevertheless, I am left wondering how one can speak of Protestant bodies in a “partial dogmatic sense”? If the Church is the Body of Christ, and one can only speak of “churches” in a dogmatic sense as local bodies of Christians who have true baptism (*i.e.*, as I will argue, only Orthodox Christians), then speaking of Protestant bodies in *any* dogmatic sense is highly questionable.

Father George Florovsky, who was one of the key figures behind the Toronto Statement, is often cited as the main proponent of this “vestiges of the Church” theory, owing to his 1933 article entitled “The Boundaries [or Limits] of the Church”. In it he writes:

Where the sacraments are accomplished, there is the Church. St. Cyprian started from the silent supposition that the canonical and charismatic limits of the Church invariably coincide. And it is this unproven identification that has not been confirmed by the communal consciousness. As a mystical organism, as the sacramental Body of Christ, the Church cannot be adequately described in canonical terms or categories alone.

It is clear that by the term “church” the authors of the Toronto Statement mean an “ecclesial reality” in Christ, that is, a “church” with mystical ties to the one, true Church due to their ability to administer “valid” baptism. This concept of an “ecclesial reality” derived from or isomorphic with the Orthodox Church seriously deviates from Patristic ecclesiology. This is language borrowed from Latin theology and very heavily used in the Vatican II documents. It is foreign to the Holy Fathers and the Sacred Canons, being an implicit version of the Branch Theory.

In short, Dr. Bouteneff’s claim that anti-ecumenists create a false dualism, or that they wrongly accuse Orthodox ecumenists of holding to the Branch Theory, rests upon this theory of a “middle ground”—that is, of *ecclesial* ground delimited by heterodox baptism which the Church supposedly recognizes as “valid” in itself, outside of Her “canonical boundaries”.

The “Validity” of Heterodox Baptism *per se* and its Implications for Orthodox Ecclesiology

The debate centers around whether heterodox baptism has been viewed by the Church as valid when administered outside of the Orthodox Church. The most authoritative book in English on this subject is entitled *I Confess One Baptism* (1994), by Protopresbyter George Metallinos of the Church of Greece. It is a study of the all-important Canon VII of the Second Oecumenical Synod—the canon which regulates the manner of receiving converts—based on the writings of the *Kollyvades* Fathers—among whom are Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite and Saint Makarios of Corinth—as well as on the writings of other churchmen and scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Father George praises the *Kollyvades* Fathers for upholding “the Church’s early practice as canonically formulated by Sts. Cyprian of Carthage and Basil the Great.” (p. 21) “Even today,” he notes, “the *Kollyvades* Fathers continue to be the spiritual guides for the Orthodox, and the principal bridge of reconnection with the patristic tradition.” (p. 29) Here I include the essential points germane to our topic:

The theological thought of these theologians moves within the framework of the following ecclesiological and canonical presuppositions:

The absolute center around which their theological conscience is formed is Eph. 4:5: “One Lord, one faith, one baptism,” and, consequently, One Church, within which alone are the sacraments valid and redemptive. This Church is the Orthodox Church, their Church.” In other words, they clearly follow the ecclesiology of St. Cyprian of Carthage—Carthage, which, moreover, the entire Orthodox East followed as a rule, in contrast with the West which, here too, followed Augustine....

Heretics of every kind as defined by St. Basil (Canon 1), whom our theologians follow in this point also, are outside the Church, and consequently their “baptism” is wholly without substance, *i.e.* “pseudo-baptism” and “not true,” since it is performed outside the Church...

Moreover, heretics cannot possibly have baptism, for they do not have the priesthood. Priesthood and baptism are bound together, and it is wholly necessary to accept either both or neither.” Heretical baptism “is not capable of providing remission of sins,” and therefore all heretics coming over to the Church must necessarily be baptized. It is clear that these views are founded on St. Cyprian’s Canon and Canon XLVII of St. Basil, which, according to the *Kollyvades*, marked the way of *acrivia* [*i.e.*, precision or rigorism—PMB], according to which there is no room for discussion concerning validity of heretical sacraments in themselves.... (pp. 35, 37-38, 39)

For them, *acrivia* is the practice of the Church emanating from her self-understanding, according to which, outside of her there are neither sacraments nor salvation.

Thus, the *economia* [i.e., concession or dispensation—PMB] that was used by the Second Ecumenical Council on the basis, as we saw, of specific presuppositions, does not in any way eliminate the Church's *acrivia*.

According to St. Nikodemos, “the *economia* that some Fathers temporarily used can neither be thought of as law nor taken as an example.”... (p. 60)

So, our writers arrive together at the unanimous decision that, according to the Church's canonical practice, as a rule *acrivia* should be applied to heretics who convert to Orthodoxy; in other words, they should be baptized, since in any case, neither by *acrivia* nor by *economia* can heretical sacraments be considered valid. (p. 62)

In other words,

...such an acceptance of Latin baptism by *economia* would in no way signify the validity of it “in itself,” but only by virtue of the conversion of the Roman Catholic to Orthodoxy. (p. 114)

I heartily commend this book to anyone interested in ascertaining the truth on these matters. It will leave no question in your mind about the Church's ecclesiology as found in the Sacred Canons pertaining to baptism, and in the writings of the Holy Fathers.

Now, in his podcast Dr. Bouteneff said that, according to Father Florovsky “[Saint Cyprian's] views didn't prevail in the rest of the history of the Church. The views of other Saints did, Fathers who acknowledged different modes of separation, and different modes of reception back into Orthodoxy.” As *I Confess One Baptism* proves, these claims are patently false. Moreover, what did Father Florovsky actually write? I quote:

The question of the nature and meaning of divisions and sects in the Church was put in all its sharpness as early as the ancient baptismal disputes of the third century. At that time St. Cyprian of Carthage developed with fearless consistency a doctrine of a complete absence of grace in *every* sect precisely *as a* sect. The whole meaning and the whole logical stress of his reasoning lay in the conviction that *the sacraments are established in the Church*. That is to say, they are effected and can be effected *only in the Church*, in communion and in communality. Therefore every violation of communality and unity in itself leads immediately beyond the last barrier into some decisive *outside*. To St. Cyprian every schism was a departure out of the Church, out of that sanctified and holy land, where alone rises the baptismal spring, the waters of salvation, *quia una est aqua in ecclesia sancta* (St. Cyprian, *Epist.* lxxi, 2). The teaching of St. Cyprian on the gracelessness of sects is related to his teaching on unity and communality. This is not the place or the moment to recollect and relate St. Cyprian's deductions and proofs. Each of us remembers and knows them, is

bound to know them, is bound to remember them. They have not lost their force to this day. The historical influence of St. Cyprian was continuous and powerful. 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.

But the practical conclusions of St. Cyprian have not been accepted and supported by the consciousness of the Church. And one asks how this was possible, if his premises have been neither disputed nor set aside. (pp. 36-37, emphasis his)

Thus, contrary to Dr. Bouteneff's assertion, Father Florovsky *affirmed* the ongoing legitimacy of St. Cyprian's *theological* premises, which were also upheld by the Second Oecumenical Synod. In this, Father Florovsky is consistent with the conclusions of *I Confess One Baptism*. Moreover, he is convinced that the theology of Saint Augustine—who is frequently misused in ecumenist writings—is very close to that of Saint Cyprian; as well, their diverging views were of a *practical* as opposed to *theological* nature.

The distinction between *theological* and *practical* issues is very important to note. Orthodox ecumenists want you to believe that the Church's varied practice in the reception of converts—what Father Florovsky describes as the Church's lack of support for the *practical* conclusions of Saint Cyprian—indicate that She has, at times, granted validity to heterodox baptisms *per se*. In other words, because the Church did not always baptize heretics or schismatics, Orthodox ecumenists postulate that She recognized in these groups true baptism. From this they have formulated a new ecclesiology which seeks to widen the Church's boundaries to include any heretical body in which baptism can be deemed "valid." This is wholly unjustified and anti-Patristic. As *I Confess One Baptism* proves, the apparent inconsistencies with regards to the reception of converts are very convincingly explained as the Church's practice of *economia*. And this *economia* "does not in any way eliminate the Church's *acriovia*. According to Saint Nikodemos, 'the *economia* that some Fathers temporarily used can neither be thought of as law nor taken as an example.'"

Perhaps equal in importance to Father George Metallinos' book, *The Unity of the Church and the World Conference of Christian Communities* was written in 1917 by then Archimandrite Hilarion (Troitsky). He was later consecrated Bishop and subsequently martyred in 1926. The Saint's extensive critique of the flawed ecclesiological ideas circulating in his day is still extremely relevant for our times.

Early in his treatise he summarizes the views of a Western-minded clergymen who had recently written on this topic. You will be struck by how similar these views are to those of Orthodox ecumenists today. Keep in mind that when Saint Hilarion uses the term “Catholic Church” he means “the Orthodox Catholic Church”, that is, the one, true Church that we proclaim in the Symbol of Faith. He writes:

[T]he archpriest P. Ya. Svetlov asserts that the Christian creeds of the West comprise, along with the Orthodox faith, Christian churches belonging to the Catholic Church, and that they are not extra-ecclesiastical communities separated from the Church, and that the extant Christian churches in the West and in the East are local churches or parts of the Catholic Church, and for any of them to assume the right of the Catholic Church constitutes misappropriation. At the same time, the Catholic Church is, in Fr. Svetlov’s opinion, a unity of true believers, scattered everywhere in all local or particular Christian churches in the West and in the East, or, what amounts to the same thing, an aggregate of local churches of the East and the West which, in the absence of a possibility of convoking an Oecumenical Council and with the Church in a state of external division, is deprived of a complete outward or visible organization, yet in possession of an internal unity of faith and of grace-filled life in Christ, Who Himself is at the head of His Church or Body.

Father Svetlov asserts that there are heterodox believers, and thus churches in the organic sense of that word, that have grace-filled life in Christ. These believers and churches are somehow united to the Orthodox Church, which he nevertheless maintains is the one, true Church. Therefore, there is an invisible, mystical unity in Christ, though the outward, visible manifestation of this unity is not yet in their possession. This is precisely the chief ecclesiological presupposition of the Ecumenical Movement, which Dr. Bouteneff shares, and is without doubt a variation of the Branch Theory. What does Saint Hilarion think of these ideas?

Such a doctrine of the Church is absolutely inadmissible, however, since it was, beyond any doubt, alien to the ancient Church, where no reduced concept of Church unity had ever been known and where faith “in One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church” had always and invariably been professed through the ninth article of the Creed. I could ask you [that is, Mr. Gardiner, the American Episcopalian with whom the Saint was corresponding] this question: Do you and I belong to the one Church of Christ? In answering it you undoubtedly would mention the insignificance of our dogmatic differences and the virtually negligible difference in rites. For me, however, the answer is determined not by considerations of dogmatic disagreements but by the fact on hand: there is no ecclesiastical unity in grace between us.... (p. 13)

The falling away from the Church was moreover regarded as that from Christ and Christianity as well. The idea that it might be possible to belong to the Church invisibly and enjoy all the grace-filled gifts of the Church while being visibly separated from her, was

quite alien to the ancient Church. And understandably so. Because a contrary idea inevitably would entail destruction of the one Church.... (p. 18)

Having presented your interpretation of our practice with respect to the Latins, you yourself also point to a strong argument against it: "If the sacraments administered outside the Orthodox Church are valid, then we have several semi-churches instead of one Church of Christ." You yourself admit with rare sincerity that this argument deserves to be most seriously considered by theologians. You write, "I regret that I do not belong to those who could counter it with a strictly logical answer." I for my part believe that no one could come up with a half-way satisfactory answer to that argument. And its tone appears to me to have a somewhat higher significance. If the mysteries are valid outside the one Church of Christ, if the fullness of the ecclesiastical life in grace is not limited to the boundaries of the Church, then there exist several churches and not semi-churches, then the ninth article of our Creed should be dropped. There can be no semi-churches of any kind.... (p. 27)

No, the truth of ecclesiastical unity does not recognize the grace of the mysteries administered within extra-ecclesiastical communities. It is impossible to reconcile Church unity with the validity of extra-ecclesiastical sacraments. Even the genius of Augustine had been unable to solve this problem satisfactorily.... (p. 28)

Later in the book Saint Hilarion turns to the subject of *economia*, or economy. His views are entirely consistent with the Holy Fathers, especially as expressed by the aforementioned *Kollyvades* Fathers:

However, Arians were not baptized upon their conversion to the Church. Why was such a means of reception of the Arians into the Church employed? *Obviously, it was only a condescending Church practice and was not at all a dogmatic teaching that the Arians are supposedly members of the one Oecumenical Church of Christ, who are only visibly separated from her, and that baptism, performed in the Arian community, was supposedly the real charismatic mystery....*

In receiving certain heretics and schismatics without baptism, in receiving even their hierarchy in their order of priesthood, the Catholic Church continued to consider only herself the one Church of Christ, the exclusive guardian of the charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit, *and by this practice she did not in the least think to declare Cathari, Donatists, Arians, Nestorians and others her members, having the saving gifts of the Holy Spirit; it seems that one absolutely must not understand Church practices in relation to heretics and schismatics being converted to the Church in any other way....*

The Church permitted diversity of practice according to the conditions of place and time, without differentiating very rigorously between the dogmatic teaching of the heretics. Otherwise a completely unthinkable conclusion is reached: according to the circumstances of place and time, the Church changed the dogmatic teaching of her unity. Such a

conclusion of course, is unconditionally inadmissible, and therefore one must agree with the explanation of Church practice offered above. (pp. 50-51)

[O]ne must seek explanation for Church practice in relation to the Latins only in the considerations of Church economy, and not in the dogmatical understanding of the unity of the Church of Christ. The Eastern Church, just as the ancient Church, has not gone astray or erred. For although at times for the sake of the profit of human souls, She has made a condescension by not requiring that a new rite of baptism be performed upon converting Latins,... *She has nevertheless retained Her dogmatical understanding of the unity of the Church.* (pp. 66-67, emphases mine)

Saint Hilarion's book seriously compromises Father George Florovsky's "Boundaries of the Church" thesis, convincingly arguing that the conclusions of both Saints Cyprian and Augustine, despite how they are reached, are identical: the mysteries of the heterodox have no salvific validity. Therefore, there is no ecclesial reality of an organic nature present. A constant theme throughout the book is that variations in the reception of converts never translate to variations in dogma, nor do the Holy Fathers formulate their theology by reflecting upon these practices. Rather, they held fast to the Church's ecclesiology while permitting variances in the practical application thereof.

In my introduction I referred to Archbishop Seraphim of Sofia's address to the Moscow Congress of 1948. The Archbishop felt very strongly that the Russian Orthodox Church should not join the WCC. Early on he quotes the Russian professor Tsonevski, who, like Father Svetsloy, sounds very much like the ecumenists of our day:

The nature of the Church and its fundamental attributes are, in the most intimate possible way, linked to its unity, because it is the Body of Christ and Christ is its Head. The Church could never be either holy, or catholic, or apostolic, unless it were one. The whole reason for and the full significance of the ecumenical movement consist in the unity of the Church; this is its basis, as well as its task and its goal. The very fact that Orthodox Churches are actively taking part in the ecumenical movement indicates that already the old view, that only Orthodox Christians are true Christians and that only they belong to the Church of Christ, is gradually being dismissed.

Saint Seraphim is sharply critical of this type of reasoning:

In this manner, Orthodox ecumenists have the unity of the Church, or one Church, as their main objective. However, their understanding of "One Church" is incorrect, for they comprehend thereby not only Orthodox Christians, but also all Christians of every other creed—*i.e.*, heretics—as being included in Her. This ecumenical point of view is at complete variance with an Orthodox outlook. The Orthodox viewpoint always defines the One Church as consisting only of right-believing Orthodox Christians. Our Church has never

considered heretics to be included in Her ranks, as members of the Body of Christ. And how else could the Orthodox regard this matter, given that the Oecumenical Synods always anathematized heretics, *i.e.*, excommunicated them? Obviously, in their ecclesiological doctrines, ecumenists no longer recognize the authority of the Oecumenical Synods. But their refusal to recognize the authority of the Synods is tantamount to a denial of the authority of the whole Orthodox Church and to an acknowledgement, in this case, of personal intellect as the sole criterion of truth—which is a denial of the Orthodox dogma of the Church.

He then goes on to discuss the

revivifying, enlightening, and saving Grace [, which] is the most precious and highest good for us. Its gift to us was the goal of Christ's coming to earth, of His suffering on the Cross, and of His death: "*I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled?*" [St. Luke 12:49] According to the explanation of this passage by Saint Anthony the Great [ca. 250–356] and Saint Macarios of Egypt, fire signifies the revivifying Grace of the Holy Spirit poured out upon us in the Mystery of Chrismation during Baptism (for which reason Grace is also called "Baptismal Grace")....

But this precious blessing for us, this revivifying Grace of the Holy Spirit with its holiness, is not and cannot be present among Protestants, because they do not have the Mystery of Chrismation. At Baptism... we cleanse ourselves from sin, die to the world, and are reborn in the Holy Spirit for a new and holy life. But this new and holy life is only possible for us with the help of the Grace that we receive in the Mystery of Chrismation. In this Mystery, the Holy Spirit, with all of His gifts, is imparted to us, renewing us and strengthening us for a spiritual, holy life. This Grace-filled, holy life is not even possible for Christians of other creeds, who may have received baptism of a kind, but on account of their having cast aside the Orthodox Church for heresy, any Grace that might be present with them is neither active nor soul-saving.

Such are the clear views of these two Russian Saints who write and speak according to the Holy Fathers. If you read their writings you will see that they were fully cognizant of the Russian Church's varied practice in the reception of converts during a time when Russian Orthodoxy was still greatly influenced by Roman Catholic Scholastic theology. *I Confession One Baptism*, though mainly an analysis of the early Church and Greek Orthodox writings, also offers a cogent explanation of the variations in Russian practice. Unfortunately, as Father Peter Heers demonstrated in his address prepared for the "Academic Conference on Ecumenism" in Thessaloniki (2004), the influence of Latin theology persists. The many documents and statements issuing forth from Orthodox ecumenists today:

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. ("The Mystery of Baptism and the Unity of the Church")

We will now consider the writings of the eminent Serbian Saint and theologian, Archimandrite Justin Popovich, who reposed in 1979. He is one of the greatest theologians of the twentieth century, a man of tremendous erudition who was not only a highly trained academic but who also abounded in love for Christ. He was also one of Serbia's most beloved Spiritual Fathers. Among other prestigious positions he served as professor of dogmatic theology at the Theological Faculty in Belgrade. He, too, was well acquainted with ecumenism, and could speak about it with great authority. Blessed Father Justin writes:

The teaching of the Orthodox Church of the God-Man Christ, formulated the following about heretics through the Holy Apostles, the Holy Fathers, and the Holy Synods: heresies are not a Church, nor can they be a Church. Therefore, they cannot have Holy Mysteries, especially the Sacrament of the Eucharist, the Sacrament of Sacraments. Precisely because the Holy Eucharist is everything and all in the Church: even the God-Man Lord Jesus Christ and the Church itself and everything in general of the God-man.

Intercommunion, that is to say participating with heretics in the Holy Sacraments, and especially in the Holy Eucharist, is the most shameless betrayal of our Lord Jesus Christ, Judas' betrayal. It is especially the betrayal of the whole of the one and unique Church of Christ, of the Holy Tradition of the Church. One would have to rid oneself of one's Christ-like way of thinking and one's conscience before the various sacraments, before their holy meanings, and the holy commandments in order to do this.

First of all we would have to ask ourselves on what Ecclesiology and on what Theology of the Church is "intercommunion" based? This is because all of Orthodox Theology is not founded on or based on "inter-communion," but upon the theanthropic reality of communion, that is to say upon theanthropic Communion itself. (cf. I Cor. 1: 9; 10: 16-17; 2 Cor. 13: 13; Heb. 2: 14; 3: 14; John 1: 3) The idea of inter-communion is contradictory in itself and totally inconceivable for the Orthodox Catholic conscience.

The second fact, indeed a sacred fact of Orthodox faith, is the following: In Orthodox teaching about the Church and the Sacraments, the single most unique mystery is the Church itself, the Body of the God-man Christ, so that she is the only source and the content of all divine Sacraments. Outside of this theanthropic and inclusive Mystery of the Church, the Pan-Mystery itself, there are no and cannot be any "mysteries"; therefore, there can be no inter-communion of Mysteries. Consequently we can only speak about Mysteries within the Context of this unique Pan-Mystery which is the Church. This is because the Orthodox Church, as the Body Christ, is the source and the foundation of the Sacraments

and not the other way around. The Mysteries, Sacraments, cannot be elevated above the church, or examined outside the Body of the Church.

Because of this, in accordance with the mind of the Catholic Church of Christ, and in accordance with the whole of Orthodox Tradition, the Orthodox Church does not recognize the existence of other mysteries or sacraments outside of itself, neither does it recognize them as being mysteries, and one cannot receive the sacraments until one comes away from the heretical “Churches,” that is to say the pseudo-Churches, through repentance to the Orthodox Church of Christ. Until then one remains outside the Church, un-united with it through repentance, and is as far as the Church is concerned, a heretic and consequently outside of the saving communion. This is because “what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness and what communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Cor. 6: 14)

The first-most Apostle, with the authority he received from the God-Man gives us this commandment: “A man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition reject [him]. (Titus 3: 10) (*Orthodox Faith and Life in Christ*, pp. 172-174)

Note that he does not restrict “intercommunion” to the Holy Eucharist alone. Because the Mysteries are all theanthropically related, affirming Grace in heterodox “mysteries” is a kin to intercommunion. Furthermore, he emphasizes that the Mysteries can only be spoken of in the context of the Orthodox Church. The Mysteries are not the source or foundation of the Church; rather, just the opposite is true. This is another key point.

There can be no question that the Patristic and Canonical evidence against this “middle ground” theory of the Orthodox ecumenists is overwhelming. I will only offer one more example, this time from the well-known Patristic scholar and Hierarch of the Church of Greece, Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos. In his critique of the aforementioned agreement, “Baptism and ‘Sacramental Economy’”, Metropolitan Hierotheos wrote:

From this brief analysis, it is obvious how much confusion prevails in ecumenist circles regarding these issues. It is also 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.*

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.

In any event, baptismal theology creates immense problems for the Orthodox. From the standpoint of ecclesiology, the text under consideration is riddled with errors. The Patristic Orthodox teaching on this subject is that the Church is the Theanthropic Body of Christ, in which revealed truth—the Orthodox Faith—is preserved and the mystery of deification is accomplished through the Mysteries of the Church (Baptism, Chrismation, and the Divine Eucharist). The essential precondition for this is that we participate in the purifying, illuminating, and deifying energy of God. Baptism is the initiatory Mystery of the Church. The Church does not rest upon the Mystery of Baptism; rather, the Baptism of water, in conjunction with the Baptism of the Spirit, operates within the Church and makes one a member of the Body of Christ. There are no Mysteries outside the Church, the living Body of Christ, just as there are no senses outside the human body. (*Orthodox Tradition*, Vol XX, No 2, pp. 40-43, emphasis mine)

The evidence I have offered thus far is from Saints and theologians who were and are “following the Holy Fathers”. And as Father Florovsky once stated, “The witness of the Fathers belongs, integrally and intrinsically, to the very structure of the Orthodox faith.” (*Collected Works*, Vol. IV, “Patristic Theology and the Ethos of the Orthodox Church”)

But “following the Holy Fathers” is precisely *not* what the Orthodox ecumenists of our day are doing. In fact, they misuse the Holy Fathers. Metropolitan Hierotheos calls this “ecumenism in theology” in his book *Hesychia and Theology*:

When I refer to ecumenism in theology I mean that these two theologies, Orthodox and non-Orthodox, are confused, in that they are mistakenly regarded as presupposing the same methodology, having the same perspective and the same principles, and differing only in respect of the references quoted in theological works. The main reason for this allegation is that the writings of the holy Fathers are interpreted through Western analytical studies (Roman Catholic and Protestant) and the interpretative criteria of our Church’s Orthodox Tradition are ignored. Academic theologians who fall into this category make very extensive use of non-Orthodox interpretations, and attempt to find passages from the Fathers that convey such a perspective. As a result, this same interpretative perspective lingers on, with patristic backing, without any examination of the framework for interpreting scriptural texts used by the Fathers of the Church, which is different from that of Christians of other Confessions. (*Hesychia and Theology*, p. 344)

Orthodox ecumenists are also critical of those Holy Fathers with whom they disagree. As one example I offer this excerpt from the conclusion of the aforementioned 1999 Agreed Statement:

The influential theory of "sacramental economy" propounded in the *Pedalion* commentaries [written by Saint Nikodemos] does not represent the tradition and perennial teaching of the Orthodox Church; it is rather an eighteenth-century innovation motivated by the particular historical circumstances operative in those times. It is not the teaching of scripture, of most of the Fathers, or of later Byzantine canonists, nor is it the majority position of the Orthodox churches today.

Metropolitan Hierotheos called attention to this attitude when he wrote in his critique:

The fifth point is that the authors of the Agreed Statement find fault with St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite, who, in interpreting the views of St. Cyprian of Carthage, St. Basil the Great, and the Second Œcumenical Synod, talks—as do all of the Kollyvades Fathers of the eighteenth century—about exactitude (*akribia*) and economy (*oikonomia*) with regard to the way in which heretics are received into the Orthodox Church. That is to say, the Fathers have at times received heretics by exactitude—namely, by Baptism—and at times by economy—namely, by Chrismation. However, even when the Church does receive someone by economy, this means that She effects the mystery of salvation at that very time, precisely because the Church is superior to the Canons, and not the Canons to the Church, and because the Church is the source of the Mysteries and, *eo ipso*, of Baptism, whereas Baptism is not the basis of the Church. 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. This is the context within which St. Nicodemos interprets the relevant decision of the Second Œcumenical Synod.

Father George Metallinos points out that opponents of the *Kollyvades*—“being as they were completely estranged from the tradition of the holy Fathers, accused [them] of being innovators, in exactly the same way that the fourteenth century Scholastics...had accused the hesychasts of the Holy Mountain of being ‘modernists’”. (*op. cit.*, p. 26) The Church, however, glorified Saints Nikodemos and Macarios—just like She glorified Saint Gregory Palamas. Their enemies were relegated to the dustbin of history.

It should be clear by now that the “middle ground” theory is not Patristic. It undermines the Church’s ecclesiology and should be soundly rejected. Anti-ecumenists cannot, therefore, be accused of a “false dualism”, for we reject “baptismal ecclesiology”. There is the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church—the Orthodox Church—and, then there are the myriad extra-ecclesiastical Christian communities who do not have the Grace of the Church. There is nothing whatsoever illogical or false about this. It is the position of the Holy Fathers.

As I stated in the beginning, I am well aware that these conclusions raise a number of questions about the status of non-Orthodox Christians, about the implications for their

eternal destiny, about how we are to view their sacramental rites, piously performed, etc. Concerning heterodox baptism I concluded Chapter 5 in *The Non-Orthodox* with the following:

Though we cannot ultimately know the extent to which heterodox rites are *externally* Grace-bestowing, it is certainly reasonable—as well as faithful to the Patristic consensus and experience—to affirm that “non-Orthodox baptisms *are something in the eyes of God*. . . . It is not the renewing, metaphysically transforming thing that Orthodox Baptism is, but it is powerful enough that even Roman actors, mocking the Christian Mysteries, were often converted to Christ simply by enacting the ritual of baptism.”

As one Orthodox scholar and anti-ecumenist so eloquently wrote a friend of mine:

In saying this, we do not trample in any way on the Providence of God: Baptism by will, Baptism by blood, or the Baptism by confession of the Good Thief at the Crucifixion. But we must not dishonestly, in an attempt to make Orthodoxy easier and more relevant to our day, confuse God's Providence with the Church and its Mysteries, any more than we should confuse the Grace that is everywhere present in the world with the specific and salvific Grace of the Mysteries of the Orthodox Church.

Concerning the Claim that Orthodox Ecumenists Do not Espouse the Branch Theory

With this foundation laid I would like now to examine more closely Dr. Bouteneff's claim that Orthodox ecumenists have never affirmed the Branch Theory. The *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* defines the Branch Theory as:

...the theory that, though the Church may have fallen into schism within itself and its several provinces or groups of provinces be out of communion with each other, each may yet be a branch of the one Church of Christ, provided that it continues to hold the faith of the original undivided Church and to maintain the Apostolic Succession of its bishops. Such, it is contended by many Anglican theologians, is the condition of the Church at the present time, there being now three main branches [Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican—PMB]...

Implied in this definition is that none of the branches alone has the fullness of the Christian Faith. In other words, the parts make up the whole, and no one has a corner on the truth. In fact, truth is not the key issue because theological differences, as well as schisms, are what cause the separate branches. What organically unites the branches is the trunk of Christ, and the entire tree comprises His Mystical Body. The branches are thus

organically united in a mystical, invisible sense, but visibly divided due to theological and other differences.

Anyone who has ever heard the “two lungs” theory already knows that Dr. Bouteneff is being disingenuous. In his book *Hesychia and Theology*, Metropolitan Hierotheos offers a brief definition of the Branch Theory, and then states:

Another parallel theory to this is the ‘two lungs theory’, according to which the Church, the Body of Christ, breathes with two lungs: Eastern and Western Christianity.

These two theories relativise the revelatory truth possessed by the Orthodox Church, and recognise elements of truth and life in other non-Orthodox Confessions as well. This cannot be accepted by the Orthodox Church, as expressed by the holy Fathers of the Church.

The aforementioned parallel theory of “two lungs” is often used when speaking of the Roman Catholic Church. In the Foreward to *The Quest for Unity: Orthodox and Catholics in Dialogue*, published by Saint Vladimir’s Seminary Press in 1996, Metropolitan Maximos of Pittsburgh writes:

We have responded to the work of the Joint International Commission for the dialogue between our two sister churches, the “two lungs” of the one Church of Christ. These two have to synchronize anew their breathing, so that the Church of Christ may begin breathing properly again. (p. 3)

This is an egregious example because, quite obviously, in Metropolitan Maximos’ estimation, the Orthodox Church does *not* have the fullness of faith and life in Christ. Instead, She is just one of the lungs in the “wider Church,” the health of Which is impaired because the Lung of the Orthodox is not in sync with the Lung of the Latins. If questioned I am sure he would say this is not what he means. But then, what *does* he mean? A Patristic-minded Bishop would never make such fuzzy or misleading (if not disparaging) comments about the Church.

This is not an isolated case. One comes across the “two lungs” theory frequently in ecumenist literature concerning a desired union with Rome. Another example, this time from a Romanian Metropolitan, Nicholas of Banat:

It has been said, and not without reason, that the Orthodox and Catholic Churches resemble the two lungs with which a man breathes. Let [the Churches] breathe from now on with both lungs and let them avoid those instances in which—for legitimate reasons or not—we maintain that we are in the state of a normal man, although we have blocked the

one lung or want to ignore it. (Cited in “Papism, the Hagiorite Fathers, and the Aftermath of the ‘Balamand Union’”, p. IV)

The practical outworking of these ideas can be seen in the opening paragraph of the “Common Declaration” signed by both Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Benedict at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy for the Feast of St. Andrew, 2006:

We give thanks to the Author of all that is good, who allows us once again, in prayer and in dialogue, to express the joy we feel as brothers and to renew our commitment to move towards full communion. This commitment comes from the Lord’s will and from our responsibility as Pastors in the Church of Christ.

Dr. Bouteneff, is the simile of a body with lungs really any different than a tree with branches? Even if we charitably grant some latitude in the interpretation of what these Hierarchs “really meant”, how can you honestly claim that we are spreading “fallacies”, setting up “straw men”, and in general, crying wolf, when statements like these are frequently made by Orthodox ecumenists? How can you disagree that ideas such as these are not legitimate causes for alarm, or that they will not lead to confusion among many of the Faithful?

Most Orthodox ecumenists, however, use more subtle language than this. Regardless, any concept of the Church in a “wider, mystical sense”—one which attempts to affirm the oneness and uniqueness of the Orthodox Church while at the same time allowing for the inclusion of heterodox “members” or “churches”—borrows too heavily from Latin theology and the Protestant concept of an “invisible Church”, thus undermining the Orthodox Church’s ecclesiology as taught by the Holy Fathers.

With this in mind I would like to direct your attention to the keynote homily that Metropolitan Anastasios presented to those gathered in Lyons this past July for the “Called to One Hope in Christ” conference. Without wishing to disparage his immensely valuable work in the reconstruction of the Orthodox Church in Albania, I cannot fail to criticize his homily, especially when Dr. Bouteneff pitted it against the “Confession of Faith Against Ecumenism”.

The Metropolitan very clearly deviates from Orthodox ecclesiology by offering a message to his eight hundred mostly heterodox Christian listeners that should only be offered to Orthodox believers.

There is, however, another aspect which must be investigated at our Assembly. This one hope of our call in Christ is not an individual matter. It is actualized in the Church: “And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the

church, which is his body” (Eph. 1:23). There is no individual Christian piety, isolated from the Church of Christ, from the communion of love with the Triune God and the members of the ecclesiastical body. Whoever lives essentially as a cell in His Body feels connected to all humankind and to the whole of creation. Such a person encloses within himself/herself all things and all people and embraces them with love, because the Church is “the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:23)....

However, we Christians cannot make this announcement of hope persuasive, if we remain divided; or if we maintain relations that are formal, conventional and distant....

We have all been *called* to a *common* hope. We do not have different hopes. The multifaceted unity of the Church has its basis and source in the three persons of the Holy Trinity (“one Spirit”, “one Lord”, “one God”) and every believer is connected with it in the “one faith”, in the “one baptism”. The Christian way of living is founded on this reality, on the life of the Holy Trinity in the Church, not on vague ideas.

At the centre of our existence, the ultimate reference point for all our expectations, inclinations and hopes is: “One God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:6).

This message—very typical of Orthodox ecumenism—leaves no doubt in the mind of a non-Orthodox Christian that they are members of the Body of Christ, members of the Church in a mystical sense, and that they are merely called to work towards the visible expression of this assumed unity so that the proclamation of Christian hope is more persuasive to the world. Ironically, and tragically, in his message of hope the Metropolitan is offering false hope by telling heterodox Christians that they are organically united to Christ and His Church. He is also not speaking the truth in love, for he merely affirms them in their errors.

Dr. Bouteneff, when this is a message that you hold up to everyone on Ancient Faith Radio as a showcase example of good ecumenism, how can anyone reasonably trust your judgement when it comes to Orthodoxy and ecumenism? What kind of impression do you think a message like this will make upon most heterodox Christians were they to hear it? I think I know the answer, and it is very disconcerting. As Father John Whiteford once recalled:

Often when the Ecumenistic activities of certain Orthodox hierarchs or jurisdictions have been openly criticized on this [email] list, the charge has been made that this is “bad-mouthing,” “gossip,” “whispering,” etc. But let me make clear why these activities are not things that Orthodox Christians can ignore. Twice in as many days I have had private e-mail from non-Orthodox people (one a Protestant, and one a Roman Catholic) who in response to my claims that the Orthodox Faith is the True Faith, and that the Orthodox

Church is not *a* church, but *the* Church, pointed to Orthodox involvement in Ecumenism to refute these claims.

I will not go into the examples they gave (which were specific) because I do not want the point I am making to be side tracked by a “did not/did so” debate. Let it suffice to say that these non-Orthodox people interpreted these actions as contradictory to any suggestion that the Orthodox Church is what it has always claimed to be. Ecumenism is not a question we can avoid. It is a deadly serious pastoral and evangelistic problem that all Orthodox Christians are forced to deal with. I wish we could just go about the work of Christ and say our prayers, and simply ignore the betrayal of Orthodoxy that we see around us—but the Ecumenists do not afford us this luxury. Their activities are an affront to our Faith and to our ministry, and are a stumbling block that hinders those who we seek to bring into the Faith.

And this is the result of mere *involvement* in the Ecumenical Movement, something that conservative, pious Protestants and Roman Catholics—the type of people who are often most inclined towards Orthodoxy—find disturbing and even offensive!

Compare the Metropolitan’s homily with this appeal from the Patriarchal Encyclical of 1895, written a mere twenty-five years before the infamous Encyclical of 1920. (Quite tellingly, the Patriarchal Encyclicals of 1848 and 1895 are not posted on the official Web sites of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, or those sites associated with it.)

Christ-loving peoples of the glorious countries of the West! We rejoice on the one hand seeing that you have a zeal for Christ, being led by this right persuasion, “that without faith in Christ it is impossible to please God”; but on the other hand it is self-evident to every right-thinking person that the salutary faith in Christ ought by all means to be right in everything, and in agreement with the Holy Scripture and the apostolic traditions, upon which the teaching of the divine Fathers and the seven holy, divinely assembled Ecumenical Councils is based. It is moreover manifest that the universal Church of God, which holds fast in its bosom unique unadulterated and entire this salutary faith as a divine deposit....

But, as has been said before, the Western Church, from the tenth century downwards, has privily brought into herself through the papacy various and strange and heretical doctrines and innovations, and so she has been torn away and removed far from the true and orthodox Church of Christ. How necessary, then, it is for you to come back and return to the ancient and unadulterated doctrines of the Church in order to attain the salvation in Christ after which you press, you can easily understand if you intelligently consider the command of the heaven-ascended Apostle Paul to the Thessalonians, saying: “Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle”... But avoid such perverters of the evangelical truth, “For they that are such

serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple”; and come back for the future into the bosom of the holy, catholic and apostolic Church of God, which consists of all the particular holy Churches of God, which being divinely planted, like luxuriant vines throughout the orthodox world, are inseparably united to each other in the unity of the one saving faith in Christ, and in the bond of peace and of the Spirit, that you may obtain the highly-to-be-praised and most glorious name of our Lord and God and Savior Jesus Christ, who suffered for the salvation of the world, may be glorified among you also.

But let us, who by the grace and goodwill of the most gracious God are precious members of the body of Christ, that is to say of His one holy, catholic and apostolic Church, hold fast to the piety of our fathers, handed down to us from the apostles. Let us all beware of false apostles, who, coming to us in sheep's clothing, attempt to entice the more simple among us by various deceptive promises, regarding all things as lawful and allowing them for the sake of union.... And especially let us, who by the grace and mercy of God have been appointed bishops, pastors, and teachers of the holy Churches of God, “take heed unto ourselves,—and to all the flock, over which the Holy Ghost hath made us overseers, to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood,” as they that must give account.

As well, consider this excerpt from the Patriarchal Encyclical of 1848:

[U]ntil there be this desired returning of the apostate Churches to the body of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, of which Christ is the Head (Eph. iv. 15), and each of us “members in particular,” all advice proceeding from them, and every officious exhortation tending to the dissolution of our pure faith handed down from the Fathers is condemned, as it ought to be, synodically, not only as suspicious and to be eschewed, but as impious and soul-destroying....

The foregoing should call into serious question the message of Orthodox ecumenists today, for whom the Church is only *truly* seen in a wider mystical sense, one which encompasses all those individuals and ecclesiastical bodies which share a common baptism in Christ. The one, visible Church—the Orthodox Church—is thus a part of this greater, and ultimately more important, invisible Church, which embraces certain “ecclesiastical frontiers” beyond her “canonical limits”. By now it should be obvious that these are not Orthodox ideas. To be Orthodox is to follow the Holy Fathers, and one searches in vain for a Patristic consensus that would justify such notions of the Church.

Conclusion

Let us review the main points I wish to convey in my response to Dr. Bouteneff:

- Holy Tradition does not support the idea of an ecclesial “middle ground” based upon the supposed validity of heterodox baptism “in itself”.
- Orthodox ecumenists are, whether wittingly or unwittingly, spreading ecclesiological heresies that rest upon this “middle ground” concept. This is generally known as “baptismal ecclesiology”.
- Orthodox ecumenists do not escape these accusations by defining the Branch Theory in an overly narrow way, or by affirming the oneness and uniqueness of the Orthodox Church while at the same time speaking of the Church in a wider, mystical sense.
- Father Florovsky completely upheld the theological views of Saint Cyprian of Carthage. In this he was consistent with Holy Tradition.
- Orthodox ecumenists err when they reject the principle of *economia*, or when they draw, from the varied practices explained by *economia*, new theological principles that are at odds with the Church’s dogma guiding Her *acrivia*.
- Orthodox ecumenists also err when they invert ecclesiological principles, claiming that the Church is founded upon the Mystery of Baptism. Instead, they should affirm that the Mysteries are found only in the Church, which is founded on Christ, to Whom we are united through Holy Baptism.
- Holy Tradition makes a distinction between ecclesial or Mysteriological Grace, which only the Orthodox Church can bestow, and general or external Grace, which is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to bring all mankind to Christ and His Church.
- We can therefore, on one hand, uphold Orthodox ecclesiology by affirming that Mysteriological Grace is not given through heterodox mysteries—which means that heterodox baptism does not unite a person to Christ and His Church—and on the other hand, recognize a certain “charismatic quality” (*i.e.*, the operation of General Grace) in heterodox baptism and other Christian acts and rites which are done in sincerity and piety; for doubtless through these things the Holy Spirit acts externally to draw the person closer to Christ. But beyond this we cannot and should not speculate.

None of this means that anti-ecumenists think it is wrong to have contact with or share our faith with heterodox Christians. Of course we are to interact with them, to explain Orthodoxy, to do what we can to bring them into the Church, etc.! There are, however, ways to go about this which do not violate the Sacred Canons or undermine our ecclesiological self-awareness.

These points lead to a series of questions (in addition to those posed in my text) that I hope Dr. Bouteneff will be willing to address in the future, justifying his answers by Holy Tradition:

1. Are Protestants and Roman Catholics heretics?
2. When a heterodox confessional body baptizes someone with triple immersion in the Name of the Holy Trinity, do you believe this unites that person to Christ, and thus to His Body, the Church?
3. If you agree that heterodox groups can administer “valid” baptism, what does this say about the rest of this group’s Mysteries?
4. If you agree that heterodox groups can administer “valid” baptism, what does this say about the group itself? In other words, in what sense are they a church?
5. What would any particular heterodox “church” need to do, say or change so that the Orthodox Church could rightly speak of them as a “church in the full dogmatic sense of the word”?
6. What is the nature of the visible unity that you are seeking by participating in the Ecumenical Movement? What is your vision of Christian unity?
7. To what degree is the visible Body of Christ not coincident with the boundaries of the Orthodox Church as delimited by apostolic succession and right belief (which are not always coincident with Her “canonical” boundaries, at least as that term is understood today)?
8. Perhaps another way of putting the previous question: Is the Body of Christ on earth wider than the Orthodox Church in an invisible or mystical sense, being comprised of heterodox Christians and confessional groups who have “valid” Mysteries?
9. Which Holy Fathers spoke of heterodox groups as having the ability to administer “valid” and “effectual” Mysteries while at the same time willfully remaining apart from the Holy Orthodox Church?
10. Please explain how one can justify the formulation of theological principles based on an examination of Church practices? In other words, using the Holy Fathers, can you explain how conclusions based on a study of the Church’s *economia* can oppose the theological principles informing Her *acrivia*? And if you do not accept the principle of *economia*, please explain what takes its place?
11. Is it intellectually honest to defend theological principles which Saint Cyprian of Carthage would oppose using an article by Father Florovsky in which he clearly upholds the Saint’s theology?
12. How is the “two lung” theory essentially not the Branch Theory?
13. Is the Pope a Co-Pastor of the Church of Christ as Patriarch Bartholomew stated in his 2006 “Common Declaration” with Pope Benedict? If so, in what way?

14. Which of the heresies enumerated by the Patriarchs who signed the Encyclicals of 1848 and 1895 have the Roman Catholic Church formally disavowed in order to legitimately lead to such a Co-Shepherding?
15. Why do you think the Patriarchal Encyclicals of 1848 and 1895 are nowhere to be found on the Web sites affiliated with the Oecumenical Patriarchate?
16. Would you try to convince a non-Orthodox Christian to convert to Holy Orthodoxy? Why or why not?
17. Is the Orthodox Church the Ark of Salvation, outside of which a heterodox Christian finds himself in serious jeopardy?
18. Why do you think that the ecclesiology held by anti-ecumenists is detrimental to the salvation of the non-Orthodox? Similarly, what conversions to Holy Orthodoxy can you point to that are a result of Orthodox ecumenist ecclesiology?
19. What are your three main arguments against Saint Hilarion's work *The Unity of the Church and the World Conference of Christian Communities*. I would like to be convinced that this book has serious flaws.
20. Please watch the video footage of Orthodox ecumenical activities found on the True (Old Calendar) Orthodox Church of Greece Web site. Regardless of your opinion of this church, you cannot deny what you see in these videos, being mostly comprised of official footage from the WCC and other ecumenical organizations. Which activities involving Orthodox participants would you justify? What, if anything, in these videos do you find disturbing? Do you think heterodox Christians viewing this footage will be drawn to the Orthodox Church, or at least realize Her claim as the one, true Church of Christ?
21. Does what I have presented here amount to "simplistic hysteria", as you stated in your podcast? If so, is this also how you would also characterize the anti-ecumenist writings of the esteemed theologians and Saints I have cited? For example, does Blessed Archimandrite Justin Popovich just set up a bunch of "straw men" because "it's very easy to do if you're into that sorta thing"?

As I noted early on, one of the problems with critiquing the literature of Orthodox ecumenists is the fuzziness of their statements, which intentionally leave the door open to a variety of interpretations. What we need is *real communication* between Orthodox ecumenists and their opponents. I truly hope that Dr. Bouteneff will be willing to address these substantive questions instead of offering a reply (assuming he does) which focuses on non-essentials, or which casually dismisses the views of anti-ecumenists as ill-informed or unjustified.

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On March 16, 1997, Dr. Constantine Cavarnos, the world-renowned Orthodox scholar and now Schema-monk, made the following statements during a lecture at the Greek Orthodox Cathedral of the Annunciation in Atlanta, GA:

The time has come for *all* faithful Orthodox Christians to speak out and *promptly put to an end* this spurious form of Orthodoxy known as “ecumenistic Orthodoxy”. It is a *betrayal* of the Holy Orthodox Church, a negation of its essence. (*Victories of Orthodoxy*, pp. 80-81, emphasizes his)

May it be blessed.

September 2/15, 2009
The Holy Martyr Mamas