

Heresy vs. Truth, Part II: A Reply to Dr. Bouteneff's "Open Response to Patrick Barnes"

November 5/18, 2009

Martyrs Galacteon and his wife Episteme at Emesa

Dear Peter,

I apologize for taking so long to reply to your open response to my critique of your podcasts on anti-ecumenism. I have been extremely busy, a fact of life with which I'm sure you are quite familiar. Respecting your wish to address each other in a more personal manner, I will do my best to respond in a less formal way.

Opening Remarks

First, I wish to express my sincere appreciation for your thoughtful and irenic response. It sheds some light on your views, though as I will argue, it doesn't fully illumine them, or if it does, the light of your additional words only makes the defects of your ecclesiological views more apparent. Nevertheless, I truly respect your effort to take seriously the message of your podcast entitled "Words and Accountability", which you uploaded to Ancient Faith Radio on September 17, 2009, the day I posted my initial response to you. I see this podcast as Part III in your anti-ecumenism series, so I will be commenting on it in this letter, too. In it you said, "If there is a message today about words-in fact Jesus' own message about accountability-it's that we need, all of us, to feel accountability for the words we speak and write." May God help us both to abide by our Lord's admonition concerning careless utterances.

Before I turn to the meat of the subject, I want to address a few things you wrote in the beginning of your response. My "treatise," as you call it, may have been a bit too long. However, I felt it necessary to go into some detail precisely *because* the intended audience is "broad and [perhaps] theologically untrained." I think it necessary when addressing such a nuanced subject as ecclesiology to present as clear and full a treatment as possible within the limits of my abilities. I don't see a way to discuss these controversial issues without referring often to the writings of the Holy Fathers and the Sacred Canons. This results in a theologically dense article that would be difficult to whittle down into a breezy twenty-minute response for a casual listener.

I also disagree that my paper was not actually a response to your podcasts. Sure, I only touched on the "Confession of Faith Against Ecumenism" (hereafter, the Confession), which was the springboard for your podcasts. But I made it clear that I was addressing statements you made during your critique of this Confession and (to my ears at least) about anti-ecumenists in general. My arguments centered around your comments concerning an "ecclesial middle ground" and your claim that no Orthodox Christian involved in the Ecumenical Movement teaches the Branch

Theory. During the course of formulating my response I was not entirely sure where you stood on some things, which is why I was careful to write: “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.” To my knowledge I did not attribute directly to you any statements that you did not make during your podcasts. If I’m wrong, I sincerely apologize, for I do not wish to misrepresent you in any way. Please note, however, that although you did not use the terms “baptismal ecclesiology” or “validity,” they are affirmed by the Toronto Statement, which you approvingly cited (see my page 6). Also realize that I intended to address certain claims you made, and this required writing about Orthodox ecumenism in a wider context. I furthermore tentatively assumed that your “middle ground” position could generally be equated with “baptismal ecclesiology.” Your response corrected my misperception, for which I am grateful. As my critique also addressed “mainstream views of Orthodox ecumenists in general” (and “baptismal ecclesiology” is certainly mainstream), I think my comments still hit the mark. In this present letter, however, I will focus on your more nuanced though still problematic “middle ground” view.

Finally, concerning my extrapolation of your comments about so-called extreme anti-ecumenists, and the misapplication of them to myself, I think I did fail to keep in mind that you were largely addressing the authors and supporters of the Confession. As I know and greatly respect some of these people, I reacted at a gut level to your more pointed statements, despite my reservations about some aspects of that document. I remain firmly convinced, however, that your criticism was unbalanced. Despite the apparent shortcomings of the Confession, I think I demonstrated that anti-ecumenists in general (and by implication, the authors of the Confession in particular) are not guilty of creating “straw men” and “false dualisms,” nor are their accusations that Orthodox ecumenists undermine the Church’s ecclesiology unreasonable, nor is their calling ecumenism a “pan=heresy” unjustified. I also think I raised legitimate concerns about Metropolitan Anastasios, whom you championed in contrast to the authors of the Confession. Of course, my conclusions rested upon what I believe is the Patristic consensus concerning the boundaries of the Church, Grace, the reception of converts, etc. Without agreement on these core issues we’re bound to think each other’s criticism misses the mark.

My Opinion of the “Confession”

Regarding the Confession you wrote “I only wish you had gone further, to admit more places where the Confession goes awry.” Well, as the document currently stands I and at least several Priests in America whom I know and respect cannot in good conscience sign it. Nevertheless, I have submitted extensive comments and suggested footnotes to the document’s authors in hopes that the inevitable publication of an English version might at least contain sufficient modifications to foster wider adoption in North America; for I do think a statement like this is worth promulgating in order to show the more ardent Orthodox ecumenists that the Faithful firmly reject their actions and statements.

My main objections to the first English translation of the Confession can be summarized as follows:

A. *Its tone is unnecessarily harsh.* Although similar language which justifies the Confession's tone can be found in relatively recent writings of the Saints and Patriarchal Encyclicals from the nineteenth century, "justified" doesn't always mean "prudent." I think the document would receive more attention if the language was "softened" a bit without losing any essential meaning. I think our modern dark age of extreme relativism, secularism and abysmally poor spiritual health, as well as widespread sensitivities to "political correctness" and "hate speech," must be taken into account when presenting a confessional statement of this nature. This issue alone would not keep me from signing the Confession. My point is simply that it unnecessarily exposes it to criticism and easy dismissal.

B. *Its use of the term "Grace" is imprecise and unclear.* The document caused confusion by failing to distinguish between external Grace and ecclesial Grace, a distinction elucidated by the Holy Fathers that you apparently consider an "over-quantification" (more on that, below). The Patristic teaching on the subject was best expressed by our Venerable Father Diadochus the God-bearer, Bishop of Photike in Epirus. As he writes in his *Hundred Texts on Spiritual Knowledge and Discernment*: "Before holy baptism Grace encourages the soul towards good from the outside, while Satan lurks in its depths, trying to block all the intellect's ways of approach to the divine. But from the moment we are reborn through Baptism, the demon is outside, Grace is within." When read with a Patristic understanding of "Grace" in mind, the document is, in my opinion, theologically sound in this area. Footnotes could clarify this term in a forthcoming English edition.

C. *It restricts the definition of the Branch Theory to one that most Orthodox ecumenists do not use.* The document states, "According to this new teaching, no Church is entitled to demand for itself exclusively the designation of the catholic and true Church. Instead, each one of them is a piece, a part, and not the entire Church; they all together comprise the Church." We are in agreement that this is inaccurate. A Confession needs to be precise, especially when defining the heresy it stands against. I suggested the authors change it to something along these lines: "According to this new teaching, the Orthodox Church mystically includes in Her fold heretics and heretical assemblies because they have 'valid Baptism' *per se*, and are thus united to Christ. Thus, the Church is comprised of both Orthodox and heretics, although the visible manifestation of this oneness is eschatological." As I demonstrated, this idea-which has been appropriately labeled "baptismal ecclesiology"-is a form of the Branch Theory.

D. *It fails to emphasize that oikonomia can be used in the reception of converts.* At one point the Confession states "For the incorporation of heretics into the Church, canonical precision (*akriveia*) requires that they be accepted through Baptism." In the next paragraph we find "One enters the Church, however, and becomes Her member, not with just any baptism, but only with the 'one baptism,'..." The first sentence is correct. Unfortunately the second sentence *per se* contradicts it. The authors should have added that by *oikonomia* converts may be received by Chrismation or Confession. They certainly believe this, and one or more footnotes will be added for clarification. I

think they were emphasizing *akriveia* (i.e., canonical precision) because, in our day, *oikonomia* has become the rule, not the exception. Moreover, *oikonomia* is often illicitly granted (i.e., in cases when it should not be allowed, such as when the convert's "baptism" was not according to Apostolic form), or enforced by certain Hierarchs as the *only* way to receive converts, thus abolishing canonical precision in this matter altogether (on threat of suspension)!

E. *It implies that salvation is impossible outside of the Orthodox Church.* The document states, "The religions of the world, but also the various heresies lead man to perdition." This is not a dogma of the Church and, as written, should not be in a confessional statement. While it *may* be true, we cannot know for certain. God has not revealed to us how He will finally judge all those who lived and died outside of the Church. (I simply shudder and think how accountable I am!) I do not believe there is a Patristic consensus on the eternal destiny of non-Orthodox people. There's an entire chapter on this issue in my book *The Non-Orthodox*. So I suggested the authors change "...lead man to perdition" to "lead man down the wrong path, away from the Church, which is the Ark of Salvation." This keeps it focused on the Church, which the heresy of ecumenism attacks, not on the Final Judgement and the Future Life in Christ, concerning which we have to remain circumspect.

F. *It includes the statement "thus essentially placing themselves outside the Church" ("thetoun ousiastikos eautous ektos Ekklesias").* I may be wrong, but I think this phrase, especially the last words concerning the Church, was a mistake. It has been a source of controversy in Greece, and I think it would be here, too. The popular traditionalist newspaper *Orthodoxos Typos* published a substantial article defending it (see pages 5 and 6 of Issue #1799). I am told the phrase does not mean that erring Hierarchs are being placed outside of the *institutional* Church. Rather, the adverb "*ousiastikos*," which is translated as "essentially," refers to the invisible and essential relations of the ecumenists to the Church as the Body of Christ; and the use of a reflexive pronoun in the phrase "*thetoun... eautous*" ("place themselves") defines and limits the phrase "*ektos Ekklesias*" ("outside the Church") to the ecumenists *themselves*. This phrase therefore describes a self-inflicted spiritual reality which awaits formal confirmation by a synod if they do not repent. Only then would they be cut off from the Church in a visible, institutional way.

I was never comfortable with this phrase, so I did the best I could to sort out whether my gut feeling was trustworthy. After reading "On the Status of Uncondemned Heretics," published by the True (Old Calendar) Orthodox Church of Greece, I now have serious doubts about the use of the words "outside the Church," especially when this scholarly article concluded in part: "a. One who is heretically-minded, but is not 'completely broken off,' is still a member of the Body, though an ailing one." The authors of the Confession would respond by saying that only in the *institutional* sense is this true. The authors of "On the Status of Uncondemned Heretics," however, write convincingly that those who preach and teach heresy have not removed themselves from the Church, whether speaking of Her institutionally or mystically. They are still members of Christ's Body, albeit *ailing* members. (See esp. Thesis I: Section B)

I'm certainly no Patristic scholar. All I can say is that I am persuaded by the views of the moderate Old Calendarists when it comes to the status of heresiarchs prior to a synodal verdict. One's departure from the path laid out by the Holy Fathers-*i.e.*, involvement in ecumenism in a way that violates the Church's Canons or dogmas-cannot, it seems to me, lead to automatic removal from Christ's Body. I also question the theology behind such a sharp distinction between the institutional and Mystical Body of Christ. How can one be in the former but out of the latter? Until decisive separation at an authoritative synod or the Final Judgment, do not the wheat and the tares, the sheep and the wolves, co-exist?

It seems to me nothing is lost in the Confession if they had employed something like "essentially making themselves pseudo-Bishops" (using the language of Canon XV of the First-Second Synod) or "essentially making themselves ailing members of Christ's Body, whose final cutting off awaits a Synodal verdict." As it stands the phrase is a rather shocking statement to most readers, and the complexity and nuance of this topic makes it difficult to clarify with a mere footnote. Without a change in the wording this alone prevents me from signing the Confession, despite my overall support for those behind this document and their courageous, well-intentioned efforts to defeat the heresy of ecumenism.

Notwithstanding my reservations, I do see the Confession as an important step towards provoking greater awareness and discussion of ecumenism. It puts much-needed pressure on Hierarchs to take a stand against this ecclesiological heresy. The goals of its authors are similar to those of the Synod of Bishops of Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, which, in 1983, published an "Anathema Against Ecumenism":

Those who attack the Church of Christ by teaching that Christ's Church is divided into so-called "branches" which differ in doctrine and way of life, or that the Church does not exist visibly, but will be formed in the future when all "branches" or sects or denominations, and even religions will be united into one body; and who do not distinguish the priesthood and mysteries of the Church from those of the heretics, but say that the baptism and eucharist of heretics is effectual for salvation; therefore, to those who knowingly have communion with these aforementioned heretics or who advocate, disseminate, or defend their new heresy of Ecumenism under the pretext of brotherly love or the supposed unification of separated Christians, Anathema!

Commenting on the Anathema, then Archbishop Vitaly of Montreal and Canada wrote:

By proclaiming this anathema, we have protected our flock from this apocalyptic temptation and, at the same time, have reluctantly put before the conscience of all the local Churches a serious issue, which sooner or later they must resolve in one way or the other. The future spiritual fate of the universal Orthodox Church depends on the resolution of this problem. The anathema we have proclaimed is *de jure* a manifestation of a purely local character of the Russian Church Abroad, but *de facto* it has immense significance for the history of the universal Church, for ecumenism is a heresy on a universal scale.

If this Confession fails in its intended purpose, I am confident God will raise up other concerned laity and clergy to draft a different document. One day, God willing, this will lead to synodal decisions at the local church level. If the Hierarchs of the Russian Church can ever be convinced to take a stand on these matters, there is reasonable hope that it could lead to an Oecumenical Synod for final resolution.

To wrap up this discussion of the Confession I offer two final thoughts. First, I disagree that the Confession's statements concerning Protestants are too sweeping. The authors used the term "Protestantism," and to my mind the "ism" makes general statements acceptable. *Of course* we all know that not everything they listed can be applied to *all* Protestant groups. For most people, characteristics of an "ism" need only be generally true, and exceptions do not make the rule. Therefore, your argument that it's wrong to say Protestantism has "discarded monasticism" because we can find Protestant monastics such as Sister Benedicta Ward is hardly convincing. It's like defending Protestantism against charges of Iconoclasm because you can point to a few Lutheran churches around the country that have some Icons on their walls.

Second, we disagree on the heart of the Confession, its very *raison d'être*, to wit, that an ecclesiological heresy (properly defined) really does exist and is actively promulgated. You seem to be in denial of this, something I have been aware of since our first correspondence in 1999. Even after proving that variations of the Branch Theory are alive and well amongst mainstream Orthodox ecumenists, you wrote, "However, I would stand by my assertion that the 'Orthodox ecumenists,' *i.e.*, people like me who participate in inter-Christian dialogue, including through the various national councils and the World Council of Churches, do not teach the 'branch theory.'" OK, maybe *you* do not teach such a thing; but after reading my critique of your first two podcasts do you still stand by your mantra of "nobody teaches the Branch Theory," uttered again in Part III of your podcast series on anti-ecumenism? You even wrote the following in your response:

You've been thorough in presenting many of the cases where Orthodox ecumenists have used language that implies something akin to a "Branch" ecclesiological relativism. There are instances where you cite them out of context, or read more into the text than is intended. The famous 1920 encyclical never says that churches are members of the same body (cf. p. 6). It speaks of non-Orthodox "churches," true, but only in respect of their own declared self-appellation.

I would like to know more about these instances where I cite them out of context or read more into them than is appropriate. I trust you have a better example than my citation of the 1920 encyclical, for you are quite mistaken. Not only can you find no evidence of your claim in the text itself, the main author of the Encyclical confirms what is plainly evident.

In the Encyclical a new consideration was being urged upon the churches, "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' (Eph. 3:6)."

In commenting on this passage in 1929, Metropolitan Germanos himself, the encyclical's main author, interprets it thus: "How wide the conception is which the Encyclical teaches at this point becomes clear in that it widens the notion of the relationships between the members of a single church - as members of one body according to St. Paul's wonderful teaching - so as to apply it to the relationships between several churches."

The importance of this interpretation of the encyclical by its main author and the architect of the Patriarchate's ecumenical involvement cannot be underestimated. Here is the cornerstone of the ecumenical policy of the Patriarchate and the key point of synchronization with the developing "ecumenical ecclesiology" of the Protestants. (*The Missionary Origins of Modern Ecumenism: Milestones leading up to 1920*, by Fr. Peter Alban Heers)

You admit that I've "been thorough in presenting many of the cases where Orthodox ecumenists have used language that implies something akin to a 'Branch' ecclesiological relativism." You offer no other evidence that I'm wrong, nor did you ever respond to my 1999 article "Ecumenist 'Double Speak': The Ecclesiological Schizophrenia of the Orthodox Ecumenists." When are you going to own up to the fact that the reigning view among Orthodox ecumenists-*i.e.*, "baptismal ecclesiology," the "theology of 'common baptism'", or whatever you want to call it-is a form of the Branch Theory, or at the very least (if you want to be stickler about the classical definition of that term) a departure from Orthodox ecclesiology as formulated by the Holy Fathers in the Oecumenical Synods, the Sacred Canons and the Patristic corpus? A dogmatic "departure" equates to a heresy, does it not? And so we have, after many decades of enduring the misguided and schism-inducing (*cf.* Canon XV of the First-Second Synod) words and actions of Orthodox ecumenists, a Confession that endeavors to prick the consciences of our Hierarchs and force some resolution to this controversy.

In my initial critique I made a good case that support for an ecclesial "middle ground" cannot be found in Holy Tradition. Such an idea undermines the Church's ecclesiology, and this is the main issue that the Confession is trying to address. You have responded with an explanation of your "middle ground" position that I think is inchoate, contradictory, and ultimately untenable. It may not be "baptismal ecclesiology,"-and Peter, I am very pleased to learn that you think this is wrong-but the end result doesn't seem far from it. In any case, your arguments are not convincing; and as I will try to explain, I do not think you are following the Holy Fathers.

"Christian Life" Without the Holy Mysteries

You wrote, "while I do not believe that we share a 'common baptism' with non-Orthodox, nor do I believe we are two lungs of one body, nor branches of one tree, I do-with reverence-assert that there is Christian life outside the Orthodox Church." This raises an important question: What is the definition of "Christian life"?

The most obvious answer comes from Holy Scripture:

Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. (St. John 3:6-7)

Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. (St. John 6:53)

In other words, our Lord emphatically states that true Christian life begins with Baptism and continues with regular Communion in the the Holy Mysteries. And according to the Holy Fathers, these Mysteries are precisely what the heterodox lack. I'll refrain from unnecessarily lengthening my response with Patristic citations. This seems to me a basic truth.

You continue: "This, to me, is a more fruitful point of discussion than the argument over whether there is 'mysteriological Grace,' or some, or a little, or whatever, present outside the Orthodox Church." But Peter, if "Christian life" has nothing to do with the Holy Mysteries, what kind of genuine life in Christ is it? Your answer-setting aside for now a discussion of Mysteriological Grace-is that heterodox Baptism is "at the very least something of a promise of entry into Christian life, if not more than that. That is different from saying it is an entry into the Body of Christ, in the same sense as baptism into the Orthodox Church." You speak of a "a sure joining into the Body" when such people are received into the Church, implying a prior "uncertain" or "partial" joining. Finally, you state that baptized heterodox Christians

have very clearly entered into a reality that sets them apart from the non-Christian sphere. In some cases this entry is borne out in a "Christian life" that one would have to be obtuse not to perceive. This is why we have C.S. Lewis, von Balthasar, de Lubac, Mother Teresa, as persons who worship and serve the One God and Father, in His Son Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit. They are Christians. Yes, they are divided from us, and would that they were one with us. But they were baptized into *something*, and that something is not "pan-heresy," as the Confession calls the "pseudo-churches of Western Europe."

As you know from my book, I agree that we can call these people Christians, that their lives have been changed by God, and that among the heterodox we can find many examples of Christ-like virtues and lives lived for His Glory. But all of this can be explained in a Patristic way as the visible effects of external Grace, the operation of the Holy Spirit upon men and women who-perhaps to the shame of many Orthodox Christians who have the Grace of the Church but do not fully actualize it in their lives, I being chief among them-responded to a degree that warrants admiration, if not hope for their eternal salvation. (One should not, however, take this too far. Why did these men and women, who were well educated and acquainted with the Orthodox Church to one degree or another, remain apart from Her? I think there's a difference between innocent ignorance and conscious rejection.)

Orthodox ecumenists, however, do not accept this Patristic explanation for reasons that remain a mystery to me. In its stead they offer anti-Patristic theories that undermine the Church's ecclesiology, theories which, among other ill-effects, trickle down to Diocesan policies that

proscribe the reception of converts through Holy Baptism. What a grave disservice to those dear souls who are joining the Church!

And what is this vague “*something*” to which you refer? Do you imply something organic and “incompletely joined” to Christ and His Church? If so, how is this not a variation of the Branch Theory, or at the very least a clear example of the fuzzy “Church in the wider sense” type of ecclesiology spread by Orthodox ecumenists? If not, then this “something” is merely a religious assembly which holds to heretical beliefs; and I remind you of what the Patriarchal Encyclical of 1848, which merely restates decisions of two Oecumenical Synods, has to say about such assemblies:

Wherefore the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, following in the steps of the holy Fathers, both Eastern and Western, proclaimed of old to our progenitors and again teaches today synodically, that the said novel doctrine of the Holy Ghost proceeding from the Father and the Son is essentially heresy, and its maintainers, whoever they be, are heretics, according to the sentence of Pope St. Damasus, and that the congregations of such are also heretical, and that all spiritual communion in worship of the orthodox sons of the Catholic Church with such is unlawful. Such is the force of the seventh Canon of the third Ecumenical Council.

You may not agree with St. Justin Popovich’s assessment of Western churches as “*pan*-heresy,” but they are at least “heresy.” As such, the Holy Fathers teach that they are devoid of Mysteriological Grace.

In this section of your response you also seem subtly to mock the Patristic distinction between external and Mysteriological Grace. You write, “Are you going to ask me how much Grace, and what kind of Grace do they possess? (I suppose one of my main objections to your approach, and that of many whom you cite, is the insistence on defining and quantifying Grace as if it were a currency.)” This is another good example of why I think you do not follow the Holy Fathers, for the “defining and quantifying [of] Grace” is a constant theme in their writings on the boundaries of the Church and the reception of converts. In other words, your criticism of “my approach” is a criticism of a great host of Holy Fathers.

Even outside of these ecclesiological topics the Saints speak of Grace in ways that raise serious doubts about the validity of your objections. A rather poignant example is from the Life of St. Seraphim of Sarov during his conversation with Nicholas Motovilov:

What do you mean by acquiring [the Spirit of God]? I asked Father Seraphim. Somehow I don't understand that.

Acquiring is the same as obtaining, he replied. *You understand, of course, what acquiring money means? Acquiring the Spirit of God is exactly the same.* You know well enough what it means in a worldly sense, your Godliness, to acquire. The aim in life of ordinary worldly people is to acquire or make money, and for the nobility it is in addition to receive honours, distinctions and other rewards for their

services to the government. *The acquisition of God's Spirit is also capital, but grace-giving and eternal, and it is obtained in very similar ways, almost the same ways as monetary, social and temporal capital.*

God the Word, the God-Man, our Lord Jesus Christ, compares our life with a *market*, and the work of our life on earth He calls *trading*, and says to us all: Trade till I come (Lk. 19:13), redeeming the time, because the days are evil (Eph. 5:16). That is to say, make the most of your time for getting heavenly blessings through earthly goods. Earthly goods are good works done for Christ's sake and *conferring on us the grace of the All-Holy Spirit.*

In the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, when the foolish ones lacked oil, it was said: 'Go and buy in the market.' But when they had bought, the door of the bride-chamber was already shut and they could not get in. Some say that the lack of oil in the lamps of the foolish virgins means a lack of good deeds in their lifetime. Such an interpretation is not quite correct. Why should they be lacking in good deeds if they are called virgins, even though foolish ones? Virginity is the supreme virtue, an angelic state, and it could take the place of all other good works.

I think that what they were lacking was the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God. These virgins practiced the virtues, but in their spiritual ignorance they supposed that the Christian life consisted merely in doing good works. By doing a good deed they thought they were doing the work of God, but they little cared whether they acquired thereby the grace of God's Spirit. Such ways of life based merely on doing good without carefully testing whether they bring the grace of the Spirit of God, are mentioned in the Patristic books: 'There is another way which is deemed good at the beginning, but it ends at the bottom of hell.' (emphases mine)

Keep in mind that this was spoken to his spiritual child, a baptized Orthodox Christian. The implications of the Saint's ending remarks are also potentially *apropos* of our debate and worthy of reflection.

The "Middle Ground" is Attested by the Church's Varied Practice in the Reception of Converts

Returning to the discussion of Mysteriological Grace as integral to a Patristic definition of "Christian life," despite the many citations I provided to the contrary from authoritative sources, you continue to insist that your "middle ground" view is attested "by the variety of practices of reception of non-Orthodox, throughout history and today, especially where we can demonstrate that this variety has clear theological basis, not merely historical precedent."

Despite my complete agreement with St. Hilarion (Troitsky) when he writes, "Otherwise a completely unthinkable conclusion is reached: according to the circumstances of place and time, the Church changed the dogmatic teaching of her unity," let's focus on your evidence for a theological basis behind this variety.

You claim that St. Basil the Great's *First Canonical Epistle* contains "explicit acknowledgement of a differentiation among the separated" because he "distinguishes 'heresies, schisms, and illegal

congregations.’ ... The schisms—whose baptism he accepts, by the way—he says are ‘reconcilable’ and, even more remarkably, ‘still of the Church (*eti ek tes ekklesias onton*).’”

The key question is, Do these stated differentiations prove that St. Basil believed Mysteriological Grace resided in each of these groups?

On the surface the phrase “*eti ek tes ekklesias onton*” might lead one tentatively to conclude “yes.” It is, however, irrelevant to our debate because we are not dealing with schismatics who were once a part of the Orthodox Church. If we were having this discussion about the Latins in the early days following the Great Schism, this phrase would be germane, as would your citations of Fr. Florovsky elsewhere, e.g., “...a canonical cleavage does not immediately signify mystical impoverishment and desolation” and “[there exist] many bonds, still not broken, whereby the schisms are held together in a certain unity with the Church.” But centuries have passed. Roman Catholics and Protestants are clearly heretics, at least in a “technical sense” (see Chapters 3 and 4 of my book). That they hold Trinitarian and Christological tenets which are closer to Orthodox dogma than beliefs held by the ancient Manichaeans, Valentinians, and Montanists is also irrelevant. The Patristic evidence overwhelmingly confirms that heterodox Christians are not schismatics, but heretics, and thus should be received, *kat’ akribeia*, by Holy Baptism. There is simply no Patristic justification for viewing Roman Catholics and Protestants as some new “fourth group” that St. Basil could not have envisioned, or that the Holy Fathers of the Sixth Oecumenical Synod (680-681)—who confirmed his canonical epistles and gave them oecumenical authority—could not have envisioned. You may “have a hard time fitting [Roman Catholics and Protestants] easily into any of his categories,” but myriad Saints from centuries ago until today do not have this same difficulty.

You continue by stating, “But what we need to retain is St Basil’s understanding of differentiated separation and therefore different modes of reception, something to which he returns elsewhere in his written work (see e.g., Epistle 199.47).” That St. Basil—who was echoing earlier Fathers—, classified people into three groups and thus received them into the Church differently does not in any way prove that he affirmed “differentiated ecclesial realities” or the validity of their Mysteries *per se*, especially with respect to heretical assemblies. Interpreting St. Basil,

Heretics of every kind as defined by St. Basil (Canon I)... 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.... Heretics cannot possibly have baptism, for they are unsound as regards the faith, and thus “the baptism which they administer is of no benefit to them, since it lacks the correct faith.” (*I Confess One Baptism*, pp. 37-38)

Epistle 199 (which is also Canon XVII of his *Second Canonical Epistle*) is simply more irrelevant “evidence,” for this refers to a Priest who, because of various threats and intimidations, rashly took an oath no longer to perform the duties of the Priesthood. What does this have to do with the subject at hand?

Fr. George Metallinos and St. Hilarion (Troitsky) have offered scholarly studies involving St. Basil's *Canonical Epistle*. You refrained from interacting with their arguments, merely disputing St. Hilarion's alleged historical inaccuracies.

Service books to this day (such as the famous "Hapgood" book in use through so much of the English-speaking Orthodox Church in the 20th c.) stipulate different modes of reception precisely with respect to the different teachings and rites of the convert's origin. In doing so they are faithful to practices of the Church over the centuries—at least since the fourth.

I fail to see how this overturns St. Hilarion's discourse. Although a thorough examination of service books throughout the centuries is beyond the scope of this debate, their stipulation of different modes of reception is most likely a reflection of the Church's varied practice *kat' oikonomia*, not an implicit acknowledgement of Mysteriological Grace in the convert's group.

Peter, I could go on, but it's clear that the only relevant evidence you can offer for your "middle ground" view is one article of dubious merit from Fr. Georges Florovsky, who is not a Holy Father.

Let us note, here, that Father Florovsky offered his comments in this inchoate and rather incoherent article, written very early on in his career (1933), in a heuristic spirit. Its subsequent reprinting in a number of different publications was, in fact, a cause of concern for him later in life. After serving in the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad in Serbia, where he was awarded the gold pectoral Cross and where he embraced a more cautious and conservative ecclesiology, he went on, as one of the founders of the World Council of Churches, to argue rather vociferously for the primacy of the Orthodox Church and to insist that Her ecumenical witness be clearly defined in terms of Her sole claim to the legacy of the Apostolic Church. Not only did he write ensuing articles that expressed this far different and more conservative ecclesiology, but he publicly expressed his regrets about his earlier views, drawn from the doctrines of St. Augustine, as well as about the general course of the ecumenical movement, at a Patristic symposium at Princeton University in 1975. His original English article on the limits of the Church appeared in *The Church Quarterly Review*, Vol. CXVII, No. 233, pp. 117-131. Readers should consult Constantine Cavarnos, *Father Georges Florovsky on Ecumenism* (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1996), for a clearer understanding of Father Georges' overall understanding of the rôle of the Orthodox Church in the ecumenical movement. ("Ecumenism and 'Baptismal Theology': The Protestant 'Branch Theory' of the Church in a New Form", fn. 3)

I have a great deal of respect for Fr. Florovsky; but his "famous and crucial assertion" (as you call it) that "[St. Cyprian's] unproven equation...has not been confirmed by the communal consciousness of the Church" does not hold up to close scrutiny, nor does his belief that "'*oikonomia*' does not (*can not*) create something out of nothing." (And one might step back and ask, if God can create the world *ex nihilo*, why can't the Holy Spirit fill an empty form with Grace upon reception into the Church?)

Words and Accountability

In Part III of your podcasts on anti-ecumenism you spoke strongly about the need for accountability. Concerning the Confession you said:

Because-that's the other thing that rankled me so much about this Confession-is that neither the authors nor most of their audience members apparently felt it important to be held fully accountable for all their words expressed in the document.

What kind of accountability do you want to see, Peter? How are the authors *not* holding themselves accountable? In this same podcast, when you say that someone who speaks of “Christian East and West as two lungs of one organism... [should be held] theologically accountable,” what do you mean exactly? You spent three podcasts criticizing the Confession and its authors. Will you make time to do even *one* podcast that expresses sincere agreement with the legitimate concerns of sober and balanced anti-ecumenists; that calls to account men such as Metropolitan Maximos of Pittsburgh or Archbishop Hilarion of Volokolamsk (though more egregious offenders like Metropolitan John of Pergamum or the Oecumenical Patriarch might be better choices), who you admit have publicly stated things that are dogmatically wrong, misleading the Faithful; or that critiques documents produced by various ecumenical gatherings, some of which are sponsored by your own seminary, e.g., the “Baptism and ‘Sacramental Economy’” agreement from 1999? (Regardless of the lack of authority these documents have over the Orthodox churches, questionable or heretical statements therein foster confusion and discord, and contribute to the overall dulling of an Orthodox *phronema* among the Faithful.) I’m glad you are “uncomfortable,” “dissatisfied,” or “extremely unhappy” with certain ecumenist statements. I only hope that given your emphasis on accountability you will at some point express more than mere passing displeasure, especially in your important rôle as a professor of dogmatic theology at a major Orthodox seminary.

Concerning my own accountability you wrote the following regarding the nature of ecumenism and “allergic reactions” to it: “You, Patrick, do not make all of these distorted assumptions, but the people whom you call upon to support your arguments often do.” I will be grateful if you would tell me who among those I cited are guilty of distorted assumptions. Also, were these distortions present in my critique, or did I merely cite people who have made wrong assumptions elsewhere? We all make mistakes in assessing various situations, so I’m not inclined to discount a source simply because they have come to false conclusions on occasion. If, however, you can demonstrate that I have propagated another’s errors, I will thank you and correct myself. You also wrote: “[W]ould that the anti-ecumenical extremists cease from fanning flames of scandal among our faithful, because if you ask me, they are doing far more to scandalize and divide than those of us who participate in ecumenical meetings.” And in your conclusion: “...much that is said in the name of anti-ecumenism...is wrong and/or under-nuanced.” I would also appreciate your sending me examples of this. I may agree with you, for I have also witnessed “flame fanning” by unstable people, or read crude arguments by those who are ill-informed. It’s not that difficult to spot and

avoid this kind of literature. However, this still leaves a wealth of sober, balanced and well-researched anti-ecumenist writings that should be acknowledged and interacted with.

Conclusions

To sum up, Peter, I share some of your concerns about the “Confession of Faith Against Ecumenism,” and perhaps I should have been more forthcoming in my initial critique of your podcasts. I see no reason, however, to be outraged by it. I think your grave displeasure with this document stems from your firm belief in the existence of an “ecclesial middle ground.” You are convinced it is permissible to speak of “differentiated separation” among the heterodox in a way that clearly implies the presence of Mysteriological Grace. You argue for the recognition of “Christian life” among the heterodox, though a proper definition of this involves the Holy Mysteries. You insist that your view does not constitute “baptismal ecclesiology,” although you believe heterodox “baptism” is probably more than a mere promise of entry into this “Christian life.” Heterodox Christians are supposedly baptized into *something* organic, which allows you to speak of a quasi-ecclesial middle ground that is based upon an imperfect joining to the Church. This is definitely “Church in the wider sense” type of ecclesiology. You failed convincingly to cite any Patristic evidence for your views, nor did you refute my initial critique. It seems to me that you have allowed your opinions about heterodox Christians, as well as too much interaction with them in ecumenical circles, to lead you to theological speculation that does not follow the Holy Fathers. I’ll close by reminding you of something else Fr. Florovsky has written:

Following the Holy Fathers... It is not a reference to abstract tradition, to formulas and propositions. It is primarily an appeal to persons, to holy witnesses. The witness of the Fathers belongs, integrally and intrinsically, to the very structure of the Orthodox faith.... The authority of [the compiler of the *Philokalia*,] St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mount, has been recently re-emphasized and reinforced by his formal canonization in the Greek Church. In this sense, it can be contended, “the age of the Fathers” still continues alive in the “Worshiping Church.” Should it not continue also in the schools, in the field of theological research and instruction? Should we not recover “the mind of the Fathers” also in our theological thinking and confession? (*The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, Vol. IV, “Patristic Theology and the Ethos of the Orthodox Church,” Part II)

Peter, we may be at an impasse. As we discussed privately, if you decide not to follow up with a public response, I am willing to post a note stating that you decided not to continue the discussion, but that such a decision does not mean you concede any of my points.

Sincerely in Christ,

Patrick