

*THE*  
**NON-ORTHODOX**

*The Orthodox Teaching on Christians Outside of the Church*

**Patrick Barnes**

All Scripture not in footnoted passages is from the King James Version.

© Patrick Barnes, 1999, 2004

*Author's Note for this Web Edition*

This book was originally published in 1999 by Regina Orthodox Press in Salisbury, MA (Frank Schaeffer's publishing house). Aside from a few minor deletions and additions, this Web version is essentially the same as the original publication. It is also the basis for the Romanian translation of the book, which should appear in early 2005. Please note, however, that the margins were changed to accommodate an 8 ½ X 11 format, so the page numbering differs from the printed books.

I elected freely to distribute this English version of my book because of many requests for the now out-of-print 1999 edition. Given the recent (as of December, 2004) joint recognition of Baptism by the Oecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), as well as other official acts and statements that clearly indicate an even bolder and more brazen effort by Orthodox ecumenists to blur ecclesiological lines, I decided that it was best not to wait for a second, in-print edition.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or if you would like to translate this book into another language. My email address is [patrick@orthodoxinfo.com](mailto:patrick@orthodoxinfo.com). More information about this book, as well as reviews and related articles, can be found at <http://orthodoxinfo.com/inquirers/status.aspx>.

Please pray for me, a sinner, and for the Holy Orthodox Church, whose ecclesiological self-understanding is being assailed by "Orthodox" ecumenists, to the detriment of Her witness and mission to the non-Orthodox.

Patrick Barnes

December 15 (o.s.), 2004

Hieromartyr Eleutherius, Bishop of Illyria, and his mother Martyr Anthia

# Table of Contents

I. A BURNING QUESTION .....	3
II. THE ORTHODOX VIEW OF GRACE.....	7
III. WESTERN CHRISTIANITY AS HERESY .....	16
IV. CULPABILITY, SINCERITY, AND VICTIMIZATION.....	26
V. AN EVALUATION OF HETERODOX BAPTISM .....	29
VI. CAN THE NON-ORTHODOX BE CALLED “CHRISTIANS”? .....	38
VII. BISHOP KALLISTOS’ ANSWER.....	44
VIII. SAINT IGNATY AND DANIEL CLENDENIN.....	56
EPILOGUE: ORTHODOXY’S “EXCLUSIVE OPENNESS” .....	63
APPENDIX I: AN EXTENDED CRITIQUE OF ECUMENIST REASONING .....	65
APPENDIX II: THE USE OF THE TERM “HERETIC” .....	85
APPENDIX III: SAINT DOROTHEOS OF GAZA ON JUDGING OTHERS .....	87
APPENDIX IV: A PERSONAL LETTER TO A PROTESTANT INQUIRER .....	89

## I. A Burning Question

In the latest edition of *The Orthodox Church*, Bishop Kallistos (Ware) raises the question, “If Orthodox claim to constitute the one true Church, what then do they consider to be the status of those Christians who do not belong to their communion?”<sup>1</sup> For many Christians today—both Orthodox and heterodox who are seriously contemplating a conversion to Orthodoxy—, this is a burning question.

It is typically Protestants, more than other Christians, who wrestle with this issue. The exclusivity of the Orthodox Church—namely, Her claim to be the one and only True Ark of Salvation (cf. 1 Peter 3:20ff) established by the Lord Jesus Christ, preserving unadulterated the very criterion of Christianity—runs counter to everything they have been taught about the nature of the Church. A marketing manager of a major Orthodox publishing house specializing in “evangelistic” literature was once heard to remark that the number of phone calls and faxes her company receives on the question of the ecclesial and eternal status of heterodox Christians is consistently high. Many Orthodox are interested in this issue, and this book is in part an attempt to provide a cogent answer.

The problem with this and other questions relating to the boundaries of the Church is that there currently exists a variety of contradictory answers. Those who have a reasonable knowledge of the state of Orthodoxy today know that certain aspects of ecclesiology are hotly debated. This is especially true with regard to the status of those not in visible communion with the Church. Several decades ago, the Orthodox theologian and ecumenical activist Nicolas Zernov made the following comment upon this sad state of affairs:

One of the Anglican delegates [at an ecumenical gathering in Oxford in 1973], Canon Allchin, asked the Orthodox, “Are we, according to your opinion, inside or outside of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church?” A lively discussion followed but no answer was given, and one of the leading Orthodox theologians frankly confessed his ignorance. He said, “I don’t know”. Such a lack of knowledge among theologians who claim to speak in the name of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church can easily perplex those who are not familiar with the sharp disagreements among Eastern Christians in regard to the status of other Christian confessions.<sup>2</sup>

There are many reasons for this confusion today, all of which have served to make questions involving the boundaries of the Church increasingly relevant, and often emotionally charged:

*Orthodox participation in the Ecumenical Movement.* The movement for unity among Christians was begun by Protestants in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Most Orthodox Churches fully entered into it only fifty years ago, if that. Orthodox

---

<sup>1</sup> Timothy [now Bishop Kallistos] Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1993 [1963]), pp. 307-308.

<sup>2</sup> “The One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church and the Anglicans,” *Sobornost*, 6:8 (1973), p. 529.

involvement in this movement has yielded precious little good fruit. In fact, a compelling case can be made that our involvement has resulted in the infection of many Orthodox participants with the *bacterium* of heretical belief.

A very important fact to be noted . . . is that exposure again and again through dialogues to this *minimalistic, relativistic mentality* [of typical modern dialogue] has a *blunting* effect on the Orthodox *phronema* or mindset. One becomes *infected* by the *virus*—or *venom* (*ios*) as the Orthodox Church Fathers call it—of heresy. . . .

The reason why St. Paul and the other holy men . . . advise avoiding repeated religious dialogues with the heterodox is clearly *the danger of being infected spiritually* by heretical ideas—it is *not* to teach *hatred* towards the heterodox. Such ideas are compared to poison, the venom of snakes, causing spiritual death.<sup>3</sup>

Another negative result of the ecumenical movement has been the drafting of “official” documents that are not faithful to traditional Orthodox ecclesiology, the most notorious example being the “Balamand Agreement” issued by Orthodox and Roman Catholics.<sup>4</sup> Though initially girded with sound ecclesiological principles which countered the Protestant claims that the aim of the ecumenical movement, and specifically of the World Council of Churches, was the unity *of*, or unity *within*, the Church,<sup>5</sup> many Orthodox participants—even entire local Orthodox Churches—have, to varying degrees over the years, lost touch with a proper understanding of Orthodox ecclesiology, often becoming increasingly estranged from the life-giving spiritual heritage of Holy Tradition. Serious compromises in the Faith have resulted, creating confusion and internal division<sup>6</sup> among the Faithful.

---

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Constantine Cavarnos, *Ecumenism Examined* (Belmont, MA: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1996), pp. 46-47, 52, emphasizes his.

<sup>4</sup> For more on this lamentable document see “The Balamand Agreement” page on the Orthodox Christian Information Center Web site (hereafter “OCIC”) at OrthodoxInfo.com/ecumenism.

<sup>5</sup> As opposed to *among Christians*, or within Christendom. See, for example, “Christian Unity as Viewed by the Eastern Orthodox Church: Statement of the Representatives of the Greek Orthodox Church in the USA at the North American Faith and Order Study Conference, Oberlin, Ohio, September 3-10, 1957”:

We admit, of course, that the Unity of Christendom has been disrupted, that the unity of faith and the integrity of order have been sorely broken. But we do not admit that the Unity of the Church, and precisely of the “visible” and historical Church, has ever been broken or lost, so as to now be a problem of search and discovery. The problem of Unity is for us, therefore, the problem of the return to the fullness of Faith and Order, in full faithfulness to the message of Scripture and Tradition and in the obedience to the will of God: “that all may be one”. . . .

In considering firstly “the nature of the unity we seek,” we wish to begin by making clear that our approach is at variance with that usually advocated and ordinarily expected by participating representatives. The Orthodox Church teaches that the unity of the Church has not been lost, because she is the Body of Christ, and, as such, can never be divided. It is Christ as her head and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that secure the unity of the Church throughout the ages.

<sup>6</sup> See Bishop Photios of Triaditza, “Orthodox Unity Today,” *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. X, No. 4, pp. 4-10.

For those alarmed by these facts, it is worth pointing out that doctrinal controversies in the Church are nothing new. Anyone can discover this by reading Church history. In our day, ecumenism—an ecclesiological heresy—has ravaged the Church and at times appears to have the characteristics of a “protracted naval battle,” to use a metaphor from Saint Basil the Great (*On the Holy Spirit*, Chapter 30).<sup>7</sup> One must keep in mind that there has never been a “Golden Age” in the Orthodox Church. She has always been beset by arguments and strife. This is in accordance with Holy Scripture: “For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you” (I Cor. 11:19). With all due sympathy to those trying to sort out the nuances of Orthodox ecclesiology, a consistent Orthodox position is definitely discernible, if only one resorts to a careful examination of Holy Tradition, and specifically, Sacred Scripture, the writings of the Church Fathers, and the Sacred Canons.

*Observation of Pious Heterodox Believers.* In our modern, pluralistic society, Orthodox Christians have a great deal of personal contact with non-Orthodox Christians, many of whom exhibit a sincere faith in Christ, living good and honorable lives that even outshine those of their Orthodox neighbors. Combine this with the fact that heterodox Christians hold to varying degrees of Orthodox truth, and one has a recipe for confusion in those who are ignorant of Orthodox teachings. Two false conclusions are typically drawn: 1) The heterodox are Christians in the same sense that the Orthodox are; and 2) the “church” to which they belong is somehow a part or “branch” of the one true Church of God.

*Ignorance of Orthodoxy, specifically the Patristic Mindset.*<sup>8</sup> “The . . . insufficient grounding [of a large number of Orthodox] in the consensual body of Patristic doctrine has led many to imagine that the Fathers disagree on the issue of Mysteries [Sacraments] outside the Orthodox Church. Separating canons from theology and theological speculation from spiritual life sets Fathers at artificial odds with one another, when in fact our own misreading and lack of intellectual acumen, not the Fathers, are at fault.”<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Patrick Barker [now Hieromonk Patapios] continues:

In the twentieth century, the Orthodox Church has been thrown into tremendous confusion. It could be said that the crisis through which we are now passing is no less severe than those crises faced by the Church during the period of the Seven Œcumenical Synods, and in particular the crisis provoked by the Iconoclast heresy in the eighth and early ninth centuries. (*A Study of the Ecclesiology of Resistance* [Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1994], p. 10)

<sup>8</sup> The concept of a Patristic mindset (*i.e.*, the *phronema ton pateron*, *consensus patrum*, or “ecclesial consciousness”) will be discussed in greater detail in Appendix I.

<sup>9</sup> Bishop [now Archbishop] Chrysostomos of Oreoi [now of Etna], “BEM and Orthodox Spirituality,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, Vol. 32, No.1 (1987), p. 61. BEM stands for “Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry,” Paper No. 111 of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches conference in Lima, Peru in 1983. This article by Archbishop Chrysostomos contains Patristic insights of a valuable kind. See related comments by His Eminence and Bishop Auxentios of Photiki in *Scripture and Tradition* (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1994 [1984], 50-52): “The diversity of

This is related to a misinterpretation of the Church's historically divergent policies regarding the reception of non-Orthodox: that the reception of converts by means other than Holy Baptism, or the declaration that a heterodox sacrament is "valid," is a tacit recognition of heterodox sacraments *per se*—*i.e.*, in and of themselves, apart from the Church.

Perhaps the reader wonders why it should take so long to answer such a simple question as the one posed by Bishop Kallistos. Many undoubtedly would like an accurate and succinct answer not involving extensive theological discussion. To satisfy these readers, it is worthwhile at the outset briefly to state the Orthodox position vis-à-vis the heterodox.

The status of the heterodox is properly seen in two ways. When speaking of their *ecclesial* status—*i.e.*, their relation to the Orthodox Church—we would say that the heterodox cannot be seen as Her members, because they have not been grafted into the one true Body of Christ through Holy Baptism. On the other hand, 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.

In what follows, we will first lay some of the theological groundwork that is requisite for a full treatment of our question. In so doing, we will address many of the issues relating to this question. A critique of various well-known answers to this question, including that of Bishop Kallistos—one that, although often cited, raises numerous problems—will bring our study to a close.

---

positions we encounter in contemporary Orthodox theological thought is engendered by the importation, into Orthodoxy, of Western influence." Also see Christos Yannaras, "Theology in Present Day Greece," *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly*, Vol. XVI, No. 4 (1972). For a survey of this problem from a Russian Orthodox perspective, consult *The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky* (Belmont, MA: Nordland Publishing Co., 1979), Vol. I, "St. Gregory Palamas and the Tradition of the Fathers," 105-120; Vol. IV, "Patristic Theology and the Ethos of the Orthodox Church," and "Western Influences in Russian Theology"; Vol. V, *Ways of Russian Theology, Part One*; Vol. VI, *Ways of Russian Theology, Part Two*.

## II. The Orthodox View of Grace

The Orthodox view of Grace is quite distinct from that of the West, especially as developed by the Scholastics from seeds in the theology of the Blessed Augustine. As the Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky explains:

[The] theology of the Eastern Church distinguishes in God the three hypostases, the nature or essence, and the energies. The Son and the Holy Spirit are, so to say, personal processions, the energies, natural processions. The energies are inseparable from the nature, and the nature is inseparable from the three Persons. These distinctions are of great importance for the Eastern Church's conception of mystical life:...

3) The distinction between the essence and the energies, which is fundamental for the Orthodox doctrine of grace, makes it possible to preserve the real meaning of Saint Peter's words "partakers of the divine nature" [2 Peter 1:4]. The union to which we are called is neither hypostatic—as in the case of the human nature of Christ—nor substantial, as in that of the three divine Persons: it is union with God in His energies, or union by grace making us participate in the divine nature, without our essence becoming thereby the essence of God. In deification [*theosis*] we are by grace (that is to say, in the divine energies), all that God is by nature, save only identity of nature . . . according to the teaching of Saint Maximus. We remain creatures while becoming God by grace, as Christ remained God in becoming man by the Incarnation.<sup>10</sup>

Eastern tradition knows no such supernatural order between God and the created world, adding, as it were, to the latter a new creation. It recognizes no distinction, or rather division, save that between the created and the uncreated. For [the] eastern tradition the created supernatural has no existence. That which western theology calls by the name of the supernatural signifies for the East the uncreated—the divine energies ineffably distinct from the essence of God. . . . The act of creation established a relationship between the divine energies and that which is not God. . . . [However,] the divine energies in themselves are not the relationship of God to created being, but they do enter into relationship with that which is not God [*i.e.*, His creation], and draw the world into existence by the will of God.<sup>11</sup>

In short, the Orthodox understanding of the nature of Grace is that it is the very energies of God Himself. Through the Trinitarian ministry of the Holy Spirit—a ministry involving both general and special activities—these energies are mediated to mankind. This stands in contrast to the Latin view flowing mainly from the anti-Pelagian writings of Saint Augustine. For Roman Catholics, Grace is a created intermediary between God and man.

---

<sup>10</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London: James Clark and Co., 1957), pp. 85-86, 87.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

## The General Ministry of the Holy Spirit

Although a Protestant work, Thomas Oden's systematic theology accurately and succinctly captures the Orthodox position on the general activity of the Holy Spirit:

The work of the Spirit does not begin belatedly at Pentecost, but is found profusely in all creation and its continuing providences, and especially in the entire history of salvation.  
...

*General and Special Operations of the Spirit.* As the Son is said to be coworking with the Father in creation and with the Spirit in consummation, so the Spirit coworks with the Father in creation and the Son in redemption (Athanasius, LCHS 1.22-27). These are viewed as general operations shared in the divine triad.

In this sense it is celebrated that God's Spirit creates (Gen. 1:2; Ps. 104:30; Job 33:4), redeems (Isa. 44:3, 23), and offers gifts to creatures (Gen. 2:7; 41:38; Exod. 28:3; 31:3). The Spirit illumines reason, enables political order, and restrains the capacity for humanity to destroy itself. Among these "general operations" of the Spirit shared with the Father and the Son are the offering of life, supporting of life newly given, nurturing continuing life, strengthening life nurtured, and guiding life strengthened. This applies to all forms of life, whether plant, animal, or human.<sup>12</sup>

*It Is the Spirit Who Convicts.* Conviction is the work of the Spirit in which one grows in awareness of one's lost condition. Through convicting grace the Spirit works to awaken the realization of how deeply one is personally trapped in intergenerational patterns of sin, unable to break free (Exod. 20:5; Num. 14:18; cf. Jer. 31:29, 30; 1 Cor. 2:14). . . .

*The Spirit Convinces the World of Sin, Righteousness, and Judgment.* The Spirit penetrates the self-deceptions, evasions, defensive ploys, and indifference of the world. The Spirit works to change the lowered awareness of sin into heightened awareness, making the unrighteous hungry for righteousness, as if already facing the final judgment (*An Ancient Homily by an Unknown Author* [Second Clement], 16-20, AF, pp. 68-70; cf. St. John 16:8-11).<sup>13</sup>

We see, here, the wide range of the Spirit's ministry in creation. In this regard, Saint Athanasius the Great, in his *On the Incarnation of the Word of God*, states:

The Saviour is working mightily among men, every day He is invisibly persuading numbers of people all over the world, both within and beyond the Greek-speaking world, to accept His faith and be obedient to His teaching.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Oden, *Life in the Spirit* (San Francisco: Harper, 1992), pp. 34-35.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

<sup>14</sup> Trans. A Religious of C.S.M.V. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary Press, 1993), p. 61.

Saint John Cassian makes similar remarks in his *Conference XIII*, “On the Protection of God”:

The grace of Christ then is at hand every day, which, while it “willeth all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth,” calleth all without any exception, saying: “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.”<sup>15</sup>

Saint Seraphim of Sarov’s famous conversation with Nicholas Motovilov affords us further insight into the Orthodox teaching regarding Grace:

However, that [*i.e.*, the fact that “the Spirit of God was not yet in the world”—St. John 7:39] *does not mean that the Spirit of God was not in the world at all*, but His presence was not so apparent as in Adam or in us Orthodox Christians. *It was manifested only externally*; yet the signs of His presence in the world were known to mankind. . . . The grace of the Holy Spirit *acting externally* was also reflected in all the Old Testament prophets and Saints of Israel. The Hebrews afterwards established special prophetic schools where the sons of the prophets were taught to discern the signs of the manifestation of God or of Angels, and to distinguish the operations of the Holy Spirit from the ordinary natural phenomena of our graceless earthly life. Simeon who held God in his arms, Christ’s grandparents Joakim and Anna, and countless other servants of God continually had quite openly various divine apparitions, voices and revelations which were justified by evident miraculous events. Though not with the same power as in the people of God, nevertheless, the presence of the Spirit of God also acted in the pagans who did not know the true God, because even among them God found for Himself chosen people. . . . Though the pagan philosophers also wandered in the darkness of ignorance of God, *yet they sought the truth which is beloved by God, and on account of this God-pleasing seeking, they could partake of the Spirit of God*, for it is said that the nations who do not know God practice by nature the demands of the law and do what is pleasing to God (cf. Rom. 2:14). . . .<sup>16</sup>

In any attempt to elucidate an Orthodox position on dogmatic issues, it is also important to consult the texts of the Divine Services. A brief look at some frequently used prayers will help to illustrate the concept of the Holy Spirit’s general ministry. The first example introduces the *Trisagion* and is recited at almost every Orthodox service:

O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, Who art everywhere present and fillest all things, the Treasury of good things and Giver of life. . . .

Here one can see an affirmation of the Holy Spirit’s general ministry towards all of creation in which He fills all things with the energies of God in His rôle as the Divine Agent of Him by Whom “all things consist” (Col. 1:17). The second example is the

---

<sup>15</sup> Trans. the Rev. Edgar C. S. Gibson, M.A., *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., Vol. 11, p. 425.

<sup>16</sup> “A Conversation of St. Seraphim of Sarov with N. A. Motovilov,” (Blanco, TX: New Sarov Press, n.d.), pp. 12-13, em-phases ours.

prayer which concludes the First Hour. Based on Saint John 1:9, it is a good example of the Orthodox understanding of the Economy of God towards His creation:

O Christ the True Light, Who enlightenest and sanctifiest every man that cometh into the world: Let the light of Thy countenance be signed upon us, that in it we may see the Unapproachable Light. . . .

Concerning the verse in Saint John's Gospel which inspired this prayer, Saint John Chrysostom comments:

If He "lighteth every man that cometh into the world," how is it that so many continue unenlightened? For not all have known the majesty of Christ. How then doth He "light every man"? He lighteth all as far as in Him lies. But if some, willfully closing the eyes of their mind, would not receive the rays of that Light, their darkness arises not from the nature of the Light, but from their own wickedness, who willfully deprive themselves of the gift. *For the grace is shed forth upon all, turning itself back neither from Jew, nor Greek, nor Barbarian, nor Scythian, nor free, nor bond, nor male, nor female, nor old, nor young, but admitting all alike, and inviting with an equal regard. And those who are not willing to enjoy this gift, ought in justice to impute their blindness to themselves; for if when the gate is opened to all, and there is none to hinder, any being willfully evil remain without, they perish through none other, but only through their own wickedness.*<sup>17</sup>

In short, everyone born into this world is a recipient of the general ministry of God in his Redemptive Economy. Moreover, in this prayer one can see God's involvement both in the *beginning* of man's salvation—the general "enlightenment" of man (which is, as will soon be shown, distinct from the *illumination* given only in Holy Baptism), such that his reason-endowed soul is rendered accountable to God (cf. Romans 1:19-20)—and in the *fullness* of man's salvation: union with God in the Unapproachable Light (*theosis*).

### **The Special Ministry of the Holy Spirit**

Beyond His general ministry in creation, there is also a special ministry of the Holy Spirit to those within the Church. For a description of this, we turn again to various Saints, beginning with Saint Seraphim's conversation with Motovilov:

But when our Lord Jesus Christ condescended to accomplish the whole work of salvation, after His Resurrection, *He breathed on the Apostles, restored the breath of life lost by Adam, and gave them the same grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God as Adam had enjoyed.* But that was not all. He also told them that it was expedient for them that He should go to the Father,

---

<sup>17</sup> "Homily VIII: John i. 9," trans. the Rev. Philip Schaff, in Vol. 14 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 1<sup>st</sup> ser., ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994 [1886]), p. 29, emphasis ours. Cf. St. John 3:19-21; Romans 1:18ff. This set will henceforth be referred to as *NPNF*. The set of *Ante-Nicene Fathers* will be noted as *ANF*.

for if He did not go, the Spirit of God would not come into the world. But if He, the Christ, went to the Father, He would send Him into the world, and He, the Comforter, *would guide them and all who followed their teaching* into all truth and would remind them of all that He had said to them when He was still in the world. What was then promised was *grace upon grace* (St. John. 1:16).

Then on the day of Pentecost He solemnly sent down to them in a tempestuous wind the Holy Spirit in the form of tongues of fire which alighted on each of them and entered within them and filled them with the fiery strength of divine grace which breathes bedewingly and acts gladdeningly *in* souls which partake of its power and operations (cf. Acts 2:1-4). And this same fire-infusing grace of the Holy Spirit which is given to us all, *the faithful of Christ, in the Mystery of Holy Baptism, is sealed by the Mystery of Chrismation* on the chief parts of our body as appointed by Holy Church, *the eternal keeper of this grace*.<sup>18</sup>

In *The Spiritual Life and How to Be Attuned to It*, Saint Theophan the Recluse writes:

Such a disposition of our soul [towards salvation] makes it ready for Divine communion, and the grace of the Holy Spirit, *which has acted hitherto from the outside by arousing us, establishes itself within*, not directly, but through the means of a sacrament [Mystery]. The believer repents, is baptized and receives the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). This is the very action of Divine communion—living and active.<sup>19</sup>

The spiritual classic *Unseen Warfare* makes a similar statement:

Thus teach the holy fathers. Saint Diadoch is the most definite among them, when he says that before holy baptism Divine grace moves a man towards good *from without*, while Satan is hidden in the depths of the heart and soul. But after a man has been baptised, the demon hovers outside the heart, *while grace enters within* (*Philokalia* 4. 76).<sup>20</sup>

Speaking of the manifestation of God's Grace in the Holy Mysteries, Vladimir Lossky writes:

As He descended upon the disciples [at Pentecost] in tongues of fire, so the Holy Spirit descends invisibly upon the newly-baptized in the sacrament of holy chrism. . . . The Holy Spirit is operative in both sacraments. He recreates our nature by purifying it and uniting it to the body of Christ. He also bestows deity—the common energy of the Holy Trinity which is divine grace—upon human persons. It is on account of this intimate connection between the two sacraments of baptism and [chrismation] that the uncreated and deifying gift, which the descent of the Holy Spirit confers upon the members of the

---

<sup>18</sup> "A Conversation," p. 14, emphases ours.

<sup>19</sup> Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1996, p. 113, emphasis ours.

<sup>20</sup> Lorenzo Scupoli, ed. St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, rev. St. Theophan the Recluse (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987), p. 153, emphases ours.

Church, is frequently referred to as “baptismal grace.” . . .Baptismal grace, the presence within us of the Holy Spirit... is the foundation of all Christian life.<sup>21</sup>

The term “baptismal Grace,” also appropriately called “ecclesial Grace,” helps one to keep in mind an important distinction in the way God relates to those within the Church. Thus, Holy Baptism is the Mystery by which a person is incorporated into Christ, which is His Body, the Church (Eph. 1:22-23).<sup>22</sup> By this Mystery, one is given the Holy Spirit and begins to participate as a new creation and “human temple” (1 Cor. 6:19) in the Divine Energies, or Grace, of God. This special impartation of and relation to the Holy Spirit can only be conferred by the Church.

What has been said thus far—especially the distinction between Grace *upon* and *within*—helps to provide a theological explanation for the existence of non-Orthodox Christians who undeniably exhibit the workings of Divine Grace in their lives. There are innumerable examples of believers who clearly appear to have had a deep relationship with Christ, as attested by their words and deeds.<sup>23</sup> Some famous ones readily come to mind: C. S. Lewis—a Christian apologist whose thinking was close to Orthodoxy in many ways—is a “hero” to innumerable Christians of every variety. His writings have been instrumental in leading many to faith in Christ. Then there is Mother Theresa, who is revered by thousands as a model of Christian charity. One also recalls William Law, who wrote the challenging Anglican classic on the spiritual life, *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*. And we cannot forget Cardinal John Henry Newman, whose love for God in his intellectual biography, *Apologia pro vita sua*, is most evident. Of course, Orthodox Christians would readily disagree with many things these people wrote and did. Nevertheless—recognizing in them true feeling, piety, and love for God—, we can rightly thank God for their lives and work, not presuming to know how

---

<sup>21</sup> *Mystical Theology*, pp. 170-171.

<sup>22</sup> The discussion of Baptism in Chapter Five may be largely meaningless to those from Protestant confessions which affirm a nominalist view of the Mysteries—*e.g.*, those descendents of the Zwinglian and Anabaptist wings of the Continental Reformation. The Mysteries are to them mere outward signs and do not spiritually effect anything. In these confessional groups, one becomes a Christian by a mere “profession of faith.” Membership in the (invisible) true Church is by “faith alone.” Thus to them, discussions about the “validity” or efficacy of their sacraments will most likely seem irrelevant.

<sup>23</sup> Caution is required here, however. Occasionally one will find misguided Orthodox Christians who have adopted as their own one or more “saints” of Roman Catholicism (post-Great Schism), Francis of Assisi being the most common. Although we do not wish to cast judgment upon Francis, to uphold such a person as a model is a grave error, as the following studies clearly bear out: *Unseen Light* (Blanco, TX: New Sarov Press, 1999, forthcoming); Father George Macris, “A Comparison of the Mysticism of Francis of Assisi with that of St. Seraphim of Sarov,” *Synaxis*, Vol. 2, pp. 39-56; “Francis of Assisi,” *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. XII, No. 2, pp. 41-42. The divergence of Roman Catholic spirituality from that of Orthodoxy will become readily apparent after reading these.

He will judge them. In such people it is obvious that God has found hearts that are open to Him.

But Orthodox Christians should also say that this openness is in reality the reception of the *external* influence of God's Grace (Divine Energies) upon their lives, which is not the same thing as the *internal* working of ecclesial Grace given only through Baptism. Recall the emphases on this distinction in the above passages by Saint Theophan the Recluse. The following from his *magnum opus* drives our point home with even greater lucidity and ties together the earlier statement about Grace being given to all men:

Thus, for arousal of the slumbering spirit within man and the leading of it to contemplation of the divine way, divine grace either 1) *directly* acts upon it, and, in carrying out its power, gives the opportunity to break the bonds that hold it, or 2) *indirectly* acts on it, shaking the layers and meshes off of it and thereby giving it the freedom to assume its rightful position.

The divine grace that is everywhere-present and fills all things *directly* inspires the spirit of man, impressing thoughts and feelings upon it that turn it away from all finite things and toward another better, albeit invisible and mysterious world.<sup>24</sup>

In other words, it could be said that non-Orthodox Christians such as we have listed—being deeply motivated by a love for God which arose from the external operation of divine Grace—“practiced by nature the demands of the law and did what was pleasing to God.”

However, “[none] of them [found] themselves under the activity of the grace which is present in the Church, and especially the grace which is given in the Mysteries of the Church. They [were] not nourished by that mystical table which leads up along the steps of moral perfection.”<sup>25</sup> Outside of the Church one may be able to make some admirable moral and spiritual progress. One cannot, however, participate in the Grace-filled life of the Church—an existence that is immeasurably different than one finds in the “mere Christianity” outside<sup>26</sup>—or, in this life, achieve the ultimate aim of the Christian Faith—deification (*theosis*).<sup>27</sup>

## Conclusion

---

<sup>24</sup> Trans. Fr. Seraphim Rose and the St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, *The Path to Salvation* (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1996), pp. 109-110.

<sup>25</sup> Father Michael Pomazansky, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology* (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1994 [1983]), p. 245.

<sup>26</sup> On this theme see Archbishop and Holy New Martyr Hilarion (Troitsky), *Christianity or the Church?* (Jordanville, NY: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1985).

<sup>27</sup> On the necessity of divine Grace for Christian perfection see St. John Cassian, *The Conferences*, XIII. St. John lived in Gaul and was a contemporary of St. Augustine. This Conference is a classic treatise on the Orthodox doctrines of Grace and free will.

When endeavoring to understand the Orthodox doctrine of Grace, one must keep in mind not only the unique Orthodox distinction between the Divine Essence and Energies of the Holy Trinity, but also the two ministerial aspects of the Third Person: the general (external) and the special (internal). The general ministry of the Holy Spirit applies to all of creation and involves a variety of salvific activities. Towards mankind His redemptive ministry is of an external nature. His special ministry—involving the internal operation of ecclesial Grace through initially imparted Baptism—is given to the organic members of His Body and continues in the mystical life of the Church, mainly through Holy Communion.

The Trinitarian ministry of the Holy Spirit is available to all. The Spirit of God operates externally upon all of mankind, bringing those who are willing to the Son—who is the Head of the Church, His Body; and once incorporated into Christ through Baptism—having been imbued with the Divine Energies of God—the newly illumined person is given access to the Father.

One should not conclude from an affirmation that the Divine Energies of God act upon *individual persons* that the Christian *group* of which they are a member is therefore a “church” in the truest sense of the word. To affirm such would be to divide the indivisible—for the Church is one as Christ is one—and to allow an admixture of truth with error that denies the promise of the Lord Jesus Christ that He would send the Holy Spirit to guide His Bride into all truth and preserve Her from error.<sup>28</sup> Those Orthodox who observe the virtues found in various heterodox believers and conclude that they must be somehow in the Church because they “appear to be Orthodox in so many ways” have not sufficiently understood or experienced their own Faith. Their charity towards these people is to be commended; yet it must not lead to a distortion of the nature of the Church.

Unfortunately, Orthodox ecumenists often disregard the principles we have briefly laid out in this chapter. The following statements made by Metropolitan Damaskinos of Switzerland constitute a typical example:

We should be prepared to seek and to recognize the presence of the Spirit—which means: the Church—outside our own canonical boundaries, by which we identify the

---

<sup>28</sup> St. John 14:16, 26; 16:13; cf. also 1 Timothy 3:15; St. Matthew 28:20; 2 Timothy 2:15.

The Holy Spirit teaches the Church through the holy Fathers and Teachers of the [Orthodox] catholic Church. . . . The Church is taught by the life-creating Spirit, but not otherwise than [has been taught] through the holy Fathers and Teachers. . . . The [Orthodox] catholic Church cannot sin or err or express falsehood in lieu of truth, for it is the Holy Spirit who forever works through the Fathers and Teachers, who faithfully ministers and protects her from error. (St. Justin of Chelije, summarizing the Orthodox position on the infallibility of the Church with an excerpt from a recent Epistle of the Orthodox Patriarchs, in *The Struggle for Faith*, pp. 134-135.)

one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. . .; only this attitude will allow us to recognize Churches outside our own ecclesiastical boundaries, boundaries which we tend all too often to equate in an exclusivistic way with salvation inside the One. . . .<sup>29</sup>

We trust that our readers can begin to see why there is ecclesiological confusion within Holy Orthodoxy today, and why it is so important to have a firm grounding in Orthodox theology. For to overlook even these elemental points of Orthodox dogma could lead to conclusions that are very spiritually harmful to an Orthodox Christian:

The characteristic belief of the heresy of ecumenism is this: that the Orthodox Church is not the one true Church of Christ; that the grace of God is present also in other "Christian" denominations, and even in non-Christian religions; that the narrow path of salvation according to the teaching of the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church is only "one path among many" to salvation; and that the details of one's belief in Christ are of little importance, as is one's membership in any particular church. Not all the Orthodox participants in the ecumenical movement believe this entirely (although Protestants and Roman Catholics most certainly do); but by their very participation in this movement, including invariably common prayer with those who believe wrongly about Christ and His Church, they tell the heretics who behold them: "*Perhaps what you say is correct,*" even as the wretched disciple of St. Paisius did. *No more than this is required for an Orthodox Christian to lose the grace of God;* and what labor it will cost for him to gain it back!

How much, then, should Orthodox Christians walk in the fear of God, trembling lest they lose His grace, which by no means is given to everyone, but only to those who hold the true Faith, lead a life of Christian struggle, and treasure the grace of God which leads them heavenward.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Archimandrite Cyprian Agiokyprianites, *Orthodoxy and the Ecumenical Movement* (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodoxy Studies, 1997), p. 20. These statements were made during the course of three separate addresses delivered in Lyons (1981), Nice (1981), and Geneva (1995). Concerning the misleading charge of "exclusivism" we will have more to say in the Epilogue.

<sup>30</sup> Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future* (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1996 [1975]), p. 191.

### III. Western Christianity as Heresy

It is not uncommon today to hear Orthodox theologians and clerics teach that Roman Catholicism and Protestantism have never been “formally declared by the Church” to be heretical. Many who teach this—undoubtedly motivated as they are by misguided ecumenical interests—wish to extend the boundaries of the Church in an illegitimate way. Their desire is to convince others that the Church views Western Christians somehow differently than, say, early heretical groups such as Arians or Nestorians. They argue that Protestants and Roman Catholics are merely “estranged brethren” who have maintained some “invisible ties” to the Orthodox Church proportional to the “degree of Christianity” remaining in their confessional body. This false teaching supposedly serves to foster Christian unity. As can be readily attested by anyone who is familiar with Orthodoxy’s internal divisions—most of which have arisen directly as a result of our participation in the Ecumenical Movement—, such teachings have only served to *undermine* true unity and leave the heterodox with stones instead of bread (Saint Matt. 7:9).

A few examples will suffice to give the reader an idea of what is often heard in Orthodox circles heavily influenced by ecumenism. Consider this statement by Nicolas Zernov:

[Western Christians] present. . . a mystery of the *divided Church* which cannot be solved on precedents taken from the epoch of the Seven Ecumenical Councils. It is a *new problem* requiring a search for a fresh approach and confidence in the power of the Holy Spirit to guide the Church in our time as He guided her in the past.

It is necessary to state from the outset, that the attitude to the Christian West *has never been discussed by any representative body of the Orthodox Church*. Neither Roman Catholics nor Protestants *have ever been condemned or excommunicated as such*, so a common policy in regard to them has never been adopted.<sup>31</sup>

Or consider this statement by Metropolitan Maximos of Aenos, the Presiding Hierarchy of the Greek Orthodox Diocese of Pittsburgh, in an unpublished paper on “Sacramental Recognition According to St. Basil [the Great]” that he presented to a meeting of Church leaders in 1997:

---

<sup>31</sup> Zernov, “The One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church and the Anglicans,” p. 531, emphases ours. Compare his statement with these by Bishop Kallistos:

The Orthodox Church in all humility believes itself to be the “one, holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church”, of which the Creed speaks: such is the fundamental conviction which guides Orthodox in their relations with other Christians. There are divisions among Christians, but the Church itself is not divided nor can it ever be. (*The Orthodox Church*, p. 307)

Protestants, who have the basic Christian faith, and thus “valid” Christian baptism, should be accepted into the Orthodox Church by chrismation. Ultra-conservative Orthodox Christian groups try to apply the name of heretic to Protestantism. However, this is an exaggeration, which is not accepted by the “mainline” Orthodox Church....

The Eastern Orthodox Church has not taken a final stand in the evaluation of its sister church, the Roman Catholic Church.... In spite of the rhetoric of the Encyclical [of 1848 (addressing, in part, how Latins coming to Orthodoxy are to be received)], which speaks of “Latin heresies,” the reception of Latin faithful reflects Saint Basil’s practice of receiving the “schismatics.” (By the way, I am personally very happy that the term “schismatic” has recently been supplanted by “estranged.”)

This Bishop has a doctorate in theology. When statements such as these are made by men of weighty credentials and of Episcopal rank—and many more statements from a variety of sources could be cited—, it is no wonder that so many have an incorrect understanding of the real situation. Let us examine these astonishing claims in the light of Holy Tradition.

### **Roman Catholicism**

The many heretical innovations introduced into the Faith by the Latin communion—especially the insertion of the *filioque* clause (“and the Son”) into the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, and the Papal dogmas of universal authority and infallibility “*ex cathedra*”—have without any doubt led to the declaration by numerous pan-Orthodox synods and Church Fathers that Roman Catholicism is persistently and defiantly heretical. Father Michael Azkoul conveniently summarizes these declarations:

If any have doubts that Papists and Protestants are heretics, let him have recourse to history, to the reputable and sagacious opinions and statements of councils, encyclicals and theologians. From the time of blessed Saint Photius, when Papism was coming into being, the Church of God has defined Her attitude towards this ecclesiological heresy even as She had towards the triadological and christological heresies of ancient times. The Council of Constantinople (879-880) under Photius declared the various innovations of the West to be heretical (J.D. Mansi, *Sacro. Council. nova et amplis. collect.* Venice, 1759, XVI, 174C, 405C); and the Council of the same imperial city (1009) confirmed the decisions of Photius against the Papists (Mansi, XXXL, 799f). Theophylact of Ochrida condemned the Papal errors (PG 126 224) as did Nicephorus Blemnydes, Patriarch of Constantinople (PG 142 533-564).

. . . Again, George of Cyprus (PG 142 1233-1245), Germanus II, Patriarch of Constantinople (PG 140 621-757), Saint Marcus Eugenicos (PG 140 1071-1100) and Patriarch of Constantinople, Gennadius (PG 160 320-373) all condemn the Papist heresies as does Saint Simeon of Thessalonica (*Dial. Christ. Contra Omn. Haer.*, PG 155 105-

108), the illustrious successor to the most blessed, Saint Gregory Palamas, God-mantled enemy of Latin Scholasticism.<sup>32</sup>

One could also add the thirteenth-century *Synodicon of the Holy Spirit*—which is appointed to be read in every Orthodox Church on the second day of Pentecost—, with its many anathemas against the Latin heresies, as well as the *Sigillon* of 1583—written on the occasion of Pope Gregory XIII’s introduction of the Gregorian Calendar and containing a short summary of numerous Roman errors, with an anathema following each.<sup>33</sup>

In the Patriarchal Encyclical of 1848, “A Reply to the Epistle of Pope Pius IX, ‘to the Easterners,’”—written in response to Latin reunion overtures and signed by no less than the heads of all four ancient Patriarchates and twenty-nine other Bishops—we read:

§ 5, xv. All erroneous doctrine touching the Catholic truth of the Blessed Trinity, and the origin of the divine Persons, and the subsistence of the Holy Ghost, is and is called heresy, and they who so hold are deemed heretics, according to the sentence of Saint Damasus, Pope of Rome, who says: “If any one rightly holds concerning the Father and the Son, yet holds not rightly of the Holy Ghost, he is an heretic” (Cath. Conf. of Faith which Pope Damasus sent to Paulinus, Bishop of Thessalonica). 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 Saint 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.<sup>34</sup>

The heresies cited in this Patriarchal Encyclical have not been renounced by the Roman Catholic Church. Moreover, the dogmas of Papal Infallibility and the Immaculate Conception have been added. The chasm only widens.

While it is true that at various times prior to these rulings the Church was hesitant to issue a formal declaration concerning the heresy of Roman Catholicism, this was often due to exigencies in which prudent archpastoral guidance dictated silence. It was not due to any wavering of the ecclesial consciousness. Such is the explicit thought of Saint Mark of Ephesus:

---

<sup>32</sup> Father Michael Azkoul, “An Open Letter to the Orthodox Hierarchy” (Seattle, WA: St. Nectarios Press Educational Series).

<sup>33</sup> Many of these items can be found in the OCIC compendium “Are Protestantism and Roman Catholicism *Heretical?*”

<sup>34</sup> Similar charges can be found in the Encyclical of 1895, also drafted in response to Roman Catholic overtures of union.

But [Saint] Mark [of Ephesus], daring more than the rest, proclaimed that the Latins were not only schismatics, but heretics. "Our Church," said Mark, "has kept silence on this, because the Latins are more powerful and numerous than we are; but we, in fact, have broken all ties with them, for the very reason that they are heretics."<sup>35</sup>

Whatever reticence the Church may have had regarding the Latins in the first two centuries following the Great Schism can also be viewed as patient hope for their full return. The largely symbolic date of 1054 does not pinpoint the date of separation of West from East. Nor can one responsibly state that the Roman church ceased overnight to be a repository of ecclesial Grace. Rather, it became spiritually ill, the disease of heresy spread, and the great branch of the West was finally detached from the rest of the Body, a reality which the Saints and various Synods since that time attest. This process may have lasted for decades—or even centuries—after the Great Schism. Speaking of the decline of true Christianity in the West, Father Seraphim of Platina remarks:

One might cite numerous manifestations of this remarkable change in the West: the beginnings of Scholasticism or the academic-analytical approach to knowledge as opposed to the traditional-synthetic approach of Orthodoxy; the beginning of the ["]age of romance," when fables and legends were introduced into Christian texts; the new naturalism in art (Giotto) which destroyed iconography; the new "personal" concept of sanctity (Francis of Assisi), unacceptable to Orthodoxy, which gave rise to later Western "mysticism" and eventually to the innumerable sects and pseudo-religious movements of modern times; and so forth. The cause of this change is something that cannot be evident to a Roman Catholic scholar: it is the loss of grace which follows on separation from the Church of Christ and which puts one at the mercy of the "spirit of the times" and of purely logical and human ways of life and thought.<sup>36</sup>

Much more could be cited concerning the heresy of Papism. However, the following remarks from the early eighteenth century by Saint Paisius (Velichkovsky) of Niamets suffice to conclude this section. The individual to whom he was writing was a Uniate priest, and thus Orthodox in nearly every way save for his use of the *filioque* clause in the Creed and his communion with the Roman Pontiff. Saint Paisius' wholly Orthodox admonitions seem unnecessarily alarming and fastidious to most modern ears:

. . . All the holy ecumenical teachers who have interpreted the Scriptures as if with one mouth say that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, and nowhere have they written that He proceeds from the Son also. Thus, if the Uniates think exactly like the

---

<sup>35</sup> Ivan Ostroumoff (Boston: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 1971), p. 122. As Protestant bodies are much less powerful than the Latin church, the declarations concerning them have been historically less guarded.

<sup>36</sup> St. Gregory of Tours, *Vita Patrum: The Life of the Fathers*, trans. Father Seraphim Rose and Paul Bartlett, ed. Father Seraphim Rose (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1988), p. 70.

Romans in such a serious heresy, what hope do they have for salvation, unless they openly renounce this Spirit-fighting heresy and become united again with the Holy Orthodox Eastern Church?

Spare neither property nor relatives if they do not wish to listen to you, but by all means save your own soul from perdition; because there is nothing more needful for you than the soul for which Christ died.... Depart and flee from the Unia as speedily as possible lest death overtake you in it and you be numbered among the heretics and not among the Christians. And not only go away yourself, but advise others to go away also, if in your conscience you know that they will hear you. And if they will not hear you, then at least depart yourself from the nets of the enemy and be united in soul and heart with the Holy Orthodox Church, and thus, together with all [the faithful] holding the inviolate faith and fulfilling the commandments of Christ, you will be able to be saved.<sup>37</sup>

There can be no mistaking the position of the Orthodox Church vis-à-vis Roman Catholicism.

### Protestantism

Unfortunately, classical Protestantism is cut from the same cloth as Papism,<sup>38</sup> while at the same time it is often much further from Orthodox Christianity than is Roman Catholicism. We cite again Father Michael's useful summary:

---

<sup>37</sup> Schema-monk Metrophanes, trans. Father Seraphim (Rose), *Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky* (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Press, 1994 [1976]), pp. 201-202.

<sup>38</sup> "'All Protestants are Crypto-Papists,' wrote the Russian theologian Alexis Khomiakov to an English friend in the year 1846. '... To use the concise language of algebra, all the West knows but one datum  $a$ ; whether it be preceded by the positive sign  $+$ , as with the Romanists, or with the negative sign  $-$ , as with the Protestants, the  $a$  remains the same. Now a passage to Orthodoxy seems indeed like an apostasy from the past, from its science, creed, and life. It is rushing into a new and unknown world.' Khomiakov, when he spoke of the datum  $a$ , had in mind the fact that western Christians, whether Free Churchmen, Anglicans, or Roman Catholics, have a common background in the past. . . . In the West it is usual to think of Roman Catholicism and Protestantism as opposite extremes; but to an Orthodox they appear as two sides of the same coin." (Ware, *op. cit.*, p. 2). See also Khomiakov's "On the Western Confessions of Faith" in *Ultimate Questions: An Anthology of Modern Russian Religious Thought*, ed. [Fr.] Alexander Schmemmann (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977), pp. 31-70. Note also what the Blessed Archimandrite Justin (Popovich) of Chelije had to say in his famous treatise "Papism as the Oldest Protestantism":

Papism indeed is the most radical Protestantism, because it has transferred the foundation of Christianity from the eternal God-Man to ephemeral man. And it has proclaimed this as the paramount dogma, which means: the paramount value, the paramount measure of all beings and things in the world. And the Protestants merely accepted this dogma in its essence, and worked it out in terrifying magnitude and detail. Essentially, Protestantism is nothing other than a generally applied papism. For in Protestantism, the fundamental principle of papism is brought to life by each man individually. After the example of the infallible man in Rome, each Protestant is a cloned infallible man, because he pretends to personal

In the 16th Century, despite the Turkish yoke, Patriarch Jeremiah II of Constantinople rejected the Lutheran overtures in his *Three Answers* on the ground of heresy while the Council of Constantinople (1638) repudiated the Calvinist heresies; the Council of Jassy (1642) with Peter Moghila denounced “all Western innovations” and the Council of Jerusalem (1672) under the famous Patriarch Dositheus published its 18 decrees together with the pronouncements of the Patriarch, *Confessio Dosithei*, forming thereby the “shield of truth” which opposed “the spirit of the ancient Church” to “the heresies of both the Latins and the Protestants” (See I Mesolora, *Symbol of the Eastern Orthodox Church* (vol. IV), Athens, 1904). Of course, the heresy of the Papists and Protestants is a clear affirmation of the Orthodox Church as the “One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church” as declared the Council of Constantinople (1672), the Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs (1848), the Council of Constantinople (1872), the Patriarchal Encyclical of 1895, the Holy Russian Synod of 1904, and the memorable words of [the] Patriarch of Constantinople, Joachim II, “Our desire is that all heretics shall come to the bosom of the Orthodox Church of Christ which alone is able to give them salvation . . .” (in Chrestos Androutsos, *The Basis for Union . . . Constantinople*, 1905, p. 36).<sup>39</sup>

Proliferation of heretical doctrine is especially a characteristic of much modern Protestantism. Although most Protestants do not consciously espouse any of the early Trinitarian and Christological heresies, even the most “traditional” of the “churches” to which they belong affirm (at most) only the first four Œcumenical Synods. In those cases, however, major inconsistencies can be found which betray a superficial understanding of Christian truth.<sup>40</sup>

For example, among the main tenets of Protestantism is that the true Church is invisible, that it can be visibly divided along dogmatic lines, and that the ancient threefold clerical order of Deacons, Priests, and Bishops in Apostolic Succession is not of the essence of the Church. These firmly entrenched beliefs are inconsistent with the Christology ratified by the Fourth Œcumenical Synod at Chalcedon. Jordan Bajis writes:

One of the most significant Church councils pertaining to the doctrine of Christ was the Council of Chalcedon (451). In its profession, we gain not only a great insight into the nature of Christ, but also a perception of the Church as well. “The doctrine of the

---

infallibility in matters of faith. It can be said: Protestantism is a vulgarized papism, only stripped of mystery (*i.e.*, sacramentality), authority and power. (unpublished; see the OCIC).

<sup>39</sup> “An Open Letter to the Orthodox Hierarchy.”

<sup>40</sup> As St. John Cassian stated so forcefully in his treatise *Against the Nestorians*, the dogmas of the Christian Faith are all interrelated:

For the scheme of the mysteries of the Church and the Catholic faith is such that one who denies one portion of the Sacred Mystery cannot confess the other. For all parts of it are so bound up and united together that one cannot stand without the other and if a man denies one point out of the whole number, it is of no use for him to believe all the others. (Book VI, Ch. XVII. *Op. cit.*, p. 600)

Church is not an ‘appendix’ to Christology, and not just an extrapolation of the ‘Christological principle,’ as it has been often assumed. There is much more than an ‘analogy.’ Ecclesiology, in the Orthodox view is an integral part of Christology. One can evolve the whole body of Orthodox Dogma out of the Dogma of Chalcedon.”<sup>41</sup>

A related example concerns the decisions and ramifications of the Third Ecumenical Synod (431). Although many Protestants understand that this Synod was concerned with the condemnation of Nestorianism, few seem to realize that many of the arguments centered around the use of the term *Theotokos*—or “Mother of God”—for the Blessed Virgin Mary. This was so much the case that Bishop Kallistos has written:

The same primacy that the word *homoousion* occupies in the doctrine of the Trinity, the word *Theotokos* holds in the doctrine of the Incarnation.<sup>42</sup>

Nevertheless, Protestants reject the use of this term and, except for “High Church Anglicans,” are utterly opposed to honoring the Virgin Mary. In so doing they unwittingly deny the Incarnation.<sup>43</sup>

Such is their affirmation of the early Ecumenical Synods!

Finally, it goes without saying that modern Protestant worship and piety, however sincere, are far from the Trinitarian,<sup>44</sup> Hesychastic, and Eucharistic foundations of

---

<sup>41</sup> *Common Ground: An Introduction to Eastern Christianity for the American Christian*, by Jordan Bassis [Minneapolis, MN: Light and Life, 1991], p. 129, citing Father George Florovsky, “The Ethos of the Orthodox Church,” *Ecumenical Review*, XII, 2, 1960, p. 197.) For more on this see “The Church Is Visible and One: A Critique of Protestant Ecclesiology”, by Patrick Barnes (OCIC).

<sup>42</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>43</sup> Not only that, but Protestant ecclesiology also reflects a Nestorian Christology. Although some Protestant groups recite the Nicene Creed in worship, they do not understand all of the Creed’s articles in the same way as the Orthodox. Most of all they misunderstand the ninth article (“And [I believe] *in One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church*”):

To say that we [Protestants] do not believe *in* the Church because the Church is not God sounds perfectly reasonable. It sounds as though we are safeguarding ourselves from any pagan confusion between Creator and creature. Yet, this obsession with protecting the “honor” of God was precisely the motivation behind both the Arian and Nestorian heresies. Indeed, this is nothing else than the application of Nestorian theology to the doctrine of the Church. (Innocent [Clark] Carlton, *The Way: What Every Protestant Should Know About the Orthodox Church* [Salisbury, MA: Regina Press, 1997], pp. 210-213, emphasis his.)

On the development of the ninth article of the Nicene Creed, see “The Church Is Visible and One.” The author makes extensive use of various Protestant scholars whose conclusions about the Nicene Creed seem rather inconsistent with their religious affiliations. Most noteworthy among these scholars is T. F. Torrance, from whose book *The Trinitarian Faith* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993) he cites pp. 275-280. The fact that bright academic lights do not take to heart what they discover is not an altogether surprising aspect of human nature, especially in the pluralistic West.

<sup>44</sup> “Although Baptists profess faith in the Trinity, when you get right down to it, that belief is not much more than lip-service. The Trinity is rarely mentioned in Baptist churches, except at Baptisms, and has

Orthodoxy. Indeed, Protestantism has deviated heavily even from its *own* “classical” roots—a fact which is well documented and often bemoaned in their more conservative (“Evangelical”) and informed circles.<sup>45</sup>

We do not say these things in a spirit of disparagement or triumphalism, but merely in order to show that Protestants are members of groups that uphold a myriad of doctrines completely antithetical to the Apostolic Faith preserved solely in the Orthodox Church. Protestant “churches” cannot be “somehow in the Church”—or “sister churches,” as the infamous Patriarchal Encyclical of 1920 calls them (a first in the history of Orthodoxy!)—when they emphatically deny the very reality of Her visible unity and existence, as authoritatively expressed in the ninth article of the Nicene Creed and unanimously understood by all Christians prior to the Reformation.

In his critique of Protestant beliefs, Hierodeacon (now Hieromonk) Gregory—a convert from the Dutch Reformed confession—forcefully sums up the Orthodox view of Protestantism “*There is a great gulf fixed* [St. Luke 16:26] between Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism.”<sup>46</sup>

### Degrees of “Churchness”?

Despite this evidence, one popular line of reasoning contends that these heretical bodies are churches to the degree that they are Orthodox. Supposedly, the nearer they are to Orthodoxy—*e.g.*, traditional Anglicans—the greater degree of “churchness” they have—in an ontological sense. However, as the ever-memorable Metropolitan Philaret—the former First Hierarchy of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad and man of considerable learning and sanctity whose relics were recently found to be almost entirely incorrupt—points out:

Perhaps somebody will say that times have changed, and heresies now are not so malicious and destructive as in the days of the Ecumenical Councils. But are those

---

absolutely nothing to do with how the church is organized or how Baptists view themselves as persons created in the image of God. In the final analysis, the Trinity is simply the solution to a theological problem: ‘How can Jesus be both God and different from the Father at the same time?’ The doctrine, as understood by Baptists and most other Protestants, has no positive content. If every reference to the Trinity were removed from Baptist hymnals and books, few people would even notice.” (*Ibid.*, pp. 52-53.)

<sup>45</sup> See numerous books by Thomas Oden, beginning with his *After Modernity...What?: Agenda for Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990); Philip J. Lee, *Against the Protestant Gnostics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994); David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993).

<sup>46</sup> *The Church, Tradition, Scripture, Truth, and Christian Life: Some Heresies of Evangelicalism and an Orthodox Response* (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1995), p. 23. For a thorough critique of the Protestant doctrine of *sola Scriptura* consult Fr. John Whiteford, *Sola Scriptura: An Orthodox Analysis of the Cornerstone of Reformed Theology* (Ben Lomond, CA: Conciliar Press, 1996).

Protestants who renounce the veneration of the Theotokos and the Saints, who do not recognize the grace of the hierarchy,—or the Roman Catholics, who have invented new errors,—are they nearer to the Orthodox Church than the Arians or Semi-Arians?

Let us grant that modern preachers of heresy are not so belligerent towards the Orthodox Church as the ancient ones were. However, that is not because their doctrines are nearer to Orthodox teaching, but because Protestantism and Ecumenism have built up in them the conviction that there is no One and True Church on earth, but only communities of men who are in varying degrees of error. Such a doctrine kills any zeal in professing what they take to be the truth, and therefore modern heretics appear to be less obdurate than the ancient ones.<sup>47</sup>

We should remember that the ancient Donatists and Novatianists were in faith and rite identical to the Orthodox. Yet these groups were never seen by the Church as “somehow still a part of Her,” or as legitimate true churches in their own right. Consider how Saint Cyprian of Carthage reasoned in the third century:

But if any one objects, by way of saying that Novatian holds the same law which the Catholic Church holds, baptizes with the same symbol with which we baptize, knows the same God and Father, the same Christ the Son, the same Holy Spirit, and that for this reason he may claim the power of baptizing, namely, that he seems not to differ from us in the baptismal interrogatory; let any one that thinks that this may be objected, know first of all, that there is not one law of the Creed, nor the same interrogatory common to us and to schismatics. For when they say, “Dost thou believe the remission of sins and life eternal through the holy Church?” they lie in their interrogatory, since they have not the Church. Then, besides, with their own voice they themselves confess that remission of sins cannot be given except by the holy Church; and not having this, they show that sins cannot be remitted among them.... How can they complete what they do, or obtain anything by lawless endeavours from God, seeing that they are endeavouring against God what is not lawful to them? Wherefore they who patronize Novatian or other schismatics of that kind, contend in vain that any one can be baptized and sanctified with a saving baptism among them, when it is plain that he who baptizes has not the power of baptizing.<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, the Monophysite heretics, (or “Oriental Orthodox”, as ecumenists have renamed them)—the Copts, Jacobites, and other “Non-Chalcedonians”—are, besides their rejection of the fundamental dogmatic teaching concerning the Person of Christ (Synod of Chalcedon, 451), “*in every other way Orthodox*”—to quote a much-abused phrase

---

<sup>47</sup> Metropolitan Philaret, from his “First Sorrowful Epistle,” July 24, 1969 (n.s.).

<sup>48</sup> *Epistle LXXV*, “To Magnus” (7-8). *Epistles LXVIII-LXXV* are the main writings dealing with the baptismal controversy.

from a relevant text by Saint John of Damascus.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, they have no ontological relation to the Orthodox Church, having separated from Her long ago.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, despite whatever “nearness” to Orthodoxy one may find in the heterodox confessional bodies of Western Christianity, they are in most respects much farther from the Truth than were the Donatists and Novatianists—whose doctrine was Orthodox—and the Monophysites, who “in every other way are Orthodox.”

## Conclusion

Despite what various Orthodox ecumenists might say, there is no doubt that the heretical status of Western Christianity in all its forms has been attested by the Orthodox Church in sundry ways—officially, and through the mouths of Her Saints who bear witness to the ecclesial consciousness. Rome departed from the Church long ago; and the Protestant bodies emerged—as the other side of the same coin—from this once-great bastion of Holy Orthodoxy in the West.

Let all Orthodox who yearn for Christian unity rightly mourn these tragic divisions; but let us face these problems with honesty and integrity, not failing to preserve inviolate the teachings of the Holy Orthodox Church. This is the responsibility of all the faithful, “because the protector of religion is the very body of the Church, even the people themselves....”<sup>51</sup> In part this means we must be honest with the heterodox about their ecclesial status and not pretend that the Orthodox Church has never declared Her position on such matters. To do otherwise is to mislead them and ultimately to confirm them in their errors.

---

<sup>49</sup> Protopresbyter Theodore Zisis, “St. John of Damascus and the ‘Orthodoxy’ of the Non-Chalcedonians” (OCIC).

<sup>50</sup> “The Copts are Monophysites and thus heretics. Their Mysteries are invalid and, should they join the Orthodox Church, they must be received as non-Orthodox. Indeed, now that most Copts have rejected the errors of the Monophysite heresy, this is a time for their reunion with Orthodoxy. Here is a place for true ecumenism. But despite the fact that the time seems ripe, we must still rest on the Providence of God and restore the Copts to Orthodoxy *in a proper way*. One cannot say that he is Orthodox simply because he believes correctly and recites the Creed. He must be received into the Church by Chrismation or Baptism. The fact that the Copts were once Orthodox, fell away, and have now come to right belief is neither here nor there. Grace does not withstand generations of heresy and separation from the Church.” (*Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. IX, No. 1, p. 8, emphases ours)

<sup>51</sup> Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs (1848), “A Reply to the Epistle of Pope Pius IX, ‘to the Easterns.’”

## IV. Culpability, Sincerity, and Victimization

Despite what we have said concerning Western Christianity, there will still be those who object to the *ramifications*, arguing that the overwhelming majority of Western heterodox are not conscious, willful heretics—being, for the most part, innocently ignorant of Orthodoxy or mere “*victims*” of heresy and historical circumstance—, thus rendering inapplicable the Sacred Canons concerning heretics.

Roman Catholic writers employ the terms “formal heresy”—*i.e.*, consciously and obstinately held—and “material heresy”—*i.e.*, unknowingly held—to reflect a pastoral sensitivity to the concept of “degrees of responsibility.” Though Orthodox writers do not often use these exact terms, the distinction is legitimate and can be drawn from Holy Tradition. Saint Cyprian writes:

For one who errs by simplicity may be pardoned, as the blessed Apostle Paul says of himself, “I who at first was a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; yet obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly” [1 Tim. 1:13]. But after inspiration and revelation made to him, he who intelligently and knowingly perseveres in that course in which he had erred, sins without pardon for his ignorance. For he resists with a certain presumption and obstinacy, when he is overcome by reason.<sup>52</sup>

It is indeed true that many Western Christians are mere victims of heresy, in blissful ignorance of Orthodoxy and therefore not formal heretics. Were some of these same people to be given the opportunity to encounter Orthodoxy, they would undoubtedly convert. Of these tenderhearted ones that only God knows, one might borrow the words of Saint Gregory the Theologian and say, “Even before [they were] of our fold they were ours.”<sup>53</sup>

The author personally knows many pious heterodox followers of Christ. Moreover, his experience as a former Protestant was spiritually positive in numerous ways. In a very real sense it prepared the way for him to embrace the fullness of Christianity, for many good and true things were taught to him during that period, and a relationship with God was cultivated. Father Seraphim (Rose) of Platina, himself a convert to Orthodoxy from Protestantism, often observed admirable Christian faith in Protestants. In speaking about a sect that was located near the Saint Herman Brotherhood in Platina, he wrote:

These Protestants have a simple and warm Christian faith without much of the sectarian narrowness that characterizes many Protestant groups. They don’t believe, like some

---

<sup>52</sup> *Epistle LXXII, “To Jubaianus,”* Ch. 13. Cf. the words of Christ concerning blasphemy against the Holy Spirit—Who is the Spirit of Truth—in St. Matthew 12:1-32.

<sup>53</sup> See Chapter Six.

Protestants, that they are “saved” and don’t need to do any more; they believe in the idea of spiritual struggle and training the soul. They force themselves to forgive each other and not to hold grudges. They take in bums and hippies off the streets and have a special farm for rehabilitating them and teaching them a sense of responsibility. In other words, they take Christianity seriously as the most important thing in life; it’s not the fullness of Christianity that we Orthodox have, but it’s good as far as it goes, and these people are warm, loving people who obviously love Christ. In this way they are an example of what we should be, only more so. *Whether they attain salvation by their practice of Christianity is for God to judge*, for some of their views and actions are far from the true Christianity of Orthodoxy handed down to us from Christ and His Apostles; but at least an awareness of their existence should help us to be aware of what we already have.<sup>54</sup>

The aforementioned Metropolitan Philaret expressed similar views:

It is self-evident... that sincere Christians who are Roman Catholics, or Lutherans, or members of other non-Orthodox confessions, cannot be termed renegades or heretics—i.e. those who *knowingly* pervert the truth. . . . They have been born and raised and are living according to the creed which they have inherited, just as do the majority of you who are Orthodox; in their lives there has not been a moment of *personal and conscious renunciation of Orthodoxy*. The Lord, “Who will have all men to be saved” (1 Tim. 2:4) and “Who enlightens every man born into the world” (John 1:9), undoubtedly is leading them also towards salvation in His own way.<sup>55</sup>

In short, it is certainly appropriate to concede that many, if not most, Western Christians are not conscious, willful heretics.

Ultimately, however, none of this has any bearing on the applicability of the Sacred Canons concerning the reception of schismatics and heretics. Such arguments are irrelevant to the question of the *ecclesial* status of heterodox Christians. As we shall see in the next chapter, the Holy Canons concerning heterodox baptism and reception into the Church make no distinction between formal and material heretics. Distinctions among heterodox *groups* are made—for instance Saint Basil’s First Canon and Canon 95 of the

---

<sup>54</sup> *The Orthodox Word*, Sept.-Oct., 1980 (94), p. 218, emphasis ours. Cf. his remarks in *Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future*:

But what is it that those outside the Church of Christ are capable of teaching Orthodox Christians? It is certainly true (no conscious Orthodox person will deny it) that Orthodox Christians are sometimes put to shame by the fervor and zeal of some Roman Catholics and Protestants for church attendance, missionary activities, praying together, reading the Scripture, and the like. Fervent non-Orthodox persons can shame the Orthodox, even in the error of their beliefs, when they make more effort to please God than many Orthodox people do while possessing the whole fullness of apostolic Christianity. The Orthodox would do well to learn from them and wake up to the spiritual riches in their own Church which they fail to see out of spiritual sloth or bad habits. All this relates to the *human* side of faith, to the human efforts which can be expended in religious activities whether one's belief is right or wrong. (*Op. cit.*, p. 122)

<sup>55</sup> From the pamphlet “Will the Heterodox Be Saved?” (leaflet #L213) published by the St. John of Kronstadt Press.

Sixth Œcumenical Synod—but not between “leaders” and “simple ignorant followers.” Though surely the leaders of the Donatist and Novationist sects—towards which these Canons were directed—were more culpable or “formal” in their heterodox stance, the great mass of the people under their care were in all likelihood mere victims. By the seventh century, there were many generations of people who were simply born into the errors created by the original leaders of these sects, innocently holding to their errors and in all sincerity believing that they were right-believing Christians. Nevertheless, no distinction is made between leaders and victims. The guidelines for the reception of innocent laypeople are no different than for more responsible and culpable clergy.

### Conclusion

There is no such thing as an inverse relationship between culpability or sincerity and the validity of heterodox sacraments. The distinction between formal and material heretic is helpful, but ultimately it is of consequence only for the sons and daughters of the Church who fall into error. For those who have never been Orthodox and hold to heterodox beliefs—whether “formally” or “materially”—the ramifications are the same: they are separated from the Church. The extent of a person’s participation in the heresies of the confessional bodies in which he or she is a member is a “downstream” issue that is ultimately irrelevant as far as *ecclesial* status is concerned. Correspondingly, the varying “degrees of Orthodoxy” of a particular heterodox group are—on an ontological level—of no consequence.

Where the issue of “victimization” and guilt *may* be applicable is in the question of *eternal* status. As we have already shown, and will have an opportunity to demonstrate further, the question of a heterodox believer’s eternal destiny should be left open. In other words, the ecclesial and eternal implications of Orthodox ecclesiology—the two aspects of the “status” to which Bishop Kallistos refers in the “burning question”—should be kept separate.

## V. An Evaluation of Heterodox Baptism

Given that Holy Baptism is the “doorway into the Church,” the question of the validity of heterodox sacraments is crucial to our topic. Non-Orthodox Christians who wrestle with this issue often phrase it in this way:

If I (speaking as a Protestant) have put on Christ through Baptism (Gal. 3:27), and am therefore a member of His Body (Eph. 5:30); and if His Body is the Church (Eph. 1:22-23), then am I not also a member of the Church? And if the Orthodox Church is the ‘one True Church,’ how can I not be a member of it in some sense?<sup>56</sup>

A full treatment of how Orthodox should view the sacraments of heterodox Christians is beyond the scope of this work. What follows is merely a brief summary of what has been stated so eloquently and thoroughly by others.<sup>57</sup>

Although certain Orthodox would argue differently today, the traditional teaching is that the Church does not recognize the spiritual “validity” or efficacy of heterodox sacraments *per se*—*i.e.*, in and of themselves, apart from the Church. Baptism is only given *by* and *in* the Church, “the eternal keeper of [ecclesial] grace” (Saint Seraphim of Sarov). Those who have never been in visible communion with the Orthodox Church are, from Her standpoint, *unbaptized*. This is the only theologically consistent position that can be derived from a thorough study of Holy Tradition—in particular, the Sacred Canons.

### The Sacred Canons and Ecclesial Boundaries

Apostolic Canons 46, 47, and 50 are the earliest written decrees, or pastoral guidelines, on the reception of converts:

---

<sup>56</sup> This question was asked of Father Thomas Hopko, Dean of St. Vladimir’s Seminary, by the author during a lecture which the former gave at the Greek Orthodox Church of the Assumption in Seattle, Washington on November 2, 1996. Part of Father Hopko’s answer, which seemed good at the time, is critiqued in Appendix I.

<sup>57</sup> See the following key works: Archbishop Hilarion (Troitsky), *The Unity of the Church and the World Conference of Christian Communities* (Montreal: Monastery Press, 1975); Father George Metallinos, *I Confess One Baptism* (Mt. Athos: St. Paul’s Monastery, 1994; distributed by the Monastery of the Holy Ascension in Resaca, GA); *The Rudder*, trans. D. Cummings (Chicago: The Orthodox Christian Educational Society, 1957); Timothy [now Bishop Kallistos] Ware, *Eustratios Argenti: A Study of the Greek Church Under Turkish Rule*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964); “The Form of Holy Baptism,” *The True Vine*, Summer 1989, No. 2; “The Reception of Converts,” *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. XI, No. 1, pp. 6-11; and “Baptism and Grace” by Father Gregory Telepneff, *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. III, No. 1). See also the “Baptism and the Reception of Converts” page (OCIC) for numerous supplementary articles.

Canon 46: We order that a bishop or presbyter that recognized the baptism or sacrifice of heretics be defrocked. For “what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?” (2 Cor. 6:15).

Canon 50: If a bishop or presbyter conduct an initiation [*i.e.* baptism] and perform not three immersions, but one immersion—that administered into the Lord's death—let him be anathema.<sup>58</sup>

Canon 1 of the Synod of Carthage (c. 258), confirmed and upheld by the Sixth Ecumenical Synod, is another authoritative and representative expression of the Church's position regarding the non-Orthodox. It is worth quoting at length, as it aptly summarizes the Orthodox view of heterodox sacraments:

While assembled in Council, beloved brethren, we read letters sent by you, concerning those among the heretics and schismatics presuming to be baptized who are coming over to the catholic Church which is one, in which we are baptized and regenerated. . . . Decreeing now also by vote what we firmly and securely hold for all time, we declare that no one can possibly be baptized outside the catholic Church, there being but one baptism, and this existing only in the catholic Church. . . .

. . .the [baptismal] water must first be purified and sanctified by the priest, in order that it may be capable of washing away the sins of the person being baptized when he is thereinto immersed. And through the Prophet Ezekiel, the Lord says: “And I will sprinkle you with clean water, and cleanse you, and I will give you a new heart, and I will give you a new spirit” (Ezek. 36:25). But how can he who is himself unclean, and with whom there is no Holy Spirit, purify and sanctify water, with the Lord saying in the book of Numbers: “And everything the unclean man touches shall be unclean” (Num. 19:22)? How can he who was not able to rid himself of his own sins, being as he is outside the Church, baptize and grant remission of sins to another? . . . Moreover, it is necessary that he who has been baptized be chrismated, so that receiving the chrism he become a partaker of Christ. But the heretic cannot sanctify oil, seeing that he has neither altar nor Church. It is not possible for there to exist any chrism whatsoever among the heretics. For it is obvious to us that oil can by no means be sanctified among them for such worthy use. And we ought to know and not ignore that it has been written: “Let not the oil of a sinner anoint my head,” which the Holy Spirit even long ago declared in the Psalms (140:6); lest anyone be tracked down and led astray from the right way and be chrismated by the heretics, the enemies of Christ.

After reiterating the point that that one who is outside the Church is deprived of all mysteriological Grace, the Synod concludes:

---

<sup>58</sup> Except where noted, citations of Sacred Canons related to Holy Baptism are taken from Appendix I of *I Confess One Baptism*. The translations are more accurate than those in *The Rudder*.

Baptism being one, and the Holy Spirit being one, there is also but one Church, founded upon (Peter the Apostle of old confessing) oneness by Christ our Lord. And for this reason, whatever is performed by them [*i.e.* the heretics] is reprobate, being as it is counterfeit and void. For nothing can be acceptable or desirable to God which is performed by them, whom the Lord in the Gospels calls His foes and enemies: "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters" (Mt.12:30). And the blessed Apostle John, in keeping with the Lord's commands, wrote in his epistle: "You have heard that the Antichrist is coming, and now many antichrists have appeared" (1 Jn. 2:18). Hence we know it is the last hour. They came out from among us, but they were not from among us. Therefore, we too ought to understand and consider that the enemies of the Lord, and the so-called antichrists, would not be able to gratify the Lord. And therefore, we who have the Lord with us, and who hold fast to the unity of the Lord, abundantly supplied as we are in proportion to His excellence, and exercising His priesthood in the Church: we ought to disapprove, and refuse, and reject, and consider profane everything done by those opposed to Him, *i.e.* His foes the antichrists. And we ought to impart in full the mystery of divine power, unity, faith and truth unto those who from error and perversity come to us for knowledge of the Church's true faith.

Additional Canons could be cited, including the oft-debated Canon 7 of the Second Ecumenical Synod and the nearly identical Canon 95 of the Sixth. All of these Canons reflect the Church's *indisputable dogmatic boundaries* which the Holy Spirit inspired the Fathers to delineate. These boundaries remain binding on the Church to this day.

### **The Principle of Economy: Explained and Applied**

When the Orthodox Church receives converts by means other than Baptism, it is always and only by what is called economy (Gr., *oikonomia*). Since this term is both critical to our study and often misunderstood, let us consider Bishop Kallistos' superb explanation of it in his scholarly work *Eustratios Argenti: A Study of the Greek Church Under Turkish Rule*:

The Greek word *oikonomia* signifies literally "the management of a household or family" (so Liddell and Scott), *oikonomos* meaning a "steward". In a religious context economy can be exercised either by God or by the Church. It indicates God's management of His creation, His providential ordering of the world, and in particular the supreme act of divine providence, the Incarnation, which the Greek Fathers call "the Economy" without further qualification [cf. also Saint John 3:16; Saint Matt. 9:13]. But since the activity of the Church is integrally connected with the action of God in Christ, the term economy can be used not only of what God does but of what the Church does.

In a wider sense it covers all those acts whereby the Church orders the affairs of her own household and provides for the needs of her members. In a narrower sense it signifies the power to bind and loose, conferred by the risen Christ (John xx. 21-22); and so it covers any departure from the strict rules of the Church [Gr., *akribeia*], whether in the direction of greater rigour or (as is more usual) of greater leniency. Economy therefore includes much of what is covered by the western term “dispensation”, but it extends to many other things as well and is not simply a term in Canon Law.

To understand the application of economy to non-Orthodox sacraments, three points should be kept in mind:

(1) The basic principle underlying its use is that the Church has been endowed by God with authority to manage the affairs of her own household. She is therefore in a full sense the steward (*oikonomos*) and sovereign administrator of the sacraments; and it falls within the scope of her stewardship and economy to make valid—if she so thinks fit—sacraments administered by non-Orthodox, *although such sacraments are no sacraments if considered in themselves and apart from the Orthodox Church*. Because a person’s Baptism is accepted as valid—or rather made valid by economy—when he becomes Orthodox, *it does not therefore follow that his Baptism was valid before he became Orthodox*. The use of economy implies no recognition of the validity of non-Orthodox sacraments *per se*; it is something that concerns only the sacraments of those entering the Orthodox Church.

(2) Economy is *only exercised where the formal conditions necessary for validity are present*. The Church, when she makes valid a sacrament originally administered outside her borders, naturally demands that the external requirements essential for the accomplishment of the sacrament *shall have been previously fulfilled*: that is to say, those actions must have been already performed which, had they been carried out within the Church, would have sufficed to ensure a valid sacrament. Orders, for example, could not be recognized if the Christian body in question had lost the outward elements of the Apostolic succession. [And Baptisms should be not be recognized if they were not performed according to the Apostolic form of triple immersion in the Name of the Holy Trinity.]

(3) The aim of all “economic” activities of the Church is practical—the salvation of souls [cf. 1 Tim. 2:4; Acts 14:27]. The Church has rules, but unlike the Old Israel she is not rigidly bound to them; it lies within her power of household management or economy to contravene the strict letter of the law if the purpose of the law will thereby be more fully achieved. (Closely linked with the concept of economy is the idea of *philanthropia*, loving kindness towards men: the Church, following the example of Jesus her Head, makes allowance for the weakness of men and seeks never to lay on them a burden too heavy for them to bear.) Because economy is something practical, its application need not be everywhere the same, but may be changed according to circumstances. Its exercise in one way at a particular time and place creates no binding precedent for the future, and does not commit the Church to following the same practice in other places and at other times. “He who does something by economy”, wrote Theophylact of Bulgaria, “does it, not as good in an unqualified sense, but as profitable on a particular occasion.”

This helps to explain the *apparent inconsistency* of Orthodox when receiving converts. From the viewpoint of modern western sacramental theology, the variations in the Greek and Russian attitude towards Latin Baptism indicate a state of intolerable vagueness and confusion. But once the principle of economy is taken into account—so Orthodox argue—it will be realized that there *has been no change in Orthodox ecclesiology or*

*sacramental theology, but simply a change in disciplinary practice.* The Orthodox Church has sometimes been willing to use economy, and sometimes not; *but this does not mean that her sacramental teaching as such has varied.*

Guided always by practical considerations, Orthodoxy has exercised economy when this aided the reconciliation of heterodox *without obscuring the truths of the Orthodox faith*; but when leniency seemed to endanger the well-being of the Orthodox flock, exposing them to infiltration and encouraging them to indifferentism and apostasy, then the Church authorities resorted to strictness.<sup>59</sup>

Therefore, a declaration by an Orthodox Bishop that a person's non-Orthodox baptism is valid simply means that the Church recognizes in the heterodox rite previously experienced by the person seeking reception a *form* (i.e., Apostolic: triple immersion) and *intention* (of the heterodox group—i.e., to baptize into what they consider to be the Church) that do not need repetition. When the person is received by *oikonomia*, the empty baptismal form is filled with ecclesial Grace by the Holy Spirit.

The use of economy is seen in the Canons themselves, e.g., Canon 7 of the Second Œcumenical Synod, Canon 95 of the Sixth Œcumenical Synod, and the First Canonical Letter of Saint Basil the Great. The Second and Sixth Œcumenical Synods confirmed and upheld the aforementioned Canon 1 of Carthage, as well as those of the Holy Apostles and Œcumenical Fathers—all of which held to *akribeia* with respect to heterodox sacraments. For example, Canon 2 of the Sixth Œcumenical Synod reads:

---

<sup>59</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 82-85, emphases ours. Ecumenist-minded opponents of the principle of economy will often point out that the eminent Russian Orthodox theologian, Father Georges Florovsky, was critical of it. One essay in particular which is frequently bandied about is "The Boundaries of the Church" (*Collected Works*, Vol. XIII, pp. 36-45). Never mentioned by these detractors, however, are the following remarks in that essay on the timelessness and authority of St. Cyprian's theology:

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. (*Ibid.*, Vol. XIII, p. 36)

A former student and friend of Father Georges, Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna, helps us resolve this seeming contradiction in his mentor's thought by stating that this essay was mainly a heuristic exercise written early in Father Georges' career (1933). The passage concerning St. Cyprian's theology stands *per se* as truthful, reflecting as it does the *dogmatic* teaching of the Church. Fr. George was merely attempting to set forth his own opinions at the time on the *practical application* of this theology—i.e., *oikonomia*. He later disavowed the very views that are misused by so many today. (See the OCIC for numerous unpublished articles on the life and thought of Fr. Georges.)

On the other hand, we ratify all the rest of the sacred Canons promulgated by our holy and blissful Fathers, to wit: . . .the Canon promulgated by Cyprian who became an Archbishop of the country of Africa and a martyr, and by the Council supporting him. . .in accordance with the custom handed down to them; and no one shall be permitted to countermand or set aside the Canons previously laid down, or to recognize and accept any Canons, other than the ones herein specified, that have been composed under a false inscription by certain persons who have taken in hand to barter the truth. If, nevertheless, anyone be caught innovating with regard to any of the said Canons, or attempting to subvert it, he shall be responsible of that Canon and shall receive the penance which it prescribes and be chastised by that Canon which he has offended.<sup>60</sup>

This same Synod—in Canon 95—goes on to uphold Canon 7 of the Second Ecumenical Synod, which directs that certain heretical and schismatic groups be received by *oikonomia*, both for the welfare of their souls and of the Church at that time.

Thus, a common, but false, interpretation of Canons 7 and 95 that suggests a recognition of the validity of heterodox sacraments *per se* is indefensible, for it would mean that the Holy Fathers of these Ecumenical Synods contradicted themselves on fundamental dogmatic issues related to ecclesiastical order. For an Orthodox Christian with a proper understanding of Holy Tradition, contradictions of this nature are an impossibility. As the famous interpreter of the Church canons, Theodore Balsamon, Patriarch of Antioch, once stated: “Preserve the canonical decrees, wherever and however they should be phrased; and say not that there are contradictions among them, for the All-holy Spirit has worded them all.”<sup>61</sup> Therefore, any *apparent* contradictions in the Sacred Canons of a dogmatic nature can only be properly explained—if one is to remain faithful to the Church’s self-understanding as reflected in the consensus of Holy Tradition—as examples of *oikonomia* on the synodal level.<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> *The Rudder*, p. 294.

<sup>61</sup> The Interpretation of Canon XC of the Council of Trullo as cited in *Orthodox Life*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (May-June, 1977), p. 50.

<sup>62</sup> A large part of Father George Metallinos’ meticulously researched book is taken up with the resolution of this issue. In a summary statement, he writes:

Whereas “the Apostles” and the earlier Councils and Fathers applied *acrivia*, the two Ecumenical Councils accepted *econo-mia*. So, this alternation of *acrivia* and *economia* under certain de-fined conditions [*i.e.*, Apostolic form] removes any hint of contradiction among the holy Canons and the Councils. (*op. cit.*, p. 54)

Also, an interesting example of *oikonomia* on the synodal level is found in Canon 77 of Carthage (c. 418):

It has pleased the Council to have letters sent to our brethren and fellow bishops, and especially to the Apostolic See, in which our adorable brother and fellow minister Anastasius afore-mentioned [*i.e.*, St. Anastasius I], since he knows Africa to be in great need, so that for the sake of the peace and usefulness of the Church, even through the Donatists, of whom whatever ones are Clerics, provided their instruction is corrected, and willing to come over to the catholic unity, in accordance with the voluntary choice and resolution of each individual catholic Bishop governing the church in the same region, if this appear to

It should be obvious by now that the term “validity” can be misleading. As has been shown, there are two senses in which it can be used: validity *per se*, and validity *upon reception into the Church*—i.e., “having acceptable form and intent so as to allow a proper use of economy.”<sup>63</sup> The latter understanding of validity is the only one that can be defended by Holy Tradition. Too often, upon hearing or reading that a person’s Baptism was “valid,” many assume that this indicates the first sense of the term: validity *per se*. However, this is incorrect.

In no sense is this “acceptance,” as a young Orthodox theologian has recently pointed out in his study of the much abused and misused First Canon of Saint Basil, anything more than a recognition of the “charismatic quality,” as Father Florovsky has expressed it, of a non-Orthodox sacramental act. The mystery of Orthodox baptism, by which we “. . . accept the death of our propensity for visible things,” to quote Saint Maximos the Confessor, involves not only an immersion into the inner life of the Church, but signifies a move away from the external grace that touches those outside Orthodoxy to that internal grace which is a sign of those baptized into Orthodoxy.<sup>64</sup>

It is apparent that a more careful and qualified use of the term “validity,” or the creation of a different term, is greatly needed.

### **Is Heterodox Baptism Merely a “Pagan Rite”?**

---

conduce to the peace of the Christians, to readmit them in their own honors, just as also in previous times it was evidently done in regard to the same dissension, a fact attested by the examples of many and nearly all churches in Africa wherein such error arose. . . . Whereby in every way the catholic unity must be advanced and consummated to the manifest profit of brotherly souls in those regions in which they are living, to the end that no obstacle may be set up against what has been decided in regard to their honors. . . . (*The Rudder*, pp. 649-650).

<sup>63</sup> Key works which make this distinction are *I Confess One Baptism* and the two-part essay by J. Cotsonis, “The Validity of Anglican Orders,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* (Spring 1958-Summer 1958).

<sup>64</sup> Archbishop Chrysostomos, “BEM and Orthodox Spirituality,” p. 56. He continues:

Baptism outside of the Orthodox Church, then, is an act detached from the inner life of the Church and separated from the special state of enlightenment that rises above those who, while confessing Christ and honoring the form of baptism put forth in the Gospels, nonetheless are not part of the evangelical call to struggle that is embodied in death to one’s self and to the “putting on of Christ” within Orthodoxy. *Oikonomia*, like a magnet of evangelical love, draws those who have embraced the iron faith of Christ. In accepting a non-Orthodox act of baptism, it takes that iron, melts it on the forge of the Church’s divine authority, and gives it form and internal strength. In no sense, however, does it recognize that which is purportedly spiritual formation outside Orthodoxy to be anything other than crude filaments of faith. There is but one baptism, if indeed there are many callings and many confessions. And that one baptism is not one in form, but one in grace-bestowing efficacy, rising out of the unique and exclusive authority of the criterion of truth which is the Orthodox faith.

Does it follow that to affirm the traditional view regarding the invalidity of heterodox sacraments *per se* one must also affirm that everyone outside of the Church is “completely pagan”? Must one insist—as do some when characterizing the Traditionalist view—that heterodox Baptism is a completely insignificant event or an “empty pagan ritual,” devoid of *any* meaning or Grace? To all such questions, Traditionalist Orthodox Christians can answer in the negative. The subtlety of Patristic thought serves to foster a nuanced approach that—coupled with a heart flowing with love and compassion for the heterodox—can most adequately address this dilemma.

On the one hand, heterodox baptism certainly is not true Baptism—an initiation into the *pleroma* of Grace within the Church. Yet on the other hand, it is proper to acknowledge a certain “charismatic quality” in heterodox rites. This leads us to some of the intricacies in the Patristic conception of Grace. Father Gregory Telepneff cites Saint Diadochus of Photiki in order to elucidate this. It is noteworthy that this Saint’s comments are entirely consistent with the ones cited earlier by Sts. Theophan the Recluse and Seraphim of Sarov:

“Before holy Baptism, grace encourages the soul from the outside, while Satan lurks in its depths, trying to block all the noetic faculty’s ways of approaching the Divine. But from the moment that we are reborn through Baptism, the demon is outside, grace is within. Thus whereas before Baptism error ruled the soul, after Baptism truth rules it. Nevertheless, even after Baptism Satan (can) still act upon the soul. . . .”

If my reading of the Holy Fathers is correct, what the saving acts of Christ make possible is the appropriation of grace by man himself—making “grace his own,” which in turn totally renews and transforms the entire person. That is to say, a real metaphysical, ontological change can now take place in the baptized person, if—as Saint Gregory Nyssa tells us in his *Catechetical Oration*—he lives virtuously and makes his baptism effective in Faith and the spiritual life.

In saying what we have about grace and baptism, we have not said that non-Orthodox are totally without grace, indistinguishable from pagans. No indeed. If I understand Saint Maximos correctly, Christ (and hence grace) can be found in virtue itself. A virtuous man takes on grace by virtue of virtue, since virtue proceeds from spiritual reality. Of course, without the radical ontological transformation that takes place in the Mysteries (Sacraments) of the Church, such grace cannot be appropriated and cannot be made “one’s own.” Nevertheless, as we see in the words of Saint Diadochus, grace is still present—though acting from without, rather than from within. And so, it is this internal-external distinction which separates Orthodox baptism from non-Orthodox baptism: the Orthodox baptism does what Christ, the Apostles, and the Church always intended it to do—it transforms man from within, totally renewing the true human nature and opening the way for potential communion with the divine.<sup>65</sup>

## Conclusion

---

<sup>65</sup> Telepneff, “Baptism and Grace,” pp. 77-78.

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.”<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis mine.

## VI. Can the Non-Orthodox Be Called “Christians”?

It should be apparent by now that knowledgeable Orthodox Christians employ the term “Christian” rather loosely when referring to the heterodox. This is akin to referring respectfully to a Roman Catholic clergyman as a “Priest” or to a Lutheran confessional body as a “church.” In a way, we are using these terms according to *oikonomia*.

When, however, the term “Christian” is used with attention to theological accuracy and consistency—*i.e.*, according to *akribeia*—, it means an organic union with Christ, which is inseparably linked to membership in the Church—His Body. Just as “falling in love” is quite different from being united in marriage as “one flesh” (Eph. 5:28-32; Gen. 2:24), conversion to Christ is different than union with Him in the Mystery of Holy Baptism. The former are inclinations of the heart; the latter are the organic realities.

In the divine-human organism of the Church every believer is like a living cell that becomes an integral part of it, and lives with wonderworking, divine-human power. For to be a member of the Church means: to become incarnated with the God-man, to share His body (Eph. 3:6), to become an organic part of His divine-human body (Eph. 5:30; 1 Cor. 12:12-13), in a word: to become divine-human in the entire reality of one’s human personality. If one attains this, he has attained a divine-human monism of life, and has a living and immortal sense that he has passed over from death into life (cf. Jn. 5:24; 3:36; 11:25-26). Moreover, he ceaselessly senses with all his being that the Church, as a divine-human organism, is the God-man extended into the ages.<sup>67</sup>

Thus, in his address to those who had been sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit (Chrismated) immediately following Baptism, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem could say:

Having been baptized into Christ, and put on Christ, ye have been made conformable to the Son of God; for God having foreordained us unto adoption as sons, made us to be conformed to the body of Christ’s glory. Having therefore become partakers of Christ, ye are properly called Christs, and of you God said, Touch not My Christ, or anointed. Now ye have been made Christs, by receiving the antitype of the Holy Ghost; and all things have been wrought in you by imitation, because ye are images of Christ. He washed in the river Jordan, and having imparted of the fragrance of His Godhead to the waters, He came up from them; and the Holy Ghost in the fullness of His being lighted on Him, like resting upon like. And to you in like manner, after you had come up from the pool of the sacred streams, there was given an Unction, the anti-type of that wherewith Christ was anointed; and this is the Holy Ghost;... Having been counted worthy of this Holy Chrism, ye are called Christians, verifying the name also by your

---

<sup>67</sup> *The Struggle for Faith*, trans. the Rt. Rev. Archimandrite Todor Mika, S.T.M., and the Very Rev. Dr. Stevan Scott (Grayslake, Illinois: The Serbian Orthodox Diocese of the United States of America and Canada, 1989), p. 127. Cf. Eph. 4:4-5, 15-16; 5:25ff; 1 Cor. 6:15,19 with Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16.

new birth. For before you were deemed worthy of this grace, *ye had properly no right to this title*, but were advancing on your way towards being Christians.<sup>68</sup>

The Holy Russian New Martyr Hilarion, in his brilliant little book *Christianity or the Church?*, provides further insight into these Patristic concepts when he discusses how the term “Christian” was used in the early Church:

Before anything else, the [early] Christians became conscious of themselves as members of the Church. The Christian community referred to itself as a “Church” in preference to all other names. The word “Church” (*ekklesia*) appears one hundred and ten times in the New Testament, while such words as “Christianity” and similar words with the same ending are completely unknown in the New Testament. After the descent of the Holy Spirit on Christ’s disciples and apostles, the Church came into being as a visible community with a spiritual interrelation amongst its members. . . . What did it mean at that time to be a Christian?

In our times we hear many various answers such as: “To be a Christian means to recognize Christ’s teaching, to try and fulfill His commandments.” This, of course, is the best of such answers. The first Christians, however, answered the question in a completely different way. From the very first pages of its history, Christianity appears before us in the form of an harmonious and unanimous community. *Outside of this community there were no Christians. To come to believe in Christ, to become a Christian—this meant uniting with the Church.* This is repeatedly expressed in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, where we read that the Lord daily added the saved to the Church (Acts 2:47; 5:13-14). Each new believer was like a branch grafted to the tree of Church life.<sup>69</sup>

Therefore, properly speaking, to be a Christian is to be “in Christ” and in His Church, which is normally<sup>70</sup> effected through triple immersion in the blessed waters.

---

<sup>68</sup> *Catechetical Lecture XXI, “On Chrism,”* trans. Edwin Hamilton Gifford, D.D., *NPNF 2nd ser.*, Vol. 7, pp. 147, 150, emphasis ours.

<sup>69</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 17-18, emphasis ours.

<sup>70</sup> As Hieromonk Haralampos of Holy Transfiguration Monastery once pointed out to me:

There are other ways to enter the Church that do not apply to most people. For example, the thief on the cross was assured that he would be in Paradise with Christ, though he was not baptized. There are also numerous examples of martyrs whose only baptism was one of blood. Others have even been baptized *in extremis* without the use of water. However, in this case the baptism would be later “corrected” by the Church if possible.

There is also the issue of “catechumens”—those who are undergoing “catechesis” (instruction) and are awaiting to be fully received into the Church. They are properly called “Christians” since they have fled to the Church and placed themselves under Her pastoral care and authority. They are truly “Christians”—though imperfect or incomplete—according to historical terminology. Perhaps a more modern designation would be “probationers,” “postulants,” or “candidates.” When baptized, they will be perfect Christians (*teleioi*); we would say “full Christians.”

Today, however, to be called a “Christian” is a fuzzy term when you consider that the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses pose as “Christian ‘churches’.” It is also not uncommon to run into someone who claims to be Christian simply because they agree with some of the teachings of Christ. However, mental

## Further Biblical and Patristic Considerations

One possible way of looking at the status of heterodox believers is to compare them to New Testament “God-fearers” like Cornelius (Acts 10:2) or the Roman centurion (who, by the way, had greater faith than anyone in Israel; Saint Matt. 8:10).

Virtue has its own value, wherever it is to be found. And yet these virtues are insufficient in themselves, without faith in Christ and reception into His Church. Before meeting the Apostle Peter, Cornelius neither believed aright concerning God, nor taught others the truth. But God, beholding his diligence in that which he knew, and foreseeing also how willingly he would embrace the truth, brought him to know Christ in a wondrous manner. . . .

Saint John Chrysostom, commenting on [Acts 10:2ff], has written, “. . .if He did not overlook the Magi, nor the Ethiopian, nor the thief, nor the harlot, much more them that work righteousness, and are willing, shall He in anywise not overlook.” The righteousness of Cornelius was not overlooked by God; it prepared him to receive the Gospel and so to be joined to the Church, wherein was the fulfillment and reward of that righteousness.<sup>71</sup>

A related example from the Old Testament may help, as well. Rahab, who was not visibly in the covenant community (Israel), nonetheless feared God (Joshua 2:8-21; cf. Saint Matt. 21:31); she is listed in the “Hall of Faith” (Hebrews 11:31) for her righteous act of hiding the three spies. Does anyone doubt her eternal destiny? Regarding the Old Testament Saints, the Greek Orthodox theologian John Karimiris writes:

It should be noted that many of the saints and just men [and women] who are mentioned in the *Old Testament*, such as Abel, Enoch, Noe [Noah], Daniel, Job, Lot, *et al.*, belonged neither to the race nor to the religion of Israel, but were outside positive divine Revelation, which begins with Abraham. They are commonly called ‘Gentiles.’ Hence

---

assent is not the same as faith unto good works, as St. James tells us: “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder” (2:19, RSV).

<sup>71</sup> The Reverend Dorraine Snogren, “Holy Tradition, The Road That Leads Home”, *The True Vine*, Issue 5 (Spring 1990), pp. 8-9. Mr. Carlton makes similar statements in his book *The Way*:

I have come to view my Protestant past in a way similar to the way the Fathers of the Church viewed the history of Israel—as a preparation for the Christian Gospel. Historically, of course, Protestantism represents a movement *away* from the historical Church rather than a movement toward it. Nonetheless, Christ did not abandon the Christians of the West, in spite of the increase of heresies. If in no other way, He was and is present in the Holy Scriptures. While Protestantism, in all of its variety, is a heresy, God works in the lives of individuals to bring them to the fulness of the truth. (*Op. cit.*, p. 27).

Carlton is a convert from the Baptist confession.

there are discussions on 'Gentile and pagan Saints,' as for example in J. Daniélou, *Les saints paiens de l' Ancien Testament*, Paris, 1956, pp. 10ff.<sup>72</sup>

Eusebius also points out in his *Ecclesiastical History*:

Of these, some excellent men lived before the flood, others of the sons and descendants of Noah lived after it, among them Abraham, whom the Hebrews celebrate as their own founder and forefather. If any one should assert that all those who have enjoyed the testimony of righteousness, from Abraham himself back to the first man, *were Christians in fact if not in name, he would not go beyond the truth*. For that which the name indicates, that the Christian man, through the knowledge and the teaching of Christ, is distinguished for temperance and righteousness, for patience in life and manly virtue, and for a profession of piety toward the one and only God over all—all that was zealously practiced by them not less than by us.<sup>73</sup>

He was speaking of the faithful *prior* to the New Covenant. Thus, Eusebius' use of the term "Christian" for those who were virtuous and professed faith in God helps to guide our thinking about those believers separated from the Church.

The writings of Saint Gregory the Theologian (Nazianzen) also bear witness to an economic use of the term "Christian," especially in the following passage from a *Funeral Oration on his Father*, Saint Gregory the Elder (+374). His father had lived a virtuous life prior to his conversion as a member of what seems to have been—given our limited knowledge of it—a monotheistic sect called the Hyspistarii. He later became the Bishop of Nazianzus and was one of the Consecrators of Saint Basil the Great. Describing his father, Saint Gregory writes:

He sprang from a stock unrenowned, and not well suited for piety, for I am not ashamed of his origin, in my confidence in the close of his life, one that was not planted in the house of God, but far removed and estranged, the combined product of two of the

---

<sup>72</sup> John Karmiris, "The Ecclesiology of the Three Hierarchs," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, Vol. VI, No. 2 (Winter 1960-1961), p. 150 fn. 22. For a discussion of the Old Testament Saints and their relation to the Church, consult pp. 146-165. He presents the Patristic consensus that the Church began with Abraham. Among his numerous citations, he quotes St. John Chrysostom, in his exposition of Ephesians 4:5:

Now what is this one body? The faithful throughout the whole world, both which are, and which have been, and which shall be. And again, they that before Christ's coming pleased God, are "one body." How so? Because they also knew Christ. Whence does this appear? "Your father Abraham," saith He, "rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it, and was glad." (John viii. 56.) And again, "If ye had believed Moses," He saith, "ye would have believed Me, for he wrote of Me." (John v. 46.) And the prophets too would not have written of One, of whom they knew not what they said; whereas they both knew Him, and worshipped Him. Thus then were they also "one body." ("Homily X," rev. Rev. Gross Alexander, *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> ser., Vol. 13, p. 99)

<sup>73</sup> Book I. 4, as cited in Karmiris, *op. cit.*, p. 152, emphasis ours.

greatest opposites—Greek error and legal imposture, some parts of each of which it escaped, of others it was compounded. For, on the one side, they reject idols and sacrifices, but reverence fire and lights; on the other, they observe the Sabbath and petty regulations as to certain meats, but despise circumcision. These lowly men call themselves Hypsistarii, and the Almighty is, so they say, the only object of their worship. What was the result of this double tendency to impiety? I know not whether to praise more highly *the grace which called him*, or his own purpose.

Noting that his father sacrificed a great deal in becoming a Christian, Saint Gregory goes on to observe:

*Even before he was of our fold, he was ours. His character made him one of us. For, as many of our own are not with us, whose life alienates them from the common body, so, many of those without are on our side, whose character anticipates their faith, and need only the name of that which indeed they possess. My father was one of these, an alien shoot, but inclined by his life towards us. He was so far advanced in self control, that he became at once most beloved and most modest, two qualities difficult to combine. What greater and more splendid testimony can there be to his justice than his exercise of a position second to none in the state, without enriching himself by a single farthing, although he saw everyone else casting the hands of Briareus upon the public funds, and swollen with ill-gotten gain? For thus do I term unrighteous wealth. Of his prudence this also is no slight proof, but in the course of my speech further details will be given. It was as a reward for such conduct, I think, that he attained to the faith.<sup>74</sup>*

Here it should be noted that Saint Gregory did not consider his father to be a Christian prior to Baptism, but rather, in context, “one of us”—that is, *in heart*. He speaks of a time “before he was of our fold,” and about a character that “*anticipates their faith*”—“a reward” for living a virtuous life thus far. This is made even more clear when later in the *Oration* he discusses how the prayers, fastings, and holiness of his mother for the salvation of her husband led to his desire to leave the sect and be Baptized:

He was approaching that regeneration by water and the Spirit, by which we confess to God the formation and completion of the Christlike man, and the transformation and reformation from the earthy to the Spirit. He was approaching the laver with warm desire. . . . And as he was ascending out of the water, there flashed around him a light and a glory worthy of the disposition with which he approached the girt of faith.<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> Trans. Charles Gordon Browne and James Edward Swallow, *NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> ser.*, Vol. 7, p. 256, emphasis ours. Cf. the words of Fr. Seraphim (Rose) of Platina: “...and there are still others outside of the Orthodox Church who by God's grace, their hearts being open to His call, will undoubtedly yet be joined to genuine Holy Orthodoxy.” Speaking of all those who will comprise the future body of True Orthodox Christians, he concludes: “These ‘seven thousand’ [Romans 11:4] are the foundation of the future and only Orthodoxy of the latter times.” (*Orthodoxy and the Religion of the Future, op. cit.*, pp. 183-184)

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 258-259.

Therefore, one could understand Saint Gregory to be saying, “They [who are outside] need only the name [of ‘Christian’, given when one becomes a catechumen, and fully appropriated—*i.e.*, made real—through Baptism] of that which they indeed possess [a virtuous life].”

### Conclusion

On the basis of this cursory look at Holy Scripture and Patristic writings, it seems entirely permissible to call one a “Christian” who professes faith in Christ—without knowingly embracing heresies that attack the Holy Trinity or the Person of Christ—and who is striving to be obedient to His Commandments.<sup>76</sup> A failure to extend sincerely the courtesy of such a label causes unnecessary offense and gives the impression that heterodox Christians have no relationship with God at all. This would place them on the same level as pagans, which is decidedly not the case. In this regard we offer these wise and pastorally sensitive comments:

Of course, there is no reason to view these [heterodox] confessions and sects as on the same level with non-Christian religions. One cannot deny that the reading of the word of God has a beneficial influence upon everyone who seeks in it instruction and strengthening of faith, and that devout reflection on God the Creator, the Provider and Saviour, has an elevating power there among Protestants also. We cannot say that their prayers are totally fruitless if they come from a pure heart, for *in every nation he that feareth Him. . .is accepted with Him* (Acts 10:35). The Omnipresent Good Provider God is over them, and they are not deprived of God’s mercies. They help to restrain moral looseness, vices, and crimes; and they oppose the spread of atheism. But all this does not give us grounds to consider them as belonging to the Church.<sup>77</sup>

Concerning those who are never afforded the opportunity to encounter Orthodoxy it is perfectly acceptable to conclude that the God of Love may place them in His Heavenly Kingdom. Ultimately, God looks upon the heart of every man—having mercy upon those whom He chooses to have mercy (Romans 9:18)—and rewards each according to his intentions and deeds (Romans 2:6ff).

---

<sup>76</sup> These qualifiers are added partly as a result of the author’s study of how *oikonomia* was justified by the Fathers in Canon 7 of the Second and Canon 95 of the Sixth Œcumenical Synods. They reflect personal opinion.

<sup>77</sup> *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology, op. cit.*, p. 244. On the salvific power of the Word of God for the conversion of sinners and the edification of believers see *The Path to Salvation*, pp. 119-123, 144-145.

## VII. Bishop Kallistos' Answer

In *The Orthodox Church*, Bishop Kallistos makes some wholly Orthodox statements concerning the nature of the Church and salvation. Among them are the following:

Orthodoxy also teaches that *outside the Church there is no salvation*. This belief has the same basis as the Orthodox belief in the unbreakable unity of the Church: it follows from the close relation between God and His Church. "A person cannot have God as His Father if he does not have the Church as his Mother." So wrote Saint Cyprian; and to him this seemed an evident truth, because he could not think of God and the Church apart from one another. God is salvation, and God's saving power is mediated to humans in His Body, the Church." *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. All the categorical strength and point of this aphorism lies in its tautology. *Outside the Church there is no salvation because salvation is the Church.*<sup>78</sup>

This teaching is found throughout the writings of the Fathers.<sup>79</sup> They use the term "salvation" in several interchangeable ways: at times referring to an eternal state in the Kingdom of Heaven, and at other times implying the means by which we achieve this state—the Church being the only place where it can be found. In this tautology lies the essence of the problem for those trying to understand the implications of Orthodox ecclesiology for the non-Orthodox, to wit: Is a person required to believe that everyone outside of the Church is damned? As we demonstrated in previous chapters, the affirmation that heterodox Christians are separated from the Church does not imply that we pass judgment on them or make any pronouncements about their eternal destiny. "[B]ut he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts. . . ." (I Cor. 4:4-5). In keeping with Her apophatic mindset, the Church remains circumspect. Therefore, to state that there is "no salvation outside of the Church" is not the same as stating "no one outside of the Church can be saved."

Had Bishop Kallistos made these points and left it at that, we would have no problem. However, as is common throughout his helpful but uneven book, impeccably Orthodox statements juxtapose ones that are either misleading or erroneous. Furthermore, "as is so often the case..., we are given the impression that logical deduction, in Orthodoxy, always yields to the ostensibly acceptable process of 'different

---

<sup>78</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 247.

<sup>79</sup> For example, cf. Saint Ignatius, *Letter to the Philadelphians* (3:2-4:1); Saint Cyprian, *Epistle LXXII*, "To Jubaianus" and *Epistle LXXIII*, "To Pompey;" and Saint Augustine, *Discourse to the People of the Church at Caesarea* (6).

approaches.”<sup>80</sup> Before examining the sets of misleading statements that mar His Grace’s treatment of Orthodox ecclesiology, we must touch upon his penchant for espousing multiple approaches to controversial issues.

### Of Birds and Men

At times His Grace uses the terms “hawks” and “doves” to distinguish between two types of Orthodox theologians: Traditionalists, and those who are of a more liberal and “lenient” mindset, apparently lacking any Patristic support for their opinions. In the chapter that deals with the question of heterodox status, Bishop Kallistos introduces two new categories which “smack of the same spirit”<sup>81</sup>: the “rigorists” and “moderates.” While these labels may be convenient, they raise the question, “Are both approaches legitimate in the light of Holy Tradition?” We think not. Unfortunately, his presentations of the various dual approaches to controversial topics leave many with the impression that there are no discernible clear-cut answers. To those not grounded in Orthodox theology there is the danger that the views of both groups will seem legitimate. This manner of presenting the different “camps” may be acceptable for the realm of *theologoumena*, but not for ecclesiology.

Furthermore, these labels carry with them some rather misleading connotations. (“Hawkish-”?) rigorism implies an attitude of rigidity, callousness, and a legalistic attention to details. In contrast, moderation connotes a “kindler, gentler” Orthodoxy, an Orthodoxy that implicitly emphasizes the dove-like qualities of meekness, peace, and harmony. (We note that the latter two are prominent buzzwords of the *Zeitgeist*.) However, these are false connotations that we hope were not intended by His Grace. Laudably, he rescues the “rigorist” position from potential disapprobation by accurately presenting it in a balanced way.

But there also exists in the Orthodox Church a more rigorous group, who hold that since Orthodoxy is the Church, anyone who is not Orthodox cannot be a member of the Church.... Of course (so the stricter group add [*sic*]) divine grace may well be active among many non-Orthodox [as already shown, through clarifying the distinction between “general” and “ecclesial” Grace], and if they are sincere in their love of God, then we may be sure that God will have mercy upon them; but they cannot, in their present state, be termed members of the Church. *Workers for Christian unity who do not often encounter this rigorist school should not forget that such opinions are held today by Orthodox of great holiness and loving compassion.*<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> Hieromonk Patapios, “A Traditionalist Critique of *The Orthodox Church*,” *Orthodox Tradition*, Volume XVI, No. 1, p. 66.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 309. Interestingly, Hieromonk Patapios points out that “in the original text, this rejoinder reads ‘. . .by many Orthodox of great learning and holiness’ (p. 317)” (*Ibid.*)

This is a succinct, lucid, and theologically correct summary that neatly sets forth the Traditional view of the Church concerning the heterodox. It also demonstrates that the “rigorist” position has nothing whatsoever to do with “rigorism” as one typically thinks of it. (That he deems it necessary to add “Workers for Christian unity who do not often encounter this rigorist school...” is but a sad commentary upon the state of the ecumenical movement and the understanding of Orthodoxy among its members in general.)

Before commenting upon the accuracy of the connotations arising from the use of the term “moderate,” we must first state our assumption that Bishop Kallistos would place Orthodox ecumenists in that group. We base this supposition on his description of the moderate views, admitting that he does not specifically mention those who might be called, in his parlance, the “ultra-moderates.”

Having said this, we make the following observations. First, the well-documented hostility towards and misrepresentation of Traditionalists that is so prevalent among ecumenists today<sup>83</sup> leads us to view any label which connotes “moderation” as a misapplication. Appearing superficially to be the most moderate and expansive of all, many Orthodox ecumenists show that their “love” is mere hypocrisy.

The key to uncovering the lie hiding under the “loving” mask of ecumenism is its own delusion. It preaches love and practices hatred. It champions peace and fosters violence. It advocates relativism in an absolutist spirit. And it has engendered division in the Orthodox Church, setting brother against brother, so that the heterodox and unbelievers are invited into the fold, while the most loyal and faithful sheep are relegated to a place beyond the boundaries of the false Church which it has created in the name of Orthodoxy.<sup>84</sup>

Furthermore, by failing honestly to confront the heterodox about their heresy, true ecclesial status, and the claims of the Church; and by failing to explain forthrightly that true Christian unity can only be achieved by a return to Holy Orthodoxy, such ecumenists undermine that very unity which they claim to be seeking. What incentive is there to work for unity based in truth—as preserved by the Church, “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15)—if the heterodox are continually told that they are merely estranged “families”<sup>85</sup> and asynchronous “lungs”<sup>86</sup> with “valid” sacraments?

---

<sup>83</sup> See “The Psychological Anatomy of Ecumenism” and the multi-volume series *Contributions to a Theology of Anti-Ecumenism* (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies), *passim*.

<sup>84</sup> “Ecumenical Delusion: The Vicious Life of False Love,” *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. X, No. 2, p. 11.

<sup>85</sup> The June 1997 edition of *The Word*, the official publication of the Antiochian Archdiocese, records a dinner event for the Coptic Pope Shenouda attended by Bishop Joseph:

These examples of ecumenist “love”—based as they are upon dogmatic minimalism and religious syncretism—only serve, as we have said, to confirm the heterodox in their errors. *This makes them the truly harsh and unloving ones.* Consider these words of a noted “rigorist,” Saint Maximus the Confessor, which describe in what “true ecumenism” consists. We hold this forth as a model for all those who seek Christian unity:

I write these things not wishing to cause distress to the heretics or to rejoice in their ill-treatment—God forbid; but, rather, rejoicing and being gladdened at their return. For what is more pleasing to the Faithful than to see the scattered children of God gathered again as one? Neither do I exhort you to place harshness above the love of men. May I not be so mad! I beseech you to do and to carry out good to all men with care and assiduity, becoming all things to all men, as the need of each is shown to you; I want and pray you to be wholly harsh and implacable with the heretics only in regard to cooperating with them *or in any way whatever supporting their deranged belief. For I reckon it misanthropy and a departure from Divine love to lend support to error, that those previously seized by it might be even more greatly corrupted.*<sup>87</sup>

### The “Moderate Group”

---

During the month of November 1996, the Copts all over the world celebrated the Silver Jubilee of His Holiness Pope SHENOUDA’s enthronement on the seat of St. Mark the Evangelist. St. Mark founded the Coptic Church in 61 A.D. and His Holiness Pope SHENOUDA III is the 117th *successor of St. Mark*. On Saturday, December 1, 1996 His Grace Bishop JOSEPH, accompanied by Protosyngelos Paul Doyle and Archpriest Michel Najim joined the Coptic communities of the West Coast in a dinner banquet honoring His Holiness at the Los Angeles Bonaventure. In his address, Bishop JOSEPH commended His Holiness’ contribution in rejuvenating Eastern Christianity and his monumental endeavor in materializing *the unity of the two Orthodox Families*, describing them as having “*the same spirit of Orthodoxy*.” “It is a great mystery,” said His Grace, “to see that fifteen hundred years of alienation within *the branches of the two Orthodox Families* were unable to shake the oneness of faith and spiritual legacy. . . . After fifteen hundred years. . . , Your Holiness was able to ascertain that *the two families have kept the same Eastern Christian Faith*. This is a great witness to the meaning of the continuity in sharing the same doctrine, as a fruit of our participation in the Fountain of Truth” (p. 47, emphases ours).

<sup>86</sup> In his Foreward to *The Quest for Unity: Orthodox and Catholics in Dialogue*, Metropolitan Maximos of Aenos made the following scandalous remarks:

Common prayer and participation as far as possible in the prayer life of the other church has also been part of our lives together in dialogue. . . . We have responded to the work of the Joint Theological 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. (Eds. John Erickson and John Borelli. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir Seminary Press and Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1996, p. 3.)

Given our analysis in Appendix I, it is not surprising to find Professor Erickson listed as one of the editors of this lamentable volume.

<sup>87</sup> *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 91 col. 465C; as cited in *The Panheresy of Ecumenism*, by Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Fili (Etna, CA: The Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1995), p. 32, emphasis ours.

Having touched upon the more aberrant forms of an ultra-moderate position, we now turn our attention to His Grace's portrayal of a seemingly more benign ecclesiological moderation.

There is first a more moderate group, which includes most of those Orthodox who have had close personal contact with other Christians. This group holds that, while it is true to say that Orthodoxy is the Church, it is false to conclude from this that those who are not Orthodox cannot possibly belong to the Church. Many people may be members of the Church who are not visibly so; invisible bonds may exist despite an outward separation. . . .

There is only one Church, but there are many different ways of being related to this one Church, and many different ways of being separated from it. Some non-Orthodox are very close indeed to Orthodoxy, others less so; some are friendly to the Orthodox Church, others indifferent or hostile. By God's grace the Orthodox Church possesses the fullness of truth (so its members are bound to believe), but there are other Christian communions which possess to a greater or lesser degree a genuine measure of Orthodoxy. All these facts must be taken into account: one cannot simply say that all non-Orthodox are outside the Church, and leave it at that; one cannot treat other Christians as if they stood on the same level as unbelievers.

Such is the view of the more moderate party.<sup>88</sup>

Reflection upon the main tenets of the moderate position reveals that it ventures unnecessarily into speculative territory, resulting in an obfuscation of Orthodox ecclesiology. Given that the "moderate group...includes most of those Orthodox who have had close personal contact with other Christians," it is safe to assume that the motivation for this ecclesial expansiveness stems from the commendable desire to uphold the "*extra ecclesiam*" aphorism without having to deny the possibility of salvation to those who are dedicated followers of Christ but outside the Church. However, this speculation causes more problems than it solves.

Let us now examine some examples of the "moderate" view provided by Bishop Kallistos, all in an attempt to answer this question: Is an approach legitimate—i.e., justifiable from Holy Tradition—which affirms that "there are many different ways of being related to this one Church"?

### **Saint Augustine's "Sheep Without"**

We begin with remarks that come well before any mention by His Grace of the "moderate-rigorous" categories. This is noteworthy, for his statements are presented as the teaching of the Church when in reality much of what is said belongs more appropriately in the "moderate" camp. After correctly stating that "outside the Church there is no salvation" he writes:

---

<sup>88</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 308-9.

Does it therefore follow that anyone who is not visibly within the Church is necessarily damned? Of course not; still less does it follow that everyone who is visibly within the Church is necessarily saved. As Augustine wisely remarked, 'How many sheep there are without, how many wolves within!' While there is no division between a 'visible' and an 'invisible Church', yet there may be members of the Church who are not visibly such, but whose membership is known to God alone. If anyone is saved, he must *in some sense* be a member of the Church; in *what sense*, we cannot always say.

This section begins well. However, with the introduction of Saint Augustine's "wise remark" a door is opened that could lead one to an improper understanding of Orthodox ecclesiology and the status of the heterodox. When taken in context, the selection from the Blessed Bishop of Hippo does not support the concept of invisible Church membership.

Therefore "the Lord knoweth them that are His;" they are the sheep. Such sometimes do not know themselves, but the Shepherd knoweth them, according to this predestination, this foreknowledge of God, according to the election of the sheep before the foundation of the world: for so saith also the apostle, "According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world." According, then, to this divine foreknowledge and predestination, how many sheep are outside, how many wolves within! and how many sheep are inside, how many wolves without! How many are now living in wantonness *who will yet* be chaste! how many are blaspheming Christ *who will yet* believe in Him! how many are giving themselves to drunkenness *who will yet* be sober! how many are preying on other people's property *who will yet* freely give of their own! Nevertheless *at present* they are hearing the voice of another, they are following strangers.<sup>89</sup>

The "sheep [who] are without" are those persons who are *presently outside* the visible flock of God but who *will be* numbered among the sheep at the Final Judgment (Saint Matt. 25:31-33). The "sheep who are inside" comprise some percentage of the Church's membership (Saint Matt. 7:21-23; 13: 24-30). In the sense in which Saint Augustine here speaks, these sheep—both inside and outside—are known by God according to His divine foreknowledge. The Church, on the other hand, acknowledges as sheep only those who in this lifetime were Orthodox and who have been glorified as Saints. For the rest of Her faithful—*i.e.*, those "inside," both living and reposed—the Church lovingly continues to offer up prayers that God may grant them salvation and "commit their souls to where the righteous repose."

Bishop Kallistos' use of the "wise remark" is not consistent with this framework. Rather, he suggests that "...there may be *members of the Church* who are not visibly such, but whose membership is known to God alone." Had he said "...there may be members

---

<sup>89</sup> Trans. the Rev. Dr. John Gibb and the Rev. James Innes, *NPNF* 1<sup>st</sup> ser., Vol. 7, p. 254, emphases ours.

of the Church in Heaven who were not visibly members of the Church on earth” we would have no problem.

Even if one were to admit that Saint Augustine held to some form of an “invisible true Church” concept<sup>90</sup>—an overly-logical extension of his flawed doctrine of predestination<sup>91</sup>—, it is highly debatable whether the expansiveness implied by Bishop Kallistos’ use of this (“dovish”?) Saint’s homiletic phrase is justified.

[Saint Augustine’s] doctrine of the church was more seriously affected by his view of predestination than was his doctrine of the sacraments. It was by no means self-evident that those who “participate physically in the sacraments” were to be regarded as members of the body of Christ, the church. For “in the ineffable prescience of God, many who seem to be on the outside are in fact on the inside, and many who seem to be on the inside are nevertheless in fact on the outside”; therefore the true church consisted of “the fixed number of the saints predestined before the foundation of the world,” even though some of them were now wallowing in heresy or vice. These belonged to the city of God, predestined and elected by grace, aliens here below but citizens above. When the church was defined this way, it was valid to say that God had none who were outside the communion of the church.

This definition of the church as the “number of the predestinated” was to figure prominently in the polemics of the late Middle Ages and the Reformation against the institutional church, *but in Augustine’s theology it had precisely the opposite function*. It enabled him to accept a distinction between the members of the empirical catholic church and the company of those who would be saved *while at the same time he insisted that the empirical catholic church was the only one in which salvation was dispensed; “for it is the church that gives birth to all.” Although God predestined, “we, on the basis of what each man is right now, inquire whether today they are to be counted as members of the church.”* It was to the church as now constituted that one was to look for grace, for guidance, and for authority. Those who accepted “the authority of the Scriptures as preeminent” should also acknowledge “that authority which from the time of the [earthly] presence of Christ, through the dispensation of the apostles and through a regular succession of bishops in their seats, has been preserved to our own day throughout the world.” This authority of orthodox catholic Christendom, “inaugurated by miracles, nourished by hope, enlarged by charity, established by antiquity,” was so powerful as even to validate the very authority of the

---

<sup>90</sup> This concept, at least as held by most Protestants today, is absolutely foreign to Orthodoxy. Indeed, there is an “invisible Church.” However, this refers to the Church Triumphant—the Heavenly Church—, with which the Church Militant is one. See “Is There An Invisible Church?” by Father Michael Pomazansky (OCIC).

<sup>91</sup> For a balanced critique of Saint Augustine’s doctrine of predestination see Father Seraphim (Rose), *The Place of Blessed Augustine in the Orthodox Church* (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1996 [1983]), Ch. III. He opens the chapter by stating that “[the] most serious of the exaggerations into which Blessed Augustine fell in his teaching on grace is to be found in his idea of *predestination*.” At the same time, however, Fr. Seraphim stresses that the Saint “most certainly did not teach ‘predestination’ as most people understand it today” but rather “in an exaggerated way which was easily liable to misinterpretation” (p. 43).

Bible. "For my part," Augustine declared, "I should not believe the gospel except as moved by the authority of the catholic church...."

There is no other valid means of making Christians and remitting sins, except by causing men to become believers by the institution of Christ and the church, and through the sacraments....<sup>92</sup>

There is no doubt that Saint Augustine believed in the necessity of visible Church membership for salvation, regardless of how imprecisely or inconsistently he may have at times reasoned concerning ecclesiology.

The "sheep without" remark was thus employed inexpediently. His Grace's statements can be too easily misread in support of the un-Orthodox notion of an "invisible true Church," especially in the light of his later claim that "we know where the Church is but we cannot be sure where it is not." This line of thinking—especially when conjoined with an illicit recognition of heterodox sacraments—is not far removed, if at all, from the Branch Theory. We are not suggesting, however, that His Grace would sanction such a corollary.

### **Khomiakov's "Invisible Ties"**

His Grace places in the ranks of the so-called "moderates" the views of the famous Russian lay-theologian and dialectician Alexei Khomiakov:

The Spirit of God blows where it chooses and, as Irenaeus said, where the Spirit is, there is the Church. We know where the Church is but we cannot be sure where it is not. This means, as Khomiakov insists, that we must refrain from passing judgment on non-Orthodox Christians:

Inasmuch as the earthly and visible [Orthodox] Church is not the fullness and completeness of the whole Church which the Lord appointed to appear at the final judgement of all creation, she acts and knows only within her own limits. . . . She does not judge the rest of humankind, and only looks upon those as excluded, that is to say, not belonging to her, who exclude themselves. The rest of humankind, whether alien from the Church, *or united to her by ties which God has not willed to reveal to her*, she leaves to the judgement of the great day.<sup>93</sup>

This passage often comes out in a discussion of heterodox status. At the outset we posit that the entire discussion of this matter might arguably end with this observation:

---

<sup>92</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, Vol. I, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 1974) pp. 302-303, 306.

<sup>93</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 308, emphasis his. The full text of Khomiakov's famous essay "The Church Is One" can be found on the Internet at <http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets>.

In response to this ["invisible tie"] line of thought, let us point out that since the Church on earth is a visible organism through which Her members are united with God and with each other by their participation in the Holy Mysteries, being "invisibly" linked to Her without the benefit of the Mysteries *is of no avail whatsoever*. So what point have we made, if we accept this kind of non-Patristic speculation?<sup>94</sup>

However, it is still worth proceeding with some amplifying remarks.

First, the following astute points made by Orthodox layman Justin Zamora during his correspondence with a Protestant inquirer put Khomiakov's statements in the proper light:

Khomiakov's point is to assert that God is not bound by the visible limits of the Church, not to assert that those visibly outside the Orthodox Church are in fact members of the Church. After all, Khomiakov asserts that the ties, if they exist at all (note that Khomiakov does not say that they exist with certainty), have not been revealed to the Church. Thus, Khomiakov is arguing that while God is not bound by such visible ties, *we are*, because "God has not willed to reveal to [us]" any way of being united to the Church other than visibly. To assert that those visibly outside the Orthodox Church are part of the Church is to assert that God has revealed other ties by which mankind can be united to her, an assertion that Khomiakov explicitly denies. Khomiakov's point is simply to say that God is not bound by the limits he has placed on us, and that accordingly we must not judge God's actions. Thus, this is more a statement about God and the Church's proper response to his actions than about the limits of the Church *per se*.

Second, the reader should know that Khomiakov's essay was also entitled "Experiment in a Catechetical Exposition of the Teaching on the Church." As Father Florovksy notes:

The "literary type" to which this catechetical "experiment" related must immediately be specified. In Khomiakov one seeks in vain for definitions and proofs. He poses and solves another problem. Actually, from the outset he excludes the possibility of defining or proving anything by formal argumentation, which might also tie and bind the unbeliever. Khomiakov denies the very possibility or hope of "demonstrating the truth and reaching it by the power of one's reason." He is speaking here about the knowledge of Christian truth. "But the powers of reason do not reach the truth of God, and human weakness is made manifest in the weakness of proofs." He consciously refrains from giving proofs or definitions—he testifies and describes.<sup>95</sup>

In short, Khomiakov's essay was largely a heuristic exercise in keeping with the apophatic tradition of the Church. His point was that one should not pass judgment on

---

<sup>94</sup> "A Traditionalist Critique of *The Orthodox Church*," p. 66, emphasis ours.

<sup>95</sup> *Ways of Russian Theology, Part Two*, p. 43.

those outside of the Church, but simply leave them to the mercy of God. Khomiakov was not always trying to making precise theological statements but rather theorizing or describing potential solutions to various enigmas. One must be careful not to read too much into his famous lines. Certainly, he is widely honored as a great nineteenth-century articulator of the Faith; but this respect “is based not on his strict adherence to Patristic theology, but rather on the fact that he paved the way for a return to the Fathers of the Church.”<sup>96</sup> Moreover, his theology is not without its ecclesiological limitations, as the eminent scholar Father John Romanides points out:

In contradiction to the doctrine of creation, which he accepts, Khomiakov opposes the spiritual and material. It is exactly here that he differs from Orthodox patristic and Biblical tradition, and it is because of this spiritualism that his ecclesiology is disconnected from Orthodox soteriology.<sup>97</sup>

The ecclesiology of the Fathers is inseparable from soteriology and Christology. The pivotal point of all their thinking is the necessity of liberation from the powers of death and the devil through communion with the Source of Life in the human nature of Christ. . . .<sup>98</sup>

This flesh of Christ is itself the foundation of dogma. . . . For this reason [the ecclesiology of the Slavophile movement—of which Khomiakov was a founder and leading thinker] overlooked the patristic dogma of the Church as a real union with each other in the flesh of Christ for the double purpose of communicating with divine life for immortality and of destroying the powers of the devil.<sup>99</sup>

Indeed, contrary to Bishop Kallistos, Father Romanides ultimately concludes that Khomiakov “fails to propose any explanation of how conversion is possible for one outside the Orthodox tradition.”<sup>100</sup> Of course, this does not imply that either Khomiakov or Father John believes that one could *not* be saved who was not in visible communion with the one true Church of God.

In light of what has been said thus far—buttressed by the clear impression one gets from Khomiakov’s other traditionally-minded writings about the Western confessions<sup>101</sup>—it is difficult not to conclude that Bishop Kallistos has done a disservice to his thought, ultimately misplacing him in the camp of the “moderates.” It is doubtful

---

<sup>96</sup> Father John Romanides, “Orthodox Ecclesiology According to A. Khomiakov” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, Vol. II, No. 1 (1956), p. 73.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67, fn. 47.

<sup>101</sup> Most notably, “On the Western Confessions of Faith” in *Ultimate Questions* and his correspondence with the Anglican deacon William Palmer in *Russia and the English Church*.

whether Khomiakov would have agreed with their ecclesiological waffling; and he most certainly would have objected to the use of his speculative views for ecumenist ends.

### **“We Know Where the Church Is But . . .”**

The Spirit of God blows where it chooses [Saint John 3:8] and, as Irenaeus said, where the Spirit is, there is the Church. We know where the Church is but we cannot be sure where it is not.

This last sentence is quite possibly one of the most famous ecclesiological apothegms of the twentieth century. In our experience it is almost never absent from a discussion of heterodox status. Does the orthodoxy of this statement measure up to its popularity? Unfortunately we must answer in the negative. By now the reasons should be obvious.

First, His Grace illegitimately uses two senses of the term “Church.” In the light of his other remarks we read this apothegm as follows: “We know where the [visible, historical, and one true] Church is, but we cannot be sure where it [the Church in an indefinable or mysterious sense known only to God and containing people who are united by ‘invisible ties’] is not.” This is simply another form of the “invisible Church membership” concept that has already been addressed.

Second, Bishop Kallistos improperly makes use of another Patristic quote, this time from Saint Irenaeus of Lyons: “Where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church, and every kind of grace.” Protestants often take this out of context in order to support their vague notion of the true Church as “invisible” and “known only to God.” However, when read in context, this Holy Martyr’s statement does not support such an idea. In fact, Saint Irenaeus was arguing for a refutation of Gnostic heresies based on the uniform teaching of a visible and historic Church and the necessity of being united to Her!

For this gift of God has been entrusted to the Church, as breath was to the first created man, for this purpose, that all the members receiving it may be vivified; and the [means of] communion with Christ has been distributed throughout it, that is, the Holy Spirit, the earnest of incorruption, the means of confirming our faith, and the ladder of ascent to God. “For in the Church,” it is said, “God hath set apostles, prophets, teachers,” and all the other means through which the Spirit works; *of which all those are not partakers who do not join themselves to the Church, but defraud themselves of life through their perverse opinions and infamous behaviour.* For where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church, and every kind of grace; but the Spirit is truth. *Those, therefore, who do not partake of Him, are neither nourished into life from the mother’s breasts, nor do they enjoy that most limpid fountain which issues from the body of Christ; but they dig for themselves broken cisterns out of earthly trenches, and drink putrid water*

out of the mire, fleeing from the faith of the Church lest they be convicted; and rejecting the Spirit, that they may not be instructed.<sup>102</sup>

We see from this that Saint Irenaeus' statement should not be used to support a "moderate" position. First, it begs the question of which extension of Grace in the ministry of the Holy Spirit—general or ecclesial—the Saint had in mind. In context, "Where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church" can only be a reference to the special ministry of the Spirit within the Church. Were it a reference to the general activity of the Holy Spirit, it would support a Protestant idea of an "invisible Church"—an idea foreign to the *phronema ton Pateron*.<sup>103</sup> Second, to imply that Saint Irenaeus' words lead to such forthright declarations as ". . .there are many different ways of being related to this one Church" is most unwise. Clearly, the venerable Bishop of Lyons did not hold to such a view.

### Conclusion

The "moderate" view—which, revealingly enough, appears to be the bad fruit of frequent contact with the heterodox<sup>104</sup>—does not stand up to close scrutiny. It is ambiguous, overly speculative, and fails to reflect accurately the true nature of the Church and the Mystery of Salvation found within Her. Lacking conclusive Patristic justification it should be rejected.

What is needed in these times is a reaffirmation of the so-called "rigorist" view. Orthodox should have no reservations about unequivocally stating that "all non-Orthodox are outside the Church." In so doing we are not inconsistent to affirm that heterodox believers have a deep and genuine faith in Christ and that God will have mercy upon them. To that end we humbly submit a new apothegm: "We know who is in the Church but we cannot be sure who will not be."

---

<sup>102</sup> *Against the Heresies*, III, 24, 1, emphases ours.

<sup>103</sup> *The Unity of the Church and the World Conference of Christian Communities*, pp. 18, 28-32. This is probably the best short treatise that one could read in order to complement the ideas in this book.

<sup>104</sup> Recall Bishop Kallistos' remark that the "moderate" view is typically found among "those Orthodox who have had close personal contact with other Christians" (p. 308). Cf. the comments by Dr. Cavarnos in Chapter One.

## VIII. Saint Ignaty and Daniel Clendenin

By way of closing out our study we deemed it beneficial to examine two pieces of writing that deal especially with the eternal ramifications of Orthodox ecclesiology—one recent and one from the past century. We will begin with the latter.

### Saint Ignaty's Letter to an Orthodox Layman

At least one Saint of recent times, Bishop Ignaty (Brianchaninov)—a man of no little intelligence and Patristic insight, as well as considerable experience in confronting the heterodoxy of his day—appears to have argued forcefully for the impossibility of salvation for the heterodox.<sup>105</sup> For many people, Saint Ignaty's views are a good example of what might loosely be called a "rigorist" view. Nonetheless, careful reflection upon his words indicate that they provide only superficial support for such a claim.

When considering his letter we must first keep the historical circumstances in mind. As the introductory note to the version in *The Orthodox Word* points out, Saint Ignaty lived during a time when the Russian intelligentsia "had departed so far from Christian truth as to be incapable of distinguishing it from error and heresy." That being the case, it is entirely understandable that Saint Ignaty would write with such bluntness and urgency. His letter indicates that there was much confusion in his day, confusion that was clearly visible in the letter from the layman that evoked this response:

I will answer the question you have raised point by point, in as few words as possible. "Why," you write, "cannot pagans, Moslems, and so-called heretics be saved? There are excellent people among them. To condemn these good people would be contrary to the Divine mercy! . . . Indeed, it is even contrary to sound human reason.—Heretics, after all, are Christians just the same. To consider oneself saved, and the members of other faiths damned, is both foolish and extremely proud!"<sup>106</sup>

Saint Ignaty proceeds to rebuke him and all those who are like-minded for their failure to understand even the basic Christian truths regarding salvation.

His letter can be divided into two parts. The first half addresses the error held widely at the time, that those who consciously deny Christ, yet do "good works," can be saved. He writes:

---

<sup>105</sup> "Christians! You Must Know Christ!," *The Orthodox Word*, Vol. I, 66-72. Another version of the letter was published in *Orthodox Life*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (January 1991) entitled "Concerning the Impossibility of Salvation for the Heterodox and Heretics." The title is not part of the original letter. As our remarks concerning this letter will indicate, the latter title implies certain conclusions by Saint Ignaty that are not borne out by a careful reading of the text.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

Christians! You must know Christ! You must realize that you do not know Him if you acknowledge salvation possible without Him for any kind of good works! He who acknowledges salvation to be possible without Christ denies Christ, and, perhaps without knowing it, falls into the grave sin of blasphemy.<sup>107</sup>

Communion with God the Father is through Christ alone.<sup>108</sup> Saint Ignaty was rightly alarmed at the fact that many Orthodox Christians in his day did not understand this most basic teaching. The purpose of the first half of his response is thus clearly to instruct his inquirer, an Orthodox layman, in sound doctrine as well as to warn him not to become infected with the *bacterium* of wrong belief that was so prevalent. It is one thing for a person who has never been presented with the opportunity to enter into the Orthodox Faith to remain outside—we have shown that there is ample warrant for hope in this case; but it is quite another thing when those who have been illumined in Holy Baptism and have tasted the fullness of Christianity, to continue in sin or fall away from right belief. As the Orthodox *Catechism* of Metropolitan Peter (Moghila) states:

*Question #63.* How must one consider those who die in the wrath of God?

*Answer.* One must consider them in the same fashion, that some will suffer less punishment and some greater after the last judgment, as it is said: “And that servant who knew the will of his lord, and prepared not himself, and did not according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes; but he that knew not, and did things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes.” (Luke 12:47-48)<sup>109</sup>

Metropolitan Philaret underscores this truth by quoting from a letter from Saint Theophan the Recluse:

With reference to the above question, it is particularly instructive to recall the answer once given to an “inquirer” by the Blessed Theophan the Recluse. The blessed one replied more or less thus: “You ask, will the heterodox be saved. . . . Why do you worry about them? They have a Saviour Who desires the salvation of every human being. He will take care of them. You and I should not be burdened with such a concern. Study yourself and your own sins. . . . I will tell you one thing, however: should you, being Orthodox and possessing the Truth in its fullness, betray Orthodoxy, and enter a different faith, you will lose your soul forever.” We believe the foregoing answer by the saintly ascetic to be the best that can be given in this matter.<sup>110</sup>

---

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>108</sup> “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me” (St. John 14:16).

<sup>109</sup> Cf. St. Luke 12:48; 2 Peter 2:20-22; Heb. 6:4-6.

<sup>110</sup> “Will the Heterodox Be Saved?”

Parenthetically we should note that Saint Theophan gives some very wise admonitions to prevent a person from engaging in unnecessary speculation about and preoccupation with the eternal destiny of those outside the Church. It is enough to be concerned about one's own soul and, hearkening to the words of Saint Seraphim of Sarov,<sup>111</sup> in this quiet witness and struggle to acquire the Holy Spirit to ever greater measures. Perhaps many will be saved as a result.

As the theme of the first half of the letter is not the focus of our discussion, however, we will proceed straightway to the second half of his letter, which begins with the following series of statements:

You say, "heretics are Christians just the same." Where did you take that from? Perhaps someone or other, calling himself a Christian but knowing nothing of Christ, may in his extreme ignorance decide to acknowledge himself as the same kind of Christian as heretics, and fail to distinguish the holy Christian faith from those offspring of the curse, blasphemous heresies. Quite otherwise, however, due true [Orthodox] Christians reason about this.<sup>112</sup>

Careful examination of the remainder of his letter indicates that Saint Ignaty had only one kind of heretic in mind, what Roman Catholics would call "formal heretics" (see Chapter Four). He does not seem to have in mind people who are heretics in a material, unconscious sense. We would be remiss in our presentation if we did not at this time remind the reader that the convenient division of heretics into "formal" and "material" does not fall out along neatly definable lines. Nor are these lines easily discernible in any given person. With this in mind we cannot find any fault with these remarks made near the end of his letter:

The more modern heresies above all strive to reject the action of the Holy Spirit: with terrible blasphemies they have rejected the Divine Liturgy, all the sacraments, everything, everything in which the Ecumenical Church has always acknowledged the action of the Holy Spirit. They call all this human ordinances—even bolder: superstition, error!<sup>113</sup>

Whether any given heterodox Christian is found guilty of such infractions at the Particular and Final Judgment,<sup>114</sup> such that he or she is ultimately cast into Hell, is known only to God. Saint Ignaty is speaking here about those persons known by God to be conscious, willful blasphemers of the Holy Spirit. It would be imprudent to apply his

---

<sup>111</sup> "Acquire the spirit of peace and thousands around you will be saved."

<sup>112</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>114</sup> On this distinction see the numerous articles on the "Death and the Future Life" page (OCIC).

words to all heterodox Christians, as some have done in the past. Once again we present the wise words of Metropolitan Philaret:

The question: Can the heterodox, *i.e.* those who do, not belong to Orthodoxy—the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church—be saved, has become particularly painful and acute in our days.

In attempting to answer this question, it is necessary, first of all, to recall that in His Gospel the Lord Jesus Christ Himself mentions but one state of the human soul which unfailingly leads to perdition—*i.e.* blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matt. 12:1-32). The Holy Spirit is, above all, the Spirit of Truth, as the Saviour loved to refer to Him. Accordingly, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is blasphemy against the Truth, *conscious and persistent opposition to it*. The same text makes it clear that even blasphemy against the Son of Man—*i.e.* the Lord Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God Himself—may be forgiven men, as it may be uttered in error or in ignorance and, subsequently may be covered by conversion and repentance (an example of such a converted and repentant blasphemer is the Apostle Paul. (See Acts 26:11 and I Tim. 1:13.)....

The Holy Orthodox Church is the repository of the divinely revealed Truth in all its fullness and fidelity to apostolic Tradition. Hence, he who leaves the Church, who intentionally and consciously falls away from it, joins the ranks of its opponents and becomes a renegade as regards apostolic Tradition. The Church dreadfully anathematized such renegades, in accordance with the words of the Saviour Himself (Matt. 18:17) and of the Apostle Paul (Gal. 1:8-9), threatening them with eternal damnation and calling them to return to the Orthodox fold. It is self-evident, however, that sincere Christians who are Roman Catholics, or Lutherans, or members, of other non-Orthodox confessions, *cannot be termed renegades or heretics—i.e. those who knowingly pervert the truth.*<sup>115</sup>

Therefore, the following closing statements by Saint Ignaty should not be applied to every heterodox Christian, as some are inclined to do, but rather to *Orthodox* Christians who are so ignorant of their own Faith that they stand to lose their soul if they become infected with the *bacterium* of false doctrine:

Do not think that such ignorance [of true Christianity] is a defect of small importance. It is not! Its consequences can be fatal, especially now when any number of books with a satanic teaching are circulating under a Christian title. In ignorance of true Christian teaching, just like that you can take a false, blasphemous idea for a true one, appropriate it for yourself, and together with it appropriate eternal damnation as well. The blasphemer will not be saved! And the perplexities you have expressed in your letter are already terrible omens regarding your salvation; their essence is rejection of Christ! Do not play with your salvation! Do not play with it, or you will weep forever.<sup>116</sup>

---

<sup>115</sup> "Will the Heterodox Be Saved?" emphases ours.

<sup>116</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 72. That these words could also be applied to *true* heterodox blasphemers goes without saying. But again, it is not for *us* to judge who these people are.

The life-and-death urgency of his words echo those of Saint Paisius to the Uniate priest and those of many other Holy Fathers.<sup>117</sup> They indicate that Saint Ignaty's primary concern was the spiritual protection of his flock. We see here an attitude that strikes modern sensibilities as rather extreme—so steeped as they are in casual indifference regarding truth. But it should be a warning to us that right belief is no trifling matter.

Firm conclusions as to how Saint Ignaty would view the heterodox of, say, America—a largely Baptist culture where Orthodoxy still has yet to make extensive inroads—are difficult to draw from a single pastoral letter. What one *can* say is that to align oneself with error is to put one's soul in grave danger. For those who were once illumined and then reject the fullness of Christianity—Orthodoxy—, one can be quite certain of their eternal destiny.

### Daniel Clendenin's Remarks

Mr. Clendenin is the author of numerous sympathetic books and articles on Orthodoxy from a Protestant perspective. However, his commendable knowledge of the Orthodox faith has apparently not given him sufficient understanding of our ecclesiology. Given the reasons for the widespread confusion over this subject, this is understandable. Here we will examine some of his relevant remarks in the January 6, 1997 issue of *Christianity Today*. The article, which has apparently received wide circulation among Evangelical Protestants, is entitled "Why I'm Not Orthodox."

But whether a non-Orthodox person can even be saved is an open question in Orthodox ecclesiology. Over coffee one day I asked an Orthodox priest whether I, as a Protestant theologian, might be considered a true Christian. His response: "I don't know."

Clendenin misunderstands this Priest's response. One might first observe that the Priest did not say, "No," but rather "I don't know." (This is undoubtedly also a very condensed version of what was said. It is quite reasonable to think that the Priest said more in his reply than this.) He confuses the situation by saying "It's an open question whether a non-Orthodox person can even be saved," putting the issue of eternal destiny in the same context with the confusing phrase "true Christian." When reading the Priest's response one should keep in mind how an Orthodox Christian who knows his Faith would be thinking.

*The use of the term "true Christian."* The Priest could not know whether Clendenin was indeed a "true Christian." Though Orthodox Christians certainly acknowledge the

---

<sup>117</sup> For example, St. John of Damascus writes: "Truth must be preferred to absolutely anything else, even life itself. It is desired for living with it, and preferable to die for it than to live without it." Cited in Constantine N. Tsirpanlis, *Introduction to Eastern Patristic Thought and Orthodox Theology* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), p. 95.

Scriptural distinction between the “wheat and the tares” (Saint Matt. 13:25), who falls into what category is known only to God. Furthermore, which category a person ends up in is ultimately a function of his free will, as previously illustrated by Saint John Chrysostom’s commentary on Saint John 1:9. Orthodoxy does not accept an Augustinian concept of predestination or election. If Clendenin had used the word “Christian” (without the modifier “true”) then it is a fair assumption that this Priest would have responded with either “yes” or “no,” depending on whether he was using the term according to *akribeia* or *oikonomia*.

*With respect to Clendenin’s ultimate destiny.* Again, the Priest had to say “I don’t know,” the same thing that he would say about anyone, Orthodox or not, including himself. Orthodox Christians never use the phrase “I’m saved” as many Protestants do. Rather, when a “born-again Christian” asks an Orthodox “Are you saved?,” a typical response is “I trust that I am on the right path, but know that I must persevere to the end” (Saint Matt. 10:22; 24:13). To put this in perspective, consider these humble words of Saint Paisius (Velichkovsky) in a letter to the Priest Demetrius in May of 1766:

Concerning myself, I may say that, finding myself by God’s mercies still in this life, even if in bodily infirmity, I have ceaseless grief and pain of soul at the thought of with what face I shall appear before the Terrible Judge at His Terrible Judgment, where there is no respect of persons... I have undoubting hope for my salvation only, after God and the Mother of God, in the prayers of the brethren who live with me, even if I am unworthy. And I do not despair that the unutterable and unattainable mercy of God will be poured out even on my sinful soul; but if not, and if for my evil deeds I shall be rightly condemned by God’s justice to eternal torment, then blessed be God: for I am worthy of this for my negligence of His Divine Commandments...; but still, for the sake of their holy prayers, I the wretched one hope also to be saved: for which I entreat your holiness to entreat God for me, remaining in all humility your true friend, desiring your salvation.<sup>118</sup>

The Protestant emphasis on “assurance of salvation” is something that appears presumptuous to most Orthodox. One can be assured that Christ objectively secured salvation for all of mankind; but this salvation must be personally appropriated by each and every person. Thus, *personally* one should have no warrant for such “assurance,” as a Christian must persevere until the end, being ever watchful. Saint Paul did not rest in some sort of “assurance,” and neither should anyone else (1 Cor. 9:27). To some, this will be merely an issue of semantics; but for many Protestants, especially those who set Grace and works in opposition to one another, this clarification is very important. “Let

---

<sup>118</sup> Schema-monk Metrophanes, trans. Father Seraphim (Rose), *Blessed Paisius Velichkovsky* (Platina, CA: St. Herman of Alaska Press, 1994 [1976]), pp. 151-152.

us imitate Abba Sisoës. When asked ‘Are you saved?’, the humble person can easily answer: ‘I do not know whether I have even begun to repent.’”<sup>119</sup>

The requirement of true repentance for salvation is a concept worth underscoring for our Protestant readers. While it is true that “Christianity” is inseparable from the Church, and *vice versa*,<sup>120</sup> it does not follow that membership in the Church guarantees that one will inherit the Kingdom of God. Indeed, it makes it more likely that there will be a greater penalty on the Day of Judgment for those who did not live up to, or “actualize,” all that they had been given. “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required...” (Saint Luke 12:48).<sup>121</sup> Membership in the Orthodox Church and a regular partaking of Her Mysteries do not “magically” confer salvation.

Participation in the sacraments must be combined with the practice of the ascetic life of the Church. Otherwise, the grace transmitted through the sacraments does not contribute to one’s salvation or cure but rather to one’s punishment. . . . Baptism and the other sacraments will not deliver [Christians] from eternal damnation, if they live without repenting and do not observe the divine commandments.<sup>122</sup>

---

<sup>119</sup> Bishop Kallistos Ware, *How Are We Saved?: The Understanding of Salvation in the Orthodox Tradition* (Minneapolis, MN: Light and Life Publishing, 1996), p. 88.

<sup>120</sup> *Christianity or the Church?*.

<sup>121</sup> The sin of a Christian offends God incomparably more, since the Christian has received a clearer and fuller knowledge of the commandments, and has received grace to strengthen him in the fulfillment of these commandments. And a Christian, who has received in himself Christ the Lord—which is the highest degree of Christian perfection—in sinning offends God immeasurably. (“Is it Sufficient to Believe in Christ in Order to Be Saved?,” compiled from the works of St. Theophan the Recluse, *Orthodox Life*, Vol. 37, No. 5, 14).

<sup>122</sup> [Metropolitan] Hierotheos Vlachos, *Orthodox Spirituality: An Introduction* (Levadia, Greece: Birth of the Theotokos Monastery, 1994), p. 71.

## Epilogue: Orthodoxy's "Exclusive Openness"

Doubtless that some readers, especially Protestants, consider the Traditional position presented herein to be too "exclusive." Similarly, Orthodox Christians involved in evangelism or the Ecumenical Movement may have concerns that such a teaching on the boundaries of the Church is unnecessarily offensive and hinders progress towards Christian unity.

Is it true—as some smitten by the bug of "ecumenical diplomacy" today say—that this concept of the Church is outdated and should be jettisoned in the interest of "love for our separated 'brethren?'" Absolutely not. How can God honor efforts to witness or restore unity when Holy Tradition is trampled under foot? Does not a desire to dilute the truth constitute a lack of faith in God or a belief that one should "take things into his own hands" rather than trust God? Do not these words of Saint Paul apply?

For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.<sup>123</sup>

We maintain that love for all of mankind, the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Saint Matt. 28:19), and efforts to heal Christian divisions are in no way incompatible with so-called "Orthodox exclusivism." In fact, there is ample reason to believe that such apostolic (*i.e.*, "sent out") endeavors are aided by it.

[T]he primacy [or exclusive claims] of the Orthodox Church need not be a stumbling-block to dialogue with the non-Orthodox Christian world, but a point of attraction. For we . . . hold to our beliefs not out of arrogance, but out of love for our traditions. We do not think that we hold in our hands something which is ours, but which is universal, catholic, and the domain of all those who confess Christ. We, in the final analysis, are the ecumenists, for we have maintained the integrity of the Faith at the same time that we offer it to others in the pure form in which it was handed down to us from the Apostles.<sup>124</sup>

*[W]e must not be afraid to say that the realm of Orthodox Christian experience is the exclusive domain of salvation. In so doing, we affirm where we know salvation to be, but do not presume, in defiance of the Providence of God, to state with boldness where it is not. And if our truth is an exclusive truth, it is made open. . . by our ability to see virtue even among those in error. This principle is reified by our constant commitment to love and hospitality. A perfect example of this was a visit made by some American Uniates to Metropolitan Cyprian several years ago. His Eminence received his guests as brothers and treated them with*

---

<sup>123</sup> Galatians 1:10.

<sup>124</sup> Archbishop Chrysostomos, Forward to Father Daniel Degy-ansky, *Orthodox Christianity and the Spirit of Contemporary Ecumenism*, ed. by Bishop Auxetnios (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1992), p. 4.

great affection. Yet, one evening, while offering them a beautiful dinner on the veranda of his cell, he told them: "Love dictates that I tell you that you are heretics and must become Orthodox." One of the clergymen, in fact, is now a Priest in the Antiochian Archdiocese. *It is our openness to the virtues of those in error, our readiness to be ridiculed and embarrassed by our "exclusivity," and our love of the truth which ultimately make us Orthodox and open to all things, being all things to all men for the sake of their salvation.*<sup>125</sup>

Though we trust that these brief remarks will challenge some of our Orthodox readers to reconsider their reactions, we suspect that many Protestants are offended by *any* ecclesiological exclusivity. On their behalf we might point out that Jesus was quite "exclusive" when He said "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life: *no man cometh unto the Father, except by Me*" (Saint John 14:6). Consistent reasoning with Holy Scripture should lead one to conclude that if the Church is His Body (Ephesians 1:22-23) then no one can come to the Father except through the Church. This is why Saint Cyprian could say, "He cannot have God as his Father who does not have the Church as his Mother." Though these are "hard sayings" (Saint John 6:60), Holy Scripture clearly teaches that Jesus Christ, as encountered through His Church, is the only Door to the narrow way which leads to Life (Saint John 10:7; Saint Matt. 7:13-14).

Despite the Orthodox polemics occasionally aimed at heterodox proselytizers in an effort to guard the flock, non-Orthodox Christians should know that the Church heartily welcomes those who inquire into our Holy Orthodox Faith. With this in mind we cannot think of a more fitting and eloquent conclusion than to offer these words of Saint Hilarion:

I hope that. . .you will be convinced that the teaching I have presented on the unity of the Church and on the unity of Her life of grace serves the work of Christian union, and not for separation. Union with the Church, adherence to the living body of the one Church of Christ, is placed highest of all. *It should be of no importance to a man who joins the Church what he was:* it is important and saving for him only that he, by becoming united with the Church, becomes a member of the Body of Christ.

Therefore, we will not close our eyes to sad reality, we will not be afraid to confess that we do not all belong to the one Church of Christ! To speak of union and annihilate and obscure the idea of the one Church of Christ for the sake of it—will this be profitable for the work of unity? . . .I pray to God to grant me, a young man, to live to the time, when we will both be together in the One Church of Christ and when, on the different hemispheres of our planet, we will have Communion in the one Bread.<sup>126</sup>

In the Church is found the fullness of God's Grace and truth. Her boundaries are open to all who willingly embrace Her. Catholicity is preserved in Her uniqueness. All are welcome with open arms.

---

<sup>125</sup> "The Exclusive Openness of Truth," *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. XI, No. 4 (1994), p. 8 (emphases theirs).

<sup>126</sup> *Unity of the Church*, pp. 71-72

# Appendix I: An Extended Critique of Ecumenist Reasoning

## Preliminary Remarks

Before beginning our analysis, a few words need to be said about the term “ecumenist.” First, we Orthodox opposed to the more aberrant forms of ecumenism are *not* against ecumenism in its true and proper form—i.e., activities proper to the Apostolic mark of the Church (to be “sent out”), conducted in ways that do not violate Orthodox canonical guidelines. “Ecumenist” and “ecumenism” carry both positive and negative connotations which should be respectively qualified by words such as “true” or “political”. In this book “ecumenist” is employed in its negative connotation, referring to a person “infected” with what the Holy Fathers call the *bacterium* of an ecclesiological heresy. The chief symptoms of this disease are statements and activities that contradict or compromise the unity and uniqueness of the Church, and which expand Her boundaries in ways that are foreign to Her self-understanding. At an advanced stage, these symptoms often include an open espousal of various forms of the heretical Branch Theory of the Church, accompanied by an open disdain for those Faithful who stand opposed to the erosion of Holy Tradition and the Patristic mindset which so often characterizes Orthodox involvement in the ecumenical movement.

Second, this clarification puts our critical observations in proper perspective. There are generally two types of afflicted people: conscious betrayers of the Faith and unwitting victims of the syncretistic *Zeitgeist*, the latter often being unaware of their illness. The former, however, are the “wolves” of whom Christ spoke. No attempt is made, here, to label these Orthodox spokesmen as one or the other. That a member of the Church is infected with the *bacterium* of wrong belief does not necessarily make him a heretic. In most cases, such individuals are only spiritually ill, *and if their souls are not cured, it may lead to their separation from the Church*. This is a complex issue beyond the scope of this book.<sup>127</sup>

Thus, in critiquing anti-traditional statements by Orthodox ecumenists, no attempt is made to question their overall sincerity, impugn their motives, or call them heretics. In God’s good time, their own words and actions will be shown for what they truly are, and the *Church* in a synodal gathering, not individual persons, will render judgment.

## Modernist Scholarship Versus Ecclesial Consciousness

Orthodox Ecumenist John Erickson is Professor of Canon Law and Church History at Saint Vladimir’s Seminary in Crestwood, N.Y. His numerous articles on the reception

---

<sup>127</sup> For further discussion see “The True Nature of Heresy,” *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. XIII, Numbers 3&4, pp. 75-77, and a “Question and Answer” on heresy in an earlier issue of the same: Vol. IV, No. 3, pp. 18-20.

of converts, *oikonomia*, etc., are a good study in the way *not* to present an academically honest and Orthodox view.

It would take a separate book to answer all of his assertions point by point. But this would be the wrong approach to take anyway—a move away from the firm foundation of Holy Tradition and onto the rationalistic and deceptive ground of a historical-critical method<sup>128</sup> detached from the spiritual life of the Church. Another way of stating the problem would be to say that Erickson appears to view Holy Tradition as a collection of documents and facts rather than as a mosaic that one perceives intuitively through the mind of the Fathers. As Father Georges Florovsky puts it:

It is not enough to be acquainted with the texts and to know how to draw from them quotes and arguments. *One must possess the theology of the Fathers from within.* Intuition is perhaps more important for this than erudition, for intuition alone revives their writings and makes them a *witness*. It is only from within that we can perceive and distinguish what (actually) is a catholic testimony from what would be merely theological opinion, hypothesis, interpretation, or theory.<sup>129</sup>

With these wise comments in mind, and in order to counter more appropriately Erickson's allegations, we should first point out that the reasoning reflected in his articulation of "secondary theology" is incompatible with the Church's "essential theology." What is meant by these two terms?

There are, in the Orthodox Church, two ways of theology; two levels, as it were, at which the divine truth might be approached. The first of these, essential theology, proceeds out of the spirit of the Church, from the very experience of the God-bearing Fathers, who, in their theological writings and expressions, bring to full bloom the sweet-scented flower of their spiritual vision. And this flower is nourished by the very Vine of the Faith, rooted in the same vineyard where Saints, Martyrs, and Confessors have toiled for centuries untold, and planted in the sure foundation of the truth itself. Such theology is not the domain of the scholar, nor is it ultimately the concern of the intellect. It cannot be separated from the spiritual life itself. (So it is, for example, that the great luminary of Orthodoxy, St. Gregory Palamas, is characterized by the Church as "the perfection of monks," the "wonder working Gregory," a "preacher of Grace," and, in *consequence of this*, "theologian invincible among theologians.") In bestowing the title "theologian" on so few of the Fathers (and only on several, formally), the Orthodox Church pays great homage to the truth which She embodies, which is inextricably bound to the spiritual life which She directs, guides, and imparts to the humble and

---

<sup>128</sup> In his article "The Reception of Non-Orthodox into the Orthodox Church" (*St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 1) Erickson says that "the view of early church life and practice on which [the 'economic approach'] is based is quite at odds with the findings of serious historical scholarship" (p. 16). Not only is this questionable, but more importantly, Orthodox Tradition does not hinge upon the findings of modern scholarship. His very *modus operandi* is foreign to the mind of the Fathers.

<sup>129</sup> "The Ways of Russian Theology," *Collected Works*, Vol. IV, *Aspects of Church History*, p. 191, first emphasis ours.

Faithful: a truth which is the highest form of theology, a “spiritual knowledge” of God. It is precisely this changeless, revealed theology which we dare not claim to capture in the pages of this small book.

The second form of theology, which the Church allows us, is secondary theology, primarily entailing the explication of the spiritual life, according to, and consistent with, the divine revelation of essential theology. This theology encompasses the process by which we lift up our intellects to the mental contemplation of the divine truth, by which we attempt to approach God in a form of mental discipline, the ultimate experience of truth being fulfilled only by the enlightenment of His Grace. Thus we have, today, “theologians,” students of this secondary way of theology, who can help us in our strivings to elevate the mere intellect to the understanding of what is “incomprehensible.” To the extent that such efforts recognize the greater worth and importance of essential theology, they remain true to Patristic tradition. While not proceeding from the mystical mind of the Fathers, they at least faithfully express it. To the extent, too, that these efforts are fixed on divine truth, they of necessity inspire humility in the student. And where humility is, the Fathers teach us, God dwells. And where God dwells, there truth is to be found.<sup>130</sup>

This leads us to the concept of “ecclesial consciousness,” and the concomitant spiritual authority that it wields. As we have already clearly shown, the Orthodox Church’s view of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism is not ambiguous or undecided. However, for the sake of argument let us assume that no “formal declarations by an official body of the Church” have been made about them. This will afford us an opportunity to examine this concept. Doing so will shed more light on the methodology of men like John Erickson.

The “argument from officialdom”—aside from the fact that it is completely overturned by historical evidence—is ultimately a sophistical one that carries no weight except for those who have an ecumenical agenda or who view the Sacred Canons as a legal system in which Western-minded Canon “lawyers” can find a way to “make a case” for an idea that is completely out of tune with the choir of the Fathers. In a brilliant article on the concept of canonicity, Father Alexander Schmemmann discusses the emergence and symptoms of a legalistic mindset that has infected some in the Church today:

Finally, [the problem of “canonical subordinationism”] leads to (and also in part proceeds from) the harmful and un-Orthodox reduction of canonicity to an almost abstract principle of *validity*. When a man has been consecrated bishop by at least two other bishops, he is considered as a “valid” bishop regardless of the ecclesiastical and ecclesiological content of his consecration. But Orthodox tradition never isolated validity into a “principle in itself,” i.e. disconnected from truth, authenticity and, in general, the whole faith and order of the Church. It would not be difficult to show that the canonical tradition, when dealing with holy orders and sacraments, always stresses

---

<sup>130</sup> *Scripture and Tradition*, pp. 1-2.

that they are valid because they are acts *of*, and *within*, the Church which means that it is their authenticity as acts of the Church that make them valid and not *vice-versa*. To consider validity as a self-contained principle leads to a magical understanding of the Church and to a dangerous distortion of ecclesiology. . . .

What is important for us here and what constitutes the “disease” mentioned above is that this organic blend of State regulations, ethnical solidarity and Church organization led little by little to a divorce of the canonical consciousness from its dogmatical and spiritual context. Canonical *tradition*, understood at first as an organic part of the dogmatical tradition, as the latter's application to the empirical life of the Church, became Canon *law*: a system of rules and regulations, juridical, and not primarily doctrinal and spiritual, in their nature and interpreted as such within categories alien to the spiritual essence of the Church. Just as a lawyer is the one who can find all possible precedents and arguments that favors his “case,” a canonist, in this system of thought, is the one who, in the huge mass of canonical texts, can find that one which justifies his “case,” even if the latter seems to contradict the spirit of the Church. And once such “text” is found, “canonicity” is established. . . . Canons do not constitute or create the Church, their function is to defend, clarify and regulate the life of the Church, to make it comply with the essence of the Church. This means that in order to be properly understood, interpreted and applied, canonical texts must be always referred to that *truth* of, and about, the Church, which they express sometimes for a very particular situation and which is not necessarily explicit in the canonical text itself. . . .

The dogmatical or spiritual essence of the Church as unity is thus the criterion for the proper understanding of canons concerning Church organization and also for their proper application.<sup>131</sup>

These incisive remarks are quite relevant to our discussion. Failure to grasp or acknowledge the ecclesiological significance of numerous Sacred Canons containing timeless dogmatic principles<sup>132</sup> is one of the main reasons why certain people in the Church today attempt to argue for the “validity” of heterodox sacraments and a whole host of related novelties. This problem is connected with a failure to comprehend the boundaries of right belief and practice according to the medical model of the Church—*i.e.*, the Patristic concept of the Church as a spiritual Hospital, with the Priests and Bishops functioning as the therapists and physician’s assistants to Christ the Healer.<sup>133</sup> Arguing that the Canons proscribing common prayer and worship with heretics, or prescribing how they are to be received into the Church, are outmoded (because they

---

<sup>131</sup> “Problems of Orthodoxy in America: The Canonical Problem,” *St. Vladimir’s Seminary Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1964, pp. 73-76.

<sup>132</sup> One should not confuse fidelity to the Holy Canons with canonical literalism. All Canons are not of equal weight. Some are not authoritative for our times. Regarding how one should view the Sacred Canons, see Fr. Alexander Lebedeff, “Some Thoughts on the Holy Canons” (OCIC).

<sup>133</sup> For more on the “medical model,” see the many works by Metropolitan Hierotheos (Vlachos) of Nafpaktos.

were not written during the unique situation in which the Orthodox Church finds Herself in the post-Christian pluralistic West), Orthodoxy's professional theologians overlook the fact that these Canons contain important guidelines that protect both the Faithful from infection with the *bacterium* of heretical beliefs, and the Hospital Ship from foundering or breaking up. Failure to heed these boundaries has resulted in many of the modernist illnesses that plague "world Orthodoxy" today, as well as the gradual erosion of a *true* ecumenical spirit—one that can only be nurtured with a proper Orthodox self-understanding.

Entirely *apropos* of our discussion are some remarks made by Father Alexander concerning a Canon about the requirements for Episcopal Consecration:

The canon both reveals and safeguards an essential truth about the Church and its proper application is possible, therefore, only within the full context of that truth. And only this context explains why canons which apparently are anachronistic and have nothing to do with our time and situations are not considered as obsolete but remain an integral part of Tradition. To be sure the Melitian schism which divided Egypt at the beginning of the fourth century [and as a consequence of which this canon was written] has in itself no great important for us. Yet the canons of the First Ecumenical Council which defined the norms for its solution keep all their significance precisely because they reveal that truth of the Church in the light of which, and for the preservation of which that schism was solved. *All this means that the search for canonicity consists not in an accumulation of "texts", but in the effort, first, to understand the ecclesiological meaning of a given text, and then, to relate it to a particular and concrete situation.*<sup>134</sup>

What is missing today in the arguments of John Erickson and other Orthodox ecumenists is precisely this fidelity to the Church's self-understanding. This will become more clear as we proceed.

### **A Misunderstanding of Fundamental Orthodox Teachings**

Professor Erickson writes:

Some have found [*oikonomia*] a welcome panacea for all manner of ecclesiastical ills. . . . Others—quite a different group!—have been attracted by its Cyprianic exaltation of the Church as the exclusive vehicle of salvation. For them, outside the canonical limits of the Orthodox Church there is simply undifferentiated darkness, in which rites like baptism and ordination have no more significance than non-baptism and non-ordination.<sup>135</sup>

---

<sup>134</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 76, emphasis ours.

<sup>135</sup> *The Challenge of Our Past* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1991), p. 117.

Erickson is also fond of saying that the “Cyprianic view” means that “outside the Orthodox Church as we see it there is simply undifferentiated darkness in which the Pope is no different than a witchdoctor.”<sup>136</sup>

These misleading caricatures lack the sober-mindedness and precision that one would expect from a man of his position. Moreover, they are quite astounding in the light of contrary evidence from Holy Tradition. Whether wittingly or unwittingly, he has helped to foster the oft-repeated but false accusation that those who affirm the invalidity of heterodox sacraments also believe that there is no Grace whatsoever outside of the Church. He obviously fails properly to acknowledge the distinction between the general and special ministries of the Holy Spirit, as outlined in Chapter Two.<sup>137</sup> Orthodox Christians who affirm the invalidity of heterodox sacraments *do* affirm that the Spirit of God operates outside of the boundaries of the Church for the salvation of the whole world. No one can come to saving faith and enter the Church without the aid of the Holy Spirit. It is thus incorrect for one to state that those outside of the Church are completely lacking in Grace.

Professor Erickson’s untraditional views have likely affected many others, including Father Thomas Hopko, the seminary Dean and Professor of Dogmatic Theology. This is evident in Father Hopko’s answer to the question posed at the beginning of Chapter Five:

*Oikonomia* does not mean “making something present that is not there” but rather “affirming that something was present even in the divided circumstances” and therefore can be “validated,” fulfilled, and sanctified when brought into the Church. And the teaching that is becoming popular today, that the Orthodox should baptize *everyone* who was not baptized by immersion in an Orthodox Church (because everything outside Her canonical boundaries is absolutely nothing, dark and graceless)—all I can say is that this is a *radical innovation!* It is being presented as if it is a conservatism, but it is in fact an innovation. Because throughout history the Orthodox Church was willing under certain circumstances to recognize the real activity of God,

---

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>137</sup> Another such prominent figure who teaches falsely and confusingly on the issue of grace is the aforementioned Metropolitan Maximos. We trust that having read this book the reader will be able to see the fallacious reasoning in these statements from his official diocesan publication *The Illuminator* (Summer, 1995):

To treat Trinitarian Christians as unbaptized heathens is an injustice committed against Christian baptism, and eventually a blasphemy against God’s Holy Spirit Who is at work at any Christian baptism....

When we confess faith in *one* baptism for the forgiveness of sins, we do not mean by that Orthodox baptism, but any Christian baptism. [The Holy Spirit is not] limited by human canonical boundaries we have established for our convenience. We cannot bind the spirit, and not allow Him to work with all the other Christians, just because some of us so decided.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in the rites and teachings of other ecclesial communities with which it is not in communion because it felt they were, to one degree and way or another, defective, though not totally and completely defective so as to not be Christian. It's an issue of truth. An example of this would be something Father Peter Gillquist once told me. He was talking to an Orthodox bishop overseas before being received into the Church. And this bishop said to him "outside the Church there is no Holy Spirit, and no grace." And Father Peter responded, "well then what Spirit brought me here today, your eminence?" What Spirit inspired Cornelius to call for the apostle Peter? God is not a prisoner of His own Church! . . . And to answer your question more directly, yes, someone with a true baptism is "somehow" a member of the Church, united to the Church, joined to it, etc.; but it's very difficult to find a way to speak about this "somehow" without falling into one trap or another—that it doesn't matter, the Church is defective, invisible, etc. No! We need to protect the full meaning of the word "Church" and how we have always viewed it. On the other hand, we don't want to claim that "outside the canonical boundaries of Orthodoxy there is only 'undifferentiated demonic darkness.'" That is just not true.

This response—characteristic of the so-called "moderate group"—confuses the definition of *oikonomia* (the opposite of what it should be) and fails both to distinguish between the two senses of the term "validity" (*per se* and form) and between the different aspects of the Holy Spirit's ministry in the Divine Economy (general and special)—and this from a professor of dogmatic theology, whose views on such matters were criticized by others over ten years earlier!

Father Thomas' further problem with baptism, that of his difficulty in believing "that God would require the 're-baptism' of those whose intentions were pure, but whose faith and/or ritual forms were defective at the time of their original baptism," is a puzzling one. Is it not precisely because we Orthodox recognize the charismatic Grace of God in all Christian religious acts that we extend the Church's wing to cover the non-Orthodox by economy? When we do indeed receive converts by baptism, is this to say that we receive them as formerly evil and heathen by virtue of their non-Orthodox baptisms? Of course not. We introduce them into the fullness of the Orthodox Faith, baptizing them into the *pleroma* of Grace, and making internal that which might have been so beautifully and sincerely external—even impinging on the internal—yet never having had internal efficacy in the fullest way. The Church comes to fulfill, not deny, the faith of those believers who are not yet within Her boundaries. Were it not so, then why have a Church? Why believe that any boundaries at all have been set? Why believe that the Orthodox Church has mystical dimensions and that She is grounded in truth itself? Why believe that, in constituting the criterion of truth, the Church is the source and fulfillment of all those relative Christian truths derived from Her? With all due respect, Father Thomas' question addresses itself away from sober theologizing, not towards it.<sup>138</sup>

---

<sup>138</sup> Bishop [Archbishop] Chrysostomos, "Father Thomas Hopko on BEM," *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. III, No. 2, p. 65.

Therefore, to affirm the “Cyprianic-economic” view of the Church and Her manner of relating to the heterodox does not entail disdain for the rites of pious heterodox Christians. In fact, to hold to the illegitimately expansive views of the representatives of Saint Vladimir’s Seminary is largely to eliminate the possibility of addressing this issue in a theologically consistent manner.

Without going into the particulars involved in the reception of converts, it is worth mentioning that Traditionalists emphatically do not prohibit the use of *oikonomia* on rare occasions, contrary to Father Hopko’s comments. What traditional Orthodox object to is the fact that current practice has degraded to such an extent—and this largely due to ecumenism—that *what should be the exception (oikonomia) has become the norm*.

As another example, consider these statements from Erickson’s chapter on “The Problem of Sacramental ‘Economy’” in *The Challenge of Our Past*:

A final point should also be mentioned. The charge is sometimes made that, if we recognize the “validity” or “authenticity” of sacraments administered outside the canonical limits of the Orthodox Church, we are as it were condoning the establishment of an anti-Church bent on our destruction. If the sacraments of the separated churches were indeed *theirs* there might be some force to this argument. But are the sacraments administered by the non-Chalcedonians and the Roman Catholics—and maybe by others as well—truly non-Chalcedonian or Roman Catholic sacraments as distinct from the Church’s sacraments, in a way, e.g., that Montanist baptism is distinct from the Church’s baptism? Certainly not. These sacraments—which are in fact the Church’s sacraments—point beyond division, schisms and even false teaching to the fulness of unity in truth and love which is proper to Orthodox, so that when, e.g., a Roman Catholic is baptized, he becomes a member of the body of Christ, not a servitor of the Pope; and when he is ordained, it is for the upbuilding of that body, not for promotion of the *filioque*.<sup>139</sup>

The same kind of muddled hyperbole is found in this passage as in his “Pope and the witchdoctor” derision. An “anti-Church bent on our destruction” is not the issue, but, rather, fidelity to Orthodox dogmatic principles: in this case the unity of the Church and the interrelatedness of the Mysteries. As Saint Hilarion points out in *The Unity of the Church*:

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 [“. . .and in One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. . .”] should be dropped. There can be no semi-churches of any kind. . . . If the recognition of the beneficence of the Latin hierarchy and its religious rites does not contradict the truth of Church unity, then I

---

<sup>139</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 129.

must, bound by my conscience, enter into unity with the Latins at once. . . . 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.<sup>140</sup>

To acknowledge that the heterodox have the Mystery of Baptism is, by a theologically consistent extension, to acknowledge that they have *all* of the Mysteries.<sup>141</sup> *This is simply a disguised form of the Branch Theory.*

To drive home the point further, compare Professor Erickson's reasoning with these wholly Patristic remarks by Archbishop Chrysostomos:

The ecumenical concerns of BEM [the "Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry" Statement] have led a few Orthodox thinkers to speak of a Christian presence in the eucharistic ceremonies and commemorations of the heterodox, in an effort to extend the profoundly eucharistic life of Orthodoxy to those outside her boundaries. One must laud these efforts in recognizing a rightness of intention [in the heterodox rites]. However, it should be clear that the spiritual meaning of the eucharist in the Orthodox church life precludes a recognition of eucharistic reality, as we understand it in the heterodox confessions. . . . We must flatly and clearly deny that what they possess is analogous to or isomorphic with the Orthodox eucharist. . . . The faith of the Orthodox Christian is perfected fully in the eucharist—the eucharistic rite constituting the very *raison d'etre* of the assembled body of believers—and it is unthinkable that one should imagine the eucharist as the Orthodox Church understands it to exist beyond those who define it and whom it defines. It is the body, forms the body, and exists for and through the body of Orthodox believers: "*kata panta kai dia panta* [on behalf of all and for all]". . . . It is quite wrong, then, for contemporary Orthodox observers to imagine (indeed, "fantasize") that the Orthodox priesthood exists "*kat' oikonomia*" outside the boundaries of Orthodoxy, for any exercise of economy with regard to the priesthood rests in an understanding of the "communal" experience in the life of the mysteries.<sup>142</sup>

---

<sup>140</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>141</sup> That the Mysteries are all interrelated has been eloquently demonstrated by Saint Justin (Popovich) of Chelije throughout his many writings. This excerpt is particularly relevant:

Immersed in the God-man, [the Church] is first and foremost a theanthropic organism, and only then a theanthropic organization. In her, everything is theanthropic: nature, faith, love, baptism, the Eucharist, all the holy mysteries and all the holy virtues, her teaching, her entire life, her immortality, her eternity, and her structure. Yes, yes, yes; in her, everything is theanthropically integral and indivisible Christification, sanctification, deification, Trinitarianism, salvation. In her everything is fused organically and by grace into a single theanthropic body, under a single Head—the God-man, the Lord Christ. All her members, though as persons always whole and inviolate, yet united by the same grace of the Holy Spirit through the holy mysteries and the holy virtues into an organic unity, comprise one body and confess the one faith, which unites them to each other and to the Lord Christ. ("The Attributes of the Church," *Orthodox Life*, Vol. 31, No. 1, p. 28)

<sup>142</sup> "BEM and Orthodox Spirituality," pp. 58-59, 60.

This passage, especially the closing sentence, comports nicely with what Father Alexander Schmemmann said earlier, to wit, “The dogmatical or spiritual essence of the Church as unity is thus the criterion for the proper understanding of canons concerning Church organization and also for their proper application.”

### Misuse of the Holy Fathers

This leads us to another example from Erickson’s writings, namely, his review of Father George Metallinos’s book *I Confess One Baptism*.<sup>143</sup> In a two-pronged critique, Erickson attempts to refute the author’s well-supported claim that Baptism must be performed according to Apostolic form (i.e., triple immersion) by referring to alleged archeological evidence regarding the shallowness of some ancient Baptismal Fonts. He thus concludes that “the Church has not insisted, always and everywhere, that baptism be performed by submersion (total immersion).”

The question is whether these failures of the Church to insist upon immersion were legitimate—i.e., sanctioned by Holy Tradition—, or a result of temporary lapses in fidelity to the canonical norms. Granting that at times the Apostolic injunction of triune immersion was not carried out,<sup>144</sup> his argument fails for at least two reasons. The first is methodological: he attempts to generalize “from the specific to the universal”:

. . .if our Faith is the same one which was given by Christ, preached by the Apostles, and preserved by the Fathers, we are outside this transmission of truth (the true meaning of “*paradosis*” or tradition) when we model the Church on what is the exception and justify the exception by the whims of modern man. In this vein, Canon XVII of the so-called First-Second Synod is quite instructive. Speaking of the past practice of the rapid Consecration to the Episcopacy of laymen and monks—though out of necessity

---

<sup>143</sup> *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 1, 1997, pp. 77-81.

<sup>144</sup> One can indeed find many examples of the failure of local churches to adhere properly to the Sacred Canons. At the appointed time, however, God always raised up His Saints to help restore the traditional practice. For example, two Saints from the late eighteenth century, Cosmas Aitolos and Macarios of Corinth, were active in this endeavor.

One more parallel with the Saint of Aitolia is worth nothing. In the life of Cosmas we read that he persuaded the wealthy to buy large baptismal basins to be dedicated to churches, so that the children might be baptized in the proper manner. Similarly, in the life of St. Macarios we are told that while Archbishop of Corinth he “gave away to all the towns and villages of the province capacious baptismal fonts, so that Holy Baptism might be performed in a perfect manner, as our Holy Eastern Orthodox Church teaches.” (Dr. Constantine Cavarnos, *Modern Orthodox Saints*, Vol. 2, *St. Macarios of Corinth* [Belmont, MA: Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1972], p. 14)

and resulting in good fruit—, this Canon states: “[T]hat which is rare [exceptional] should not be taken as a rule of the Church....” In his interpretation of this Canon, St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite repeats this warning about generalizing from the specific to the universal: “. . . However, what is specific and rare [exceptional], and comes about in a time of necessity, does not become a universal rule in the Church (something which is also stated by St. Gregory the Theologian and in the second Act of the Council held at the Church of St. Sophia, which says: ‘Those things which are good in rare [exceptional] instances must not be a rule for the many’),” *Pedalion (The Rudder)*, pp. 360-61.<sup>145</sup>

Saint Vincent of Lerins also addresses this principle:

What, if some novel contagion seeks to infect not merely an insignificant portion of the Church, but the whole? Then it will be his care to cleave to antiquity, which at this day cannot possibly be seduced by any fraud of novelty.

But what if in antiquity itself there be found error on the part of two or three men, or at any rate of a city or even of a province? Then it will be his care, by all means, to prefer the decrees, if such there be, of an ancient General Council to the rashness and ignorance of a few. But what, if some error should spring up on which no such decree is found to bear? Then he must collate and consult and interrogate the opinions of the ancients, of those, namely, who, though living in divers times and places, yet continuing in the communion and faith of the one Catholic Church, stand forth acknowledged and approved authorities: and whatsoever he shall ascertain to have been held, written, taught, not by one or two of these only, but by all, equally, with one consent, openly, frequently, persistently, that he must understand that he himself also is to believe without any doubt or hesitation.<sup>146</sup>

In keeping with this, we come to the second reason why Erickson’s argument fails: the early *consensus patrum* clearly contradicts his claims. For example, the *Catechetical Lectures* of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem contain detailed instructions for how a person is to enter the Church through Baptism. In Chapter 20, he writes:

After these things, ye were led to the holy pool of Divine Baptism, as Christ was carried from the Cross to the Sepulcher which is before our eyes And each of you was asked, whether he believed in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, and ye made that saving confession, and descended three times into the water, and ascended again; here also hinting by a symbol at the three days burial of Christ. For as our Savior passed three days and three nights in the heart of the earth, so you also in your first ascent out of the water, represented the first day of Christ in the earth, and by your descent, the night; for as he who is in the night, no longer sees, but he who is in the day, remains in the light, so in the descent, as in the night, ye saw nothing, but in ascending again ye were as in the day. And at the self-same moment ye were both dying and being born; and that Water of salvation was at once your grave and your mother. And what Solomon spoke of others will suit you also; for he said, in that case, There is a time to bear and a time to die; but to you, in the reverse order, there was a time to die and a time to be born; and

---

<sup>145</sup> “Some Remarks to a Priest Concerning Holy Tradition and Modernism” (OCIC).

<sup>146</sup> *A Commonitory*, Ch. III.

one and the same time effected both of these, and your birth went hand in hand with your death.<sup>147</sup>

Likewise, in Saint Basil the Great's *On the Holy Spirit* (Chapters 15 and 27), we read the following:

In three immersions, then, and with three invocations, the great mystery of baptism is performed, to the end that the type of death may be fully figured, and that by the tradition of the divine knowledge the baptized may have their souls enlightened....

Moreover we bless the water of baptism and the oil of the chrism, and besides this the catechumen who is being baptized. On what written authority do we do this? Is not our authority silent and mystical tradition? Nay, by what written word is the anointing of oil itself taught? And whence comes the custom of baptizing thrice?<sup>148</sup>

And in his sermon "On the Baptism of Christ," Saint Gregory of Nyssa says:

Let us then leave the task of searching into what is beyond human power, and seek rather that which shows signs of being partly within our comprehension:—what is the reason why the cleansing is effected by water? And to what purpose are the three immersions received? That which the fathers taught, and which our mind has received and assented to, is as follows. . . .<sup>149</sup>

Erickson's sole Patristic citation in the first section of his review is inconclusive at best. He uses the sentence from Saint John Chrysostom's *On John 25.2* (PG 59:151)—"It is as in a tomb that we immerse our heads in the water. . . , then when we lift our heads back the new man comes forth"—in such a way as to suggest that in most cases *only* the candidate's head was immersed in ancient times. But as a similar passage in his *Baptismal Instructions* bears out, it is highly unlikely that this is what Saint John actually meant:

Next after this, in the full darkness of night, he strips off your robe and, as if he were going to lead you into heaven itself by the ritual, he causes your whole body to be anointed with that olive oil of the spirit, so that all your limbs may be fortified and unconquered by the darts which the adversary aims at you.

After this the priest makes you go down into the sacred waters, burying the old man and at the same time raising up the new, who is renewed in the image of his Creator. . . . Instead of the man who descended into the water, a different man comes forth, one who

---

<sup>147</sup> Rev. and trans. Edwin Hamilton Gifford, *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., Vol. 7, pp. 147-148, emphasis ours.

<sup>148</sup> Trans. the Rev. Blomfield Jackson, *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., Vol. 8, p. 22, 42. Cf. Saint John of Damascus, *Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Book IV, Ch. IX, "Concerning Faith and Baptism."

<sup>149</sup> Trans. William Moore and Henry Austin Wilson, *NPNF* 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., Vol. 5, p. 520. See also the extended discussion on immersion imagery in Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), Ch. 2.

has wiped away all the filth of his sins, who has put off the old garment of sin and has put on the royal robe. . . .

When the priest says: "So-and-so is baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," he puts your head down into the water three times and three times he lifts it up again, preparing you by this mystic rite to receive the descent of the Spirit. . . .

As soon as they come forth from these sacred waters, all who are present embrace them, greet them, kiss them, rejoice with them. . . .<sup>150</sup>

Is one to believe that the "whole body" is anointed with oil but not with water? Or that the "going down into" and the "coming forth" is not an allusion to immersion? Or that the above description is anything but what a person would witness at a Traditional Orthodox baptism today?<sup>151</sup> To at least the first two questions the translator himself would answer in the negative, for in the footnotes to this passage he states: "The ritual act of immersion is rich in symbolism."<sup>152</sup> "The triple immersion is symbolic of Christ's three days in the tomb." He then enjoins the reader to compare the Saint's passage with those of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem (above), the passage from which Professor Erickson quoted, and *In. Col. 6* (PG 62.342-343).

As if this proof from antiquity was not enough, we set forth an excerpt from the Patriarchal Encyclical of 1895, which amply supports our challenge of Erickson's views:

§ VIII. The one holy, catholic and apostolic Church of the first seven Ecumenical Councils baptized by *three immersions in the water*, and the Pope Pelagius speaks of the triple immersion as a command of the Lord, and in the thirteenth century baptism by immersions still prevailed in the West; and the *sacred fonts themselves*, preserved in the more ancient churches in Italy, are eloquent witnesses on this point; but in later times sprinkling or effusion, being privily brought in, came to be accepted by the Papal Church, which still holds fast the innovation, thus also widening the gulf which she has opened; but we Orthodox, remaining faithful to the apostolic tradition and the practice of the seven Ecumenical Councils, "stand fast, contending for the common profession, the paternal treasure of the sound faith."<sup>153</sup>

---

<sup>150</sup> Trans. Paul W. Harkins, *Ancient Christian Writers*, ed. Johannes Quasten et al., Vol. 31, *St. John Chrysostom: Baptismal Instructions* (New York: Newman Press, 1963), pp. 52-53.

<sup>151</sup> Unfortunately, the qualifier "Traditional" needs to be added because in many Orthodox parishes the Baptismal rite is not performed correctly. This is due to a number of reasons, including simple negligence and ignorance. In Traditionalist parishes, one would almost never find these aberrant practices.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>153</sup> This document was written as a reply to the Papal Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII (1895) on Reunion and signed by thirteen Bishops of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Emphasis ours.

In view of all that has been said, it is ironic that in the very same issue of *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* in which his review of *I Confess One Baptism* appeared, Erickson makes these concluding remarks in his article on the reception of converts:

Many Orthodox as well as Catholics have a sincere desire for rapprochement and unity, but all too often their desire has been frustrated by the misinformation and the distrust of the few. Theologians [presumably including himself] can help to establish an atmosphere of trust by exposing falsehood and dispelling error.<sup>154</sup>

### Misapplication of History

For his second criticism of Father George's book—this one on the principle of *oikonomia*—, Erickson incorrectly uses a favorite passage of his from the writings of Saint Theodore of Studios during the "moëchian [adultery] controversy."<sup>155</sup> Erickson wishes to show that one must distinguish between heretics as earlier Church Fathers described them—the un-Baptized or those "baptized" not in the name of the Holy Trinity—and those who are "heretics by extension." The former are "wholly cut off and estranged with respect to the faith itself,"<sup>156</sup> while the latter are still somehow "of the Church." When questioned as to why he did not think it necessary to (re)baptize those who received Baptism from clergy supporting the adulterous second marriage of Emperor Constantine VI, Saint Theodore replied that the Moëchian clergy were merely heretics by extension. Thus, their Mysteries were still valid.

While this is all true, as Bishop Auxentios of Photiki points out, debates about the technical definition of a heretic have little relevance to the modern situation with Protestants and Roman Catholics:

Professor Erickson's notion that the Church has always known separations and divisions, and that the issues of heresy and schism are complex, is well-founded and articulate. There have constantly been divisions in the Church, spiritual illnesses among local Churches, as Saint John Chrysostomos expresses this, and careful distinctions, as in the much-overused and abused First Canon of Saint Basil the Great, with regard to the degree and effects of various schisms and heresies. . . .

What separates the historical schisms and divisions which Professor Erickson cites from the past from the question of Monophysitism, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism, today, is *precisely time and the consensus of the Church over time*. Many of these earlier divisions were cured, after an interval of time, and the administrative or institutional unity of the Church was restored. In other words, over time, spiritual unity prevailed. The Chalcedonian schism and the separation of Orthodoxy from the Papists (and thus from their Protestant descendants), however, *have withstood the test of many*

---

<sup>154</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>155</sup> See also *The Challenge of Our Past*, p. 119.

<sup>156</sup> *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 1, 1997, p. 80.

centuries. While there are obviously common points in the liturgical and institutional lives of the Orthodox and these other churches, the spiritual unity between them has not been restored. Indeed, over time, the spiritual integrity of these heterodox groups, from an Orthodox standpoint, has been eroded. . . .

If, as Professor Erickson argues, by the eighteenth century the Orthodox Church was struggling to make a distinction between “heretics properly so-called (*sic*)” and “those whose separation admits of a remedy,” [*i.e.*, those who are “heretics by extension”] we would remind him that, aside from those who separate from the Church in willing defiance, *the best test in determining who is and who is not a heretic—who is properly so called—is once more the passage of time*, a kind historical counterpart to that personal intransigence which defines heresy at the individual level. It is in this context that one must understand the attempts by Saint Nikodemos the Hagiorite to argue that by canonical exactitude (*akribeia*) the Church rejects the baptisms of heretics, while it is only by “economy” (“*oikonomia*”) that they are accepted (see, for example, the Saint’s commentary on the Forty-Seventh and Sixty-Eighth Apostolic Canons). . . . [Saint Nikodemos was trying] to express in canonical terms the spiritual alienation, over time, that separates heretics properly so called from those who are ill with heresy, but subject to the Church’s remedial efforts.<sup>157</sup>

Saint Theodore’s remarks about the “Moëchians”—a group that, at the time of his comments in question, had not been synodally condemned—cannot be extended to groups such as Roman Catholics and Protestants. In attempting to do so, Erickson commits a gross historical anachronism.

This is an important point. A working presupposition in all of Erickson’s writings is that heterodox Christians are “heretics by extension.” This is a preposterous assumption. This distinction can only properly be applied to those who have emerged from the Church as heretics. It is wholly indefensible to apply the Sacred Canons and writings of the Fathers, which were dealing with those who had emerged from the Church and who believed themselves to be Orthodox and members of the one visible Church, to the situation that we face today. The Fathers equated Christianity with Orthodoxy. The concept of a “divided Christendom”—with believers holding to a wide range of divergent beliefs while considering themselves to be Christians (but in no wise Orthodox, or members of the Orthodox Church)—had not even occurred to them. It is only since the advent of ecumenism that the distinction between the Church and Christendom has become blurred, with Canons written centuries before our day being selectively applied to all followers of Christ, regardless of their relation to Orthodoxy.

---

<sup>157</sup> Personal letter to the author dated April 22, 1997 (O.S.), emphases ours. This was written to the author during the course of his extended correspondence with Professor Erickson. The catalyst for the correspondence was the latter’s publicly televised involvement in a worship service at the Marble Collegiate Church during the WCC-sponsored “Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.” The entire correspondence can be found on the OCIC.

Saint Theodore's remarks must be seen in this light. They were made during a unique situation two hundred years prior to the Great Schism. Saint Theodore's main point was that the "Moëchians"—all of them Orthodox Christians—should not be considered wholly estranged, especially since they had not been synodally declared to be heretics.<sup>158</sup> Erickson wishes to extend this Saint's reasoning to heterodox Christians: Roman Catholics who have been separated from the Orthodox Church for centuries, and Protestants who have never had anything to do with Orthodoxy, originating as they did from Roman Catholicism. It must be flatly stated, though with great sorrow, that from the Orthodox perspective, both of these heterodox bodies are wholly estranged from the Church, regardless of our "common heritage" or of the fact that some of them can still be shown to baptize in the Name of the Holy Trinity. Not a single Church Father or Saint has *ever* stated that Roman Catholics or Protestants are "somehow still a part of the Church"—i.e., mere heretics by extension.

It thus comes as no surprise to hear Father George Metallinos comment in a recent interview for a conservative Orthodox journal that, "When Professor Erickson criticizes my book, he does not insult me, but rather he insults the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church. These critics are not thinking as proper Orthodox Christians."<sup>159</sup>

Having lost the distinction which we make between essential and secondary theology, heterodox writers (and, alas, many Orthodox writers) have come to an independent style of writing and research. Failing to acknowledge the revealed truth of essential theology, they likewise fail to use it as the criterion of truth, by which to guide their research and form their expressions. Having no criterion of truth, they often (and sometimes rather arrogantly) endow their own opinions with a supposedly self-evident aura of "truth." And the more that their opinions deviate from the truth of the Fathers, the more this aura becomes a blinding barrier of dark rays, hiding the light of truth. Secondary theology holds forth, in darkness, while the light of essential truth dims and fades into the recesses of the mind. In this way, sadly enough, all too many Orthodox Christians have come to misunderstand completely the meaning of Scripture and to distort and debase the Patristic witness. They have come to share the views of the heterodox and to lose sight of the Orthodox notion of truth.<sup>160</sup>

## Conclusion

What we have said carries great weight with those who understand that in Orthodoxy, the criterion for truth is the *consensus patrum*, or collective mindset of the Fathers. Given that "[t]he classical Patristic dictum, 'Following the Holy Fathers. . .' is

---

<sup>158</sup> Incidentally, this distinction between potential heretics and heretics officially declared to be such is critical for the Church in other ways today. It is precisely a failure to acknowledge this distinction that has led to such divisions amongst Old Calendarists.

<sup>159</sup> "The Theological Question of Our Day," *Divine Ascent*, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 59.

<sup>160</sup> *Scripture and Tradition*, p. 3.

the only one which expresses how Orthodox understand themselves,”<sup>161</sup> it is certainly telling that modern scholars such as Erickson cannot find support from this *consensus patrum* for their attempted refutations of the “Cyprianic-economic” view. When they do appeal to the writings of the Saints, they do so—as Archbishop Chrysostomos has stated—in a way that separates “canons from theology and theological speculation from spiritual life” setting “Fathers at artificial odds with one another.” As Father Florovsky said, *One must possess the theology of the Fathers from within....*

Thus, when we turn to the writings of the Saints, and especially those who have lived during the ecumenical age—*e.g.*, Saint Hilarion the New-Martyr, Saint Justin (Popovich) of Chelije, and the Blessed Elder Philotheos (Zervakos)<sup>162</sup>—, we discover that there is absolutely no support for the un-Orthodox ideas of academic elites who have little or no respect for, or sensitivity to, the spiritual wisdom contained in Holy Tradition.<sup>163</sup> These Saints have noetically “seen”—as a consequence of their ascetically-clarified vision—the “great gulf [that is] fixed” between Orthodoxy and the Western confessions.<sup>164</sup> They have also sensed the danger that the ecumenical movement poses for the Church. The writings of men like Professor John Erickson unfortunately serve the ends of this dangerous enterprise.

Furthermore, when we reflect on the views of men such as Father Thomas Hopko and John Erickson, it is difficult for us to determine what can be gained from believing as they do. What are the compelling aspects of their well-intentioned expansive position, either emotionally (that is, towards the heterodox) or theologically? If the traditional view of the Church was that, in affirming a “Cyprianic” ecclesiology, one must necessarily damn all outsiders to hell—living, as they claim that we Traditionalists believe, in “undifferentiated darkness,” completely devoid of Grace—then their seeming charity might be attractive. However, this is not the case. Furthermore, unlike the so-called “economic theory,” their view cannot account for the Church’s varied

---

<sup>161</sup> *The Non-Chalcedonian Heretics*, by the Holy Monastery of Saint Gregory, trans. by Archbishop Chrysostomos and Hieromonk Patapios, 2nd ed. (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1996), p. 6.

<sup>162</sup> A sample of their writings can be found on the OCIC: “Papism as the Oldest Protestantism,” by the Blessed Justin (Popovich) of Chelije; and “A Desperate Appeal to the Ecumenical Patriarch” by the Blessed Elder Philotheos. See also “Way Apart: What is the Difference Between Orthodoxy and Western Confessions?,” by Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) of Kiev and Galich.

<sup>163</sup> Monk Damascene Christensen, *Not of This World: The Life and Teachings of Father Seraphim Rose* [Father Seraphim Rose Foundation, 1993], Ch. 61, “Renovationism,” *passim*.

<sup>164</sup> In the Introduction to what is probably the best short overview of the differences between East and West available in English, the authors make the following comment: “For, indeed, the Eastern and Western Churches are still as far from one another as the East is from the West.” (Bishop [now Archbishop] Chrysostomos and Archimandrite [now Bishop] Auxentios, *The Roman West and the Byzantine East* [Etna, CA: The Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1988], p. 8).

practice in the reception of converts throughout the centuries while at the same time remaining faithful to Her ecclesiology.

It is tragic that views such as those put forth by these Saint Vladimir's Seminary professors have led to aberrant pastoral practices—*e.g.*, those of jurisdictions associated with the S.C.O.B.A.<sup>165</sup>—that potentially deprive the souls of those seeking entry into the Church of the *pleroma* of Grace afforded only in Orthodox Baptism. Consider this sober warning from Saint Basil the Great:

Whence is it that we are Christians? Through our faith, would be the universal answer. And in what way are we saved? Plainly because we were regenerate through the grace given in our baptism. How else could we be? And after recognizing that this salvation is established through the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, shall we fling away “that form of doctrine” which we received? . . . Whether a man have departed this life without baptism, or have received a baptism lacking in some of the requirements of the tradition, his loss is equal.<sup>166</sup>

At best, it appears that these Orthodox ecumenists have been duped into thinking that *akribeia* will greatly hinder the conversion of the heterodox. But are they more wise than Saint Cyprian?:

Nor let any one think that, because baptism is proposed to them, heretics will be kept back from coming to the Church, as if offended at the name of a second baptism; nay, but on this very account they are rather driven to the necessity of coming by the testimony of truth shown and proved to them. For if they shall see that it is determined and decreed by our judgment and sentence, that the baptism wherewith they are there baptized is considered just and legitimate, they will think that they are justly and legitimately in possession of the Church also, and the other gifts of the Church; nor will there be any reason for their coming to us, when, as they have baptism, they seem also

---

<sup>165</sup> The Antiochian Archdiocese forbids a Priest—on threat of suspension—from “re”-baptizing a heterodox Christian who has been “baptized” in the Name of the Trinity and in water. No mention is made of Apostolic Form (*i.e.*, triune immersion), one of the key prerequisites for an acceptable use of *oikonomia*. For that matter, *single* immersion is not even mentioned. It is common knowledge that Baptisms in modernist jurisdictions are routinely performed by sprinkling (aspersion) or pouring (affusion). Similarly we note the following excerpt from a May 19, 1997, “Memorandum” by the aforementioned Bishop [now Metropoli-tan] Maximos—an open supporter of the infamous Balamand Agreement—to his diocesan clergy:

*Reception of Converts:* Converts to our Faith, coming to us from the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant churches that baptize with a Trinitarian formula are received into our Church through the Sacrament of Chrismation. They are not received through the Sacrament of Baptism. Any one that receives such a convert through Baptism and not Chrismation will be immediately suspended and brought to a Spiritual Court hearing. This is not a new policy or directive. No one has the authority or right to arbitrarily change this practice of our Church.

<sup>166</sup> Trans. the Rev. Blomfield Jackson, *NPNF 2<sup>nd</sup> ser.*, Vol. 8, p. 17.

to have the rest. But further, when they know that there is no baptism without, and that no remission of sins can be given outside the Church, they more eagerly and readily hasten to us, and implore the gifts and benefits of the Church our Mother, assured that they can in no wise attain to the true promise of divine grace unless they first come to the truth of the Church. Nor will heretics refuse to be baptized among us with the lawful and true baptism of the Church, when they shall have learnt from us that they also were baptized by Paul, who already had been baptized with the baptism of John, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>167</sup>

It may be revealing when attempting to sort out these issues to step back and ask some simple questions. For example, why do those opposed to the Traditionalist view of the Church typically *prohibit* a convert from being received by Holy Baptism? Is it because they do not wish to offend them?<sup>168</sup> But what could be offensive about reception by Baptism—unless, of course, the person seeking entrance has been told that he is merely switching “camps” within the “divided Church”? If the new baptizand is not told such things outright, is it unreasonable to suppose that he will draw conclusions about his former confessional body that could undermine his conception of the Orthodox Faith, causing spiritual harm as a result of a subtle *bacterium* of relativism?

But again, *why* do some Orthodox Churches not return to the Traditional norm of reception by Baptism? It seems both strange and unwise that the “mainstream” Orthodox Churches in America—i.e., those who are members of the S.C.O.B.A.—do not resort to *akribeia* given the current ecumenical climate of ecclesiological relativism. The claim of their Church representatives—that their Church’s practice of receiving heterodox by *oikonomia* is not an innovation resulting from their involvement in ecumenism—is not at all convincing. Even if they *could* persuasively argue from Holy Tradition that *oikonomia* should be the rule and *akribeia* the exception, these Churches would be in error; for they miss the *spiritual importance*—given our times—of reinforcing in the minds of their flock the uniqueness of the Orthodox Church. Thankfully, the importance of this has not been lost on all Orthodox Churches:

Having in mind this circumstance and the growth today of the heresy of ecumenism, which attempts to eradicate completely the distinction between Orthodoxy and all the heresies, so that the Moscow Patriarchate, in violation of the sacred canons, has even issued a resolution permitting Roman Catholics to receive Communion in certain cases, the Council of Bishops recognizes the necessity of introducing a stricter practice, i.e. that

---

<sup>167</sup> *Epistle LXXII, “To Jubaianus” (24:1-2)*, trans. Rev. Ernest Wallis, *ANF*, Vol. 5, p. 385.

<sup>168</sup> It is possible that this is the case with Erickson. See “The Reception of Non-Orthodox into the Orthodox Church,” p. 16. We remind those who may think this way that the Traditional view is *not* against the reception of converts by *oikonomia* on a case-by-case basis. There are occasions when insistence upon Baptism might be judged by a Bishop to be harmful to the soul in question. But such selective uses of *oikonomia* are not what Erickson and others want. Rather, they argue for the blanket recognition of heterodox sacraments and reception by Baptism only in rare cases.

baptism be performed on all heretics who come to the Church, excepting only as the necessity arises and with the permission of the bishop, for reasons of economy or pastoral condescension, another practice of reception in the case of certain persons (i.e. the reception into the Church of Roman Catholics and those Protestants who perform their baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity) through the renunciation of their heresy and by chrismation.<sup>169</sup>

May all those who are concerned about the welfare of Christ's Holy Church reflect soberly upon these things.

---

<sup>169</sup> "Resolution of the Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, 15/28 September 1971," *Orthodox Life*, Vol. 29, No. 2, p. 43. This is the position held by numerous traditional Orthodox churches throughout the world. Recall the earlier words of Bishop Kallistos:

Guided always by practical considerations, Orthodoxy has exercised economy when this aided the reconciliation of heterodox without obscuring the truths of the Orthodox faith; *but when leniency seemed to endanger the well-being of the Orthodox flock, exposing them to infiltration and encouraging them to indifferentism and apostasy, then the Church authorities resorted to strictness.*

## Appendix II: The Use of the Term “Heretic”

It is worth saying a few words on the use of a term that unfortunately has acquired quite a pejorative reputation.

Father Seraphim of Platina once wrote the following in a letter to a woman who was interested in becoming Orthodox but who was concerned about how some in the Orthodox Church (usually converts) related to those outside of Her, resorting even to offensive name-calling:

I was happy to receive your letter—happy not because you are confused about the question that troubles you, but because your attitude reveals that in the truth of Orthodoxy to which you are drawn you wish to find room also for a loving, compassionate attitude to those outside the Orthodox Faith.

I firmly believe that this is indeed what Orthodoxy teaches. . . .

The word “heretic”. . . is indeed used too frequently nowadays. It has a definite meaning and function, to distinguish new teachings from the Orthodox teaching; but few of the non-Orthodox Christians today are consciously “heretics,” and it really does no good to call them that.

In the end, I think, Father Dimitry Dudko’s attitude is the correct one: We should view the non-Orthodox as people to whom Orthodoxy has not yet been revealed, as people who are *potentially Orthodox* (if only we ourselves would give them a better example!). There is no reason why we cannot call them Christians and be on good terms with them, recognize that we have at least our faith in Christ in common, and live in peace especially with our own families. St. Innocent’s attitude to the Roman Catholics in California is a good example for us. A harsh, polemical attitude is called for only when the non-Orthodox are trying to take away our flocks or change our teachings.<sup>170</sup>

We live in a culture of extreme atheistic relativism, where the only dogma tolerated is that we should be intolerant of those who actually believe that there are dogmas reflecting absolute truth. Combine this with popular attitudes reflecting sensitivity to “multi-cultural diversity” and “politically correct language,” and the terms “heretic” and “heresy” end up seeming harsh and “unloving.” Yet these traditional terms, found often in the writings of the Fathers, should not be viewed by informed and sober-minded people in such an emotionally negative way.

This language may “turn off” some people, but it is only because they do not know what is meant by the terms “heretic” and “heresy” and the necessity for them. . . . [T]hese words have been in the theological glossary of the Orthodox Church from the beginning.

---

<sup>170</sup> Christensen, pp. 757-758.

A “heretic” is simply one who maintains a “heretical doctrine.” The sincerity and good will of the “heretic” is not in question. Nevertheless, “heresy” is evil, because it is a powerful means by which the Devil seeks to “prevail” against the Church. . . .<sup>171</sup>

Western Christians should keep in mind that the position of the Church against heretics and heretical teaching—most forcefully stated in Her various anathemas—has arisen, and will continue to arise as long as She contends in this world, for *pastoral* reasons (e.g., to guard the flock and to awaken those in error), *not* to condemn others harshly. As Archbishop Chrysostomos states:

[W]e must realize that the Orthodox Church is “catholic.” It is meant for everyone. When, therefore, we seek to protect those within the Church from the *bacterium* of non-Orthodox belief, we must be constantly aware that this is for the purpose also of preserving Orthodoxy as a pure standard for all those who confess Christ (if not for all of those who are not, in fact, confessors of the Christian Faith). We wish to preserve perfectly and in full force the bread of salvation taught to us by the Prophets, the Savior, the Apostles, and the Fathers and Mothers of the Church, lest we offer stones in the name of Orthodoxy. Our exclusivity, our *apparent* disdain for the religious observances of others, and our fear of the relativism of even the best-intentioned ecumenists are things that ultimately derive from pure and true ecumenism, which is expressed in the missionary spirit of desiring with the whole heart and soul to bring all mankind to Orthodoxy. We must remember this. And if we do remember it, then we will be very careful not to hurt, to insult, or to humiliate non-Orthodox. All spiritual actions are, of course, meant to benefit our own souls; but, at the same time, they are aimed at the salvation of our fellow man.<sup>172</sup>

It goes without saying that one should be extremely careful when using the terms “heresy” and “heretic.” They are unfortunately loaded with many negative connotations, perhaps making them an unwise choice of words depending upon the recipient. When not in the hands of a person who is “wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Saint Matt. 10:16), such words could be misconstrued as a statement about a person’s sincerity or love for God—which may be very genuine—or about their eternal destiny. Though a use of these terms is clearly warranted by Holy Tradition and by the example of the God-bearing Fathers, the potential for abuse is great, especially for those who are not skilled at “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15).

---

<sup>171</sup> “What Is Heresy?,” St. Nectarios Education Series No. 63.

<sup>172</sup> *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. IV, No. 3, p. 20. Though this is more applicable to the determination of heresy in a member of the Church, it is worth repeating here:

[W]hen the Church issues statements against a heresy, it is readily cognizant of its responsibility to exercise ‘economy’ in the case of those who unknowingly fall to misbelief, and it never issues its condemnations with the intention of destroying souls, but of awakening those in the dark sleep of error and bringing them to repentance. (“The True Nature of Heresy,” pp. 76-77)

### Appendix III: Saint Dorotheos of Gaza On Judging Others

Many Holy Fathers have taught that we are to judge no one, that as one draws closer to God in ascetic struggle, he will begin to see that he truly is “chief among sinners”—as Orthodox Christians pray before every partaking of Holy Communion—, and that all others should be esteemed higher than himself.

With this in mind we offer for the reader’s consideration these wise and instructive words of Saint Dorotheos of Gaza (sixth century):

Why are we so ready to judge our neighbor? Why are we so concerned about the burden of others? We have plenty to be concerned about, each one has his own debt and his own sins. It is for God alone to judge, to justify or to condemn. He knows the state of each one of us and our capacities, our deviations, and our gifts, our constitution and our preparedness, and it is for him to judge each of these things according to the knowledge that he alone has. For God judges the affairs of a bishop in one way and those of a prince in another. His judgment is for an abbot or for a disciple, he judges differently the senior and the neophyte, the sick man and the healthy man. Who could understand all these judgments except the one who has done everything, formed everything, knows everything? I remember once hearing the following story: a slave ship put in at a certain port where there lived a holy virgin who was in earnest about her spiritual life. When she learned about the arrival of the ship she was glad, for she wanted to buy a small serving maid for herself. She thought to herself, 'I will take her into my home and bring her up in my way of life so that she knows nothing of the evils of the world.' So she sent and enquired of the master of the ship and found that he had two small girls who he thought would suit her. Whereupon she gladly paid the price and took one of the children into her house. The ship's master went away. He had not gone very far when there met him the leader of a dancing troupe who saw the other small girl with him and wanted to buy her; the price was agreed and paid, and he took her away with him. Now take a look at God's mystery; see what his judgment was. Which of us could give any judgment about this case? The holy virgin took one of these little ones to bring her up in the fear of God, to instruct her in every good work, to teach her all that belongs to the monastic state and all the sweetness of holy commandments of God. The other unfortunate child was taken for the dancing troupe, to be trained in the works of the devil. What effect would teaching her this orgiastic dancing have, but the ruin of her soul? What can we have to say about this frightful judgment? Here were two little girls taken away from their parents by violence. Neither knew where they came from; one is found in the hands of God and the other falls into the hands of the devil. Is it possible to say that what God asks from the one he asks also from the other? Surely not! Suppose they both fell into fornication or some other deadly sin; is it possible that they both face the same judgment or that their fall is the same? How does it appear to the mind of God when one learns about the Judgment and about the Kingdom of God day and night, while the other unfortunate knows nothing of it, never hears anything good but only the

contrary, everything shameful, everything diabolical? How can he allow them to be examined by the same standard?<sup>173</sup>

Some Saints even prayed for the conversion of the Devil himself and all his fallen angels! What unfathomable love has been shed abroad in the hearts of these ascetic-warriors! For those who have tasted of true humility born of prayer and spiritual struggle, the thought of passing eternal judgment upon others is abhorrent. God alone is the Righteous Judge of Mankind. Our speculation should cease with this affirmation. As Saint Macarius of Optina wrote in the nineteenth century:

As to those people who are good and kind but are not believers, we cannot and must not judge them. The ways of the Lord are inscrutable; let us leave these good people entirely to His judgment and to the grace of His Providence. He alone knows how and why He has built the argosy of humanity, and the small boat of each one of us, such as it is.<sup>174</sup>

These wise words remind us of the Patristic dictum so eloquently set forth by Saint Gregory the Dialogist over fourteen hundred years ago: "Who is able to enter into the secret judgements of God? Wherefore those things which in divine examination we cannot comprehend, we ought rather to fear than curiously to discuss."<sup>175</sup>

---

<sup>173</sup> Trans. Eric P. Wheeler, *Dorotheos of Gaza: Discourses and Sayings* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1977), pp. 133-134.

<sup>174</sup> Trans. Iulia De Beausobre, *Russian Letters of Spiritual Direction: 1834-1860* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1994). p. 54.

<sup>175</sup> Trans. P.W., ed. Edmund G. Gardner, *The Dialogues of St. Gregory the Great* (London: Philip Lee Warner, 1911), Book IV, Ch. 27, pp. 209-210.

## Appendix IV: A Personal Letter to a Protestant Inquirer

As this book was going to press I exchanged a series of letters with a Reformed Protestant who had seen some of my “postings” to an Internet forum. Many of his questions concerned ecclesiological issues. In an attempt to help him resolve some of these issues I sent him a copy of Chapters Six and Seven. In response he wrote the following:

In the first section of Chapter Seven you said, “...to state that there is ‘no salvation outside of the Church’ is not the same thing as stating ‘no one outside of the Church can be saved.’” This may be a fundamental sticking point for me in my understanding because I cannot see anything but a problem with this. It looks like a flat out logical contradiction. To me it looks like someone saying, “Just because he only has a half dozen eggs doesn't mean he only has six eggs.” As far as I can understand it, there can be “no” salvation outside the Church, or there can be “some” salvation outside the Church, but to assert that both are true makes no sense. To me it would be like being told I have to believe in square circles in order to be a Christian. How can I make myself believe in a contradiction? I understand that there are mysteries of the faith beyond my feeble comprehension, but if true contradiction is part of the faith, then none of our discussion really matters all that much because then the Orthodox Church could be both the one true Church and also be a false church at the same time. How could I trust the promise of God if its opposite could simultaneously be true? I guess my question here is why you wrote that this statement was still within the bounds of what the Orthodox would have no problem with? To me it involves either pure contradiction or extreme equivocation. Either way, I don't understand how it could be useful in explaining truth.

We thought it beneficial to publish my response to his letter, more excerpts from which are contained therein.

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear X,

Thank you for your note and questions. Of course, the overall premise of my book is that it is not a contradiction to hold the Patristic axiom “*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*” while at the same time holding forth the possibility of persons inheriting eternal life without having been in the Orthodox Church. The second principle is drawn from dogmas concerning God: that He is a righteous Judge who is plenteous in mercy and rich in love, Whose will it is that all men might be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). I demonstrate that the juxtaposition of these principles results in an Orthodox answer to the “burning question”: the maintenance of an apparent antinomy. This answer is one that enjoys wide support from Saints and teachers of the Church. In other words, in my book I do two main things. First, I try to clarify and reinforce the

reader's understanding of Orthodox ecclesiology during a time when it is under siege. Second, I critique various derived statements concerning the difficulties raised by its implications, ultimately positing a "new apothegm."

I think your problem with these concepts may stem from something we all suffer from in the West: rationalism—*i.e.*, a penchant for wanting truth to be expressed in a systematic way that ties up all the loose ends and connects all the dots. In a word, "over-logicalness." It seems that you are attempting to logically bring about a full reconciliation of two seemingly contradictory axioms. However, this is not a Christian way of thinking about theological matters. This is because much of Christian theology is an apparent antinomy.

In our very theology, we Orthodox apply the principle of moderation, of practical objectivity, if you will. The apophatic character of our approach to the truths about and of God is based on the juxtaposition of opposites. By bringing two opposing principles into unity, we often approach the apparent enigma of Christian truth. But this, too, is not a process of compromise, but a process in which the real force of truth is made manifest."<sup>176</sup>

A few examples will suffice: the Chalcedonian *Oros* concerning the Person of Christ (that He is both fully God and fully Man without any "confusion, change, division, or separation" of the two Natures), the dogma of the Holy Trinity (God as One in Three Persons), and the Orthodox doctrine of synergy (summed up so beautifully in Phil. 2:12b-13 and carefully worked out within the limits of human reason and divine revelation in the thirteenth of Saint John Cassian's *Conferences*).

As Christian history shows us, heresy typically arises from an overemphasis of one aspect of the truth, leading to a neglect of another aspect without which balance is not maintained.

It was characteristic of heretics that they erred in one extreme or the other, denying either the One or the Three, either despising marriage or denigrating virginity. "But the church, by contrast, proceeds with ordered composure midway between the quarrels on both sides."<sup>177</sup>

In short, my book is an attempt to "proceed midway."

I should point out that what I try to elucidate and defend is certainly not dogma. In other words, Orthodox ecclesiology *is* dogma; the thesis of my book is not. It is quite possible that one could write a book arguing that the second axiom concerning God's love and mercy should not lead one to conclude that anyone can be saved who was not a member of the Church in this life. However, this would not make my book "wrong"

---

<sup>176</sup> *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. VII, No. 2, p. 6.

<sup>177</sup> Pelikan, *op. cit.*, p. 334.

and theirs “right.” Rather, it would only show that the question of the eternal status of heterodox believers is not one for which the Church has ever formulated a dogmatic answer. There are many questions like this in Holy Orthodoxy.

You wrote: “So for now the only two positions that I see as being consistent with this basic truth are 1) ‘Outside of the Church there is no salvation; and my communion *is* the Church; therefore a person cannot receive salvation if he was never a member of my communion’; or 2) ‘Outside of the Church there is no salvation; but it is possible for salvation to be found outside of my communion; therefore the Church might include more communions than my own.’” In response I say that the first *could* be demonstrated from Holy Tradition; however, the Mind of the Church, as noetically discerned by the Holy Fathers, does not seem to have borne witness to this as an accurate statement (let alone *dogma*) of the Church’s attitude towards the heterodox. Point One is not necessarily “incorrect,” it is just not balanced enough by other truths. And it certainly does not have to be affirmed to be an Orthodox Christian. On the other hand, Point Two is entirely wrong. It reflects an attempt to reconcile two seemingly contradictory principles in a way that leads to a heretical conclusion. This is akin to the manner in which Nestorius tried to resolve the apparent antinomy of the two Natures of Christ in one Person.

You then wrote: “The bulk of the last letter I sent was explaining why I see this position as problematic. I see it is as making it extremely difficult to know where to draw the boundary once it allows for anyone to be ‘saved’ outside the Church.” As I think I have demonstrated, there is no difficulty here at all. One simply affirms the boundaries as they are clearly and dogmatically expressed in Holy Tradition and then juxtaposes the great mercy and love of God, all in order to demonstrate that a good case can be made for a person being granted eternal life in the Kingdom of God who—through no fault of his own or for reasons that only God can judge—did not die as an Orthodox Christian. I do not attempt to posit my own theory as to how—within the limits of Holy Tradition—these two principles might be fully reconciled. (This is really all that Khomiakov was trying to do with his “invisible ties.”) My understanding of the Patristic consensus is that all one needs to do is maintain the apparent antinomy and leave it at that. What many ecumenists do, however, is undermine the first principle in their appeal to the second. This is un-Orthodox and completely unnecessary.

As for Father X’s statement on the forum concerning the probability that even members of the Jehovah’s Witnesses—“Christians” who openly and consciously attack the Holy Trinity—can be saved: this is just his opinion. I do not necessarily share it. I simply refrain from making any statements about how God will judge their members. Fortunately, I am not required to sort this out in order to be an Orthodox Christian!

This leads me to emphasize something I have stated in another chapter. I want you to give it serious consideration. I am referring to Saint Theophan the Recluse’s reply to

an “inquirer” concerning the question of whether the heterodox can be saved. He replied: “Why do you worry about them?... You and I should not be burdened with such a concern. Study yourself and your own sins...” Your desire to find and embrace the purity of the Truth is admirable. But you must keep in mind that there are certain things that God has chosen not to reveal to us. One of these is how He will ultimately judge others on that Day. He has revealed certain aspects of that Day of Judgment in order that we may repent and prepare ourselves; but He has not told us how He will—in His infinite knowledge of our incredibly complex nature and His providential ordering of our lives—ultimately weigh each of us in the balance. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9). This being true, we should not concern ourselves with whether God will save others or how. For us it is enough to know where and how *we* can be saved. We affirm this to be only within the Orthodox Church; but we can also make a compelling case from Holy Tradition that we do not also have to affirm that He will not save a portion of those who do not enter the Church in this life.

I hope this helps. May the grace of God lead you into all truth!

Sincerely yours, Patrick