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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.³¹

³¹ 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)

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:

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.³²

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.³³

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.³⁴

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.

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

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

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

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:

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."³⁵

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.³⁶

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

³⁵ 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.

³⁶ 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.

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 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.³⁷

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,³⁸ 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:

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

³⁸ "'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":

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).³⁹

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 Ecumenical Synods. In those cases, however, major inconsistencies can be found which betray a superficial understanding of Christian truth.⁴⁰

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

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 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).

³⁹ “An Open Letter to the Orthodox Hierarchy.”

⁴⁰ 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)

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 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.”⁴¹

A related example concerns the decisions and ramifications of the Third Œcumenical 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.⁴²

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.⁴³

⁴¹ *Common Ground: An Introduction to Eastern Christianity for the American Christian*, by Jordan Bajis [Minneapolis, MN: Light and Life, 1991], p. 129, citing Father George Florovsky, “The Ethos of the Orthodox Church,” *Œcumenical 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).

⁴² *Op. cit.*, p. 25.

⁴³ 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

Such is their affirmation of the early Œcumenical Synods!

Finally, it goes without saying that modern Protestant worship and piety, however sincere, are far from the Trinitarian,⁴⁴ Hesychastic, and Eucharistic foundations of 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.⁴⁵

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.”⁴⁶

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

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.

⁴⁴ “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 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.)

⁴⁵ 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).

⁴⁶ *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).

have—in an ontological sense. However, as the ever-memorable Metropolitan Philaret—the former First Hierarch 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 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.⁴⁷

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.⁴⁸

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

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

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

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....”⁵¹ 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.

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

⁵⁰ “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)

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