

ON BAPTISM:
A REPLY TO THE NORTH AMERICAN
ORTHODOX-CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL CONSULTATION
by
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The North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation, meeting at St. Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary, produced an Agreed Statement (*"Baptism and 'Sacramental Economy'"*) in June of 1999, which calls for the mutual acceptance of "the ecclesial reality of baptism in both Churches in spite of the divisions." The Statement further asserts that "the formal recognition of Orthodox baptism has been constant in the teaching of the popes since the beginning of the sixteenth century, and was emphasized again at the Second Vatican Council." Likewise, the Synod of Constantinople in 1484 and of Moscow in 1667 testify to the "implicit recognition of Catholic baptism by the Orthodox churches, and do so in a way fully in accord with the early teaching and practice of antiquity and the Byzantine era."

There is already an excellent critique of the Agreed Statement by Hieromonk Patapios, (*"When is Chrismation not Chrismation?"*, *Orthodox Tradition XVI*, 4-5). He argues that the conclusions – including the premature "Recommendations" – are not consistent with the teachings of the Fathers or the Canons of the Church. Such a result arising from the Consultation is inevitable, since it failed to examine seriously and to take into account the concept of heresy as the falsification of "the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3); and this consequently leads to the misconception of grace-filled Mysteries outside the Church, first propounded by Augustine of Hippo.

Our concern in this paper is the Consultation's Agreed Statement (*"Baptism and 'Sacramental Economy'"*), which is based on the debatable notion that both Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism fulfill the apostolic commission to baptize despite their doctrinal differences in general, and the method of baptism in particular. Also, we want to take issue with the Consultation's denial that, from the beginning, the Church distinguished between what is mystagogically "lawful" and what is "expedient", that is, between a strict and lenient application of the Canons.

The latter she calls "economy" (*oikonomia*) and the former, its complement, denotes "strictness" (*akribeia*). Depending on circumstance, sometimes the one is applied, sometimes the other, nevertheless, strictness is normative. The Agreed Statement claims that "the principle of economy" as currently practiced by many Orthodox churches has no apostolic pedigree, but is the invention of the post-Byzantine era. The Consultation endorses the view that this "principle" is a canonical development in the thought and practice of the Orthodox Church.

The right to apply "strictness" or "leniency" has always belonged to the "pastoral discretion" of the bishop, acting within the grace given to him by the Church, to do what is in her best interest; thus, according to Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky, the Church employs three ways to receive converts – "rebaptism", chrismation, penance – which, however, does not imply the recognition of mystagogical grace outside the Orthodox Church (*"The Basis on Which Economy May be Used in the Reception of Converts," Orthodox Life XXX*, 4 [1980], pp. 2-34).

Contrary to the Agreed Statement, this discretion of bishops is not “a virtually infinite power, capable, as it were, of creating ‘validity’ and bestowing grace where they were absent before.” Intrinsic to the spiritual power of “binding and loosing” which the Lord gave to the Apostles and their successors, the nature of episcopal discretion is neither magical nor juridical. The bishop cannot use economy with every Canon, nor can he exercise his authority capriciously, for, finally, it is not the bishop, but the Holy Spirit Who fills what is missing or empty in the heretical rite. He also brings power to what otherwise has no efficacy.

Furthermore, the evidence does not support the contentions of the Agreed Statement which hold that only since St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain (1749 – 1809) has the Orthodox Church adopted “a new understanding of economy.” Neither he and St. Macarius of Corinth, nor St. Athanasius of Paros, etc. “inadvertently bestow a new meaning on the term *oikonomia*” – innovation is not the way of the Fathers! In fact, Nicodemus *cum suis* merely revived ancient practice obscured temporarily during the Turkokratia, by the eighteenth century Western “crusade” of Protestant and Latin missionaries and by Western education, which enticed so many Greeks to Europe. It is the time of the “pseudomorphosis” of Orthodoxy that distinguished the traditional Faith under false forms and definitions, as Fr. Florovsky used to say.

Before proceeding with the analysis of The Agreed Statement on Baptism of the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation, an important question needs to be asked.

1. Is Roman Catholicism a heresy?

If the Christian Revelation is to have any meaning, the word “heresy” cannot be ignored. There is heresy now, as there was when Scriptures first mentioned it. St. Paul said it would always exist to test the Church (II Cor 11:19). To deny the existence of heresy, to insist that religious beliefs are only differing points of view, is to deny the distinction between divine and human doctrine.

The charge of heresy (and schism) against Roman Catholicism is not frivolous; it is part of Orthodox history. Her most eminent spokesmen have made the accusation, *e.g.* the Patriarchs of Constantinople, St. Photius, Michael Cerularius, Gregory II, Sergius II, Cyril V, St. Gennadius II Scholarius (the last Byzantine Patriarch), Metropolitan Platon of Moscow, St. Mark of Ephesus, etc.

Roman Catholic heresies are too numerous to list, everything from the *filioque* to the Papacy to the Immaculate Conception. Suffice it to say, its teachings on virtually every theological subject, in some way, diverge from the Apostolic Tradition; and, for this reason alone, an Orthodox-Catholic Consultation is pointless. Such dialogues are harmful when they suggest that “the faith once delivered to the saints” is negotiable.

2. St. Cyprian of Carthage

Anyone reading in the Agreed Statement that St. Cyprian (supported by his contemporary, St. Firmilian of Caesarea) “acknowledged that their position on (heretical) baptism was a new one,” ought to have not only strong suspicions about the objectivity of the Agreed Statement, but also about the familiarity of its authors with church history and the continuity of the patristic witness.

St. Cyprian writes on the matter of “heretical baptism” against the background of a controversy, that is, his opposition to the practice of Pope Stephen I (255-257), who welcomed heretics to the Church without “rebaptism.” The church historian, Eusebius, cites the words of

Dionysius of Alexandria on Stephen: “He had written before respecting Helenus and Firmilianus, and all those from Cilicia, and the nations adjoining, that he would not have communion with them because they, he said, rebaptized heretics.” This is not trivial, observed Eusebius, for there have been “decrees which have been passed in the greatest councils of the bishops, that those who come from the heretics, are first to be instructed, and then are washed and purified from the filth of their old and impure leaven” (*Hist. Eccl.* VII, 5).

Stephen was certain that the “rebaptism” of heretics was an innovation. His conviction had been twice tested, by the Novatians in Gaul and, again, in Spain. If they were apostates, the Pope was right not to re-baptize them. St. Cyprian himself held this view, that is, that those heretics and schismatics originally baptized in the Church do not require baptism (*Ep. LXXI ad Quint.*, 1 PL 4 423A). But Cyprian’s difference with the Bishop of Rome was obviously in regard to something else. He saw in Stephen’s refusal to re-baptize heretics a certain arrogance, a private interpretation of Tradition.

The “consultation” between St. Cyprian and several Numidian bishops over the question of “heretical baptism” became the occasion for his subsequent letter to Stephen. Assured of their Orthodoxy, the Saint offers not a new opinion, “but we join with you [Numidians] in equal agreement, in an opinion long since decreed by our predecessors, and observed by us, – judging, namely, and holding it for certain that no one can be baptized abroad outside the Church, since there is one baptism appointed in the holy Church” (*Ep. LXIX ad Jan.*, 1 ANF).

To Bishop Quintus, Cyprian declares (*Ep. LXXI*, 1 PL 3 1150) that some colleagues “think that they who have been dipped (*tincti*) by heretics ought not to be baptized when they come to us, for the reason that they say that there is one baptism; which indeed is therefore one, because the Church is one, and there cannot be any baptism outside the Church, [–not even of infants who have ‘contracted the contagion of the ancient death’ (*contagium mortis antiquae*). (*Ep. LVIII ad Fid.*, 5 ANF)–]. For since there cannot be two baptisms, if heretics truly baptize, they themselves have this baptism” Cyprian will not concede to “the adversaries of Christ,” the power of washing, purifying and sanctifying anyone. Therefore, heretics who come to the Church, “are not re-baptized among us, but are baptized” – *qui inde veniunt non rebaptizari apud nos, sed baptizari* (*Ep. LXXI*, 1 PL 3 1150A).

Furthermore, “our brother, Stephen” and those with him who honor the rites of heretics, should not appeal to some fictitious “ancient custom” (*Ad. Quin.* 2, 377B). Stephen is the innovator, Cyprian wrote to Pompey. He defames the Apostles by his words and actions, “as if they had approved of the baptisms of heretics, or had communicated with them without the Church’s baptism” (*Ep. LXXIV*, 2 ANF). The Bishop of Rome must abandon this new custom and return “to the divine origin and to the evangelical and apostolical tradition” (*ibid.*, 10 ANF). Adhering to the Faith, St. Cyprian disavows the beliefs which heretical baptism presupposes. “For if we and heretics have one faith, we may also have one grace... confess the same Father, the same Son, the same Holy Spirit, the same Church” and, therefore, “they may also have one baptism if they have also one faith” (*Ep. LXXII ad Jub.*, 4 ANF).

In 256, Cyprian received support from an unexpected source, St. Firmilian of Caesarea (d. 268). He agreed that nothing in the Tradition of the Church affirms the notion forwarded by Pope Stephen, that the apostles forbade bishops and presbyters to baptize “those coming to us from heresy” and instructed their successors to do the same. None is so foolish as to believe that the apostles delivered this, when it is even well known that these heresies, (*e.g.*, Marcion),

“execrable and detestable as they are, arose subsequently ... long after the apostles, and after long lapse of time from them” (*Ep. LXXIV ad Cyp.*, 5 ANF).

But “they who are at Rome,” Firmilian continues, “do not observe those things in all cases which are handed down from the beginning, and vainly pretend the authority of the apostles.” He does not demand uniformity in customs everywhere in the universal Church. History records that “there are some diversities among them, and that all things are not observed alike” with no harm to “the peace and unity of the Catholic Church.” But with his practice, however, Stephen “breaks this peace against you, which his predecessors have always kept with you in mutual love and honor, even herein defaming Peter and Paul the blessed apostles ... who in their epistles execrated heretics, and warned us to avoid them.” Therefore, Firmilian describes Stephen’s actions as adopting “the tradition of men” (*ibid.*, 6).

They who contend, Firmilian added, that persons baptized among heretics ought to be received as if they were rightly baptized do not understand the words of the Apostle Paul, “One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God” (Eph. 4:5-6). If there is no difference between heretical and Orthodox baptism, our Faith must be one, and assuredly we have the same Lord; and if the same Lord, we share the same Church, for Christ cannot be divided. The whole idea of conversion is pointless. If they have baptism, they have the Holy Spirit, and, therefore, all the other Sacraments. They, too, are the sons of God. “Why do we call them heretics and not Christians? Moreover, since we and heretics have not one God, nor one Lord, nor one Church, nor one faith, nor even one Spirit, nor one body, it is manifest that neither can baptism be common to us with heretics, since between us there is nothing at all in common” (*ibid.*, 26).

There is another matter on which Saints Cyprian and Firmilian concur in rejecting: the simple invocation of the Holy Trinity gives validity to any rite of Baptism. “But who in the Church is perfect and wise who can either defend or believe this, that this bare invocation of names is sufficient to the remission of sins and the sanctification of baptism”; nor must we think that the heretic’s “disposition and faith” towards the Trinity is sufficient (*ibid.*, 9).

St. Cyprian (and St. Firmilian) present what the Canons denote as “strictness” (*akribeia*) or the ordinary practice of the Church. We will look at “accommodations” (*oikonomia*) later. We need now to view the teachings of the other Fathers on baptism, since the authors of the Agreed Statement imply that the mystagogy of St. Cyprian is, at best, one of many opinions, and a doctrine advocated by only a few extremists.

3. The Other Church Fathers

There is indeed a patristic consensus on baptism. It is worth reading Jean Danielou’s *From Shadows to Reality* (bk. I, chap. 2; bk. II, chaps. 1-2; bk. IV, chaps. 1-2; and bk. V, chap. 3); and *The Bible and the Liturgy* (chaps. 2-5) which deal with the teachings of the Fathers on baptism by immersion, which they consistently associate with the Cross, the devil, death, hades, resurrection, the typology of the Old Testament (Exodus, the Red Sea, Crossing the Jordan, etc.). Danielou devotes many pages to the rite of baptism (oil, exorcism, confession of faith, etc.) and also offers chapters on chrismation/confirmation which is linked directly with baptism.

It is sad that the late Cardinal’s monumental patristic studies brought neither himself nor his co-religionists to the Orthodox Church. They are hedged on one side by Newman’s *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* and by the *Summa Theologica* on the other. Also, Roman Catholic theologians are everywhere intimidated by the philosophers and scientists.

Thus, it seems almost futile to ask them to accept the authority of the Fathers (among whom they wrongly count Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Augustine) on any subject.

St. Cyprian belonged, as some might say, to one theological school or one era, his ideas being peculiar to that milieu. In the words of Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston, “They would say that this is a Cyprianic point of view. By ‘Cyprianic’ they seek to create the impression that it was Saint Cyprian who was the ‘odd ball’ who invented, or in any case, vigorously promoted this ‘hard line’ view” (“The Form of Baptism,” *The True Vine* II. [1989], 21). To consider St. Cyprian as being unique appropriates plausibility to the Consultation’s arguments, but results in a rejection of the patristic world-view. Ascribing to seventeenth century Greek theologians the systematic reversal of what had been the normative practice of the Eastern Church since at least the fourth century is an exhibition of ignorance which discredits its case.

The testimony of the Christian writers before and after St. Cyprian gives no support to the assertions of the Consultation. History is clear; the Fathers, East and West, had a single Apostolic Tradition – heretical baptism is no baptism – no matter how this truth was locally applied. It would not be an oversimplification to say that most of the Western Fathers had a penchant for “economy”, while the Greek or Eastern Fathers were more inclined to administer the Mysteries with “strictness”. In both cases the truth of the matter is preserved.

We can see this in St. Pope Leo’s letter (*Ep. CLIX.*, 8 NPNF). He writes that “they who have received baptism from heretics, not having previously been baptized, when they come to us are to be confirmed by the imposition of hands with only the invocation of the Holy Spirit, because they have received [only] the bare form of baptism without the power of sanctification.” An Orthodox sees in his words, *oikonomia*; an ecumenist, proof that there was no universal understanding of the purpose and form of baptism or the other Mysteries.

Like the other Fathers, Pope St. Leo I followed the method of baptismal immersion (not pouring or sprinkling). His reason was simple: “in the baptismal office death ensues through the slaying of sin, and threefold immersion imitates the lying in the tomb three days, and the raising out of the water is like Him that rose again from the tomb” (*Ep. XVI ad Ben.*, 4 NPNF). Leo often compared the baptismal font to the womb of the Theotokos, “for the same Holy Spirit fills the font, Who filled the Virgin, that the sin, which that sacred conception overthrew, may be taken away by this mystical washing” (*Serm. XXIV*, 3 NPNF). Put another way, our first parents’ primal transgression was the sin of disobedience which produced the condition of mortality, for “the wages of sin is death” – what St. Leo calls “the taint of our birth” (*vitium originis*) (*Serm. XXVII*, 2 NPNF) – on account of which all men sin; or, as St. Paul exclaims, “The sting of death is sin” (I Cor. 15:56).

It should be evident that the Fathers have a common understanding and method of baptism, whatever the local idiosyncrasies: the invocation of the Trinity and threefold immersion is normal. Furthermore, the Eastern Fathers have the same view of heresy as their Latin brethren. The point can be illustrated with two Greek Fathers: St. Basil the Great and St. Cyril of Jerusalem. The former writes:

Whence is it that we are Christians? Through our faith, would be the common answer. And in what way are we saved? Plainly because we were reborn through the grace given in our baptism. And after recognising that this salvation is established through the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, shall we fling away ‘that form of doctrine’ (Rom. 6:27) ... 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 (*De Sp. Sanc.*, X, 26).

And what is the correct method of baptism? “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 (τὸν θεογνωστῶν) the baptized may have their souls enlightened (φωτισθῶσιν). It follows that if there is any grace in the water, it is not of the nature of the water, but of the presence of the Spirit” (*ibid.*, XV, 35). In other words, to baptize and to invoke the Holy Spirit is the privilege of the Church. “We do not therefore receive them [heretics] into the Church, unless they be baptized into our baptism. Let them not say that they have been baptized into Father, Son and Holy Spirit, inasmuch as they make God the author of evil...” (*Ep. CXCIX ad Amph.*, 47 PG. 32 752A).

As we shall see, although it is his inclination to treat all heretics the same, St. Basil does not always demand “strictness” for converts; yet, he nowhere concedes the existence of baptism or any Mystery outside the Church. St. Cyril of Jerusalem, in this regard, seems to have been closer to St. Cyprian. “We may not receive the bath twice or thrice, only heretics are rebaptized because they were not initially baptized” – μὴ ἄνω γὰρ ἀφρητικῶς τινὲν ἐναπτύζονται, ἡπεὶ οὐκ ἐκ τῆς ἀρχῆς βάπτισμα (*Procat.*, 7 Cross).

In his *Catechesis* III, 3 (NPNF), St. Cyril urges the candidate not to regard the baptismal “laver” as “simple water, but rather to regard the spiritual grace that is given with the water.” It is “the holy pool” (κόλυμβος ἁγίος) (XX, 4) which if anyone fail to enter, “he has no salvation” (III, 10). No doubt, he includes heretics which by implication are necessarily outside the Church. Their exclusion from the Church means, of course, that heretics have no Church, precisely because they have neither the same Lord, nor the same Faith, nor the same Baptism of the Church.

4. Augustine and Aquinas

The Roman Catholic members of the Consultation have been weaned on the Augustinian-Thomist tradition, which began its divergence from the Apostolic tradition when Augustine wrote against the Donatists that “as the baptized person, if he depart from the unity of the Church, does not thereby lose the sacrament of baptism, so also he who is ordained, if he depart from the unity of the Church, does not lose the sacrament of conferring baptism.” (*De Bapti. Co. Donat.* I, I, 1 PL 43 109). Yet, he maintained that the sacraments of heretics and schismatics have no spiritual benefit. He does not deny there is only one Catholic Church and one baptism; nevertheless, Augustine declares that heretics have “lawful baptism unlawfully” – *Baptismum ergo legitimum habent, sed non legitime habent* (*ibid.*, V, vi, 7 181).

This remarkable sophistry permits Augustine to advise that anyone “compelled by urgent necessity, being unable to find a Catholic from whom to receive baptism, and so, while preserving Catholic peace in his heart, should receive from one without the pale of Catholic unity, the sacrament which he was intending to receive within its pale, this man, should he forthwith depart this life, we deem to be none other than a Catholic” (*ibid.*, I, ii, 3 110). Was Augustine indifferent to the arguments of St Cyprian whom he claimed to admire? St. Cyprian said that the Holy Spirit indwells the Church, that the Sacraments do not sanctify without Him. Did Augustine mean to imply that the Church and heretics share the same Spirit? or perhaps, heretics are part of the Church? But not even Augustine dared to hold that opinion. Augustine’s

legalism here is puzzling to the Orthodox, but it is a natural consequence of his belief that the theology of the Fathers was incomplete, a shortcoming that God wanted him, with the assistance of law and philosophy, to correct.

Like Aquinas after him, Augustine distinguished between “the sacrament” and “the virtue of the sacrament” – *aliud est sacramentum, aliud virtus sacramenti* (*Tract. In Ionn.* XXVI, 11 PL 35 1611). The word *sacramentum* applies only to the visible aspect of the rite (water, oil, exorcism, etc.) while the *virtus* is the unseen reality. In other terms, if Augustine allowed that heretics have the “power” to generate “sacraments” without grace (*virtus*), it is because he saw no necessary connection between the seen and the unseen. The “sacrament” is nothing more than a “sign” (*signa*) of the divine Presence. As we already observed, the Church holds to the contrary, that what is seen is more than a sign of the unseen grace, but a symbol, that is, the two dimensions of the Mysteries interpenetrate, joined so that to dip the hand into the sacred water of baptism is to dip the hand into grace or to receive Holy Communion is to consume the Body and Blood of Christ under “the antitypes of bread and wine” (St. Basil the Great).

Looking at Thomas, however, we find a medieval theologian who built his own mystagogy on the work of Augustine. He agreed with the Bishop of Hippo that “the reality and sign is the baptismal character, for the latter is the reality signified by the external washing and is itself the sacramental sign of the interior justification. This justification is the reality only, *i.e.*, it is signified but is not itself a sign” (*Sum. Theol.* III, Q. 66. Art. 1). He did not differ with Augustine on “heretical baptism.” He acknowledged that the principal purpose of baptism is to remedy original sin. On the necessity of triple immersion (*ibid.*, III, Q. 66, Arts. 7-8), Aquinas had other opinions.

Thomas scanned the history of the Church and concluded that, although immersion is commonly observed, “it is accidental to baptism whether the washing be done in this or that way.” He contended that a single immersion is permissible; and, speaking of the traditional baptismal “signs” of the triple immersion, Aquinas, with typically Scholastic finesse, explained that “considered in themselves, both the single and the triple immersion are permissible because by the single immersion the unity of the death of Christ and the unity of the Godhead is signified; the triple immersion signifies the three days of the burial of Christ and the Trinity of Persons.”

Finally, inquiring whether sprinkling and pouring of baptismal water represent the same things as immersion, Aquinas conceded that they are “less clear” in their signification than the “bath,” “but no matter how the washing is done, the body of a man or some part of him is put under the water, just as Christ’s body was put under the earth.” The “reality” or “grace” is present during the rite and the spiritual purpose of baptism is realized.

Here is a prime example of Scholastic logic: Thomas cited St. John Chrysostom, St. Pope Gregory I, and Augustine. Although to a man they advocated immersion, Aquinas managed to twist their words to serve his position. Yet, the “angelic doctor” often remarked that the Fathers have erred, and their authority is less than the Scriptures. The Orthodox, however, believe them to be the supreme expositors of the Bible. Lest we forget, Thomas Aquinas is still lord of Roman Catholic theology, and it views the Mystery of baptism from his perspective.

5. The Canons

Before embarking on an examination of the Canons, we need to recall that the Sacred Canons of the local and ecumenical Councils are all forever unchangeable and valid. If not

composed by the Ecumenical Councils, they have been ratified by them. The Church which describes them as inspired by the Spirit of God, as “rules prescribed in the best interest of the Church ... the prophetic voice which commands us to keep these testimonies of God and to live by them; thus, it is plain that they remain unwavering and rigid” (Canon 1 of the Seventh Ecumenical Council). The Church may add to them, but never abrogate them. Lastly, there is good reason that the decrees and formulations of Church councils open, “Following the holy Fathers...”. Any opinion or proclamation of Bishops or Councils or any custom which conflicts with the teachings of the holy Fathers is to be rejected (*cf.* Fr. George D. Metallinos, *I Confess One Baptism...* Trans. By Priestmonk Seraphim. Daphne [Greece], 1994, pp. 51-53).

We begin with St. Basil’s Canon I (Epistle 188 to Bishop Amphilochius of Iconium). It is a summary of the Orthodox or patristic view of heretical baptism. “By *heresies* they meant those who were altogether broken off and alienated in matters relating to the actual Faith; ... for their disagreement directly concerns the actual Faith in God” (PG 32 665B). St. Basil defined *schisms* as “those who had separated for some ecclesiastical reasons and questions capable of mutual solution; ...they still belonged to the Church.” Of course, a schism invariably becomes a heresy, at which moment it ceases to be part of the Church. Finally, Basil mentioned unlawful assemblies [parasynagogues] (a form of schism) which were “gatherings held by disorderly presbyters or bishops or by uninstructed laymen.... when men in orders had rebelled with the disorderly, they were received, on their repentance, into the same rank.”

According to St. Basil, heretics have no baptism, even if their rite employs the Trinitarian formula. “For those who have not been baptized into the names delivered to us have not been baptized at all.” He applauded “Cyprian and our own Firmilian” who held that “they who had apostatized from the Church had no longer on them the grace of the Holy Spirit, for it ceased to be imparted when the continuity was broken. The first separatists had received their ordination from the Fathers, and possessed the spiritual gift by the laying-on of their hands. But they who were broken off had become laymen, and because they are no longer able to confer on others that grace of the Holy Spirit from which they themselves are fallen away, they had no authority either to baptize or to ordain.”

Thus, these pseudo-priests and those “baptized” by them, on coming to us ought “to be purified by the Church’s true Baptism. Nevertheless, since it has seemed best to some of those of Asia that, for the sake of economy for the many, their baptism should be accepted, let it be accepted” (*ibid.*, 669A). Although, “it is our duty to reject their baptism,” for the good of the Church the bishop must be permitted to “fall back upon custom, and follow the Fathers who have ordered what course we are to pursue. For I am under some apprehension,” St Basil added, lest “we through the severity of our decision, be a hindrance to those who are being saved. If they accept our Baptism, do not allow this to distress us. We are by no means bound to return them the same favor, but only strictly to obey the canons.”

St. Basil did not encourage the indiscriminate use of economy. With certain heretics, it may never be applied. On joining the Church, some are simply baptized, while others must be chrismated “and only on these terms approach the Mysteries.” We are not free to assume that Basil’s Canon is a bit of creative thought; it was a legacy. He said nothing less than the Council of Carthage (258) and First Ecumenical Council (325), nothing more than the seventh canon of Constantinople I (381) – “As for those heretics who betake themselves to Orthodoxy... we accept them with a Confession in which they anathematize every opinion hostile to the teaching of the Catholic and Apostolic Church of God. They shall be sealed with the Chrism...” Some heretics,

this Canon declares, must be received as “Greeks” (*i.e.*, pagans), that is, they must undergo the entire process of baptism in order to become Christians.

The forty-seventh *Apostolic Canon* amplifies our understanding of heretical baptism. “Let a bishop or presbyter who shall baptize again one who has rightly received baptism, or who shall not baptize one who has been polluted by the ungodly, be deposed, as despising the cross and death of the Lord, and not making a distinction between the true priests and the false” (*cf. Ap. Can. 86*). Canon ninety-five of *Quinisext* states the same: “Those who from the heretics come over to orthodoxy, and to the number of those who should be saved ... we receive on their presentation of certificates and on their anathematizing every heresy which does not hold as does the holy Apostolic Church of God... then first of all we anoint them with the holy chrism... But concerning the Paulianists... Eunomeans... Montanists... all of their number who are desirous of coming to the Orthodox faith, we receive as pagans... and then we baptize them... and so they become partakers of the holy Communion.”

There will not be another major statement on baptismal “economy” until after the apostasy of the Roman church. In the twelfth century, Theodore Balsamon, Patriarch of Antioch, in his *Responsa* to various inquiries, some on the treatment of “Latins” returning to “the piety and dogma of the Catholic and Orthodox Church,” insisted that inasmuch as “the papists have lost the power to efficaciously perform sacred rites or to sanctify the Latin race with divine and blameless Mysteries... they shall be admitted to Communion on the condition that they abjure Latin dogma and custom, being instructed in things Orthodox and treated according to the canons” (*Resp. PG 138 968*).

The Church made statements about heretical baptism before, during and after “the councils of union,” none more powerful than the *Horos* (Definition) (1755) of Cyril V, Patriarch of Constantinople, which was approved by all the Patriarchs. It reaffirms that heretical rites “give no sanctification to such as receive them, nor avail at all to the washing away of sins. We receive those who come over to the Orthodox Faith, who were baptized without being baptized, as being unbaptized, and without danger we baptize them in accordance with the Apostolic and Catholic Church, the common Mother of us all” (*cf. Metallinos, p. 136*).

The North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation recommends to the current Ecumenical Patriarch that he “formally withdraw” the *Horos*, as if it were a legal rather than an ecclesiological pronouncement. Cyril based himself on the Tradition of the Church. He chose “strictness”, to be sure, a choice dictated, in large part, by the activity of predatory Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries. Today, the *Horos* is more needed than ever.

6. Archaeological Research

In the Agreed Statement, “Baptism within the Rites of Initiation” (sec. B, 2), the Consultation argued “archaeological research indicates that many ancient baptismal pools were far too shallow for total submersion.” Let us be clear that “the facts” are always neutral until interpreted. The right interpretation depends on the right criterion. The Orthodox Church alone has it: her memory of two thousand years.

One should have expected Professor John Erickson of St Vladimir’s Russian Orthodox Seminary (OCA) to have taken the Orthodox position. He shares, however, the thinking of the Consultation to which he belongs. In his critical review of Fr George Metallinos’ *I Confess One*

Baptism... (*St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* XLI, 1 [1997], 77-81), Erickson rejects the author's call for the "rebaptism" of all heretics, including Papists, Protestants, and non-Chalcedonians. The arguments of Fr George's book he believes are based on the "innovation" of a few eighteenth-century Orthodox monks, a mischief which climaxed in the *Horos* of Patriarch Cyril. In truth, behind Erickson's rebuttal is his ecumenist faith, which views his "partners in dialogue" as "separated brethren," "sister churches", and not as heterodox.

Also, Erickson insists that the historical data does not justify the exclusive practice of triple immersion as the traditional way to baptize. Therefore, Latins and Protestants who today generally baptize by "sprinkling" (aspersion) or "pouring" (affusion) are genuinely baptized – notwithstanding the mandates of Scripture that "our bodies are washed with pure water" (Heb. 10:22; Acts 22:16); that they "descend into the water" (Acts 8:36-38) – that they are baptized despite the introduction of the philosophical ideas of "matter" and "form", the erroneous doctrines of "original sin" and the *filioque* as intrinsic to the understanding of the Sacrament.

Erickson suggests that not even the Fathers, everywhere and always, demanded baptismal immersion or "submersion". He quotes St John Chrysostom in support of his position (*On John* XXV, 2 PG 95 151), but the translation is poor and incomplete. He may be indebted to Thomas Aquinas (*Summ. Theol.* III, Q. 66 Arts. 3, 7) for his reading; because St John says quite the opposite. For the truth, Erickson might also have consulted St John's *Ad Illuminando Catechesis*, the *Teachings of the Twelve Apostles*, St Justin's *Apology*, *The Apostolic Tradition* of St Hippolytus, *De Baptisma* of Tertullian, the *de Mysteriis* of St Ambrose, St Venerable Bede's *History of the English Church and People*, as well as the other writers and Fathers already mentioned.

Professor Erickson's sources (J.G. Davies, *The Architectural Setting of Baptism*. London, 1961; and A. Stauffer, *On Baptismal Fonts, Ancient and Modern*. Nottingham, 1994) report that many fonts in Greece and throughout the Middle East (*e.g.*, the excavation of Dura Europa) were clearly too shallow to allow complete submersion of the human body, even when prone in the water. Erickson concludes that the early Church shows a diversity of baptismal practices, a "tradition" which ought to be recovered and implemented today. But he fails to make several distinctions – between baptismal "economy" and "strictness," between fonts for infants and for adults; and, last, the disparity in Orthodox and heretical rites.

In addition, Erickson's hasty research was inadequate. "The evidence of early baptisteries and Christian art have been open to varying interpretations," according to E. Ferguson. "Some have contended that the candidate stood in a pool while water was poured over his head, a partial immersion. The literary accounts do not seem to bear this out. The earliest baptismal fonts in the house church at Dura Europa were sufficient for an immersion. Dimensions and shapes of other baptismal fonts from the fourth and following centuries vary, but most appear unnecessarily large for anything other than a complete washing" ("Baptism," in *Encyclopaedia of Early Christianity*. Ed. by E. Ferguson. New York, 199, 132-133; also, 136f; and, D. Stone, *Holy Baptism*. New York, 1899, pp. 141-150).

Professor Erickson is surely not the only "Orthodox ecumenist" who treats with contempt the exclusivism of his Church. It is all too common nowadays. There is also something cavalier about his religious and historical evaluation of the Canons, an eagerness to criticize them and a refusal to obey them when they collide with his ecumenical sentiments. I am always disconcerted by Orthodox Christians who side with non-Orthodox against their own brethren, all

for the sake of a religious ideal which not only is the product of our secular times, but has no foundation in the Apostolic Tradition.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

- a. Having ignored the Scriptural, patristic and canonical injunctions about religious intercourse with unbelievers, heretics and schismatics, many Orthodox have become more devoted to ecumenism than to theological truth.
- b. Not having the same mind, Orthodox and Roman Catholics cannot have “the same understanding of baptism.” The Agreed Statement is not a sign of reconciliation, but of capitulation.
- c. The Agreed Statement proclaims: “A central element in this particular teaching is the conviction that baptism comes to us as God’s gift in Christ,” through traditional doctrine of the holy Trinity. “It is therefore not ‘of us’, but from above. The Church does not simply require the practice of baptism; rather the baptism that comes to us from Christ.” Yet the Patristic witness shows that all the Mysteries exist by and for the Church (not the reverse) which is the Spouse of Christ. The Church is the primary value, she is “the pillar and ground of truth” – not Baptism, as the Statement implies.
- d. That Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism seem to share so much in common does not require the Church of God “to recognize in each other the same baptism” and thus “also recognize in each other, however imperfectly, the present reality of the same Church,” as the Agreed statement pronounces. But the Faith is not the same in both religious bodies. Orthodoxy alone is the Church and any persistent similarity between them is a result of history, not ecclesiology.
- e. To maintain that both Roman Catholicism and the Church of God have the same “ecclesial reality in spite of our divisions,” is wholly inconsistent with “the perennial teachings” of the Apostolic Faith. The mystagogical equation is simple: true Faith, triune immersion, invocation of the Holy Trinity, perfected by Chrismation and all crowned in the Eucharist. Therefore, it is of no relevance to Orthodox-Papist relations what the Popes and his councils think or decree. To contend that the Orthodox Synods, on some occasions, have not applied the rule of strictness to heretical baptism should not be misunderstood by ecumenical partisans. The decisions of these local Synods are ultimately an exercise in economy. The non-Orthodox should not be misled by them to believe that the Church identifies her Mysteries with the empty rites of heretics. Indeed, St. Ambrose states: “The baptism of heretics does not heal, it pollutes” (*De Myst. IV, 23*)
- f. The teachings of “sacramental economy” “propounded in the *Rudder* commentaries” does indeed represent “the traditional and perennial teachings of the Orthodox Church”; it is not “an eighteenth century innovation motivated by the particular historical circumstance operative in those times,” as the Consultation claims. It is “a doctrine of scripture, of all the Fathers, and the later Byzantine canonists.”
- g. The sacramental practices of the papacy are of no concern to the Orthodox. Even the Uniates are a tertiary matter.
- h. The concessions of Orthodox patriarchs, bishops and priests to ecumenism do not alter the Faith of the Church.

- i. The Orthodox Church ought “to address openly” the menace which modern theories of “sacramental economy” pose to the integrity and purity of our Faith. She should, therefore, extract herself from all ecumenical entanglements.
- j. The Patriarchates must publicly reconfirm and enforce the 1755 decree on rebaptism as a necessary part of canonical mystagogy.
- k. That some Orthodox churches have now and in the past received heretics by Chrismation suggests no repudiation of her traditional position that heretical rites are void of grace.
- l. The only way to effect “ecclesial communion” between the Orthodox and other religious bodies is their conversion to the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Orthodox Church.

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