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ON THE RECEPTION OF THE HETERODOX  
INTO THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

THE PATRISTIC CONSENSUS AND CRITERIA



Left front center: Saint Auxentios of Mount Katirli (+1757), spiritual father of Patriarch Cyril V (+1775) of Constantinople blessing the Council of Three Patriarchs (Constantinople, Jerusalem, and Alexandria) in 1755 and the adoption of its Encyclical whose policy Antioch also later accepted. Right front center: Saint Hermogenes the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia (+1612) blessing the convening of the 1620 Moscow Council under his successor and disciple Patriarch Philaret of Moscow (+1633). Artwork by Joseph Kulits.

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# **ON THE RECEPTION OF THE HETERODOX INTO THE ORTHODOX CHURCH**

The Patristic Consensus and Criteria

An Orthodox Ethos Publication



Uncut Mountain Press

# ON THE RECEPTION OF THE HETERODOX INTO THE ORTHODOX CHURCH:

The Patristic Consensus and Criteria

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- I. Orthodox Christian Ecclesiology
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*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations,  
baptizing them in the name of the Father and of  
the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to  
observe all things that I have commanded you; and  
lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*

— The Lord  
(Matthew 28:19-20)



Christ the Vine

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## P R E F A C E

What is the patristic\* consensus vis-a-vis the rites of the heterodox? What are the criteria by which the Holy Fathers determined the application of economy in the reception of converts? Which are the presuppositions that must be met before a temporary, pastoral diversion from evangelical precision can be implemented in a salvific way—without overturning Orthodox dogma and undermining the Orthodox *phronema*?

These are some of the most important and pressing questions facing the Church's mission today, with answers urgently needed most especially in missionary lands. These questions must be answered collectively and decisively by today's Orthodox Church, in the tried-and-true Orthodox conciliar manner, based upon the patristic consensus and criteria. The extensive and unprecedented examination of this subject that you now hold in your hands will prove to be of immense value in this process for the Church catholic.

Conversions to Orthodoxy worldwide are at the highest levels since the first millennium. We have, in terms of mission, returned to a pre-Constantine status quo in much of the western world, where the Church is largely made up of adult converts who are passing through the catechumenate. Thus, for the good estate of the Church, especially in missionary lands, proper catechism and reception of the Holy Mysteries in the process of initiation is of the greatest importance. The immediate establishment and future growth of the House of God largely depends upon the expert craftsmanship of the builders as they lay the foundation stones, sealing and uniting each one, one at a time. If the Lord's workmen are operating on the basis of a mistaken method of construction, one which does not take into proper consideration expert specifications and essential presuppositions, the consequences may, sooner or later, be

catastrophic. It is not a question of if, but when, an earthquake will strike and thus expose the ignorance of the engineers' design and the shoddiness of the builders' workmanship.

The significance of this book for the Church at this time can be likened to the necessity of both following the chief engineers' designs and the master builders' methods in the construction of one's home. Without these, the builders largely labor in vain and for vanity's sake. So, too, following the evangelical and patristic designs for initiation into, and dwelling within, the House of God is absolutely essential if the inhabitants are to "put on Christ" and the Church is to be built up. Each one of us must "take heed how [we] build" up the Church, "for other foundation can no man lay than that [which] is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3: 10-11).

A mindful observer today, however, notes that there is confusion among many who have been charged with the task of the mystagogue—the initiator into the Mystery of Christ and the Mysteries of the Body of Christ. Some pastors are unknowingly—and unevenly—implementing decisions which are expressing an ecclesiological\* outlook which they themselves otherwise reject. Even as they are proclaiming to the world "the best kept secret"—that *the One Church* founded on Pentecost is the Orthodox Church—they are carrying out pastoral decisions of the greatest import in the lives of their faithful which essentially deny this proclamation. But, just as "every house divided against itself shall not stand" (Matt 12:25), so too continuing in such inner confusion brings ever greater degrees of instability.

At stake here is not only the proper ecclesiastical approach and the necessary prerequisites of pastoral economy, but also the very identity of the Body of Christ and the integrity of the dogma of the Church. These two—dogma and ethos, ecclesiology and pastoral economy—are inseparable and interdependent. This unity points us to the essential and perennial interpretative key of the Church's practice in the reception of converts—the twofold governance of *akrivia* and *oikonomia*, by which the managers of the household of Faith, the "economists of the Spirit," regulate the spiritual affairs of those being saved. These two "wings" of the Dove's pastoral management are so important that, whether one fails to grasp the wisdom of this "key" or rejects it altogether as the "key" which opens the door of understanding the patristic approach, his misfortune is the same: an inevitable fall from the Orthodox dogma of the Church.

This failure is often reached due to another failure: not following the hierarchy of things. For, if, as is often the case today, one who seeks

to apprehend the identity of the Church and boundaries of the Body begins at the end with the outcome of the Church's pastoral management and economic regulation in the sea of history, he has the order of things backwards and is ignoring the proper hierarchy. It is essential that we begin with Revelation, with the Incarnation and its continuation, the Church—Her nature, identity, boundaries—and *only then* examine Her journey through history and Her shepherds' pastoral management of the flock. Christ and His Body, the Church, are the same *yesterday, and today, and forever* (Heb. 13:8), even if His appearance may change from that of an infant to that of one crucified and buried, resurrected and ascended, or come to judge the world, or from a small house-Church in Jerusalem to the Hospital of the Empire and once again to a Church in the catacombs.

We must respect the order of things and begin with the identity once delivered before we set out to interpret the implications of economical exceptions in history. Thus, for example, before we enter behind the veil of the Mysteries we must encounter the Face of Christ in the *kerygma* (preaching). Again, before we can speak authoritatively, from experience, of the inner workings of the Body, we must be initiated properly and fully into the Life and Way of that Body. Only from within the experience of the Body of Christ, of the Mysteries in the Mystery of the Incarnation, can we understand the working-out of the Economy of Salvation which is guided directly by the free and all-wise hand of Christ. And only when we are well grounded in the *faith* in the Church *once delivered* (a “given” that, like all dogma, does not develop or change) are we able to understand the patristic and canonical\* wisdom surrounding the occasional, exceptional economic reception of the heterodox into the Church.

God is not only over all His created works with mercy (Ps. 144:9) but even over His work of salvation and even over His own commandments. He is not “under” them, bound or limited by them. Therefore, just as the order of nature was overcome, but not undone, in His divine *kenosis* (self-emptying), the God of all being conceived in the womb of a Virgin, so too, if and when *He* so wills, He Himself may set aside, for a time, according to need, the *akrivia* of His own divine order of salvation for the sake of some special *oikonomia-philanthropia*. The thief on the cross, who was not born of water and the Spirit (Jn. 3:5) and yet nevertheless entered Paradise on the strength of his confession of Christ's divinity, is such a unique instance of *oikonomia*, which, however, did not thereby overturn in the least the commandment to baptize. Thus, such exceptional “economizing” can never become the rule or be done when it in any way undermines or compromises the identity and nature of the Church or Her Mysteries.

As an erudite observer wrote nearly 100 years ago, “The Church is fully *tamiouchos* [treasurer], possessed of stewardship in her own household, and in her exercise of *oikonomia*, *philanthropia* must relax *akrivia* for the good of human souls and for her own cause, whenever need demands and the condescension is possible.”<sup>1</sup> And as St. Theophylact of Bulgaria writes, he who does anything “by economy, does not do so...because it is a good thing in and of itself, but because it is needful to do so in this particular circumstance.”<sup>2</sup>

It is clear then that while *oikonomia* is an irremovable component of the Body in the hands of the shepherds, it is also governed by presuppositions, such as the existence of a particular and pressing need, never impairing the well-being of the Church, never undermining Her identity and boundaries, and always serving the salvation of the members of the Body. Contrary to contemporary claims of the unlimited authority of the overseer, there is nothing arbitrary or purely subjective about the exercise of *oikonomia*. “*Philanthropia* can justify *oikonomia* only so long as it does not produce *anomia* [lawlessness].”<sup>3</sup> The undermining of the boundaries and blurring of the identity of the Body so prevalent today in ecumenical circles is a contemporary example of such lawlessness.

This short review of the *akrivia* - *oikonomia* interpretative key is necessary as a preparation to reading this book, for without it, it is not only both impossible to properly understand the Church’s pastoral practice in the reception of the heterodox but also impossible to remain faithful to the Church’s identity, boundaries and mission. It is these which are not only the casualty of negligence or ignorance but also the target of those today who are carried off by the demonically inspired heresy\* of syncretistic ecumenism.<sup>4</sup>

It is not surprising that the crucial matter of the proper reception of the heterodox into the Church is found at the epicenter of both the mission and the dogma of the Church, and in both the challenge of strange doctrines and destructive practices. Distortion is not limited to theology and church administration. In many parishes much distortion

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1 Canon J.A. Douglas, “The Orthodox Principle of Economy, and Its Exercise,” *The Christian East*, 1932, 13:3, 4; pp. 91-98.

2 Theophylact, *The Explanation of The Epistle of Saint Paul to the Galatians*, pp. 69-70.

3 Douglas, *ibid.*

4 According to the respected professor emeritus of Dogmatic Theology at the University of Thessaloniki, Demetrios Tselengides, Saint Ephraim of Katounakia famously said that, after fervent prayer, Christ indicated to him that contemporary ecumenism has a spirit of wickedness and is dominated by unclean spirits.

and confusion exists today as to the boundaries and identity of the Church. There is no coherent or consistent consideration of heterodox rites, often even within the same parish or diocese. It is commonplace to hear of a catechumen who entreats to be baptized to be flatly denied on account of a diocesan policy which indiscriminately, even without need, implements economy. It is also possible to hear of catechumens who are not baptized because their heterodox baptism is considered to be “the one baptism” (even if they were never triply immersed) but are nevertheless subsequently joined in the Mystery of Matrimony (by the same priest) because “there are no sacraments outside the Church.”

In addition to a general confusion there are ecclesiological theories being advanced which consider the heterodox and the Orthodox to be in partial or incomplete communion<sup>5</sup> and, thus, there is no more talk of return but only of “reconciliation.” Therefore, the thinking goes, those turning to the Church from Catholicism, for example, are not *now* being initiated *into the Body* but simply being “reconciled” to the Orthodox Church. Such a category is, of course, not commemorated anywhere in the canonical or patristic literature, such as St. Basil the Great’s three-fold classification of those returning to the Church.

The implication of this stance is that fundamental differences in faith no longer prevent us from effecting a *de facto* union with the heterodox. There is implicitly a new confession of faith being posited, one which says that the “one baptism” is every baptism, whether it be performed within the Church or outside thereof, by an Orthodox Christian or by the heterodox, according to apostolic form or not. Furthermore, this new confession of faith also holds that, since we share the “one baptism” with the heterodox and enjoy so-called partial union with them, they too are *members of the Church*—even if perhaps “ecclesiastically lacking” in some way. The attempted implementation of such a theory and practice of reception of the heterodox in the near future, which is rumored to be on the horizon, would certainly conclusively confirm the timeliness and need of this study.

In light of these and other innovative theories which “reshape” the Face of Christ and His Body, the authors of this present work redoubled their efforts to strictly follow the Holy Fathers and be successors in every way of the recently glorified Saints of the Church. Both in their writings

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5 One hears sentiments such as the Orthodox and the heterodox “are united by baptism in the Trinity and participate in the ecumenical movement as baptized Christians but are in a state of division because they can’t express one faith.”

and in our own personal encounters with them or their disciples and those directly guided by them with regard to reception into the Church, we have found great clarity and consistency with the patristic consensus. St. Paisios of Mt. Athos and his disciples, St. Iakovos of Evia and his spiritual children, and Elder\* Ephraim of Arizona and his spiritual children, to name just three of the Church's recent holy ones, all confirmed and implemented the teachings and practice of the whole host of saints and canons commemorated in this book. We were greatly aided and encouraged seeing this oneness of mind and practice among the saints of our day<sup>6</sup>—a sure sign of the continued presence and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

It is perhaps this struggle to be faithful to the Holy Fathers of this and every age that makes this present study immensely valuable for every pious Orthodox Christian, whether clergyman or layman. The scope and depth of this study likewise makes it unprecedented in any language, as does the angle from which it has been written—from within the context of mission among the heterodox.

All of this and more makes this present work essential reading for all who would acquire the patristic mind on the matter and implement it with discernment in their parishes and lives.

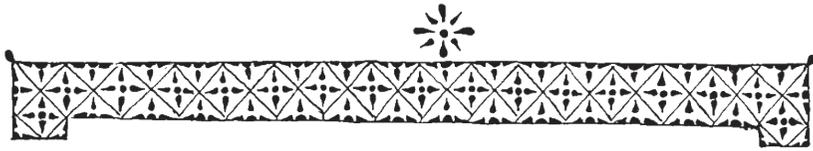
Holy and Great Wednesday 2023

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6 See chapter 17.



Holy Trinity (Andrei Rublev, 15<sup>th</sup> century)



## INTRODUCTION

The teaching concerning the reception of the heterodox<sup>7</sup> into the Orthodox Church continues to be a topic of debate and even controversy, particularly among Orthodox Christians in the West where patristic commentaries on the canons and the testimonies of God-bearing saints and elders are not well known. While there are good patristic writings on this subject, new articles on this topic have continued to appear which have received considerable attention and which criticize the practice of receiving into the Church by baptism those who have been “baptized” in a heterodox group in the name of the Holy Trinity.<sup>8, 9, 10</sup> Such articles may contain quotes from saints, canons, and councils of the Church but arrive at mistaken conclusions about ecclesiology<sup>11</sup> and the reception of converts due to misquoting, misinterpreting, inaccurately translating, and taking texts out of context (whether intentionally or unintentionally). Some of these articles contain claims and content that have not been thoroughly addressed in a single text. When saints, canons, and councils are misquoted and misinterpreted in this manner, the

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7 The term “heterodox” and “heretic” are synonymous. In the context of reception into the Church, these terms are used interchangeably to refer to those who identify themselves as Christians but who are not part of the Orthodox Church. “Heterodox” is often used in place of “heretic” due to the abrasive connotation that has developed around the term “heretic” in the West.

8 Yakovlev, *Sacramental Rigourism: Tradition or Modern Phenomenon?*

9 Cabe, *Rebaptism: Patristic Consensus or Innovation?*

10 Justinianus, *Why I Don't Support Re-Baptism.*

11 Ecclesiology has to do with what is meant dogmatically by “the Church.”

impression can be given that an author is “following the Fathers” while arriving at conclusions contrary to the teachings of the Fathers, resulting in further confusion among the faithful. False and misleading teachings about ecclesiology and the reception of converts are unfortunately not only found in a few articles on the Internet but are even repeated by some Orthodox priests, bishops, and seminary professors. The purpose of this book is to present the teachings of the Holy Fathers and Ecumenical Councils on the boundaries of the Church and the reception of converts, and to explain why and how critics of the patristic teaching on this topic arrive at their mistaken conclusions.

A few of the common criticisms one finds against the patristic teaching on the reception of the heterodox include the following: The Apostolic Canons are no longer relevant; the teaching of St. Cyprian of Carthage that there is no grace\* in the mysteries of schismatics and heretics is not accepted by the Orthodox Church; the Orthodox Church instead accepts that there is “ecclesiality” and the “presence of the Holy Spirit” in the mysteries of heretics and schismatics; those who are baptized by heretics in the name of the Holy Trinity have a “valid” baptism; those who receive “valid” baptisms outside of the Orthodox Church must not be received into the Orthodox Church by baptism; St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite and others who have agreed with St. Cyprian of Carthage do not represent Orthodox tradition; and that distinctions made by St. Nikodemos about exactitude (*akriveia*) and economy (*oikonomia*)<sup>12</sup> in the reception of heretics constitute a “novel” teaching invented by St. Nikodemos in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This book will demonstrate how these assertions are based on a misunderstanding of Church history, mistranslations of canons, misunderstandings regarding the teachings of the Fathers, a lack of awareness of what constitutes authoritative teaching in the Church, and a reliance on the writings of a few recent saints who were unfortunately influenced by the

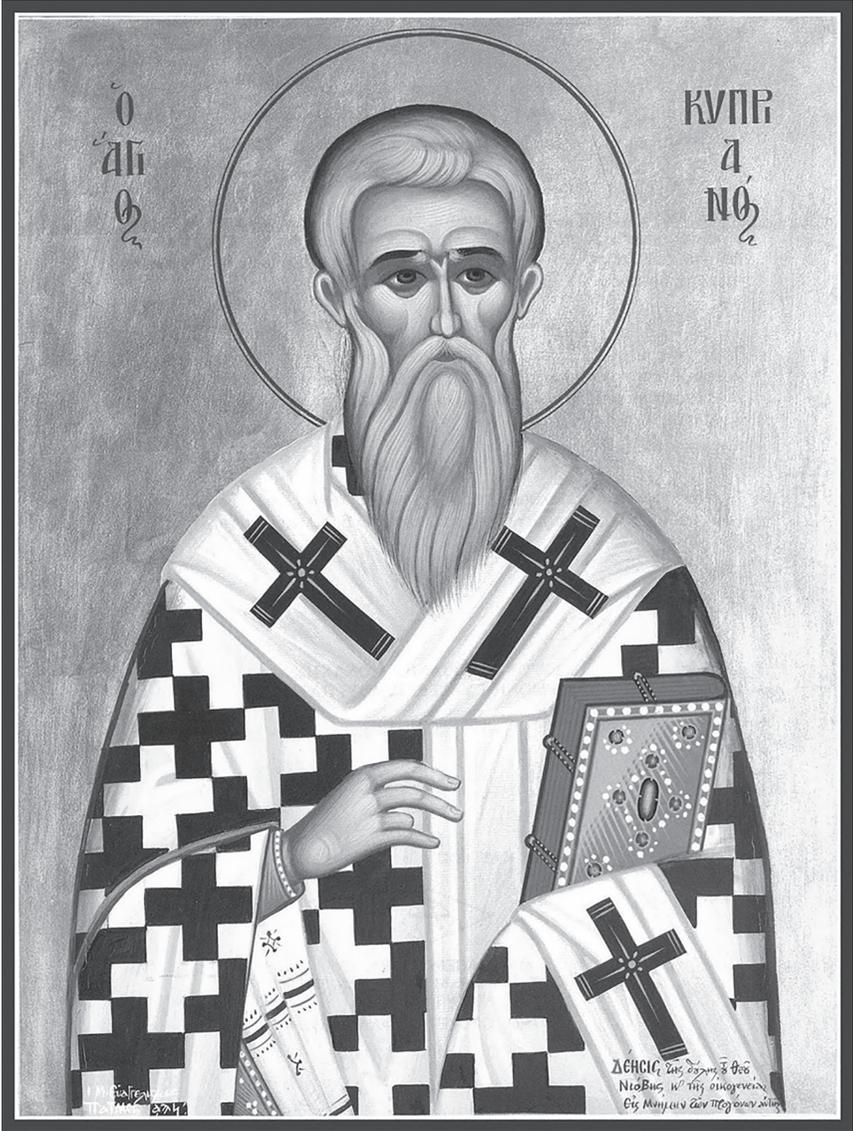
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12 Economy or *Oikonomia* means “the management of the house.” It is an exercise of stewardship by the Church in allowing deviations from the exactitude of the standard (*akriveia*) when necessary for particular circumstances and for the salvation of the many. *Oikonomia* cannot become *akriveia* but is temporary, circumstantial, and driven by necessity as this text will discuss further. See also Chapter 8.

heterodox ecclesiology of the post-Schism Latin Scholastics. The problematic approach to the canons and Fathers found in such writings often leads to a heretical ecclesiology (reminiscent of Vatican II) which separates Christ from His body (the Church) and reduces the Mystery of Baptism to a magical formula that transmits the grace of the Holy Spirit regardless of whether the person administering the baptism is an organic member of the Orthodox Church, which is the body of Christ.

This book will also demonstrate that the ecclesiology of St. Cyprian of Carthage is the ecclesiology of the Apostles and of the Orthodox Church despite the fact that some councils and canons historically allowed for the reception into the Church of certain heterodox groups by chrismation with certain presuppositions. It will also be shown that when the Church has received heterodox by chrismation this was never accompanied by an acknowledgement of the presence of grace in heterodox mysteries but was allowed by economy due to particular needs of the Church and was permitted only if the convert had received the apostolic form of baptism from the heterodox (three full immersions in the name of the Holy Trinity). We will also show that those baptized by the heterodox without the apostolic form (three immersions in the name of the Trinity) were historically required to be received into the Orthodox Church by baptism. Latins around the time of the Schism who began to baptize with a single immersion, as well as Orthodox who were influenced by the Latins to deviate from the apostolic form of baptism, have historically been considered as unbaptized and in need of baptism in three immersions according to the apostolic requirement.

This book will examine the sources of the patristic teaching on the reception of heterodox into the Orthodox Church, discuss and examine various criticisms raised against this teaching, and present the patristic consensus and criteria regarding the reception of the heterodox into the Church.



St. Cyprian of Carthage (+258)  
Feast Day: August 31



## CHAPTER 1

### **“Ecclesiality” and the Presence of the Holy Spirit in Rites of the Heterodox**

Critics of patristic ecclesiology often assert that by allowing some heterodox to be received by chrismation, the Orthodox Church has historically acknowledged the “presence of the Holy Spirit” in the mysteries of the heterodox. While many who have advocated for the reception of Latins, Protestants, and other heterodox by chrismation have taught that the mysteries of the heterodox do not have grace, and that the empty forms of heterodox mysteries are filled with grace only when the convert is received into the Orthodox Church; there have been increasing efforts to claim that the reception of the heterodox by chrismation proves that the Orthodox Church acknowledges the presence of the Holy Spirit and “ecclesiality” in heterodox mysteries. This view implies that the heterodox are in some way already part of the Church while not being in communion with the Orthodox Church and while not confessing the Orthodox faith. Such assertions about “ecclesiality” in heterodox groups and the presence of the Holy Spirit in heterodox mysteries are a dangerous departure from Orthodox ecclesiology and can lead to the embrace of the pan-heresy of Ecumenism<sup>13</sup> which pursues

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13 St. Justin Popovich and other modern saints have referred to Ecumenism as a “pan-heresy,” meaning that the Ecumenical Movement strives to create unity among “Christians” regardless of dogmatic truth. When external unity is pursued without unity of Faith, such a unity becomes a “pan-heresy” in that it is a uniting of all heresies.



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