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The Reception of Non-Orthodox into the Orthodox Church: Contemporary Practice¹

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How are non-Orthodox Christians received to full eucharistic communion in the Orthodox Church, and what are the ecclesiological implications of their reception? This question is more complex than it might first appear. Practice today varies considerably from one Orthodox Church to another, and in North America, from one jurisdiction to another and even within a single jurisdiction. For example, depending upon the group, diocese or individual priest receiving him or her, a confirmed Catholic might be baptized, or anointed with chrism on various parts of the body (or possibly on the forehead only) according to the usual pattern of post-baptismal chrismation, or anointed with chrism on various parts of the body following some other pattern, or accepted upon renunciation of errors and profession of the Orthodox faith, or received simply by aggregation. Varied also are the theological arguments advanced to explain or justify a given practice. Most Orthodox these days would not receive a Catholic by baptism, but one may not conclude from this that they all recognize an ecclesial reality in the Catholic Church. Theological positions on this point are nearly as varied as liturgical practices.

The SCOBA Guidelines

The *Guidelines for Orthodox Christians in Ecumenical Relations*, initially developed and published by the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in America (SCOBA) in

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1966, may serve as a convenient point of departure for examination of this complex subject. According to these *Guidelines*:

4. When receiving into the Orthodox Church a person who comes voluntarily from another confession, the Orthodox priest will accept the candidate by means

¹ Paper presented at the fifty-first meeting of the U.S. Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation, Brookline MA, May 29, 1996.

of whichever of the three modes prescribed by the Sixth Ecumenical Council [i.e., the Synod in Trullo] is appropriate (Canon 95):

- a) Baptism by triune immersion;
- b) Chrismation;
- c) Confession of faith.

5. Proof of the fact of baptism must be established by an authentic document or by the testimony of a qualified witness. The priest must undertake to instruct the applicant in matters of the Faith and practice that govern the inner life and outward behavior of the Orthodox Christian. If the applicant has not been baptized in the Name of the Holy Trinity in a Christian church whose baptism could be accepted in the Orthodox Church by the principle of *oikonomia*, he or she must be baptized as prescribed in the Service books. In cases of doubt, reference to the Bishop is mandatory.²

At first glance, these norms seem clear enough. On two crucial points, however, further explanation is needed:

(1) What application does Trullo canon 95 have today? Of the groups enumerated in the Canon, only the Nestorians and the Eutychians and Severians (i.e., non-Chalcedonians), for all of whom reception by profession of faith is prescribed, are still extant. No provisions are made for the many groups which have appeared since the 7th century. One could reasonably argue that Trullo canon 95 and the other relevant ancient canons appear to distinguish and categorize groups on the basis of their proximity to Orthodoxy and that they assign modes of reception accordingly.

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One could then attempt to apply the canon analogously to present-day groups. Thus, just as the ancient canons prescribe baptism for diverse gnostics and non-Trinitarians, so today baptism is appropriate for Unitarians, Mormons, Christian Scientists and the like. Yet not everyone would accept this interpretation of the relevant ancient canons, and even if everyone did, many problems of contemporary application would remain. While a measure of agreement might be achieved concerning those who are to be received by baptism, it would be much more difficult

² Ed. R. Stephanopoulos (2nd ed, New York, 1973) 18-19.

to determine who should be received by anointing with chrism rather than simply by profession of faith, and also why they should be thus received.³

(2) What is the meaning of *oikonomia*? As modern reviews of the subject have demonstrated, there are nearly as many definitions of “the principle of *oikonomia*” as there have been writers on the subject.⁴ At one end of the spectrum (e.g., Androustos and Dyovouniotis among the Greeks, Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky among the Russians) are those who would invoke the Cyprianic principle according to which the sacraments of the non-Orthodox are utterly null and void, so that by strictness (*akribeia*) all “converts” should be received by baptism; and if they are received in some other way *kat’ oikonomian*, this in no way implies any recognition whatsoever of an ecclesial reality in the group from which they come. Others (e.g., Zernov and Florovsky) have rejected this “economic” approach to the sacraments altogether. Still others have adopted its vocabulary only to modify it in diverse significant ways: Economy “cannot create out of noth-

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ing” but is rather a matter of healing that which is infirm (Abp. Alexis van der Mensbrugge)⁵; it can come into play only when “something, exists but presents a curable defect” (Abp. Peter L’Huillier)⁶; it is a matter of “discernment” of the “presence or absence of the mystery of the Spirit” (Fr. John Meyendorff).⁷ Thus understood, the “principle of *oikonomia*” suggests that outside the Orthodox “there is a Christian reality that possesses a certain significance for the universal Church,” that “the heterodox have maintained a certain relationship with the Church and therefore the possibility of enjoying the grace of the Church” (Fr. Ion Bria).⁸

³ For more on the relevant canons and ancient and medieval practice, see my article “Divergencies in Pastoral Practice in the Reception of Converts,” in *Orthodox Perspectives on Pastoral Praxis*, ed. T. Stylianopoulos (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, Brookline MA, 1988) 150-77; and also Abp. Peter (L’Huillier), “The Reception of Roman Catholics into Orthodoxy: Historical Variations and Norms,” *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 24 (1980) 75-82.

⁴ See most conveniently my article “Sacramental ‘Economy’ in Recent Roman Catholic Thought,” *The Jurist* 48 (1988) 653-67, especially 653-57; and, of older studies, F.J. Thomson, “Economy: An Examination of the Various Theories of Economy Held Within the Orthodox Church...” *Journal of Theological Studies* N.S. (1971) 13-36.

⁵ “Les sacrements: Ponts ou murs entre l’Orthodoxie et Rome?” *Messenger de l’Exarchat du Patriarche Russe en Europe Occidentale* 13 (no. 51) (1965) 170.

⁶ “Economie et theologie sacramentaire,” *Istina* 17 (1972) 20; see also his incisive “L’economie dans la tradition de l’Eglise Orthodoxe,” *Kanon: Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft fur das Recht der Ostkirchen* 6 (1983) 19-38.

⁷ “Eglises soeurs: Implications ecclesiologiques du Tomos Agapis,” *Istina* 20 (1975) 44.

⁸ “Intercommunion et unite,” *Istina* 14 (1969) 236.

The SCOBA *Guidelines*, of course, were intended to present what is held in common by all the member jurisdictions. It is understandable why these *Guidelines* sometimes become rather general and imprecise, leaving questions like the foregoing unanswered. Unfortunately the guidelines of the various Orthodox churches and jurisdictions, though sometimes more detailed and specific, likewise do not permit formulation of a single, consistent answer to these questions. Rather, they reveal not only diversity of practice but also divergent approaches to ecclesiology and sacramental theology. Two main lines of approach can be discerned in contemporary practice, one which for convenience may be called the “Russian,” the other, the “Greek.” The situation is further complicated by the fact that contemporary practice of some jurisdictions in North America has conflated these two approaches in various ways.

The “Russian” Approach

“Russian” practice and the theological rationale behind it should strike Roman Catholics and other western Christians as

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comfortingly familiar. Pioneered by the Ukrainian Peter Moghila in the 17th century, this approach is strongly influenced by Latin scholasticism. It not only has dominated the practice of the Russian Orthodox Church and of many others but also has deeply influenced manual theology throughout the Orthodox world. According to this “Russian” approach, mainline Trinitarian Protestants (and also unconfirmed Roman Catholics) are to be received by anointing with chrism following the full post-baptismal rite. This is not just because Protestants deny that chrismation is a sacrament. Protestants lack the apostolic structures of ministry which the Orthodox believe are necessary for the Church. Not having bishops in “apostolic succession,” they lack “valid orders” and in turn, the capacity for consecrating chrism and for conferring “valid chrismation.” Those baptized among them have, as it were, an incomplete Christian initiation. While they have a “valid baptism,” canonically they are in a position roughly analogous to that of a person baptized in an emergency by a layman. On the other hand, confirmed Latin Catholics and Eastern Catholics, like non-Chalcedonians, are to be received by confession of the Orthodox faith, since they have “valid orders” and therefore also a valid “sacrament of chrismation.”⁹

⁹ Cf. the Russian Orthodox Church’s rite for reception of Roman Catholic converts (1756, 1776, 1831, 1845, 1858, 1895). A French translation of the 1895 edition of the rite is presented by L. Petit, “L’entrée des Catholiques dans l’Eglise Orthodoxe,” *Echos d’Orient* 2 (1898-99) 129-38 at 136-37. Substantially the same rite, but with diverse additions chiefly intended to make it appropriate also for persons coming from other groups, is presented in English translation in Isabel F. Hapgood’s *Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic Church*, a work commissioned by Bishop Nicholas of the Russian North American mission diocese and first published under his

Of course, it is fashionable these days to disparage Peter Moghila and this “Russian” approach as hopelessly Latinized. At the same time, this approach is by no means completely at odds with earlier Eastern practice and reflection. Among other things, it offers a clear and coherent modern application of Trullo canon 95. While neither that canon nor other texts reflecting the continuing practice of the Church of Constantinople in antiquity sets forth a rationale for why certain groups are to be received by chrismation while others are to be received simply by profession of faith, the approach taken by Moghila and his heirs, which relates the completion of Christian initiation to the presence of apostolic ministry, has a certain logic to it. Already in the 4th century Didymus the Blind of Alexandria uses a similar line of reasoning when he explains that those coming from heretical groups which nonetheless practice Trinitarian baptism “are to be anointed because they do not have holy chrism, for only a bishop by means of heavenly grace consecrates chrism.”¹⁰ In addition, Eastern presentations of the sevenfold sacramental system and of the place of chrismation within it showed heavy Latin influence long before the days of Peter Moghila, and they continue to show it even now, as a glance at the most widely circulated Orthodox catechisms, popular handbooks and dogmatic treatises, whether “Greek” or “Russian” reveals.

The “Greek” Approach

successor, Archbishop Tikhon, later Patriarch of Moscow (3rd edition, Syrian Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese, Brooklyn, NY, 1956) 454-63. The rite begins with a carefully worded series of renunciations and affirmations (e.g., “Do you renounce the false teaching which claims that the dogma of the procession of the Holy Spirit is not sufficiently expressed by the word of Christ the Savior himself, ‘Who proceeds from the Father,’ and that it is necessary to add to these words of Christ ‘and from the Son?’”). These are followed by the command “Enter into the Orthodox Church...”; Psalm 67; the prayer “O Lord God Almighty, who dost always offer diverse ways of repentance unto those who have sinned...”; the affirmation “The Orthodox-Catholic faith which I now confess...”; the command “Bow your knees before God...”; and the absolution “Our Lord and God Jesus Christ, who committed unto his apostles the keys of the Kingdom...” (cf. Hapgood 461-63). Note also the provisions of the 1986 *Priest’s Handbook* of the Midwestern Diocese of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA), pp. 11-12: “Converts from religions which do not practice Holy Baptism or which do not baptize with water in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are received through the sacrament of Holy Baptism, Chrismation, and Communion.... After a proper period of catechetical instruction and affirmation of the Orthodox faith, those who have previously been baptized in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are received by the appropriate rite of reception.... Non-Chalcedonian Christians (Copts, Armenians, Jacobites, etc.) and validly confirmed Roman Catholic Christians are received by Holy Confession, followed by reception, absolution, and Holy Communion....”

¹⁰ *On the Trinity* 2.15, PG 39:720-22.

The “Greek” practice is less well known than the “Russian.”

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It also is more difficult to interpret, since it has not been the object of systematic reflection not has it had a smooth, continuous history. What follows, therefore, is only a sketch.

It should be noted, first of all, that in general Eastern writers oil the sacraments (e.g., Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite) were less interested in “the sacrament of chrismation” (i.e., the “second sacrament” of Christian initiation) than they were in the mystery of myron. The substance of the chrism itself, and not just its use in the post-baptismal rite, was the object of their reflection. In Byzantium, chrism was used not only for the post-baptismal rite and various consecrations (churches, emperors) but also for the reception of certain classes of heretics (as specified in Trullo canon 95’s second category) and for the reconciliation of apostates to Islam and occasionally of schismatics (like the Studites in the 9th century), the “validity” of whose post-baptismal chrismation was never in question. It was even sometimes used for reconciling a Christian who had fornicated with a Jewess.¹¹ While one may speak of all these various uses as “chrismation,” the rite employed for “converts” was not the same as the post-baptismal rite, whether in its structure or in its prayers. These were specifically prayers of reconciliation, not the post-baptismal prayer “Blessed art Thou, Lord God Almighty, source of all good things, sun of righteousness....” The similarity of the rites was chiefly in the use of chrism, generally applied to all the senses, and in the phrase “Seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

In the absence of detailed liturgical sources, it is not clear how widely Latins were received by anointing with chrism, as distinct from profession of faith, in the later Byzantine Middle Ages or precisely what rite and prayers were employed. From shortly after the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453, however, we do have a special rite for reception of Latin converts.¹² Set forth by a council in Constantinople in 1484, this rite was subsequently was

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ratified by representatives of all the eastern patriarchs at the 1667 Moscow Council. It is not unreasonable to assume that the 1484 rite reflected pre-1453 practice, or at least a pre-1453 practice. In any case, given circumstances in 1484, it is unlikely that this rite would be less

¹¹ For details see my article “Divergencies...” especially 169-71.

¹² Available most conveniently in I. Karmires, ed., *Ta dogmatika kai symbolika mnemeia...* 2 (Athens, 1960) 987-89.

“rigorous” than pre-1453 practices. The rite itself is a simple one, quite unlike the post-baptismal one in structure and prayers. It begins with “O heavenly King,” the Trisagion prayers and Psalm 50 (51), followed by a series of renunciations. The convert says the Nicaeo-Constantinopolitan Creed without the *filioque*, after which the bishop or priest anoints him (on all the senses, though Patriarch Macarius of Antioch in the 17th century reports seeing former Uniates anointed on the forehead alone) saying “Seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Finally, immediately before the dismissal, there is a prayer of reconciliation:

O Lord our God, who didst bow the heavens and come down to earth because of Thine ineffable mercy, and didst teach all men to confess the true and blameless faith and the knowledge of the consubstantial and coeternal Trinity, who also from Thine own truthful mouth didst state that the worshipful and all-powerful Spirit proceeds and subsists from Thine unoriginate God and Father: Do Thou, Master, receive also Thy servant N. who turns from the Latin heresy to the truth of Thy Gospel, and to Thy truthful words, and to the immaculate theology, confession and tradition of Thy holy apostles and teachers of piety. As Thou art merciful and sympathetic, pardon him, strengthen him to remain in the Orthodox faith and confession, open wide his mouth so that he may disgorge the heresies and other impieties that come from the gates of Hades, open his mental eyes to understand Thy wonders, cleanse his soul from heretical mists and all other ungodliness, and through me unite him to Thy Orthodox fold. For unto Thee are due all glory...¹³

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Greek practice in reception of converts changed dramatically in the wake of the controversies over “heretic baptism” in the mid-18th century. In 1755, Patriarch Cyril V of Constantinople issued a controversial *Definition of the Holy Church of Christ Defending the Holy Baptism Given from God, and Spitting upon the Baptisms of the Heretics Which Are Otherwise Administered*, which was signed also by the patriarchs of Alexandria and Jerusalem. From that time onward, the Greek Church in principle required (re)baptism of all Latin converts (and for that matter of Uniate and non-Chalcedonian converts as well). Writers favoring the new practice (e.g., St. Nikodemos the Haghiorite in his commentaries on the Pedalion), faced with the problem of explaining the earlier (and the continuing Russian) practice of non-rebaptism, did so in terms of *oikonomia*. From the mid-19th century in the Church of Constantinople, and from the early 20th century in the Church of Greece, reception by anointing with chrism again begins to

¹³ *Ibid.* 989.

be permitted, at first only very grudgingly, this being explained simply as a matter of *oikonomia*. Inasmuch as the 1755 Definition on heretic baptism has never been rescinded, recourse to *akribeia* (i.e., rebaptism) remains a possibility in the Greek Orthodox world and is often advocated especially in circles influenced by the example of Mount Athos.¹⁴

The rite prescribed in the 1987 Priest's Handbook of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America follows the broad outlines of the 1484 rite.¹⁵ After "O heavenly King," the Trisagion prayers and Psalm 50 (51), the candidate recites a brief confession of faith. The priest anoints him/her with chrism on the

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various senses, saying "Seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit. Amen," and reads the following prayer:

Lord our God, You have considered your servant (name) worthy to be raised to perfection through the Orthodox faith and to receive the seat of your Holy Myrrh. You, the Ruler of all, maintain him (her) in true faith in You and increase him (her) in justice and adorn him (her) fully in all graces given by You. For You are He who blesses and sanctifies all things and to You we give glory..

A litany and the dismissal follows. Like the 1484 rite, this is clearly a rite of reconciliation, not the post-baptismal rite. Nevertheless, it is intended not only for confirmed Catholics and non-Chalcedonians but also for mainstream Protestants, who (according to most modern Orthodox presentations of sacramental theology) lack the "sacrament of chrismation/confirmation," the "second sacrament" of Christian initiation. In fact, the "Greek" approach to the reception of non-Orthodox has not given much thought specifically to Protestants and their ecclesial status. Often the prevailing practice for receiving "Latins," whether by baptism or by chrismation, has simply been extended to them. Such an extension is easy enough to justify on the basis of many theories of sacramental *oikonomia*, but it is quite at odds not only with "Russian" practice but also with much of modern Greek manual theology, which often relies on the scholastic "Russian" reasoning sketched above to explain why Protestants must be chrismated.

¹⁴ See, for example, Fr. George D. Metallinos, *I Confess One Baptism...* (Greek edition Athens, 1983, English translation St. Paul's Monastery, Holy Mountain, 1994), reviewed elsewhere in this issue.

¹⁵ (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, New York, 1987) 85-87. As the *Handbook* states, this rite "is the service followed by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople for those occasions when non-Orthodox are accepted into the Orthodox Church with Holy Myrrh (Chrism) only." This service was first published in the book of Archimandrite (now Metropolitan of Sweden) Paul Menevisoglou, *The Holy Myrrh in the Eastern Church* (Thessalonike, 1972), pp. 208-09.

Some Conflations

In North America one may find not only the “Russian” practice and the “Greek” practice but also some conflations of the two, in which the logic behind each is obscured. It is easy to see how these conflations have come about. According to *The Priest’s Guide* of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese, for example, “Converts who have previously been baptized in the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit shall be received after a proper period of

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catechetical instruction and affirmation of the Orthodox Faith by the Sacraments of Chrismation and Holy Communion.”¹⁶ While the text does not specify “all converts,” its provisions regularly are applied to Catholics as well as to Protestants, though not always to non-Chalcedonians. In any case, where does one turn to for the “Sacrament of Chrismation”? Quite often recourse is had to “Hapgood,” i.e., Isabel E. Hapgood’s translation of the *Service Book of the Holy Orthodox-Catholic Apostolic Church*, commissioned by Bishop Nicholas of the Russian North American mission and first published under his successor, Archbishop Tikhon, in 1906, but kept in print since the Bolshevik Revolution by the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese. But quite understandably, that *Service Book*, notwithstanding some confusion in its rubrics, reflects the “Russian” practice, according to which the only rite of chrismation used for the reception of converts follows the shape and employs the prayers of the post-baptismal rite, since it is intended precisely for Protestant converts, not for confirmed Catholics or non-Chalcedonians.

A similar concatenation of accidents lies behind the 1989 *Service for the Reception of Converts* of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA).¹⁷ Before 1989 the OCA/Metropolia for the most part had followed the “Russian” practice.¹⁸ At the same time, many clergy and hierarchs were aware of at least some aspects of the “Greek” approach (that anointing with chrism was a means of reconciliation in Byzantium, that from the late Middle Ages onward Catholics were received by chrismation, and that following the 1667 Moscow Council, at which virtually all the Orthodox Churches were represented, reception of Catholics by chrismation would for a time at least be the universal Orthodox practice). The new rite therefore “was considered by the Holy Synod as most appropriate in our present conditions for the reception of Roman

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¹⁶ (Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, Englewood NJ, 1977) 14-15.

¹⁷ (Orthodox Church in America, Syosset NY, 1989).

¹⁸ Cf. the provisions of the 1986 *Priest’s Guide* of the OCA’s Midwestern Diocese, quoted n. 8 above.

Catholics and most Protestants.... The use of Holy Chrism, as a seal of reconciliation, corresponds to the tradition of the universal Church and the contemporary practice of other Orthodox autocephalous churches.”¹⁹ Those responsible for the rite, however, apparently were unaware that there are some significant differences between the post-baptismal rite of chrismation and the reconciliatory rite used in the Byzantine world. The structure and prayers of the OCA service are basically those of the post-baptismal rite as these would be employed in “Russian” practice for the reception of unconfirmed Catholic and mainstream Protestant converts.²⁰ The resulting service

¹⁹ Unpaginated “Elplanatory Instructions.”

²⁰ Part II of the 1989 *Service*, “Reception into the Holy Orthodox Faith” (pp. 3-12) corresponds in most details to the rite presented in Hapgood, *Service Book*, 454-467, save that the English has been modernized. At least two differences may be noted, however. (1) The renunciations and affirmations of the earlier rite (cf. n. 8 above) have been completely eliminated. (2) The prayer “Blessed art Thou, Lord God Almighty, source of all good things, sun of righteousness...” has been touched up slightly to make it less obviously post-baptismal. Where Hapgood (p. 405) reads “who hast given unto us, unworthy though we be, blessed purification through hallowed water, and divine sanctification through life-giving Chrismation,” the *Service* (p. 9) reads “You have given to us, unworthy though we be, blessed sanctification through life-creating anointing”; and where Hapgood reads “who now, also, art graciously pleased to regenerate this thy servant, N., that hath newly received Illumination by water and the Holy Spirit, to know thy truth...” the *Service* reads “Now be graciously pleased that your servant(s) _____ should turn from the guile of error and know your truth....” Also noteworthy is Part I of the 1989 *Service* (pp. 1-2), “Reception into the Catechumenate,” an element not found in other contemporary Orthodox texts relating to reception of converts. This basically consists of two prayers: (1) “In your name, O Lord of truth, and in the Name of your Only-begotten Son...,” i.e., the ancient prayer for formal enrollment in the catechumenate which since the Middle Ages has immediately preceded the exorcisms and other pre-baptismal rites (cf Hapgood, *Service Book*, p. 271; on the prayer itself and its significance see M. Arranz, “Les Sacrements de l’Ancien Euchologe constantinopolitain [4],” *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 50 [1984] 51-54). (2) “O Lord our God, we pray to you and beseech you that the light of your countenance...,” i.e., the ancient prayer on the eighth day of the birth of a child into a Christian family, which marked his or her introduction into what Atranz has called the “first catechumenate” or “pre-catechumenate” (cf. Hapgood, *Service Book*, p. 267; on the prayer itself and its significance see M. Arranz, “Les Sacrements [3],” *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 49 [1983] 289-91). Certainly “a proper period of catechetical instruction” (to use the words of *The Priest’s Guide* of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese and of the OCA’s Midwestern Diocese) is appropriate for virtually anyone who wishes to enter the Orthodox Church, whether previously baptized or not. In the case of a non-Orthodox Christian whose baptism is accepted by rite Orthodox Church, however, one may question the appropriateness of employing prayers and other elements of the formal catechumenate which by their nature are intended for the unbaptized.

is highly ambiguous. If one follows the logic of the “Russian” approach (which is evident among other places in the appendix to the OCA Service, which enumerates *more scholastico* the “seven mysteries of the New Testament”), this essentially post-baptismal rite is certainly appropriate for Protestant converts. (“Because we do not accept their orders, we cannot accept them as fully initiated, and therefore we confer on them the Sacrament of Chrismation, the second sacrament of Christian initiation.”) But is the same rite also appropriate for convert Eastern Catholics and confirmed Latin Catholics? One might conclude that the ecclesial status of such persons differs little if any from that of mainstream Protestants and that convert Catholic clergy therefore also should be (re)ordained, just as Protestants are. (In the OCA, as in the “Russian” tradition, they are received in their existing orders, without reordination.) Of course, a rubric indicates that Roman Catholic converts (unconfirmed as well as confirmed?— nothing is said on the subject) are to be anointed only on the forehead. It is unlikely, however, that this subtle detail, so lacking in historical resonance, will bear the full weight which those responsible for the Service are apparently assigning to it. One may hope that in the future this Service will be emended or else withdrawn altogether in favor of the “Russian” practice which the OCA formerly followed.

Concluding Observations

Serious Orthodox-Catholic dialogue has been handicapped by what might be described as an “imparity” in the articulation of ecclesiology and sacramental theology. The Catholic “position” on the ecclesial status of the Orthodox, and hence also on how to receive them to full eucharistic communion in the Catholic Church, is well known. In contrast to the Protestants, who

constitute separated “ecclesial communities,” the Orthodox, like the non-Chalcedonians and some others, constitute “churches” which, although separated from the Roman Church, nevertheless “possess true sacraments, above all— by apostolic succession— the priesthood and the eucharist.”²¹ Hence they are fully initiated and are to be received to full communion accordingly. On the other hand, the Orthodox have not articulated their “position” on the ecclesial status of those outside the visible structures of the Orthodox Church in a comparably clear and authoritative manner. While the “Russian” approach easily lends itself to a reciprocal recognition of the Catholic Church precisely as “church” and of confirmed Catholics as fully initiated, most versions of the “Greek” economic approach do not.

²¹ Vatican II’s Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 15.

It is possible that an eventual Great and Holy Council of the Orthodox Church will address this “imparity,” but it is unlikely to do so soon. The topic of *oikonomia* was on the preliminary agenda of the council, but the introductory report on the subject (prepared in 1971 by the Inter-Orthodox Preparatory Commission) was widely criticized as being filled with internal contradictions, and the topic was withdrawn when the first Pan-Orthodox Preconciliar Conference met in fall 1976. While the issue of the relationship of the Orthodox Church to other Christian churches and communities does remain on the agenda of the Great and Holy Council, preliminary documents on this issue simply affirm the need for dialogue and do not directly address the issue of the ecclesial status of these bodies.

Thus far the work of the joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic and the Orthodox Churches has proceeded without clarification of this basic issue. The Bari Statement “Faith, Sacraments and the Unity of the Church” (1987), which among other things considered the administration of the sacraments of Christian initiation, stopped well short of the mutual recognition of sacraments that some Orthodox and Catholics had been expecting on the basis of earlier

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statements by individual church leaders.”²² More recently the Balamand Statement “Uniatism, Method of Union of the Past, and the Present Search for Full Communion” (1993) did affirm that “any rebaptism must be avoided,”²³ but it did not provide a sufficient theological rationale for this affirmation. Even if all the Orthodox Churches were to accept this affirmation (which they have not), it is unlikely that they would interpret it in the same way. The work of the Joint International Commission thus rests on inadequate foundations.

While lacking the authority and international character of the Joint International Commission, the U.S. Orthodox-Roman Catholic Theological Consultation has contributed in a small way to discussion of these ecclesiological issues with its joint statement on “The Principle of Economy” (May 1976). The statement is critical of the approach taken by most theories of sacramental *oikonomia*. These “do not do justice to the genuine whole tradition underlying the concept and practice of economy.” The consultation instead suggests that “a proper understanding of economy involves the exercise of spiritual discernment,” and it expresses the hope “that our churches can come to discern in each other the same faith, that they can come to recognize

²² For the text of this statement see most conveniently *The Quest for Unity Orthodox and Catholics in Dialogue*, ed. J. Borelli and J.H. Erickson (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood NY, and United States Catholic Conference, Washington DC, 1996) 93-104.

²³ Paragraph 13; *Quest for Unity* 177.

each other as sister churches celebrating the same sacraments, and thus enter into full ecclesial communion.²⁴

Can anything more be done to resolve the inherent contradictions between the “Russian” scholastic approach to sacramental theology and ecclesiology and the various versions of the “Greek” economic approach? Certainly both approaches, if pursued single-mindedly, suffer from certain defects, and both offer some important and mutually corrective insights. As pursued by both Catholics and Orthodox, the scholastic approach sometimes has

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insisted too much on the convenient but illusive distinction between validity and liceity or fruitfulness, as though the sacraments operate in a mechanical fashion without regard to ecclesial context. By insisting on the ecclesiological significance of the sacraments, the economic approach, at least in many of its versions, has helped to correct this misapprehension. Particularly, since Vatican II, Catholic sacramental theology has gone beyond some of the limitations of the scholastic approach to adopt patristic perspectives much more congenial to Orthodoxy. The economic approach, at least in its more radical versions, is also in need of correction. As Florovsky has pointed out, “it is only a ‘theological opinion,’ very late and very controversial, having arisen in a period of theological confusion and decadence in a hasty endeavor to dissociate oneself as sharply as possible from Roman theology.”²⁵ If nothing else, the view of early church life and practice on which it is based is quite at odds with the findings of serious historical scholarship. Notwithstanding the claims of its proponents, the economic approach does not faithfully express and explain the traditional practice of the Orthodox Church with regard to Christians outside its visible communion. At this point, it would be helpful if the Orthodox, without repudiating the several helpful insights of the economic approach, would officially reject the notion that *kat’ akribeian* all non-Orthodox seeking to enter into full communion with the Orthodox Church should be (re)baptized and that, if they are not, this is simply a matter of “economy” and of no ecclesiological significance. It would be helpful, for example, if the Patriarchate of Constantinople at long last would rescind its 1755 decree on heretic baptism. It would also be helpful if the Orthodox Churches which currently practice reception of Catholic “converts” by anointing with chrism would do so in such a way as to indicate clearly that this is not a reiteration of their post-baptismal confirmation/chrismation.

While much of the burden of addressing these issues of practice and theological reflection lies on the Orthodox, the U.S.

²⁴ Paragraph 10; *Quest for Unity* 88.

²⁵ “The Limits of the Church,” *Church Quarterly Review*, October 1933, p.125.

Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation and the International Joint Commission for Dialogue can assist by clearly identifying those areas which are most in need of clarification and by providing much-needed historical-critical perspective on the issues which still divide our churches. Many Orthodox as well as Catholics have a sincere desire for rapprochement and unity, but all too often their desire has been frustrated because of misinformation and the distrust of the few. Theologians can help to establish an atmosphere of trust by exposing falsehood and dispelling error. This is their vocation, and for this they have been trained. Without patient labor at this arduous and often thankless task, talk of mutual recognition as sister churches may well remain an empty formula.