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Preface/Abstract

This article seeks to characterize the dominant schools of thought among the contemporary canon law scholars of the Eastern Church, and to argue for a new nomenclature in study and commentary upon church canons or laws based upon a synthetic understanding of these various Eastern approaches. This nomenclature is designed to convey the notion of an interdisciplinary method of canonical analysis similar to and based upon the various methods already used by Orthodox canonists and theologians. This method includes: a textual study of the canons themselves, a review of interpretations of them, a survey of the historical context in which the canons were promulgated, and an analysis of the historical context within which they were collected and interpreted. We denominate this method “Canonology.”
“Canon law” is something most scholars associate with Roman Catholicism, but virtually every Christian denomination has rules, laws, or some form of hierarchy or order. Hence, the antiquarian subject of “canon law,” broadly conceived, is basic to the question of any church’s order, i.e., ecclesiology. Since the legal realist movement of the early 20th century, “law” has implied little more than a positivistic expression of governmental will. For the ancient church of the East, canons are just one aspect of the life of The Church as it struggles to actualize and express the kingdom of God in an imperfect world, one part of the ongoing dialectic between the Church triumphant and the Church militant. While the concept of “canon law” is not alien to Eastern Orthodox theology (e.g., nomocanons came into use as governmental codifications or expressions of church rules during the Byzantine period), this nomenclature, particularly given the post-modern connotation of “law,” fails to describe a truly eastern or Orthodox approach to canons of The Church. Using the conventional western 20th century understanding of the term, there is no such thing as “Canon Law” in an Orthodox context. Surveying the varying approaches of a whole range of contemporary Orthodox canonists serves to illustrate this point. This article seeks to characterize the dominant schools of thought among the contemporary canon law scholars of the Eastern Church, and to argue for a new nomenclature in study and commentary upon all church canons and laws, regardless of denomination, based upon a synthetic understanding of these various Eastern approaches.
Clearly defining or identifying different methods of “doing” Orthodox canon law is not as easy a task as might first appear. For one thing, Orthodox canonists are as likely to label each other as to label themselves. However, there do seem to be two concepts that permeate labeling and polemics among Orthodox who discuss the canons. These concepts are “tradition” and “ecumenism.” For example, Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna has written *Contemporary Eastern Orthodox Thought: The Traditionalist Voice*, and other works published by “The Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies.” This group and its spokesmen strongly oppose any acknowledgement of Roman Catholics or Protestants as members of “The Church.” At the other end of the spectrum is the Eastern Orthodox-Roman Catholic Consultation in the United States, whose purpose is to foster dialogue between the two denominations. The “third rail” of this discussion, i.e., the “white elephant in the room” that goes unmentioned, is whether or not “heterodox” Christians are members of The Church. Are they really Christians? A significant part of the answer to this question would seem to be whether their baptisms mean anything theologically, and this one issue often drives the disagreement between Orthodox canonists. Essentially, Eastern Orthodox canonists are divided between “conservatives” and “moderates,” and they are divided paradigmatically and principally on this point.

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2 Hereafter we will use the terms “heterodox” and “non-Orthodox” to denote those religious organizations who consider themselves Christian but who do not place themselves under the administrative authority of any Orthodox bishop. For our purposes here, an Orthodox bishop will be defined as a bishop in full communion with the Patriarch of Constantinople. Without such a definition, our arguments become circular and our language confusing. We should note that such definitions are, in a sense, matters of linguistic and logical convenience, in that many self-identified Christians who we would not thus define as Orthodox claim to be just as “orthodox” or even just as “Orthodox” as anyone else. In fact, the whole matter of definition begs some of the very ecclesiological questions raised by this article. It is odd how rarely this linguistic observation appears to have been made in Orthodox literature. This is why we analogize it to Political Science’s “third rail” or Psychology’s “white elephant.”

The aforementioned Chrysostomos’ books and writings, and those of other self-proclaimed “traditionalists” like Patrick Barnes are recommended on the website titled “Orthodox Christian Information Center,” which claims to be “An Internet Voice for Traditional Orthodox Thought and Practice.” This website, run by Barnes, is strongly critical of the views of many reputable Orthodox theologians who are termed “modernists” or “ecumenists.” For example, one finds criticism of Fr. Thomas Hopko, former dean of St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Seminary in Crestwood, New York and Fr. John Erickson, the current dean, as well as criticism of Illuminator, the official publication of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Pittsburgh under Metropolitan Maximos Aghiorgoussis.

Of the thirteen subpages on the website grouped under the heading “Ecumenism Awareness” two of them deal specifically with baptism and ecclesiology. In fact, much of the “traditional” polemic is devoted to criticizing the current practice in North America of receiving converts from some Christian denominations by chrismation or mere profession of faith (thus implicitly recognizing as valid their non-Orthodox baptisms). This issue of the validity of “heterodox” baptisms, more than any other, illustrates the difference in perspective of different “schools” of Orthodox canonical scholarship. For example, one book recommended by the Orthodox Christian Information Center is *I Confess One Baptism* by Fr. George D. Metallinos, D.Th., Ph.D., adjunct professor at the

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4 http://www.orthodoxinfo.com
5 See http://www.orthodoxinfo.com/intro
6 See http://www.orthodoxinfo.com/ecumenism awareness
7 “Heterodox,” in this context signifies only that the baptism was performed by someone other than an ordained Orthodox priest, and no “emergency” exception applied to render the baptism otherwise incontrovertibly Orthodox.
8 Rev. George Metallinos, Ph.D., D.Th.; *I Confess One Baptism* (Daphne, Greece: Paul’s Monastery Press, 1992). This book, originally written in Greek, was translated into English by the Priest-Monk Seraphim and was published by St. Paul’s Monastery on Mt. Athos.
University of Athens. In this book, Fr. Metallinos relies heavily on the 18th century figure, St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite, and his canonical compilation, The Rudder. Fr. Metallinos sees St. Nikodemos and his “Kollyvade” colleagues, Neophytos Kafsovalyvitis, Makarios of Corinth, and Athanasios Parios, as monastic leaders of a traditionalist reaction against a “modernism” Metallinos equates to the “modernism” some Orthodox theologians are accused of today.

Others touted as traditionalists are Dr. Constantine Cavarnos, who has written a biography of St. Nikodemos. Many “traditionalists” also consider the use of the Gregorian (new) calendar to be heretical, and they thus believe that the vast majority of the Orthodox Churches (those in communion with the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople) have lapsed into heresy both over the reception of converts from other denominations by any means other than baptism, and over the use of the modern calendar.

It remains to briefly examine the canonical methodology of the writers and thinkers within this group. In reviewing this methodology the writings of Archbishop Chrysostomos and Fr. Metallinos on the specific subjects of ecclesiology and the

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9 I have adopted the phonetic translation “Nikodemos,” which I consider closer to the original Greek, as opposed to the more common latinized version of “Nicodemus.” “Nikodimos” might be more phonetically correct, but might also cause confusion by being so different from the dominant latinized translation. “Hagiorite” is a transliteration based on the Greek name for Mount Athos, the Holy Mountain (Hagion Oros), where St. Nikodemos lived and worked as a monk. Hence, one could as easily refer to him as “St. Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain,” or even St. Nikodemos of Mount Athos.


11 The term “Kollyvade” is discussed infra.

12 Constantine Cavarnos, St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite, Volume 3 in the Lives of the Orthodox Saints Series, (Belmont, Mass.: The Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1974; Second edition, 1979). Page citations are to the reprint edition. There is no indication that Cavarnos accepts this label, but his pro-monastic writings would seem to imply it.
baptisms of heterodox Christians are helpful. In an article entitled “BEM and Orthodox Spirituality,” Archbishop Chrysostomos puts forth what he calls his “traditionalist” or “conservative” criticism of the interfaith paper on baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry (“BEM”) published in Lima, Peru in January of 1992 by the Plenary Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches. He comments particularly upon what he calls the “Orthodox reception” of the BEM document as reflected in papers and discussions appearing in the *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*. He apparently feels that the response of mainstream Orthodox theologians reflected in these articles is over-accommodating to “the West,” and he implies that the majority of such opinions are “of a reformist spirit.”

Chrysostomos argues that modern Orthodox theologians are held captive by Western categories of thought in such a way as to generate “self-criticism that borders on self-abnegation.” He holds that “in short, the Western captivity still exists.” He claims that his is a holistic approach to all theology, particularly in understanding the sacraments and the limits of the church. He asks that “with regard to baptism, the Eucharist, and ministry outside the Orthodox Church, it is imperative that we regain a certain spiritual perspective which many of the Orthodox responses to Lima lack.” In evaluating the work of these Orthodox respondents to the Lima BEM, Chrysostomos comments that, “our theology still falls short of that blending of personal spirituality and intellectual exposition which marks the great apologists and confessors of the Orthodox faith.”

Hence, Archbishop Chrysostomos attacks the Western categories of understanding he perceives in the mindset of his opponents, and he simultaneously

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14 *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 30, no. 2 (1985).
15 Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna, “BEM and Orthodox Spirituality,” supra.
criticizes “modernist” Orthodox theologians for being improperly or incompletely grounded or “immersed” in what he calls the “patristic consensus” and “spiritual Gestalt which the whole sacramental life (of the Orthodox Church) forms.” This theme of the Western captivity of modern Orthodox theology and the necessity of immersion in history and theology from an “Eastern and patristic mindset” are evidenced in other works by the same author.16 This theme is echoed by Cavarnos17 and Fr. Metallinos.18

The conservative, it seems, depends upon a thorough background understanding of patristic theology and historical context in order to properly “do” canon law.

This part of Chrysostomos’ argument is classic among Orthodox theologians over the centuries: Not only do we disagree with “the West” on matters of theology, we are not even “doing” the same thing when we “do” theology; in fact, our minds do not even work in the same way (and unlike the Westerners, we are using faculties which are more than merely “rational” or “mind”).19

A major assumption of this line of reasoning is that Chrysostomos’ understanding of the meaning of “ekklesia” and the nature and characteristics of the sacraments and life of the Church are axiomatic. The Archbishop assumes, and then asserts, that all Christians properly immersed in the patristic mindset will share his understanding of the

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16 For example, see Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna, Orthodox and Roman Catholic Relations from the Fourth Crusade to the Hesychastic Controversy (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 2001). ISBN: 0-911165-49-5.

17 While Dr. Cavarnos’ subject is biography rather than canon law per se, the very writing of this biography and discussion of St. Nicodemus’ era and associations presupposes the theological importance of these subjects.

18 Regarding viewing canons in the theological mindset of the commentators at issue, see, e.g., Metallinos, I Confess One Baptism 35: “In order to understand the manner in which our writers view the Canon in question, we must stay with their presuppositions which are the fruit of the spiritual level of the time…” Regarding historical context, see Ibid, 65-94, and 95, where Metallinos states: “From the preceding historical review,…we come away with a picture quite different from the one we had until now.”

nature and life of the Church (including the sacraments). For example, he asserts without textual reference that Orthodox baptism “is not simply entry into the Church community or congregation as such,” and it “has no universal focus, such as the forgiveness of original sin and the entry of an individual into the Christian oikoumene, but rather intensely draws the candidate’s attention to a personal struggle, within the confined limits of the Orthodox Church itself, with the power of the devil for the liberation of the soul and its union with God” (emphasis added).

With respect to the Church into which Orthodox baptism allows entry, the Archbishop asserts that, in effect, that Church is the Orthodox Church (as he defines it), and he then quotes St. Diadiochos of Photiki to the effect that “Grace leads the soul toward good from without…From the moment we are reborn in baptism, however…grace dwells within.” The Archbishop proceeds to interpret this statement as meaning that only baptism within the Orthodox Church confers grace that “dwells within,” while only “external grace … touches those outside Orthodoxy.” Aside from the controversial nature of the statements about original sin, the structure of the baptismal service, and the putative distinction between “types” of grace, there is also an important assertion made that the Orthodox Church (however that term may be defined by the Archbishop, which he does not set forth) is the sole repository and conferrer of indwelling grace.

What is somewhat remarkable in these arguments is the lack of any definition of “Orthodox,” “non-Orthodox,” and “Church.” Chrysostomos does attempt to define the local Church as the local Eucharistic community possessing a valid priesthood. This valid

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20 Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna, “BEM and Orthodox Spirituality,” supra.

21 We are not told explicitly what the outlines of this church might be. For example, one may wonder whether the archbishop considers the professors at St. Vladimir’s, Metropolitan Maximos, or the Ecumenical Patriarch a part of it. “Conservative” writers doubtless will differ on this point.

22 Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna, “BEM and Orthodox Spirituality,” supra.
priesthood is rooted in the spiritual life of those who have taken part in it before and who have “fallen asleep in the faith,” but this begs the question of the criteria by which we judge that immersion and the outlines of that faith. If we are engrafted upon the tradition of the proper fathers and forefathers through communion with them in the Eucharist, and we define the “Orthodox” fathers and forefathers as those with whom we commune, is this anything more than a circular argument?

The last characteristic of the conservative’s canonical method that bears brief mention here is his usage of the term “oikonomia.” The basic theory of the conservative or “traditionalist”23 is to assume the existence of a universal rule set forth in “the canons” and to explain any departure from (or contradiction within) this universal in terms of “oikonomia.” For example, in explaining the apparent contradiction between Canon VII of the Second Ecumenical Council and the Canon of Carthage/St. Cyprian,24 Metallinos claims that Zonaras was wrong to simply give preference to Canon VII because it is ecumenical and later because: “Our theologians…living in the Church’s tradition…are not satisfied with this answer. They do not admit even the slightest discrepancy between Fathers and Councils…”25 It is interesting to note the implication here that some traditionalists do not admit of even the right of an Ecumenical Council to “revise” previous canonical rulings, nor do they seem to accept any difference between dogmatic or “unchangeable” canons on the one hand and disciplinary or “changeable” canons on the other. Thus, Fr. Metallinos implies that the only explanation for Zonaras’ interpretation is that he must somehow fall short of “living in the Church’s tradition.”

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23 As we have defined him through his own self-labeling.
24 This is a conflict in canons concerning baptism of heretics and their reception by the Orthodox Church, a conflict to which we shall need to return at some length later.
25 Metallinos, I Confess One Baptism 53.
Therefore, Fr. Metallinos expects St. Nikodemos’ explanation, or any other given by a theologian “living in the Church’s tradition,” to differ from Zonaras’. That explanation, according to Metallinos, is that “the Church has two methods of governing and correcting, namely acrivia…and economia…According to this saint, the Second Ecumenical Council kept the (previous) Canon partially, acting in accordance with economia and concession…"\(^{26}\) Similarly, Archbishop Chrysostomos often resorts to the concept of *oikonomia* (economia)\(^{27}\) to explain interpretations or applications of the Canons differing from his view of the “general rule.”\(^{28}\)

In conclusion, the conservative school sees the Canons as an integrated whole without internal contradiction. There is no need for any theory of amendment, nor is there any need for a distinction between changeable and unchangeable. There is, however, a real utility in the theory of *oikonomia* to explain inconsistencies between canons or between Canon and practice. There is also an admission of the need to understand the patristic tradition and the historical context underlying the canons and applications of them.

\(^{26}\) Ibid, 54. In other words, by allowing some heretics to be received without (re)baptism, the later and ecumenical council was loosening the earlier rule on an ad hoc basis not to be regarded as precedential or normative in any continuing or permanent way.

\(^{27}\) Throughout this article we prefer the spelling “*oi konomia,*” conveying, as it does, the etymological relationship to “*oikos*” or “household.”

\(^{28}\) See Archbishop Chrysostomos of Etna, “BEM and Orthodox Spirituality,” supra: “It is evident that, within a clear grasp of the Orthodox mystery of baptism, it is superficial to speak of the acceptance of non-Orthodox baptisms as valid or grace-bestowing…many contemporary Orthodox theologians, with an inadequate footing in the patristic literature, come to imagine that the act of *oikonomia*…is one of accepting baptismal grace beyond Orthodoxy.” Thus, the Archbishop steadfastly refuses to interpret *any* of the Canons as recognizing the validity of any “non-Orthodox” baptism, and explains the longstanding practice of receiving some converts without rebaptism as the Church “creating” validity onto fundamentally invalid heterodox baptisms through *oikonomia.*
“Non-conservative” Orthodox canonists and theologians offer a variety of approaches that can only briefly be described here. While space prohibits thoroughly subcategorizing them, a discernible spectrum of views exists within this “moderate” or “non-conservative” camp. We have named the ends of the spectrum: the “legalistic” and the “non-legalistic.”

A good place to begin survey of the “legalistic” end of the “moderate” spectrum is Bishop Kallistos Ware, who has been described by Archbishop Demetrios of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North America as “perhaps the most knowledgeable, sensitive, and articulate spokesman for Orthodox Christianity in the West.” In his standard introduction to Orthodoxy, The Orthodox Church, Ware describes the Orthodox canonical understanding in this way:

Orthodox, while reverencing this inheritance from the past, are also well aware that not everything received from the past is of equal value...nor is everything received from the past necessarily true ...It is absolutely essential to question the past...It is necessary to avoid alike the error of the ‘Old Believers’ and the error of the ‘Living Church’: the one party fell into an extreme conservatism which suffered no change whatever in traditions, the other into spiritual compromises which undermined Tradition…True Orthodox fidelity to the past must always be a creative fidelity; for true Orthodoxy can never be satisfied with a barren ‘theology of repetition’, which, parrot-like, repeats accepted formulae without striving to understand what lies behind them…The Orthodox conception of Tradition is…not a dead acceptance of the past but a living discovery of the Holy Spirit in the present. Tradition, while inwardly changeless (for God does not change), is constantly assuming new forms, which supplement the old without superceding them.

Like the conservatives, Ware describes a historically and temporally contextual understanding of Church “law,” albeit one less literalistic and rigorous. Unlike the

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29 We use this term with no other intent than to distinguish the self-described “conservatives” from everyone else.
30 Archbishop Demetrios, quoted in St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press Spring Catalog 2003 (Crestwood, N.Y., St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003) 1.
31 Bishop Timothy (Kallistos) Ware, The Orthodox Church (London: Penguin Group, 1997) 197-198.
conservatives, he adopts categories to describe Orthodox Tradition that are commonly found among modern canonists: 1. unchangeable dogmatic definitions of ecumenical councils vs. changeable disciplinary ecumenical canons; 2. canons of ecumenical councils vs. canons of local councils. 32

In this, he is joined by Dr. Lewis Patsavos, Professor of Canon Law at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology. 33 Dr. Patsavos adds that, as to amendment of disciplinary canons, “only a synod of equal or greater importance than the one that promulgated the legislation can effect the transaction.” 34 He goes on to state that “A mechanical knowledge of the law is no help. What is necessary is an understanding of the spirit of the law, which can only be attained by understanding the legislator’s reason and purpose for issuing the law.” 35 He recommends four approaches to interpreting these “laws”: 1. grammatical or linguistic interpretation; 2. logical interpretation which examines the logical relationships within the parts of each “law”; 3. historical interpretation (as with the thinkers discussed above); 4. systematic interpretation which examines the logical relationships between various “laws.” 36 With respect to the issue of baptisms performed by non-Orthodox denominations, Patsavos’ view is clearly at odds with the conservatives. He relies on the mainstream 37 view that while only sacraments

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32 Ibid. 202-206.
33 Lewis Patsavos, *Manual for the Course in Orthodox Canon Law* (Brookline, MA: Hellenic College/Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, 1975) 35.
34 Ibid. 38.
35 Ibid. 39. See also Lewis Patsavos, “The Canonical Tradition of the Orthodox Church,” Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America webpage, http://www.goarch.org/access/Companion_to_Orthodox_Church/canons.html
37 The terms “mainstream” and “legalistic moderate” will be used, for lack of any better, to describe the canonical theories that combine the following attributes: 1. distinguishing between dogmatic unchangeable canons and disciplinary canons which can be changed; 2. distinguishing between levels of authority behind canons, i.e., those of ecumenical councils are accorded greater weight than local or patristic canons; and 3. distinguishing between “applying” the canons strictly or literally (*akribeia*) and “applying” them more loosely (*oikonomia*).
performed by Orthodox ministers are usually valid, the Orthodox Church has, through *oikonomia*, treated some non-Orthodox baptisms as “valid.” He lists those of “Monophysites and Nestorians,” and those of Roman Catholics as “valid.” As authority for this he cites Canon VII of Constantinople I and Canon 95, Penthekte (Trullo). He gives no reason for the differing practice he reports of the former being received by mere confession of Orthodox faith, while the latter are “usually requested…to undergo Holy Chrismation.” Protestants are apparently located farther away on this spectrum. In their case, “According to exactness, the baptism of Protestants is invalid…Current practice recognizes the validity of Protestant baptisms performed with the Trinitarian formula, but requires the performance of Holy Chrismation.”

Perhaps the most distinguished contemporary Orthodox canonical specialist is Archbishop Peter L’Huiller, whose book *The Church of the Ancient Councils-The Disciplinary Work of the First Four Ecumenical Councils* is widely considered the authoritative work on its subject. His complex, scholarly approach is similar to those of Patsavos and Bishop Ware and may hence also be characterized as toward the “legalist” end of the “moderate” spectrum, although he shares some characteristics of the “non-legalists” described below. For example, he is comfortable considering ecumenical

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38 Whatever “valid” might mean, if anything, in an Orthodox “non-Western” usage. His understanding of this particular subject thus appears similar to, but is not equivalent to, the understanding of Archbishop Chrysostomos, who views the matter not legalistically, but more as a matter of the Church “creating” charisma rather than legislating or recognizing validity, a validity the Archbishop views as impossible to accord to any baptism “outside the Church.”

39 Patsavos, *Manual for the Course in Orthodox Canon Law* 57-58. His belief that Nestorian, Monophysite, and Catholic baptisms are valid, while Protestant ones are not directly contradicts the views of Archbishop Chrysostomos and Fr. Metallinos summarized supra. We will examine the canons cited by Patsavos and their interpretation in due course.

Canons as “the core of Church Law in the Christian East”\textsuperscript{41}, and he cites with approval Zonaras’\textsuperscript{42} classification of canons according “to an order of the weightiness of the sources.”\textsuperscript{43}

Archbishop Peter assumes throughout his work that councils legislate “laws” governing the church. Hence, he is concerned with serious scholarly study of mens legislatoris:

The understanding of the ancient canons does not interest just the historians of institutions but also all Orthodox practitioners of canon law, sine the canons; stipulations constitute the core of all legitimate law now in force. The point of all interpretations is obviously to determine the exact meaning of each canon. Me must, therefore, investigate the intention of the legislator, the mens legislatoris…Research must be concerned as much with the historical context as with the canonical text itself; we must carefully investigate what the lawgiver wanted to correct, suppress, add, or simply call to mind.\textsuperscript{44}

To be sure, Archbishop Peter acknowledges the dangers inherent in automatically applying “to canon law principles of interpretation established by specialists in civil law,”\textsuperscript{45} and he cautions against understanding all canon law as “law in the proper sense which has general application.”\textsuperscript{46} He sets forth a methodology by which to determine if a canon is to be considered such a “law” or merely an “application strictly limited to a moment in church history.”\textsuperscript{47} To this, he adds that canons may “lose their force” either fully or partially, and that “economy excludes by nature an automatic application of

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 1. Archbishop Peter is comfortable throughout his work with the notion that councils legislate “laws” governing the church, e.g., see ibid., 7-11.
\textsuperscript{42} The reference here is to Zonaras’ Exigesis.
\textsuperscript{43} L’Huiller, ibid 3. While the Archbishop does not come right out and adopt this viewpoint, he does say that the Exigesis “has always been well received and rightly so,” and that his hierarchical classification by authority of the body promulgating the canon was made by Zonaras “henceforth, the accepted order.”
\textsuperscript{44} The quote is from ibid. 7. For L’Huiller’s views on councils as legislatures, see ibid. 7-11.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid. 7.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid. 8.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid. 8-10.
analogy,“\(^{48}\) i.e., that \textit{oikonomia} prohibits rote application of a canon or canons to any situation not precisely the same as the one producing the canon.\(^{49}\) In this, he appears to understand \textit{oikonomia} less as a legalistic \textit{dispensatio} than as the overarching principal of managing the church in good order. In this particular respect he corresponds more with the non-legalist group described below, but otherwise analyzes canonical problems in legal terminology \textit{a la} Patsavos. Furthermore, as will be seen below, he can still be found using the term \textit{oikonomia} in the \textit{dispensatio} sense to denote an ad hoc act of liberality towards heretics.

As to the broader subject of “heterodox” baptism, Archbishop Peter’s position is reflected in his brief discussion of \textit{The Rudder} as a canonical text and in his commentary on Canon VII, Constantinople I. He agrees with the prevailing view that although Agapios is listed as a coauthor, the book is really the work of St. Nicodemus. He praises the recension of the canons contained within the text as “on the whole correct,”\(^{50}\) but he considers the value of \textit{The Rudder} to be “first and foremost, valuable witness for the understanding of the milieu in which it was formed.” He considers any belief in the dogmatic infallibility of \textit{The Rudder} a “manifest exaggeration,” \textit{particularly in connection with} St. Nicodemus’ position on the invalidity of Roman Catholic baptism.\(^{51}\) In his commentary on Canon VII of Constantinople I, the archbishop refers to Macedonians being received into the Church without rebaptism “by economy.”\(^{52}\)

\(^{48}\) Ibid. 9.
\(^{49}\) Note here that such precise similarity should be quite rare given that no two individuals or moments in time are exactly the same.
\(^{50}\) L’Huiller, \textit{Church of the Ancient Councils} 5.
\(^{51}\) Ibid. (emphasis ours).
\(^{52}\) Ibid., 133. As we will discuss, infra, this reference to economy notwithstanding, Archbishop Peter’s general view of heterodox baptism is found on p. 132 of his book where he states that the permanent criterion concerning the ways of receiving heterodox into the Church “is founded on the proximity or
in a footnote to the introduction to his book, Archbishop Peter iterates the accepted rule that “the canons issued or approved by the General Councils cannot be abrogated or modified except by another General Council. As a result, we have chosen to categorize him more toward the “legalist” end of the “moderate” school, rather than as with the canonists discussed below.

Finally, we should briefly mention some of the canonical views of the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew Archondonis of Constantinople. These correspond closely to those of Bishop Ware and Archbishop Peter. In an article entitled “A Common Code for the Orthodox Churches,” the Patriarch set out his view that the canons of the Orthodox Church should be codified, and that such a codification “will of necessity be connected with their revision…which will imply the change, fusion, shortening, and even abrogation of some canons.” He accepts the distinction between dogmatic and disciplinary canons, stating that all canons are changeable except only “the fundamental laws of the Church…formulated basically by the Lord and the Apostles, or those which are in accordance with the essence of the Church and are expressions of it.” He cites Basil the Great, Tertullian, Augustin, and Leo the Great as patristic evidence of such alterability, and he frankly acknowledges that some canons contradict each other. He quotes Nicholas Afanasiev thus: “The Church cannot live only by the existing canon law, which is in reality the law of the Byzantine Church supplemented by the decrees of local

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53 See ibid 14, footnote 59.
Churches. The Church has the right to perform creative canonical work at all times, not just at a restricted period of time.”

Importantly, the Ecumenical Patriarch tells us two things about the nature of the evolution over time of the Church’s canonical understanding. First, the actual practice of the Church demonstrates both the need and the permissibility of change because “the Church…guided by the Holy Spirit, follows practices always tending to foster the achievement of her highest purpose, that is to say the salvation of human souls.” Second, changes should be made (or changes in Church praxis should be canonically recognized) only when there is evidence of the usefulness of the change (rather than mere speculation) and urgent necessity (rather than a mere desire to experiment or a mere belief that change is better). Within this wise institutional inertia, evolution is nonetheless inevitable and advisable in that the aim is always “serving the salvation and the progress of the peoples,” not slavish obedience to “canons as positive laws of (in)disputable authority for all places and all times.”

As one moves further toward the less legalistic end of the moderate spectrum, the general canonical outlook reached is the one labeled by conservatives as “ecumenist” or “modernist.” It is a viewpoint typified by John H. Erickson and The Eastern Orthodox-Roman Catholic Consultation in the United States (henceforward the “U.S. Consultation,” for brevity’s sake), who are among the conservatives’ most frequent polemical targets. To coin a term based upon Erickson’s writing, we may label this end


55 The Patriarch cites here the 12th canon of Trullo (Pentethkte).
56 The Patriarch does not mince words here, as he likens this to turning “the canons into an idol for foolish worship.”
of the moderate spectrum “non-legalistic.” In “The Orthodox Canonical Tradition”⁵⁷ Erickson argues that correct interpretation of canons must reject both legalism and anarchy. Anarchy rather obviously assigns the canonical tradition no value whatsoever, and hence it is only marginally relevant to any canonical study. Therefore, Erickson’s primary argument is:

We Orthodox Christians today desperately need to rediscover the implications of communion for community, lest our much-vaunted ‘spirituality’ and ‘mystical theology’ degenerate into dilettantish escapism, and our church community into that caricature idolized by the legalist and scorned by the anarchist. In this task of rediscovery, the canonist…cannot imitate the legalism of the classic Byzantine canonists for whom it was enough to cite the text, chapter and verse, and then resolve any apparent contradictions by wooden application of certain arbitrary hermeneutical rules- the canon of an ecumenical council takes precedence over one of a local council, a later canon takes precedence over an earlier one, etc. Nor can he simply ignore the canons when it seems expedient, justifying his actions by appeals to pastoral discretion or ‘economy’.⁵⁸

His argument is essentially that the word “canons” is not synonymous with “laws.” In his own words, the canonist: “must go beyond ‘canons’ and ‘canon law’ to the ‘canon’ as that word was understood in the early Church.”⁵⁹

His views are similar with regard to the meaning of oikonomia, and with respect to the specific subject of “heterodox” baptisms, Erickson takes the following positions:

For example, most Orthodox these days would receive a non-Chalcedonian or a Roman Catholic or a mainstream Protestant without (re)baptism., and most would receive at least non-Chalcedonian clerics in their orders, without (re)ordination. But how is this reception to be explained?…An alternative approach to the question of acceptance or non-acceptance has been particularly prominent in Greek sacramental theology since the eighteenth century. For convenience this approach may be

⁵⁸ Erickson, The Challenge of Our Past, supra 20-21
⁵⁹ Ibid., 21
labeled “economic”: because of the prominence which it gives to the term oikonomia or “economy.”

Erickson describes this approach as alternative by comparison to the “Western” “Augustinian” approach said to underlie the actions of the seventeenth century Russian church, which recognized the sacraments of “mainstream” heterodox as “valid” but not fully effective or fruitful.

As to oikonomia, he reminds us that “The most frequently encountered technical use of the word oikonomia in canonical literature reflects this pastoral orientation: the apportionment or disposition of a penance.” His point is that true oikonomia is much more than the conservative’s conception (often shared by “moderates”) of a “departure from or suspension of strict application (akribeia) of the Church’s canons and disciplinary norms…in many respects analogous to the West’s dispensatio.” Indeed, it would be more accurate to say that canons are particular examples of the Church’s oikonomia, rather than that oikonomia is an exception to the Church’s canons.

This general outlook is shared by the Orthodox members of the US Consultation, as reflected in The Quest for Unity, a compilation and publication of various statements by the joint Orthodox-Catholic “US Consultation.” In “an agreed statement on the Lima Document: Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry,” the US Consultation agreed in 1984 that:

“The presentation of the theological meaning of baptism as renewal of life in Christ, participation in Christ’s death and resurrection, cleansing from sin, the gift of the spirit, incorporation into the body of Christ, and a sign of the Kingdom, sets forth essential elements of faith in regard to this sacrament. Chief among these are affirmation that Christian

60 Ibid., 115-116
61 We will examine this historical development infra.
62 Erickson, The Challenge of Our Past 118.
63 Ibid., 116
baptism is in water and the spirit, in the name of the Trinity, and that baptism is an unrepeatable act. … We affirm with the Lima statement that baptism, in its full meaning signifies and effects both ‘participation in Christ’s death and resurrection’ and ‘the receiving of the spirit.’ We further recognize that each of our churches expresses this unity in its rites, although there are significant differences in practice … the Consultation agrees that in the Lima statement we can recognize to a considerable degree the faith of the church in regard to baptism. Because of this agreement, we recommend that our two churches explore the possibility of a formal recognition of each other’s baptism as a sacrament of our unity in the body of Christ, although we acknowledge that any such recognition is conditioned by other factors.”

Likewise, in connection with the proper understanding of the term “oikonomia,” the Consultation, 1976, held that the conservative and moderate-legalist understandings of economy

“as a departure from or suspension of strict application (akribeia) of the Church’s canons and disciplinary norms, in many respects analogous to the West’s dispensatio does not do justice to the genuine whole tradition underlying the concept and practice of economy. The Church of Christ is not a legalistic system whereby every prescription has identical importance, especially when ancient canons do not directly address contemporary issues. Nor can the application of economy make something invalid to be valid, or what is valid to be invalid. Because the risen Christ has entrusted to the Church a stewardship of prudence and freedom to listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit about today’s problems of Church unity, a proper understanding of economy involves the exercise of spiritual discernment.”

Several distinctions and similarities between the conservatives and the various moderates are apparent. Both the traditionalist and the legalist-moderate share a view of the canons as “legislation,” and hence they require “oikonomical” theories that are legalistic in nature. Both the traditionalist school and the legalist share an understanding of oikonomia as largely a “dispensation” from the rigid application of canonical laws that are assumed to have determinate non-ambiguous meanings. However, the two groups

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65 Borelli and Erickson, The Quest for Unity 69-71 (emphasis ours).
66 Ibid., 88.
differ in that the conservatives reject many of the other legalistic distinctions of the legalistic moderates, opting instead for the notion that there is no need for such distinctions because all the canons are really uniform; i.e., there are no contradictions between them that require explanation, only exceptions in individual cases via oikonomia. The conservative also believes that many apparent contradictions between canons can be explained by the observer’s insufficient grounding in the “patristic mindset.” In this, the conservative is surprisingly close to the non-legalistic viewpoint which, although acknowledging contradictions between canons, still seeks to harmonize them by some method other than mechanical distinctions between legislating authorities, such as the rule that “a later council may amend or overturn the rulings of a prior one.”

The non-legalists believe that the apparent contradictions within “canon law” are a function of the incomplete historical or theological understanding of the observer, rather than differing opinions or levels of authority among the authorities generating the canons. They believe that historical study and theological understanding should reveal the same theological truth behind the various canons that may appear to contradict one another. Oddly, the ultra-conservative traditionalist at the other end of the spectrum is remarkably close to this view.

The non-legalist disagrees with the moderate-legalist and the conservative about the use of “oikonomia” as a ready explanation for contradictory canons and as an easy tool to avoid applications of the canon that seem anomalous. The conservative and the moderate-legalist agree on oikonomia and disagree about “legalism” or “formalism” as described here. The conservative and the non-legalist agree in rejecting “legalism” and “formalism,” but disagree about oikonomia. The moderate-legalist and the non-legalist
disagree about *oikonomía* and about legal formalism, but they agree in rejecting the conservative’s rigid understanding of history and his belief that all canons are “unchangeable” and hence, essentially dogmatic.

What all the contemporary Orthodox canonists do agree upon is this: the absolute necessity of understanding the canons within their historical context, and within the totality of the Tradition of the Church revealed in its life, its worship, and its vast corpus of patristic writing.

A complete survey of Eastern contemporary canonical method requires mention of two other Orthodox theologians whose views cannot be fit as neatly into one of these three categories. They are Metropolitan Hierotheos Vlachos and Fr. Patrick Viscuso.

Metropolitan Vlachos is a prolific writer, particularly in the areas of Orthodox spirituality and mystical theology. Although he is generally thought to be “traditional” in his outlook (for example, he is quite popular in monastic circles), Metropolitan Vlachos does not share many of the views expressed by those we have described as “conservatives.” Although his writings on the specific subject of Church canons are sparse, the chapter titled “Orthodoxy and Legalism” contained in his book, *The Mind of the Orthodox Church*, is instructive. In fact, in this book, the Metropolitan is at great pains to point out that there is a significant difference between tradition and conservatism. Specifically,

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67 And the categories themselves are merely my convenient organizational constructs for sake of brevity and generalization, which probably obscure differences within each of them. The alternative, however, is no categorical thinking at all, which would suffice for those beyond rational thought and in a state of *theoria*, but which would not allow the rest of us to analyze or reason in the hope that this activity of thinking will (along with many other forms of praxis) bring us into such a full communion with God that such reason and thought will cease and Christ will be “all and in all.” Col 3:11

“conservatism retains the ossified forms of the past, estranged from life, while tradition, having life and experiencing it, conveys it in forms of the present. Thus it is by nature impossible to connect and identify the Orthodox Church with legalism, which does not presuppose the existence and living experience of the true life.”

In passages reminiscent of the writings of Professor Erickson, the Metropolitan condemns the same “unorthodox” extremist viewpoints that Erickson referred to as “anarchy” and “legalism.” The only difference is that Metropolitan Vlachos uses the term “antinomianism” rather than “anarchy.” He goes on to reinforce his argument against legalism by contrasting Orthodox theology with “papism.” This, again, is reminiscent of Erickson’s description of any legalistic notion of oikonomía as “Western.”

In a characteristically poetic passage, Metropolitan Vlachos echoes the warnings of the Ecumenical Patriarch, Archbishop Peter, and Professor Erickson:

“It has been observed from Church history that in the periods when the Christians had become secularized, many Canons were formulated, so that people could discern their spiritual instability, distinguish good from evil, and be guided on the path of cure. So the law is not a human invention, but a revelation by God for man to be cured. Thus it is not a goal, but a means, a medicine necessary for man’s cure. The wrong use of the Law, changing it from a means to an end, from medicine to an ideology, is an unhealthy legalism, which constitutes the pharisaical justice and self-justification which do not save man.”

In this sense, at least, Metropolitan Hierotheos agrees that a study of historical context is relevant to a proper understanding of the canons.

Likewise, Father Patrick Viscuso, a canonist of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, is a strong proponent of a historical understanding of the canons. Although his writings do not permit easy categorization among the canonists examined above, Viscuso’s approach is distinctly historical. Rather than legal polemics, he specializes in

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70 Ibid., 180-181 (emphasis ours).
analyzing and explaining the canonical viewpoints of Byzantine canonists within their historical milieu. For example, Father Viscuso analyzes Mathew Blastares’ theological perspective on canon law and concludes that “Blastares thus considers ecclesiastical laws to be guides that allow for the correct shaping of each individual member of the Church in order that they might be joined into one body or structure built on the foundation of Christ, the cornerstone.” Viscuso expresses neither approval nor disapproval of this philosophy. He is more interested in analyzing and explicating the views expressed by prior canonists within their historical contexts, rather than taking particular canonical positions himself. Hence, while he is a canonist, his primary emphasis is historical theology.71

While Metropolitan Hierotheos and Father Viscuso comment upon the subject of canon law from perspectives that are either primarily spiritual or primarily historical, respectively, they join the remaining contemporary canonists we have discussed in accepting the necessity of placing the canons in their proper historical context in order to properly “do” canon law.

This then is a consensus general canonical methodology for Eastern Christians: historical contextual analysis. While disagreeing about many other things, all contemporary authorities agree that a candid examination of the historical context of the canons is useful. On the other hand, at least two things separate these experts’ positions on the contemporary application and understanding of various canons. First, they disagree about the actual historical context of the canons. Second, as demonstrated

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above, the three general groups disagree fundamentally and “triangularly”\(^{72}\) on what “canon law” means, and on the method of reasoning and the mental categories through which canons are to be understood or systematized. It is conceivable that a sufficiently thoroughgoing examination of history might force agreement not only upon the first subject, substantive historical context, but also upon the second subject of reasoning methodology. One need only assume that the history of how and why the canons themselves were promulgated and used by the Church is relevant to how they should be used and understood by us today.

One last observation is in order. Even those canonists whom we have denominated “legalistic” acknowledge that “canon law” is not to be understood as law in the same sense as civil law or other governmental enactment. As such, the very use of the term “law” in connection with the canons is at best confusing, and at worst leads to the idolatry condemned by Patriarch Bartholomew and the pharisism bemoaned by Metropolitan Vlachos. “Canon law” is an oxymoron resulting from non-Orthodox methods of thinking. There is some support for this statement among all of the contemporary canonists we have cited.\(^{73}\) Hence, the use of this term should cease. This article instead coins the word “canonology,” i.e., the study of canons. That is what canonists really have been doing and should continue to do. It has very little to do with

\(^{72}\) What we mean here is that we do not see a bipolar division into two camps: “conservative” and liberal,” but rather the type of triadic and isometric equilibrium where the three groups disagree with and agree with each other in apparently equal measure. Whether this in some way manifests Trinitarian theology, or is rather a superimposition of the triadic thinking considered fundamental to the Western cultural gestalt is an interesting subject beyond the scope of our study.

\(^{73}\) For example, see Vlachos, \textit{The Mind of the Orthodox Church}, supra 166-184 and Erickson, \textit{The Challenge of Our Past}, supra 14-15.
law. It has to do with imperfectly translating the true, unknowable, inexpressible, and untranslatable “Canon of Faith” into human language, and then temporally applying it to particular situations, or to case-by-case adjudications. This is the human component of our theandric Church grappling with the challenges of life in this world while still focusing on the eschaton and remaining inspired by the Holy Spirit and in communion with the Trinity. Only insofar as it assists in maintaining that communion and in effecting that salvation, is study of this subject useful. The subject is not law. It is a branch of theology, consisting of both theory and praxis.

A detailed exposition of the specifics of such a method is beyond our scope here, except for a few observations that will hopefully lead to further analysis. First, canonology expressly includes study of both text and context in an almost Hegelian dialectic. The 21st century Orthodox theologian, Father John Chryssavgis discusses the importance of context in any theological exercise:

“Now we may read texts that cross cultures and cut through centuries, but we must always remember the context and the culture in which these were first written. Church history, indeed human history is always cultural. A denuded, a-cultural history is inconceivable and impossible. ‘That which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all’ concerning the Christian faith, cannot be properly understood or even arguably denied without an estimation and appreciation of the entire Patristic Tradition as this has been expressed at different times and in different places. For Patristic theology is inescapably contextual and historical conditioned in respect of its catholicity, simply reminding us of the need to

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74 As further evidence we point to the fact that, unlike the Byzantine canonists of a thousand years ago, none of our contemporary canonical scholars is a practicing lawyer, nor possesses a license, nor the qualifications to be one.
75 Metropolitan Vlachos, The Mind of the Orthodox Church 179, alludes to this in saying: “Thus the commandments, God’s Law, are an essential therapeutic medicine for man to attain illumination and deification. However, in the state of the vision of God, they are transcended, done away with…the last things are not just things awaited, but they are also present for the saints who share in the experience of deification. Therefore, in the experience of deification which is man’s justification there is no Law, precisely because then the person has been cured.”
interpret that which is received, to incarnate or ‘flesh it out’ in historical context.”76

It is a fallacy to regard sociological, psychological, or cultural justifications for canons as *per se* invalid. Many Christians engage in a similar fallacy when they regard scripture as “the word of God” rather than as the work of men *inspired by God*. In both instances, the fallacy arises from overlooking the *theandric* nature of the work of the Apostolic Church in this world, including the scripture *and* the canons *she* has produced. Doesn’t this recognition, though, leave us without firm, logical, predictable, and consistent principles with which to govern the work of the Church and evaluate the “validity” of those groups who claim to be part of it? Does this analysis not, in effect, leave us “rudderless?” The answer is yes and no. To the extent that the church *does* have centuries of canonical precedents to guide its present course, the answer is: “No, there are guiding principles,” in the same way that prior case-law provides precedents for decision-making in Anglo-American common law jurisprudence. To the extent that those precedents cannot be applied woodenly and without regard for their imperfect human contexts, *as laws (nomoi)*, the answer is: “Yes, to that extent we are rudderless, or better said, *free.*” The matter is not simple. If it were, one might wonder exceedingly at why Christ left us no such compendium of statutes, rules, or (dare we say it) *laws (nomoi).* The fact is He did not. The Holy Apostles did not either, at least as far as we yet know, and this leads to a second insight that can inform the teasing out of “canonology.”

In steering between rudderlessness on the one hand, and slavish adherence to precedents applied to inapposite situations on the other, canonology can serve at least two

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functions. First, as the sociologist Alvin Gouldner did for Marxism, or as Max Weber did for modern western Capitalism, it can turn the criteria and critiques of any particular canonical consciousness or system on itself, exposing where the system’s incarnation (worldly apparatus) begins to conflict with the pure theory from which it springs. Second, it can view a past canonical consciousness in its own historical context, and thereby attempt to reify the absolute (theic) Truth spoken of by Patriarch Bartholemew, merely by identifying its historical, and relative (andric) component. The first endeavor might be called reflexive canonology. It seeks to refine the canonical consciousness by revealing its practical inadequacies and inconsistencies when compared against the world it sought to create or ideate.77

77 For Gouldner, underneath the structure of any system of thought (that which defines it as different from any other theory) lies a nightmare version of the theory waiting to get out. Weber called this structure an “iron cage.” Gouldner believed in reflexive social theory that criticized social systems by measuring them against their own assumptions, goals, and slogans. Thus, as a Marxist who believed in alleviating the oppression of the “proletariat,” he nonetheless found real world Marxism wanting (a nightmare) when measured against its own methodological and value assumptions and its own raison d’etre. Through continuous application of this reflexive method of criticism to an ever adjusting social system or theory, a Hegelian dialectic might be achieved that would refine and improve the social theory. For a complete discussion, see James J. Chriss, Alvin Gouldner: Sociologist and Outlaw Marxist (Brookfield, Vt.: Ashgate Publishing Co., 1999). Somewhat similar views of the dialectic between social theory and its application to the real world appear in Roberto Mangabeira Unger, Knowledge and Politics (New York: The Free Press, 1975). The point here is that these concepts of dialectic and reflexive analysis can be fruitfully applied to any systematic theory of social organization, including one that posits canons as the system and the Church as the organization.
The second is a form of *apophatic*\(^{78}\) theology, seeking by understanding and transcending the relative and historical, *to approach*, but not *to rationalize*, the inherently supra-rational Divine energy that gives life and form to the Church through the Holy Spirit. It is a fundamental tenet of Orthodoxy that the Divine Nature is unfathomable, and that God is “known” (or better said, “apprehended”) only incompletely in this life, through His uncreated Divine Energies.\(^{79}\) Neither of the two canonological methods described disputes the validity or authority of each particular canonical manifestation or incarnation within human history. On the contrary, this method assumes that each such incarnation of the Truth was “true” and “valid,” if it was the real and true reflection of the Church’s canonical consciousness at that point in time.\(^{80}\)

When we refuse to value-judge or artificially prioritize apparently conflicting canonical incarnations, contemplation of the fundamental truth expressed in each of them becomes possible. The contemplation of which we speak involves a tension between maintaining the pure doctrine of the faith against threat of adulteration and realizing the

\(^{78}\) Apophatic theology is contrasted in Greek patristic literature with kataphatic theology. Kataphatic theology attempts to make positive statements about God. Apophatic theology, the more favored way of the Eastern fathers of the church, seeks only to dispel misconceptions about God. It is essentially negative in character. While it may be extremely difficult to make positive statements about God, apophatic theology holds that positive theological statements by others can be so obviously mistaken as to require a response from the Church. Apophacism appears most often in creedal statements simultaneously proclaiming apparently contradictory realities, like that Jesus is both fully God and fully man. These forcefully intentional dilemmas are designed not to precisely define a metaphysical reality impossible to grasp with the human mind anyway. They are meant only to deflect mistaken human attempts to exaggerate one or the other pole of the logical tension between the horns of each such mysterious theological dilemma, and thereby to undervalue the mysterious and transcendent tension eternally maintained within each apparent contradiction. One definition of divinity might be: that which resides within, and is not bound by, apparent, humanly defined contradiction. I would argue that an even more valid definition of heresy is: a belief that *exaggerates* one or another characteristic we attribute to God over all the others, a belief born of the puny human need for logical consistency, for ideas that make sense to us, that we can get our minds around. Is this not in fact a form of idolatry?

\(^{79}\) See, e.g., St. Gregory Palamas, *Topics of Natural and Theological Science*.

\(^{80}\) Inserting the last subjunctive clause beginning with “if” is designed to avoid problems associated with councils of disputed authority such as Florence-Ferrara and the so called “robber council” of Ephesus.
Body of Christ on earth in its fullest possible manifestation to most fully inaugurate the Kingdom of God on earth. Walking the fine line of equilibrium within that tension is a difficult task, but “strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to life, and few are they who find it. [Matthew 7:14].”