

Sacramental Rigourism: Tradition or Modern Phenomenon?

[arche-athanatos](#) [Uncategorized](#) November 22, 2021 60 Minutes



While much of the research in this has been done through my own reading of primary sources, the vast majority of the quotes found here were produced by compilations done by others. My goal was to take the essence of their content and produce it through a theoretical lens dedicated to the specific question of heterodox sacraments. I would like to thank Codex Justinianus, Seraphim Hamilton, Ubi Petrus, the late Archimandrite Ambrosius Pogodin, Sergei Fedorov, Petr Pashkov, as well as the folks at Aletheia for the wealth of research they have provided, as well as those among them who have discussed, engaged, and refined my thoughts on the matter. I would like to thank Juan, whose initial disagreements sharpened me considerably, and later agreements provided a wealth of knowledge and resources. For convenience, many of their compiled sources I have cited according to the primary source for the reader's ease. I have included them in a works cited list below, along with a more fulsome list of articles and resources which explore even more sources in greater detail.

Not a few Orthodox writers have advanced the position that the Church currently exists in a state of epistemic confusion. By and large, these typically speak of the “pan-heresy of Ecumenism” which festers not merely as an explicit view, but as an implicit view festering among major thinkers and clergy within the Church. Central to this debate is the question of whether the sacraments, ontologically speaking, only exist in the Orthodox Church. The nomenclature here is difficult, for to speak of “sacramental validity,” the “presence of sacraments,” and having “grace-filled sacraments” often refers to the same phenomenon until matters are clarified and tested by the tradition of our Church.

For the sake of this article, I will assume that the sacramental rigourist position is as follows: outside of the canonical boundaries of the Orthodox Church, united by the *synaxis* of its canonical bishops (being able to sustain internal schisms, as with Constantinople and Moscow), no sacraments ontologically exist. Any rites practiced within these bodies receives **no analagous input or movement from the Holy Spirit**. A baptism is a washing, a chrism is a mere smearing of oil, an ordination a mere costuming, and the Eucharist merely bread and wine.

This position has ancient precedent, with controversy. It is advanced most famously by St. Cyprian of Carthage and St. Firmilian of Caesarea. More recently, the position has been advanced by the Kollyvades Fathers, and specifically St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite. Among modern thinkers and Saints, we number St. Hilarion Troitsky, Fr. Seraphim Rose, St. Justin Popovic, and many others. The premise of the Kollyvades and subsequent thinkers stipulates that for a diversity of reasons throughout history, the Church has applied *ekonomia* in cases of reception. Simply put, the sole standard and legitimate method of reception of converts from outside the Orthodox Church is baptism as a canonical norm (*akrivea*.) Because the method of reception is an economic phenomenon, it does not have any apparent implications for the status of rites practices outside the Church.

On the contrary, my position, and that of the majority of the Church today and historically, is that there is a degree of validity to the sacramental practice of heterodox confessions which find their origin in the Orthodox Church (Roman Catholics, Oriental Orthodox, Old Calendarist schismatics, etc.) This is demonstrated by the three methods of reception employed by our Church in the reception of converts: baptism, chrismation, confession. Apart from baptism, each method assumes the **ontological**, and not merely **formal** presence of the former method. To chrismate assumes the presence of a baptism, to receive by confession assumes the presence of the previous two, and to receive a clergyman by confession assumes the same of his ordination (and therefore ecclesiality.)

Proponents of rigourism do not advance it as a formulaic exposition on sacramentology. Rigourists advance their position as a quasi-dogmatic norm of the Fathers and Councils. The position assumes that its base logic is **identical** to the logic practiced by the Fathers, and as such, this is the lens by which any nuances are brushed off or explained. In effect, it begins with an *a priori* judgement that at the most theoretical level, the charismatic boundaries of the Church must coincide exclusively and exhaustively with its canonical boundaries, and it is from this fundamental premise that all interpretation must take place regarding the rulings of the ancients.

This reasoning is circular, for it assumes that the modern formula used to explain the historic positions necessarily translates into an understanding of how the Fathers applied their logic. Indeed, there is no other way to accomplish this since chronologically, one only sees the economic argument advanced formulaically in the 18th century onward. For instance, the absolute lack of explanation for which the Quinisext Council prescribes three modes of reception for converts is explained away as *ekonomia*, not because of any content within the council itself or elaboration by subsequent canonists and Fathers, but simply because the explanation must be true ex post facto . The very presence of the explanation by the moderns assumes that this was the logic of the ancients, leading us to a very clear “cart before the horse” scenario.

However, the problem lies in the fact that the position is advanced as quasi-dogma, and is often referred to in broad, universalizing terms. Frequently one hears, “The Orthodox Church does **not** recognize the sacraments of heretics.” Truly? By implication, those churches which *de facto* do are in some heresy or error. Notable rigourists state that those who speak of mysteries “outside the body” must admit that the body is “either divided or includes heresy and delusion,” both of which “express the heresy of ecumenism.” Despite this, the onus is on the rigourist to demonstrate that the position of St. Cyprian is the historic, normative position of the Church to

the degree that universalizing statements are justified. Indeed, they must demonstrate that the logic articulated in economic theory is not merely a post facto phenomenon, but was the logic inherent to the ruling of the ancient Church.

The rigourist position can therefore be summed as follows:

- The ruling of Sts. Cyprian and Firmilian are normative to the sacramentology of the Eastern Church.
- Any attempt to conceive of mysteries being practiced “outside the Church” implies a heretical ecclesiology.
- Any departure from the sole legitimate method of reception does not imply the presence of mysteries outside the Church, but the practice of *ekonomia*.

This article will demonstrate that each of these premises is faulty. First that St. Cyprian’s view is universal and normative in the Church, and second that the **economic** theory is the fundamental and valid way of interpreting any instance where the Church prescriptively receives individuals by any method other than baptism. It shall also demonstrate that the Church has provided ample content for one to understand how the sacraments may be practiced outside of the canonical synaxis of the Orthodox Church.

If the economic theory is not valid, this implies that sacraments are not merely present in valid “form” but have an ontological presence by the movement of the Holy Spirit. Whether or not individuals in heterodox confessions benefit from these to the effect of their salvation is a separate question which I may cover in another article.

Sts. Cyprian & Firmilian – The Western Fathers

The position of St. Cyprian of Carthage provides the most simple and standard premise for the rigourist position. He states as much:

“For if the Church is not with heretics, therefore, because it is one, and cannot be divided; and if thus the Holy Spirit is not there, because He is one, and cannot be among profane persons, and those who are without; certainly also baptism, which consists in the same unity, cannot be among heretics, because it can neither be separated from the Church nor from the Holy Spirit.”
(Epistle 70.1)

The Council of Carthage (257) establishes this principle. It is also worth noting that a similar principle is often appealed to in the Apostolic Canons (46, 47, 50) as well as the eighth canon of the Council of Laodicea. In essence, each of these establishes that one baptized by categorical heretics must receive baptism in order to come into the Church. However, it is St. Cyprian who articulates the ecclesiological dimension of this, applying it not merely to heretics, among whom numbered divers Gnostics of the time, but schismatics as well.

Relevant to the Eastern Church, St. Firmilian of Caesarea establishes a very similar understanding:

“But what is his error, and how great his blindness, who says that the remission of sins can be given in the synagogue of the heretics... In this respect I am justly indignant at this so open and evident stupidity of Stephen: that although he glories so much in the place of his Bishopric and contends that he holds the succession of Peter, on whom the foundations of the Church have been laid, he should introduce many other rocks and establish the new building of numerous Churches, since he defends with his authority that Baptism is found in them.” (Letter 74:8)

St. Firmilian’s words segue perfectly into the crux of the issue. Firstly, that to say that St. Cyprian’s understanding is normative at the universal level cannot be true, for history witnesses to the fact that his understanding of the matter was outright rejected, most notably by St. Augustine of Hippo, but at the canonical level by Pope St. Stephen who rejected the outcomes of St. Cyprian’s Council, and whose position on the matter was likewise expressed by St. Vincent of Lerins.

St. Augustine writes of baptism:

*“...It has already been said that **the grace of baptism can be conferred outside the Catholic communion, just as it can be also there retained...** So those, too, who in the sacrilege of schism depart from the communion of the Church, **certainly retain the grace of baptism, which they received before their departure**, seeing that, in case of their return, it is not again conferred on them whence it is proved, that what they had received while within the unity of the Church, they could not have lost in their separation. **But if it can be retained outside, why may it not also be given there?**... Hence it is clear that they are guilty of impiety who endeavour to rebaptize those who are in **Catholic unity**; and we act rightly who do not dare to repudiate God’s sacraments, **even when administered in schism.**”* (On Baptism, Against the Donatists, 1:2)

St. Augustine further establishes the ecclesiological principle at hand:

“It is to no purpose, then, that they say to us, “If you acknowledge our baptism, what do we lack that should make you suppose that we ought to think seriously of joining your communion?” For we reply, We do not acknowledge any baptism of yours; for it is not the baptism of schismatics or heretics, but of God and of the Church, wheresoever it may be found, and wherever it may be transferred. But it is in no sense yours, except because you entertain false opinions, and do sacrilegious acts, and have impiously separated yourselves from the Church. [...] And yet even such, if they have once been born in baptism, need not be born again.” (Ibid., 1:14)

*“And hence it is clear that they are guilty of impiety who endeavor to rebaptize those who are in Catholic unity; and we **act rightly who do not dare to repudiate God’s sacraments, even when administered in schism.** For in all points in which they think with us, **they also are in communion with us**, and only are severed from us in those points in which they dissent from us.”* (Ibid., 1:1)

This most directly addresses the fundamental question of ecclesiology at hand. As far as St. Augustine is concerned, rigourist arguments regarding the Church being “divided” do not hold, for St. Augustine maintains that even in schism and heresy, some relation to the One Church

remains, though it is found wanting, damaged, or imperfect. In the seventh chapter of the same, St. Augustine establishes Matthew 12:30 as a principle by which we can understand this.

One would certainly not refer to St. Augustine as an Ecumenist for his statements! And yet, he acknowledges in this statement that a degree of “communion” is retained with those who are in schism on account of some error. The entirety of St. Augustine’s *Against the Donatists* is a worthy witness against the ecclesiological error of St. Cyprian concerning those who have been separated.

Pope St. Stephen affirms the view that those coming from heretical and schismatic confessions have a true baptism:

*“If any one, therefore, come to you from any heresy whatever, let **nothing be innovated (or done) which has not been handed down**, to wit, that hands be imposed on him for repentance; since the heretics themselves, in their own proper character, do not baptize such as come to them from one another, but only admit them to communion.”* (Quoted in St. Cyprian Epistle 73:1)

Ultimately, the Western voice on the matter concludes with the words of St. Vincent of Lerins and the abrogation of St. Cyprian’s ruling in the Council of Carthage (419). St. Vincent writes that St. Cyprian, despite his error, is wholly absolved of the matter, but such treatment is not extended to the Donatists, who took his views to their logical conclusion:

“And O marvellous revolution! The authors of this same doctrine are judged Catholics, the followers heretics; the teachers are absolved, the disciples condemned; the writers of the books will be children of the Kingdom, the defenders of them will have their portion in Hell. For who is so demented as to doubt that that blessed light among all holy bishops and martyrs, Cyprian, together with the rest of his colleagues, will reign with Christ; or, who on the other hand so sacrilegious as to deny that the Donatists and those other pests, who boast the authority of that council for their iteration of baptism, will be consigned to eternal fire with the devil?” (Commonitory 6:15)

The Council of Carthage thus states:

*“For in coming to faith they [those who were baptized by Donatists, i.e. heretical schismatics] thought the true Church to be their own and there they believed in Christ, **and received the sacraments of the Trinity. And that all these sacraments are altogether true and holy and divine is most certain**, and in them the whole hope of the soul is placed, although the presumptuous audacity of heretics, taking to itself the name of the truth, **dares to administer them. They are but one after all**, as the blessed Apostle tells us, saying: One God, one faith, **one baptism, and it is not lawful to reiterate what once only ought to be administered.** [Those therefore who have been so baptized] having anathematized their error may be received by the imposition of the hand into the one Church, the pillar as it is called, and the one mother of all Christians, where all these Sacraments are received unto salvation and everlasting life; even the same sacraments which obtain for those persevering in heresy the heavy penalty of damnation.”* (Canon 57)

It is important to understand the view of this council in stating that “They are but one after all.” This implies that there is a sense in which schismatics and certain heretics partake of the “Oneness” of the Church. Clearly, that “Oneness” does not per se point to its canonical boundaries, but some intermediate state in which their belonging to the Church is present, but its participation is inhibited by some other means.

It further states concerning the bishops which rule their respective flocks:

“Such communities as have returned from the Donatists and have had bishops, without doubt may continue to have them even without any action of the councils, but such a community as had a bishop and when he dies wish no longer to have a bishop of their own, but to belong to the diocese of some other bishop, this is not to be denied them. Also such bishops as before the promulgation of the imperial law concerning unity as brought back their people to the Catholic Church, they ought to be allowed still to rule them” (Canon 99)

Important to note also is the fact that other subsequent Carthaginian Councils, such as the one headed by Gratus in 348, determined not only that rebaptisms should not occur, but that the schismatic hierarchy of the Novatians should be received without reordination, recognizing their full dignity, as well as that of the Donatists. ([Archpriest Liveriy Voronov](#))

St. Jerome writes on the matter:

*“Cyprian of blessed memory tried to avoid broken cisterns and not to drink of strange and therefore, rejecting heretical baptism, he summoned his African synod in opposition to [Pope St.] Stephen, who was the blessed Peter’s twenty-second successor in the see of Rome. They met to discuss this matter; but the attempt failed. At last those very bishops who had together with him determined that heretics must be re-baptized, **reverted to the old custom and published a fresh decree.**”* (Dialogue with the Luciferians)

St. Jerome further writes:

*“Since Hilary when he left the Church was only a deacon, and since the Church is to him, though to him alone, a mere worldly multitude, he can neither duly celebrate the Eucharist, for he has no bishops or priests, **nor can he give baptism without the Eucharist.** And since the man is now dead, inasmuch as he was a deacon and could ordain no one to follow him, his sect died with him. **For there is no such thing as a Church without bishops.**”* (Ibid., 21)

This is especially telling, since St. Jerome has emphasized two significant ecclesiological elements to the nature of the Luciferian schism, and how it could have been seen otherwise under different circumstances. He states that Hilary’s schism could not persist precisely because it did not have the grace invested in the Bishopric, for which reason Hilary could neither **baptize**, nor could he **ordain**. If Hilary’s inability to do so were a matter of simply being outside the Church, there should be no discussion as to his Diaconate. Indeed, as we shall later see, the interpretations which suggest that a schismatic or heretical bishop can keep the grace of his orders but not confer them does not prove an obstacle to St. Jerome either, for whom it was

Hilary's lack of **episcopacy**, not his schism, that rendered him unable to confer baptism and ordination.

St. Jerome concludes the matter with the following:

*“But if anyone thinks it open to question whether heretics were always welcomed by our ancestors, **let him read the letters of the blessed Cyprian** in which he applies the lash to Stephen, bishop of Rome, **and his errors which had grown inveterate by usage**. Let him also read the pamphlets of Hilary on the re-baptization of heretics which he published against us, and he will there find Hilary himself confessing that Julius, Marcus, Sylvester, and the other bishops of old alike welcomed all heretics to repentance; and, further, to show that he could not justly claim possession of the true custom; **the Council of Nicæa also, to which we referred not long ago, welcomed all heretics with the exception of the disciples of Paul of Samosata**. And, what is more, it allows a Novatian bishop on conversion to have the rank of presbyter, a decision which condemns both Lucifer and Hilary, **since the same person who is ordained is also baptized.**” (Ibid, 23-27)*

St. Fulgentius of Ruspe further iterates:

*“Anyone who receives the sacrament of Baptism, whether in the Catholic Church or in a heretical or schismatic one, **receives the whole Sacrament**; but salvation, which is the strength of the sacrament, he will not have, if he has had the sacrament outside the Catholic Church [and remains in deliberate schism]. He must therefore return to the Church, not so that he might receive again the sacrament of baptism, which no one dare repeat in any baptized person, but so that he may receive eternal life in Catholic society, for the obtaining of which no one is suited who, even with the sacrament of baptism, remains estranged from the Catholic Church” (Rule of Faith 43)*

Once again, in anticipation of a revisionist response largely based around the form of the sacrament, one must make an account for precisely what is meant by the **whole sacrament** in this instance. Indeed, St. Fulgentius is clearly not promoting a form of proto-ecumenism inasmuch as he insists that the baptism, though clear “full,” does not profit a man his salvation if he remains in **deliberate** schism.

Lastly, from Pope St. Gregory the Great:

*“We have learned from the ancient institution of the Fathers that **all who are baptized in heresy in the name of the Trinity** (*ut quilibet apud haeresim in Trinitatis nomine baptizantur*), **when they return to the Mother of the Church, should invoke into her bosom either through the anointing with chrism** , or through the laying on of hands, or only through the confession of faith (*aut unctione chrismatis aut impositione manus aut sola professione fidei ad sinum Matris Ecclesiae revocentur*).... Therefore, the Arians are accepted into the Catholic Church in the West through the laying on of hands, and in the East – through the anointing with myrrh. The Monophysites and others are accepted only through the confession of the true faith, **since the holy baptism, which they received from the heretics, then receives the power of purification in them**, when they (Arians) receive the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands, and these*

(Monophysites) unite with the bosom The Holy Ecumenical Church through the confession of the true faith (quia sanctum baptisma, quod sunt apud haereticos consecuti, tunc in eis vires emundationis accipit, cum vel illi per impositionem manus spiritum sanctum acceperint uel isti per professionem verae fidei sanctae et uneuersali unit fuintia Ecclesus.) (Letter from Pope St. Gregory I to Catholicos Kirion I, [translated by R. Bagrov.](#))

What this forces us to conclude at the very least is that the position of St. Cyprian was **not** accepted normatively in the Western Church, which had remained an integral and indeed, most orthodox part of the Orthodox Catholic Church until its schism many centuries later. Taking Sts. Augustine, Jerome, Gregory, Stephen, Fulgentius and Vincent at their word, St. Cyprian's method was in fact a novelty, not the traditional practice of the day. I have not even mentioned the Council of Arles (314), or St. Isidore of Seville. The clear fact is that even referring to the sacramentology illustrated here as "Augustinian" is difficult given that the **patristic consensus of the Western Fathers stands against St. Cyprian's view**. Moreover, these quotes demonstrate not merely that rebaptism can be avoided through *ekonomia* because of "valid form," but these demonstrate that not only is rebaptism categorically **rejected**, but other means of reception have been brought in as well: confession (anathematization of error) and re-vesting (as opposed to reordination).

By this very fact we cannot affirm that the Cyprianic position is quasi-dogmatic nor normative. Despite this, proponents of rigourism would maintain that the Orthodox Church has retained the normative practice of the eastern churches. In the face of this evidence, a rigourist is likely to continue to argue that the re-baptism remains "economic." However, there is no evidence to suggest that this logic is being used.

Turning then to the Eastern Fathers, we have to contend with a few things. Firstly, that speaking of "heretics" per se is not a given category, but one subject to variations allowing for degrees of departure from Orthodox truth. What we see in reality, is while the Orthodox do not hesitate to refer to Roman Catholics or Non-Chalcedonians as heretics, we do hesitate to define these in the same category of "heretics" as the earlier fathers did. Those heretics are more often than not Gnostics of various persuasions or rampant non-Trinitarians. So when Fathers such as St. Cyril of Jerusalem speak of the baptism of heretics a "no baptism" (Protocatechesis 7), we require context unless we acknowledge a **contradiction** between him, and the conclusions set out by the Western Fathers and subsequent Eastern Fathers and Councils.

The Fathers and the Councils

Having thoroughly dealt with the matter as pertains to the Western Church, we still have to contend with whether the premise that the Eastern Church maintained the practice of general re-baptism and non-recognition of heterodox sacraments as normative. Already with St. Basil, we see a dichotomy being laid out.

St. Basil provides for an initial, formal distinction between heretics, schismatics, and parasynagogues. Among the first, he numbers the "Valentinians, Marcionists, and Manichees." (First Canon of St. Basil) Surely, those who deny the God of the Old Testament Himself, dualists, incarnation-deniers, indeed proponents of an entirely separate faith are regarded as

heretics under such a definition. It's entirely absurd then, to speak of St. Basil's Canon to suggest that groups such as Roman Catholics belong to a similar category.

In the same canon, St. Basil speaks of the views of Sts. Cyprian and Firmilian which describe the loss of grace and rank among those who practice sacraments outside the Church. Despite this, he maintains his sympathies towards general re-baptism, while nonetheless accepting that we ought to do as local custom demands (Ibid.) One should count it absurd, however, that St. Basil would discourse regarding economy being applied to the re-baptism of what would essentially be non-Trinitarians, and yet even many Ecumenists today would not go so far as to consider "economically" whether or not to re-baptize someone coming in from a similar heresy.

St. Theodore the Studite reflects upon these questions further, emphasizing in the case of the Apostolic Canons, that of "heretics" it means specifically those who do not have a baptism on account of their being "not baptized and do not baptize in the name of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit." ([Letter 40, to Naucratis](#)).

St. Theodore further states, that between heretics, we must differentiate between those who are heretics in the "proper sense, because they impiously teach about the very essence of our faith in the Trinity," and heretics in the sense of their "abuse" of the word (Ibid.) Of the latter, he describes them as:

"They confess both faith in, and baptism in the Holy Trinity, retaining the unique properties of each Hypostasis, not merely that which is common to the three." (Ibid.)

This corresponds to St. Augustine's assessment, that inasmuch as there is a sufficient level of common faith retained, the grace to administer sacraments is retained. Likewise, this corresponds with the canonical interpretations of St. Nicodemus Milas, who comments on the Forty-Seventh Apostolic Canon:

"If the baptism of well-known heretics was not damaged, but in its essence corresponded to Orthodox baptism and, therefore, could be considered by the church as essentially correct, then those who passed from such heresies (where the essence of baptism was not damaged) did not need to be baptized again." ([Link](#))

St. Nicodemus Milas likewise states of the Forty-Sixth Apostolic Canon *"Applies only to heretics who existed in Apostolic times and distorted the main dogmas about God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and about the incarnation of the Son of God. Regarding heretics of a different kind, there are corresponding prescriptions of other rules of councils and of Holy Fathers"* ([Link](#))

This is the official interpretation accepted by the Most-Holy Governing Synod of Russia in 1901:

"This Apostolic Canon refers to heretics in the times of the apostles, who offended against the chief dogmas about God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and about the incarnation of the Son of God. The following canons are directed against further kinds of heresies: 1 E.C. 19, Laodicea 7 and 8, and 6 E.C. 95, and Basil Gr. 47." ([Quoted in Archimandrite Ambrosius \(Pogodin\)](#))

We are forced to conclude that there is a genuine distinction between the heretics described by the Apostolic Canons as well as the Canons of Laodicea. One should understand all such rulings within the early Church in their proper context. When the early Church speaks of heresies and schisms, the principle of exclusivity regards groups entirely removed from its fundamental reality, and not merely organized groups that have adopted a particular set of errors around fundamental doctrines which nonetheless remain in broad agreement. This is not unusual, as even St. John of Damascus uses the category of “heretic” to refer to the Ishmaelites— Muslims, who most of us would regard as an entirely alien faith.

Ecumenical Councils

This brings us to the crux of the **canonical argument**. We have already seen that despite some nuances, a genuine ontological status belongs to heretics on account of their baptism. The latter Council of Carthage would even have us accept clergy in the dignity of their rank. The Apostolic Canons and other statements by Fathers must also be understood according to a different understanding of what it means to be a “heretic.” These arguments are encapsulated in their most complete form in the First Council of Constantinople, Trullo, and in the Acts of the Seventh Council.

First Constantinople:

“Those who from heresy turn to orthodoxy, and to the portion of those who are being saved, we receive according to the following method and custom: Arians, and Macedonians, and Sabbatians, and Novatians, who call themselves Cathari or Aristori, and Quarto-decimans or Tetradites, and Apollinarians, we receive, upon their giving a written renunciation [of their errors] and anathematize every heresy which is not in accordance with the Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church of God. Thereupon, they are first sealed or anointed with the holy oil upon the forehead, eyes, nostrils, mouth, and ears; and when we seal them, we say, The Seal of the gift of the Holy Ghost.

But Eunomians, who are baptized with only one immersion, and Montanists, who are here called Phrygians, and Sabellians, who teach the identity of Father and Son, and do sundry other mischievous things, and [the partisans of] all other heresies—for there are many such here, particularly among those who come from the country of the Galatians:— all these, when they desire to turn to orthodoxy, we receive as heathen. On the first day we make them Christians; on the second, catechumens; on the third, we exorcise them by breathing thrice in their face and ears; and thus we instruct them and oblige them to spend some time in the Church, and to hear the Scriptures; and then we baptize them.” (I Constantinople, Canon 5)

Trullo:

“Those who from the heretics come over to orthodoxy, and to the number of those who should be saved, we receive according to the following order and custom. Arians, Macedonians, Novatians, who call themselves Cathari, Aristeri, and Testareskaidecatitæ, or Tetraditæ, and Apollinarians, we receive on their presentation of certificates and on their anathematizing every heresy which does not hold as does the holy Apostolic Church of God: then first of all we anoint

them with the holy chrism on their foreheads, eyes, nostrils, mouth and ears; and as we seal them we say — The seal of the gift of the Holy Ghost.

But concerning the Paulianists it has been determined by the Catholic Church that they shall by all means be rebaptized. The Eunomeans also, who baptize with one immersion; and the Montanists, who here are called Phrygians; and the Sabellians, who consider the Son to be the same as the Father, and are guilty in certain other grave matters, and all the other heresies—for there are many heretics here, especially those who come from the region of the Galatians — all of their number who are desirous of coming to the Orthodox faith, we receive as Gentiles. And on the first day we make them Christians, on the second Catechumens, then on the third day we exorcise them, at the same time also breathing thrice upon their faces and ears; and thus we initiate them, and we make them spend time in church and hear the Scriptures; and then we baptize them.

And the Manichæans, and Valentinians and Marcionites and all of similar heresies must give certificates and anathematize each his own heresy, and also Nestorius, Eutyches, Dioscorus, Severus, and the other chiefs of such heresies, and those who think with them, and all the aforesaid heresies; and so they become partakers of the holy Communion.” (Trullo, Canon 95)

I understand there are issues with the translation in question, specifically in numbering groups such as Manichaens, Valentinians, and Marcionites along with Monophysites and Nestorians. Some have argued that a genuine translation would in fact, indicate that Monophysites and Nestorians should be **re-baptized** along with the aforementioned groups. The late Fr. Daniel Griffith translated each of these canons in parallel with the original Greek in an unpublished document, and demonstrates that in fact, Manicheans, Valentinians, and Marcionites were to be re-baptized:

*“And the Manicheans, and Valentinians and Marcionites and all coming from similar heresies, we re-baptize, receiving them as heathens. (Καὶ τοὺς μανιχαίους δέ, καὶ τοὺς Οὐαλεντινιανούς, καὶ Μαρκιωνιστάς, καὶ τοὺς ἐκ τῶν ὁμοίων αἵρέσεων προσερχομένους, ὡς Ἑλλενας δεχόμενοι, ἀναβαπτίζομεν)” (Canon 95 of Trullo, Quoted in Fr. Daniel Griffith (Unpublished,) *The Proper Manner of Receiving into Communion Those Seeking Entrance into the Catholic Church According to the Canonical and Liturgical Standards of the Holy Eastern Orthodox Church.*)*

Concerning Monophysites and Nestorians it then states,

“Eutychians and Severians and those of like heresies must give certificates and anathematize their heir heresy and Nestorius, Eutychius, Dioscorus, and Severus.

Εὐτυχιανιστάς, καὶ Σεβηριανούς, καὶ τοὺς ἐκ τῶν ὁμοίων αἵρέσεων χρὴ ποιεῖν λίβελλους, καὶ ἀναθεματίζειν τὴν αἵρέσεων αὐτῶν, καὶ Νεστόριον, καὶ Εὐτυχία, καὶ Διόσκορον καὶ Σεβήρον” (Ibid.)

This argument is strengthened by the fact that the Church has historically supported the use of three methods of reception. For instance, the knowledge of three distinct rites of reception is explained by Timothy of Constantinople in the fifth century:

*“There are three rites for accepting those coming to the Holy Divine, Catholic and Apostolic Church: the first rite demands holy baptism, the second one — we do not baptize but anoint with the Holy Chrism and the third — **we neither baptize nor anoint but demand the renunciation of their own and all other heresy.**” (Quoted in Archimandrite Ambrosius (Pogodin))*

Likewise, St. Theodore the Studite clearly understands this distinction to mean that Nestorians, Meletians, and Eutychians must **not** be re-baptized, but must be received by confession:

“Not through baptism, nor chrismation, but by anathematization of their heresy do we receive Meletians, Nestorians, Eutychians and the like.” (Letter 40, to Naukratios).

Trullo reiterated and endorsed the previous six Ecumenical Councils, as well as the Apostolic Canons, Laodicea, and specifically, the Council of Carthage which abrogated the practice of St. Cyprian. It is therefore important to understand this council according to the full breadth of its implications. It did not establish a new practice, and it did not establish anything as a result of ignorance. It both upholds St. Cyprian’s legitimacy, while affirming the Council which abrogated his decision.

In fact, Trullo only receives St. Cyprian’s canon with an important qualification:

*“Moreover the canon set forth by Cyprian, archbishop of the country of the Africans and martyr, and by the synod under him, which was kept **only in the country of the aforesaid bishops, according to the custom delivered down to them.**” (Canon 2 of Trullo, Quoted in Griffith.)*

Any sense in which we can understand the canons to uphold St. Cyprian’s ruling are directly addressed by commentary from Patriarch Theodore Balsamon, who stated that the “Decrees of the Council at Carthage (257) are not mandatory and as such ineffective.” (Quoted in Archimandrite Ambrosius, On the Question of the Order of Reception of Persons into the Orthodox Church, ch. 1).

Zonaras likewise comments on St. Cyprian’s decrees thus:

“Thus, the opinions of the Fathers gathered at the council with the great Cyprian do not refer to all heretics and all schismatics. Because the Second Ecumenical Council, as we just pointed out, makes an exception for certain heretics and grants its sanction for their reception without repeating the baptism, demanding only their anointing with the Holy Chrism provided that they renounced their own heresies and all other heresies.” (Ibid.)

If one states then, that Trullo accepted “St. Cyprian’s canon,” one should also contend with the fact that it also upheld the canon of the council which abrogated it, and likewise endorsed in substance the same council by establishing a ruling concerning reception through means other than baptism. Unless this is a direct contradiction or mistake within the council (an even less acceptable view), one is forced to agree with Zonaras, Balsamon, and St. Nicodemus Milas that St. Cyprian’s view does not hold. Virtually all canonists save St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite understand these in such a way.

This also decisively deals with claims that “Augustinian” sacramentology was never accepted in the east, where the Cyprianite view prevailed. The **only** example we have of St. Cyprian’s interpretation being upheld in a council was limited to his jurisdiction during his life while those rulings remained in place.

Both these councils establish as a **canonical norm** a method of reception proper to each group, all of whom depart considerably from the Orthodox faith and practice. As a matter of fact, Trullo’s acceptance of not merely chrism as a method of reception, but now too confession for groups such as Monophysites, indicates not merely an acceptance of grace-filled baptism, but also the presence of a valid chrism. As such, one should see these canons as a normative model for which to assess future heresies once they arise (Roman Catholicism and various types of Protestants, for instance.)

Economic theory, in its novelty, is unable to adequately explain the need for a broad and categorical application of canonical rulings for reception of divers heretics. If we start from a premise that the canonical and charismatic boundaries of the Church coincide entirely, barring not only non-Trinitarian heretics but even right-believing schismatics, then these canons should speak only of cases in which it may be permissible to accept certain groups through other means. Most important to note is the third rite of reception in confession.

St. Peter Mohyla writes of chrism, *“Of this blessing and divine assistance hath every one need who becometh a Christian; and as then the Holy Spirit came down in the visible form of fire and bestowed his grace, or gifts, upon the Apostles, so now, when the priest anointeth the newly baptised person with the holy oil, he becomes endued from above with the gifts of the Holy Spirit”* (Confession, 104).

That one should be accepted by a mere renunciation of their previous rebellion or error and permitted to approach the Mysteries implies not only the validity of form of the baptism which they received, but also the presence of the Holy Spirit operative in their chrism. Understanding that chrism imparts this gift contingent on the ontological grace present in the baptism of the Church implies that for at least some heretics and schismatics, the presence of the Holy Spirit is present in their mysteries.

Even more importantly, St. Peter traditionally expounds on chrism as a **repeatable** mystery, unlike baptism. An individual having received the baptism and chrism of the Church may nonetheless fall into apostasy, and from such apostasy the rite of chrismation can be legitimately used towards reconciliation and vivifying the Christian life with the presence and operation of the Holy Spirit. What this implies for individuals being received by confession therefore, is not merely that the form of the rites they received in their heresy were correct, but that the Christian life is indeed present among them, moreso than it would be for an Orthodox who has gone into apostasy.

Acts of the Seventh Council

Thus far we have established the following facts:

- There is a significant discrepancy between the quasi-dogmatic claims of economic theory and catholic reality. The Western Fathers near-unanimously condemned the position of St. Cyprian, and so we cannot speak of “patristic consensus” on the matter.
- Eastern Fathers expressed reservation about heterodox sacraments, but neither to the same extent as the rigourists propose, nor to the extent that precluded two major councils of the Church from expressing contrary views.
- Trullo explicitly upheld **Western** rulings on the question of re-baptism and reception, and specifically rejected the practice of St. Cyprian as having strength anywhere other than his own province, during his own lifetime.
- From the fifth century onwards, we see clear proof that **chrismation and confession** were used as methods of reception. Sacramentally, the use of confession as a method of reception implies not only validity of form in baptism, but the presence of valid chrism, and as such the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Having established that re-baptism is not canonically normative and the baptisms of certain heretics were accepted by the Fathers, Councils, and that these baptisms were not mere “forms” but grace-filled in themselves, and likewise that chrismation receives similar treatment, one moves on to other sacraments.

The general practice of the Russian Church historically has been to accept priests from Roman Catholicism according to the dignity of their orders. For the same reason it is absurd to think of *ekonomia* being used as a justification in cases where masses of thousands are being brought into the Church, we cannot speak of *ekonomia* bypassing the sacraments now of baptism, chrismation, and ordination.

A former rigourist himself, Fr. Daniel Sysoev of blessed memory recounted that one of the most profound pieces of evidence of recognition of heterodox sacraments lies in the Seventh Ecumenical Council, wherein St. Tarasius receives the bishops of the Iconoclasts in their dignity, neither through reception through baptism nor in re-ordination. He speaks as follows:

*“St. Tarasius speaks not as just a person, but as the chairman of the Ecumenical Council. **This [that we recognize valid sacraments outside the Church] is the official answer of the Council to the question of the monks about the possibility of ordination among heretics.** The whole first session is devoted to this. So it is the official teaching of the Church, expressed at the most serious level. **If the sacraments were not performed outside the canonical boundaries of the church, then there would always be one rite – Baptism.** The opinion of St. Hilarion (Troitsky) that all the sacraments [of heretics are invalid] is not based on the Tradition, and contradicts the spirit and letter of the canons, that in the unification they are given impulsively. Sacraments from personally uncondemned heretics are accepted because they are not personally condemned. This is a manifestation of the authority of the keys that the Church has.”* ([Link](#))

Fr. Sysoev summarizes the whole matter thus:

“The sacraments of heretics are recognized by the Fathers of the First, Second, Sixth and Seventh Ecumenical Councils. Among the Fathers of the Church — St. Stephen of Rome, St. Vincent of Lerins, Blessed Augustine, St. Basil the Great, St. John of Damascus, St. Mark of Ephesus, St. Theophan the Recluse, St. Philaret of Moscow, and are rejected by St. Cyprian of Carthage and St. Hilarion Troitsky.” (Ibid.)

St. Tarasius points out during the Acts of the Seventh Council that St. Meletius was “*ordained by the Arians; yet, when he ascended the pulpit and preached the consubstantiality, his ordination was never disapproved.*” (Acts of the Seventh Council)

Further, he states, “*What say ye to Anatolius? Was he not President of the fourth Ecumenical Council, and this although he was ordained by the impious Dioscorus in the presence of Eutyches himself? **May we not then, admit those who have been ordained by heretics, since Anatolius was thus admitted?*** And again, it is the undoubted **voice of God**, that the children shall not die for the fathers, but each one shall die for his own sin. **And moreover, consecration is from God.**” (Ibid.)

*“The greater part of those who sat in the sixth Ecumenical Council were ordained by Sergius, Pyrrhus, Peter, and Paul, prime movers of the heresy of the Monothelites, because that they, in succession, obtained the chair of Constantinople; and from Peter, the last of these, to the time of the sixth Council, was a space of fifteen years, during which period John, Thomas, and Constantine, who were also high Priests in succession, received their orders from the heretics aforesaid, but no objection was ever raised against them on that account: now this heresy continued for upwards of fifty years. **Nevertheless, the Fathers of the sixth Council scrupled not to condemn all the four above-named heretical Patriarchs, though they had been ordained by them.**” (Ibid.)*

St. Tarasius thus makes our argument for us. He not only himself accepts Iconoclast bishops without reordination, but even speaks of other Christological heretics being received in a similar fashion, even those ordained by Arians. At the point of St. Meletius, one cannot even speak of the festering presence of Arianism within the Church because these schisms were formidable, and all post-Nicean.

That a cleric should be received through any of the aforementioned methods, and moreover that the dignity of his priesthood should be accepted as it was granted demonstrates now not only the presence of the earlier sacraments, but now also of an **ecclesiality**. From this we can confirm that heretics can in theory, have not only a valid baptism, but the key pillars of Church life expressed through valid Apostolic Succession. St. Tarasius confirms as much when he explicitly states that “**consecration is from God,**” which precludes any sort of **economic** argument about the validity of form of an ordination.

Schism and Papism

Of all that has been written thus far, we understand that a genuine ecclesiastical nature can be ascribed to certain heretics. Of those currently existing, Nestorians and Non-Chalcedonians are plainly by canonical norm (not *ekonomia*) to be received by confession of faith. We know that in

the first millennium, the Western Fathers unanimously understood this to be the case, and that the Eastern Fathers and Councils *de facto* adopted these standards. Furthermore, we know that in both cases, there are types of heretics and schismatics which receive genuine grace of Apostolic succession, for which reason their clergy are not re-ordained once they are brought into the Church.

What this leaves is the attitude of the Church towards Roman Catholics and Protestants. It is worth noting that the consistency of the Church is often in question with respect to these. Even within union and pre-schism, we have examples of Latins demanding the re-baptism of Greek Christians within their borders, such as in Norman Sicily, and reciprocal orders by the Greeks in their own territory. These are less guided by ecclesiological and sacramentological concerns, and evidently are political in nature. Certainly, it's absurd to consider such things to their logical extent, for during this time both churches retained mutual recognition and communion. What this does tell us is that at certain points, members of the Church can be guided more by antipathy and political considerations than by consistent application of doctrine.

After 1054, a genuine “consummation” of the schism took centuries to solidify. In many cases, a *de facto* intercommunion continued in various parts of Christendom for centuries until political considerations made this impossible. It is safe to say that this was essentially treated as a schism “within” the Church rather than one party dividing itself from the catholic Church writ large. St. Mark of Ephesus, speaking at the Council of Florence referred to the Roman Church as “holy,” and using all the relevant honorifics to refer to the Pope. ([Quoted in Archimandrite Ambrosius \(Pogodin\)](#))

Prior to the Council of Florence, even in the aftermath of the failed Council of Lyon, the standard method of receiving Latins was in accordance with the general rule provided to schismatics. They were to repudiate their errors and repent, after which they would be brought before the chalice. Theodore Balsamon expresses this view around 1190, with no suggestion that they should be baptized or chrismated. ([Met. Kallistos Ware](#))

In the lands of Rus', the established custom was similar. In the twelfth century, Metropolitan Cyricus of Kyiv writes:

“If a Latin wishes to come under Rus' law, let him attend our Church for seven days. He is to be given a new name. Each day four prayers are devoutly read in his presence. Then let him bathe in the bathhouse. He will refrain from meat and dairy products for seven days, and on the eighth day, having bathed, let him come to Church. Four prayers must be read over him. He is dressed in clean clothes. A crown or a wreath is placed on his head. He is anointed with Chrism and a wax candle is placed in his hand. He receives Communion during the Liturgy and henceforth is considered a new Christian.” ([Quoted in Archimandrite Ambrosius \(Pogodin\)](#))

Amidst the attempted reunification of the churches in Lyons and Ferrara-Florence, one only sees a concrete, established rule on reception of the Latin heretics in the aftermath of Florence, codified in 1484. At the absolute height of animosity towards Latins and the fall of Constantinople, the Church determined that the formal ruling for Latins should be reception via chrismation. This is profound, because in the face of this, any pseudo-logic around

how *ekonomia* can be applied because of the sheer quantity of individuals being brought into the Church is brought low. Reception via chrismation is **not** a concession to economy or any other principle. The Church did not see this as a relaxation as would be implied by *ekonomia*, but as a **punishment** and scathing rebuke of the Latin heresy. St. Mark of Ephesus writes thus:

*“The Latins are **not only schismatics but are heretics**. However, our Church was silent about this because [the Latins] are so numerous; but was this not the reason why the Orthodox Church moved away from them, because they were heretics? We simply cannot unite with them unless they agree to remove the addition (made by them) into the Symbol [Creed], and confess the Symbol just as we confess it.” (Ibid.)*

And concerning reception he writes thus:

“But if they completely deviated, and this in their theology about the Holy Spirit — sinning against which is the greatest of dangers — then it is clear that they are heretics, and we cut them off as heretics. Why do we anoint them who come to us? — Is not this clear — as heretics? The 7th canon of the Second Ecumenical Council speaks thus: ‘Those heretics who come over to Orthodoxy and to the society of those who are saved we receive according to the prescribed rite and custom: Arians, Macedonians, Novatianists, who call themselves ‘pure and better,’ Quatrodecimans or Tetradites as well as Appolinarians. We receive them on condition that they present a written document and that they anathematize every heresy, which is not in accord with the thinking of the holy, catholic and apostolic Church of God, and then they should be marked with the seal, that is, anointed with chrism on the forehead, eyes, nostrils, mouth and ears. And as they are marked with the seal, we say seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Ibid.)

It is impossible to understand this as economy. St. Mark not only boldly declares his position as a matter of rebuke of the Latins, but he appeals to the **established conciliar process**. One wonders why rigourists choose to adopt a logic that places their view of sacraments and reception above the councils and fathers of the Church, falsely claiming that they stand in line with them.

The Russian Consensus

In having demonstrated that the Western Fathers unambiguously rejected re-baptism of certain heretics as acceptable, and upheld the presence of sacraments among certain heretics, I have established that the rigourist position chronologically and geographically has never been universal or quasi-dogmatic. In elaborating on the Ecumenical Councils and Eastern Fathers, it was also demonstrated that the East did not accept this position normatively, and in fact established canonical standards which at their absolute harshest, still acknowledge valid baptism from among Latins.

A further testament to the geographical and chronological novelty of the rigourist position is the fact that it is not historically the practice of the churches of Rus’ to have adopted the Greek rigourist stance. Likewise, the Greek stance remained in complete harmony with the established rulings of Constantinople 1484, only collapsing to the novel and modern doctrine presented in the nineteenth century.

Prior to any polemical arguments about the “Latin captivity” of Russia, we already have St. Joseph of Volotsk repeating the arguments illustrated previously concerning the Ecumenical Councils. Speaking of the same heretics, schismatics, and parasynagogues, he states of them:

*“They confess the Holy Trinity, and that our Lord Jesus Christ is called the true God, and they believe in the Incarnation, but adhere to some heretical ideas. And if they want to convert to the orthodox faith and curse their heresy, then **the holy books command us not to baptize them, but to accept them as baptized, and shortly afterwards to grant them communion of the Divine Mysteries.***

*It is about such heretics that the sacred rules, St. John of the Ladder and the interpretation of the holy Evangelist John the Theologian speak: **if a heretic confesses and curses his heresy, then he will immediately receive the Holy Mysteries.***” (The Enlightener, Word 15)

It has already been acknowledged that the churches of Rus’ did not accept Latins through re-baptism. The only time this practice was put into question was in the 1620 Council of Moscow, which controversially determined that they should be accepted through re-baptism. However, this practice hardly lasted, and three decades later was entirely abrogated by the 1655 Council of Moscow, wherein Patriarch Nikon of blessed memory declared that re-baptism is not a canonical practice, and instead determined to receive them by chrismation in accordance with the practice of Constantinople.

In 1666, when this issue came up again, Patriarch Macarius of Antioch traveled to the lands of Russia to provide them with the genuine and traditional teaching of the Church. He writes thus:

*“The Latins must not be re-baptized: **they have the seven sacraments and all seven Councils, and they are all baptized correctly in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit with an invocation of the Holy Trinity.*** We must recognize their baptism.” (Ibid.)

Though not a Saint himself, Patriarch Macarius had been running this campaign within Russia using canonical documents from Mt. Athos, and fully representing the Greek tradition of the time. Moreover, he acknowledges not merely the validity of their baptism but **the reality of their seven sacraments.**

With this question thoroughly established in the Church of Russia, one seems precisely the same issue in the Ukrainian Church, then under Constantinople. St. Peter Mohyla, a champion of the Orthodox faith in resisting the Unia, makes it very clear that Latins are not to be re-baptized. In fact, he takes the canonical principle of First Constantinople and Trullo, and expounds on these to include modern heresies. He specifically states that only Protestants fall under the category of those heretics which have baptism, but not the other sacraments, while others maintain them.

“The essence of the heretic is twofold. The first are those who do not believe in the Holy Trinity and who do not baptize in three immersions in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit: these, like the Hellenes (pagans), must be baptized...

The second sort are those, who believe in God and in the Trinity, and in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, they are baptized in three immersions: but they have their own delusions and various heresies, and apart from baptism, they do not have the other mysteries of the Church. Among these are the Saxons (Lutherans) and Calvinists, and such others. To baptize these is of no use, as they are baptized, but precisely after the renunciation of their cursed heresies and the confession of the Orthodox faith, they are anointed with the holy myrrh.

The third pertains to schismatics, having all seven sacraments and rites of the Church; but having separated for themselves from the unity of the Church and holy Orthodox catholicity... We do not baptize, and inasmuch as they received chrismation from their own, we do not chrismate them with the holy myrrh, but after renouncing their schism, they confess the symbol of faith, they are purified by their prayers and permission from the hierarchs.” ([Ruling on the Reception of Heretics Coming to the Holy Apostolic and Catholic Church/ Trebnik of St. Peter Mohyla, Kyiv, 1646, c. 164](#))

I understand many have issues with the status of St. Peter Mohyla in the Church, accusing him of Latinization. Despite this, it is demonstrably the case that his statements maintain the consistency that economic theorists cannot muster, as it provides no contradiction between the practice of the Church and its ecclesiology.

The position of Mohyla is unambiguously then also the practice of the Russian Church writ large. Archbishop Benjamin in his *Novaya Skrizhal* upholds this view in 1899:

*“All heretics are divided into three types. To the first belong those who do not believe in the Holy Consubstantial Trinity and do not perform baptism by triple immersion into water; these, along with pagans and Muhammadans are to be baptized as directed by Canon 19 of the First Ecumenical Council. Heretics of the second type are those who believe in the One God in the Trinity and are baptized by triple immersion, but have their own delusions and heresies and with the exception of baptism either do not recognize other sacraments or, in performing other sacraments improperly, reject chrismation. **They are not to be baptized because they are baptized, but, following the repudiation of their heresies and confession of the Orthodox Faith, are to be united to the Church by way of the sacrament of Chrismation, as is prescribed by Canon 7 of the Second Ecumenical Council.** The third type of heretics, called dissidents, maintain all the seven sacraments including chrismation, but, having separated from the unity of the Orthodox Church, dare to add to the pure confession of faith their own delusions, which are contrary to the ancient teachings of the Apostles and Fathers of the Church, and introduce many pernicious views into the church and, in rejecting ancient pious rites of the Church, introduce new traditions, which are contrary to the spirit of piety. **These we do not baptize for the second time nor do we anoint them with the Holy Chrism. After the repudiation of their delusion and repentance from their sins, they confess the Orthodox Symbol of Faith and are cleansed from their sins by the prayers and hierarchical absolution.**”* ([Quoted in Archimandrite Ambrosius \(Pogodin\)](#))

St. Philaret of Moscow provides perhaps the clearest and most often quoted (as in Florovsky) statement confirming the grace and ecclesiality of heterodox confessions. He writes:

“Mark you, I do not presume to call false any Church which believes that Jesus is the Christ. The Christian Church can only be either purely true, confessing the true and saving divine teaching without the false admixtures and pernicious opinions of men, or not purely true, mixing with the true and saving teaching of faith in Christ the false and pernicious opinions of men... but I just simply look upon them; in part I see how the Head and Lord of the Church heals the many deep wounds of the old serpent in all the parts and limbs of his Body, applying now gentle, now strong, remedies, even fire and iron, in order to soften hardness, to draw out poison, to clean wounds, to separate out malignant growths, to restore spirit and life in the numbed and half-dead members. In this way I attest my faith that, in the end, the power of God will triumph openly over human weakness, good over evil, unity over division, life over death.” (Quoted in Fr. Georges Florovsky, [The Limits of the Church](#)).

St. Philaret's views will later be repeated by St. Sophrony of Essex and Fr. Dimitru Staniloae, who likewise, God willing, will be canonized in the near future. Ultimately, this is also the understanding of the contemporary Russian Church. Notwithstanding the clear statements of St. Hilarion Troitsky to the contrary, the only dominant positions within the Russian Church are those of St. Philaret, who speaks of the genuine grace operating within the members and sacraments of the heterodox churches, and of those such as St. Seraphim Sobolev, who hold to something akin to an “Augustinian” view, that the sacraments of heterodox are genuine and active, but not beneficial unto their salvation.

The following illustrates this clearly:

“We are private individuals; and in their opinions they must conform to the decision of the Orthodox Church. It seems that our Church is condescending to Catholics and recognizes the power of not only the baptism of the Catholics and other sacraments, but also the priesthood, which is very significant.” (St. Theophan the Recluse, Quoted from Sergei Fedorov, [The Reality of Sacraments Outside the Church](#))

“The sacrament of the episcopate is mutually recognized by us [with Catholics] and respected.” (St. Nicholas of Japan, Ibid.)

“Among the errors of Vladimir Solovyov, one should also refer to his calling Catholicism the Church. Catholicism should be called a schism with heretical confession, due to which, although there is apostolic succession with the sacraments here, but the inner regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit is not effective for Catholics and, therefore, it does not regenerate and does not save them. Vladimir Soloviev is even more mistaken when he calls Protestantism the Church. There is no regenerating grace here at all, for there is no sacrament of holy chrismation and there is no apostolic succession. Therefore, Protestantism , as an unauthorized gathering, is even farther away, than Latinism, from the Orthodox Church... although, according to the apostolic succession, the inner regenerating grace is communicated in Catholicism through the sacraments of baptism and chrismation.” (Quoted from Valery Sinilschikov, [St. Seraphim Bogucharsky on the reality of heretical sacraments](#))

“Anyone baptized in the name of the Trinity is a Christian, no matter what confession he belongs to.” (St. Philaret of Moscow, Quoted from Sergei Fedorov, [The Reality of Sacraments Outside the Church](#))

*“The Orthodox Church, through the mouths of the holy fathers, affirms that salvation can be attained only in the Church of Christ. At the same time, however, communities which have fallen away from orthodoxy have never been viewed as fully deprived of the grace of God. Any break from communion with the Church inevitably leads to an erosion of her grace-filled life, but not always to its complete loss in these separated communities. **This is why the Orthodox Church does not receive those coming to her from non-orthodox communities only through the sacrament of baptism.** In spite of the rupture of unity, there remains a certain incomplete fellowship which serves as the pledge of a return to unity in the Church, to catholic fullness and oneness... **The ecclesial status of those who have separated themselves from the Church does not lend itself to simple definition. In a divided Christendom, there are still certain characteristics which make it one:** the word of God, faith in Christ as God and saviour come in the flesh (1 Jn. 1:1-2; 4, 2, 9), and sincere devotion. (Jubilee Council of Bishops of the Russian Orthodox Church, “Basic Principles of Attitude to the Non-Orthodox.”)*

The Greek Discourse

The rigourist position draws its legitimacy from two sources as such. St. Nicodemus the Hagiorite and the Kollyvades Fathers are presented as the genuine holders of the tradition of the Church, and the 1756 Council of Constantinople which put their interpretations into effect. Thus far, it has been demonstrated that this position is not in fact representative of the tradition of the Church, its councils, or its Fathers. The Kollyvades Fathers are also ground zero for the “economic theory” which is expressed in St. Nicodemus’ interpretations of the canons in the Rudder.

St. Nicodemus writes:

“Latin baptism is erroneously referred to by that name: it is not a baptism at all but is simply a washing. This is why we do not say that we ‘re-baptize’ the Latins, but we ‘baptize’ them. The Latins are not baptized since they do not perform triple immersion at baptism, which has been a tradition in the Orthodox Church from the apostles from the very beginning.” ([Quoted in Archimandrite Ambrosius \(Pogodin\)](#))

We will return to this argument later. One first needs to establish precisely what the tradition of the Greek Church is during this time.

Just prior to Constantinople 1484, with the views of St. Mark of Ephesus being well known and established by the anti-unionist party, St. Gennadios Scholarios nonetheless makes the following statement about Latins and Armenians:

“The following question was asked by the monks, if it’s acceptable for the Armenians & the Latin pilgrims to partake of the panagia. We say you should distribute to them the antidoron too. For they are Christians and for that reason they came from such long distances to venerate the

*Master's tomb. And although they have been split from us for various reasons concerning the faith, and are heterodox, **being Christians, they seek with faith and piety their sanctification; and we must give it to them.** ... Only the Great Mystery of Communion should not be distributed to them. And if someone of them is willing to stay and understands, they must firstly **deny their beliefs, and then confess the glory of the catholic Church, then they are worthy of communion. That is the habit of the catholic Church of Christians.** Henceforth, the holy patriarchs who presided over a feastal liturgy, accepted both the Armenians and the Latins who came with piety to the liturgy, they did not keep them away, and before they left, allowed them of venerating and offered them their patriarchal right hand to kiss, and blessed them and gave them antidoron." (St. Gennadios Scholarius, [Epistle to the Sinai Monks, p.539](#))*

From this we can see that after Constantinople 1484, chrismation was not a normalization but rather a strict application of the rigour that followed. It was **inconceivable to the Ecumenical Church that Latins should be rebaptized**. One can also assume that since the 1484 Council only spoke of Latin reception, the words of Scholarios would still apply to Non-Chalcedonians.

Moving further, if Constantinople 1484 is not sufficient to establish this practice, the Church can rely on two more Councils which were accepted with dogmatic authority and broad, universal acceptance. The first among these is the Council of Iasi (1642) which supported the Confession of St. Peter Mohyla, and stated the following concerning re-baptism:

"[T]his mystery [of baptism] once received is not again to be repeated, provided the person who provided the baptism believed orthodoxly in three Persons in one God and accurately, without alteration, pronounced the aforementioned words: namely, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen." (Quoted in Craig Truglia, [Saint Peter Mogila's Confession and the 1642 Synod](#)).

More importantly, this is repeated by the Council of Jerusalem, expressed in the confession of Dositheus. It reads:

"Moreover, we reject as something abominable and pernicious the notion that when faith is weak the integrity of the Mystery is impaired. For heretics who renounce their heresy and join the Catholic Church are received by the Church; although they received their valid Baptism with weakness of faith. Wherefore, when they afterwards become possessed of the perfect faith, they are not again baptized." ([Confession of Dositheus](#), Decree 15).

Rigourists will typically point to Dositheus' statements concerning the form of Latin baptism, as "mortal sin." However, this does nothing to demonstrate their position. Dositheus' argument points out that in having established aspersion as a standard rather than a rule, the form of Latin baptism poses a **risk** of being unbaptized. If it were clear that the form was fundamentally incorrect, there would be no talk of "risk," but it would be stated simply that they are unbaptized.

This is the only way to reconcile Dositheus' initial statements, as well as the following condemnation of St. Cyprian's argument:

*“So [St. Cyprian and his followers] misinterpreted the apostolic tradition and narrowed down the meaning of what the Apostle says [one faith, one Lord, one baptism] in a general sense... So The great Cyprian wrote decisively in conciliarity, saying that the heretics, according to what Jeremiah said in the second chapter, “left the fountain of living water, and hewed out broken cisterns for themselves, which could not hold water” (Jer. 2:13). Therefore Jerome also wrote in the dialogue against the Luciferians: “Blessed Cyprian tried to avoid the commonly visited lakes, and not drink someone else’s water.” That is why **Cyprian rejected the baptism of heretics, but in vain.** However, he did not do this out of love for disputes and did not approve this decision with anathema, and **therefore was not condemned as a heretic, because he did not persist in his opinion.**” (Quoted from Sergei Fedorov, [The Reality of Sacraments Outside the Church](#))*

This leaves us with now four councils which by virtue of their reception-methodology affirm the sacraments of the heterodox: Constantinople 1484, Iasi 1642, Jerusalem 1672, and Moscow 1666. This view is also endorsed in the 1723 Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs:

*“We reject as a most disgusting abomination [the opinion] that a lack of faith violates the fullness of the Sacrament. Because heretics (whom the Church accepts after they rejected heresy and joined them to the Catholic Church), despite the fact that their faith was initially flawed, **received a perfect baptism; therefore, when they subsequently acquire perfect faith, they are not re-baptized.**” (Ibid.)*

Harsh words considering the premise of the rigourist argument is that baptism is normative, and chrismation **may** happen by *ekonomia* if the situation permits it. The clear evidence is that the Church speaks with a common voice– to rebaptize one who receives their baptism from certain heretical groups is an error, abomination, and denial of baptism itself.

The only council then, that provides for any other interpretation whatsoever is 1756 Constantinople, which likewise only uses the “form” argument. Concerning this council, St. Nicodemus Milas writes:

*“**The Church has never condemned that baptism which was done by pouring. Not only that, but the Church itself permitted such a form of baptism in the event of need and considered baptism by means of pouring as not contrary to the apostolic tradition.** Therefore, the above-noted decision of the Constantinople Council cannot be considered as binding for the whole Orthodox Church since it is contrary to the practice of the Eastern Church of all centuries and particularly, to the practice of the Greek Church itself from the time of the division of Churches to the time of that Council in Constantinople.*

*As a result of the exceptional conditions that arose in the relations between the Greek and the Latin Churches, the 1756 Council in Constantinople promulgated a requirement to baptize anew every Roman Catholic desiring to convert to the Orthodox Church. A similar requirement called forth by a similar set of circumstances as was faced by the Greek Church was decreed by one of the Moscow Councils in 1620. **But these requirements, deviating from many centuries of practice by the Eastern Church, were looked upon as an extreme example of strictness,***

inevitably called for by the unfavorable circumstances of the times, and do not have, nor can have, a universal significance.” (Quoted in Archimandrite Ambrosius (Pogodin))

Moreover, it was **never** the case that Constantinople 1756 received universal acceptance by the Church. In fact, St. Philaret of Moscow writes concerning it:

“The question is: who is more reliable to follow, four patriarchs and the council of 1484, or three patriarchs of 1756? A large council could change the decision of a smaller one; but the minority cannot take away the strength from the decision of a preceding larger council.”
(Collection of Views and Statements of Filaret, Metropolitan of Moscow, Concerning Church-Governance.)

He further states:

*“If those who are baptized by pouring, according to the opinion of Constantinople, are not baptized: **how can “economic condescension” make them baptized, having not provided them with baptism?** If the Greek Church accuses the Russian Church of being responsible of recognizing as baptized those whom the Greeks recognize as not received, then the Greek Church accuses the Russian Church of having gravely sinned, and there exists no ecclesial unity... If there is indeed such a worthy witness: it would be hard to believe that the learned [Constantine] Oikonomos considers “Western baptism both valid and invalid,” seeing as this is the will of the Church that the one sprinkled was both baptized and not baptized? Is not the power of baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity, and in the mysterious grace given to this action by Christ our God?”* (Letters of Met. Filaret of Moscow to A.N. Muraev (1832-1867), Kyiv, 1869. p. 369)

Coming back to the argument made by St. Nicodemus and the Kollyvades, the argument is primarily one of form, which then implies substance. This creates several key issues for the rigourist. First, it does not contend with the simple fact that Latin baptism by affusion had been in use centuries prior to the schism, and is explicitly mentioned in the Didache as a valid method that can be used:

“But if you have not living water, baptize into other water; and if you can not in cold, in warm. But if you have not either, pour out water thrice upon the head into the name of Father and Son and Holy Spirit.” (Didache, 7)

This practice had become all but standard in the Latin Church by the tenth century. However, if we assume that form informs substance, and Latin baptism is unacceptable by virtue of its poor form, then how is it that the “economic” argument may be applied? If we are consistent and use the economic theorists’ view that we could accept the baptisms of Arians by virtue of their use of immersion, and therefore not Latins, how is it that the Church, until this time, had been accepting Latins? *Ekonomia* under such circumstances should not even be possible, since the one and only criterion for its use, the validity of form, is not present.

There also lies the question of how essential this argument is. If we assume that the **only** valid aspect to a heterodox baptism, which has the ontological value of a bath, is its form, are we not

betraying St. Nicodemus one way or another when we accept baptisms by aspersion? Are such baptisms even “theoretically” valid? For if the form of baptism is the true marker of what allows us to practice *ekonomia*, then rigourists ultimately have a minimum standard of what constitutes a valid, yet empty form.

This begs the question. Is the invocation of the Trinity that which has inherent power that makes a Latin baptism ontologically different from any other washing? We know that according to St. Nicodemus and Constantinople 1756, the form is depraved and invalid. What is the “missing key” then, that allows us to still accept such a baptism? What makes a Latin baptism ontologically different from a Muslim or Jewish ritual ablution?

If it is in fact, the name of the Holy Trinity, then the view self-refutes, and it means that the invocation of the Holy Trinity in the baptism does in fact, provide a measure of ontological value to the rite.

It is likewise worth mentioning that St. Nicodemus’ interpretations contained in the Rudder are themselves in question. There are well documented concerns about mandatory revisions made to his initial writings in the Rudder on the matter, mentioned in an article by [Fr. John Cox](#) and by [Theodore Giankou](#). But even if we assume, incorrectly, that St. Nicodemus revised his initial writings on the question of re-baptism, and sincerely held his unprecedented canonical interpretation, we find that he contradicts himself in explaining other canons. For instance, his interpretation of Canon 66 of Carthage states:

*“The present Canon decrees that **if persons baptized by the Donatists in their infancy learn the truth of Orthodoxy after coming of age and attaining to discretion, and come to hate the cacodoxy, whether they, I say, seeing that they have been baptized in the baptism which is performed in accordance with tradition, to wit, that performed by the Orthodox ecclesiastics (which is one, as St. Paul says), ought not to be baptized a second time, but of course, to be obliged to anathematize the heresy of Donatus, and then after the imposition of the hand of the bishop or priest, in accordance with the old procedure of the Church (see c. VIII of the First Ecumenical Council), to be received into the catholic Church...**”*

However, even if we assume that St. Nicodemus can be taken at face value concerning the manner of reception of baptisms, **this does not explain the threefold method of reception.** How is it that we can not only accept the baptisms of the heterodox, but also their chrismation? Their ordination? It is clear that from the time of St. Tarasius of Constantinople as well as the later Carthaginian Councils that we accept even the ordinations of certain heretics. The practice of the Russian Church today corresponds to this, and this fact was even accepted by St. Philaret of Moscow who designed the rite by which a heterodox clergyman was to be re-vested.

St. Seraphim Sobolev, well-known for his stance against ecumenism, likewise expresses this view in his rebuke of Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky, who upheld the rigourist view. He states:

“The view that Catholics are without grace and are pagans is at odds with the teachings of the Orthodox Church and is erroneous. This fallacy increases even more, for it involuntarily raises

the question: if there is no grace in the Catholic Sacraments, then how does the Russian Church receive Catholic clergymen in their present dignity?

One cannot agree with the opinion of the late Metropolitan Anthony [Khrapovitsky] that the grace of the priesthood is bestowed upon them in the sacrament of repentance when they convert to Orthodoxy. Such an opinion cannot be justified in the canons, for not one of them says that heretics with ecclesiastical degrees, upon their conversion to Orthodoxy, should be imparted through repentance the gift of the priesthood. It is impossible to find confirmation of this in the Holy Fathers of the Church, who never taught that when one sacrament was performed, the gift of another sacrament was simultaneously communicated. (Concerning the Article “Serving Russia,” in *Distortion of Orthodox Truth in Russian Theological Thought*. 1943, p. 303)

In fact, this was the method of reception applied to St. Alexis Toth, who with all his faithful was received by mere confession of the faith into normalized communion. How closely this echoes the Russian practice of receiving the Uniates! This is just one other example of such reception:

“Bishop Porphyrius Uspensky, in describing his audience with the Patriarch of Constantinople in 1843 writes that he informed the Patriarch that in 1841, 13,000 Uniats reunited with the Russian Orthodox Church. The Patriarch inquired: “Did you baptize them?” Bishop (then an Archimandrite) Porphyrius Uspensky gave a negative reply, explaining to the Patriarch that “the Uniats, by their inner conviction and faith, have always been in communion with our Church and had no need to be re-baptized.” (Quoted in Archimandrite Ambrosius (Pogodin))

This was also the policy of St. Tikhon of Moscow, Metropolitan Eulogius Georgievsky, and Archbishop Georges Wagner, all of whom would routinely receive Latin clergy by means of re-vesting, not re-ordination. This tradition has continued today with notable examples being the reception of Hieromonk Gabriel Bunge.

Ultimately, economic theory cannot explain such phenomena without resorting to a sort of post-hoc rationalization. What discourse can there be on form now? Have the Latins retained adequate form of not only baptism, but now too of chrism and ordination? Does “Apostolic Succession” transmit itself in such a way that we are now able to also bypass the laying on of hands, providing the gifts of the Spirit to clergymen ordained beyond our borders?

Conclusion and the Church Today

I felt that writing this article was necessary on account of the many strains of thought that predominate in Orthodoxy in the West. The internet has provided a plethora of blessings to people who are now familiar with the Orthodox tradition. These flock to the Church, seeking its spiritual riches and ultimately, salvation itself. Despite this, the easy access to information has also paved the way for any type of demagoguery to spread itself easily, from liberal strains of Orthodoxy to the most rigouristic examples of “True” or “Genuine” Orthodoxy.

The fact is, the views expressed in this article are factually those of the majority of the Church today. Barring individual Bishops, it is the policy of **virtually every Orthodox Church** to

receive certain heterodox by means other than baptism, and to implicitly or explicitly recognize the validity of their sacraments. The Churches of Antioch and Alexandria have thriving relations with their non-Chalcedonian and Uniate counterparts on the basis of this, while the Russian Church today continues to receive Latin clergy through re-vesting, not re-ordination. Across the jurisdictions of the United States, this remains the policy across the board. In all of Orthodoxy, **not a single autocephalous body accepts rigourism as a normative teaching**. To my knowledge, only Mt. Athos and ROCOR have an official stance on this, both of whom are under the omophorion of Patriarchates that reject the teaching.

Even today, we see that this problem has created schisms within Christ's body, against the reprimands of St. Paul, saying "For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it." (1 Corinthians 11:18). There now exists a schism in the United Kingdom between various jurisdictions within the Church of Moscow, where the manner of reception has now caused an internal rift. These issues become cause for concern, confusion, and undue hostility between members of Christ's Church. With the tradition of the Church being abundantly clear as outlined, there is no excuse for these to take place.

What is a convert to do? Many have been driven to sorrow, confusion, or pharasaic pretension when faced with the arguments of rigourism. They either rely on ignorance about the policy of the Church, or assume that the Church is the victim of the festering and clearly now dominant "pan-heresy of Ecumenism." Many of these have been thoroughly convinced that to reject the rigourist view is indicative not merely of an erroneous opinion, but calls into question every bit of theology put forward by those who oppose it as individuals lacking in *phronema* or the "Orthodox ethos." It is more noble therefore to demonstrate to such individuals that the Church which they have now committed themselves to is not practicing error on such a scale, but is currently consistent with itself, and has always been so.

The only genuine arguments that can be made within the patristic consensus are the question of whether salvation is possible outside the Church. I have not touched upon my personal view on this matter, but it is clear that Saints of some significance certainly thought so. Among these, St. Philaret of Moscow, St. Sophrony of Essex, and the uncanonized Frs. Dimitru Staniloae and Georges Florovsky. Staniloae and Sophrony express things most aptly in my view:

*"Only the one and unique Church can have the fullness of grace. **All the other Churches, however, do have grace because of their faith in Christ, but not in its fullness.** We can, furthermore, believe that in our days there are still people who, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, are equal to the great Saints of the Church of ancient times. (I am saying this in connection with what I heard about several people in Russia.) [This is] because Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Heb. 13:8). All this is the truth. Whoever departs from this faith will not stand."* (Quoted in Seraphim Danckaert, "[Two Schools: What the Council of Crete Means for the Future of Orthodox Theology](#)").

*"But here the question is posed: what are the other Christian confessions that do not confess such an intimate and effective union of the integral Christ in them? We hold that **they are incomplete churches, some closer to fullness, others farther away...** We hold that the non-Orthodox confessions are separate groups that have been formed in a certain relationship with*

the full Church and exist in certain relationship with it, but do not share in the full light and power of Christ the sun. Thus in a way the Church includes all the confessions divided from it, because they could not fully depart from the Tradition present [in the Church]. But the Church in the full sense of the word is only the Orthodox Church.” (Quoted in Seraphim Danckaert, [“Two Schools: What the Council of Crete Means for the Future of Orthodox Theology”](#)).

St. Sophrony states even further, under danger of accusations of “Ecumenism,”

*“The argument is not at all that unity with Westerners is to be achieved through “compromises” in our faith itself, but that union, or at least rapprochement, is impossible other than through fearless contact in our spiritual life itself, in life together.... **But for this it is necessary to take a step toward fellowship in prayer with them... These thoughts frightened those I spoke with.**” (St. Sophrony of Essex, Quoted in *The Cross of Loneliness: The Correspondence of Saint Sophrony and Archpriest Georges Florovsky*, p. 105)*

Whether or not they are correct remains to be seen. What I have demonstrated decisively in this is at minimum, the “Augustinian” understanding of sacraments. Whether salvific or not, heterodox bodies whose origins lie in the Orthodox Church **do** indeed have valid sacraments, and this is evidenced by the **consensus of the Western Fathers**, and the canonical and patristic tradition of the whole Orthodox Church. Our saints speak with a common voice on this matter, and the position is upheld by an Ecumenical Council, Trullo, and no less than three subsequent, universally accepted Councils, as well as a plethora of confessions and common statements of faith. What previously seemed, by pure sub-cultural pretension, that the rigourist argument is supported by the “tradition of the Church” against the post-Vatican II Ecumenism, turns out to be a paper tiger in the face of patristic evidence.

The tradition of the Church marks out its views without always necessarily elaborating upon them. Despite their attempts to position as the “traditional” view, rigourists reverse this relationship entirely. On the basis of the question of “**how** can the heterodox have sacraments when the Church is canonically one?” they create a lackluster and ineffective hermeneutic to explain the matter. Our method starts from the tradition itself, its conclusions and declarations, and then attempts to either establish a theoretical framework from this, or it leaves the matter to mystery. As Fr. Georges Florovsky states in “The Limits of the Church,”

“One thing remains obscure. How does the activity of the Spirit continue beyond the canonical borders of the Church? What is the validity of sacraments without communion, of stolen garments, sacraments in the hands of usurpers?... The Church performs the sacrament and, in her, Christ the high priest... It may not follow, perhaps, that we should say that schismatics are still in the Church. In any case this would not be precise and sounds equivocal. It would be truer to say that the Church continues to work in the schisms in expectation of that mysterious hour when the stubborn heart will be melted in the warmth of God’s prevenient grace, when the will and thirst for communality and unity will finally burst into flame. The ‘validity’ of sacraments among schismatics is the mysterious guarantee of their return to Catholic plenitude and unity.”

This article has demonstrated something entirely simple. The Church is not in error, the Church continues to speak with the voice of truth, and in no way compromises itself through its methods

of reception. Converts have nothing to fear from their priests who rightly implore them to be received from their traditions through the proper rites, and anyone coming from Latin or non-Chalcedonian Christianity would be right to question a priest who absolutely insists that what they had received in their church was “invalid.”

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Published November 22, 2021