

The Benefits of the Application of the Principle of *oikonomia* in the Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and other Christian Churches

MONICA ELENA HERGHELEGIU

Several pan-orthodox conferences of the 20th century (Rhodes, Chambesy) drew attention to the necessity of reactivating the principle of oikonomia. The fundamental meaning of oikonomia – where it goes beyond the strict interpretation of the canons – is to emphasise the obligation of church leaders (mostly bishops) to decide ecclesiastical questions in accordance with the constructive goals of the laws themselves, the Divine plan of God for the salvation of the world. The application of this principle in sacramental issues is approached: the recognition of the baptism or the holy orders of other confessions, the approval of inter-confessional marriages or intercommunion. The article ends with an addenda which presents the document of the Russian Orthodox Church “The Basic Principles of the Attitude of the Russian Orthodox Church to Other Christian Confessions” as an example of a model of inter-confessional dialogue dominated by the strict application of legal norms.

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In recent years the problem of achieving sacramental communion between Christians belonging to different churches and confessions has grown in importance. Ecumenical dialogues have become more important in a world in which Christianity seeks to present itself as a unitary, steadily growing spiritual force rather than a belief divided into different groupings which question each other's sense of existence.

Especially now, at a time of closer contacts between the Christian Churches and the opening of the borders between religions, practical issues of how to relate to one another continue to arise. Although inter-confessional marriages are no longer a novelty, the debate continues on such issues as mutual recognition of baptism, inter-communion at the marriage ceremony or the partaking of each other's sacraments. While the Roman Catholic Church and some Protestant Churches have reached agreements on the recognition of baptism or almost unconditional approval of mixed marriages, the Orthodox Churches are still struggling with these arguments claiming that the canonical tradition does not permit them to be flexible in sacramental matters.

The biggest problem of Orthodoxy today is that it lacks a modern and contemporary reflection on theological matters. Every autocephalous Orthodox Church develops its own norms and statutes but a unitary