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***OIKONOMIA AND AKRIBEIA*
IN THE CANONICAL TRADITION OF
THE ORTHODOX CHURCH**

PhD Thesis Summary

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PhD Thesis Summary

The issue of church *akribeia* and *oikonomia* is a fundamental theme of Orthodox canon law. *Akribeia* and *oikonomia* are the two ends of the spectrum between which the work of the Church takes place, both towards its own members and towards the Christians outside it. The two fundamental principles of orthodox canon law are related to the divine plan of *salvation*, discovered and accomplished through the incarnation of the Savior Jesus Christ. By applying *akribeia* and *oikonomia*, the Church pursues the same goal, namely *the salvation of believers*.

Regarding the application of canons, the Orthodox Church is guided by two fundamental canonical principles: *akribeia* (gr. *Ἀκρίβεια*-accuracy, precision, rigor, strictness, severity) and *oikonomia* (gr. *Οἰκονομία*-administration, exception, dispensation, derogation, accommodation). On the one hand, the principle of canonical acrimony implies strict observance and rigorous application by the Church of the prescriptions established by the canons. On the other hand, the practice of church *oikonomia* involves a decrease in the rigor of canonical provisions or even the suspension of their application by the church authority, depending on the interest of the Church and that of the faithful. The principle of *oikonomia* is based on the fact that church law considers laws as prescriptions that the church authority can apply, depending on the circumstances, either with indulgence or harshness. Using *oikonomia*, the Church can "sweeten" the severity (*akribeia*) of canonical prescriptions or even suspend the application of canons for certain believers, but only in exceptional circumstances and only for blessed reasons. The application of the church *oikonomia* never implies the abrogation of canons and implicitly the violation of *akribeia*. In short, the church *oikonomia* expresses the benevolent attitude of the church authority both towards the members of the

Church who violate its provisions and towards the Christians outside it who want to become members of the Church.

The choice of the doctoral research topic is based on two reasons. First of all, the subject is a topical one. *Akribeia* and the church *oikonomia* are two fundamental canonical principles.

Nowadays, *oikonomia* is a term commonly used in the practice of the Orthodox Church. *Oikonomia* is an effective tool that the Church uses today widely in worship (the administration of the Holy Sacraments), in missionary and pastoral activity, as well as in ecumenical dialogue with various Christian denominations, in order to approach their teachings of faith. Thus, the Orthodox Church has at hand a unique, dynamic tool from a pastoral and legal perspective, which can be used to solve problems between norm and practical life. The second reason that determines me to approach this topic is purely professional. I am fully aware that deepening the issue of *akrabeia* and *oikonomia* is of real use to me in the pastoral activity I carry out within the parish.

The issue of church *akrabeia* and *oikonomia* has been the subject of numerous works in the literature abroad. The subject was approached both by Orthodox theologians, especially by Greeks, and by Roman Catholic theologians. In the attached bibliography we have selectively mentioned the most important works that address the issue of church *akrabeia* and *oikonomia*. Among them are the monographs of H. Alivizatos¹, and that of the Archbishop of Athens, Hieronimos Kotsonis.² In addition to these monographs, we mention

¹ H. Alivizatos, *Hê Oikonomia kata ton kanonikon dikaion tês Orthodoxou Ekklêsias*, Athens, 1949.

² Jérôme Kotsonis, *Problèmes de l'Économie ecclésiastique*, traduction française par l'Archimandrite Pierre Dumont, O.S.B. (coll. Recherches et synthèses, section de dogme, II), Éditions J. Duculot, S. A., Gembloux, 1971.

the articles written by Bishop Aristarchos of Xenoupolis³, Panteleimon Rodopoulos⁴, Dimitrios Salachas⁵. Roman Catholic theologians approached the concept of *oikonomia* in Byzantine canon law, as well as the evolution of the doctrine of church *oikonomia*, from its origins until the 11th century; these are the articles of Kamiel Duchatelez⁶, Pierre Raï⁷, Gilbert Dagron⁸, Heinz Ohme⁹. There are also more recent works that approach from a theological perspective the teachings about *oikonomia* and its application in the cult of the Church; among these we mention the articles of F. J. Thomson¹⁰, Kamiel Duchatelez¹¹, Pierre L'Huillier¹², Pierre Raï¹³, Carolina Cupane¹⁴, A. de Halleux¹⁵ etc.

³ Aristarchos, Bishop of Xenoupolis, „The notion of Economy in the Greek Orthodox Church”, in *Eis mñmhn Mhtropolítou Ikoníou Iakóbou (Stefanídou)*, Athína, 1984, p. 117-131.

⁴ Panteleimon Rodopoulos, „Oikonomia nach Orthodoxem Kirchenrecht”, in Παντελεήμονος Ροδοπούλου (Μητροπ. Τυρολόης καὶ Σερεντίου), *Μελέται Α΄, Κανονικά-Ποιμαντικά-Λειτουργικά-Οικουμενικά-Διάφορα*, Θεσσαλονίκη, 1993, p. 229-240.

⁵ Dimitrios Salachas, „Il principio di ‚oikonomia‘ e di ‚akribeia‘ nella Chiesa Ortodossa Greca odierna”, in *Nicolaus*, 4 (1976), p. 301-340.

⁶ Kamiel Duchatelez, „La notion d'économie et des richesses théologiques” in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique*, 92 (1970), p. 267-292.

⁷ Pierre Raï, „L'Économie dans le droit canonique byzantin des origines jusqu'au XIe siècle. Recherches historiques et canoniques”, in *Istina*, 3 (1973), p. 260-326.

⁸ Gilbert Dagron, „La règle et l'exception. Analyse de la notion d'économie”, in Dieter Simon (ed.), *Religiöse Devianz. Untersuchungen zu sozialen, rechtlichen und theologischen Reaktionen auf religiöse Abweichung im westlichen und östlichen Mittelalter*, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt am Main, 1990, p. 1-18.

⁹ Heinz Ohme, „Oikonomia im monenergetische-monotheletischen Streit”, in *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum*, 12 (2008), p. 308-343.

¹⁰ F. J. Thomson, „Economy: An Examination of the Various Theories of Economy Held within the Orthodox Church, with Special Reference to the Ecumenical Recognition of the Validity of non-Orthodox Sacraments” in *Journal of Theological Studies*, 16 (1965), p. 368-420.

¹¹ Kamiel Duchatelez, „L'économie baptismale dans l'Église Orthodoxe”, in *Istina* 16 (1971), p. 13-36; Kamiel Duchatelez, „Le principe de l'économie baptismale dans l'antiquité chrétienne”, in *Istina*, 18 (1973), p. 327-358; Kamiel Duchatelez, „L'économie dans l'Église Orthodoxe”, in *Irénikon*, 66; 2 (1973), p. 198-206.

¹² Pierre L'Huillier, „L'économie dans la tradition de l'Église Orthodoxe”, in *Jahrbuch der Gessellschaft für das Recht der Ostkirchen* 6 (1983), p. 19-38.

¹³ Pierre Raï, „L'économie chez les Orthodoxes depuis 1755” in *Istina*, 3 (1973), p. 359-368.

¹⁴ Carolina Cupane, „Appunti per uno studio dell' oikonomia ecclesiastica a Bisanzio”, in *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik*, 38 (1988), p. 53-73.

Romanian theologians were also concerned with the issue of church *oikonomia*. The first studies that approach the church *oikonomia* in relation to church law belong to Gheorghe Cronț¹⁶. Isidor Todoran also gives a presentation on the notion of *oikonomia* and a historical look at the use of *oikonomia* in the life of the Church. The author insists on the dogmatic basis of *oikonomia*¹⁷. Father Professor Dumitru Stăniloae devotes a study to church *oikonomia* (*Oikonomia in the Orthodox Church*)¹⁸. The study consists of the following parts: the general notion of *oikonomia* and its relation to *akribeia*, the criteria of *oikonomia* in the history of the Church the two criteria of *oikonomia* reviewed together. Dumitru Stăniloae's study addresses the basic problems of *oikonomia* in the Orthodox Church; the author offers specific answers to the problem of receiving heterodox people into orthodoxy. Father Stăniloae states that in the use of *oikonomia* "love is the dynamic state of maximum and full communicativeness from the one who loves to the one that is loved. Greek theologians claimed that the Church was completely closed within its borders. Instead, Russian theologians claimed that there are no borders of the Church; the boundaries of the Church extend as far as the canonically performed sacraments"¹⁹.

Father Liviu Stan dedicates a study to church *oikonomia* ("*Oikonomia and intercommunion*")²⁰. In his opinion, the church *oikonomia* has its source in

¹⁵ A. de Halleux, „'Oikonomia' in the First Canon of St. Basil”, în *Patristic and Byzantine Review*, 6 (1987), p. 53-64.

¹⁶ Gheorghe Cronț, „Iconomia în dreptul bisericesc ortodox”, în *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, nr. 7-9 (1937), p. 417-448; Gheorghe Cronț, *Dispensa și grațierea în dreptul bisericesc ortodox*, București, 1937, p. 1-72

¹⁷ Pr. prof. Isidor Todoran, „Principiul iconomiei din punct de vedere dogmatic”, în *Studii Teologice*, anul VII (1955), nr. 3-4, p. 139-149

¹⁸ Dumitru Stăniloae, „Iconomia în Biserica Ortodoxă”, în *Ortodoxia*, anul XV (1963), nr. 2, p. 152-186.

¹⁹ Dumitru Stăniloae, „Iconomia în Biserica Ortodoxă”, anul XV (1963), nr. 2, p. 182.

²⁰ Pr. prof. Liviu Stan, „Iconomie și intercomuniune”, în *Ortodoxia*, anul XXII (1970), nr. 1, p. 5-19.

the divine *oikonomia*, both in its dogmatic aspect and in the canonical-disciplinary one. The church *oikonomia* is applied practically out of love for people.

Archimandrite Dr. Chesarie Gheorghescu discusses the Orthodox teaching on church *oikonomia* in his work *Orthodox teachings on divine oikonomia and church oikonomia*, Mănăstirea Dintr-un lemn – jud. Vâlcea, 2001²¹. In his monography, Father Chesarie Gheorghescu capitalizes on the previous Romanian bibliography on *oikonomia*. Last but not least, Iulian Mihai L. Constantinescu, university lecturer at the Faculty of Orthodox Theology in Craiova, elaborated the work *De impedimentis matrimonii. From canonical akribeia to church oikonomia*, (Craiova, 2010); In this paper, the author presents the impediments to marriage, as a Sacrament of the Church and as a legal institution of the state, from an Orthodox perspective. The issue of obstacles or impediments to marriage is treated from the perspective of Orthodox canon law. Iulian Mihai Constantinescu refers to the notions of *akribeia* and *oikonomia* regarding the Holy Sacrament of Marriage.

More recently, the journal Review of Ecumenical Studies devotes a special issue to church *oikonomia*. The magazine groups a series of articles on the subject of church *oikonomia* under the title *Ecumenism Between Akribeia and God`s Economy / Ökumene zwischen Akribeia und Oikonomia*²².

²¹ Lucrarea a fost publicată într-o primă ediție în revista Studii Teologice, anul XXXII (1980), nr. 3-6, p. 297-516.

²² Monica Elena Herghelegiu, „The Benefits of the Application of the Principle of *oikonomia* in the Dialogue between the Orthodox Church and other Christian Churches”, în Review of Ecumenical Studies, 2 (2011); Florian Schuppe, „Seelsorge an den Grenzen der Kirche Die *Oikonomia* als Schlüssel zum Verständnis des orthodoxen ökumenischen Handelns”, în Review of Ecumenical Studies, 2 (2011); Emanuel P. Tăvală, „*Oikonomia* din perspectiva dreptului canonic ortodox”, în Review of Ecumenical Studies, 2 (2011); Constantin Rus, „Canoanele 1 și 47 ale Sfântului Vasile cel Mare și problema *oikonomiei*”, în Review of Ecumenical Studies, 2 (2011).

In conclusion, the presentation of the specialized literature, which is not at all satisfactory, reveals the fact that it is necessary to deepen and update the subject of church *akribeia* and *oikonomia*.

Our research focuses on the issue of church *akribeia* and *oikonomia* in the canonical tradition and practice of the Orthodox Church. The analysis of the concept of *oikonomia* implies its relation to *akribeia*. We aim to achieve the following objectives:

- the meaning and definition of the concept of *akribeia* (*ἀκρίβεια*) in the canonical tradition of the Orthodox Church;
- the meaning, definition and terminology of the concept of *oikonomia* (*οἰκονομία*) in the canonical tradition of the Orthodox Church;
- establishing the types of church *oikonomia*;
- the purpose of church *oikonomia*;
- conditions of application of church *oikonomia*;
- limits and duration of application of church *oikonomia* measures.

Our approach starts from the premise that, in canon law, *akribeia* and *oikonomia* form a dynamic pair of canonical principles that are not mutually exclusive. The analysis of the concept of *oikonomia* involves its relation to *akribeia*. The approach to the problem of church *akribeia* and *oikonomia* involves the use of various research methods, such as: the method of analysis and synthesis, the descriptive method and the explanatory method of the described phenomena, which of course also involves a comparative approach. The study of church *akribeia* and *oikonomia* also implies an interdisciplinary approach, meaning that the two canonical principles will be approached both from a theological perspective and from a historical and philological perspective. In this paper we intend to combine the used research methods and

apply them simultaneously, so that historical expositions do not consist of historical data listed in chronological order, emptied of content and ecclesiological and canonical meaning, but rather of data that contributes to a better understanding of theological realities.

Our approach involves two stages. In the first stage we aim to define the canonical concepts of *akribeia* and *oikonomia*, to specify the origin and evolution of the orthodox teachings about church *oikonomia*. In the second stage, we intend to present the specific way that the principles of *akribeia* and *oikonomia* are applied by the church authority.

Our research is based mainly on the investigation of written sources: the New Testament, patristic and post-patristic writings, epistolary correspondence and collections of canons. Throughout the research I tried to use mainly primary bibliographic sources, historical and canonical sources of Latin or Greek. I have passed all this through the filter of the latest works and studies published in the field, in languages of international circulation, especially regarding the issue of *oikonomia* and *akribeia* within the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church, on the island of Crete, Greece, 2016.

This doctoral paper, which does not claim to be exhaustive, given the fact that it deals with dynamic canonical issues, *oikonomia* and *akribeia*, is structured in five chapters, with length and unitary content.

Thus, the first chapter, entitled "Principles of *oikonomia* and *akribeia* in orthodox theology" is a historical presentation (biblical, patristic and contemporary) of the principles of *oikonomia* and *akribeia*, from the Orthodox point of view. I insisted more on the etymology of words, on their meanings, how these concepts are seen in the Holy Scriptures and in the writings of the Holy Fathers and writers (such as Atticus of Constantinople, Cyril of Alexandria, Eulogius of Alexandria, John VI of Constantinople, Theodore the

Studite, Nicholas Mystikus, etc.), ending, as was natural, with the vision of modern and contemporary authors, Romanian and foreign.

From this synthetic presentation it could be observed, beyond any doubt, that both concepts have a serious biblical-patristic foundation. In other words, the divine *oikonomia* of the Holy Trinity found its practical, human expression in the church *oikonomia* that was applied by the Church from the first days of its historical existence.

The second chapter, entitled "Oikonomia and akribeia in the canonical tradition of the Orthodox Church", examines how the biblical-patristic teaching on *oikonomia* and *akribeia* was transposed into the canonical legislation of the Orthodox Church in the first millennium. These concepts are analyzed in the texts of the canons in the fundamental collection, emphasizing especially those canons, synodal or patristic, which best express the *akribeia* and *oikonomia*, their meaning, application, limits and principles of their application.

It can easily be concluded from this that the holy synods (ecumenical or local), and also the Holy Fathers who composed them, were guided entirely by the word of Scripture, which says that "God does not want the sinner to die, but to return and be alive" (Iezechiel 18, 23).

The next chapter, the third ("The relationship between the principle of *oikonomia* and the principle of *akribeia*"), deals, theoretically and practically, with the way in which the two concepts interact. One can observe a slight disagreement between the different authors in formulating clearly and concisely how the two theoretical concepts can be applied practically. That is why, over time, it was necessary to establish general and special criteria or conditions to guide the church authority in the application of *oikonomia* and *akribeia* in the various concrete cases that would arise. Reference was also made to the ecclesiastical authority allowed to apply these principles, especially *oikonomia*, with emphasis on the role of the diocesan bishop in this regard, especially when

it comes to the application of sanctions for violating canonical and church norms.

In the last part of this chapter we also referred to specific situations, with canonical examples, in which *oikonomia* can, or, on the contrary, cannot be applied. Therefore, it is imperative to know its limits, as well as how it can be applied, especially today, which is why this chapter concludes with an orthodox view of the impact of state civil laws on millenary canonical norms of the Church.

With the fourth chapter ("*Oikonomia* and *akribeia* in the practice of the Orthodox Church") we enter into the practical, concrete sphere of application to church life and that of the faithful, of these two fundamental principles. The most important areas of applicability of these principles were reviewed: the administration of the Holy Sacraments, the receiving of those of other faiths in the Orthodox Church, the issue of mixed marriages (including in the debates of the Holy and Great Synod of the Orthodox Church), the issue of intercommunion in the priesthood life and pastoral practice of the servants of the holy altars etc.

The last chapter, entitled "*Oikonomia* and *akribeia* in the practice of the Orthodox Church" is a synthesis of the opinions of the most representative theologians (in this case, canon writers, but not only), of the Orthodox Churches: Greek (Ch. Andrutsos, H. Alivizatos, I. Kotsonis, I. Zizioulas et al.), Russian (M. Bulgakov, P. Svetlov, N. Zernov, G. Florovsky et al.), Serbian (Nicodim Milaș, Iustin Popovici) and Romanian (Gh. Cronț, D. Stăniloae, L. Stan, Ioan N. Floca), regarding the issue of *akribeia* and *oikonomia*. I noticed that, although easily divided, depending on their personal orientation or the Churches they belong to, their opinions are of real use in shaping a clearer and

more complete picture of what *akribeia* and *oikonomia* represent, not only in their particular works but, by extension, also in the Churches they are a part of.

The exact understanding of these two fundamental canonical concepts, *akribeia* and *oikonomia*, is of real use today, especially in terms of the practical side of church, pastoral, liturgical and, why not, administrative life.

Moreover, through their moderate application, especially of *oikonomia*, wisely and according to the context, the Orthodox Church always remains open to the application of the spirit of meekness, which wants all the lost to return to its bosom. In its historical life, the Church wants nothing more than to apply, to transpose the triune divine *oikonomia* and of the Incarnation of the Lord, into its ecclesial life and that of its faithful, praying constantly, as did our Savior Christ, so in the end "let us all be one" in Him (cf. Ioan 17, 21).

Lately, Orthodox theologians, but not exclusively, have been increasingly interested in the significance of *oikonomia* and *akribeia*, which are an integral part of the canonical tradition of the Ecumenical Orthodox Church. However, the issue of these two principles, or canonical institutions, is not easy to analyze, for reasons that are easy to understand, which refer especially to the definition of these concepts, the way they operate, their limits, etc.

Today, when Western theologians face seemingly unresolved issues, they often turn to the East for inspiration and ask, "Is there no hidden value in the practice of *oikonomia*? Can it help us solve our problems?" They especially consider practical issues, such as "Can *oikonomia* be invoked to solve the problem of communion between divided Christian Churches?" Or, "Can a Church that believes in the apostolic succession of bishops recognize other Churches where there is no such succession?" Further, "When a sacramental marriage fails and there is no hope of restoring the union, can the Church, through *oikonomia*, grant a dispensation to the partners in the first marriage and allow them to enter a second?" Similarly, "If a man and a woman live in a

union that cannot be canonically valid, the Church can accept their repentance and receive them in full at Holy Communion, without asking them to give up their conjugal life? “

This broader approach also includes the present doctoral research, which tried to provide notional and terminological clarifications regarding the two concepts invoked, but also to answer some of the above questions. Thus, in the first part of the research I tried, from a biblical, patristic and canonical point of view, to answer the question "What are *oikonomia* and *akribeia*?". From the start, however, we must eliminate the possibility of any precise definition, but we can provide a description of their functions.

The need for *oikonomia* arises when there is an apparent conflict between the application of the law and the invocation of the Christian spirit, that “spirit of meekness”. For example, an illegal act may have caused a rupture in the life of the community and there is a need to heal the wound to avoid future defiance of the law or another threat of peace or even acts of violence. When the community is attacked, those in charge can indeed act as good *oikonomoi*, messengers of God’s word. They should heal the ecclesial body; they should disarm the threat of revolution with constant gentleness. Such an intervention has its roots in a mysterious power that has its origin in the saving word of God and in the action of the Holy Spirit. *Oikonomoi* are bishops, either in their dioceses or gathered in synods of different levels, provincial, patriarchal and ecumenical, depending on the importance of the problem. Biblical, patristic and synodal sources leave no doubt about the presence of this institution in the Church, nor about the capacity of bishops and synods to use it.

The use of *oikonomia*, however, has well-defined limits. It cannot, for example, go against dogma.

It must also not include the use of wrong means, not even for seemingly blessed purposes. Nor should it be a source of scandal for the ecclesial

community or for a local Church. Within these limits, the intervention should always serve a positive purpose, such as peace within the community, salvation of souls, the spiritual benefit of all involved.

Finally, since the need for *oikonomia* arises from different situations, each use of it is unique. It cannot and must not set a precedent for future action.

Moving further in our research, we concluded that no simplistic approach to the issue of *oikonomia* and *akribeia* is beneficial to this complex issue. The Orthodox Church has always existed according to this principle and has gone through a multitude of historical events in order to reach a proper understanding of *oikonomia*.

What is certain is that most canonists, led by Pierre L'Huillier, found no convincing evidence that *oikonomia* has traditionally meant a derogation from the law, from the *akribeia*. This meant an exception to a general rule, whenever the law itself allowed this exception. Therefore, there was no antinomy between *akribeia*, strict enforcement of the law, and *oikonomia*, prudent enforcement of the same law. In each case, the law, the canonical norm, was enforced.

Modern theory, which has never enjoyed a real consensus, and which, in the alternative application of *akribeia* or *oikonomia*, considers opportunity, is in complete contradiction with the canonical conception of the early Church. In fact, for the early Church, the essential forms of discipline were an intangible legacy, going back to early Christianity. As G. Florovsky observed, the extensive and amorphous theory of *oikonomia* was born in a period of decline in Orthodox theology. That there may be a multitude of opinions among Eastern theologians has been proved by the fact that the understanding of the church's authority over *oikonomia* has been questioned from its foundations.

On the other hand, the sources of *oikonomia* determination are found, first of all, in the Christian literature of the first eight centuries, before the

seventh and last Ecumenical Synod; secondly, in the attitude, words and actions of the Orthodox Church towards heterodox communities; thirdly, and somewhat restrained, in the attitude of the heterodox churches towards other Churches and Christian communities. Thus, some firm principles appear:

1) *Oikonomia* belongs to the very essence of the Orthodox Church. It is permanent with the permanence of the Church. But it cannot be defined; it is a lived reality, which cannot be reduced to a precise concept. Just as stability and flexibility exist within the Church, so does *oikonomia*. The main purpose of the Church, the salvation of human beings, is unchanging; so is *oikonomia*, which serves the same purpose. But because the Church can adopt a new attitude, for example, today it has an ecumenical dialogue, whereas before it did not, *oikonomia* can also take new forms that respond to the new needs of historical epochs;

2) *Akribeia* belongs to the very essence of the Church, in the same way that *oikonomia* does. *Akribeia* represents a sacred accuracy, even strict, in obedience to the law. It is practiced mainly in the monastic environment, such as the Holy Athos Mountain, where it is considered the expression of the purest love. Both are authentic manifestations of the Orthodox tradition; they balance each other. One cannot exist without the other;

3) *Oikonomia* must never ignore dogmas. But we should distinguish between dogma and its interpretation. In the case of interpretation, *oikonomia* can be used. There are classic examples in this regard. Great Athanasius tolerated the use of the Latin term "person" in Trinitarian theology, despite the fact that he considered it an incorrect translation of the hypostasis. Saint Basil the Great refrained from insisting on the divinity of the Holy Spirit in order to save his Church from the unwanted interferences of secular authority and also out of compassion for those with a weak faith.

Oikonomia can be used in ecumenical dialogue. Even the Church of Rome has used it recently, not insisting on the insertion of the addition "Filioque" in the Creed.

The problem of intercommunion in the Eucharist could serve as an illustration of the right and wrong use of *oikonomia* in matters involving dogma. Today, as we presented in this research, three opinions are proposed:

a) Intercommunion is legitimate only if there is full communion between the Churches. One such position is certainly *akribeia*: it is the exact enforcement of Orthodox traditions; it is theologically grounded;

b) There should be intercommunion or open communion between the Christian Churches as a means of obtaining unity. Such a position is not the correct application of *oikonomia*, because there is no unity between the Churches. He tries to introduce intercommunion under false pretenses; this is like inserting banknotes without the support of the value of gold, inflation will occur over time. Accepting intercommunion before union would violate the teaching of the faith, which says that there should be communion in one Church, not in divided Churches;

c) Intercommunion is allowed in prayer and liturgical practices, in mutual recognition of the validity of the Sacraments. Indeed, it has become quite common practice, especially in ecumenical assemblies, for Orthodox and heterodox Christians to pray together, even on liturgical holidays, with the exception of common communion. As for the Sacraments, their validity can be mutually recognized through *oikonomia*, but recognizing their validity is not the same as sharing them with a heterodox community..

Another important conclusion of our research is that *oikonomia* is not the same as dispensation in Latin theology. It is more theological, less legal.

Moreover, it is beyond any doubt that *oikonomia* is a theological reality right in the heart of the Church, rooted in the living power of the Spirit, always present in the ecclesial community.

It is also interesting to note that the attention of Orthodox theologians has spontaneously shifted from the abstract idea of *oikonomia* to the concrete person of the "*oikonomos*", that is, the one called to apply *oikonomia*; in other words, they continued to bring a person to the center of attention. For them, the central question was „What can *oikonomoi* do?”

The *oikonomos* is always part of the episcopal body; he may act individually within his territorial jurisdiction or he may act collegially as a member of a synod. Synods exist at different levels depending on the organization of the Church.

The task of the *oikonomos* is to take care of God's "house"; this is *oikonomia* in a broad sense. An act of *oikonomia*, in a strict and specific sense, is always determined by an extraordinary situation, by a conflict that requires a solution, by a wound that needs healing. It is an extraordinary gesture in the responsibility of taking care of a household. However, it has its limits: it must never violate dogmas. Therefore, before the *oikonomos* can act, he must determine whether or not he is free to do so. He can do nothing against the revealed truth. Another limitation in the use of *oikonomia* is that it must be balanced by the practice of *akribeia*. There is no specific rule on how to achieve this balance, but it must exist.

As the Church evolves throughout history, so does the practice of *oikonomia*, depending on the context. A precise definition would constrain it; openness is an essential quality of it. A definition is impossible, but with the help of modern cognitive theories, we can perhaps go further and better understand the nature of the *oikonomos*' power: his horizons always extend beyond the limits of the law. He seeks to understand the purpose of the Church,

more precisely, the purpose of God through and in the Church. Keeping his attention on the Savior of the world, the *oikonomos* also tries to save those lost from the flock. He operates from a certain creative intuition.

I have also shown that *oikonomia* thus springs from the contemplation of God's saving power. Since the understanding of this power cannot be exhausted, neither can the conceptual limits of *oikonomia* be determined. The church cannot comprehend in a definition its own potential for development.

Oikonomia, as understood in the Orthodox Church, does not exist in the Roman Catholic Church. The legal institutions of "epieikeie", "echitate", "dispensare", "sanatio in radice", additional jurisdiction and so on, are not equivalent, not even close, to the economy. They are radically different. They exist and function in the world of laws, never beyond. They are common tools of law and order, although some of them are rarely used. They are perfectly definable; their effect is impeccably predictable. If a personal judgment is required in their application, the person's field of action is limited to determining the facts of the case and applying the law. It must remain within the legal horizon. On the contrary, *oikonomoi* must get out of it, even in the mysterious and sacred world of faith..

Another important result of our research is the clear differentiation between the understanding of *oikonomia* in the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. Although many definitions of *oikonomia* circulate in the Roman Catholic Church, almost none of them can be accepted as representing the complex reality existing in the Orthodox Church. They can be deficient in many ways. For example: a) It does not mention the absolute limitation that the Orthodox do not stop expressing: *oikonomia* should not violate dogma; b) They do not promote the need to balance the use of *oikonomia* with the practice of *akribeia*, as the two make up the life of the Church; c) It focuses on the abstract idea of *oikonomia* and not on the person of

the *oikonomos*, who has the right to represent the Savior beyond any legal description and d) They forget the character of the historical evolution of *oikonomia* and present it as a crystallized legal institution. In any case, a useful *oikonomia* transplant from the Orthodox Church into the Catholic or Protestant community is neither possible nor desirable. Rather, the Orthodox tradition should serve as inspiration for other Christians, first to create a favorable environment for *oikonomia*, then to establish its regulation.

Oikonomia can only flourish if the balances between the spiritual world and the legal world (of the laws) are well designed and correctly arranged. This means that every law, and the legal system as a whole, must be in the service of spirituality and not the other way around. An example can illustrate this concept better than any explanation. Here is the Sacrament: The Son came to find and save the lost. It means that any law concerning the administration of the Sacrament corresponds to the evangelical image. If the laws lead to the opposite, make it difficult to approach the sinner and persuade the sinner to meet harsh conditions before he is forgiven, then it means that something has gone wrong with the evangelical message. This small example is intended to highlight the main problem: an ecclesial community can only practice *oikonomia* if, by proving mercy, it has learned to go beyond the narrow confines of the law. An overwhelming emphasis on the law, giving up the freedom to seek the Sacrament, facilitates an environment in which *oikonomia* can not flourish.

Furthermore, the implementation of *oikonomia* will depend on the continual contemplation of the saving power of God through and in the Church, on our growing understanding of the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. Dogma should not be wronged in this process, but this rule is reversible: whenever there is no dogma, the use of *oikonomia* (in the strict sense, meaning an extraordinary intervention) should not be prevented. To give a small

example again: an iconologist can conclude that the saving power of God can save a sinner (say, a divorced and remarried person), insofar as he can be received again in the communion of the Eucharist. After all, the Savior who came to forgive sins may forget the union of which only sad memories remain. There is no limit to His saving power, and the *oikonomos* called to apply *oikonomia* can interpret it on a case-by-case basis. It is obvious that Orthodox thinking moves directly into the heart of the saving mystery and is not afraid of the collapse of the law, which is destined for ordinary circumstances. *Akribeia* is there to support the legal system, *oikonomia* has the courage to go beyond it.

In conclusion, perhaps we can say this: *oikonomia* is not a precise norm of action, as apparently similar Latin institutions are. It is a way of life in the Christian community. It is based on an increasingly contemplative understanding of God's saving power. Logically speaking, as long as there are still things to be learned about this power, *oikonomia* cannot and should not be defined.

At the end of this research, we could say succinctly that, although the practice of *oikonomia* has been widely adopted in the two millennia of the historical life of the Church, there has never been a canon that defines its content exactly, its mode of operation, its field of application, categories, measurement and limits, because it simply exists and functions as an empirical fact. This shows, among other things, that *oikonomia* is not and should not be defined. If it ever became law, it would transform into law, it would literally become law, and it would no longer be fully the *oikonomia* so adequately announced by its name. Therefore, church *oikonomia* functions most effectively in the daily pastoral deaconship of the Church, extending the incarnation of the Son of God for the reception and salvation of man. The need for *oikonomia* and philanthropy is adopted according to considerations relating to part of the needs of the human person, and on the other hand, to the

“welfare” of the Church. Regarding the relationship between *akribeia* and *oikonomia*, it is clear that *oikonomia* is understood only in relation to *akribeia*, on which it is based to coexist, to exist and to be exercised. In this sense, *oikonomia* is not a hermeneutic method. Therefore, the criterion of any attempt to apply *oikonomia* in the Church is a complete knowledge of its full attribute. In reality, *oikonomia* is adopted to preserve *akribeia* and its truth. Finally, without relativizing the ontological absolute (the *akribeia*), the Church exercises *oikonomia* according to the circumstances and from case to case, and this, always in the perspective of *akribeia* and never the other way around.

Naturally, in the last chapter, I could not present everything that is happening currently in terms of the application of *oikonomia*, not only because of the extremely numerous existing cases, but also because of the inherent nature of *oikonomia*. Since church *oikonomia* is an expression of the unhindered spirit of Christian freedom, it cannot be exhausted by some described cases, because it would thus lead to a condemnable occasionalism, devoid of any spiritual source and incapable of counterbalancing the Orthodox Church’s attachment to *akribeia* altogether. Indeed, what is specific to the Orthodox Church can be essentially summed up like this: its constant and unchanging attachment to the treasures of Tradition and, at the same time, its flexibility due to *oikonomia*. It is through this, for many, that Orthodoxy that over time has so often faced various extreme situations, sometimes changing its life, without sacrificing a single piece of its eternal and unchanging teaching, forever remaining a pillar and the foundation of truth (cf. I Timothy 3, 15).

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