

CHAPTER TWO

THE MEANING AND NATURE OF THE MYSTERIES (SACRAMENTS)

The word “*Mystery*” (Sacrament) means a hidden and silent Truth, which is revealed through Divine Revelation. This term was introduced into Theological and Liturgical terminology signifying those God-instituted Rites, which comprise the visible aspects of Divine Grace, not merely symbolising it but invisibly and with Supernatural Creative Action transmitting it. Having been instituted by Christ Himself, they have value and Power, being the active means of Divine Grace whereby the old nature corrupted by sin is removed from those who are worthy. They raise the New Creation in Christ by transmitting the Newness of Life in Christ. Thus the Holy Mysteries have invisible Supernatural Powers that inscribe the inexhaustible Saving results in the inner man, Regenerating and causing all those who faithfully, sincerely and honestly approach and participate in them to progress in the New Life.

1. The Meaning of the Term “*Mystery*”

The first meaning of the term “*Mystery*” is derived from the Greek verb “*μύειν*” (meaning “...to close the eyes or the mouth as instruments of transmitting or seeing the hidden things...”) according to which it is “a hidden and Mystic Thing.” During the Roman period the term signified the Militant Oath that soldiers vowed at their Enlistment in the Roman Army and which was generally referred to as the “*Sacramentum*.” In Roman Law the term “*Sacramentum*” means the Covenant that was placed in the temples by those who disputed it.

In Holy Scripture, in both Old and New Testaments, the term is used 45 times. It means the secret Will of God that is related to the Salvation of mankind “...according to the Revelation of the Mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest by the Prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the Commandment of the Everlasting God.”¹ In other cases it refers to a hidden and symbolic institution, such as that of Marriage symbolising the Union of Christ with the Church² or some kind of narration, such as in the case of King Nabuchodonosor³ or a certain symbolic name, such as the Mystery of the Seven Stars mentioned in the Book of Revelation,⁴ or even the Mystery of the name of the great city of Babylon.⁵ In any case, nowhere in Holy Scripture is the term “*Mystery*” used, meaning a Sacred Rite by means of which Supernatural Divine Grace of the Holy Spirit is transmitted through material symbols.

Even up to 4th century Christian writings, the term preserved its classical meaning, signifying something secret, hidden and Sacred. St Ignatios of Antioch proclaimed that the Death of our Lord Jesus Christ is “the *Mystery*” of our Salvation because “...through Him and His Death (which some deny), the *Mystery* through which we came to believe, and because of which we patiently endure, ... we might be found to be Disciples of Jesus Christ, our only

¹ Rom. 16:25-26.

² Ephes. 5:32.

³ Daniel 2:18, 27 and 30.

⁴ Rev. 1:20.

⁵ Rev. 17:5.

Teacher.”⁶ Also in his letter to the Ephesians he wrote: “...now the *Virginit*y of Mary and her giving Birth were hidden from the ruler of this age, as was also the Death of the Lord – three Mysteries to be loudly proclaimed, yet which were accomplished in the Silence of God.”⁷

Tertullian also used the term generally, referring to Christian Teaching as a “Mystery,” especially the Teaching concerning the Holy Trinity as well as the whole Christian Faith and the entire Work of Salvation. (“*Sacramentum Oikonomia*”) Furthermore he spoke of Holy Baptism and Eucharist as Mysteries,⁸ commenting that “...the body is Washed in order to Clean the soul; the body is Anointed in order to Sanctify the soul; the body is Sealed in order to Strengthen the soul; the body is covered by the laying on of the hands in order to Enlighten the soul by the Holy Spirit; the body eats the Flesh and Blood of Christ, in order that the soul would be fed by God.”⁹

St Cyprian used the term “Mystery” (“*Sacramentum*”) in a general meaning, to manifest the different institutions of Christianity, especially those of Baptism, Chrismation, Divine Eucharist, Repentance-Confession and Ordination.¹⁰

2. The External and Internal Aspect of Mysteries

Although the Mystery has an external and perceptible aspect, simultaneously it includes an internal and Supernatural Reality, which is not conceivable or understandable to our physical senses as only through Faith is it accepted. The Mystery is the visible Sign of the invisible Grace of God, which is outpoured upon the Faithful having been instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ whereby each Faithful receives Divine Grace.¹¹ It consists of the natural and the Supernatural.¹² It is the material symbol that upholds the immaterial Grace of God, which works towards the Salvation of man.¹³ Holy Mystery is not restricted to special Ceremonies alone but extends to all Divine Truths of Christian Faith.

St John Chrysostom explained that Divine Mystery is those things that are normally unseen but which, through Faith “...we see differently and we believe differently. This is our Faith about the Mysteries.” And concerning the Truths of Faith, he observed, “...I hear that Christ was Crucified and I admire the Philanthropia; the unbeliever hears and he thinks about the weakness. I hear that He became a servant and I admire the Dominion. He (the unfaithful) hears and thinks about the dishonour. I hear that He died and I am astonished, that He came under Death and was not held but dissolved Death; he (the unfaithful) hears and suspects weakness. Differently am I and the unbeliever disposed about these.” Particularly with regard to Sacred Rites that are the ways of the Grace, St John Chrysostom

⁶ St. Ignatius, *To Magnesians*, 9, 1, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 95.

⁷ St. Ignatius, *To Ephesians*, 19, 1, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 92.

⁸ Tertullian, *Praescriptione haereticorum*, XX, in migne, *P.L.*, 2, 20. Ibid, *Adversus Praxeam*, II and XXX, in migne, *P.L.*, 2, 180 and 220. Ibid, *De Baptismo*, 13, in migne, *P.L.*, 1, 323. Ibid, *Adversus Marcianem*, IV and XXXIV, in migne, *P.L.*, 2, 442. Ibid, *De resurrectione carne*, C, IX, in migne, *P.L.*, 1, 806. Ibid, *De coron. militiae*, III, in migne, *P.L.*, 2, 79.

⁹ Ibid, *De resurrectione carne*, VIII, in migne, *P.L.*, 2, 852.

¹⁰ St. Cyprian, *Epist.* 70, § 3, in migne, *P.L.*, 3, 1082. Ibid, *Epist.* 73, § 20 and 21, in migne, *P.L.*, 3, (?). Ibid, *De unitate Ecclesiam*, in migne, *P.L.*, 4, 528. Ibid, *de lapsis*, c. 25, in migne, *P.L.*, 4, 500. Ibid, *Epist.* LXIII, § 14, in migne, *P.L.*, 3, (?).

¹¹ Mogilas, A, 99, in Karmeris, *The dogmatics*, p. 635.

¹² Dositheus of Jerusalem, *Confession*, ch 15, p. 39.

¹³ St. Athanasius of Paros, *Epitome*, p. 344, in Jugie, *Theologia*, v. II, p. 14.

noted that “...the unbeliever hears *of the Bath (Baptism) and he thinks simply of water; I do not see only what is seen but the **Cleanliness** of the soul through the Holy Spirit. He (the unbeliever) thinks only of the bath of the body; I **believe** that the soul becomes Clean and Holy ... For I do not judge the events only by their appearance but through the eyes of the mind.*”¹⁴

St Augustine in a similar manner expressed his opinion **by referring to** the Mysteries as “*Sacramentalia.*”¹⁵ He distinguished the internal aspect of the Mysteries from their external aspect, **observing** that the Mystery itself is different **to** that of the Power of the Mystery.¹⁶ Thus the Bread and the Cup of Divine Eucharist are called Mysteries because in them we see other aspects **that are contemplated at the time**, the Fruit **of which** is spiritual.¹⁷ Similarly concerning the Water of Baptism, **which** is visible. It Washes **away the contamination of sin from the body and this Bath signifies whatever is acting within the soul.**¹⁸ Consequently, the external event is different **to** that of the **context** of the Mysteries. Some **aspects** are seen **while** others are thought. Whatever is seen has a **physical aspect whereas** whatever is thought **bears special Fruit.**¹⁹

This combination of **sensual** and material with invisible and spiritual **aspects** within the Mysteries **correspond** completely to the fact that man **consists** of **both matter** and spirit. And as he consists of two elements, body and soul, he receives double Purification: **the spiritual through the invisible aspects and the physical through the body.**²⁰ God wanted to grant His Grace not only invisibly - although this was not impossible for Him to **do because for anything** He Wills He does – but through some visible Signs as well, **thereby assuring His Promises to His Elect.** Because mankind **consists** of two elements, God granted **two methods** of **transmitting** His Divine Grace - through matter and through the Holy Spirit.²¹

St Gregory of Nyssa observed that in Baptism “...*sensible Water is offered to the body...*” whereas “...*upon the soul the invisible Spirit is called to **descend** in an **indescribable manner...***” “...*and the Water cleans the body, whereas the Spirit Seals the soul in order that, through the sprinkling of the heart and the Bathing of the body, we approach God.*” Similarly **at** the Anointing “...*the **visible** myrrh Anoints the body, whereas the Holy and Life-giving Spirit Sanctifies the soul.*”²²

3. Holy Mysteries as Symbols and **Bestowers** of Divine Grace

Thus the Mysteries are **Signs** and Ways, Symbols and Bestowers of Divine Grace. In these spiritual and Supernatural nature rule **over** the perceptible and material. The Mysteries are perceptible Signs **that** symbolise the invisible Divine Grace, which is transmitted to the Faithful and which stimulate their Faith assuring the **Truthfulness** of **Divine Promises.** Hence

¹⁴ St. John Chrysostom, *To 1 Corinthians*, Homily 7, § 1, in Migne, *P.G.*, 61, 55-56.

¹⁵ St. Augustine, *De catech. Rudibus*, § 50, in migne, *P.L.*, 40, 344-345. Ibid, *Sermo* 227, in migne, *P.L.*, 38, 1099-1100. Ibid, *Sermo*, 228, § 3, in migne, *P.L.*, 38, 1102.

¹⁶ Ibid, *In Johannis evangelium. Tractatus* XXVI, § 11, in migne, *P.L.*, 35, 1011.

¹⁷ Ibid, *Sermo* 272, in migne, *P.L.*, 38, 1246.

¹⁸ St. Augustine, *In epistola Joannis ad Parthos. Tractatus* VI, § 11, in migne, *P.L.*, 35, 2026.

¹⁹ Ibid, *Sermo* 272, in migne, *P.L.*, 38, 1247.

²⁰ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*, III, § 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 429.

²¹ Kritopoulos, in Karmeris, *The dogmatics*, v. II, p. 524.

²² St. Gregory of Nyssa, *To the day of the Lights*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 46, 581. St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*, XXI, § 3, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 1092.

the “...*Bath through Water...*” can be characterised as being symbolic “... of the Washing of the soul, which cleans every stain of evil.” Furthermore, in Baptism we symbolically “... insinuate the three day Burial of Christ...” and being Baptised “...we do not die in reality, nor we are buried, nor we are really raised having been crucified, but the imitation is in image.” It can be said of the transmission of the Body and Blood of our Lord in the Divine Eucharist that “...in the type of the bread the Body is offered to you and in the type of the wine is the Blood of Christ is given to you...” “...in order that in the different elements you partake of the Body and Blood of Christ, becoming of the same Body and the same Blood with Him.”²³

Considering that the elements that are used in the Holy Mysteries remain unchanged in their nature, even after the Blessing and Perfection of Divine Mystery, we must not be surprised when the bread used in the Divine Eucharist is referred to, especially before its Consecration, as the “...*Image of the Body of the Only Begotten...*” and be assured that indeed “...*this Bread is the Image of the Holy Body...*”²⁴ or that the elements used for the Consecration are called “...*antitypes of the Body and Blood of Christ...*”²⁵ However, even after the Consecration we hear some Holy Fathers stating that “...we are Commanded to eat not bread and wine but the antitype of the Body and Blood of Christ...”²⁶ and they generally speak of “...*antitypes of the precious Body and Blood...*”²⁷

The Mysteries are real ways, active bestowers and channels of Divine Grace, through which and by which it is transmitted to those who partake of it. They are the Mysterious Energies²⁸ and Actions of God within the Church for the Salvation of the world.

St John Chrysostom proclaimed that “...*Christ did not deliver us anything material but through material things, He gave us the spiritual.*” Referring specifically to Holy Baptism he observed that “...*through perceptible thing the Gift is offered, but the content is spiritual, the Birth and the Rebirth, in other words the Regeneration.*” Emphasising the necessity by which the spiritual was combined with the perceptible, he added “...*if you were bodiless, they would have been delivered to you naked; but, because the soul is engaged with the body, the spiritual are delivered to you through perceptible things.*”²⁹

The previously mentioned Holy Fathers used the terms “type” and “antitype” to clarify their opinions and exalt, especially the internal aspect and Supernatural Attributes of the Holy Mysteries. Thus, St Cyril of Jerusalem, concerning the bread and wine used in Divine Eucharist, stressed that it is prohibited for anyone to comment on the flavour or quality of the bread and wine because they “...*are the Body and Blood of Christ according to the Despotical Decision...*” by which we become of “...*the same Body and the same Blood...*” of Christ. We should never judge by “... *the taste ...*” but the Faith must inform us “...*without any hesitation...*” that we are deeply honoured to received “...*the Body and Blood of Christ.*” In addition, he literally and clearly proclaimed that the Water of Holy Baptism, “...*the simple water, receives the Power of Sanctification by the Invocation of the Holy Spirit and Christ.*” Therefore he urged all who would be Baptised to be careful “...*when they descend into the*

²³ Origen, *To John VI*, § 17, in Migne, *P.G.*, 14, 257. St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis Mystagogia*, II, §§ 4 and 5, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 1081. Ibid, *Catechesis Mystagogia*, IV, § 3, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 1100.

²⁴ Report of Serapion, in Rauschen, *Fiorilegium*, p. 29.

²⁵ In the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil, the Great, before the consecration.

²⁶ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis Mystagogia*, V, § 20, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 1124.

²⁷ St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Homily 8, To his sister Gorgonia*, § 18, in Migne, *P.G.*, 35, 809. *Apostolic Diatagae*, V, 14, 7, in *B*, v. 2, p. 85; VI, 30, 2, *B*, v. 2, p. 116; VII, 25, 4, *B*, v. 2, p. 125.

²⁸ St. Irenaeus, *Heresies*, book II, ch. 30, § 7, in Migne, *P.G.*, 7, 820. Cf. Ibid, in Hadjephraimides, pp. 177-178.

²⁹ St. John Chrysostom, *To Matthew*, Homily 82, § 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 58, 743.

Water...” **not to pay attention** “...to the simple water but to the Action of the Holy Spirit...” **from which they receive** their Salvation, “...for without both it is impossible to be Perfected.” **With regard to** the Anointing of Holy Chrismation, he observed that “...as the Bread of Eucharist after the Invocation of the Holy Spirit is **no longer** simply bread but the Body of Christ...” “...likewise the Holy Myrrh is not simply myrrh, neither should anyone **consider** it as something common with invocation, but a Charisma of Christ...” **that** through the Presence “...of the Holy Spirit becomes energetic.”³⁰

St Serapion **speaking of** the “...likeness of the Body of the only Begotten...” during the consecration at the time of the invocation, **requested** “...the bread to become the Body of the Word...” and “...the cup the Blood of the Truth...”, so that “...all those who have communion to receive the medicine of life.”³¹

St. Gregory of Nyssa concerning the changes **that** take place in the Holy Mysteries and the rest of the ecclesiastic ceremonies through the Action of the Holy Spirit observed that in Baptism “...the water does not grant the benefit, but the command of God and the invocation of the Spirit.” “For this reason do not disregard the Divine bath, neither consider it as something common because of the use of the water.” Referring to the rest of the Holy Mysteries he **stressed** that “the Bread” of the Eucharist before it is Sanctified “is previously common bread, but when he celebrates this Mystery it is said to have become the Body of Christ.” The same refers for the “Mystical Oil” and for “the wine.” “Being small in value before the blessing, after the sanctification by the Spirit each one acts invisibly.” He emphasized the same regarding Ordination. The “...one who was yesterday alone becomes leader of many, president, teacher of piety, celebrant of Mysteries...” “...according to the appearance he exists as he was...” but “...through some kind of invisible power and Grace his soul is transfigured to the better.”³²

4. The internal side of the Holy Mysteries.

The Roman Catholics distinguished the external side of the Mysteries into two parts, that of “matter” and “form”.³³ These terms were unknown in the ancient and united **Orthodox** Church. The Orthodox Church **regards** these scholastic terms as unnecessary and prefers to uphold the terms “visible” or “external” or “natural”. The Mysteries include spiritual acts and conditions, as well as essential words of consecration **that** instituted the Mysteries³⁴.

Concerning the internal and invisible side of the Mystery it must be noted, that all the Holy Mysteries offer to those who partake of them the sanctifying Grace of the Holy Spirit, which either regenerates them and strengthens them in the new life in Christ (Baptism, Chrismation), either nourishes and gives life to them through their union with Christ (Divine Eucharist), either offers to them the healing of the wounds of their souls and bodies (Repentance, Unction), either making them capable and strengthening them to serve in the

³⁰ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis Mystagogia*, III, § 2; and XXI, § 3, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 429 and 1092.

³¹ Report of Serapion, in Rauschen, *Fiorilegium*, p. 30.

³² St. Gregory of Nyssa, *To the day of the Lights*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 46, 581.

³³ Cf. Ott, “Précis”, pp. 458-459. Jugie, v. III, pp. 16 and 33.

³⁴ Androustos, *Dogmatique*, p. 297. *Ibid*, *Symbolique*, p. 289.

various diakonia of the Church (Priesthood), or exalting and sanctifying their union in life (Marriage).³⁵

According to Androutsos, the Mysteries “...are not of the same value, neither of equal necessity.” Thus “...the Eucharist surpasses all the rest and in value and according to its benefits, and together with Baptism is the main of the Mysteries.”³⁶

Mogilas spoke of the Eucharist that “...this Mystery surpasses all the others and benefits more than the others to our salvation.”³⁷

Kritopoulos characterized the three Mysteries, Baptism, Eucharist and Repentance that they are “...in type of the Holy Trinity.” He distinguished these from the other four which are “...mystical ceremonies, which are called by the Church Mysteries, because they incorporate some kind of mystical and spiritual Grace.”³⁸

The Holy Mysteries have their Supernatural Attributes not because of the worthiness of those who officiate them or of those who partake of them. Their holiness and truth derives from Christ Who instituted them.³⁹ Receiving their Supernatural Attribute from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, they have the Divine Grace that characterises or symbolises each one separately and transmits Divine Grace to those who do not resist or oppose to them.

When we say, that the Holy Mysteries contain **Divine** Grace, we do not mean that this **Divine** Grace is contained within them as the water in a container but rather that they are contained within them in power as the result of their cause. Except the **Holy** Mystery of the Divine Eucharist, in which the change of the used elements – bread and wine- takes place in reality. The Mysteries are instruments which transmit the **Divine** Grace of God to those who partake of them, as this is manifested by Holy Scriptures by the use of the terms “of” and “through”. Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, taught us saying: “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”⁴⁰ St Paul **emphasied** “...not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,”⁴¹ and he added “...that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word.”⁴² Elsewhere it is assured “...that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given...”⁴³ to those who were Baptised and transmit “...the gift of God...” – the charisma of the *Diakonia* - to St Timothy “...through the laying on of, the hands...”⁴⁴ of St Paul. The Mysteries are the instruments and **channels** through which the Divine Grace of God is **granted** and transmitted to the faithful.

³⁵ Cf. Scheeben, *Les Mystères*, p. 576.

³⁶ Androutsos, *Symbolique*, p. 298.

³⁷ Mogilas, A, 106, in Karmeris, *The dogmatics*, v. II, p. 638.

³⁸ Kritopoulos, in Karmeris, *The dogmatics*, v. II, p. 525.

³⁹ St. Augustine, in migne, *P.L.*, 43, 559.

⁴⁰ John 3:5.

⁴¹ Tit. 3:5.

⁴² Ephes. 5:26.

⁴³ Acts 8:18.

⁴⁴ 2 Tim. 1:6.

St. John Chrysostom concerning Baptism observed that in Baptism “...the water becomes the childbirth to him who is being born. As the womb is to the embryo, likewise the water to the faithful; for in the water he is fashioned and formed.”⁴⁵

St. Cyril of Alexandria spoke of the water in Baptism that “...as the water which is poured into the boiler through the flames of the fire reveals its power, likewise through the energy of the Spirit the perceptible water is changed to some kind of Divine and unspeakable power, and sanctifies those who enter in it.”⁴⁶

St. Cyril of Jerusalem assured that the Myrrh of Holy Chrismation “...as the bread of the Eucharist after the invocation of the Holy Spirit, it is not anymore simply bread, but the body of Christ, likewise and this holy myrrh is not anymore simple, neither should anyone say that it is something common with invocation; but that it is Christ’s gift, and the presence of the Holy Spirit, who becomes active.”⁴⁷

In relation to the way of the dwelling and transmission of the Divine Grace in the Divine Mysteries one must never forget the image, which our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ used concerning the action of the Holy Spirit saying: “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”⁴⁸ In other words “...as the wind cannot be seen, although it gives a sound...” likewise and “...even more the action of the Spirit cannot fall under the laws of nature, nor to the rules of bodily birth, nor to any of such things.”⁴⁹

Consequently, the ways by which the Divine Grace is transmitted within the Divine Mysteries remains inconceivable, unspoken and always a mysterious Mystery to all intellectual.

God Himself Acts in the Holy Mysteries transmitting His Divine Grace bringing an essential change to the receiving soul. The power and result of the Mystery derives not from any human factor but from its Divine Institution and Power. The Holy Mysteries have their perfection not in their use but even before their use. Neither are they perfected because of the faith of the faithful.⁵⁰ To receive the Gifts of the Holy Mysteries it is required to have faith as an indispensable pre-requirement but neither the faith, the good will nor the devotion of the partaker is the cause of the Gift and Grace of God within the Mystery. The Mystery has within it and from it the Supernatural Power and Grace to Act either way for the Salvation of those who with faith and piety receive it or for the condemnation of those who with ungodliness approach it.

This validity and effectiveness of the Holy Mysteries is proclaimed by the Orthodox Church, according to the ancient practice of offering these even to infants who enjoy the same Gifts and Charismata regardless of their understanding and faith as they do not resist or oppose the Grace. So, the Grace of God is offered not because of the work of the Celebrant or of the one who partakes of it (*ex opera operantis*), but from its own Energy, from the Power within it (*ex opera operato*), through the exact work of the Mystery itself as the

⁴⁵ St. John Chrysostom, *To John*, Homily 26, § 1, in Migne, *P.G.*, 59, 153.

⁴⁶ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *To John*, book II, 1, in Migne, *P.G.*, 73, 245.

⁴⁷ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis Mystagogia*, III, § 3, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 1092.

⁴⁸ John 3:8.

⁴⁹ St. John Chrysostom, *To John*, Homily 26, in Migne, *P.G.*, 59, 155.

⁵⁰ Dositheus of Jerusalem, *Confession*, Term XV, in Karmeris, *The dogmatics*, v. II, p. 758.

instrument of Divine Grace.⁵¹ It is true that these terms used by the Scholastics remained unknown to the Orthodox Theology of the Eastern Orthodox Church to such extent that some Orthodox Theologians rejected this teaching.⁵²

5. The Indelible Character of Divine Grace

With regard to the effectiveness of the Divine Mysteries and their results upon those who partake of them, the belief of the Roman Catholic Church concerning the indelible character of the three main Mysteries of Baptism, Chrismation and Priesthood, **is that they cannot be repeated.**⁵³ **However,** the term “*character indelebilis*” (“*indelible character*”) is not found in the writings of the Greek Fathers and is considered to have no foundation in either Holy Scripture or in Holy Tradition and therefore they are considered only as theological **terms.**⁵⁴

The Greek Fathers do not use the term “*character*” but speak of Baptism as the “*Holy Seal indelible*” **and** “*Mystical Seal*” through which the one who is Baptised becomes known to the Master and is numbered **amongst** “...*the holy and logic flock of Christ...*” and “...*is sealed with the Seal made without hands...*” and “...*Seal unbreakable.*”⁵⁵

Clement the Alexandrian used the example of the image and seal on coins, as well as the seal which is **branded upon** animals displaying “*the owner*” and from this analogy he declared that “... *the faithful soul, which has received the Seal, carries the stigmata of Christ.*”⁵⁶

The *Shepherd of Hermas* mentions “*the Seal*”⁵⁷ which when one “*receives*” it, “*he lays aside his deadness and receives life.*”⁵⁸ “*It was necessary, he said, for them to come up through water in order to be made alive, for otherwise they could not enter the Kingdom of God, unless they laid aside the deadness of their former life. So even those who had fallen asleep received the seal of the Son of God and entered the Kingdom of God. For before a man, he said, bears the Name of the Son of God, he is dead, but when he receives the seal, he lays aside his deadness and receives life. The seal, therefore, is the water; so they go down into the water dead and they come up alive. Thus this seal was proclaimed to them as well, and they made use of it in order that they might enter the Kingdom of God.*”⁵⁹

In the Apocrypha “*Acts of Paul and Thecla,*” St Paul speaks to St Thecla about future temptations and she responded **by** asking to be given “*the Seal*” so that the tempters **would** not touch her. St Paul advised her to have patience, assuring her that she **would** receive “*the water.*”⁶⁰

⁵¹ Trempeles, *Dogmatique*, v. III, p. 23.

⁵² Androutsos, *Dogmatique*, p. 312.

⁵³ Denzinger 695, in Leeming, *Principles*, pp. 134, 136-139.

⁵⁴ Androutsos, *Dogmatique*, p. 314. Ibid, *Symbolique*, p. 297. Dyobouniotes, *The Mysteries*, p. 26. Dositheus of Jerusalem, *Confession*, Term XVI, in Karmeris, *The dogmatics*, v. II, p. 760.

⁵⁵ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Pre-catechesis*, §§ 16 and 17; Ibid, *Catechesis*, I, § 2, in Migne, 33, 360, 365 and 372. St. Basil, *To Baptism*, § 5, in Migne, *P.G.*, 31, 433. *Apostolic Orders*, III, § 6, in Migne, 1, 797. Leeming, *Principles*, p. 155.

⁵⁶ Clement the Alexandrian, *Epistles* 86, in Migne, *P.G.*, 9, 697.

⁵⁷ *Shepherd of Hermas*, Parable 9, 16, 4, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 276.

⁵⁸ Ibid, Parable, 9, 16, 3, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 276.

⁵⁹ Ibid, Parable, 9, 16, 2-4, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 276.

⁶⁰ *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, in Leeming, *Principles*, p. 162.

St Basil raised the question of how could an Angel claim us and how could he separate us from the enemies “...if he does not recognize the Seal? How can you say that I am of God without bearing the characteristics?” He responded: “The unsealed treasure is easy for the thieves; the unsealed sheep without danger can be attacked.”⁶¹

St Gregory the Theologian of Nazianzus observed that “...the sealed sheep is not an easy game, the unsealed is susceptible to thieves.”⁶²

St John Chrysostom, using the image of the seal of the soldier, observed that “As the soldiers are sealed, likewise the faithful receive the Spirit; even if he is a deserter, he is made known to all.” By means of the last sentence he proclaimed the indelible character of the Seal since even after a Christian’s desertion he is openly known as a Christian. Elsewhere the same Holy Father observed that the Orthodox Christians received the indelible character of the Seal in Baptism “...as sons in the Spirit.”⁶³

St Athanasius the Great of Alexandria commented that “...Chrismation is called Seal and is from the Holy Spirit ... The Seal imprints the Son on our souls, as though we have the form of Christ, as the Apostle says; ‘My little children for whom I labour in birth again until Christ is formed in you.’^{64,65}

St Paul also proclaimed: “For as many of you as were Baptised into Christ have put on Christ.”⁶⁶ “For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His Resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.”⁶⁷

St Cyril of Jerusalem, referring to the newly Illuminated said that they were “...Baptised into Christ and having vested Christ they became of the same image of the Son of God ... partaking of Christ we are called Christs.”⁶⁸

The terms “to seal” and “seal” are used. Even in the Service the celebrant invokes the words: “Seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit. Amen.” The use of this invocation is believed to be from the “Catecheses” of St Cyril of Jerusalem who taught that after Baptism “...the Seal was given for the communion of the Holy Spirit...” when “...the Holy Myrrh... is anointed upon the forehead and the other parts of the body...” of the newly Illuminated who “...become the anointed ones receiving the antitype of the Holy Spirit, because they are images of Christ.”⁶⁹

Parallel to this, the “Euchologion” of St Serapion refers to the anointing of the newly Illuminated with the Holy Myrrh that is called “Seal” which strengthens them to “...remain

⁶¹ St. Basil the Great, *To the holy Baptism*, § 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 31, 433.

⁶² St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Homily 15*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 36, 377.

⁶³ St. John Chrysostom, *To 2 Corinthians*, Homily 3, § 7, in Migne, *P.G.*, 61, 418. Ibid, *To Ephesians*, Homily 2, § 2, in Montfaucon, v. 11, p. 13. Leeming, *Principles*, p. 169.

⁶⁴ Gal. 4:19.

⁶⁵ St. Athanasius the Great, *To Serapion*, Epistle 1, § 23, in Migne, *P.G.*, 26, 584.

⁶⁶ Gal. 3:27.

⁶⁷ Rom. 6:5-6.

⁶⁸ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis Mystagogia*, III, § 1, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 1091.

⁶⁹ Ibid, *Catechesis*, XVIII and XXI, § 1, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 1056, 1088.

solid and unmovable, unharmed and spotless...” having the “...*Seal of Christ on the forehead.*”⁷⁰

The Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church **used** of the term “*Seal*” in relation to the Mysteries of Holy Chrismation and Baptism based upon the following New Testament teachings, according to which: “*In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in Whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit.*”⁷¹ “*Now He Who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, Who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.*”⁷² **St Paul urged** the Christians “...*not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by Whom you were sealed for the Day of Redemption.*”⁷³

In the 2nd century written Apocrypha book entitled “*Acta Barnaba,*” one finds the expression “*sealed of the Bishop.*”⁷⁴ In the *Egyptian Order* (Apostolic Tradition of St Hippolytus) the term “*sealing*” is used on the laying on of hands during the Ordination.⁷⁵ The Bishop “...*seals the head of the candidate thrice.*” During the preparation part of Ordination of a Bishop the confirmation of the election is called “*small seal*” to differentiate from the “*Great Seal*” which is the Ordination itself.⁷⁶ Some Canons of the Ecumenical or Local Councils speak of invalid ordinations,⁷⁷ which refer not to the invalidation of the Ordination, but to the invalid installation of the ordained person. The **Holy** Mystery continues to have its value until the unfrocking of those who performed the illegal ordination. The rights and authorities which derive from Ordination with the jurisdiction and installation to the uncanonical bishopric or parish are the ones which are cancelled and proclaimed invalid.

Generally, it can be said **for** all the Holy Mysteries that within them the **Action** of the Divine Grace is purely creative and that the Holy Spirit is He Who acts and recreates through the **Holy** Mysteries perfecting all those who partake of them without any need of repetition. This refers to all Holy Mysteries in which the Holy Spirit acts with the same **Divine** Power.

The form of the Seal which is imprinted through the Holy Mysteries, as well as how their prints cannot be removed, especially in the Holy Mystery of Baptism, remain **indescribable.**⁷⁸ Who can **possibly** understand the Actions of God? Who can understand with his limited mind the movements of the Holy Spirit? Who can comprehend the **inexpressible** ways of Regeneration and Recreation of the Newness of Life in Christ? Again, one must never forget the Biblical words: “*For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?*”⁷⁹

⁷⁰ *Euchologion*, prayer 16, in Trempelas, *Small Euchologion*, v. I, p. 395. Cf. Didymus The Blind, *About the Holy Trinity*, II, 15, in Migne, *P.G.*, 39, 720.

⁷¹ Ephes. 1:13.

⁷² 2 Corinth. 1:21-22.

⁷³ Ephes. 4:30.

⁷⁴ *Acta Barnabae*, ch. 20, in Bonnet, *Acta apostolorum apocrypha*, v. III, p. 299.

⁷⁵ Publication: Connolly, p. 179.

⁷⁶ Pseudonicodinus, *About the Officialians*, ch. 20, in Migne, 157, 117.

⁷⁷ Canon XVI of the 1st Ecumenical Synod; Canons XIII, XXII and XXIII of the Council in Antioch; Canons LXXVI and XV of the Apostles; Canon VI of the 4th Ecumenical Synod.

⁷⁸ Dyobouniotes, *The Mysteries*, p. 26. Androutsos, *Dogmatique*, p. 314. Trempelas, *Dogmatique*, v. III, p. 29.

⁷⁹ Rom. 11:34.

6. The Necessity of the Holy Mysteries

From all the above the necessity of the Holy Mysteries **is obvious**. They were instituted by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and were assigned as the ways through which the Divine Grace accomplishes the Regeneration and Sanctification of the faithful. It is also evident that the abstention from Holy Communion, Repentance **and all Holy Mysteries** result in the **deprivation** of Salvation. The Lord clearly proclaimed that Baptism is the only way for one to become a member of God's Kingdom. He taught that "...*unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God*"⁸⁰ and concerning Holy Communion He stated that "...*unless you eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood, you have no Life in you.*"⁸¹

The case of the thief on the cross⁸² who entered Paradise without partaking of the Holy Mysteries, the Holy Apostles receiving of the Holy Spirit through the breathing upon them by Christ⁸³ and the descent of the *Paracletus* (Holy Spirit) upon the Disciples on the Day of Pentecost⁸⁴ by which they received the Authority of forgiving or not the sins, were exceptional and unique, necessary for their Regeneration and their fulfillment of their mission. These cases are extraordinary events, which were performed by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The only thing that is clearly revealed is that God can save man in different ways or to strengthen him for a mission to which He calls him. Under no circumstances is it permissible to predetermine where and when and how God should Act.

The differentiation of the Holy Mysteries as "*compulsory*" or "*at will*" (marriage and priesthood) is inaccurate because all the Holy Mysteries are necessary. It **is dependent upon the** free will of the faithful to choose between marriage or celibacy. In the case where we choose Marriage, it is necessary to Sanctify our union through the Holy Mystery of Marriage. The same applies if one wishes to enter the Mystery of Priesthood.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ John 3:5.

⁸¹ John 6:53.

⁸² Luke 23:43.

⁸³ John 20:22-23.

⁸⁴ Acts 2:2-4.

⁸⁵ Trempeles, *Dogmatique*, v. III, p. 31.