

CHAPTER THREE

THE PERFECTION OF THE HOLY MYSTERIES

In order that a Holy Mystery is perfected and bears the saving fruits of its energy the following are prerequisites: The Mystery, besides the extraordinary cases of Baptism, is not permitted to be celebrated **by lay** faithful but only by a canonical ordained bishop or priest. The validity and authority of the Holy Mystery does not depend on the moral status, way of life, worthiness or unworthiness of the celebrant, because according to the common teachings of the Holy Fathers of the Orthodox Church, Christ is **the One Who** celebrates all the Holy Mysteries through the celebrant who becomes His instrument. It is required for the celebrant **to act willingly** in order to perfect the Mystery according to the **Rites** of the Orthodox Church. The bishop or priest must be canonical and not in heresy or in schism. Mysteries performed outside the Orthodox Church, in communities of heretics or schismatics, are invalid. Such events must be performed canonically.

1. Those Who Have the Special Priesthood Are the Necessary Instruments for the Perfection of the Holy Mysteries

It has been mentioned in previous chapters that all faithful who are canonically baptised are members of the One Body of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and **comprise** the Royal Kingdom but not all have the authority to perform the Holy Mysteries. Only those who have the special gift of priesthood with unbroken Apostolic Succession, bishops and priests,¹ are capable of officiating the Holy Mysteries. Just as deacons, **although** having received the first level of priesthood, cannot celebrate any of the Holy Mysteries, likewise the laity, who, although they **comprise** the Royal Kingdom,² have neither the authority nor the capability of **performing** the Holy Mysteries **except** in extreme necessity. **As for example**, when death is **impending upon an infant they may** perform the Holy Mystery of Baptism **as long as they are not in heresy or schism**. **Bishops and priests**, when celebrating the Holy **Mysteries are** not the main celebrants but only instruments of God through whom the invisible great High Priest, Jesus Christ, Who is inseparable from His Mystical Body, His Church, Sanctifies and Perfects the Holy Mysteries.

Christ Himself is He Who offers the Sacrifice without the shedding of blood, and Who is being offered. The bishop or priest calls upon the **Holy Spirit** to sanctify **the offerings on** the Altar and change them into Christ's precious Body and Blood. In addition during the Consecration and the Transmission of the Mystery, the celebrant gives his place to Christ Who Sanctifies the Mysteries, **making** the bread and the cup the Body and Blood of Christ. The celebrant avoids **referring to himself by** saying "*I baptise*" or "*I anoint*" or "*I ordain*" but rather uses the terms "*...the servant of God...*" is baptised, sealed, crowned, ordained, etc and gives his place to the invisible Lord.

¹ Jeremias, in Karmeris, *The dogmatics*, p. 406. Mogilas, (A 109, A 107), in Karmeris, *The dogmatics*, pp. 640 and 638.

² Rev. 1:6.

St Cyril of Jerusalem taught that “...the Grace is not from men, but from God through men.”³

St John Chrysostom, above all the other Fathers of the Orthodox Church, observed that “...the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit act *altogether while* the priest lends his own tongue and gives his own hands...” but “...Grace works everything.” The celebrant during the Holy Mysteries “...opens only his mouth but God works everything. The celebrant is only present as an instrument of God.” Elsewhere, he *spoke of* the Divine Eucharist that “...no man enters into the present things, but everything is the work of God, and He is the One Who leads us to the mystagogy.” Concerning Baptism, he said that it is great “...but great is not he who baptises, but He Who is called to the Baptism...” in other words, the Holy Trinity. Concerning Ordination, he emphasised that “The hand of man is placed upon the head, in other words that of the bishop’s, but everything is worked by God and His Hand touches the head of the one who is being ordained.” Elsewhere, he invites the faithful to believe that now, when the Divine Liturgy is celebrated “...it is truly the Supper *at which* the Lord sat ... For no man works this, but He Himself.” He also advised those who partake of Holy Communion that when they see “...the priest giving...” them the Holy Mystery, they must not think that he is the one who makes this but strongly believe that “...it is the Hand of Christ which is stretched out. For as when someone is baptized...” the priest is not the one who baptises him “...but God is the One Who holds His Hand on the head through His invisible Power, and neither an Angel, nor an Archangel, nor anyone else dares to approach and touch, likewise in the Mystical Supper of the Divine Eucharist”⁴

St Augustine considers Christ to be the true Celebrant of the Holy Mysteries. “Christ,” he says, “baptizes in the Holy Spirit. This is unique in Christ, that although there are many celebrants, either just or sinners, they baptise, but the holiness of Baptism is ascribed to the only Holy One, upon Whom the *Holy Spirit* descended and about Whom it was said that ‘He shall baptise in the Holy Spirit.’ Peter baptized, but Christ was baptising. Paul baptized, but Christ was baptising. And Judas could have baptized, but, even then Christ *would have been the One Who* was baptising.”⁵

2. The Unworthiness of the Officiator does not Affect the Power of the Mystery

The Orthodox Church supports the opinion that neither the private life nor the unworthiness of the clergymen *could* affect the Holiness and Power of the Holy Mystery *in any way*.

St Cyril of Jerusalem *exhorted* every catechumen to approach “...Baptism, not as to the person who appears, but calling to mind the Holy Spirit...” Who sanctifies

³ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*, XVII, § 15, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 1009.

⁴ St. John Chrysostom, *To John*, Homily 86, § 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 59, 472. *Ibid*, *To 2 Timothy*, Homily 2, § 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 62, 612. *Ibid*, *To 1 Corinthians*, Homily 8, § 1; and Homily 3, § 2, in Migne, *P.G.*, 61, 69 and 25. *Ibid*, *To Acts*, Homily 14, § 3, in Migne, *P.G.*, 60, 116. *Ibid*, *To Matthew*, Homily 50, § 3, in Migne, *P.G.*, 58, 507.

⁵ St. Augustine, *In Johannis evangelium. Tractatus*, in Migne, *P.L.*, 35, 1024. Cf. Leeming, *Principles*, p. 54.

the water of Baptism and acts through it “...for He is ready to seal the soul...” of the one who is being baptised.⁶

Jeremiah observed that “...although the Mysteries are celebrated by some unworthy (clergymen) who are not themselves benefited, being spiritually damaged, those who receive (the Mysteries) are sanctified and do benefit. For Divine Grace and through unworthy (clergymen) acts and perfects the Mysteries. We must honour those who serve and must not dishonour the good (clergymen) because of the unworthy ones (as in the case of Judas who was among the Apostles).” He continues asking, “Does God not ordain all, even the unworthy?” He answers the question by stating: “...God does not ordain all but He acts through all, even though they are unworthy, in order to save the people.”⁷

St Gregory the Theologian of Nazianzus prevented a candidate who was preparing himself for Baptism because he said “Let a Bishop baptise me and he must be a Metropolitan or Jerusalemite...” or “...a presbyter, but from the unmarried who leads an abstemious and angelic life.” St Gregory continued: “Do not judge the judges, he who needs the healing, do not love to judge those who are worthy to be unfrocked.” He then uses the imagery of the ring by saying that although the ring which is used to seal official documents is made out of gold or iron, the image will be stamped one and the same.⁸

St John Chrysostom stressed that, if the divine Grace “seeks everywhere the worthy ones”, there will be neither “Baptism, nor Body of Christ”. But now “through the unworthy God acts” and under no circumstances is the Grace of Baptism damaged because of the unworthy life of the priest. “God acts through all, even if they are unworthy” and this is because He seeks the salvation of the people. For, when He sent out the disciples to preach, and “through Judas (although unworthy) He acted.” Also, concerning the false prophets who were prophesying in God’s name, “He says: ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness’, and others had cast out demons.”⁹ If God acted through such unworthy persons in order to benefit His people how “...much more will He act through the priests?” He urged strongly “that no one should be scandalized by examining the life of the priest” and reminds the faithful that the Grace “that God grants” “should not be dependent on the virtue of the priest” for “no man introduces it, but Grace is the work of God and God is He Who leads us to mystagogy”. He concludes that “if we were to examine the life of the rulers, we should then ordain the teachers and the up will be down, and the feet will be up and the head down.”¹¹

St Isidorus of Pelusion states that “no one is harmed by receiving” the Mysteries through the “unworthy” and under no circumstances “are the precious Mysteries spoiled”, even if the officiator “priest is the worst of all sinners”. He

⁶ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*, XVII, § 35, in Migne, *P.G.*, 1009.

⁷ Jeremias, Answer A, in Karmeris, *The dogmatics*, v. I, p. 391.

⁸ St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *To the holy Baptism*, § 26, in Migne, *P.G.*, 36, 396.

⁹ Matth. 7:23

¹⁰ Matth. 7:22.

¹¹ St. John Chrysostom, *To 1 Corinthians*, Homily 8, § 1, in Migne, *P.G.*, 61, 69. *Ibid*, *To 2 Timothy*, Homily 2, §§ 3 and 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 62, 610 and 612.

reminds us about the raven by which the Prophet Elijah was fed¹². As in the case of that great Prophet, God was feeding him through an unclean instrument, likewise within the Church the unclean priests do not prevent, because of their sins, the Grace of God to regenerate us and to lead us to mystagogy¹³.

2. What the Church officiates is necessary for the perfection.

If the private life of the priest and his unworthiness under no circumstances prevents the action of the Holy Spirit to perfect the Holy Mysteries, it is necessary and an important term, that the officiator has to have the good will, to perform whatever the Orthodox Church performs in the Holy Mysteries and to invoke and repeat the same words and movements as well as the prayers which the Orthodox Church uses. For the priest sanctifies the Mysteries by the power of the Holy Spirit¹⁴. To this aim, right from the beginning, it was the practice that the officiator priest after preparation vested himself with special vestments in order to perform any of the Mysteries and in order that through these he will separate himself from the daily and common life and be prepared for the sacred diakonia. It is also worthy to note, that in all the Holy Mysteries there is a preparatory part, prayers and invocations during the service. In order that the Holy Mystery be considered valuable, it must keep the form and the words of invocation and prayers which the Orthodox Church has established, not because they act as some kind of magic instruments, but because they express the faith and the opinion of the Orthodox Church and describe the full character of that which the Church performs and aims to transmit through the performed Mystery the divine Grace of God.

Hence, the validity of the Mystery is not affected if the officiator prays carelessly or indifferently and even celebrates the Holy Mysteries without faith. It is enough that he celebrates the divine Mysteries exactly as the holy Orthodox Church received them from her Founder. And for his impiety and indifference, the priest is responsible and accountable before God, Who invisibly performs the Holy Mysteries. The unfaithfulness of the priest cannot eliminate the effectiveness and power of the Holy Mysteries. Since he still remains within the Church and is not separated from her Head by renouncing the Orthodox faith, he can perform the Mysteries, although within his soul he remains alien to the Divine Grace.

The keeping of the order within the Holy Mysteries is necessary and indispensable in expressing the Church's opinion and faith.

St Justin, the philosopher and martyr, states that the "*first* (in honour presbyter) *during the Eucharist prays according to his power*"¹⁵. Afterwards, when special liturgical types of celebration were introduced, not all the local churches used the same type. But all the liturgical types were united through the one and same faith, which created a harmonious agreement.

¹² 1 Samuel (I Kings) 17:6.

¹³ St. Isidorus of Pelusion, *Epistles*, book III, epistle 340, in Migne, *P.G.*, 78, 1000.

¹⁴ Mogilas, A' 100, in Karmeris, *The dogmatics*, v. II, p. 635.

¹⁵ St. Justin, the philosopher and martyr, *I Apology*, 67, 5, *B*, v. 3, p. 198.

Again, if someone performs exactly the liturgical type of the one holy Orthodox Church, but expresses a different faith, then the Mysteries are invalid, although the external form is correct.

St Athanasius the Great of Alexandria rejects the baptism of the Arians, although they kept the type which was delivered by Christ, the invocation of the Holy Trinity, because “*although the perfection was given in the name of the Father and of the Son, they (the Arians) do not call upon the Father truthfully, because by renouncing the sameness of the essence they also renounce the true God*”. Because they did not accept the Son being of the same Essence of the Father, they did not perform the baptism “*in the Father and the Son*”, “*but to the Creator (Father) and the creature (the Son), to the Maker and the thing which was made.*” Elsewhere, he also observes that “*many other heresies use only the names (of the Holy Trinity), but they do not believe correctly, neither have the healthy faith, thus the water (of baptism) which they offered is useless, for the lack of piety; and consequently he who is sprinkled by them is polluted in irreverence rather than being saved.*”¹⁶

St Basil the Great considers that some heretics should be rebaptized, because they were “*the branches of Marcion and according to their heresies, marriage was impure and they did not partake of wine and that they said that the creation of God was polluted*”. “*For they should not say that they were baptized in the name of Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, for they supposed God to be the creator of evil, just as Marcion and the rest of the heresies*”¹⁷.

3. The mysteries of the heretics.

Now we come to deal with the question: “*What happens with the mysteries of the heretics or schismatics?*” Concerning this major subject we must emphasise that the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Eastern Orthodox Church deals with this matter on a different basis to that of the Western Roman Catholic Church. Without remaining indifferent towards the canonical performance of the holy Mysteries, the Orthodox Church takes into consideration the fact that the mysteries of the heretics were performed outside the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church and are considered invalid. St Cyprian, expressed in his writings that “*outside the Church there is no salvation.*” This opinion was the general belief and principal of the first Church.

Tertullian considered the baptism of the heretics¹⁸ invalid and his predecessor Agrippinus in the Synod of 198 A.D. took similar decisions¹⁹. Simultaneously this was the opinion of all the Churches of the East. This is manifested in an epistle of Dionysius of Alexandria to Xystus II (257-258), according to which Stephen threatens to cut all communion with the Churches of Cilicia, Cappadocia and Galatia and all the surrounding Churches “*because they rebaptized the heretics*”. Dionysius speaks about Synods which took place in Phrygia between the years 230-245 AD, which

¹⁶ St. Athanasius the Great, *Against Arians*, II, §§ 42-43, in Migne, *P.G.*, 26, 236-237.

¹⁷ St. Basil the Great, *Epistle* 199, § 47, in Migne, *P.G.*, 32, 732.

¹⁸ Tertullian, *De Baptismo*, § 15, in Migne, *P.L.*, 1, 1216.

¹⁹ St. Cyprian, *Epist.* 71, § 4, in Migne, *P.L.*, 4, 424. *Ibid*, *Epist.* 73, § 3, in Migne, *P.L.*, 3, 1157.

renounced the baptism of the heretics²⁰. In an epistle addressed to Phirmilianus, archbishop of Caesarea, we find literal witness of this practice²¹. Thus all the Churches of Pontus and Asia Minor appeared to agree on this matter with the Churches of Africa.

The *Apostolic Orders* proclaim that “*those who receive anything from heretics receive infection for they became partakers of their erroneous opinion. For they are not priests ... then neither those who were baptized by them are initiated but are infected, and have not received the forgiveness of their sins but a bond of impiety.*”²²

St Cyril of Jerusalem assures us that “*the heretics are rebaptized because they have not received Baptism.*”²³

Thus the entire ancient Church was against heretical baptism.

On the other hand what was accepted for the validity of the Holy Mystery of Baptism was also accepted for all the Holy Mysteries, and especially for that of Ordination. Thus Innocentius I in his epistle dated 13th December 414 AD concerning the ordinations of the defrocked bishop of Sardica Bonosus literally stated that when he ordained he could not transmit whatever he did not have but what he had, in other words, his condemnation.²⁴ When he was asked by Alexandros of Antioch (413-420), if it was possible to recognize the ordinations of the Arians who were returning to the Orthodox Church, he excluded any possibility because, although their baptism was accepted as being performed in the type of the invocation of the Holy Trinity, they do not have the Holy Spirit., By breaking away from the true Faith they alienated themselves from the perfection of the Holy Spirit and consequently could not transmit the fullness of the Holy Spirit.²⁵

4. The mysteries of the schismatics.

It was not only the heretics who departed and separated themselves from the original Body of Christ, but also the schismatics. Consequently, it was natural that the mysteries which were officiated by them, although they were performed exactly as in the Orthodox Church, and officiated by bishops or priests who were previously ordained canonically but afterwards had split, these mysteries were considered invalid by the Orthodox Church.

St Cyprian, when asked by the bishop Magnus, proclaimed the invalidity of the mysteries of the heretics and schismatics. He emphasised that since they are out of the Church, they are deprived of the only Source of the divine Grace and are

²⁰ St. Dionysius of Alexandria, in Eusebius, *Church History*, VII, 4 and 5, in Migne, *P.G.*, 20, 641 and 644.

²¹ St. Cyprian, *Epist.* 75, § 7, in migne, *P.L.*, 3, 1208.

²² *Apostolic Orders*, VI, 15, in *B*, v. 2, p. 104.

²³ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Pre-catechesis*, § 7, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 445.

²⁴ Innocent, *Epist.* 17, c. 3, in migne, *P.L.*, 20, 530.

²⁵ *Ibid*, *Epist.* 24, in migne, *P.L.*, 20, 549. Gelasianus, *Sacramentarium*, in migne, *P.L.*, 74, 1145 and 1147. Johannes Papae, *Epist.* 267, in migne, *P.L.*, 136, 887. Paschalis Papae, *Epist. to the archbishop of Magentia*, in migne, *P.L.*, 163, 175.

abandoned by the Holy Spirit.²⁶ This was also the practice of the Churches in Pontus and Asia Minor. All those who separate themselves from the Church do not have the Grace of the Holy Spirit.

In order for a Mystery to be valid, it is not enough that it is officiated canonically according to the Rites of the ancient Church or by a clergyman who was canonically ordained, but it is essential that the clergyman has to be in communion of Faith with the Orthodox Church. A bishop or priest who is separated through heresy or schism from the true Church, breaks the line of Apostolic Succession, falls from the Grace of the Priesthood, alienates himself from the perfection of the Holy Spirit and becomes once again a layman who has no authority to baptize. In other words any mystery which is officiated outside the Orthodox Church can be under no circumstances recognized as valid.

The fact that the canonically ordained bishop or priest remains an instrument of Divine Grace, of which the only source and treasury is the Church. We must never forget that the canonically ordained through Divine Grace which was transmitted to him, makes him for life an instrument for diakonia of the Divine Word and steward of the Divine Mysteries.

The mysteries which are officiated by heretics or schismatics or by defrocked Orthodox clergymen are not only illegal, but invalid and powerless and consequently must be repeated canonically.

5. The term “*Economia*”.

“*Economia*” (dispensation) is the temporary deviation from the accurate practice of the Church in order to achieve a greater benefit²⁷. St Cyril of Alexandria uses the example of sailors who, when they are out at sea and face the winter storms, they empty the ship of its cargo, in order to save the whole ship and the crew; likewise the Church, when required, uses “*Economia*”, in order not to suffer damage but to accomplish greater benefit²⁸. “*Economia*” is used not to deviate from the essential correctness of the Church, but in order to achieve greater benefits or to avoid greater damage.

If ‘*Economia*’ is used for extraordinary reasons and deviates from the Church’s correctness, it is obvious that this does not create a permanent condition but is an exception to the rule and for a specific case only (“*jus singulare*”). It lasts briefly, in order that those who are outside of the Orthodox Church enter her bosom, as when a door is opened and immediately closed, in order that the Church’s accuracy is not disturbed²⁹.

²⁶ St. Cyprian, *Epist.* 76, §§ 2 and 7-11, in Migne, *P.L.*, 3, 1886 and 1191. Ibid, *Epist.* 69, § 1, in Migne, *P.L.*, 4, 413. Ibid, *Epist.* 72, in Migne, *P.L.*, 3, 1084.

²⁷ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Epistle 46 to Gennadius*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 77, 319.

²⁸ Ibid, *Epistle 46 to Gennadius*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 77, 320. Ibid, *Epistle 87*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 77, 376.

²⁹ Trempelas, *Dogmatique*, v. III, p. 49.

‘*Economia*’ cannot at first and in advance be offered to all the members of the Orthodox Church; neither can it be said that the Orthodox Church is obliged to recognize as valid the mysteries of those outside the Orthodox Body.

Through “*Economia*” the Orthodox Church completes, gives life and grants the Gift and the Charismata of the Holy Spirit to those who were not previously canonically included within the body of the Church because when “*a heretic returns to Orthodoxy he corrects the previous error and heresy is removed; the Baptism by the anointing with holy Myrrh, the ordination by the laying on of the hands*”³⁰. “*Economia*” can also be exercised even to members of the Church who require special dispensation for some reason or another. In this case the Canons (Laws) of the Church are set aside but only for that moment.

“*Economia*” can only be applied to the Canons of the Orthodox Church which have been established by the Fathers under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and can be regarded as flexible. But under no circumstances can “*Economia*” be applied to the Dogma of the Church which is the Revelation of God to His Church.

³⁰ St. Justin, the philosopher and martyr, *Answer 14 to the Orthodox*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 6, 1282.