

OVIDIUS UNIVERSITY CONSTANTA
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
DOCTORAL FIELD THEOLOGY

THESIS

Summary

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CONSTANȚA

2021

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**THE HOLY SECRETS OF INITIATION. BIBLE
GROUNDS AND THE NEED FOR THEIR
UNDERSTANDING TODAY**

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The Holy Sacraments have always been an incomprehensible mystery to man far from God. Today, more than ever, in the society in which we live and which proposes non-values as values, in the society in which the human soul no longer matters, it is imperative that man know and understand the importance of his belonging to Christ and His Church. , belonging realized through the Holy Sacraments in general and the sacraments of initiation in particular. Starting from the fact that only through Christ man can be defined as the crown of the whole creation, so rational being capable of dialogue and love with the Creator, it results that the understanding of Baptism, Anointing and Eucharist in the secularized society of our century is imperative for that man may not forget that he is a dichotomous being, created out of love for God in order to remain in His love.

The word mystery has been invested over time with various religious, cultural, philosophical, existential connotations and because of them it is difficult to comprehend in a single definition all these meanings.^[1] . The religious meanings and meanings defined in studies, descriptions and comparisons of the religious phenomenon seem to have been realized in an appropriate form only in the Greek period of culture, more precisely through the mythologies and theogonies of Homer and Hesiod which would be the first proof of the application of reason. on the religious fact^[2] . That is why many of the terms used today in the study of the history of religions are of Greek origin.

The world of philosophy has been fascinated by what this terminology can express. The great philosophers, studying, among other things, everything related to the nature of things, define this nature as a mystery, which has its foundation in a mystery unknowable to rationality. Although some have managed through logical analysis to reach a certain depth in expressing the meaning of the mystery, yet no one in the philosophical world has managed to understand its root. "No matter how much man seeks to touch him, he always arrives at a time or place called the gate of mystery. Through this gate of the abyss that leads to infinity, the mystery appears in a palpable and intelligible form "^[3] .

Not only a body, man, although he is master of the materiality of the world, still cannot limit himself to it, precisely because of the aspiration that his soul has permanently towards the Creator. He carries in himself as a gift of creation the Image of God and permanently tends to the likeness of Him, a fact demonstrated in the idea that the materiality of the world can never satisfy man's desire to ascend to the Absolute, that is, to God.

The plan of salvation for all in Christ is expressed in Pauline theology in the Epistle to the Romans where the Apostle says, "For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; for the hardness of Israel was hard on every part, until the number of the nations came" (Rom. 11:25). This theme highlights the universality of the Mystery of God, Who desires the salvation of all nations through the one sacrifice of the Logos. Moreover, the revelation enjoyed by the chosen people is now perfected by the revelation made by the Savior, and it is addressed not only to one people but to the whole human race.

From what is highlighted, we understand that "Pauline developments on mystery are part of a dogmatic tradition, a tradition in which the word mystery and the group of related terms were used as means of expression."^[4] For the Apostle of the Gentiles, the word mystery and mystery, respectively, represents the fulfillment in Christ of the eternal plan of God, existing forever in God, first hidden from the Gentiles, so that at the right time, when they were ready for his fulfillment, they would be fully revealed by the Person. Son.

The mystery is often expressed in the mystery of the Church, for through Christ, in His Church, the mystery of God is revealed to all who receive the mysteries of initiation. Although all who desire have access to the rational knowledge of the mystery of God, for all nations are called, yet in regard to the knowledge of the mystery by experience, by direct experience of the revealed truth, it can be accomplished only by the grace of the Holy Sacraments, so by receiving in the first phase the grace of the mysteries of initiation. To express the knowledge of the mystery, the Apostle Paul uses "the words epignosis, syneesis, which designate not only a rational knowledge, but also an inner experience by the grace of the Holy Spirit." ^[5]

The wisdom that St. Paul speaks of is special^[6], a private individual who has her source in grace. The teaching or knowledge he acquires by collaborating with divine grace is different from any rational power, surpassing it, Pauline wisdom being "learned from the Holy Spirit" (I Cor. 2:13). The Pauline mystery therefore implies a mysticism: its appropriation by faith produces as an effect in the believer a light and a force which strengthens, covers and overflows him, but introduces him into a state of gratitude and effective love after the example of Christ and in communion. grace with Him. It is not first of all extraordinary experiences, even though Paul knew such experiences, but of an action of the Spirit by grace

that transforms the inner man, making Christ dwell in hearts, rooted and grounded in love. That is why the Apostle says, "May the riches of His glory be given to you, that you may be strengthened, by His Spirit, in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts" (Eph. 3: 16-17).

The wisdom expressed by Paul is God's gift. He transcends philosophers who, though skillful in word, living outside the relationship with Christ, did not know Him. Paul expresses a wisdom beyond words, speaking of God's immutable plan of creation. This knowledge can in no way be the fruit of human thought, it being received as a gift from the One through whom all things were made. This is evident in the Epistle to the Corinthians, where St. Paul says, "For since in the wisdom of God the world knew not God by wisdom, it pleased God to save them that believe through the folly of preaching" (I Cor. 1: 1). 21).

The genius of St. Paul is evident in the way he expresses the meanings of the mystery. The didactic manner in which it highlights the objective structure of the mystery makes the expression of revealed truths intelligible to the audience. To expose the various aspects of the mystery he uses the categories of reason. Thus God is seen as the ultimate origin of the mystery, and Christ is its presence in the physical world in His position as Mediator, between the Uncreated and the created.

The Holy Sacraments must be understood by the intertwining of reason and faith, because man, a dichotomous being, composed of material body and immaterial soul, therefore unseen, receives the Holy Sacraments in their dual form, that is, in seen and unseen form. The unseen form of the Holy Sacraments refers to the divine grace, which descends through the Holy Spirit, in the prayer of the sacramental priesthood, over the seen form of the Holy Sacraments, that is, over matter, which it sanctifies, matter which human reason knows and can explain. . The intertwining of matter and grace is necessary for the dichotomy of the human being.

It is important for today's man to feel the work of grace and to understand rationally the role of the Holy Sacraments of initiation, so as not to perceive them as mere rituals devoid of grace, performed in remembrance of the events of Christ, as the Protestant world does. Without receiving grace from the Holy Spirit through the Holy Sacraments, man remains a stranger to God, not knowing the revealed truth that highlights, as the Apostle says, "by grace are ye saved" (Eph. 2: 5). Of course, divine grace "does not save itself."^[7] ,

but his reception through the Holy Sacraments opens to man the reason to work the deeds necessary for salvation, and these are achieved through the intertwining of faith and reason. In other words, grace, faith, and good works, manifested in complete freedom, lead man to salvation. Therefore, the Holy Sacraments are the seen form of the transmission of God's grace in an invisible way.

In the Church the gift of the cross is accessible to all believers who, through the mysteries of initiation, Baptism, Anointing and the Eucharist, become living members of the body of Christ, that is, of the Church whose head is the Son of God. Within it, Christians permanently receive the divine grace uncreated through the Holy Sacraments. It is the treasury from which believers through the work of the Holy Spirit receive grace, collaborate with it, and appropriate the fruits of objective salvation.

From this relationship results the indissoluble character between the Church and the Holy Sacraments, these two elements being those that raise man to the state of deification by grace, of course in the context in which man, in full freedom of will, receives divine grace and works the deeds of salvation.

Through the divine grace communicated to man through Baptism, Anointing and the Eucharist, the encounter with Christ is not one in potency, but in reality, for grace makes experiential the living presence of Christ in the lives of believers. From here we understand that the Holy Sacraments are not simple symbols, as the secularized society wants to define them, but are visible works through which the grace of Christ is shared invisibly, through the Holy Spirit. The relationship between man and God expresses through the grace shared with man through the Holy Sacraments, a different feeling, a free and conscious advance towards God, Who is permanently revealed and never exhausted. Through the Holy Sacraments man comes "in living contact with the sanctifying cultic mystery of Christ"^[8] .

Defining the Holy Sacraments as symbols does not mean removing everything that is real from them, for the only way they can be seen as a symbol is, as Father Stăniloae teaches, "the field in which the seen is part of the unseen and as such includes, because a part can represent the whole, based on participation"^[9] .

The grace of the Holy Sacraments represents the apogee of the encounter between the Uncreated and the created. He transcends the power of the word spoken in the sermon, the mysteries representing the intertwining of word and deed, and he who receives them

becomes partaker of the fruits of objective salvation, which he can subjectivize by personal effort and collaboration with divine grace. One of the effects of collaborating with the grace received in the mysteries of initiation is impeccably expressed by St. Nicholas Cabasila who points out: new people enlivened by new life and for example by becoming one another, they began to ignite the flame of Christ, both in their souls and in the souls of others ”^[10] .

The image of God in man, received through creation and darkened by the sin of disobedience, is restored by the grace of the mysteries of initiation, as highlighted by St. Paul when he says to the Corinthians: glory to glory, as the Spirit of the Lord ”(II Cor. 3:18). This work is accomplished by receiving the sacraments of initiation, for through Baptism, Anointing, and the Eucharist, we partake of the image of Christ, so that we, who have received the Image of God as a gift, may work in the process of resemblance to God.

Patristic theology in full agreement with Holy Scripture emphasizes that the Son of God is the Original Mystery or the source of all mysteries. It follows that the understanding of the mysteries of initiation as simple symbols has effects on human life and implicitly on society. The reduction of mysteries to symbols without real foundation expresses their removal from the sacred and reformulation into the profane. This reformulation proposed by today's society involves the separation of the mysteries of initiation from their Source, and the main effect is to plunge man into a state devoid of grace.

If the act of the incarnation eliminates the distance between God and man, the Son of God becoming our brother after humanity^[11] , the Holy Sacraments in general and the sacraments of initiation in particular represent the annulment of the distance in time and space between the Uncreated and created, because man is forgiven by Baptism, by Anointing receives the gifts of the Holy Spirit, so becomes a being capable of intimate intimacy with God, and in the Holy Eucharist the incomprehensible miracle of reason is realized, as the creature eats the Body of Christ and instead of burning, it is perfected and advances towards deification by grace.

Through the grace of Holy Baptism, man receives a special power that strengthens the faith and desire for a deeper and deeper knowledge of God. This work of grace, fully accepted by the human will, is a real one, which cannot be separated from the greatness of the mystery. It is what contemporary society cannot understand when it expresses the desire to reduce the value of Baptism to a simple symbolic ceremony. The performance of Holy

Baptism means the "birth again", "from water and from the Spirit" of the one who comes to the Holy Sacrament. Grace is real, and it is shared with the newly baptized in the Creator's love for the crown of His creation.

The empathy we feel when we see someone's suffering is real, which means that there is an ontological change in man, and by participating in the bath of Baptism, the ontological change of man is real, because he takes part in the death of the Son of God and his resurrection. by the work of divine grace.

Through the bath of Baptism man becomes new, bears in himself the Image of God and having a model of Christ, can tend towards the likeness of God. Through this Holy Sacrament, "our outward man passeth away, and the inner man is renewed day by day" (II Cor. 4:16). Baptism is the first mystery through which man enters into a relationship with God, beginning the experience of living in Him, which is impossible to accomplish in another way, in a way detached from Christ. Without the hypostatic union achieved in the Person of Christ, "divine nature and human nature were separated. There is a contact between the two natures, but not the communion "[\[12\]](#) .

The sacrament of Anointing, which follows immediately after Baptism, is man's second interaction with uncreated divine grace. This mystery has as its main purpose the strengthening of the grace received through Baptism. It is foreshadowed at the Baptism of the Son of God, which presupposes the anointing that is especially important to the man who desires to be a part of the Church of God. That is why St. Paul expresses: "And he that stablisheth us in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God, who hath sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (II Cor. 1: 21-22). .

Through this Holy Sacrament, man is called to the great dignity of the universal priesthood, because all the Baptized are anointed with myrrh to be part of the universal priesthood, a priesthood that differentiates Christians from pagan nations. The basis of this theology is offered by St. Peter who says: "You are a chosen tribe, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people agonized by God, to proclaim in the world the goodness of him who called you out of darkness" (I Peter 2: 9).

The Holy Eucharist is the mystery that crowns Baptism and Anointing. Through it the newborn man of the water of Baptism, after receiving the seal by which he defines himself as the son of God by grace, is fully united with Christ in the Holy Eucharist. The reception of

Holy Communion expresses man's ability to draw near to Christ as a result of entering the Church through Baptism and Anointing.

Really tasting the body and blood of the Son of God in the Holy Eucharist, the relationship between the Divine and the human is transposed into another light, the human expressing a chosen feeling, a special spiritual experience, totally incomprehensible to those without living in God. In the Eucharist the intimacy between the Uncreated and the created is maximum because "he who clings to the Lord is one spirit with Him" (I Cor. 4:17). From this encounter man tastes grace, feels it and collaborates freely with it, so that his will is one with the will of Christ. This is what St. Paul says when he says, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

The immutability of the sacraments of initiation is a certainty in that prayers are a form of confession of faith. This faith is a precursor to the works of grace, between faith and grace being an indissoluble reciprocity^[13]. The prayers of the sacraments of initiation include the Christological theology united with the anthropological one, this unity representing the most comprehensive confession. In them the divine work for man is fully highlighted, and the invocation of the Holy Spirit in the central moment of the mysteries causes the uncreated divine grace to descend through the work of the Spirit over matter and man.

The fact that Christ is the One who realizes the Holy Sacraments, and therefore those of initiation, is impeccably demonstrated by Saint Nicholas Cabasila who states: "Our Lord Jesus Christ is no longer present as before, through a communion of life, connections and occupations, but in a more perfect way, by which we ourselves become His members and form a secure body and one soul with Him." ^[14]

For this reason the mysteries of initiation cannot be changed either in doctrine or in structure according to the will of society, for He who is their perpetrator is the One through whom all things were made, and for this reason the reality of shared grace cannot be disputed. The difference between those who believe and those who do not believe, although they are all Christians who have received the mysteries of initiation, is the freedom of the human will to cooperate or not with the grace received. By collaborating with him, he bears fruit to the faith and the good deeds of faith that bring salvation, and by the absence of this collaboration results in a deliberate departure of man from God, the Church and grace.

Another aspect that must be mentioned against those who express themselves to change the ordinance of the sacraments is that the Holy Sacraments belong to the Church of Christ, and those outside the Church cannot express desires that destroy the order of the community of believers. The Church is made up of several members, each Christian who has received the sacraments of initiation and works with grace not only belongs to the Church, but is an active part of it through the fruitfulness of the gifts he received in the Holy Sacraments for the benefit of other members. Therefore, the change of the ordinance of the sacraments presupposes a distortion of the functionality of the Church, it having as foundation the same faith and the same Baptism. It follows that the Holy Sacraments must remain untouched by the secularism of the world, for only through them do believers have the communion beyond words with the Triune God in Persons.

Understanding that man's purpose is to reach deification by grace, and corroborating this understanding with the relationship between the Uncreated and created by the grace of the Holy Sacraments, we naturally deduce that man's initiation into the Church is a condition of salvation and its change. It cannot be achieved as a result of human will, but only by divine revelation. In other words, what Christ founded on earth cannot be overcome by the powers of hell, and from this we understand that for the act of deifying man by grace to be feasible in reality, it is imperative that none of what we have received from Christ does not change.

Putting all this in analogy, we can say as St. John beautifully points out that "In our Lord Jesus Christ there are two works: as God consubstantial with the Father and as man consubstantial with us, He has the work of human nature."^{[151](#)} . It follows that the work is the effect of power. The theandry of the works in the Person of Christ is the key to understanding the divine works that are accomplished in the Church by the grace of the Holy Sacraments. Just as the Son of God worked the divine through the material body, so those who receive the mysteries of initiation can collaborate with divine grace by making their lives a joint work between the divine and the human.

The work of deification by grace is impossible to understand and practice for one who does not wish to collaborate with the divine grace received through the Holy Sacraments. The importance of understanding the role of divine grace in human work is paramount. Only by accepting grace and collaborating with it does the human will acquire divine dynamics, the

desire for fulfillment in Christ, the desire for psycho-somatic integrity and therefore the desire for advancement to perfection.

The dichotomy of human nature urgently requires a cleansing in a double way, that is, the body through the water of Baptism and the soul through the work of the Holy Spirit. Only through this double cleansing is man free from sin and alive to God, the Holy Spirit renewing in man the word of Scripture which says that he was created "in the image and likeness of God." If the water shows the image of death, through the work of the Holy Spirit, the neophyte receives the vow of life.

From the totality of the Holy Sacraments it can be seen that the invocation of the Holy Spirit is accomplished differently. Theologian Paul Evdochimov points this out when he says that "at the center of every mystery is its own Pentecost, that is, the descent of the Holy Spirit."^[16] .

A particularly important aspect that must be emphasized as an argument for the unchangeability of the mysteries is that just as the work of Christ is real, being proved not only theologically but also historically, so is the work of the Holy Spirit. Christ rose in His Church until the end of the ages. Moreover, the transformation of the matter of the holy mysteries denotes a real and indissoluble connection between the work of the Holy Spirit and the matter which he exchanges. For this reason, it is impossible for anyone to change the order of the mysteries or to consider them as mere symbols that do not have a living and active relationship between the Uncreated and the created.

The invocation of the Holy Spirit is the central part of the mysteries of initiation. Through it, a double transformation is realized: of matter by filling them with divine grace and of man who tends towards the likeness of God, so towards the nature of the Emperor as beautifully highlighted by Saint Nicholas Cabasila.

It should also be mentioned that the change of both the elements and the believers is not an eminently divine act, because it is an interpenetration between freedom and human will that wants to approach God and the work of the Holy Spirit who through divine grace comes to man's aid. Thus, the work of sanctification is not an uncontrollable act for man, but a fully conscious act. Reason wants to draw closer to God and moves in this direction through a free act. Collaboration with divine grace enables the human will to attain the goal of deification by grace, the only purpose that the crown of creation should have in this

life. This synergy represents "the passing of life and the power of mysteries into our will"^[17] .

It is imperative that the first person be a pneumophore in order to possess the gifts necessary to acquire the status of a Christophore. In other words, you can reach Christ only by divine grace through the Holy Spirit within the Holy Church. Moreover, starting from the truth that the beginning of the Church required the descent of the Holy Spirit, made at Pentecost, the beginning of the preaching of Christ was accomplished through the work of the Holy Spirit in which the 3,000 people were baptized after the first preaching of God's word. From this we understand that in order for man to know Christ, the word and Baptism are absolutely necessary. The act of Pentecost brings over the Apostles the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and their word becomes fruitful, full of grace and truth, and those who listened to it sought Christ desiring Baptism.

Concluding the highlighted we can say that the mysteries of initiation are those through which man is restored in the love of the Holy Trinity. He who comes to Holy Baptism is subject to sin and spiritual death, and by coming out of the water of Baptism over which the Holy Spirit descends sanctifying it, the Image of Christ takes shape in the neophyte. Then, through the Sacrament of Anointing, man receives the seal of the Holy Spirit by strengthening and preparing him for the experience of life in Christ and for the tasting of the very body and blood of the Son of God, Who gave Himself for the life of the world.

The three Holy Sacraments are in an indissoluble relationship, and their order defines the growth of man in the spiritual life according to the divine will.^[18] . The uncreated divine grace that man receives through the mysteries of initiation is incomprehensible to those outside of life in Christ, but to those who remain in faith as a result of free and conscious cooperation with grace, it represents the ontological power that keeps man alive. forever.

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