

# THE HOLY MYSTERY OF PRIESTHOOD

## I. DEFINITION, NAMES, LEVELS AND DIVINE INSTITUTION

Priesthood is the Holy Mystery that was instituted by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, by which, through the prayers with the laying on of the hands of a Bishop upon the head of an Ordained person, Divine Grace enabling him to practice the services of each level of Priesthood with authority is transmitted to him.<sup>1</sup> The Priesthood comprises a special order within the Church distinguished by three different ranks or levels: Deacon, Presbyter and Bishop. The Divine institution of the Holy Mystery of Priesthood is witnessed by Holy Scripture, not only by the practice and Teachings of the Holy Apostles, but also by the election of the Holy Apostles by Christ.

### 1. Priesthood as “*Diakonia*”

The Officiator of all the Holy Mysteries is our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who is invisibly present in His Orthodox Church as the active High Priest. However, the Lord uses the officiators chosen from the main body of His Orthodox Church and sent for *diakonia* as His necessary instruments to perform the Heavenly Mysteries. They become worthy by the Grace of the Holy Spirit to receive the Mystery of Priesthood and although “*they are still from flesh and blood, yet they come close to the blessed and Divine Nature.*” They serve for the Salvation of their brethren in the Church, “*working with Power,*” which “*does not raise them to the heights neither gives [them] civil power,*” “*...neither to the Angels nor Archangels God gave*” [Power] but to weak men “*who live on earth.*”<sup>2</sup> The necessity of this Holy Mystery of Priesthood is obvious, by means of which those who are elected and consecrated for this most high and Heavenly *diakonia* are raised in an Order in which they serve Heavenly things that not even the Angelic Hosts can look into, although they desire to do so.

Thus “*...we all have received the same Spirit and we all have been called to adoption.*” We all compose the royal Priesthood by means of which, through the union with Christ, we have communion with His threefold Offices. However, through Ordination candidates are placed in a special Order within the Church. They are able to perform the Mysteries and to serve before the Holy Altar, whereas those who have not received this special Grace of the Royal Priesthood, cannot serve. And although all Orthodox Christians partake of the general Priesthood and are members of the “*...royal nation of God, as the same God testifies saying, that in all places the Gentiles will offer sacrifices pleasing to Him and pure offerings; and God does not accept by anyone else sacrifices, but only through His Priests.*” All Orthodox Christians “*...as Priests of God and healers...*” pray for kings and soldiers.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Plato of Moscow, *Orthodox Teaching*, pp. 157-158. Kefalas, *Catechesis*, p. 187. Frangopoulos, *Christian Faith*, pp. 212-213. Mitsopoulos, *Themata*, p. 322.

<sup>2</sup> St John Chrysostom, *About Priesthood*, Homily 3, § 5, in Migne, *P.G.*, 46, 643. Ibid, *About anathema*, § 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 48, 950.

<sup>3</sup> St Justin the Philosopher and Martyr, *Dialogue*, 116, § 3, in *B*, v. 3, p. 316. Tertullian, *Exhort. Cast. 7; De baptismo 17; De monogamia*, 7. St Irenaeus, *Heresies*, book IV, ch. 8, § 3, in Hadjephraimides, p. 277-278. Origen, *Against*

St Augustine speaks not only of the Bishops and the Presbyters who are called specially in the Church as Priests as it was said that "...they shall be Priests of God and of Christ..."<sup>4</sup> but also for all those who are called anointed ones because of the mystical Chrismation and who are likewise called Priests because they are members of the One Priest, of Whom St Paul spoke of as the "...holy nation, royal Priesthood."<sup>5</sup> Thus St Leon I, the Great Pope of Rome, adds that as the sign of the Cross makes all those who are Regenerated in Christ kings, likewise the Anointing of the Holy Spirit makes them Priests, so that besides the special Order of Ministry, every Orthodox Christian partakes of the royal nation and the rank of the general Priesthood.<sup>6</sup>

We do not only have the titles of "*Bishop*," "*Presbyter*" and "*Deacon*" in the Holy Book of Acts but also in the Holy Epistles. The titles of "*High Priest*" and "*Priest*" found in the Old Testament were quickly used within the Christian Faith, although at the beginning with some hesitation, because these terms were also used by the Gentiles. Thus the biblical terms "*Bishop*," "*Presbyter*" and "*Deacon*" were preferred.

Tertullian first used the term "*Sacerdos*" ("*Priest*") to signify not only the Bishops, but also the Presbyters.

St Cyprian refers the above term only to the Bishops without rejecting it, as well as to the Presbyters.<sup>7</sup>

St Innocent I and St Leon I speak of the Presbyters as being second class Priests.<sup>8</sup>

St Augustine calls the faithful to a certain level "*Sacerdotes*" ("*Priests*"). He applies this term especially to the Bishops and Presbyters.<sup>9</sup>

The Greek term "*ιερέυς*" ("*Priest*") is ascribed during the first centuries mainly to the Bishop, because at that period he was the main officiator of the Holy Mysteries. From the 4<sup>th</sup> century "*Priests*" were also called "*Presbyters*" because with the growth of the Church, they also offered the Divine Eucharist, and henceforth the Bishop was entitled "*Archpriest*" or "*Hierarch*."<sup>10</sup>

The names ascribed to the ceremony of this Holy Mystery were formed either by the way of performance, such as "*Ordination*" or "*Laying on of hands*," (in Latin "*Benediction Presbyteri*," "*ordinatio*") either because of the result which it brought about

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*Celsus*, VIII, 73; and *About prayer*, 28,9 and *In Leveticus*, Homily IX, 9, in *B*, v. 10, pp. 230 and 291. Evdokimov, *Orthodoxia*, pp. 223-225.

<sup>4</sup> Rev. 20:6.

<sup>5</sup> St Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, XX, 10, in migne, *P.L.*, 41, 676.

<sup>6</sup> St Leo I of Rome, the Great, *Sermo* IV, 1, in migne, *P.L.*, 54, 149.

<sup>7</sup> St Cyprian, *Epistola* 58, in migne, *P.L.*, 3, 1005.

<sup>8</sup> St Innocent, *Epistola ad Decentium*, 3, in migne, *P.L.*, 30, 554.

<sup>9</sup> St Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, XX, 10, in migne, *P.L.*, 4, 676.

<sup>10</sup> *Apostolic Orders*, VIII, 11, in *B*, v. 2, p. 149. St Dionysius, *About the hieratic perfections*, ch. V, 2, in Migne, *P.G.*, 3, 509.

such as “*hieratic perfection*,” “*Consecration*,” either from the total ceremony, such as “*sacramentum autistitis*,” “*Priesthood*,” “*ceremony*.”

Mogilas differentiates two types of Priesthood, the general Priesthood in which all Orthodox Christians partake and the Mysterious Priesthood. The latter “...*is a Mystery and was instructed by Christ to the Apostles and through the laying on of their hands until this day is the Ordination performed, since the Bishops succeeded the Apostles to give out the Divine Mysteries and to serve the Salvation of men, as the Apostle said: ‘Let a man so consider us as servants of Christ and stewards of the Mysteries of God.*”<sup>11,12</sup>

Jeremias observes that through Priesthood “...*all our ceremonies are perfected and we have no holy thing without a Priest.*”<sup>13</sup> Elsewhere he observes that “...*the Gospel is preached and read in public, and the Mysteries are spread by no one else, but rather by those who were dedicated for this service. For the Catholic (Orthodox) Church, those who are Sealed canonically and are called alone and are Ordained, as the ecclesiastic tradition requires, not holding any evil heresy, allows them to teach and to celebrate.*”<sup>14</sup>

Kritopoulos observes that “...*it is an ancient and Apostolic custom, which was delivered to the Church, that not all the Christians proceed for the diakonia of the Word and the celebration of the Mysteries, but they are elected among those who are great in virtue; afterwards by the laying on of the hands of those who were before them, they are placed for this service and through the common prayers of the Church they are raised to this diakonia.*”<sup>15</sup>

## **2. The Differentiation of the Three Levels of Priesthood**

The Divine Grace that is transmitted to the person who is Ordained, differs in each level, creating the three ranks of Priesthood: that of Deacon, Presbyter and Bishop. The Ordained person gradually moves from the lower level to the higher and through three different Ordinations the one who was previously a simple Christian, passing through the level of Deacon to that of Presbyter becomes at the end a Bishop.<sup>16</sup>

At the time of the Holy Apostles, only two ranks were distinguished, that of Presbyters and Deacons. But when the Holy Apostles passed away, the rank of Bishop was established into Church life. Thus St John the Apostle, Evangelist and Theologian, addressed letters to the Angel-bishops of the seven churches in Asia Minor;<sup>17</sup> and his disciples, St Ignatius of Antioch and St Polycarp of Smyrna, were Ordained Bishops by the Holy Apostle, both mentioning the three ranks of Priesthood in their writings.

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<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinth. 4:1.

<sup>12</sup> Mogilas, A’ 108, in Karmeris, *The dogmatics*, v. II, 640.

<sup>13</sup> Jeremias, *Answer II*, § 4, 4, in Karmeris, *The dogmatics*, v. II, p. 461.

<sup>14</sup> Jeremias, *Answer I*, in Karmeris, *The dogmatics*, v. II, p. 406.

<sup>15</sup> Kritopoulos, ch. 11, in Karmeris, *The dogmatics*, v. II, p. 539.

<sup>16</sup> Mitsopoulos, *Themata*, pp. 265-267, 322.

<sup>17</sup> Rev. 2:1-3:22.

Besides these three levels, which compose the high level of Priesthood, earlier the lower clergy was distinguished by the simple laying on of hands which took place outside the Holy Altar. The one being Ordained was simply blessed but as the sub-deacons, the exorcists, the readers, the door-keepers, the chanters and the candle holders<sup>18</sup> he did not participate in the Mystery of Priesthood. The ranks of sub-deacons, readers and chanters are still in use to this day.

The authority of each rank of the high Clergy is determined by the *Apostolic Orders* as follows: “*To the Bishops we distributed those things of the Archpriesthood, to the Presbyters the things of Priesthood, to the Deacons the diakonia of both. For neither is it permitted for a Deacon to offer a Sacrifice or to Baptize or to give a small or great blessing. Neither is it permitted for a Presbyter to perform an Ordination.*” The Bishop “*...Ordains, lays on hands and offers. We receive blessings from the Bishop, but nothing from the Presbyters.*” Likewise “*...the Bishops defrock all Clergy who are worthy of being defrocked, but a Bishop...*” cannot be dethroned. The Presbyter “*...receives blessings from the Bishop and a co-presbyter. Likewise he gives blessings to a co-presbyter.*” “*He lays on hands, but does not Ordain, does not defrock and he excommunicates the lower ranks if they are accountable for such punishment.*” Elsewhere the *Apostolic Orders* forbid the Presbyters to Ordain Deacons or Deaconesses or Readers or servants or Chanters or door-keepers because only the Bishops may do so. The Deacon is not allowed to bless but may receive blessings from the Bishop and the Presbyter. The Bishop or the Presbyter gives blessings while he (the deacon) serves the faithful not as a Priest, but by serving the Priests.

Women Deaconesses were Ordained in the Altar like today’s Deacons, during the Divine Liturgy when they received a Deacon’s Stole (Orarion). They received not just the blessing of the laying on of hands, but a real Ordination in same manner as that of the Deacon. Deaconesses were ranked higher than the Sub-deacon and the rest of the lower Clergy. Hence “*...the Deaconess does not bless, nor performs anything which the Presbyters or the Deacons do, but rather they keep the doors and serve the Presbyters in the Baptism of women for decency.*”<sup>19</sup>

### 3. Divine Institution

The Divine Institution of the Holy Mystery of Priesthood has its roots in the election by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ of the Twelve Apostles<sup>20</sup> who comprised the close group of Disciples. The Lord called the Apostles for a special Mission, promising them that they would become “*...fishers of men...*”<sup>21</sup> and “*...named them Apostles;*”<sup>22</sup> and “*...to them it has been given to know the Mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven.*”<sup>23</sup> Christ

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<sup>18</sup> Cornelius to Phabius, in Eusebius, *Church History*, VI, 43, in Migne, *P.G.*, 20, 616. *Apostolic Orders*, III, 11, 2, in *B*, v. 2, p. 64. Pseudo-Ignatius, *To Antiochians*, ch. 12, in *B*, v. 2, p. 328.

<sup>19</sup> *Apostolic Orders*, VIII, 46 and 28, 2-4, 6; and III, 11, 2, in *B*, v. 2, pp. 171, 162 and 64.

<sup>20</sup> Matth. 3:13-14; 4:18-22; 10:1-4. Mark 1:16-20; 3:13-19. Luke 5:1-11; 6:12-16. Cf. Frangopoulos, *Christian Faith*, pp. 213-215.

<sup>21</sup> Matth. 4:19. Luke 5:10.

<sup>22</sup> Luke 6:13.

<sup>23</sup> Matth. 13:11.

called the Holy Apostles for a special Mission “...that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons.”<sup>24</sup> After Christ’s glorious Resurrection, “He breathed on them...” and gave them the Holy Spirit,<sup>25</sup> vesting them with Authority to “forgive” or to “retain the sins.”<sup>26</sup> He transmitted the Mission to them, as the Father had sent Him, proclaiming them to be His successors of His work of Salvation.<sup>27</sup> At the mountain of Galilee He instructed them to “...make disciples of all nations...”<sup>28</sup> and promised them that He would be with them “...always, even to the end of the age.”<sup>29</sup> Through these instructions, Christ implied that after their deaths the Authority with which they were vested would be passed down to their successors and practised until the end of this age.

Concerning the question: “Did the Lord, when giving this Authority, use any external ceremony?” we can perceive that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, being the Founder of the Holy Mysteries was not restricted to the use of any such things but as God, He brought upon His Disciples the desired results. Nevertheless, as in the case of the Mysteries of Holy Priesthood and Holy Confession He breathed upon the faces of the Holy Apostles in order to give them the Holy Spirit, or, in the case of Baptism, He inculcated the use of water. After the Lord’s Ascension into Heaven, the Holy Apostles and the rest of the faithful had chosen Matthias to replace the “Ministry and Apostleship” from which Judas Iscariot “...by transgression fell.”<sup>30</sup>

Besides the Twelve Holy Apostles, the Lord had “...appointed seventy others also...” to whom He gave the Authority to go and preach “...into every city and place where He Himself was about to go...,”<sup>31</sup> to “...heal the sick...,” to proclaim that “...the Kingdom of God has come...”<sup>32</sup> and to cast out demons in His Name.<sup>33</sup> Thus we have a second group who assisted the Lord although not on the same level as the group of the Twelve.

It is obvious and indisputable that our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the Son of God, established within His Orthodox Church a special Order that was distinguished from the rest of the faithful, in which some, such as the Twelve Apostles, were vested with all the Authority and the Mission of the Teacher, while others such as the Seventy Apostles, were vested with less Authority.

In the Book of Acts, besides the election of Matthias, we have a detailed description of the election and Ordination of the seven Deacons of whom the faithful “...chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon,

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<sup>24</sup> Mark 3:14-15.

<sup>25</sup> John 20:22.

<sup>26</sup> John 20:23.

<sup>27</sup> John 20:21.

<sup>28</sup> Matth. 28:19.

<sup>29</sup> Matth. 28:20.

<sup>30</sup> Acts 1:23-26.

<sup>31</sup> Luke 10:1.

<sup>32</sup> Luke 10:9.

<sup>33</sup> Luke 10:17.

*Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch...,” and “...whom they set before the Apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them.”*<sup>34</sup>

St John Chrysostom observed that “...*the laying on of the hands is of man, but everything else God works and His Hand is touching the head of the one who is Ordained.*”<sup>35</sup>

The fact that the seven Deacons had the Authority to Baptise proves that they did not receive the rank of Deacon but instead that of a Presbyter, taking into consideration that there were no Bishops at that time, but only the Apostles.<sup>36</sup> St Paul mentions the rank of Bishops and Deacons in his Epistles to the Philippians<sup>37</sup> and to St Timothy.<sup>38</sup>

In the Book of Acts we find the rank of Apostles and Elders<sup>39</sup> who were not elderly in age but who had ecclesiastic authority. This is manifested in the Apostolic Synod that took place in Jerusalem (49 A.D.).<sup>40</sup> “*And as they (St Paul and St Timothy) went through the cities, they delivered to them the decrees to keep, which were determined by the Apostles and Elders at Jerusalem.*”<sup>41</sup> Afterwards the differentiation of the Presbyter appeared serving within the Church on a special level as mentioned by the Apostolic Synod and in the Epistle instructing all Christians to “...*call for the Elders of the Church...*” to “...*pray...*” over the sick, “...*anointing them with oil in the Name of the Lord.*”<sup>42</sup>

It is obvious that the Presbyters comprised a special Order within the Orthodox Church who were highly ranked clergy, vested with Hieratic attributes. This is confirmed by the Book of Acts, according to which, during their First Apostolic Journey, St Paul and St Barnabas strengthened “...*the souls of the Disciples...*” in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch where they “...*appointed Elders in every church.*”<sup>43</sup> Such Presbyters or Elders or Overseers were Ordained by St Paul in Ephesus and Miletus, having called them on his last trip from Jerusalem to Ephesus and having exhorted them to “...*take heed...*” to themselves “...*and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made*” them “...*overseers, to shepherd the Church of God which He purchased with His own Blood.*”<sup>44</sup> In his Pastoral Epistles St Paul speaks of the Elders, referring to them as “...*the Elders who rule well ... counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the Word and Doctrine...*”<sup>45</sup> and that “...*for this reason*” he left St Titus “...*in Crete...*” so that he “...*should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint Elders in every city.*”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Acts 6:5-6.

<sup>35</sup> St John Chrysostom, *To Acts*, Homily 14, § 3, in Migne, P.G., 60, 116.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Phil. 1:1.

<sup>38</sup> 1 Tim. 3:1-13.

<sup>39</sup> Acts 15:6, 22, 23; 16:4

<sup>40</sup> Acts 15:6-29.

<sup>41</sup> Acts 16:4.

<sup>42</sup> James 5:14.

<sup>43</sup> Acts 14:21, 22, 23.

<sup>44</sup> Acts 20:17, 28.

<sup>45</sup> 1 Tim. 5:17.

<sup>46</sup> Tit. 1:5.

These “*Presbyters*” are referred to as “*Bishops*” in the Epistles since there were no Bishops as such “...*but the Apostles alone.*”<sup>47</sup> The terms “*Presbyter*” and “*Bishop*” are identical according to the New Testament, not only from what St Paul said to the Presbyters of Ephesus, characterising them as “*Overseers*” but from how he commemorates “*Bishops and Deacons*”<sup>48</sup> in his Epistle to the Philippians as well as in his Epistle to St Titus concerning “*Elders*” whom he refers to as “*Bishops.*”<sup>49</sup>

Theodoretus of Cyrus, interpreting the verse “...*a Bishop then must be...*”<sup>50</sup> wrote that they “...*were also called at that time Presbyters and Bishops.*”<sup>51</sup>

We see St Timothy and St Titus vested not with Apostolic Authority but nevertheless with Authority greater than that of a Bishop-Presbyter because the Holy Apostles appointed Presbyters whom they Ordained, in each city. It is also manifested in the seven letters of the Book of Revelation that the Bishops are mentioned as “*Angels*” of the churches of Asia Minor.<sup>52</sup> “*And He Himself gave some to be Apostles, some Prophets, some Evangelists, and some Pastors and Teachers, for the equipping of the Saints for the work of Ministry, for the edifying of the Body of Christ.*”<sup>53</sup>

#### **4. The Church’s Testimony About The Three Levels of Priesthood**

The Tradition of the Orthodox Church, which followed the Apostolic era, bears witness of the Divine establishment of the ecclesiastic Hierarchy and the spiritual Authorities which are transmitted by Divine Grace to those who receive the three ranks of Priesthood that were distinguished clearly during the post-Apostolic era.<sup>54</sup>

St Clement of Rome very often referred to the Presbyters or Elders, condemning the rebellion against the Presbyters. “*It is disgraceful, dear friends, yes, utterly disgraceful and unworthy of your conduct in Christ, that it should be reported that the well-established and ancient church of the Corinthians, because of one or two persons, is rebelling against its Presbyters.*”<sup>55</sup> “*For this reason, therefore, having received complete foreknowledge, they appointed the officials mentioned earlier and afterwards they gave the offices a permanent character; that is, if they should die, other approved men should succeed to their Ministry. Those, therefore, who were appointed by them or, later on, by other reputable men with the consent of the whole Church, and who have ministered to the flock of Christ blamelessly, humbly, peaceably, and unselfishly, and for a long time have been well spoken of by all – these men we consider to be unjustly removed from their Ministry. For it will be no small sin for us, if we depose from the Bishop’s Office*

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<sup>47</sup> St John Chrysostom, *To Acts*, Homily 14, § 3, in Migne, *P.G.*, 60, 116.

<sup>48</sup> Phil. 1:1.

<sup>49</sup> Tit. 1:5.

<sup>50</sup> 1 Tim. 3:2.

<sup>51</sup> Theodoretus of Cyrus, *to 1 Timothy* 3:2, in Migne, *P.G.*, 82, 804.

<sup>52</sup> Rev. 2:1-3:22.

<sup>53</sup> Ephes. 4:11-12.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Damalas, *Catechesis*, p. 67.

<sup>55</sup> St Clement of Rome, *1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians*, 47, 6, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 55.

those who have offered the Gifts blamelessly and in holiness. Blessed are those Presbyters who have gone on ahead, who took their departure at a mature and fruitful age, for they need no longer fear that someone might remove them from their established place.”<sup>56</sup> “Only let the flock of Christ be at peace with its duly appointed Presbyters.”<sup>57</sup> “You, therefore, who laid the foundation of the revolt, must submit to the Presbyters and accept discipline leading to repentance, bending the knees of your heart.”<sup>58</sup>

In the *Didache*, we see that the “Prophets and Teachers” who had special charisma, had a main role in worship. “On the Lord’s own day gather together and break bread and give thanks, having first confessed your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one who has a quarrel with a companion join you until they have been reconciled, so that your sacrifice may not be defiled. For this is the sacrifice concerning which the Lord said, ‘In every place and time offer me a pure Sacrifice, for I Am a great King, says the Lord, and My Name is marvellous among the nations.’ Therefore appoint for yourselves Bishops and Deacons worthy of the Lord, men who are humble and not avaricious and true and approved, for they too carry out for you the Ministry of the Prophets and Teachers. You must not, therefore, despise them, for they are your honoured men, along with the Prophets and Teachers.”<sup>59</sup> *Didache* also urges the faithful to present their “firstfruits” “to the Prophets” “for they are your High Priests.”<sup>60</sup> Elsewhere we read “But permit the Prophets to give thanks however they wish.”<sup>61</sup> “Now concerning the Apostles and Prophets, deal with them as follows in accordance with the Rule of the Gospel. Let every Apostle who comes to you be welcome as if he were the Lord.”<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, *Didache* distinguishes the real Prophets and Teachers from those who are false.<sup>63</sup>

In the writings of St Ignatius the Theophoros of Antioch are mentioned clearly the three Offices of Priesthood. St Ignatius seeks to unite the Christians around the Bishop, the Presbytery and the Deacons before the danger of heresies. “Take care, therefore, to participate in the one Eucharist (for there is one Flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one Cup which leads to unity through His Blood; there is one Altar, just as there is one Bishop, together with the Presbytery and the Deacons, my fellow servants), in order that whatever you do, you do in accordance with God.”<sup>64</sup> Elsewhere, we read: “Continue to gather together, each and every one of you, collectively and individually by name, in Grace, in one Faith and one Jesus Christ, Who physically was a descendant of David, Who is Son of Man and Son of God, in order that you may obey the Bishop and the Presbytery with an undisturbed mind, breaking one Bread, which is the Medicine of Immortality, the Antidote we take in order not to die but to live forever in Jesus Christ.”<sup>65</sup> “I have therefore taken the initiative to encourage you, so that you may run together in

<sup>56</sup> St Clement of Rome, *1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians*, 44, 2-5, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 52-53.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, *1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians*, 54, 2, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 58.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, *1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians*, 57, 1, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 60.

<sup>59</sup> *Didache*, 14-15, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 157.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 13, 3 and 6, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 157.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 10, 7, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 155.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 11, 3-4, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 155.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 11, 5-12 and 12, 1, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, pp. 155-156.

<sup>64</sup> St Ignatius of Antioch, *To Philadelphians*, 4, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 107.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, *To Ephesians*, 20, 2, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, pp. 92-93.

*harmony with the Mind of God. For Jesus Christ, our inseparable Life is the Mind of the Father, just as the Bishops appointed throughout the world are in the Mind of Christ. Thus it is proper for you to act together in harmony with the mind of the Bishop, as you are in fact doing. For your Presbytery, which is worthy of its name and worthy of God, is attuned to the Bishop as strings to a lyre.*<sup>66</sup>

St Justin the Philosopher and Martyr, addressing the Roman Emperor, described the Christian way of worship in his Apology and spoke of the “...*first of the brethren...*” who addresses prayers and gives glory and thanks to the Father of all, and who Consecrates the Mystery of the Eucharist and “...*through words ...makes the admonition and invitation for the imitation of the good.*”<sup>67</sup>

Clement the Alexandrian<sup>68</sup> and Origen literally referred to the three Offices of Priesthood. St Gregory of Nyssa<sup>69</sup> and St Augustine<sup>70</sup> exalted the effectiveness of the Grace that is transmitted through the Holy Mystery of Priesthood.

## **II. RESPONSIBILITIES OF TRANSMITTING AND RECEIVING PRIESTHOOD**

The only responsible Officiator of the Holy Mystery of Priesthood is the Bishop who holds the highest Office within the Orthodox Church and consequently uses the Spiritual Authority of the Holy Apostles to appoint the Elders in the Church according to the New Testament. Bishops lay their hands upon those who are Ordained and in some cases more than one Bishop may also lay hands upon an Ordained one, signifying the unanimous election and consent of the participants. It is a necessary requirement that the one who will receive the Holy Mystery of Priesthood not only be Baptised within the Orthodox Church and uphold the Orthodox Faith, but he must also be of the proper age of candidates for the Office of Bishop having passed through the first two Offices. In addition, he must lead a blameless life, although the Divine Grace of the Holy Spirit acts even through the unworthy. Nevertheless, it is required that the candidate approaches in person and with his own freewill, and in the case of Deacon or Presbyter, if married, with the consent of his wife.

### **1. The Responsible Officiator of the Holy Mystery According to the New Testament and the Tradition of the Orthodox Church**

The only responsible Officiator of the Holy Mystery of Priesthood is the Bishop who holds the highest Office within the Orthodox Church and who is the steward of the Spiritual Authority that was transmitted by the Lord through the Holy Apostles to His

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<sup>66</sup> St Ignatius of Antioch, *To Ephesians*, 3, 2 – 4, 1, in Lightfoot, *Apostolic Fathers*, p. 87. Dositheus, *Confession*, ch. 10, pp. 32-35.

<sup>67</sup> St Justin the Philosopher and Martyr, *I Apology*, 65, 3 and 67, 4, in *B*, v. 3, pp. 197-198.

<sup>68</sup> Clement the Alexandrian, *Pedagogus*, 3, in Migne, *P.G.*, 8, 677. *Ibid*, *Stromata*, III, 12, in Migne, *P.G.*, 8, 1180 and 1189. *Ibid*, *Stromata*, VI, 13, in Migne, *P.G.*, 9, 328.

<sup>69</sup> St Gregory of Nyssa, *To the day of Lights*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 46, 581.

<sup>70</sup> St Augustine, *Contra Epistola Parmeniani*, II, 13, 28, in Migne, *P.L.*, 43, 70.

Church.<sup>71</sup> Thus the seven Deacons were Ordained by the Holy Apostles.<sup>72</sup> St Paul reminded St Timothy that “...*the Gift of God...*,”<sup>73</sup> which appointed him as the highest Officiator in the Church, made him responsible for appointing Presbyters or Bishops<sup>74</sup> in each city. That Holy Gift was transmitted to him “...*through the laying on of his hands...*”<sup>75</sup> and he cautioned St Timothy therefore “...*not to lay hands on anyone hastily.*”<sup>76</sup> The “...*laying on of the hands of the Eldership...*”<sup>77</sup> mentioned in his First Epistle to St Timothy is simply the external consent of the Presbytery before the whole Church for that specific Ordination. St Paul also wrote to St Titus: “*For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint Elders in every city.*”<sup>78</sup> As it is apparent from the above, St Titus and St Timothy were the responsible Officiators for the transmitting of the Divine Grace of Priesthood. Also in the Book of Acts St Paul and St Barnabas Ordained the Presbyters in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch.<sup>79</sup>

The consent of the faithful was also required, whether the one who was to be Ordained was worthy or not.

St John Chrysostom, interpreting the verse in 1 Timothy 4:14, observed that “...*the Presbyters did not Ordain the Bishop*” and elsewhere he proclaimed that the Bishops “...*are higher than the Presbyters in that they alone Ordain.*”<sup>80</sup>

St Hieronymus recognised that only the Bishop has the responsibility of Ordaining.<sup>81</sup>

St Athanasius the Great of Alexandria, with regard to the Priesthood of Aeschylos asked: “*From where did Aeschylos become a Presbyter? From Colluthos? But since Colluthos was a Presbyter and died and all his Ordinations are invalid ... all those who were appointed by him in his schism laymen ...are doubtful.*”<sup>82</sup>

According to the *Egyptian Order* (Apostolic Tradition of St Hippolytus) it is stated that “...*when a Presbyter is Ordained, let the Bishop lay his hands on his head; the Presbyters, let them touch also.*” But this laying on of the hands of the Presbytery does not have a Mystic nature and merely confirms the consent of the Presbyters to the Ordained one as being accounted amongst the body of the Presbyters.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. Damalas, *Catechesis*, pp. 65-67.

<sup>72</sup> Acts 6:5-6.

<sup>73</sup> 2 Tim. 1:6.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. 1 Tim. 3:1-13.

<sup>75</sup> 2 Tim. 1:6.

<sup>76</sup> 1 Tim. 5:22.

<sup>77</sup> 1 Tim. 4:14.

<sup>78</sup> Tit. 1:5.

<sup>79</sup> Acts 14:23.

<sup>80</sup> St John Chrysostom, *To 1 Timothy*, Homily 13, § 1 and 11, § 1, in Migne, *P.G.*, 62, 565 and 553.

<sup>81</sup> St Hieronymus, *Epistola 146 ad Evangel.*, in Migne, *P.L.*, 22, 1194.

<sup>82</sup> St Athanasius, the Great, *Apology against Arians*, § 12, in Migne, *P.G.*, 25, 269.

<sup>83</sup> Achelis, *Die ältesten Quellen*, p. 43. Papadopoulos, *History*, p. 483.

Hence in the Ordination of a Bishop, the demand of the participation of two or three other Bishops<sup>84</sup> does not imply that one Bishop alone cannot Ordain another Bishop if necessary. However the presence of more than one Bishop is required because, with the witness of two or three, the Proclamation that the Elected is worthy to be Ordained to the Office of Bishop is more assured. The laying on of the hands by the rest of the Bishops implies the consent of the Election.<sup>85</sup> Additionally, the laying on of hands upon a Deacon's head at the Gospel Reading or that at the end of the Holy Mystery of Confession upon the repentant's head, differs from that of Ordination.

## 2. Those who are Skilled for Receiving the Three Offices

Not all Faithful or Officers in the Clergy are responsible for transmitting the Holy Mystery of Priesthood. Similarly, not every Orthodox Christian can be considered as having the proper skills necessary for acceptance in the Holy Order of the Clergy.

In order for one to be considered an Orthodox Christian, it is necessary to have received the Canonical Baptism, because it is not sufficient that one confesses Jesus Christ correctly. Rather it is required that one be Baptised in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Eastern Orthodox Church. Consequently, Clergymen who belong to any heretical organisation, regardless of what rank they might have held, must be Baptised Canonically and according to the Tradition and Rites of the Orthodox Church because any previous Baptism is not recognised as being Canonical. If they are laymen, they must be tested as to whether they are worthy to enter the Clergy and be Ordained Canonically.

St Paul recommends that he who is called to the Office of Bishop should not be "...a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil."<sup>86</sup> Hence, the Holy Councils determined the age limit of 25 years for Deacons, 30 years for Presbyters and 45 years of age for Bishops.

In addition to the above, in order to receive the third Office of Priesthood, it is necessary that he who is elevated has passed through the two previous Offices of Deacon and Presbyter.

According to the advice of St Paul: "*Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure.*"<sup>87</sup> The Bishop "...must examine previously the life of the one who is to be Ordained and then call the Grace of the Holy Spirit upon him."<sup>88</sup> In the Book of Acts St Peter advised the faithful to "...seek among them seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and Wisdom..."<sup>89</sup> in order that they may Ordain them as Deacons. The skills that St Paul described in his Pastoral Epistles

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<sup>84</sup> *Apostolic Order*, III, XX, in *B*, v. 2, p. 68. 4<sup>th</sup> Canon of the 1<sup>st</sup> Ecumenical Council.

<sup>85</sup> Papadopoulos, *History*, p. 433. Synesius of Ptolemais, *Epistolae* 62, in Migne, *P.G.*, 66, 1405. Theodoretus of Cyrus, *Church History*, V, 23, in Migne, *P.G.*, 82, 1248. *Apostolic Orders and Apostolic Order*, in Funk, *Didascalia et Constitutions apostolorum*, ed.27, v. 2, p. 98. *Covenant of the Lord*, in Rahmani, p. 27.

<sup>86</sup> 1 Tim. 3:6.

<sup>87</sup> 1 Tim. 5:22.

<sup>88</sup> Theodoretus of Cyrus, *To 1 Timothy 5:22*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 82, 821.

<sup>89</sup> Acts 6:3.

presuppose investigation and test by the one who will Ordain in order to determine if the one who seeks Ordination is suitable of such high honour. St Paul demands that he who shall be Ordained “... *have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he falls into reproach and the snare of the devil.*”<sup>90</sup>

According to the above, those who have fallen into mortal sins after their Baptism must be excluded from the Priesthood. Also those who have married twice must be excluded, according to the Teaching of St Paul that “...*the Bishop must be the husband of one wife.*”<sup>91</sup>

St John Chrysostom observed that “...*God does not Ordain all, but acts through all.*”<sup>92</sup> This means that God disapproves of those who receive Priesthood unworthily, although He works the Holy Mysteries through them for the sake of those faithful who are Sanctified.

To receive Priesthood, it is required that he who is Ordained accepts with his own free will, without any pressure, deceitful tricks or radical methods. One must examine himself very carefully before entering the great and most Holy Mystery of Priesthood.

Furthermore one must not forget the instruction of St Paul who said: “*Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says.*”<sup>93</sup> In the early Church there were charismatic women who were also Prophets, as was the daughter of St Philip, yet they were never accepted into the higher levels of Priesthood, serving only as Deaconesses in order to assist the Bishops or Presbyters in the Baptism and Catechism of women.

The celibacy of Bishops became an administrative matter, enforced at first by the Emperor Justinian I, who, in his laws known as “*Nearas*” (no. 6, 123 and 137), demanded that those who were elevated to the Office of Bishop must be elected from those who followed the Monastic way of life or from those Clergymen who willingly and with the consent of their wives, separated themselves from them. Afterwards the 6<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Synod with her 12<sup>th</sup> Canon<sup>94</sup> literally forbade married men from being Ordained Bishops while they lived with their wives.

In the practice of the Eastern Orthodox Church one is allowed to be married before his Ordination into the first Office of Priesthood - as a Deacon – on condition that it is by his free will and not by force. In addition, according to the 18<sup>th</sup> Canon<sup>95</sup> of the 6<sup>th</sup> Ecumenical Synod, it is forbidden to separate the one who will be Ordained from his wife.

### **III. EXTERNAL SIDE OF THE HOLY MYSTERY OF PRIESTHOOD AND THE TRANSMITTED DIVINE GRACE**

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<sup>90</sup> 1 Tim. 3:7.

<sup>91</sup> 1 Tim. 3:2.

<sup>92</sup> St John Chrysostom, *To 2 Timothy*, Homily 2, § 3, in Migne, *P.G.*, 62, 610.

<sup>93</sup> 1 Corinth. 14:34.

<sup>94</sup> Pedalion, pp. 303-305.

<sup>95</sup> Pedalion, pp. 446-447.

The laying on of the hands of the Bishop upon the head of the one who will receive the Gift of Priesthood, accompanied with a special prayer literally referring to the Priestly Office in which he has been accepted, consists of the external and visible aspect of the Holy Mystery of Priesthood. The invisible result, which affects the soul of the Ordained, is the transmission by the Holy Spirit of the Gift of Priesthood, which enables him to bring forth the work of his Office, assuring him of the necessary terms exalting him as a worthy servant of the Lord through the co-operation with the Divine Grace and additionally imprinting within him the inexhaustible Seal, which prevents the repetition of Ordination into the same Office.

### **1. The Laying on of the Hands with Prayer as the External Aspect of the Holy Mystery**

The laying on of the hands accompanied with prayers that differ according to each Office to which the Ordained is elevated, consists of the external aspect of the Holy Mystery. The Apostolic roots of the laying on of the hands is witnessed not only in the Ordination of the seven Deacons<sup>96</sup> and St Timothy,<sup>97</sup> but also in those who were elected to be Ordained by St Timothy.<sup>98</sup>

In the Tradition of the Orthodox Church one will find countless testimonies that witness to this Apostolic Tradition.

Thus in the *Apostolic Orders* we find the Commandment: “*When you Ordain a Presbyter, O Bishop, you yourself must lay your hand upon the head.*”<sup>99</sup> Concerning the Ordination of a Deacon, it is instructed: “*When you establish a deacon, O Bishop, place on him your hands.*”<sup>100</sup> In the rest of the Holy Canons we find the expressions: “*...if any Bishop receives the laying on of hands of one Bishop... this laying on of hands is invalid...*” “*...and through the laying on of their hands they had the spiritual charisma.*”<sup>101</sup> All the testimonies of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century literally commemorate or indicate the laying on of the hands during Ordination.<sup>102</sup>

It is understandable that with the laying on of the hands the special prayer followed, by which the Bishop called the Divine Grace of God to descend upon the one being Ordained. This is testified to in the Book of Acts, concerning the Ordination of the seven Deacons, since the Holy Apostles “*...when they had prayed, they laid hands on*

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<sup>96</sup> Acts 6:6.

<sup>97</sup> 2 Tim. 1:6

<sup>98</sup> 1 Tim. 5:22.

<sup>99</sup> *Apostolic Orders*, VIII, 16 in *B*, v. 2, p. 159.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, VIII, 17 in *B*, v. 2, p. 160.

<sup>101</sup> Canon 9 of the 1<sup>st</sup> Ecumenical Synod, *Pedalion*, pp.177-179. Canon 17 of the Synod of Antioch, *Pedalion*, p. 544. Canon 6 of the Chalcedon. Canon 1 of St Basil the Great, *Pedalion*, pp. 773-789.

<sup>102</sup> St John Chrysostom, *To Acts*, Homily 14, § 3, in Migne, *P.G.*, 60, 116. Cornelius of Rome to Phabius of Antioch in Eusebius, *Church History*, VI, 43, in Migne, *P.G.*, 20, 620. St Dionysius the Aeropagite, *About the hierarchal perfections*, ch. 5, § 2, in Migne, *P.G.*, 3, 509.

them...,”<sup>103</sup> as well as in the case of the Ordination of the Elders in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch where “...they had appointed Elders in every church, and prayed with fasting... they commended them to the Lord in Whom they had believed.”<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, today’s way of Ordination is derived from the ancient Tradition of the Orthodox Church as witnessed in the ancient writings.

At the time of Ordination the Bishop calls upon the Holy Spirit saying: “*The Divine Grace which heals all weaknesses ... elevates the devoted Sub-deacon to be a Deacon (or the Deacon to be a Presbyter, or the Presbyter to be a Bishop.)*” This invocation by the Bishop is considered to be the beginning of the Holy Mystery, since the Ordination follows. The most important moment of the Ordination is the prayer, with the laying on of the hands, addressed to the Holy Trinity, when the Bishop calls upon the Grace of the Holy Spirit to descend and rest upon the head of the one who is being Ordained, thereby elevating him from his previous Office to a higher one. At that moment Heaven and earth are joined together. The hands of the Bishop become like a fiery bridge that leads directly to God. For the Orthodox Church each Ordination, regardless of the level of Office, is a Day of Pentecost, especially at the Ordination of a Bishop.

## **2. The Gift that is Transmitted as the Invisible Aspect of the Holy Mystery**

The invisible aspect of the Holy Mystery of Priesthood comprises of the Gift that is transmitted by Divine Grace to the one who is Ordained. This Divine Gift offers to the one who is Ordained the Spiritual Authority to perform the Work and the *Diakonia* of the Office in which he was elevated. The lives of those who receive this Gift worthily are Sanctified.

This Divine Gift needs to be renewed and one must not only rely on the receiving of the Spiritual Authority but one must struggle for his own spiritual growth in the newness of Life in Christ, becoming a living example for the faithful; a vessel through which God will be glorified. St Paul gives us this example when he proclaimed: “*I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.*”<sup>105</sup>

Clergymen receive the Authority to perform the Holy and Divine Mysteries through Ordination, regardless of their personal state of worthiness or unworthiness. However, the Divine Grace that Sanctifies them and which proves them to be worthy and enlightened servants, is offered only to those who are worthy. Hence one can understand the opinion of St John Chrysostom that “...*God does not Ordain all, but works through all.*”<sup>106</sup>

Examining this Gift concerning the Authority to perform the Work of each Office, it appears to be united, although it is received gradually. The Deacon receives a limited Authority, the Presbyter or Elder a higher level and the Bishop the fullness of this

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<sup>103</sup> Acts 6:6.

<sup>104</sup> Acts 14:23.

<sup>105</sup> 1 Corinth. 9:27.

<sup>106</sup> St John Chrysostom, *To 2 Timothy*, homily 2, § 3, in Migne, *P.G.*, 62, 610.

Authority. This differentiation of Authority in each Office does not take away the unity of the Holy Mystery. Instead it indicates the growth of the given Gift in order to perform a higher level of work and this, altogether, composes the united Mystery of Priesthood. So in the Orthodox Church we do not have three Holy Mysteries of Priesthood, but only one.

The Holy Mystery of Priesthood imprints on the soul an inexhaustible Seal that cannot be removed or repeated.<sup>107</sup> As in the case of Baptism, one is forbidden to receive the Holy Sacrament twice, since once received Canonically, likewise with Ordination, it is forbidden to be repeated.<sup>108</sup> Thus he who is Ordained Canonically in the Orthodox Church by a Canonically established Bishop, receives the Authority to perform the duties assigned to him with the same Power. Whether worthily or unworthily as he may be, sinner or holy, he performs them Canonically, either believing or not, as long as he does not alienate himself from the Canonical Body of the Orthodox Church. Invalid Ordinations of the three Offices are considered as being all those that were performed by heretics and schismatics.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Androutsos, *Dogmatique*, p. 314. Ibid, *Symbolique*, p. 381. Trempelas, *Dogmatique*, v. III, p. 312. Mesoloras, p. 333. St Gregory of Nyssa, *To the day of Lights*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 45, 581. St Augustine, *Contra Epistola Parmeniani*, II, 13, 28, in Migne, *P.L.*, 43, 70.

<sup>108</sup> Canon 48 of the Synod of Carthage, *Pedalion*, pp. 632-633.

<sup>109</sup> Epistolale Cornelius of Rome to Phabius of Antioch, in Eusebius, *Church History*, VI, 43, in Migne, *P.G.*, 20, 620. Canon 16 of the 1<sup>st</sup> Ecumenical Synod, *Pedalion*, p. 189. Canon 13 of the Synod of Antioch, *Pedalion*, p. 542. Canon 76 of the Apostles, *Pedalion*, pp. 136-137. Canon 23 of the Synod of Antioch, *Pedalion*, p. 547. Canon 1 of St Basil the Great, *Pedalion*, pp. 773-777. Canons 1 and 68 of the Synod of Carthage, *Pedalion*, pp. 605, 645. Canon 8 of the Synod of Antioch, *Pedalion*, p. 539. St Basil the Great, *Epistle* 240, § 3 in Migne, *P.G.*, 32, 897. Ibid, *Epistle* 239, in Migne, *P.G.*, 32, 892. Ibid, *Epistle* 244, in Migne, *P.G.*, 32, 920. Dyobouniotes, *Dogmatique of Chr. Androutsos*, p. 52. Kotsonis, *The canonical*, p. 164. Androutsos, *Symbolique*, p. 384.