

Doctoral (PhD) Thesis Summary:

The Holy Chrism in the Orthodox Church – The Ordinance of Preparation, the Theological Meaning of the Matter and the Sacramental Effects of Chrismation

Orthodox Theology, based on the Scripture, states that the world was made by God and given to man so that he might consecrate it and consecrate himself through it. In Christian meaning, the world and the matter are not a „*prison of souls*,” as the ancients stated, but man’s chance to work together with God in order to achieve holiness.

The Holy Chrism is a mixture of 38 ingredients (essences, oil, plants and wine), prepared according to a special recipe of the Church, which is consecrated, after preparation, by the Synod of Bishops of an autocephalous Church, during the Solemn Divine Liturgy on Holy Thursday. Following the prayers of the bishops, the chrism becomes the Holy and Great Chrism, which the Church uses for the Holy Mystery of Chrismation, for the consecration of places of worship and antimensions on which the Divine Liturgy is held.

The present thesis, structured in five large chapters, aims to explain how and under what circumstances Holy Chrism is prepared, the history of preparation of Chrism on Romanian land, what is the connection between nature and grace and how matter actually becomes a bearer and transmitter of the Holy Spirit’s Divine Grace; what are the sacramental effects of various types of anointment with Chrism and to present a collection of charters issued throughout time on the occasion of the consecration of the Holy Chrism in the Romanian Orthodox Church.

Chapter I – Liturgical matter – the relationship between nature and Grace

Patristic theology talks of man’s salvation, but not as something separated from nature. The process of man’s salvation in his entire being (body and soul) is distinctive to Eastern Christianity.

Father Dumitru Stăniloae speaks about the relationship between nature and man, stating that salvation itself depends on its correct understanding: „*Man cannot conceive himself outside cosmic nature. This might mean that neither nature can fulfil its meaning without man, or through a man who works against her. (...) Nature is obviously the environment in which man can do good or bad deeds to his neighbour, developing or ruining himself, ethically and spiritually*”.¹

¹ Pr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. I, Edit. IBMBOR., București, 2003, p. 337.

The texts of the Old Testament reveal a series of situations in which the Fallen Man, banished from the face of God and from the Heaven where he was receiving Divine Grace, is not completely abandoned by God, but communicates with Him and discovers Him in the goodness received as a result of obedience.

Persons such as Moses, Abraham, Jacob, David or the prophets and the judges received the knowledge of God's Mysteries even before the Ministry of Jesus, as illumination.

Our being, as *icon of God*, permanently participates to the divine, to the godly light, even if he no longer sees it clearly. Saint Gregory of Naziansus states that we are „*the offspring of God*,” based on Apostle Paul (Acts 17,29)

Growth in likeness to God demands a permanent deepening in one's union with God. The interior connection between likeness and union reveals the first one as updated not through the way of external imitation, neither in the manner of internal identification, but based on the Eucharistic manner of full communion.

The maximum union with God, man's receiving of the fullness of God without merger with Him, is the glorification of man, which is done through the Divine Grace of the Holy Spirit, communicated through the Holy Mysteries, during which matter is consecrated and filled with grace, becoming a „*vehicle of Divine Grace*.”

Nature itself becomes an environment of the godly, sanctifying work of man and God coming closer and communion: „*Going down to the water of the Jordan and making the voice of the Father heard and revealing the Holy Spirit above Him, He consecrated the waters so that all who unite with Him through faith might receive the Holy Spirit, Cleanser of Sins. Thus, nature becomes a means through which God works, by sanctifying men. The Son of God did not assume human body for no purpose, but to make matter, through His connection to it, an environment of His sanctifying work.*”²

The Church is the place where matter is consecrated and becomes a carrier of Divine Grace. Through the descent of the Holy Spirit on mankind, the divine, uncreated energies unite the created nature with the uncreated. The Church is, in its essence, the participation of the universe to the conditions of divine life.³ Here, in the Church, man fulfils his highest purpose, that of priest of creation.

Father Alexander Schmemmann mentions that among all creatures made by God on Earth, man alone responds to the blessing of God with his own blessing and, subsequently, „*homo adorans*” would be a more proper naming than „*homo sapiens*” or

² Sf. Grigorie de Nazianz, *Cele 5 Cuvântări Teologice*, trad., introd. și note de Pr. Prof. Acad. Dumitru Staniloae, Editura Anastasia, București, 1997, p. 155-156.

³ Drd. Ștefan Sandu, *Ființa Bisericii după doctrina celor trei confesiuni creștine* în rev. «Ortodoxia», anul XXII, nr. 4, octombrie- decembrie, 1970, pag. 542.

„*homo faber.*” The priest is the basic definition of man – as he sits in the centre of the world and unifies it through his act of blessing.⁴

Man, as priest of creation, is thus a binder between nature and Divine Grace, the means through which nature is consecrated and brought as gift to God the Creator.

Chapter II. The Holy Mystery of Chrismation in the life of the Church.

In the Old Testament, the Sacrament of Chrismation is adumbrated in the anointment with Holy Oil, as seen in the commandment given by God to Moses for the ordination of priests. Aaron was the first to be ordained in this manner.⁵ The anointment was not done with any type of oil, but required the „Holy Anointing Oil,” used for the consecration of altars and of articles used during worship. The method of preparation was received by Moses from God Himself and the penalty for using this oil in other purposes was extremely harsh: *”he shall be cut off from his people.”*⁶

Adumbrated in the Old Testament through the anointment of priests, prophets and altars and announced as a *„new overflow of the Spirit,”* the Holy Mystery of Chrismation is not directly mentioned in a commandment of the Lord, unlike Baptism, but the Holy Evangelist John mentions Christ’s promise that all those who believe in Him, after his Exultation – meaning after the Resurrection and His Ascension – would become worthy of receiving the Holy Spirit.⁷

The Acts of the Holy Apostles indicate us that the Sacrament of Chrismation was administered by the Apostles through the laying of hands and that it was distinct from Baptism. The formula used: *„seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit,”* is found in the words addressed by Saint Paul to the community in Ephesus: *„... you have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of the promise, Who is the guarantee of our inheritance...” (Ephesians 1, 13-14); „And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” (Ephesians 4,30).*

Documents from Church Fathers and writers of the first three Christian centuries reveal that the Holy Mystery of Chrismation was administered to Christians immediately after receiving Baptism and that it was also used at the conversion of heretics or fallen Christians to Orthodoxy.⁸ The Ecumenical Synods, as well as local ones, regulated the

⁴ Pr. Prof. Alexander Schmemmann, *Pentru viața lumii. Sacramentele și Ortodoxia*, trad. de Pr. Prof. Dr. Aurel Jivi, Edit. IBMBOR, București, 2001, p. 13.

⁵ Ieșire 29, 4-7.

⁶ Ieșire 30, 32-33.

⁷ Ioan 7, 37-29.

⁸ Cel mai important studiu pe această temă îl găsim la Sf. Ciprian Episcopul Cartaginei care într-o discuție cu un anume episcop Ștefan îi explică acestuia cum trebuie administrată Taina Mirungerii și că Mirul trebuie sfințit de către episcop.

correct administration of Chrismation and stated its receivers, its spiritual effects and who can consecrate the Holy Chrism.

Chapter III – The Holy Chrism.

Until the second half of the XVIth Century, the consecration of the Holy Chrism was considered a special prerogative of the Ecumenical Patriarch, who offered it to the rest of the patriarchates. Throughout time, however, historical patriarchates began consecrating the Holy Chrism by themselves, as a sign of autocephaly. Documents from the time reveal that until the XIXth Century, the Ecumenical Patriarchate forced bishops from the Romanian Principalities to take Holy Chrism only from Constantinople and permanently rejected moves by local Metropolitan bishops to consecrate the Holy Chrism on their own. However, due to the political and economic ties of several Romanian princes with Apostolic Seats, the Holy Chrism was, on several occasions, consecrated by the Patriarchs of Jerusalem, Alexandria and Antioch on Romanian land, together with Romanian bishops. Thus, in 1513, Patriarch Pachomius of Constantinople lead the consecration of the Holy and Great Chrism in Târgoviște, at the invitation of Voivode Neagoe Basarab; in 1515, Ecumenical Patriarch Theoliptus is invited by the same Voivode at the consecration of the Curtea de Argeș monastery, a service during which the consecration of the Holy Chrism was also performed; in the XVIIth Century, Nikiforos, the Patriarch of Alexandria, probably consecrated the Holy Chrism in Moldavia, where he made several trips, at the invitation of prince Vasile Lupu, whose confessor he was; in Iași, in 1643, Theophan III, Patriarch of Jerusalem, consecrated the Holy Chrism, as a sign of gratitude to Voivode Vasile Lupu who paid all the debts of the Patriarchate to the Ottoman Empire; Patriarch Dositheos of Jerusalem consecrated the Holy Chrism twice on Romanian land, in Bucharest in 1670 and 1702; his successor, Patriarch Chrysanthos also might have consecrated Chrism in Bucharest in 1707, on occasion of the consecration of the New Saint George Monastery in Bucharest, a foundation of Martyr Saint Voivode Constantin Brâncoveanul; after the political unification of the Romanian Principalities and the Declaration of Independence in 1877, Metropolitan Primate Calinic Miculescu, together with the bishops of the Holy Synod, consecrated Holy Chrism in Bucharest on 25 March 1882; this historical act was preceded by the consecration of Chrism in Cernăuți by Silvestru Moriariu Andrievici, the Metropolitan of Bucovina and Dalmatia, in March 1880.

In 1885, through the Synodic Thomos signed by Patriarch Joachim IV of Constantinople together with ten bishops of the Ecumenical Synod, the autocephaly of the Romanian Orthodox Church was officially recognized and, thus, its right to

consecrate the Holy Chrism. Since then, Romanian Primate Metropolitans and Patriarchs have consecrated the Holy Chrism 21 times, according to the pastoral needs of the Romanian Church.

The ordinance of the preparation of the Holy Chrism, also known as the mixture of materials, the boiling according to a special ritual during the first three days of the Holy Week, is detailed in the Archieratikon. The synod of all bishops (including auxiliary bishops), headed by the Patriarch, gathers on Holy Thursday and perform the Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great together with the Vespers, consecrating the Chrism. After the service ends, it is shared, through Metropolitans and Bishoprics, with all churches to be used by bishops at the consecration of places of worship and antimenses, and by priests at the Holy Mystery of Chrismation. Without it, the Sacrament of Chrismation cannot be performed.

Chapter IV – The Theological Meaning and the Sacramental Effects of the Anointment With the Holy Chrism.

The Orthodox ordinance states that the administration of the Sacrament of Chrismation (or Confirmation) is done immediately after Baptism, as there is a deep connection between the two Holy Mysteries. The gifts received by the new Christian during Baptism are perfected through Chrismation. The work of the Holy Spirit in the Sacrament of Baptism means birth into a new virtuous life in Christ and the Sacrament of Chrismation highlights this life through its purpose – to help the receiver maintain the connection with the Godhead and the growth of spiritual powers of each baptised human. This means that even if the powers received at Baptism remain, it is the Divine Grace of the Holy Spirit which develops them, „*awakes them*” through the Holy Mystery of Chrismation.

Saint Maximus the Confessor speaks of seven spirits that reside in the anointed one: *the spirit of wisdom, understanding, knowledge, reverence, counsel, power and fear of God.*⁹

Besides these spirits or gifts of the Holy Spirit, the newly-baptized Christian receives, through the seal of Chrism, the call to universal priesthood, in which Saint John Chrysostom identifies three missions: „*The spirit that is now partially given to us as a deposit will be full in glory. He, the Spirit, made us **prophets, priests and emperors**, since those were the ones anointed in the Old Testament. We, however, have none of these dignities but all three of them fully.*”¹⁰ Emperor becomes the one who rejects all the evil

⁹ Sfântul Maxim Mărturisitorul, *Răspunsuri către Talasie*, în Filocalia, vol. III, Editura Arhiepiscopiei, Sibiu, 1947, p. 251-152.

¹⁰ Sf. Ioan Gură de Aur, *Tâlcuiri la Epistola a doua către Corintheni*, Editura Sophia, București, 2007, p. 42.

deeds and sacrifices sins; priest is the one who brings himself to God, sacrificing his body and prophet is the one who discovers future events in the commandments of God.

Father Alexander Schmemmann speaks of an *ordination* of Christians at the moment of receiving the Holy Mystery of Chrismation – a Pentecost of the baptized through which a new life in the Holy Spirit is inaugurated.

The Anointment with chrisms of man's limbs has also a spiritual meaning, according to Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, as the Christian receives in that moment an armour of the Holy Spirit which he must use in the unseen war against the spirits of evil.

The seal is made in the sign of the cross as to symbolize the godly power of Christ's wisdom to endure the torment on the Holy Cross and through this sign full of power everything is cleaned and blessed.

The Anointing with Chrism of Churches – Renewal of the Pentecost.

The consecration of places of worship is done through a special service performed by the bishop and with the anointment with the Holy Chrism of the Altar Table and of the walls of the church. This ordinance has roots in the Vetro-Testamentary practice of consecrating the Tent of Meeting and the Temple, but also remembers the anointment of the body of Jesus after being taken from the Cross and the overflow of the Holy Spirit on the Church on Pentecost. During the consecration service, the bishop places parts of relics of martyrs, which are anointed with Chrism because they have already united with Christ – the True Chrism – in the foot of the table.

The anointment with Chrism of Antimensions. After the consecration, the Antimension (a rectangular piece of cloth on which the scene of the burial of the Lord together with the faces and symbols of the Evangelists are painted) is placed on the Altar Table. The antimimension is consecrated by the bishop alone and anointed with the Holy Chrism as it symbolizes and even replaces the Holy Table when the situation requires it – for instance when the Divine Liturgy is held outside the church.

The anointment with Chrism of kings and of people returning to Orthodoxy. The ritual of coronation of Christian kings includes the moment of anointment with the Holy and Great Chrism. This practice is connected to the Old Testament tradition, where the king was "*the anointed one*" and symbolized the Messiah – saviour of the people. Both in Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire and in the West, the coronation service was led by the Patriarch (or Pope) and included the anointment with Chrism. The fundamental significance of the "*anointment*" of kings is that, through it, they are filled by the "*gifts of the Holy Spirit*" and become "*followers of Christ,*" separating from the "*Old Man*" and becoming a new person.

Anointment is also used in the Orthodox Church when a person who strayed and had fallen from the right faith returns to the Church and wants atonement, or when a Christian belonging to another confession, but baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity, wishes to become Orthodox. The service ordinance for such cases includes several prayers of forgiveness, a confession of the right faith with the rejection of heresies, and ends with the seal of Chrism. This confirms the status as son of the Church and restores the spiritual gifts that were lost through heresy or apostasy, strengthening the reborn Christian on the path of virtue.

Appendix with the Thomoses of Consecration of the Holy Chrism in the Romanian Patriarchate.

Conclusions. This aim of this thesis is to gather, for the first time in Romanian theology, historical, liturgical, canonical and dogmatic studies and references about the Holy Chrism and we hope that it succeeded in doing so.

Besides the ordinance of consecration of the Holy Chrism, and the technical explanations about the necessary ingredients and their preparation, the current paper presents dogmatic explanations on the manner in which matter becomes bearer of Divine Grace, the place in which matter is consecrated, historical and biblical arguments of the use of Chrism and last but not least the sacramental effects of its use in the Church.

Propunător,

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