

THE VALIDITY OF THE MYSTERIES (SACRAMENTS) PERFORMED BY HERETICS AND DEPOSED CLERICS AND THE NEWLY SO-CALLED "WALLED OFF"

By an Athonite Monk

For decades, there has been an issue that divides the True Orthodox faithful (those who do not have ecclesiastical communion with the ecumenists), which has caused many separations and disputes. This issue is the validity or not of the Mysteries (sacraments) of the innovative new calendarists and other ecumenists. The discussion on this topic is timeless and has not brought any result, since it is not conducted based on canonical dialogue, but spasmodically and without some official ecclesiastical bodies to direct it. It is mainly conducted through libels and other faded leaflets, where everyone tries to justify his opinion and impose it on his opponent! The truth, of course, cannot be found neither through insults, nor through distortions of texts, nor through curses and anathemata, but through sincerity and respect towards it, in the path to its real pursuit.

It is therefore astonishing how the faithful, and especially monks, do not hesitate to distort elements and data simply to support their opinion, indifferent as to whether this is moral and honest and represents what they are researching, that is, the Truth! Perhaps sometimes the end justifies... the means! Perhaps again, the search for this truth is an alibi to vent our passions upon others, without being blamed for them! Who, after all, would dare to accuse someone who is angry for... Faith? In general terms, there is a tendency of bias among the supporters of these two positions, with one accusing the other of opposing the orthodox ecclesiology and the stance of the Fathers towards similar issues that arose in the past.

The truth, of course, cannot be somewhere in the middle... as in these matters there is no room for intermediates; one is either pregnant, or not! So, in our case, either the mysteries of the unjudged (or not yet judges) heretics have Divine Grace, or they do not; there is no alternative! The examples we have from ecclesiastical history, unfortunately, everyone easily uses to justify himself, as there are many ambiguities and uncertainties in these equivocal references to past events. However, for some, these are fine print! Of course, this is unacceptable, because it shows that sincerity has disappeared and the purpose itself has taken the sceptre! Therefore, under these conditions, we will try, God willing, in our turn, to contribute to the further investigation of this problem, presenting some additional thoughts to the already existing ones.

This issue was recently triggered by the appearance of the so-called Walled-Off-Non-Innovators, first beginning in Mount Athos, where a notable group of former zealous monks, having abandoned ecclesiastical communion with the rest of the Zealot Fathers, put forward a new doctrine concerning ecclesiastical facts. This interruption of communion was not based on protesting the wrongdoings in the realm of the GOC (Genuine Orthodox Christians), and the indeed significant transgressions, into which the higher and lower clergy occasionally fall, but on promoting another ecclesiology. Of

course, within their argumentation are also the accusations of schisms and divisions among the GOC, which we often hear from the mouths of modernists, but we consider these as a smoke screen... just to enrich their indictment; since they themselves, even before stepping into the field of "battle," began to exhibit divisive phenomena!

To get an idea of what they think, so the reader can understand what it is about, I will mention some of their basic doctrines. According to them, when heresy is preached with a bare head, the faithful must indeed cease commemorating the heretical patriarch or bishop, but without separating from the "church" which the said heretic shepherds! The walled-off faithful, after his separation, must wait for the convening of an Orthodox Synod which will proceed to the condemnation of the heresy and its leaders, so that he can return again after the restoration to the previous ecclesiastical communion.

Heresy, according to them, is something that lives and moves within the Church, and must be fought from within and not from without. There is no such thing as an unjudged heretic outside the church, even if the heresy has been judged and condemned in the past by an Orthodox Synod; another Synod must be convened again to judge and depose the heretics separately. Sure thing...! For this reason, a canonical ordination of a cleric, higher or lower, outside the sphere of the heretical patriarch is not conceivable, as he, though fallen into heresy, has the unique privilege of performing canonical ordinations! Therefore, the succession of valid ordinations exists only in him and in the "communal" bishops subject to him.

The performance of ordinations by Orthodox bishops without the consent of the heretical patriarch is considered illegal and uncanonical, falling outside the boundaries of the "One Church," even if it is under the yoke of heresy. No Orthodox bishop can ordain a cleric, not even a deacon or reader, without the approval of the heretical patriarch, as such ordination occurs outside the Church! Thus, the unjudged heretical patriarch and his followers remain within the Church; though, in reality, they are only partially within it, as they are considered "potentially" (δυνάμει) outside but not "actually" (ἐνεργεία) so!

It is evident that, according to them, Orthodox confession plays no role, as they focus exclusively on the form and only on the form, considering that a heretical confession of faith cannot deprive one of sanctifying grace! This somewhat reminds us of Papal Canon Law, where even the act of defrocking cannot strip the defrocked of their priesthood; it merely renders it inactive. So entrenched is the "Grace" among heretics! As we shall see below, in their attempt to support their doctrine, they invoke examples aligning with Papal ecclesiology and Law¹, even if unknowingly.

Let's see, however, what the other side believes. Their position is clearer and more demonstrable if we examine the sources and arguments they cite, despite some deficiencies here as well. They believe that it is not necessary to convene a Council to expel someone from the Church since if a member is caught openly preaching heresy

¹ Constantinos Rallis, "Penal Law of the Orthodox Church", 1907, p. 20, footnote 81. and "Anastasios Christofilopoulos", Greek Ecclesiastical Law, p. 152, 1965.

(bareheaded), and after being admonished two or three times², remains unrepentant, then Divine Grace departs from him, as the contamination of heresy has defiled him. They assert that where there is heresy, there is necessarily contamination.

They also state that when a Mystery (Sacrament) is devoid of sanctifying Grace, it is non-existent, meaning it is invalid; such are the sacraments of heretics who have been condemned synodically or those spoken against by the Fathers, as well as those defrocked, since defrocking strips them of their priesthood. However, they distinguish differences when Mysteries are referred to as invalid, as an invalid Sacrament can be existent or non-existent depending on the case. An invalid Mystery is non-existent when performed outside the Church by heretics or defrocked individuals, but existent when performed by Orthodox with canonical ordination but illegally, for example, without the local Metropolitan's permission, thus forbidden to be received by the faithful³. This Mystery merely lacks validity, meaning canonicity; however, the Sacrament itself exists.

The first case involves heretics and defrocked individuals, while the second pertains entirely to Orthodox individuals. The restoration to the legality of a Mystery performed by an Orthodox is an easy matter and does not require special procedures compared to the sacraments of heretics, which, depending on the case, may require the collective opinion of the Church.

These, in general terms, are the positions of the two opposing factions, without implying that there are no internal differentiations and variations within each.

The case of the walled-off with the above ecclesiology constitutes a completely new phenomenon in the Church's life, as never in its history has there been a similar way of dealing with heretics. Paradoxically, they consider heretics outside the Church but simultaneously within it, as long as they have not been first judged by an Orthodox Council specifically convened for them to expel them. In ecclesiastical history, we see the holy Fathers reacting in a clear way, leaving no room for misinterpretation, so the faithful are not puzzled about what is right or wrong. They knew that when a Patriarch or even a lower cleric openly preached heresy, they immediately separated and tried to bring him back with various exhortations and pleas to return to the correct teaching.

If the deviant Patriarch or cleric persisted in their heretical doctrines, the Orthodox Fathers would convene a Council, condemning the heresy and its bearers. In cases where convening a Council was impossible due to state intervention supporting the heresy, the Orthodox would consider the heretics definitively outside the Church, deprived of every ecclesiastical right and authority, even if unjudged synodically. And they acted correctly

² Titus 3:10. "Reject a divisive person after a first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned."

³ Panagiotis Panagiotakos, "The Priesthood and Its Nomocanonical Consequences," 1951, p. 35. "For example, the difference between invalid ordinations and uncanonical ones is enormous. The former are acts performed outside the Church, while the latter are those performed within the Church and in violation of canonical order and exactness only (violation of ecclesiastical law by unlawful acts, etc.)."

because Orthodox ecclesiology considers only those who hold the Orthodox faith intact and unadulterated within the Church, not those with altered and falsified beliefs.

According to the Fathers of our Church, a heretic is outside the Church from the moment they manifest their heretical beliefs, and after being admonished once or twice, they persist in their erroneous views. No special procedure is needed for this, as the correct confession of faith is a primary factor for one to belong to the Church, even if they ostensibly hold the patriarchal rank or any other authority and prestige in person. Their initial authority no longer holds any administrative and ecclesiastical value since it is not accompanied by Orthodox confession, and consequently, they lack any spiritual authority over the Orthodox flock. Moreover, every priestly act they perform remains inactive and powerless.

The Orthodox flock recognizes only those who rightly proclaim the word of Truth, not those who theologise freely and as they wish, like today's ecclesiastical leaders of the modern church. Thus, anyone who wishes to theologise freely risks their position within the Church, even if they have not widely expressed their erroneous views for the competent authorities to perceive and take the necessary steps for their removal. In simple terms, they belong to the Church only in appearance! However, the faithful are not harmed by ecclesiastical communion with such a heretic, as long as they are unaware of their hidden delusion and consider them to be truly Orthodox.

The conclusion from the above is that, in the Church, we may see many approaching and communing, but we do not know who among them is a true member of the Church! This happens with hidden heretics; but what about those who openly and frankly preach false doctrines? Can they remain indefinitely within the Church because no Council has been convened to condemn and expel them? We have many clear examples from ecclesiastical history and the teachings of the Fathers showing us the correct path!

Noteworthy is the reference by Saint Gregory Palamas on this matter, where he says the following: "If we allow what the Fathers have theologised to remain undefined, it could easily be constructed by anyone wishing, but they will be immediately anathematised if they do not repent; for it is said, if anyone preaches a gospel different from ours, let them be anathema."⁴ Also, in his third letter to Akindynos, he states that whoever follows the heretical teaching, dividing the one divinity into created and uncreated (i.e., preaching heresy), thereby divides himself, **separating from Divine Grace** and completely detaching from the pious, no less than heretics such as Arius, Eunomius, and Macedonius, perhaps even more so⁵!

⁴ "On the Procession of the Holy Spirit, Discourse II, 36, p. 251. '...if we were to define what has been theologised by the saints in an indefinite manner, this would easily be constructed by anyone who wished; but immediately, if he does not repent, he will be subjected to anathema; 'for if anyone,' it says, 'proclaims a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed, let him be accursed.'"

⁵ "To Akindynos, Letter III, 9, p. 601. 'But he who asserts that only the essence is uncreated, while the power, will, and energy emanating from it are created, divides the one divinity into created and uncreated, thereby dividing himself and being cut off from divine grace and completely severed from the pious, no less than Arius, Eunomius, and Macedonius, if not even more so.'"

Significant is also the Saint's reference to the supreme importance of **holding the Truth of the Faith, as it constitutes the binding link between the believer and the Church, since moving away from it places one automatically outside the Church!** Indeed, he tells us, "even if they deceive some and lead them astray, whoever and however many they may be, they remove them from the holy Church, but it remains equally secure and unshakeable, firmly established on the foundations of the Truth. For those who belong to the Church of Christ are followers of the truth, and those who do not belong to the truth do not belong to the Church of Christ."⁶

It is evident from these words of Saint Gregory that those who move away from the truth automatically expel themselves from the Church, without any other procedure, without waiting for the convening of Councils, etc.! How, then, do some people chatter about heretics within the Church, who indeed cannot be moved from there by anything, regardless of the heresies they spew or the blasphemies against the faith they vomit, under the pretext of the indiscriminated? Do they not know that **once a heresy is condemned, its decisions are timeless and do not need to be repeated every time someone embraces it in the future?** A witness to the timelessness of the decisions is again Saint Gregory, who, expressing the opinion of the Church, mentions in his first Apologetic Discourse the following: "...the letter (of the Council) rebukes there openly not those previously defended, but those who stir up issues in the future..."⁷

Another Father of our Church, who is considered an authority on these matters, is Saint Theodore the Studite, who lived and thrived with his confessional struggles during the second phase of iconoclasm.

After the Seventh Ecumenical Council and the condemnation of iconoclasm, peace ensued, and Orthodoxy was restored. The Council, after anathematising the heresy and deposing the unrepentant iconoclasts, accepted with economy those who sincerely repented and reinstated them to the priesthood by cheirothesia (laying on of hands). However, the peace in the Church did not last long, because after a few years, the weeds began to sprout again, seeking to re-establish the heresy. Most of the higher and lower clergy, as usual,⁸ either out of fear or because they secretly harbored the taint of heresy, followed the instigators of the heresy. Few remained steadfast in their Orthodox faith, among them Saint Theodore with his monastic synodia. The saint endured terrible persecutions and tortures to renounce his faith and follow his contemporary iconoclasts, who indeed were subject to the timeless anathemata of the Seventh Ecumenical Council but were canonically holding the

⁶ "Antirrhetic Discourse I, 56, p. 137. 'For even if they deceive some and lead them astray, those whom they lead away are cast out of the holy Church, while it remains no less secure and unshaken, firmly established on the foundations on which truth is supported. For all who belong to the Church of Christ are of the truth, and those who are not of the truth are absolutely not of the Church of Christ.'"

⁷ "Antirrhetic Discourse I, 53, p. 131. '...And indeed, it is not those who make prior apologies but those who subsequently stir things up that are openly reprimanded there...'"

⁸ "Theodore the Studite, Letter 40, To Naucrati, My Child, p. 168". 'Such a priest is now rare to find, one who does not mingle and associate with heretics.'

succession of the priesthood since they had not been deposed again by an Orthodox Council. They were, that is, unjudged, just like the present-day World Orthodox, who indeed have ecclesiastical communion with almost all the condemned and judged heresies of the world by Ecumenical and Pan-Orthodox Councils, but have not been separately condemned and officially deposed by any newer Orthodox Council. However, the Saint, mainly through his hundreds of letters, gives us the essence of Orthodox ecclesiology against the chatter about unjudged heretics, which some newly minted anti-ecumenist "theologians" embrace today.

There are many examples found in his writings, where the treatment of iconoclasts by the Orthodox is evident, without any distinction between already-judged and unjudged. A characteristic example is when the Saint is asked by an abbot about certain priests returning from heresy, and the way to receive them back into communion. Saint Theodore states the following: "Our advice to the question of the lord abbot is this, so that by the feast of the Holy Apostles all may be freed from the penance and partake of the Mysteries. However, the priests should not perform the Mysteries, until an Orthodox council is convened, during which every absolution and joy will be given. But all together, like simple monks, whether ordained or not, should bless and be blessed, and pray and receive prayers."⁹

In another letter, defending to an abbot the imposition of penances on repentant heretics, he says the following important things: "And to speak concisely, the priest or deacon who was defeated by heretics either by signature or by communion should be completely prevented from performing the mysteries, but also from communion. After the end of the penance, he should surely partake of the mysteries, but not officiate, until the holy council. And he should bless or pray as a simple monk, not as a priest, but this also after the end of the penance. And he should not enter the churches held by heretics, nor even if a church is liberated and held by an Orthodox, since heretical services have been performed there, the Orthodox should not serve without the solution of an Orthodox bishop."¹⁰

Thus, we see the Saint in both cases considering the priests returning from heresy inadequate to celebrate the Divine Liturgy unless they are first restored by an Orthodox Council, by cheirothesia, of course, which means that their ordination done by heretical

⁹ "Letter 101, To Peter of Nicaea, p. 418. 'This is our counsel regarding the inquiry of the lord abbot, that until the time of the holy apostles, all should be released from penance and participate in the holy sacraments; however, priests should not exercise their priestly functions until the arrival of an orthodox council, where all issues and all joy will be resolved. In the meantime, all should act as common monks, whether ordained or not, blessing and being blessed, praying and receiving prayers.'"

¹⁰ "Letter 152, To Theodore the Monk, p. 510. 'In summary, any priest or deacon who is found to be in agreement or in communion with heretics should be completely barred from performing any sacred rites, and also from communion. After the completion of their penance, they may partake of the holy sacraments, but they are by no means to perform liturgical services until an orthodox council is convened. They may bless or pray as a common monk, but not as one ordained, and this only after completing their penance. They should not enter churches held by heretics, nor should any church that has hosted heretical rites be used for orthodox services until it has been restored by an orthodox bishop.'"

iconoclasts, even though not yet judged, like today's new-calendarists, World Orthodox, or ecumenists, was invalid and needed restoration. Studying these two examples brings to mind the current situation, where priests following the new calendar or pseudo-old-calendarist Athonites, etc., ordained by ecumenist bishops, with universally acknowledged ecumenism as pan-heresy, have separated from them and are accepted without any procedure by the so-called newly walled-off, and especially Athonites!!!

According to the statements of the newly walled-off, the ordinations of these priests are perfectly canonical since they were performed within the church and by bishops who were heretics but had unbroken Apostolic succession! This unclear view of matters on their part and the inability to distinguish truth from falsehood unfortunately causes great confusion among the faithful, who remain perplexed in the face of this dilemma. We do not know their motives, but one thing is certain, they do great harm to the struggle against ecumenism, even if they do not admit it, as they overturn and falsify rules and traditions of centuries of our Church. It is a matter of wonder how those who present themselves as the exponents of genuine detachment overlook such clear testimonies of Saints, insisting on the theories of some questionable "theologians" of our time, such as Euthymios Trikaminas, Aristotle Delimpasis, etc. Under this doctrine of the "unjudged," some "innovators" accepted certain "newly walled-off" as ministrants, even before the cessation of the commemoration of the heretical patriarch!!! Laughable matters!

How will they convince us, then, that they follow the Fathers when they improvise and literally "cook" their doctrines, presenting them as the spirit of the Church, when so blatantly they falsify or overlook them? What do they have to offer as an excuse for the immediate acceptance of these pseudo-ministrants, without considering the canonical order, which imposes at least a formal rule-penance, so that it is shown how they erred all this time they were communing carelessly with the ecumenists? How, all of a sudden, while being accountable before the holy canons for their long-standing violation due to heretical communion, do **they present themselves as heroes and confessors without a trace of guilt or shame?**

Saint Theodore was adamant regarding the returning from heresy clergy and not only them. "And I say; If according to you after denial, that is, after communion with Christomachists, they are immediately accepted, and without being imposed a penance, why do I risk in vain every day, and do not resort to the those who are antithetical, from where I can immediately join the Orthodox with repentance, without penance?"¹¹ Also, in his questions and answers to Methodios the monk, he mentions the following: Question 7: For monks and clerics who signed and communed with this heresy, how should we accept them; without penance or with penance, if they confess that they no longer serve. And if we are allowed to impose penances on them. Answer: It is clear that we should accept them after penance. How, without showing the fruits of their repentance, is it possible for

¹¹ "Letter 11, p. 253. 'If, according to you, after denying or communing with the Christ-fighters, such people are immediately to be accepted and without penance, why do I endanger myself every day in vain, and why do I not defect to the adversaries, only to be accepted again without penance by the Orthodox through repentance?'"

them to be worthy to unite with the Orthodox body? **The imposition of penances on them by us is not forbidden...**¹²"

Unfortunately, none of the above criteria are met by the newly "walled-off" from ecumenism clergy, who were accepted... with lyres, psalteries, and tambourines¹³!

And again: "As for the presbyter, about whom you instructed to tell us that he is so and so, and that he was freed from barbarian captivity, we know this, for we have learned everything from him himself. But the man does not want, that is, does not tolerate, to adapt to our typicon. For you know, God-respected, that by common decision of both those who are still on earth, and those confessors who recently departed to the Lord, **it was decreed that clerics once overcome by heretical communion should be prevented from performing the sacraments, until providence visits us from above.**

And how could we release him from the canon, and by accepting one establish a law above all previous ones that prohibit it, and by this act contrary to the divine and first and original abbot, who generally does not allow them to bless even common meals, much less to perform mysteries, and thus scandalize other confessors and cause discord among those who insist on accuracy?

And if some people made a decision on their own, due to the limited time and the compulsion from those who demanded it, to let some of the presbyters go free after the penance, it is not possible for us to do this without the president, because we believe that the reason for the prohibition is correct. How will the difference be seen between those who betrayed the truth, and the others, those who fought bravely, and those who did not prefer to suffer at all for the good? And where is Christ and where is Beliar, the light and

¹² "To Methodios the Monk, p. 649. 'Question 7. - Concerning the monks and clerics who have signed and communed in the same heresy: how should they be received? Without penance or with penance, if they confess that they will no longer act in the priesthood? And is it permissible for us to impose penance on such people? Response. - It is clear that it should be with the appropriate penances. For how could they be deemed worthy to be joined to the Orthodox body if they do not display the fruits of repentance? And we also should impose penance on such people; there is no answer otherwise...'"

¹³ "Isaiah 5:12. 'They have harps and lyres at their banquets, tambourines and flutes and wine, but they have no regard for the deeds of the Lord, no respect for the work of His hands.'"

the darkness, if everything is mixed up, and before the synodical decision, another decision, and before the peace, peace¹⁴?

So if the newly separated ones want to be representatives of the Holy Fathers' spirit and ecclesiology, as they have self-proclaimed, let them show us the works of their repentance! On the contrary, they are extremely aggressive and quarrelsome towards those who have been greatly troubled by the persecutions, and much older than them in the anti-ecumenical struggle, genuine Orthodox; guided and even incited by some former zealots Athonite monks. Let those who accept them indiscriminately answer us: did they demand anything from them that the Holy Father stipulates, or did they turn a blind eye because it suits them this way? So their first act of repentance should have been the temporary cessation of priesthood and the waiting for the convening of a Synod, which would restore them to the priestly office without impediment, due to the heretical origin of their ordination and their long-term participation in the heresy. But they deny that they have any impediment or flaw due to heresy and their ordination is in all respects canonical and flawless! If this is true, then essentially there is no heresy where they walled themselves off from; therefore there was no reason for walling-off and consequently what they did is not a walling-off but a schism! There is a big difference between these words!

However, according to Saint Theodore, there can be no return from heresy without the previous conditions, as not only is the Orthodox practice annulled, but also the value of the struggles of all those who suffered for Orthodoxy for so many years, as they are equated with those who lived comfortably and peacefully with the heretics. If they return as heroes without any consequence for their previous life (wonders the Saint), then why did he himself suffer countless persecutions, imprisonments, and beatings, when he could have also followed the heretics and returned to Orthodoxy unpunished? How could he be distinguished from a heretic, when both are treated equally the same? We must constantly emphasize that the Saint always speaks about unjudged heretics who have not been defrocked!

¹⁴ "Euthymius of Sardis, Letter 211, p. 640. 'Regarding the priest about whom you instructed me to report in such and such a manner, and whether he has been liberated from barbarian captivity, we understand each detail from his own testimony. But the man neither wishes nor endures to be governed by our rule. For you know, God-honored one, that by the common decision of the confessors still living and those who have recently departed to the Lord, it has been decreed that priests who have once fallen into heretical communion are barred from performing sacred rites, until the time of episcopal oversight provided from above. And how could we dissolve the rule and through the acceptance of one, abolish the law for all those previously barred, acting contrary to our divine and primal leader, who himself does not tolerate such ones to simply bless common meals; let alone allowing them to perform priestly duties, thereby scandalizing the other confessors and sowing discord among those who uphold strictness? Even if some have perhaps hastened in their own discernment due to the urgency of the time and the compulsion of the seekers, to release certain priests after penance, this we by no means can in no way do without the president, as it is also to be considered that the reason for their restriction is righteous. For where would the distinction be between those who betrayed the truth and those who did not; those who bravely struggled and those who did not choose to suffer for the good? And where would Christ and Belial, light and darkness, be, if we mix everything together, and before the council's judgment, judgment, and before peace, peace?'"

Another point we must pay special attention to in the words of the Saint is that the integration of those who walled themselves off from heresy into the Orthodox Church should not be done by anyone as they wish, but based on the previous decisions of the Synods and the opinion of bishops. It is clear from the above that even in the time of the Saint, there were some who lightly accepted such walled-off ones without many procedures! Saint Theodore unequivocally rejected this uncanonical stance, declaring that he would not violate the rule, and whatever is to be done, will be done with the consent of the President, based on previous decisions. So if the newly walled-off ones insist so much on the lack of judgment of the ecumenists, then let them respect the lack of judgment in their case too, waiting for the judgment of Orthodox bishops, so that they may be integrated into the Orthodox Church canonically and not through the back door...

Mysteries of "unjudged" heretics

Let us also examine the stance of the Fathers and specifically Saint Theodore regarding the mysteries conducted by heretics who followed a condemned heresy, while they themselves were still unjudged.

Saint Theodore lived in a time when the situation did not differ much from ours, as he had to deal not only with iconoclast heretics but also with many lukewarm Orthodox. Many Orthodox, even clergy, had not realized the extent of the danger that accommodation and indiscriminate economy with the heretics entailed; they ate together, prayed together, and generally associated with them as if they were canonical Orthodox! **Perhaps the long duration of the heresy played a role in this, which had calmed the initial zeal of the faithful and brought about some dullness in their Orthodox sensibilities (e.g. many so-called Genuine Orthodox of Greece).** Saint Theodore, with much love and patience, advised through letters and verbally the faithful to abstain from their communion, emphasizing the spiritual danger they were in from associating with them. He mainly emphasized to the faithful to abstain from the mysteries of the heretics, presenting these not as soul-saving but as poisons leading the Christian to eternal damnation!

The communion offered by the heretics, he said, "is not common bread, that is bread" but "a potion," that is, poison, which however does not harm the body but darkens and tarnishes the soul.¹⁵ The damage is greater! He then explains the reason why, **despite the external similarity of the Orthodox with the heretics in the rituals, the typical and the general external appearance,** the heretical ones are in vain and the worst, destructive for the Christian. "What if the prayers of the liturgy are of the Orthodox, what does it matter if it is done by heretics? Because they do not believe as the one who composed them believed, nor do they believe in what the words mean. Because the whole liturgy praises the faith that Christ became a true man, while they deny it, even if they say it, because

¹⁵ "Letter 24, To Ignatius, my child, p. 286. 'Communion from the heretics is not common bread, but poison, harming not the body but darkening and obscuring the soul...'"

they think He should not be depicted.¹⁶ **We see clearly that the Saint believed that the reason the mysteries of the heretics were ineffective was not whether those who performed them had been judged or not, but whether the performers had the same faith as the Orthodox Church!** And he continues saying: "So even here he does not believe what he says, even if the liturgy is Orthodox, but he babbles foolishly, or rather he insults playing the liturgy, because even magicians and charmers use divine hymns in their demonic rituals."¹⁷

The correct faith, therefore, is the main cause of the completion of a Mystery and not the external forms, temples, vestments, typica, etc., which have secondary importance. But how can they have the same faith as the Fathers and the Church in Christ, since they have signed in the World Council of Churches that they seek together with the other heretics to find the Truth? That is, Christ! They do not know that Christ is not just the Truth, but the very Truth itself? Therefore, they have no common faith with the Church!

Writing also to another spiritual child of his, he mentions the following: "So, if it happened like this, let us not avoid making liturgies for him to God, but if nothing of this happened, but he communed with heresy and did not manage to commune the body and blood of the Lord, because that bread was heretical and not the body of Christ, I do not dare to say let a liturgy be done for him (because the divine things are not games), so that he who asks for this matter does not hear."¹⁸ Unfortunately, you do not find many today who dare to say things as they are, not fearing to be labeled as fanatics. How would the modern newly separated ones call Saint Theodore if he attributed to the mysteries of the unjudged ecumenists the characteristics he once gave to the unjudged iconoclasts of his time? Surely they would call him "Sectarian," "Old Calendarist," or anything else they characterize and slander those genuine Christians today who have the ability to understand Orthodox ecclesiology, and the courage to express it.

Saint Theodore, however, does not stop here; his fiery tongue, like a catapult, strikes down as a bombshell on the superficial and other hypocrites of his time who, not content with their own misery, wanted to drag others along with them into the Gehenna of fire: "Let those who forcibly drag into communion those who do not want to, know that they do this in an idolatrous manner; because they do not offer the Body of Christ which was

¹⁶ "Letter 24, To Ignatius, my child 'Even if the prayers of the liturgy are (written) by the Orthodox, do they accomplish anything? For they do not believe as the one who performed them does. Nor do they believe as the words themselves signify. Since the entire mystery glorifies that Christ truly became man; they deny it, even if they say it, because their belief does not represent Him.'"

¹⁷ "Letter 24, To Ignatius, my child. 'He does not believe here either as he says; even if the liturgy is orthodox; but such a one speaks vainly; rather he mocks the liturgy, playing with it; for even sorcerers and enchanters use divine songs in their enchantments.'"

¹⁸ Letter 197, To Dorotheos, my child, p. 608. 'Therefore, if it happened thus, it is not to be refused to perform liturgies for him to God. But if none of these occurred, and he was in communion with the heresy and did not partake of the body and blood of the Lord; for that bread is heretical and not the body of Christ (it is not to be dared to hold a service for him); for the divine things are not to be trifled with.'"

willingly sacrificed, but on the contrary, the body which has the appearance of being sacrificed to idols, which is unwillingly sacrificed in friendly libations to demons. And the word is true, and the proof is clear, and no one listens.¹⁹ It is unnecessary to mention the countless examples in the letters of the Saint regarding the quality of the mysteries of the unjudged heretics of his time, as the few indicative ones we presented are enough to highlight the current reality and situation.

Communion from the heretical cup

Some today overlook these issues, pretending indifference. However, for the Saint, they were of vital importance because participation in these mysteries entailed spiritual death for the faithful Christian, since receiving them caused contamination and assimilation with the heretical minister who administered them. "For what communion," the Saint tells us, "hath light with darkness? Neither should he be reckoned among the Orthodox who does not commune with Orthodoxy, even at the last hour. Where he is found, there shall he be judged, and with whatever provision he has made for eternal life, with that shall he be numbered."²⁰ In simple words: He who communes from the chalice of "patriarch" Bartholomew becomes like him in every way, even if he claims to believe Orthodox! If you are found at your end communing from him, you will be numbered with him... we imagine where!!!

This exactly is emphasized in another letter of the Saint, saying: "As the divine bread when partaken of by the Orthodox makes all the participants one body, so also does the heretical bread make those who partake of it one body opposite to Christ; and let the babbler vainly babble with cheap excuses to justify himself."²¹ Therefore, the communion of the heretics has opposite results to that of the Orthodox, since instead of uniting you with the body and blood of Christ, it unites you with the adversary, the Devil! What, then, do the proponents of the validity of the ecumenical mysteries have to say? How is it possible for their mysteries, "full of grace," to lead to opposite results, even if partaken by devout believers? How do they continue, even after their secession, to still have in their

¹⁹Letter 136, To Theodore the General, p. 482. 'Let those who hastily draw the unwilling into their communion know that they are acting in a pagan manner; they are not offering the Body of Christ voluntarily, but rather something that resembles food sacrificed to idols, according to the unwillingness of the one being sacrificed in their offerings made to demons against them.'

²⁰Letter 136, To Theodore the General. 'For there is no fellowship between light and darkness; nor will he be counted among the Orthodox, who does not commune with Orthodoxy, even at the last hour. Where he is found, there he will be judged; and with whatever provision he has taken for eternal life, with that he will be reckoned.'

²¹ "To Niketas the Abbot, Letter 154, p. 517. 'Just as the divine bread, partaken of by the Orthodox, makes all those who partake of it one body; so too does the heretical bread, by making those who partake of it share in it with each other, present one body opposed to Christ, and the empty speaker speaks vainly.'

hagiography persons who died in communion with the ecumenists, such as Paisios²², Porphyrios²³, etc.? Why did they not follow their example, since participation in the heretical mysteries did not prevent their holiness?

We should also emphasize that communion from the hands of the newly walled-off is not particularly different from that of the ecumenists, having the same spiritual consequences, **as long as they refuse the canonical restoration of their priesthood through laying on of hands**. If they are not at peace with the existing bishops of the genuine Orthodox (this is their own issue), then, as we said before, they should cease their priestly activities until the convening of a Synod, which will address their restoration. The problem, however, is not only this, but mainly their insistence that they are ecclesiologically in order, which indicates **lack of repentance and lack of understanding of the real situation in which they find themselves; an unheard-of thing for someone who has just returned from heresy!**

The Indelibility of Priesthood, Ordinations of Deposed Clergy, and Acceptance of Heretics into the Church

This issue of the indelibility or not of the priesthood does not exist in the Orthodox sphere, as it was never posed as a theological problem to be solved. The Orthodox Church has always believed that the cleric, higher or lower, who is subjected to deposition for canonical offenses concerning piety or justice, is stripped of it and placed among the laity. He is completely deprived of the priesthood! The theory of the indelibility of priesthood is of Papal origin, having entered the Orthodox sphere quite late, initially through George Kedrenos. This fact is indisputable, as it is testified by numerous sources within ecclesiastical literature and by the canonical regulations and canons of our Church.

²² "It is characteristic how those who have broken away from the commemorators are fervent 'worshippers' of Paisios, Porphyrios, and other recently appearing 'saints', whom the Ecumenical Patriarchate has begun to canonize in recent years, obviously for self-serving purposes. It is perplexing how the newly schismatic do not follow the example of their 'saints', who remained faithful children of their 'church' until the end! Everyone knows that these particular 'saints' gave themselves to prevent anyone from breaking ecclesiastical communion with the 'patriarch', supposedly to prevent the unity of the church from being disrupted. Specifically, the Elder Paisios went so far as to physically strike pilgrims who followed the Old Calendar! Even more perplexing, however, is the fact that our former zealots, who came into ecclesiastical communion and union with those newly schismatic, tolerate the commemoration in the temples of their cells of the names of these deviously fabricated 'saints'!"

²³ "The new Athonites are aware of the true ecclesiological positions of the Holy Fathers of our Church, but they are indifferent, content with the present prosperity. This is why they occupy themselves only with 'visions' and 'miracles', like those of the aforementioned 'saints', and with these, they feed the crowd that follows them blindly, because they know that this is the food they prefer!"

It is true, however, that the theory of indelibility found fertile ground among the theologians of recent years²⁴, who hastened to reproduce and disseminate it; this, however, is explained within the context of the further alteration of Orthodox ecclesiology and theology by Papal theology, especially in the post-schism years²⁵. Ignorance on the subject has made many believe that it is an Orthodox position and not an imported Papal doctrine, which they have even elevated to the status of dogma! Nowhere in the holy Canons do we encounter the phrase "indelible priesthood," but only about stripping it away, that is, total removal!

Unfortunately, this misconception is held today not only by modernist theologians but also by many conservative and especially walled-off ones. The late Father Maximos of St. Basil's Skete of Mount Athos, who is considered a mentor by some new traditionalists, explicitly wrote, reproducing this Papal error: "...only an Ecumenical Council by specific act and decision of it can decide on the 'suspension' of the indelible priesthood by a local Church and declare the Mysteries of it devoid of divine grace.²⁶" However, the Canons of our Church are clear when they speak of the essence of depositions: "He who has been caught in public theft concerning what is called the main crimes, cannot come to the priesthood; but if after this he falls into such a passion, **he is stripped of the priesthood**, according to the twenty-fifth canon of the Holy Apostles.²⁷" Also, the Quinisext Council states similarly, rejecting the erroneous view of Father Maximos: "And if the transgressor of the decrees is a cleric, **we order him to be stripped of his clerical rank**; if he is a layman, let him be excommunicated.²⁸" Likewise, it is stated in another Canon: "Those found guilty of canonical crimes and **subjected to complete and perpetual deposition, and relegated to the place of the laity**, if they voluntarily repent, rejecting the sin by which they fell from grace, and completely alienate themselves from it, let them appear (at that time by their tonsured hair) as a clergyman. If not, choosing otherwise arbitrarily, **like**

²⁴ See P. Trembelas, *Dogmatics*, vol. III, pp. 28-29

²⁵ "Panteleimon Rodopoulos, *Summary of Canon Law*, p. 125: "The Indelibility of Priesthood. According to this theory, ordination is not erased, and if the deposed priest is reinstated, the ordination is not repeated. The Orthodox Church has not officially ruled on this matter. The Roman Catholic Church established this doctrine through the Council of Trent (1545-1563). Some Orthodox theologians, influenced by Roman Catholic teaching, accepted this theory. However, the long-standing practice of the Church and its teaching on grace reject the theory of the indelibility of priesthood. Deposed clergy return to the rank of laity or monks."

²⁶ "Apostasy and Division, 1981, p. 74, cf. also p. 47."

²⁷ "Saint John the Faster, Canon 28. *Sacred Rudder*, p. 575."

²⁸ "Sixth Ecumenical Council, Canon 81. *Sacred Rudder*, p. 291."

the laity, let them grow their hair (not appearing with the priestly tonsure of those times), having preferred worldly life to the heavenly.²⁹"

This becomes clearer in the interpretation of this Canon: "Clerics completely and **perpetually deposed** for canonical crimes, such as fornication, theft, or adultery, and dressing as the laity and standing with the laity, are commanded by this Canon that, if they voluntarily repent and completely abstain from the sin **for which they lost the grace of priesthood**, they should shave their heads...³⁰"

St. Nikephoros Patriarch of Constantinople, when asked about this issue, responds as follows: "Question XIII: If a bishop, having fallen into a crime, **is deposed by a synod**, and then again ordains a presbyter, and this presbyter, coming to a monastery, receives penance from the same father for years, and then functions in the priesthood, should such a priest be accepted if he is blameless, we ask. Answer: Since the impropriety is obvious, you should not have even asked about such a crime; for the Lord said, 'A bad tree cannot bear good fruit'; not that being penanced by his own superior or even a saint releases him from serving; **for neither is he a priest, nor is the releaser a saint**; for if it were so, all canonical precepts would be overturned and vanish.³¹"

Let us note that the proponents of this Western doctrine believe that with deposition the deposed is not deprived and stripped of the priesthood, but there is a "suspension"³² of it, that is, in some way a deactivation!!! The priesthood itself remains intact and unaffected by the deposition, no matter how many times the deposed is deposed, regardless of the severity of the reason for the deposition! Indeed, the result of the deposition does not depend on the magnitude or type of sin committed, but on the act of deposition itself. St. Photius the Great, referring to a priest who married children against the will of their parents, in his 83rd letter, says: "For this reason, he is not subjected to deposition, but for a certain specified time he will be suspended from priestly service, and in other things, he will endure affliction, fasting, and prayers³³..." The distinction between deposition and suspension of priesthood is glaringly evident; deposition is a severe punishment, while suspension is a lighter and shorter-term cessation. It is inconceivable how some cannot

²⁹ "Sixth Ecumenical Council, Canon 22. Sacred Rudder, p. 237."

³⁰ "Sixth Ecumenical Council, Sacred Rudder."

³¹ "Sacred Rudder, Asteros edition, p. 738."

³² "Cf. Apostasy and Schism, p. 47."

³³ "I. Valletta, Letters of M. Photius, p. 412."

understand that these are different matters and are thus led into such babble, confusing the non-confusable! Suspension is one thing, deposition another!

In the Religious and Ethical Encyclopedia, under the entry "deposition," the following is mentioned: "Deposition is the most severe of the punishments exclusively affecting clergy. Through this punishment, **a clergyman loses his clerical status and returns to his previous state before entering the clergy**. If he belonged to the secular clergy, he reverts to the laity; if he belonged to the monastic clergy, he reverts to the state of a simple monk. **Deposition permanently strips the punished individual of all powers associated with the clerical rank he held. This stripping is so complete that the deposed clergyman becomes part of the laity**. The consequence of deposition is that the one who undergoes it returns to a state where **nothing distinguishes him from the laity**³⁴."

The term "Indelible Character" is entirely unknown to the Fathers of our Church³⁵; instead, they used terms such as "indestructible seal," "mystical," or "unbreakable, etc."³⁶ but only regarding divine Baptism and not the priesthood³⁷.

We should also note that the prohibition of re-ordinations, as well as marriage after deposition, does not in any way imply the indelible character of the priesthood, which, as we have seen above, is entirely stripped away from the deposed³⁸. It is characteristic that

³⁴ "Religious and Ethical Encyclopedia, vol. 7, pp. 151-152."

³⁵ **K. Rallis, Handbook of Ecclesiastical Law, p. 105**

"The opinion of those who accept that already in ancient church times the deposed remained potential clergy, with the **indelible** character conferred by ordination, **is not at all proven by the passages they invoke.**"

³⁶ K. Rallis, Handbook of Ecclesiastical Law, p. 2336

³⁷ Many supporters of these peculiar doctrines frequently cite a certain commentary by Saint Nikodemos in the footnote to the 28th Apostolic Canon. There, after first presenting the various opinions of some Fathers on the matter, he concludes, although not definitively, as he himself states, that the sacraments performed by deposed and heretical clergy are valid. He reached this conclusion by invoking the principle that "like must be inferred and judged from like," comparing the 13th Canon of the Council of Antioch and the 5th Canon of the 6th Ecumenical Council with these cases of deposed and heretical clergy.

However, such a comparison is entirely misplaced because these two Canons refer to entirely different situations! These sacred Canons speak of illegal ordinations conducted by canonical bishops who still possess their priesthood intact, not by deposed or heretical clergy who are deficient in it. It is entirely arbitrary to classify and compare these two cases by the same standard, as the nature of the illegality is vastly different! It is like judging a serial killer with the law that applies to someone accused of simple theft!!!

³⁸ Theophilos Bishop of Kampania, "Nomikon," ed. 1728, p. 28: "An archbishop who has become grandiloquent is completely stripped of his archbishopric, as defined by the 2nd canon of the Council of Hagia Sophia."

when a clergyman is deposed for some offense, only the punishment of deposition³⁹ is imposed on him and not excommunication, which is used for the laity⁴⁰. However, if the deposed clergyman, now a layman, falls into a grave offense again, he is punished with a penalty that is appropriate only for laypeople⁴¹, that is, excommunication! Therefore, he is treated by the court as a layman and not as a clergyman with "suspended" priesthood! Moreover, he is buried as a layman!

Under the same spirit, the provisions were also being moved that imposed on a clergyman who had fallen into an offense first to be deposed by ecclesiastical courts so that his priesthood would be taken away, and then to be handed over to civil courts for further punishment⁴². The purpose of this was to avoid the desecration of the priesthood, which the convicted clergyman would bear from the humiliations and other punishments he would suffer during his imprisonment⁴³.

In the "Church Law" by professors Spyridon Troianos and George Poulis, the following important points are recorded: "The loss of clerical status is independent, at least directly, of the will of the bearer, because resignation from the priesthood is not allowed (cf. 7.1.3.c). Only after (ecclesiastical) criminal proceedings with the final imposition of the penalty of deposition does the clergyman lose his (arch)priesthood and return to the order

³⁹ Holy Apostles, Canon XXV

"Bishop, or presbyter, or deacon caught in fornication, perjury, or theft shall be deposed but not excommunicated. For the Scripture says, 'You shall not exact vengeance twice for the same offense.' The same applies to other clerics."

⁴⁰ Nikodemos Milas, Ecclesiastical Law of the Orthodox Church, 1906, p. 708

"Due to the different status of the laity and the clergy in the church, the punishment for individuals of each order is also different. The most severe punishment for the clergy is the removal from spiritual office (deposition), while for the laity, it is excommunication. The clergy, as such, are not subject to this latter penalty."

⁴¹ Nikodemos Milas, Ecclesiastical Law of the Orthodox Church, 1906, p. 708

"When, as a result of his deposition, he is again ranked among the laity, having committed some transgression here that incurs the penalty of excommunication, for which he should have been punished with deposition as a cleric, he is then punished with this severe penalty that is imposed on the laity."

See also p. 718.

⁴²Nikodemos Milas, Ecclesiastical Law of the Orthodox Church, 1906, p. 661

⁴³ **Theophanes Continuatus, Chronographia (lib. 1-6), Page 355, line 22**

"But immediately falling at the patriarch's feet, he said, 'I adjure you, master, by God, to depose me first, and then, when I am stripped of the priesthood, let them punish me as a malefactor.' It should be noted that if the priesthood is not lost upon deposition, Patriarch Photius should have told Bishop Theodore of Euchaita, who was accused, that he is wrongly pleading, for such an action would have no desirable outcome, since the priesthood cannot be removed through deposition."

Compare:

"For these are the offspring of Arius's wicked seed. But him, who has armed his blasphemous lips against the Creator, the holy assembly stripped of the priesthood; and his most impious and godless heresy, they subjected to anathema."

Patriarch Photius, Letter 6, I. Valettas, p. 206, Ed. 1864.

he belonged to before ordination, either that of the laity or the monks. This arises from the consistent practice followed over the centuries by the Eastern Church, despite the fact that here too the indelible nature of the priesthood has sometimes been supported. According to this doctrine, which is accepted by the Western Church, the clergyman never loses the divine grace acquired through ordination; therefore, the acts he performs after his deposition are indeed uncanonical and illegal, yet still valid.⁴⁴

It is manifestly clear what has just been mentioned! The priesthood is only lost through deposition, resulting in the return of the deposed to his former order, either that of the laity or the monks. The indelible or ineradicable nature of the priesthood⁴⁵ is a Western doctrine, upon which the theory of the new walled-off and the validity of the mysteries performed outside the Orthodox Church by unjudged heretics is literally based.

“In the realm of Orthodoxy (the two professors continue), where, as we said above, the doctrine of the indelible nature of the priesthood did not prevail, the acts of the deposed are considered completely invalid with all the related consequences from both ecclesiastical and civil legislation (e.g., Article 175 § 2 of the Penal Code). These consequences cease (are not retroactively annulled) with the granting of pardon to the person condemned to deposition according to Article 155 of Law 5383/32 (see 11.2.7). If the decision for pardon includes the remission of the penalty, the deposed automatically regains the clerical status that he lost with the deposition. It is self-evident that this return to the clerical order is the result of grace and not the application of the doctrine of the indelible nature - as some claim.⁴⁶”

This paragraph sheds ample light and debunks the nonsense that many semi-educated people say, that the recognition of the sacraments of heretics is due to their indelible character and not to the economy applied by the Church to bring them back into its ranks. The Church has the full authority to remove and restore Divine Grace whenever it deems it appropriate for the benefit of the whole. The Lord left clear instructions to the Holy Apostles and their successors for the governance of the Church with the power of authority. “Amen, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.⁴⁷” Woe if Divine Grace were the

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 242

⁴⁵ "The designation of the priesthood as indelible or inexhaustible means one and the same thing."

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 242-243

⁴⁷ Matthew 18:18

plaything of every heretic and blasphemer⁴⁸, trapped under papal-type legalisms, waiting for the same offenders to repent, so they can convene a Synod to condemn themselves!

To be outside the Church and to lose Grace does not require many formalities, it is enough to express a heresy and persist in it. Everything else happens automatically!!! For a clergyman, things are worse, because **he not only is personally cut off**⁴⁹ from the Grace given by the Lord who is being blasphemed but also deprives his flock of such overshadowing due to his fallen state. The example of the light bulb is very apt to illustrate the condition of an unjudged heretic who dares to perform the Divine Mysteries while being unrepentant. This bulb, when it does not receive an electric current, remains off, regardless of whether its existence as a bulb is intact. Similarly, the unjudged clergyman who, with his bad confession of Faith, has left the Church, maintains the form, but inactive and inert, as without the coexistence of Grace, he is considered as nothing. The mysteries he performs are not valid, but they are potentially acceptable by the Church, provided he returns to it. A similar approach is taken by the Church regarding the baptism performed outside it. The pseudo-baptism, even if it fulfills the Orthodox form, is considered completely non-existent but receives substance by economy only within the Church's boundaries. The switch in this case that disconnects and reconnects the bulb is the correct confession of Faith, which leads you into and out of the Church and then the Synodical Decision that formally confirms the event.

As we said, the Church has authority over the Mysteries and acts in every situation accordingly, always considering its interest within the framework of economy. Under this perspective, it has often accepted sacraments of heretics who had long been condemned and deposed, without considering whether they were judged or unjudged, or whether their mysteries were non-existent or valid, invalid or valid. Its primary purpose was one, to bring them back into the Church; the rest are curable.

A striking example is the 6th Ecumenical Council, which in the 95th Canon accepts anciently anathematized and deposed heretics (Arians, Macedonians, Novatians, Quartodecimans, Apollinarians, etc.) only through the submission of libelli and the anointing with holy Myron. No re-ordination or repetition of another Mystery! It is a doctrine in the Orthodox Church that only within its boundaries can valid Mysteries be performed in all respects; those performed outside it are completely invalid and to be rejected, yet some of them are to be accommodated by economy on occasion. **Once a clergyman leaves the Church, Grace ceases to overshadow him, not only personally but also his Mysteries, even if the Church has not immediately proceeded with the direct removal of his priesthood through deposition.**

⁴⁸ Proceedings of the Holy Synods, Vol. III, p. 644. The proceedings mention a certain presbyter who was a Monothelite, who attempted to perform a sign from God to confirm his heretical belief. The Fathers of the Synod condemned him: "...being able to do nothing, for how could he, blaspheming against God, perform wonders? We recognized him as a deceiver and a fraud, and it was evident that, being a heretic, he should be stripped of all clerical rank and ministry. The holy synod, having deposed him, proclaimed this." **Thus, even before his deposition, this heretic was unable, due to his blasphemies, to perform the sign, having been abandoned by Grace.**

⁴⁹ Apostasy and Schism, p. 73.

Of course, this cannot be understood by the objectors, who constantly present the following argument: If they say that the ordinations and consequently the other mysteries of those outside the church are invalid, then why does the Church proceed with the deposition not only of those who ordain but also of those who are ordained, or during their reintegration does not re-ordain them? The answer is simple!

Based on the principle that the greater encompasses the lesser, it is correctly maintained that voluntary departure from the Church (especially in cases where excommunication has been imposed) **necessarily results in the loss of clerical status that the former Church member might have had.** Any contrary solution would be completely irrational. However, for the sake of ecclesiastical order, it would be prudent for the Church to proceed with the defrocking of the departing member so that, in the event of the lifting of excommunication or a potential return of the former Orthodox member, they do not automatically regain their clerical status⁵⁰. This is further explained as follows:

The application of *economia* in this context refers both to the point of recognizing such ordinations generally, as these should be considered by the Church as never having occurred, and to the point of the possible non-repetition of the ordination under *economia*, should an issue arise concerning the use of the irregularly ordained as clergy after forgiveness has been granted. In this case, *economia* could not be granted by the local bishop, but rather by the Synod or the competent ecclesiastical court, which alone has the right to lift or modify the penalty. The same applies to the non-repetition of the ordination of a clergyman ordained by a deposed bishop, regardless of the lifting or modification of the deposed bishop's penalty. **The Church, therefore, may use *oikonomia*, analogous to the non-reordination of a deposed bishop who is pardoned by it, and choose not to reordain those ordained by the deposed bishop..** Consequently, the possible refusal to apply *economia* **would result dynamically in the re-ordination of a clergyman ordained by a deposed bishop**, since, in our view, the concept of the indelible character of priesthood (character *indelebilis*) cannot be discussed, **as our Church does not accept such a doctrine**, nor has it developed any related theory in its theology⁵¹.

Thus, it is not the validity of the sacraments that compels the Church to handle them in such a manner, but rather the **ecclesiastical order** that dictates this practice and the possibility of using **economia**. It is important to note that through the defrocking of those ordained by deposed individuals, the Church informs the broader community of its state, so that others may be warned against them⁵². Otherwise, they could discreetly move among the flock, unknown to many, as adventurers or, if they were heretics, spreading their false teachings and corrupting the faithful. Therefore, the publicizing of false shepherds is of utmost importance! Hence, the defrocking of those outside the Church is necessary, though not essential regarding Apostolic Succession and the validity of their

⁵⁰ Canon Law, p. 243.

⁵¹ Amilkas Alevizatos, "Oikonomia in the Canon Law of the Orthodox Church," pp. 74-75.

⁵² "Canonical Law," p. 242: "...if the defect in the ordination is so evident that it becomes apparent to everyone, then the actions of the ordained are invalid without the need for an annulment decision."

mysteries. Mysteries performed by heretics or deposed clergy are considered invalid, and their possible acceptance signifies not the recognition of their intrinsic validity, but rather for reasons of *economia* due to the re-admission of those performing them into the body of the Orthodox Church. For this reason, in cases where the Church deemed it more appropriate to apply exactness, these same ordinations would be performed anew, without this being considered re-ordination⁵³.

Therefore, the **contradiction** into which the proponents of indelible ordination fall is quite evident. On one hand, they claim that ordinations performed by deposed individuals are valid and are accepted without re-ordination, while on the other hand, they say that defrocking does not constitute a removal of the priesthood, but only a suspension of its grace! If, therefore, there is a suspension of grace at the defrocking of the ordaining individual, then how was priesthood transmitted to the ordained when grace was impeded, and why do they argue for its validity? Consequently, the result of such ordination is entirely non-existent, because it is Divine Grace that performs the priesthood, and therefore the ordaining individual transmitted nothing! Whether the priesthood is removed during defrocking or there is a suspension of grace, the result is exactly the same concerning the quality of the ordination that takes place, regardless of whether the person performing the ordination has priesthood, but it is inactive⁵⁴. Thus, priesthood and Apostolic Succession, even if we accept their theory, stop at the first generation of the deposed and are not transmitted beyond that. How, then, do they support valid ordinations not just for those initially ordained by deposed or heretical individuals, but also for their successors many centuries later? Because that is what they are saying when they claim that the acceptance of these ordinations was not done by *economia*, but because of the actual transmission of grace due to the existence of priesthood!

One of the main "theoreticians" of these views was the late Aristotle Delimbasis, who leaves us truly speechless with his **contradictions**. Throughout his book "Pascha Kyriou," he tries to convince us of the validity of the mysteries performed by both deposed and non-deposed, heretics, and schismatics, and all sorts of "non-judged" individuals! "Mysteries are considered non-existent and invalid when the priest performing them has undergone the great anathema, which is nothing other than separation from God and the entire catholic Church. This great anathema was, for example, suffered by the heresiarch Nestorius, whom the Third Council definitively condemned from the episcopal rank and every clerical assembly. Therefore, while other deposed individuals who are "relegated to the place of the laity," meaning praying together with the faithful, will "lead the life of laypeople," those punished with the great anathema are reckoned as laypeople **outside the**

⁵³ Amilkas Alevizatos, "Economy According to the Canonical Law of the Orthodox Church," pp. 76-77: "It is unnecessary to say that the Church has no obligation, as is wrongly and commonly believed, to proceed with re-ordination if it deems it necessary and advantageous for the ecclesiastical organization, because this practice has been considered from the beginning as a new ordination."

⁵⁴ Cf. P. Boumis, "Canonical Law," p. 239: "Deposition, therefore, can be said to be the suspension of the operation of the grace of priesthood. That is, deposition renders Divine Grace inactive. For this reason, the sacraments that a deposed cleric might perform are invalid and are considered as not having been performed."

Church. That is, the former are placed in the place of laypeople as deposed clergy, while the **latter become laypeople**⁵⁵." Unfortunately, we cannot understand his rationale and the ecclesiology on which it is based! While he finally mentions the existence of invalid mysteries among condemned heretics, he attributes this only to the imposition of the great anathema and not to the defrocking imposed on them by the Council! He even distinguishes the status in which they are placed; he says that the result of defrocking is one thing, and that of the great anathema is another, since the former assigns them to the place of laypeople (retaining, of course, the clerical status), while the latter as mere laypeople! The consequence of the second case, he says, is due to the fact that they are outside the Church. We could extensively comment on the above absurdities, but we will focus on what we consider the main point. What makes condemned heretics laypeople, he says, is the anathema that took them out of the Church; however, we know from the holy patristic teaching of our Church that one leaves the Church by accepting heretical teachings, especially those defined as such, and refusing to reject them when admonished. The anathema is the formalization and finality (i.e., the end of the "two-way street") of the departure from the Church of the unrepentant heretic, and not the cause! Saint Gregory Palamas is very clear when referring to the unjudged patriarch of Constantinople John Kalekas, saying: "For all of the Church of Christ are of the truth, and those not of the truth are absolutely not of the Church of Christ⁵⁶." In translation: "For those belonging to the Church of Christ are followers of the truth, and those who do not belong to the truth do not belong to the Church of Christ either." There are not two exits from the Church of Christ, one through anathema and the other through the loss of correct confession, meaning the truth. These are sophistries to support their error and unorthodox ecclesiology! The Lord told us that the Church consists even of two or three people. If in the history of the Church there is this case where it shrinks so much to reach this minimal number, then what anathema or what Council is this that expels the remaining ones definitively outside of it? For here, the Lord, I do not believe, uses the term "potentially" for those outside the Church...! It is therefore clear that the loss of correct confession takes one out of the Church, and not some formalities, necessary though for other reasons!!!

⁵⁵ "Paska Kyriou," p. 782.

⁵⁶ "Logos Antirritikos A', 56," p. 137.

The conclusion from all of this, I believe, is that the supporters⁵⁷ of these unorthodox and foreign beliefs accept the validity of all ordinations, whether they come from those who have been deposed or from **those deemed heretical**; even if they do not dare to admit it openly!

Another supporter of the validity of sacraments performed by those who have been deposed says the following: "The punishment of deposition is related to the question of whether the priesthood is indelible or not. Many canonists believe that the priesthood does not have an indelible character and consequently, deposition removes even the gift (the grace) of the priesthood. Others accept that, since the grace of the priesthood is given by God, no man can remove it and therefore it is indelible⁵⁸." It is inconceivable how such nonsense can stand as serious arguments and be believed even by distinguished university professors! One should know that the Mysteries (Sacraments) of God on earth are managed by the Church, and it decides on their validity or invalidity and who will receive them or not. This is the authority given to the holy Apostles on earth. Therefore, only the Church has the ability to choose accordingly to the situation, to manage or uphold strictness on the mysteries performed by heretics or deposed clergy. People decide this! We wonder, if a human cannot remove the grace of the priesthood because it was given by God, how can they suspend it? What is the great difference? The position of the Fathers is clear on this matter as well; let us listen to what Saint Nicodemus says in his note on the 35th Apostolic Canon, about those who were ordained outside their parish and were deposed for it: "One might ask if the clergy ordained by an extraterritorial bishop, without the opinion of the parish bishop, and deposed, can be reinstated to the clerical rank from which they were removed, or not? It seems they can, as some say, because they were not expelled from the clergy for their own sin, but because of the one who ordained them outside the parish, especially if they did not know that the one who ordained them did so against the opinion of the local bishop. Since they can be reinstated to the clerical rank, could it be by a second ordination by the local bishop, as deposed, or by his consent and approval alone? Perhaps by his consent alone: this because it is forbidden to perform second ordinations, according to the Canons; also, because, as someone forcibly takes a woman and without the consent of the bishop and her parents, a priest marries them, if afterward the bishop and the woman's parents consent to the marriage, there is no need for a second marriage ceremony (hence, Saint Basil the Great in the 22nd Canon wants the

⁵⁷ Compare Aristotle Delimpasis, "Pascha Kyriou," where referring to the lifting of the Bulgarian schism and the restoration of deposed clergy, he states the following paradoxical assertion: "Hence it becomes clear that the deposed, when performing liturgy, is not assuming a foreign authority!!!" It appears, from what we see, he considers the deposed minister entirely unblemished from a canonical standpoint, since he does not even fall into the sin of assuming authority! Then what is the purpose of his deposition, since it cannot bring any consequences upon him? Where is the role of suspending priesthood, which is often cited during deposition, when it is not sufficient to restrict the flow of grace, from and to the deposed? On what basis do they make such absurd claims? Anyone can perceive the contradictions they fall into, as well as the ecclesiological inconsistency and opposition with the Orthodox view: "The sacraments and sacred rites performed by the deposed clergy are invalid. Performing these constitutes the offense of assuming authority, and ecclesiastically threatens the perpetrator with the penalty of major excommunication or anathema." Pantelimon Rodopoulos, "Epitome of Canon Law," p. 126.

⁵⁸ P. Boumis, "Canon Law," p. 236.

consent of the parents to validate such a forced marriage): similarly, the ordination by the extraterritorial bishop, **if the local bishop consents, has the validity and power as if it were his own ordination.** For just as the cause of their deposition arose from the lack of consent of the local bishop, **so does the validity of their ordination come from the will and opinion of the same bishop**⁵⁹.”

The Church, of course, applies the aforementioned by the Saint not only to non-canonical ordinations by extraterritorial bishops but also to those by heretics who had severed succession for centuries! So, let us not find it strange, from all that we have mentioned, the way the Church operates, because as we said, its purpose is the safeguarding and unity of the flock and not punishment and division.

These, in summary, are our positions on the current issue that concerns and greatly divides the Orthodox flock, which has separated itself from the communion of heresy, and is contemplating what to do! We hope to have contributed somewhat to the resolution of this problem, asking at the same time for the understanding of the readers for any mistakes.

⁵⁹ Sacred Rudder, p. 38, Footnote 1.