

The distinction between sacraments and sacramentals according to Fr Boris Bobrinskoy

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν μυστηρίων τῆς Ἐκκλησίας εἶναι ἓνα ζήτημα μὲ ἀύξανόμενο θεολογικὸ ἐνδιαφέρον στὶς μέρες μας, καθότι κάποιοι ἀμφισβητοῦν τὴν παγίωση τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ ἑπτὰ γιὰ τὰ μυστήρια. Τὸ καίριο ἐρώτημα ποῦ ἀνακύπτει εἶναι: ποιά ἢ διαφορὰ μεταξὺ μυστηρίων καὶ «μυστηριοειδῶν»;

Κατὰ τὸν π. Boris Bobrinskoy, τρία εἶναι τὰ κριτήρια τῆς διάκρισης μεταξὺ μυστηρίων καὶ μυστηριοειδῶν:

1) Τὰ μυστηριοειδῆ εἶναι προαιρετικά, ἐνῶ τὰ μυστήρια εἶναι ἀναγκαῖα γιὰ τὴ σωτηρία.

2) Τὰ περισσότερα ἀπὸ τὰ μυστηριοειδῆ ἔχουν ἰδιωτικὸ χαρακτήρα σὲ ἀντίθεση μὲ τὰ μυστήρια ποῦ εἶναι «καθολικά», ἀφοροῦν δηλαδὴ ὅλο τὸ σῶμα τῆς Ἐκκλησίας.

3) Τὰ μυστηριοειδῆ ἔχουν θεσπιστεῖ ἀπὸ τὴν Ἐκκλησία, ἐνῶ τὰ μυστήρια εἶναι θεοσύστατα.

Τὰ κριτήρια αὐτὰ δὲν εἶναι βέβαια ἱκανοποιητικά οὔτε ἀπὸ μόνους, ἀλλὰ οὔτε καὶ συνολικά. Ὡστόσο ἡ συμβολὴ τοῦ π. Boris Bobrinskoy στὸ ὅλο θέμα εἶναι σημαντικὴ, ἀφενὸς ἐπειδὴ ἐπιχειρεῖ νὰ ἀποτρέψει τὴν ἀνάπτυξη ἐνὸς ἀχαλίνωτου πεντηκοστιανισμοῦ στὸν χῶρο τῆς ὀρθόδοξης μυστηριολογίας καὶ ἀφετέρου ἐπειδὴ ὑποδεικνύει τὸν ὀρθὸ τρόπο, μὲ τὸν ὁποῖο θὰ μπορούσε νὰ ἀναβιβαστεῖ ἓνα μυστηριοειδὲς σὲ μυστήριο, δηλαδὴ μὲ τὸ ἀποδειχθεῖ ὅτι τὰ ἀνωτέρω κριτήρια διάκρισης δὲν ἰσχύουν γι' αὐτό.

Ἐπομένως, παρὰ τὸ ὅτι ἡ συνεισφορὰ του ἐκ πρώτης ὄψεως φαίνεται ἀνεπαρκῆς, εἶναι τελικὰ ἀξιόλογη, δεδομένου ὅτι δὲν ἐπιζητεῖ δραματικὲς ἀλλαγὲς στὸν ἀριθμὸ τῶν μυστηρίων, ἀλλὰ ἀντιμετωπίζει τὸ ὅλο ζήτημα ἐντὸς του πλαισίου τῆς ὀρθόδοξης παράδοσης.

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The number of the sacraments is an issue of increasing theological interest nowadays¹. Although their number has been established as seven in Orthodox Church centuries ago, there have been voices, which doubt that the enumeration of seven sacraments must be considered as permanent. For instance S. Boulgakov states that the gift of the Holy Spirit is not limited to sacraments and that number seven is not of permanent character, for sacramentals are not different from the seven sacraments with reference to their active strength². N. Afanasiev as well mentions that although the common sense of Church accepted number seven for sacraments, dogmatic thought does not rely on this. The Spirit 'bloweth where it listeth'³, but if there are only seven manifestations of the Spirit, this means that the Spirit does not 'bloweth where it listeth', but only there where it has been determined⁴.

The question consequently is, what is the difference between sacraments and sacramentals? According to Fr Boris Bobrinsky there are three criteria for the distinction between them⁵:

- 1) Sacramentals are optional; they are not followed by an explicit and specific will of God to be performed. Sacraments, on the contrary, are necessary for the salvation and they form the spiritual life of the believer.
- 2) Most of the sacramentals have private character; they concern the personal, domestic and professional life of the Christian. Sacraments are 'catholic', they have been established for the edification of Church. However, some of the sacramentals, such as the inauguration of a temple, have this ecclesiastic character and are performed for the edification of the community.
- 3) Sacramentals are established by Church. Sacraments, on the other hand, are God-instituted. [Still, a further distinction by Fr Boris between evangelical sacraments (Baptism, Holy Eucharist etc.) and ecclesiastic sacraments (Marriage, Holy Unction) seems to reduce the importance of this criterion].

1. See Εὐ. Θεοδώρου, «Τὸ ζήτημα τοῦ ἀριθμοῦ τῶν μυστηρίων ἐξ ἐπόψεως ὀρθοδόξου», *Θεολογία* 57 (1986) 370-377.

2. *L' Orthodoxie*, Paris 1935, pp. 156-157.

3. John 3,8.

4. «Sacraments et Sacramentaux», *La Pensée Orthodoxe* VIII (1951) 17.

5. «Ἀγιαστικά Προάξεις», *Θρησκευτική και ἠθική Ἐγκυκλοπαιδεία* 1 (1962) 239-240.0100

It is obvious that these criteria are not fully satisfactory, not only each on its own, but even all together as a whole in some cases. They have no absolute significance and they do not stand in all cases, as Fr Boris himself admits⁶. Therefore it is rather curious why he does not mention the most common and basic argument, the one from the difference between the 'ex opere operato' conferment of the divine grace in sacraments and the 'ex opere operantis' conferment of the divine grace in sacramentals. This would certainly reinforce and complete his argumentation in the best way. For instance we may say that exorcism is God-instituted as a command of Christ to the Apostles ('cast out devils')⁷ and fulfills all the above criteria to be called sacrament in the narrow sense of the term, but it is also clear that the effectiveness of an exorcism depends on the condition of the human factor⁸; this is out of the question for the seven sacraments.

Perhaps Fr Boris had doubts about the argument in question, influenced by other Russian theologians, who support, as we mentioned above, that there is no difference between sacraments and sacramentals concerning the energy of the divine grace⁹. Yet it is interesting that, although he refers to the opinion of these theologians with respect¹⁰, he finally prefers to side with another theologian of the Russian Diaspora, Paul Evdokimov, who notes that the Spirit 'bloweth where it listeth', but in the sacraments, under the terms that Church demands and due to the promise of the Saviour, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are surely granted and with the testimony of Church¹¹.

Fr Boris adds that the establishment and the limitation of sacraments impose a permanent and objective order, which excludes every unbridled Pentecostalism¹². He realizes the danger of an uncontrolled increase of the number of sa-

6. *Ibid*, col. 239.

7. Matt. 8,10. See also Luke 10,18-19.

8. See Matt. 17,14-21 / Mark 9,14-29 / Luke 9,37-43.

9. Or perhaps he did not want to insist on an argument that had already been totally rejected by them.

10. *Ἀγιαστικαὶ Πράξεις*, 238-239.

11. *Ibid*, col. 239. The whole extract and especially the expressions «due to the promise of the Saviour» and «surely granted» actually imply the doctrine of the «ex opere operato» conferment of the divine grace in the seven sacraments, even if Fr Boris does not count this (though he could) as a fourth criterion for the distinction between sacraments and sacramentals.

12. *Ἀγιαστικαὶ Πράξεις*, 239.

craments so he attempts to indicate the different characteristics of sacraments and sacramentals. And this is indeed his essential contribution to the whole issue. He does not propose a different number for the sacraments, he does not even seek for a final answer to the problem, but he shows us the way to solve it by indicating three criteria for the distinction between sacraments and sacramentals. His point seems to be that if we want to change-increase the number of sacraments, we must examine first carefully how many of the sacramentals stand these three criteria in order to be included in the sacraments. In this way we would avoid the danger of Pentecostalism.

Working on this pattern (adding besides the fourth criterion we mentioned) we supported in a previous study of ours that a sacramental which stands all the criteria so as to be included in the sacraments is the monastic tonsure, which can be added without change of the number of sacraments because monastic tonsure, having an intrinsic similarity and also contrast to marriage, can be accounted as an alternative to this sacrament¹³.

As a conclusion we may say that Fr B. Bobrinsky's contribution to the issue of the distinction between sacraments and sacramentals, though it seems at first sight to be rather inadequate, it is after all remarkable and a reason for this is that Fr Boris has the ability to compromise views opposite to each other by combining positive elements of each one¹⁴. Dealing with the establishment of seven sacraments on the one hand and the demand for a revision of this number on the other hand he tries to satisfy both sides in a way not just to please everyone

13. Μ. Γαλεριανού, «Ὁ ἀριθμὸς τῶν μυστηρίων τῆς Ἐκκλησίας», *Ὁρθοδοξία καὶ παιδεία* 3 (2004) 139-162 and esp. pp. 152-160.

14. This is obvious also in his second article in the same cyclopedia with reference to the Ascension of Christ from a dogmatic point of view. Generally, handbooks of Orthodox Dogmatic Theology associate the Ascension of Christ only with His kingly office. S. Boulgakov, on the contrary, associates Lord's Ascension exclusively with His priestly office. Fr Boris wisely comprises these different views by supporting that the Ascension of Christ is associated with both His kingly and priestly office because the two offices are connected and it is not wise to separate them («Ἀνάληψις [Δογματική]», *Θρησκευτικὴ καὶ Ἠθικὴ Ἐγκυκλοπαιδεία* 2 [1963] 496-498). Given the circumstances in that period, that is the theological standards on this subject, his view was quite original. Following from his position, next step is to associate the Ascension of Christ even with His prophetic office, since all the offices are connected and therefore we often refer to the «triple office» of Christ instead of the «three offices» of Christ. (For more see our study: *Ἡ Ἀνάληψη τοῦ Χριστοῦ κατὰ τὴν ὀρθόδοξη θεολογία*, Ἀθήνα 2006, pp. 37-51).

but to achieve an agreement too; he understands the need of revision referring to the number of sacraments and at the same time he justifies the established limit on the number of sacraments. But above all he rejects a dramatic change that would be out of bounds of Orthodox Dogmatic Theology. So, his first priority is to remain faithful to Orthodox Tradition and this is from an Orthodox point of view the most important element of his contribution.