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# The Issue of Burying Unbaptized Babies, in the Orthodox Church

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## Abstract

Man's life is full of the unpredictable; it consists in joys and sorrows, which arise through the mysterious economy of God. If the joys can be easily assimilated, the troubles are “tests of fire” for the mental balance, faith, and love of the Christian. The hardest ordeal is caused by the death of a loved one; and among the situations in which a person dies, the death of a child is terrible, terrifying and never rationally understood ...

Therefore, the present study aims to analyze, from a theological point of view, the way which the Orthodox Church tried to find pastoral-missionary and liturgical solutions for the hardest test that the Christian family faced over time: the premature death of a baby and the service that can be performed by the priest in this situation. The text combines the scriptural arguments regarding the baby as a gift of God for a family, with the patristic theologism on this topic, then makes a synthesis of the practice of Church life on the death and burial of infants, in Slavic and Greek Orthodoxy, face to face with the rules of the Romanian space on the problem. Pointing out and criticizing various non-canonical and non-liturgical practices, the study considers the newest Decision of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, which clarifies the issue and establishes the liturgical ordinances that the priest is obliged to perform in such situations. The note of interest and novelty of the study is amplified by three markers. The first is the notification of the lack, of a specific liturgical ritual for the burial of unbaptized infants throughout Orthodoxy, for hundreds of years. The second is given by the disapproval of liturgical innovations for such a life situation, coming from antiquity; unfortunately, such liturgical improvisations have passed to the present day! The third is to emphasize the fact that the bibliography on the subject is extremely poor, an element that denotes the caution and even the retention of theologians to approach this delicate subject.

## Keywords

child, Holy Sacrament of Baptism, Infant Funeral Service, non-liturgical practice, non-canonical aspect.

## I. Preliminaries

One of the greatest pains of the soul that a mature Christian bear in life is the death of a child. The pain is amplified, and the dramatic situation created is accentuated when the untimely deceased child has not received the Sacrament of Baptism and cannot be buried according to the whole Christian order. Over time, many Christian families, some with a fervent spiritual life, have experienced such deep suffering, and their condition has always called for a pastoral-liturgical solution, both for deadly abducted infants and for inner injured parents. For this reason, on several occasions, in the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, theological analyzes took place on this topic, which pastoral solutions were sought through. The last of these debates in the Holy Synod was reopened as a result of the fire that took place on August 16, 2010, at the Clinical Hospital of Obstetrics and Gynecology “Prof. dr. Panait Sîrbu” (Giulești Maternity Hospital) in Bucharest, when six newborns lost their lives, and another five suffered severe burns and were left with terrible sequelae for the rest of their lives. Of these, some were unbaptized. The fact that, at that time (August 2010) there was no liturgical order for such situations, and those babies could not be buried with service started wide discussions in all the Romanian media. Following that unfortunate event, the Romanian Orthodox Church has drawn up several ordinances, which the priest performs in the case of the burial of babies passed to the eternally unbaptized.

The present study aims to show how our Church has succeeded in responding to this demand of the faithful people, to lead to their resting place the infants who, for various reasons, have died unbaptized. At the same time, the study also makes a brief comparative analysis: how this issue of the burial of unbaptized infants is managed in the other Orthodox Churches.

## II. Some scriptural foundations and patristic and canonical arguments on the subject of the “newborn baby”

In the Holy Scriptures there are texts that show the baby is a divine gift for his parents: “Thou didst knit me together in my mother’s womb...” (Psalm

138, 13), “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born, I consecrated you ... ” (Jer. 1, 5). If God allows the conception and birth of a child, he certainly has a plan with him; if he lives, or dies, that child belongs to the Lord and from this scriptural premise starts the present study, regarding the proposed topic: the burial of unbaptized infants.

The general canonical rule shows that the funeral service is performed

“ [...] only to validly baptized Christians, if they have passed to the eternal reconciled with the Church, that is, to those who were not excommunicated or given anathema at the time of their death. According to the Church ritual, it is forbidden to bury non-Christians, heretics, schismatics, those under excommunication or anathema, those who refuse to receive the Holy Sacraments and oppose Christian burial, as well as suicides. [...]”<sup>1</sup>.

To the situations listed here are added the convicts who died burdened with grievous sins, those who died in duels – who are assimilated to suicide, and those who were cremated. Infants who died unbaptized could fall into the category of non-Christians; but can it be said sententiously about the minor dead son of some Christian parents that he is a pagan? On the contrary, it can be said that the baby born of good Christian parents is a virtual Christian, although his spiritual and physical growth, according to Christian law, is determined by many factors. In this sense, in the theological tradition related to this theme, the image of the fruit tree is often used, the flowers of which cannot be said to be already fruitful (since they can be barren), nor can they be said to be dry or other variety (as they can be fruit-bearing, from the tree variety).

Making a minimum service for unbaptized babies stops one of the most damaging and blatant canonical violations: “Baptism” of premature or dead infants. Out of an oversized love and with too possessive accents for the lost children<sup>2</sup>, some parents insisted and obtained, through

<sup>1</sup> Arhid. prof. dr. Ioan FLOCA, *Drept Canonic Ortodox. Legislație și administrație bisericească*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1990, vol. II, p. 131. See also arhim. Nicodim SACHELARIE, *Pravila bisericească*, Ploiești, <sup>2</sup>1996, art. 1027, p. 106.

<sup>2</sup> Among mothers with this sad experience, for example, there is an unofficial text, a “Canon of Repentance for Aborted Children”, and another “Canon of Repentance for Newborn and Unborn Babies”, printed and reprinted in various private publishing

weakness, error and sin of some clerics: the baptism of dead infants, the “baptism of the grave” where the dead and unbaptized infant is buried, or the “baptism” of a vessel of earth brought from the infant’s grave. Sometimes this non-canonical ordinance, non-existent in the Orthodox worship, was made even on the occasion of the feast of the Lord’s Baptism or on the day of St. John the Baptist, and the respective infants were called “Ion” or “Ioana”, as the case may be<sup>3</sup>; when done on other occasions, these children were considered and listed as “Nobody”<sup>4</sup>. This sad reality violates the prescriptions of Canon 18 of Carthage: “... not to give the Eucharist (by extension, any other Holy Sacrament) to the bodies of the dead. For it is written: «Take, eat! ...», but the bodies of the dead can neither take nor eat, nor can the priests baptize those who have already died”<sup>5</sup>.

If it happens at home, the death of the unbaptized baby is entirely the fault of his parents! They have an obligation to watch over him and, if he is weak or ill, to call the priest to baptize him. In extreme circumstances, in order the child does not die unbaptized, the parents must know that there is a “Short Baptismal Service”, which the priest quickly performs, and the service will be completed later, without repeating the three immersions and anointing with the Holy and Great Anointing. There is also the “Baptism of Necessity” service which any Christian and even parents can administer

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houses. More recently, in 2020, the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church approved the text.

<sup>3</sup> This explains why, on papers, especially in some presented at the Holy Altar by old women, there are dozens of names “Ion, Ion, Ion... etc”. and “Ioana, Ioana, Ioana... etc”.. All those names hide similar situations, which are discussed here. On this issue, the Church has a clear position: the Holy Sacraments are administered only to living people! When asked if these children can receive Baptism, archim. Ioanichie BĂLAN answers: “In no case can aborted children and stillborn children be baptized, because they do not have a soul in them. All of them remain in God’s judgment and in the conscience of the parents who killed them”. – in *Călăuză ortodoxă în Biserică*, Editura Sfintei Mănăstiri Sihăstria, 1992, vol. I, p. 74.

<sup>4</sup> Although totally erroneous, this practice in some areas illustrates how the theology of the person is received, at the level of the people’s faith. In Orthodox theology, the name illustrates the person; without a name, the human person is “nobody”. But this popular tradition captures the perseverance of deliverance from anonymity seen not only as a mere lack of a name, but as a lack of Christ, Who has “a name above every name” (Ephesians 1, 21; Philippians 2, 9) and Who calls man to a living and eternal connection, of interpersonal love.

<sup>5</sup> Arhid. prof. dr. Ioan FLOCA, *Canoanele Bisericii Ortodoxe. Note și comentarii*, Editura Polsib SA, Sibiu, 1993, pp. 249-250.

to the dying child, by the correct utterance of the baptismal formula; and if the infant does not die, the priest will read the service in full later, without repeating the baptismal formula<sup>6</sup>. Non-catechized and negligent parents (meaning careless about the salvation of their baby) are punished according to Canon 37 of St. John the Faster, with a 3-year stoppage from Holy Communion, with dry food and many prostrations; if the baby is 7 days old or older, the repentance canon for parents increases up to 7 years off Holy Communion, with 40 prostrations daily and dry food<sup>7</sup>. The clergyman must apply a similar canon to medical personnel who, through carelessness, ignorance or negligence cause the death of an unbaptized infant who is in maternity or hospital.

The theological argument of this severity is shown by Canon 110 of the Synod of Carthage (419), which teaches that infants “who themselves could not commit any sins, are indeed baptized in order to give up their sins, in order to cleanse themselves by rebirth of what they attracted from the old birth”<sup>8</sup>.

### **III. Theological arguments in support of the possibility and necessity of holding a funeral service for unbaptized dead infants**

According to the teaching of the Orthodox Christian faith, as bearers of ancestral sin, unbaptized infants cannot enter the Kingdom of God, but, as some who have no personal sins, they are absolved from eternal torment. Their salvation remains absolutely in the care, judgment, and mercy of God. That is why it cannot be ultimately said that in the event of death, they would be lost in nothingness. Every human person is in God’s care. The quality of person is not given through Baptism, but it begins from conception, from the mother’s womb, continues through birth, is fulfilled by Christian living in this world and is perfected Beyond, where those who rich the Kingdom partake with God “truer, on the non-evening day of the Kingdom...”<sup>9</sup>. Through Baptism, the human person is sanctified,

<sup>6</sup> *Molitfelnic*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2019, pp. 55-56.

<sup>7</sup> Arhid. prof. dr. Ioan FLOCA, *Canoanele Bisericii Ortodoxe...*, p. 444.

<sup>8</sup> Arhid. prof. dr. Ioan FLOCA, *Canoanele Bisericii Ortodoxe...*, p. 291.

<sup>9</sup> *Liturghier*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2012, pp. 193 și 274.

and adopted by God through grace; through Baptism, man becomes a Christian, and a member of the Church. Unbaptized dead infants and sons of Christian parents are not indeed members of the Church, but they are still not entirely outside of it. They cannot be considered damned, nor can the most unfaithful or the worst of men be considered irretrievably lost: he can return to Christ through repentance, he can discover Christ and he can structurally change his life. In the case of a baby, at the same time with his premature death, all the things not yet written by him in the “book of his life”, not lived, but known by God, are extinguished: qualities or defects, good or bad deeds, spiritual life or far from the right faith – its whole existence, not traversed by life in this world. And if these have not happened, logically and justly the baby in question can receive neither reward (glorification) nor divine punishment (torment), just as it cannot be said of an extremely virtuous non-Christian that God will allow him to go to hell, but He will not give him the same reward, joy and light as those of the righteous and the saints of Heaven. In this regard, St. Gregory the Theologian teaches about unbaptized dead infants:

“[...] And those will not be filled with glory, nor will they be punished by the Righteous Judge, on the one hand as unscrupulous, and on the other hand as some without malice, but especially as some who suffer the damage without being caused. For he who does not suffer torment is not necessarily full of honor, just as he who is without honor is not necessarily tormented” [here in the sense of “in hell”]<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> The translation is made by the undersigned. The original text is: “Τους δέ, μήτε δοξασθήσεσθαι, μήτε κολασθήσεσθαι παρά τού Δικαίου Κριτού, ὡς ἀσφραγίστους μέν, ἀπονήρους δέ, ἄλλα παθόντας μάλλον τήν ζημίαν, ἢ δράσαντας. Οὐ γάρ ὅστις οὐ κολάσεως ἀξίος, ἤδη καί τιμής ὡσπερ οὐδέ ὅστις οὐ τιμής, ἤδη καί κολάσεως” – in: PG 36, 389. Father Ilie *CLEOPA* once asked about the fact that these babies do not go to torment, and about this mystery, he answered that these babies “neither torment, nor rejoice, nor stay in darkness, nor in light. “, But they sit in the northern part of the sky, where there is a kind of fog”, like the dawn of day, when it has not yet dawned “- see *Ne vorbește Părintele Cleopa*, Editura Episcopiei Romanului, ediția a II-a, 2001, vol. III, p. 139. There is another expression, more subtle and more plastic, attributed to St. Gregory of Nyssa, with reference to the eternal state of these infants, who “rest within the radiance of the morning star”, and the theological formulation “Unbaptized dead infants do not share the light, but are honored with peace” circulates at the level of theological seminaries, in the discipline “Dogmatics”, when trying an explanation of the condition of infants in this category.

They can be considered to be under the all-encompassing care of God, Who works fully in His Church, but Who is omnipresent and working by grace throughout the Cosmos, which is His Creation<sup>11</sup>.

St. Simeon of Thessaloniki teaches that until they receive Baptism, the unbaptized infants of Orthodox Christians, can be considered catechumens, as were those in the early period of the Church who were preparing to receive Baptism:

“[...] And on the eighth day the infant is brought before the doors of the Church, for he is not yet sanctified with Baptism. ... And [at 40 days] if the baby is not be baptized yet, sitting before the candlesticks and bowing him at the altar [the priest] releases him, giving him to his mother. From this, the baby is called [...]”<sup>12</sup>.

Therefore, like catechumens, they can participate in some services, for example in the “didactic” part of the Liturgy. Although they cannot receive the Holy Sacraments of the Church, they can receive some of the ordinances of the Church, such as the pre-Baptismal prayers and exorcisms. Continuing this reasoning, it can be stated that the funeral service, being only a special prayer, in a form adapted to the situation and approved by the Holy Synod (as decided and practiced in the Romanian Orthodox Church, since 2010) could be administered to catechumens, in this case, to unbaptized infants. The lack of a funeral arrangement for such infants was part of the Church’s harsh and straightforward pedagogy in the early centuries, when, in order to urge parents not to postpone the baptism of their children, in cases of infant death the body was simply taken to the grave, without any ritual or prayer.

<sup>11</sup> See, in this regard, the excellent article of dr. Anca MANOLESCU, “Moartea fără religie”, in: *Dilema veche*, nr. 242, 2-8 september 2010. Of course, the idea set out above is at the frontier between very precise Orthodox theology and the more elastic approach of doctrine issues, which is of Christian confluence, and remain, after all, the mysteries of God’s will.: “Modus innexplicabilis, totius theologiae”!

<sup>12</sup> Sfântul SIMEON AL TESALONICULUI, *Tratat asupra tuturor dogmelor credinței noastre ortodoxe, după adevăratele principii puse de Domnul nostru Iisus Hristos și urmașii Săi*, Editura Arhiepiscopiei Sucevei și Rădăuților, Suceava, 2002, vol. I. cap. 59 – “Detailed showing of what is done before and after Baptism”, p. 107 și cap. 60 – “For on the eighth day the Lord took the name of Jesus which was given to him”, p. 108.



The Synod of Constantinople in 1815, held under the presidency of Patriarch Cyril, showed that

“[...] infants who die unbaptized are not tormented, being cleansed from voluntary sins. However, they do not deserve the Kingdom of God, because they were not cleansed of the stain of ancestral sin through the divine Bath and did not obtain spiritual rebirth. [...]”<sup>13</sup>.

The fact that the babies of the Orthodox parents, who had fallen asleep unbaptized, were always buried (without service) in the cemeteries of Orthodox Christians, even if on the sidelines, is proof that they were considered to be taken under God's care. The arguments gathered and invoked above constitute as many motivations for which the problem of the burial of unbaptized infants had to be solved, theologically and canonically, liturgically and pastoral missionary.

#### **IV. Other arguments: hymn references and popular traditions related to the problem of babies passed prematurely to the eternal ones**

Until 2019, the Romanian *Euchologion*<sup>14</sup> did not contain a service for the burial of unbaptized infants and no guidance in this regard; it only contained the “Service of the Babies' Burial”<sup>15</sup>, which is performed for baptized infants. According to the hymnographic text in *Euchologion*, the theological argument of parents' love for their children – in general, and of caring for deceased infants – in particular, is the Incarnation of the Son of God. When incarnated, “He became impoverished by taking flesh and willing to become a baby without change” and showed Himself “as

<sup>13</sup> Taken from Hristou ANDROUTZOS, *Dogmatica* (transl. pr. prof. dr. Dumitru Stăniloae), Sibiu, 1930, p. 350. See also prot. dr. Spiridon CÂNDEA, *Botezul din necesitate*, Editura “Revistei teologice”, Sibiu, 1940, p. 24.

<sup>14</sup> In this sense, I consulted several editions of the Romanian *Euchologion*: Râmnic – 1768 și 1782, Brașov – 1811, Blaj – 1815, Chișinău – 1820, Sibiu – 1833 și 1849, Iași – 1834, București – 1855 și 1948.

<sup>15</sup> *Molitfelnic*, pp. 281-294. See also *Aghiasmatar*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române., București, 2002, pp. 241-254 și *Panihidă*, Editura Trinitas, Iași, 2000, pp. 51-67.



a Baby”<sup>16</sup>. About babies, it is shown that they are “innocent”, “imperfect with age”, “incorruptible”, “clean”, that “they did not taste the worldly sweets”<sup>17</sup>. Elsewhere, the hymnographer urges us to pray to the Savior, saying: “Blessed is this baby ... like a clean bird in the heavenly nests, saved by his spirit from the various cords, and joined with the spirits of the righteous to rejoice in Your kingdom”<sup>18</sup>.

It should be noted that all these texts are related to infants who received the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, but they can also be considered partial or allusive references to infants who died unbaptized. According to the teaching of the Orthodox Church, even if they died of ancestral sin, because they did not receive Baptism, the only Holy Sacrament that erases this sin, yet unbaptized dead infants have no personal sins and have not led a defile life in soul and body. The unfulfilled and sinless condition of premature dead infants, but also the immeasurable grief of their parents is captured with great sensitivity in a “Preaching” in a *Euchologion*, from the end of the 17th century:

“[...] Oh, poor death, how you mow and bitter us with your venom, killing us without our knowledge!

[...] But why did you spread this poppy so hastily and reluctantly? Why did you cut this grape uncooked, so urgently? This raw master, who did not make a crooked thing before God. This was the joy and gladness of the parents in all their abominations; this was the rest of their eyes. Oh, merciless death, but even after that you walked in ambush to kill him mercilessly and his raw body and untouched by all the sins of the world.

[...] Oh, frightened death, behold, you have yellowed his body, and we see his face like a sear flower before our eyes. This was the joy of his parents, for his parents thought that he would have many days and a long life before him, saying: «This will be the light of our eyes. This will be our staff and strength in the days of our old age. He will remain in the world after our death.» But you, death, you merciless reaped this unripe ear? [...]”<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>16</sup> *Molitfelnic*, Canonul, Cântarea 1, p. 281.

<sup>17</sup> *Molitfelnic*, Canonul, Cântările 1 și a 3-a, pp. 281 și 282.

<sup>18</sup> *Molitfelnic*, Canonul, Cântarea a 9-a, p. 290.

<sup>19</sup> “Cazanie la oameni și la kokoni mici morți”, in: *Molităvnik*, Bălgrad, 1689, f. 212

The text contained in the worship book cited above, refers to baptized and untimely dead infants, but the state of their transition to the eternal ones, of physical and spiritual purity, is entirely similar to unbaptized dead infants. Regarding the dead infants, the *Triodion* states sententiously: “It must also be known that baptized dead infants enjoy the delight of the heavenly goodness; and the unbaptized dead infants or those of the heathen will go neither to the delight of heaven nor to hell”<sup>20</sup>. Perhaps this explains why, based on an old, unwritten tradition that comes from the monastic space, during the 40 days after this sad and unbearable situation of life, many of the mothers who lose babies, baptized or unbaptized, read the “Canon” from “The Service of the Burial of Babies” every evening.

In particular, it is known from the practice of the Church about aborted and unbaptized infants that they are mentioned in the great prayer for those asleep, within the service of Proskomedia, which, reading it, the priest draws particles “for children, timeless infants, male part and female part”<sup>21</sup>. Many mothers who have had the traumatic experience of abortion, intentionally or spontaneously, and / or the experience of losing a baby immediately after birth, when they confess their sins to the clergy receive a canon of repentance for each situation. After atoning for repentance, those mothers offer sacrifices of bread, wine, and light to the Holy Altar with the thought of the babies they have lost, and with the hope and belief that the souls of lost children — though not explicitly written on the memorial, as they have no names not being baptized, they use this offering, brought out of boundless love for them and deep repentance for sin committed. There is even a tradition (obviously wrong!), according to which the mother who tried to baptize her baby, but failed for certain objective reasons, constantly directs her desire to be baptized to the soul of that baby; she considers this longing for her child, united with the (unfulfilled) intention of having baptized him, a kind of “symbolic baptism through her desire and faith as

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v. – 213 r. / pp. 1032-1033. This *Molităvnik*, called “al protopopului Ioan Zoba din Vinț”, was reissued in an excellent critical edition by a team of researchers, consisting of Ana Dumitran, Alin Mihai Gherman and rev. prof. dr. Dumitru Vanca. The volume appeared in Editura Reîntregirea a Arhiepiscopiei Ortodoxe a Alba Iuliei, în 2009.

<sup>20</sup> “Sinaxar în Duminica Lăsăturii sec de carne”, in: *Triod*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune, București, 2020, p. 36.

<sup>21</sup> *Liturghier*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2012, pp. 121-122.

a mother”<sup>22</sup>. Though erroneous from the point of view of the teaching of the Orthodox Christian faith, this tradition nevertheless emphasizes the existential and spiritual unity between mother and infant and the mother’s care for her infant, but cannot replace the service of Baptism for that infant:

The “baptism of desire” is something different than what is claimed here<sup>23</sup>;

“Necessity baptism” or “quick baptism” has not been done – it is recognized and often used by the Church, but provided the service is completed after the danger has passed;

“Baptism by the faith of another” does not exist in Christian theology;

It is also incorrect for some theologians to invoke the “Baptism of Blood”, on the pretext that unbaptized infants who have died in accidents, for example, may consider themselves Christians by suffering their unjust, untimely death.

Also, from the practice of the Church and from the tradition of commemorating the dead in Romanian, it is known that the only occasion during the liturgical year when even those who disappeared in the most terrible situations can be mentioned in the prayers of the Church<sup>24</sup> is the

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<sup>22</sup> During a “synaxe” (online spiritual dialogue, with questions and answers) organized by Vatopedi Monastery on February 17, 2021, a young mother who had lost a baby through a miscarriage asked Archimandrite Ephrem what he thinks happened to her baby’s soul, beyond. The abbot replied that, based on an old Christian tradition, preserved especially in the monastic space, the child passed to the eternal ones taking over “something from his mother’s Baptism”. Of course, from a doctrinal point of view, the answer is inaccurate, but from a pastoral point of view he tries an explanation and a consolation, emphasizing the indestructible ontological connection between child and mother. And when the mother is a Christian, the child born of her cannot be considered, at all, a pagan.

<sup>23</sup> In connection with this, the hieromonk Nicodim Sachelarie considers: “Children who die unbaptized for reasons beyond the control of their parents or the priest may be considered partakers of the baptism of desire, as are the righteous of the Old Testament or by analogy with the healings of Jesus at the request of parents and friends, for God does not punish the innocent, on the contrary, He created man for happiness. However, parents will confess and be given canons according to their care or indifference: to baptize or raise a child, to visit a holy place, to give alms” – see *Pravila bisericească*, ediția a III-a, Editura Valea Plopului, 1999, paragraful 181, pp. 44-45.

<sup>24</sup> It should be noted here that, from the Slavic tradition, the tendency to mention suicides at Pentecost also entered the Romanian space. The procedure practiced among the people, especially in Moldova, is this: the family memorial is drawn up, with all those asleep, but the names of the suicides are not written there. The paper is brought to

service of the special Vespers, also called the “Service of Kneeling”, from the feast of the Pentecost, with its Fifth Prayer:

“[...] Which also on this feast, utterly perfect and saving, you have been kind enough to receive intercessory prayers for those held in hell, giving us great hope that you will send relief and comfort to those grieving with oppressive sorrows[...].”<sup>25</sup>

If “those kept in hell” who have committed such grave sins and have received this divine sentence are mentioned on this occasion, and God the Holy Spirit “comes to the aid of our weakness” in prayer and intercedes for them “with unspeakable sighs” (Romans 8, 26), by extension, this prayer could also include unbaptized sleeping infants who have not committed any sin and have no personal guilt, but the ancestral sin, when they have passed on to eternal ones<sup>26</sup>.

## V. The issue of burying unbaptized infants in other Orthodox Churches

The death of an unbaptized infant and the desire to be buried Christian do not belong only to the Romanian Orthodox space, where the issue has already been debated in the Holy Synod and has received doctrinal, canonical and liturgical solutions. The other sister Orthodox Churches also face such problems, and the practice is as set out below.

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the Holy Altar, accompanied by a candle sacrifice, five breads and wine. Although suicides are not mentioned nominally, on that day, at the proskomidia, during the Holy Mass and at the Vespers of the “kneeling” Vespers, all the praying energies of the family are directed to the remembrance of those concerned to receive relief – the suicides – which are included in this intercession effort through the formula “with all their sleeping nation”, that is, together with those asleep in the true faith of the family (“nation”) of which they were / are also part. This subject will have to be studied more carefully, from a theological and liturgical point of view.

<sup>25</sup> *Penticostar*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1973, p. 362.

<sup>26</sup> Several excerpts from this part of this study have been published under the author’s signature pr. lect. dr. Lucian PETROAIA, entitled “Care sunt rânduilele ce se pot săvârși pentru copiii morți nebotezați?”, in: *Ziarul Lumina*, XVII (2021), nr. 99 (4819), p. 11, col. 1-3.

### **V.1. The practice of the Greek Orthodox Church on the burial of unbaptized infants**

As in our Church, the liturgical tradition of the Greek Orthodox Church has stopped any form of service for unbaptized dead infants for hundreds of years. However, this issue concerned the priesthood and the hierarchy. As early as 1965, Professor Ioannis Foundoulis of the Faculty of Theology in Thessaloniki studied the problem, showing that burial services are not performed for these infants, but in the Greek Church it is customary for them to be buried in a corner of a cemetery or near the chapel or private cemeteries, “in a space dedicated to the Lord”<sup>27</sup>. After him, Dr. Xenophon Papaharalampos, professor at the Faculty of Theology in Athens and a member of the Synodal Commission of the Greek Orthodox Church on issues of dogmatics and Church canon law, deepened the issue by developing a study entitled *On the Indulgence of Unbaptized Dead Babies Burial According to Church Order*. The study is still posted on the website of the Holy Synod of the Greek Orthodox Church and can be consulted by those interested. The Synodal Commission for Dogmatic, Canonical, Church Law and Pastoral Issues took note of the study, analyzed the whole issue and proposed a funeral order for infants who left the earthly life unbaptized. At its working meeting on 8 June 2001, under the chairmanship of the Blessed Archbishop Christodoulos, the Permanent Synod of the Church of Greece approved the ordinance. By the circular order with no. 2716 of July 3, 2001, the Holy Synod of the Greek Orthodox Church informed the clergy and the faithful that, starting with that date, the funeral service for unbaptized infants is allowed, with two conditions required for this:

- a. at least one of the parents must be an Orthodox Christian and asks the priest to officiate the funeral service for his baby;
- b. there was a desire and an attempt to have a quick baptism, but it could not be done, for various objective reasons.

I present here the sketched funeral service of the unbaptized dead infants, established by the Holy Synod of the Greek Orthodox Church: after the small blessing, the cortege leaves the house where the deceased baby is laid, to the Church, singing “Trisagion”. Inside the Church, Psalm

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<sup>27</sup> Prof. dr. Ioannis FOUNDOLIS, *Dialoguri liturgice. Răspunsuri la probleme liturgice*, Editura Bizantină, București, 2008, vol. I, p.107.

118 is sung in three states, only the chosen verses [marked with a red cross in the Romanian *Euchologion*] from the funeral service of the laity, but without litany and exclamations. After the troparion “With the spirits of the righteous” the Apostle (from the Epistle to the Romans 6, 9-11) and the Gospel (from Luke 18, 15-17; 26-27) are read. It continues with the prayer “Lord, the One who guards the babies in this life” and the other verses, which are also in the Romanian *Euchologion*: “Oh, who will not cry, my son”, “Oh, who will not sigh my son”, “Death is relief for babies... Glory... Pain was for Adam... And now... Changing the sad...”<sup>28</sup>. Meanwhile, all the people kiss the icon on the sleeping baby’s chest. The dismissal “The Risen One” is made. At the tomb, when putting some dust in the coffin, the priest utters the formula: “The earth is the Lord’s”<sup>29</sup>.

The Greek Orthodox Church considers that the new decision applies to the Church economy, which operates in ecclesiastical decisions out of love for people, here in the concrete case of premature and unexpected death of infants who could not be baptized in time. The new decision also takes into account the consolation of the parents, who are tried by the death of their baby<sup>30</sup>.

## V.2. In the Russian Orthodox Church,

*Euchologion* contains no rules regarding the burial of unbaptized infants. More recently, in 2017-2018, however, the Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church intensely debated the issue regarding the state of unbaptized dead children souls, from a theological point of view. Following these analyzes, a short ordinance was approved that will be used by priests in the case of the burial of an unbaptized dead baby.

<sup>28</sup> *Molitfelnic*, pp. 253-254.

<sup>29</sup> Thanks to the pious priest Fr. dr. Iulian Eni, servant in Thessaloniki, for providing these few data on the issue discussed here.

<sup>30</sup> Although the Greek Orthodox Church has officially expressed itself by the decision of the Holy Synod, I also mention here the positive answer given by the Fathers of the Holy Mountain, true theological and spiritual authorities in Greece, but also for all Orthodoxy, to the question “Is the funeral service for unbaptized children performed?”. Their answer can be found on the Holy Mountain website and can be consulted. Among the arguments put forward in support of this affirmative answer, two formulated by the Fathers are also listed: 1. “unbaptized infants are brought as sacrifice to the shelter of God, they are in His arms”; 2. “It is proper to entrust these infants to the economy, love, and mercy of God”.

### **V.3. In the Serbian Orthodox Church,**

there is no official practice of burying unbaptized infants, and the Serbian *Euchologion* contains nothing for such a situation. If an infant dies unbaptized, the priest is forbidden to go to the home or family and to be present at the funeral. The dead unbaptized baby cannot be brought to Church. Unofficially, for a humanitarian approach to the problem, the priests stay near the families tried by such trouble; the mere presence of the servant of God brings much comfort to the family. In practice, the priest does not read any service, but at the grave he can say an appropriate word about the need to administer the Sacrament of Baptism to infants, in due time, taking into account unforeseen aspects of the possibility of death due to poor health or other reasons<sup>31</sup>.

### **V.4. In the Bulgarian Orthodox Church,**

the issue of administering the Sacrament of Holy Baptism has unsuspectedly serious aspects. Statistics show that in 2010, about 40% of Bulgarian citizens were unbaptized. The situation is a consequence of the atheist doctrine imposed by the regime that ruled this country for several decades, until 1990. Regarding the administration of Baptism to infants and children, in Bulgaria there is a practice of bringing them to baptism from the age of baby to that of the pubescent and even the preadolescent: in Bulgaria, children are baptized between the ages of 1 and 7 or, in many cases, even around the age of 10. This practice is based on the consideration that, after one year, the children are stronger, that the older age protects them from illness and other fragile pretexts, practice that does not belong to the authentic spirit of Orthodoxy, but only to the local tradition of popular culture. The percentage of infant mortality is quite high, on this level from 1 year to 10 years quite a few children die, baptized or unbaptized. Sometimes it happens that, due to the priest's carelessness or ignorance, the funeral service is administered to unbaptized people, including children!! In the official liturgical worship of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church there is no special service for unbaptized dead children. However, there are certain exceptions, which occur when a hierarch grants a dispensation for a short

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<sup>31</sup> Thanks to Rev. Boian Alexandrovici, Archbishop of Dacia Felix, who gave me some details about this issue, according to the practice of the Serbian Orthodox Church.



Christian service, based on the Orthodox faith of the baby's family, and then the priest can say only one litany. The second case, also exceptional and which is also committed with the release of the hierarch, refers to some small prayer ordinances, which are made in the evening, similar to the "memorials" that are read at the dead vigil in Romania, but Bulgarians called them "rules"<sup>32</sup>.

### V.5. In the Orthodox Church of Poland

there are no rules regarding the burial of unbaptized children. The editions of the Polish *Euchologion* in use (Warsaw, 1925 and 2010) do not contain any details in this regard. In concrete cases where such an event takes place in a family of Orthodox Christians, the priest is called to the grave of the sleeping baby, where he does not read any prayer, does not sing any troparion or verse, but sprinkles the tomb, the coffin and the body of the baby with holy water and addresses a word of encouragement to the family<sup>33</sup>.

### V.6. At the Romanians from Bessarabia and Ukraine,

some ancient traditions have been preserved, which sacredly respect the liturgical and canonical prescriptions. It is well known that there is no funeral service for unbaptized children; the priest is not even called to the house where an unbaptized infant died, a sign that the situation is a consequence of the parents' neglect in bringing the baby to Baptism in time. Moreover, no service is performed and no prayer is read. However, as a sign of mercy and care for the souls of these children, there is the practice of burying the unbaptized infants near the graves of some members of their family, previously asleep, who were good Christians and who were buried

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<sup>32</sup> The data related to the popular mentality and the liturgical practice regarding pedobaptism and the burial of unbaptized infants in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church were inserted here following the consultation with Rev. Neluțu Oprea, parish priest of the Romanian Orthodox Church in Sofia (Bulgaria), whom I thank for his kindness.

<sup>33</sup> Thanks Rev. dr. Tomasz Stempa, servant at the chapel of the Theological Academy in Warsaw and lecturer in this theological education institution, who analyzed the respective problem, in collaboration with Fr. prof. dr. Gheorghe Tofiljuk – rector of the Academy, with Fr. dr. Anatolie Șemanjuk – professor at the same institution and with the minister priests from the Metropolitan Cathedral of Warsaw, giving me some of these data, which I presented here.

according to all Orthodox ordinances. Elderly priests consulted on this issue, inherit the tradition even today<sup>34</sup>.

## VI. A brief history of the problem in our Church

Since ancient times, infants have been considered a gift from God to the Christian family. In Christianity, as in Mosaic, the family that has many children was and is considered to be blessed by God. The death of a baby caused and still causes deep sorrow to the family, especially the mother, and in ancient times, turbulent, with the onslaught of barbarians, epidemics and plagues, many babies perished, some of them unbaptized, for whom the funeral service could not be performed.

However, the liturgical Christian tradition has been and is well imprinted in the conscience of the faithful Romanian people, as in villages and towns, in hospitals, midwives or nurses have always known the obligation that if the newborn baby is suffering and is to die, he must be baptized immediately, even if, in practice the sacrament is celebrated in the interval from the eighth to the fortieth day after birth. However, if the baby is ill, “he must be baptized immediately after birth. The Church does not set days or times of day when such a baptism is to be performed, but it can be done whenever it is needed”<sup>35</sup>. *Euchologion* records this situation with the following practical solution:

“[...] It is well to know that if the unborn child is weakened and does not suck, but shoots to die, they should not wait, as some say, until the sixth or eighth day, to baptize him; but, at the hour when he was born, washing him, and immediately baptizing him, so as not to die unbaptized. For if the five-month-pregnant

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<sup>34</sup> Thanks to Rev. Andrei Deleu, director of the Chancellery of the Metropolitan Church of Bessarabia, who was kind enough to give me some clarifications regarding the issue under discussion.

<sup>35</sup> Pr. prof. dr. Nicolae D. NECULA, *Biserică și cult pe înțelesul tuturor*, Editura Europartner, București, 1998, p. 132. See also by the same author, *Tradiție și înnoire în slujirea liturgică*, Editura Episcopiei Dunării de Jos, Galați, 1996, in vol. I – cap. “Este corectă practica botezării copiilor avortați (lepădați)?”, pp. 157-161 and in vol. II, homonym, Editura Episcopiei Dunării de Jos, Galați, 2001, cap. “De ce este necesar să botezăm copiii la scurt timp după naștere?”, pp. 215-224.

women who, in one fell swoop happen to reject the infant, fall under the penalty of murder, according to laws and canons, the more vigorously we must guard the newborn infants, and let them not die unbaptized. [...]”<sup>36</sup>.

But when an unbaptized infant died out of carelessness, ignorance, or unbelief of his parents, the priest attended the funeral in the cemetery with his family, without reading any service. When the coffin was lowered into the grave, a “Trisagion” was sung. This was the ritual for unbaptized dead babies until 2010, in the practice of Church life in our country. But the precariousness of this service, in the context of the rich cult of the dead among Romanians and in the conditions of the pain caused by the death of the baby, never gave full consolation to the parents.

For these reasons, it was necessary to officially and thoroughly analyze the issue of the burial of unbaptized infants in the Romanian Orthodox Church. This was done for the first time in a debate of the Holy Synod, in the meeting of May 5, 1908. Following the proposals of Metropolitan Partenie Clinceni, former bishop of the Lower Danube (1886 – 1902), then the Holy Synod decided “to allow priests to perform the religious service of pogribania for stillborn children, as well as those who die before being baptized, being sons of Orthodox Christians”<sup>37</sup>. However, the synodal decision of 1908<sup>38</sup> does not specify what this service consists of, nor what

<sup>36</sup> *Molitfelnic*, ed. cit., p.17. This specification is in agreement with Canon no. 38 of St. Nichifor the Confessor, which shows: “If the woman births the baby and he is in danger of death, after three or five days, that baby should be baptized, but another baptized and clean woman should breastfeed him. ...”. In *Tratat asupra tuturor dogmelor credinței noastre ortodoxe...*, cap. 59, p. 106 Saint Simeon of Thessaloniki teaches that if he is in danger of death, the baby can be baptized at the very moment of his birth. The specification from *Euchologion*, quoted above, is a good update and application of the mentioned canonical prescriptions, as a solution to concrete, extreme situations that may arise in some infants.

<sup>37</sup> Summary of the meeting of the Holy Synod of May 5, 1908, in the magazine “Biserica Ortodoxă Română”, XXXII (1908), nr. 3, p. 258.

<sup>38</sup> It must be said that this decision had been forgotten and, consequently, not systematically applied in the parishes. However, it is mentioned by Rev. prof. dr. Ene BRANIȘTE, în *Liturgica specială pentru instituttele teologice*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1985, cap. V – “Ierurgiile și rânduielile tradiționale în legătură cu sfârșitul omului și cu grija pentru cei morți”, p. 543, but it is misinterpreted: “Funeral services may be performed for unborn or stillborn unborn infants, as for baptized dead infants”. Therefore, no distinction is made between the

its typical order should have been. However, in the practice of Church life, in the Romanian Orthodox Church, the burial of unbaptized infants was never performed, the unwritten Church tradition and the popular custom<sup>39</sup> being, therefore, stronger than the written law. Due to these inaccuracies and shortcomings, the issue was resumed by the Holy Synod of our Church in 2010.

## **VII. Decision of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church on the burial of unbaptized infants**

The general theme of 2011, declared by the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church as “Homage Year of Holy Baptism and Holy Wedding”, offered the opportunity to debate, at the canonical theological level, but also from a practical liturgical point of view, the very delicate and real issue of burial of the infants who have not received the Sacrament of Baptism. In

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funeral service performed for baptized infants and the special ordinance that should be followed for the burial of unbaptized infants (which did not even exist at that time, in fact). There is a big difference between the two categories of babies, so it is not possible to do the same service for some and for others.. See note 42, the same place, where the difference is made with the practice of other Orthodox Churches, where “in such cases, the priest blesses only the pit and the service is replaced with the singing of the Trisagion”.

<sup>39</sup> In general, Romanians have great care for newborns. Mother and the newborn were read, in time, all the prayers, according to the service of *Euchologion*. If a baby died for various reasons (especially due to the mother’s lack of care), in popular tradition it was believed that the soul of that child turns into “moroi” and haunts the family that did not help him live his life. The bodies of such children were usually buried in gardens or on the outskirts of the cemetery, in the area where the suicides or non-Christians were buried. On the subject of “moroi”, reflected in the Romanian popular tradition, see Corina BISTRICEANU PANTELIMON, *Sacralitatea răului. Studiu de sociologie a tradiției*, Editura “Lumea credinței”, București, 2008, pp. 41-43; Luiza Maria DUMITRU, *Sacrul monstruos. Mitologie, mitistorie, folclor românesc*, Editura Paideia, București, 2007, pp. 242-243; prof. univ. dr. Valeriu BĂLTEANU, *Dicționar de mitologie românească*, Editura Fundației Universitare “Dunărea de Jos”, Galați, 2001, pp. 135-136; Simion Florea MARIAN, *Mitologie românească*, Editura Paideia, București, 2000, p. 40. Unbaptized dead children could not be mentioned, and their loss was a moral and spiritual burden that, as a rule, in the community (especially rural) in which they lived, their mother carried it like a stigma all her life. In case of loss of a child, the priest read to the mother “The prayer when the woman rejects the baby unwillingly”- *Molitfelnic*, pp. 18-19.

order to establish a unitary norm in the Romanian Orthodox Church, it was necessary to prepare a funeral service for unbaptized infants. This issue was discussed by the Holy Synod of our Church in its working meeting on October 29, 2010, in order to resolve, from a liturgical and pastoral-missionary point of view, this kind of situation that occurs in the lives of Christian families.

Following the proposals of the Theological, Liturgical and Didactic Commission and following the analyzes from the mentioned synodal meeting, the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church approved that unbaptized infants could receive a funeral service, but on the basis of clear conditions.

First, the synodal judgment shows that unbaptized dead infants who could be buried with Christian service must have been born of Christian parents. Secondly, it is specified that these infants can be divided into two categories: a) those who died at birth and b) those who were born alive and received the prayer from the eighth day, when the child is named. Therefore, the service performed for infants in the two categories is different. About these two situations, based on the Decision of the Holy Synod with no. 8208/2010 and in the Norm no. 3911 / June 14, 2016 of the Chancellery of the Holy Synod the last edition of *Euchologion* in Romanian brings complete clarifications<sup>40</sup>, as I specify below.

Babies of Christian parents, who died unborn at birth or after birth lived a few days, then died unbaptized, but the priest did not read any prayer to them, can be buried with the following ordinance, which is performed near the grave: the priest, having only the epitachelion on his neck, gives the small blessing, after which the “Trisagion” is sung and the prayers “Holy Trinity” and “Our Father” are said. Then the priest reads the “Gospel” from “The Burial Service of the Babies” (Luke 8, 15-17; 26-27) and “The Prayer of Comfort for the Sorrowful”. After a word of instruction about “The purpose of baptism in due time”<sup>41</sup>, when the coffin with the baby’s body is placed in the grave, the priest says “The earth is the Lord’s” (Psalm 23, 1).

Infants who died unbaptized, but were named on the 8th day after birth by the priest reading the specific prayer from *Euchologion*<sup>42</sup> can receive

<sup>40</sup> “Îndrumări privind înmormântarea pruncilor nebotezați”, in *Molitfelnic*, pp. 295-296.

<sup>41</sup> Decision of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church no. 8208/2010, pct. 1.

<sup>42</sup> “Rugăciunea la ziua a opta, la însemnarea pruncului, când i se pune numele”, *Molitfelnic*, 2019, pp. 16-17.

a funeral service for children, in short, according to the following order, which is also performed near the grave: the priest gives the small blessing, followed by the “Little Prayers” and Psalm 90, then reads the irmoses of Songs 3, 6 and 9 of the canon “The service of the burial of infants”, the Apostle (I Corinthians 15, 39-45), the Gospel (Luke 18, 15-17; 26-27) and “The Prayer of Comfort for the Sorrowful”. Then the priest makes the small dismissal and gives a “short pastoral word in which he will remind about the need to perform the Sacrament of Holy Baptism for infants”<sup>43</sup>.

### VIII. Some conclusions

**VIII.1.** That debate of the Holy Synod which resumed an older topic, unresolved until 2010<sup>44</sup>, shows the care of our Church, for the discussion and nuance of this problem with doctrinal, liturgical and canonical implications, in order to solve pastoral and social missionary real-life situations, which trouble or extremely test some of the believers.

**VIII.2.** The debate and solution of this problem has brought and will bring great relief, in soteriological and eschatological plan, to the souls of those children who, after October 2010, passed unbaptized to the eternal ones and who will pass, as such situations will be. These children will be able to be buried with the Christian service of burial, according to the

<sup>43</sup> Decision of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church no. 8208/2010, at point 2, also provided, initially, a “litany of fervent supplication”, which was said before the Apostle, but also a “prayer of release in which the name given to the baby is pronounced” stating born of Christians parents (the first names of the father and mother is pronounced here) »“. These two elements do not appear in “Îndrumările...” din *Molitfelnic*, 2019 edition.

<sup>44</sup> Until now, the topic has not been carefully and completely analyzed in Romanian theology. Except for the bibliographic sources cited above in this study, I mention here a few newer articles.: diac. Ciprian BĂRA, “Cel mai important lucru pentru cei adormiți este să-i pomenim la Sfânta Liturghie”, in: *Ziarul Lumina*, VI (2010), nr. 30 /1532, pp. 8-9; Raluca BRODNER, “Starea sufletelor copiilor nebotezați «o taină cunoscută de Dumnezeu»“, in: *Ziarul Lumina*, VI (2010), nr. 143/1645, p. 16. I also note the fact that, following the accident at the Maternity Hospital in Giulești, in January 2011 over 3,600 comments were posted on the Internet (!), Regarding the situation as such and the need for a decision that the Romanian Orthodox Church had to take, for the benefit of the souls of unbaptized dead children, but also for the comfort of their families.

order established by the Holy Synod, and according to the state which they passed to the eternal ones in.

**VIII.3.** The respective funeral arrangements for unbaptized dead infants bring much comfort to the parents of those infants and show to the people that our Church is an institution that descends upon the sufferings of the Christian, understands and heals them. To this great consolation, it is added for the parents that the unbaptized deceased infants may be mentioned according to all the Orthodox ordinance, the priest using at the memorial services even the two sets of typical liturgical guidelines synthesized above<sup>45</sup>, found in the latest edition of *Euchologion* in Romanian. However, parents should be held accountable through catechesis and should be directed to their spiritual fathers, where they should confess and receive canon of repentance – where appropriate – to atone for the sin of neglect, but especially to avoid similar situations in their family or other families.

**VIII.4.** For the priest who lives so close to the people by the very nature and purpose of his ministry, performing the funeral service for an unbaptized infant is a remarkable experience that will mature him from a pastoral point of view. The experience will cause the consecrated minister to carefully watch over his “flock”, to fully observe the teaching of the Church and the canonical prescriptions concerning the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, as well as the ordinances connected with the funeral service. The particular and exceptional case of the burial of an unbaptized infant must be managed with pastoral tact, accurately performing the liturgical ordinance approved by the Holy Synod for this situation and avoiding any doctrinal, canonical and liturgical violations.

**VIII.5.** It is observed that in the other Orthodox Churches (except the Church of Greece), the issue of burying unbaptized infants is still unstudied from a dogmatic, liturgical, canonical and pastoral-missionary point of view and is left to local traditions and mentalities. Sometimes these tend to be pagan or remained at the level of dangerous and totally wrong improvisations of some servants<sup>46</sup>. Behold, the pastoral care of

<sup>45</sup> See this particularly important statement in *Molitfelnic*, 2019, p. 296.

<sup>46</sup> In the Roman Catholic Church the problem has been studied and has several stages.



the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church provides a model for solving this problem, opening the possibility of a pan-Orthodox debate on this subject in order to establish a uniform practice throughout Orthodoxy.

**VIII.6.** It should be noted that it would be appropriate to make certain clarifications, in relation to: a) the exact age of the babies covered by this decision (from birth and up to one month, up to one year, up to seven years?); b) the tasks incumbent on the parents in connection with the burial and the ordering of the memorial of these infants; c) wide media coverage, by publishing brochures containing this synodal decision and other practical advice for the people, in such situations.

**VIII.7.** The decision of the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church regarding the burial of unbaptized infants gives hope and increases faith into the souls of parents and other Christians who have gone through this experience and who receive the certainty that although that infant left our world prematurely and lost the joy of living and the fulfillment of a man's life on this earth, spent in prayer to the Hereafter, he will dwell in the mystery of God's love, will, and ordinances<sup>47</sup>.

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From the exclusive statement of Blessed Augustine that unbaptized babies go to hell, where they suffer light torments (*damnationem mitissimam*), after the 10th-11th centuries, the sweetened idea of a place, in eternity, in which these children spend in a form of oblivion, without the sight or presence of God, appeared in the Catholic space. More recently, there is an insistence on a theology of hope, which places these infants in an area of chiaroscuro, in which they feel, accentuated, the mercy of God.. After the Second Vatican Council, Roman Catholic theology radically changed its view on this subject and states that these children can have a perspective of eternal happiness, that they can be saved.. The latest concerns belong to the International Theological Commission of the Vatican which, in the publication *Origins – service of Catholic New Service* formalized the document *The Hope of Salvation for Children Who Die Without Being Baptized*, approved by Pope Benedict XVI (April 2007). The document launches the theological formula of *Limbus infantium* – through which one tries to define a temporary paradisiacal state of the souls of unbaptized children, a concept proper to Catholic theology.

<sup>47</sup> From this second part of the present study, several other excerpts have been published, under the author's signature pr. lect. dr. Lucian PETROAIA, entitled "Care sunt rânduieile ce se pot săvârși pentru copiii morți nebotezați? (II)", in: *Ziarul Lumina*, XVII (2021), nr. 101 (4821), p. 11, col. 1-3.