
Romania: baby dies after being baptised by immersion. Orthodox Synod: rite will not change, more caution and guidelines for priests

The rite of Baptism will not and cannot change, the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church (pictured) reiterated, after the case of a baby who drowned while being christened. Gathered in an ordinary session on Thursday, 25 February, the Synod explained that in order to preserve “communion and dogmatic, liturgical and canonical unity with the universal Orthodox Church”, the Romanian Orthodox Church “cannot modify its doctrine, its sacramental liturgical rite and its canonical discipline”. Although in the Romanian Orthodox Church it is also common practice to administer Baptism by partially immersing the baby in holy water and then pouring water three times over the baby’s head, the traditional form in use is that of the baby being completely immersed in water three times. In an online petition, more than 65,000 Romanians and the people’s lawyer had asked the Orthodox Patriarch Daniel to change the form of the baptismal rite so as not to endanger the lives of babies. On 31 January 2021, in Suceava, a six-week-old baby boy, Iustin, born prematurely, felt sick immediately after receiving Baptism by immersion and died in hospital the following day. The autopsy showed that the boy had water in his lungs and the Orthodox priest who administered Baptism is now under arrest, charged with manslaughter. The Holy Synod has now asked Orthodox priests to inform themselves about the state of health of the babies they are going to baptise and to be more careful while administering the sacraments. Moreover, it was also decided that seminarians shall receive a more thorough formation in the administration of Baptism, and that the laity, too, shall be trained, with catechesis, to understand the meaning of the Sacraments. The Holy Synod is the highest authority of the Romanian Orthodox Church and is chaired by Patriarch Daniel.

Cristina Grigore