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MIXED OLD CATHOLIC - ORTHODOX COMMISSION

SACRAMENTAL TEACHING

Amersfoort, Netherlands, 3 October 1985

THE SACRAMENTS OR MYSTERIES OF THE CHURCH

1. In the New Testament the word "*mysterion*" refers to the inconceivable act of God's work of salvation in Christ. The church, in which Christ remains for ever, is a continuation of the mystery of Christ, of the wonderful union of the divine and human nature. The invisible, uncreated salutary grace of the triune God is manifested in the church in connection with physical means, historical institutions and concrete acts, that is with natural and real signs. This grace is bestowed by the Holy Spirit who is sent to the church and gives all in it.

2. The Holy Spirit, leading the church into all truth (cf. John 16:13), guarantees it the divine grace necessary for the salvation of men. This grace is manifold and is bestowed abundantly.

3. During his earthly ministry, which had its noblest expression in the cross and resurrection, Christ created the salvific means of sharing with us grace: the holy sacraments or mysteries. Christ imparted these sacraments to the church. As regards the fundamental and essential aspects of their liturgical realization in prayer and visible signs connected with it they received their shape through the apostles. In this way then the institution and arrangement of the sacraments are derived from the New Testament: in part expressly and directly from the words and actions of Jesus, in part from indirect references and actions of Jesus as well as the conviction of his disciples and apostles that whatever they were instituting and directing to be done in the life of the church was in union with the will and direction of the Lord. And so they do not offer of themselves anything new or arbitrary regarding the fundamentals and essentials of salvation.

4. The sacraments with which the church was endowed are: baptism, confirmation, eucharist, penance, unction, ordination and marriage. Even though this list of sacraments can neither be found in a systematic way in the New Testament nor in the tradition of the fathers, it reflects the uninterrupted conviction and practice of the church.

5. The sacraments as specific sanctifying actions lead to the new creation and unfolding of life in Christ through the incorporation of the recipients into the church as the body of Christ, this being effected by the Holy Spirit. Through the sacraments of the church each individual achieves his development to life in Christ in all the manifestations of his or her personal and corporate existence. This whole new existence and development of the believers to life in Christ gained by the sacraments is a reliable way to the heavenly kingdom and leads to eternal life.

6. The sacraments are not mere symbols of grace but their reliable instruments and transmitters. The physical elements of the sacraments are consecrated through prayers and sacred actions of the church and are connected with the communication of grace in different ways in the individual sacraments.

7. The use of physical elements in the sacraments is necessary because of the psychosomatic condition of human beings: "If you were incorporeal he would have given you naked incorporeal gifts; but as the soul is connected with the body he gives you the spiritual in the physical" (John Chrysostom, *Hom.* 82.4/83.4 in Mt. - PG 58.743).

8. The physical means are not effective by themselves but in virtue of the presence of the Holy Spirit: "If there is grace in the water it does not come from the nature of water but from the presence of the Spirit" (Basil the Great, *Spir.* 15/35 - PG 32.132).

9. It is the general view of the church that the sacraments in themselves are effective for salvation. Grace comes from the giver and actual liturgist of the sacraments, Jesus Christ, who remains in the church forever and continues his work through it, and it is bestowed by the Holy Spirit who is effective in the celebration of the sacraments. In order that the sacraments accomplish their salutary purpose, people must express their inner readiness to receive them.

10. The liturgists of the church are necessary for the celebration of the sacraments. These are the bishops and priests who assume this task through the sacrament of ordination. The efficacy of the sacraments is not invalidated by the imperfection or unworthiness of the liturgists.

11. It is the triune God who performs the holy sacraments as well as the whole work of salvation: "The Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit administer all things, the priest lends his tongue and makes his hand available" (John Chrysostom, *Hom.* 87.4/86.4 in Jo. – PG 59.472; cf. also the same, *Hom.* 2.4 in 2 Tim. – PG 62.612; Augustine, *Tract.* 6.7 in Jo. – PL 35.1428).

In the view of the joint Orthodox-Old Catholic theological commission, the above text on "The Sacraments or Mysteries of the Church" represents the teaching of the Orthodox and Old Catholic churches.

Amersfoort, 3 October 1985

BAPTISM

1.1. Baptism is that God-given sacrament of the church through which the one baptized in the name of the holy and life-giving Trinity becomes a member of the church of Christ, is freed from the dominion of sin and is born again to a new creature in Christ by partaking of the mystery of the divine work of salvation in Christ.

1.2. The necessity of the sacrament of baptism, already prefigured in the Old Testament, was proclaimed by Jesus Christ by his baptism in the Jordan as well as by his commission to the apostles to make all nations disciples by "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:18-20). Without being born again of water and the Spirit man cannot enter the kingdom of God (John 3:5).

1.3. According to the Tradition of the ancient undivided church, the believer who is submerged in consecrated water and emerges three times in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is buried with Christ and rises with him (cf. Col. 2:12; Rom. 6:3-5).

1.4. The physical elements with which the sacrament of baptism is carried out and through which God's almighty grace works in the baptized cannot be regarded as mere symbols or changeable external material elements of the ecclesiastical practice of baptism passed on by the apostles. They are connected with the event in which the baptized is washed clean of original sin and personal sins and is renewed in Christ. In this sense, the perseverance of the church concerning the observance of the apostolic practice (submerging three times in consecrated water) should be understood. The practice of the undivided church is baptism by immersion three times. Baptism by pouring water three times is also known in the church as emergency baptism.

2.1. The baptized is reborn by the operation of divine grace and is joined with Christ in one body and enjoys the status of a child of God. By this connection to one body he is united with the faithful of all ages and nations and lives this fellowship in the church; he becomes a citizen of the kingdom of God and realizes his salvation in spiritual battles in the hope of partaking in the life of the world to come. Although these effects of baptism are a gift of the triune God and are founded in the mystery of the divine work of salvation in Christ, in order to become fruitful they assume the personal acceptance of the divine gift in faith, conversion and works of love on the part of the baptized.

2.2. Adult baptism and infant baptism effectuate the same gift of divine grace. The only difference concerns the time at which the divine grace given through baptism can become available for the baptized and yield spiritual fruits. The fact that such spiritual fruit for adults as well as for small children is only possible in the unbroken unity with the Christian fellowship in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church makes the necessity obvious that the baptized, whether adults or small children, must be led by the church's community; in the case of small children, the godparents confess the faith of the church in the name of the baptized.

2.3. Participating in the mystery of the life, death and resurrection of Christ through baptism has as a natural and immediate consequence the possibility and necessity of the baptized partaking in the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out at Pentecost and acceding to the sacrament of eucharist.

2.4. Baptism is administered by the bishop or a presbyter (priest) and only in emergency cases by deacons or laity.

In the view of the joint Orthodox-Old Catholic theological commission, the above text on "Baptism" represents the teaching of the Orthodox and old Catholic churches.

Amersfoort, 3 October 1985

CONFIRMATION

1. In baptism man is born again in the power of the Holy Spirit to life in Christ. Thereby he receives a new spiritual existence. His spiritual progress and the growth of what he has acquired through baptism likewise require the presence and the work of the Holy Spirit. Confirmation bestows the gifts of the Holy Spirit on the baptized, allows them to take part personally in the event of Pentecost and at the same time guarantees this gift, according to the words of the Orthodox liturgy: "Seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

2. According to the unanimous faith of the ancient and undivided church, in the celebration of confirmation the practice of the apostles is carried on, who laid hands on the baptized in order that the Holy Spirit come upon them (cf.

Acts 8:14-17; 19:1-7). In order that the new life of man in Christ may grow, confirmation immediately followed baptism, as is witnessed to by the Eastern and Western fathers of the church: "Those who are baptized in the church are brought before the leaders of the church and receive the Holy Spirit by our prayer and the laying -on of hands and are thus perfected through the seal of God" (Cyprian of Carthage, *Ep.* 73.9 – *PL* 3.1115/1160). "Spiritual sealing follows... for after baptism by water perfection occurs when at the bishop's prayer the Holy Spirit is poured out" (Ambrose of Milan, *Sacram.* 3.2.8 – *PL* 16.434/453). "After having bathed himself in the river Jordan and brought the waters into contact with his deity, he emerged from them and the Holy Spirit in substance came upon him, like resting on like. In the same manner to you also, after you had emerged from the pool of the sacred waters, was given the unction, the image of that where with Christ was anointed" (Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.* 21.1 – *PG* 33.1088f.). "The illuminated ones must be anointed with the heavenly unction after baptism and partake of the kingdom of Christ" (Synod of Laodicea, canon 48 – Mansi 2.571).

3. Only the bishops as those who followed in the apostolic ministry were to lay hands on the baptized in order that the gift of the Holy Spirit be transmitted to them. When the number of believers grew beyond the ability of bishops to fulfill this task, the practice of chrismation of the baptized by presbyters developed early in the East and for a while partially in the West. The blessing of the oil of chrism though remained under the sole responsibility of the bishop (cf. Synod of Carthage a.419, canon 6 – Mansi 4.424). As a rule confirmation was reserved for the bishop throughout most of the West; the arrangement enjoined by synods that the baptized have to be confirmed as soon as possible after their baptism points out that baptism and confirmation belong together by necessity. The view and practice of the ancient undivided church requires the three sacraments of initiation – baptism, confirmation and eucharist – to be celebrated in conjunction with each other, for even though each is complete in itself and theologically distinguishable from the others they still belong inseparably together and form a homogeneous whole.

In the view of the joint Orthodox-Old Catholic theological commission, the above text on "Confirmation" represents the teaching of the Orthodox and Old Catholic churches.

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HOLY EUCHARIST

1. The sacrament of holy eucharist is the focal point of the entire life of the church. In this sacrament Christ is present in reality and essence. He offers himself in a bloodless way and shares himself with the faithful in an ever new and real representation of his bloody sacrifice on the cross offered once and for all. So the eucharist is at the same time sacrament and real sacrifice. In this sacrament the faithful receive the body and blood of Christ and by it are united with him and through him with one another and take part in the power of his work of salvation that has its climax in his sacrifice on the cross and in his resurrection.

2. The Lord himself instituted the eucharist. Before the Passover during the meal, the Lord took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to the disciples saying: "This is my body." And he took the cup, gave thanks and gave it to them saying: "Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood, the blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in remembrance of me" (cf. Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-23; 1 Cor. 11:23-25).

3. In bread and wine, which are consecrated and changed in the eucharist, the Lord himself is really and truly present in a supernatural way and imparts himself to the faithful. Bread and wine are, after the consecration, the body and blood of Christ and not mere symbols of his body and blood. "The bread and the wine are not images of the body and blood of the Lord – certainly not! – but the deified body of the Lord himself; the Lord himself said: 'This is' not the image of my body but 'my body' and not the image of my blood, but 'my blood'" (John of Damascus, f.o. 86 – *PG* 94.1148f). According to the proclamation of the seventh ecumenical synod "neither the Lord nor the apostles and fathers have called the bloodless sacrifice offered by the priest an image, but the body and the blood themselves... before the consecration they were called images, after the consecration they are called, in an actual sense, body and blood of Christ; this is what they are and believed to be" (Mansi 13.265).

4. The eucharist represents the whole work of the divine economy in Christ that has its climax in his sacrifice on the cross and in his resurrection. The eucharistic sacrifice stands in direct relationship to the sacrifice on the cross. The sacrifice of Calvary is certainly not repeatable. It happened once and for all (Heb. 7:27). But the eucharist is much more than a symbolic image or an image that reminds us of that sacrifice. It is the same sacrifice celebrated sacramentally. It is celebrated as a commemoration of the Lord ("Do this in remembrance of me") and is not a mere, but a true and real commemoration and representation of Christ's sacrifice. Before us are the body and blood of the Lord themselves. "That (sacrifice) we now also offer, namely the one once offered, the inexhaustible one. This happens to commemorate that which once happened; for he says 'Do this in remembrance of me'. Not an ever different sacrifice as the (Jewish) high priest of those times, but we always offer the same one; or rather we effect a memorial of the sacrifice" (John Chrysostom, *Hom.* 17.3 in Heb. – *PG* 63.131). "And as we commemorate his suffering in all our celebrations of the sacrifice – for the suffering of the Lord is the sacrifice that we offer – we may not do anything else than what he has done" (Cyprian of Carthage, *Ep.* 63.17 – *PL* 4.387/398f.).

5. The priest officiating at each eucharist is the Lord himself. "You are the one who offers and is offered, who accepts and is imparted, Christ, our God" (Prayer of the Cherubic Hymn). "He is the priest; it is he himself who offers, and he himself is the offered gift" (Augustine, *Civ.* 10.20 - *PL* 41.298; cf. Ambrose of Milan, *Enarr.* 25 in Ps. 38 - *PL* 14.1051f/1102; the same, *Patr.* 9/38 - *PL* 14.686/720). The whole eucharistic community, clergy and people, has an organic part in the performance of the eucharistic celebration. The liturgists of the sacrament are bishop and priest. The practice of the church and the canons forbid deacons "to offer" (cf. first ecumenical synod, canon 18 - Mansi 2.676).

6. According to apostolic tradition and practice, leavened bread is used in the eucharist. The use of unleavened bread in the West is a later practice. In addition wine is used - "the fruit of the vine" (Mark 14:25) - that from ancient times is mixed with water (cf. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Haer.* 5.2.3 - *PG* 7.1125; Cyprian of Carthage, *Ep.* 63 - *PL* 4.372-389/383-401).

7. The consecration of bread and wine in the eucharist takes place through the entire eucharistic prayer. The words of the Lord "Take, eat... drink ye all of it" in the eucharistic prayer, which has a consecratory character as a whole, do not themselves effect the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. The transformation is effected by the Holy Spirit whose descending is being prayed for in the epiclesis.

8. After appropriate preparation all believers take part in the eucharist; for who does not take part at the table of the Lord does not take part in the life in Christ: "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53). According to the practice of the church prevailing since ancient times not even infants and much less children are kept away from the eucharist. Only the unbaptized, heretics, those separated from the church and those restrained by church discipline for any reason are excluded from the partaking of the sacrament (cf. John of Damascus, f.o. 86 - *PG* 94.1153). The faithful communicate under both kinds as was the case at the last supper.

9. In the eucharist the faithful are united with their Lord and with one another by the communion in his body and blood and together form one body. "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor. 10:17). "Because we partake in the one bread, we all become one body of Christ and one blood and members amongst each other and are thus united with Christ in one body" (John of Damascus, f.o. 86 - *PG* 94.1153). In union with Christ, the believer is filled with grace and with all spiritual gifts and blessings that union with Christ involves. He makes progress in spiritual life, grows in perfection and thus has the hope of resurrection to eternal life and the full participation in the glorious and blessed kingdom of Christ.

In the view of the joint Orthodox -Old Catholic theological commission, the above text on "Holy Eucharist" represents the teaching of the Orthodox and Old Catholic churches.

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[MEYER, H. and L. VISCHER, Edd. *Growth in Agreement. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level.* (NY/Geneva: Paulist Press/World Council of Churches, 1984) 254-259]