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PER LA PROMOZIONE
DELL'UNITÀ DEI CRISTIANI

THE MYSTERY OF THE CHURCH AND OF THE EUCHARIST
IN THE LIGHT OF THE MYSTERY OF THE HOLY TRINITY
Munich, June 30 to July 6 - 1982

Faithful to the mandate received at Rhodes, this report touches upon the mystery of the church in only one of its aspects. This aspect, however, is particularly important in the sacramental perspective of our churches, that is, the mystery of the church and of the eucharist in the light of the mystery of the holy Trinity. As a matter of fact the request was made to start with what we have in common and, by developing it, to touch upon from inside and progressively all the points on which we are not in agreement.

In composing this document we intend to show that in doing so we express together a faith which is the continuation of that of the apostles.

This document makes the first step in the effort to fulfill the program of the preparatory commission, approved at the first meeting of the commission for dialogue.

Since there is question of a first step, touching upon the mystery of the church under only one of its aspects, many points are not yet treated here. They will be treated in succeeding steps as has been foreseen in the program mentioned above.

I

1. Christ, Son of God incarnate, dead and risen, is the only one who has conquered sin and death. To speak, therefore, of the sacramental nature of the mystery of Christ is to bring to mind the possibility given to man, and through him, to the whole cosmos, to experience the "new creation," the kingdom of God here and now through material and created realities. This is the mode (tropos) in which the unique person and the unique event of Christ exists and operates in history starting from Pentecost and reaching to the Parousia. However, the eternal life which God has given to the world in the event of Christ, his eternal Son, is contained in "earthen vessels". It is still only given as a foretaste, as a pledge.

2. At the Last Supper, Christ stated that he "gave" his body to the disciples for the life of "the many," in the eucharist. In it this gift is made by God to the world, but in sacramental form. From that moment the eucharist exists as the sacrament of Christ himself. It becomes the foretaste of eternal life, the "medicine of immortality," the sign of the kingdom to come. The sacrament of the Christ event thus becomes identical with the sacrament of the holy eucharist, the sacrament which incorporates us fully into Christ.

3. The incarnation of the Son of God his death and resurrection were realized from the beginning, according to the Father's will, in the Holy Spirit, This Spirit, which proceeds eternally from the Father and manifests himself through the Son, prepared the Christ event and realized in fully in the resurrection. Christ, who is the sacrament par excellence, given by the Father for the world, continues to give himself for the many in the Spirit, who alone gives life (Jn 6). The sacrament of Christ is also a reality which can only exist in the Spirit.

4. The Church and the Eucharist:

a. Although the evangelists in the account of the Supper are silent about the action of the Spirit, he was nonetheless united closer than ever to the incarnate Son for carrying out the Father's work. He is not yet given, received as a person, by the disciples (Jn 7:39). But when Jesus is glorified then the Spirit himself also pours himself out and manifests himself. The Lord Jesus enters into the glory of the Father and, at the same time, by the pouring out of the Spirit, into his sacramental tropos in this world. Pentecost, the completion of the paschal mystery, inaugurates simultaneously the last times. The eucharist and the church, body of the crucified and risen Christ, become the place of the energies of the Holy Spirit.

b. Believers are baptized in the Spirit in the name of the holy Trinity to form one body (cf. 1 Cor 12:13). When the church celebrates the eucharist it realizes "what it is", the body of Christ (1 Cor 10:17). By baptism and chrismation (confirmation) the members of Christ are "anointed" by the Spirit, grafted into Christ. But by the eucharist the paschal event opens itself out into church. The church becomes that which it is called to be by baptism and chrismation. By the communion in the body and blood of Christ, the faithful grow in that mystical divinization which makes them dwell in the Son and the Father, through the Spirit.

c. Thus, on the one hand, the church celebrates the eucharist as expression here and now of the heavenly liturgy; but on the other hand, the eucharist builds up the church in the sense that through it the Spirit of the risen Christ fashions the church into the body of Christ. That is why the eucharist is truly the sacrament of the church, at once as sacrament of the total gift the Lord makes of himself to his own and as manifestation and growth of the body of Christ, the church. The pilgrim church celebrates the eucharist on earth until her Lord comes to restore royalty to God the Father so that God may be "all in all". It thus anticipates the judgment of the world and its final transfiguration.

5. The mission of the Spirit remains joined to that of the Son. The celebration of the eucharist reveals the divine energies manifested by the Spirit at work in the body of Christ.

a. The Spirit prepares the coming of Christ by announcing it through the prophets, by directing the history of the chosen people toward him, by causing him to be conceived by the Virgin Mary, by opening up hearts to his word.

b. The Spirit manifests Christ in his work as savior, the Gospel which is he himself. The eucharistic celebration is the anamnesis (the memorial) Truly, but sacramentally, the ephapax (the "once and for all") is and becomes present. The celebration of the eucharist is par excellence the kairós (proper time) of the mystery.

c. The Spirit transforms the sacred gifts into the body and blood of Christ (metabole) in order to bring about the growth of the body which is the church. In this sense the entire celebration is an epiclesis, which becomes more explicit at certain moments. The church is continually in a state of epiclesis.

d. The Spirit puts into communion with the body of Christ those who share the same bread and the same cup. Starting from there, the church manifests what it is, the sacrament of the Trinitarian koinonia, the "dwelling of God with men" (cf. Rv 21:4).

The Spirit, by making present what Christ did once for all Y the event of the mystery Y accomplishes it in all of us. The relation to the mystery, more evident in the eucharist, is found in the other sacraments, all acts of the Spirit. That is why the eucharist is the center of sacramental life.

6. Taken as a whole, the eucharistic celebration makes present the Trinitarian mystery of the church. In it one passes from hearing the word, culminating in the proclamation of the Gospel Y the apostolic announcing of the word made flesh Y to the thanksgiving offered to the Father and to the memorial of the sacrifice and to communion in it thanks to the prayer of epiclesis uttered in faith. For the epiclesis is not merely an invocation for the sacramental transforming of the bread and cup. It is also a prayer for the full effect of the communion of all in the mystery revealed by the Son.

In this way the presence of the Spirit itself is extended by the sharing in the sacrament of the word made flesh to all the body of the church. Without wishing to resolve yet the difficulties which have arisen between the East and the West concerning the relationship between the Son and the Spirit, we can already say together that this Spirit, which proceeds from the Father (Jn 15:26) as the sole source in the Trinity and which has become the Spirit of our sonship (Rom 8:15) since he is also the Spirit of the Son (Gal 4:6), is communicated to us particularly in the eucharist by this Son upon whom he reposes in time and in eternity (Jn1:32).

That is why the eucharistic mystery is accomplished in the prayer which joins together the words by which the word made flesh instituted the sacrament and the epiclesis in which the church, moved by faith, entreats the Father, through the Son, to send the Spirit so that in the unique offering of the incarnate Son, everything may be consummated in unity. Through the eucharist believers unite themselves to Christ, who offers himself to the Father with them, and they receive the possibility of offering themselves in a spirit of sacrifice to each other, as Christ himself offers himself to the Father for the many, thus giving himself to men.

This consummation in unity brought about by the one inseparable operation of the Son and the Spirit, acting in reference to the Father in his design, is the church in its fullness.

II

1. If one looks at the New Testament one will notice first of all that the church describes a "local" reality. The church exists in history as local church. For a region one speaks more often of churches, in the plural. It is always question of the church of God but in a given place.

Now the church existing in a place is not formed, in a radical sense, by the persons who come together to establish it. There is a "Jerusalem from on high" which "comes down from God", a communion which is at the foundation of the community itself. The church comes into being by a free gift, that of the new creation.

However, it is clear that the church "which is in" a given place manifests itself when it is "assembled." This assembly itself, whose elements and requirements are indicated by the New Testament, is fully such when it is the eucharistic synaxis. When the local church celebrates the eucharist, the event which took place "once and for all" is made present and manifested. In the local church, then, there is neither male nor female, slave nor free, Jew nor Greek. A new unity is communicated which overcomes divisions and restores communion in the one body of Christ. This unity transcends psychological, racial, sociopolitical or cultural unity. It is the "communion of the Holy Spirit" gathering together the scattered children of God. The newness of baptism and of chrismation then bears its fruit. And by the power of the body and blood of the Lord, filled with the Holy Spirit, there is healed that sin which does not cease to assault Christians by raising obstacles to the dynamism of the "life for God in Christ Jesus" received in baptism. This applies also to the sin of division, all of whose forms contradict God's design.

One of the chief texts to remember is 1 Cor 10:15- 17: one sole bread, one sole cup, one sole body of Christ in the plurality of members. This mystery of the unity in love of many persons constitutes the real newness of the Trinitarian koinonia communicated to men in the church through the eucharist. Such is the purpose of Christ's saving work, which is spread abroad in the last times after Pentecost.

This is why the church finds its model, its origin and its purpose in the mystery of God, one in three persons. Further still, the eucharist thus understood in the light of the Trinitarian mystery is the criterion for functioning of the life of the church as a whole. The institutional elements should be nothing but a visible reflection of the reality of the mystery.

2. The unfolding of the eucharistic celebration of the local church shows how the koinonia takes shape in the church celebrating the eucharist. In the eucharist celebrated by the local church gathered about the bishop, or the priest in communion with him, the following aspects stand out, interconnected among themselves even if this or that moment of the celebration emphasizes one or another.

The koinonia is eschatological. It is the newness which comes in the last times. That is why everything in the eucharist as in the life of the church begins with conversion and reconciliation. The eucharist presupposes repentance (metanoia) and confession (exomologesis), which find in other circumstances their own sacramental expression. But the eucharist forgives and also heals sins, since it is the sacrament of the divinizing love of the Father, by the Son, in the Holy Spirit.

But this koinonia is also kerygmatic. This is evident in the synaxis not only because the celebration "announces" the event of the mystery, but also because it actually realizes it today in the Spirit. This implies the proclamation of the word to the assembly and the response of faith given by all. Thus the communion of the assembly is brought about in the kerygma, and hence unity in faith. Orthodoxy (correct faith) is inherent in the eucharistic koinonia. This orthodoxy is expressed most clearly through the proclamation of the symbol of faith which is a summary of the apostolic tradition of which the bishop is the witness in virtue of his succession. Thus the eucharist is inseparably sacrament and word since in it the incarnate word sanctifies in the Spirit. That is why the entire liturgy and not only the reading of holy scriptures constitutes a proclamation of the word under the form of doxology and prayer. On the other hand, the word proclaimed is the word made flesh and become sacramental.

Koinonia is at once ministerial and pneumatological. That is why the eucharist is its manifestation par excellence. The entire assembly, each one according to rank, is leiturgos of the koinonia. While being a gift of the Trinitarian God, koinonia is also the response of men. In the faith which comes from the Spirit and the word, these put in practice the vocation and the mission received in baptism: to become living members, in one's proper rank, of the body of Christ.

3. The ministry of the bishop is not merely a tactical or pragmatic function (because a president is necessary) but an organic function. The bishop receives the gift of episcopal grace (1 Tm 4:14) in the sacrament of consecration effected by bishops who themselves have received this gift, thanks to the existence of an uninterrupted series of episcopal ordinations, beginning from the holy apostles. By the sacrament of ordination the Spirit of the Lord "confers" on the bishop, not juridically as if it were a pure transmission of power, but sacramentally, the authority of servant which the Son received from the Father and which he received in a human way by his acceptance in his passion.

The function of the bishop is closely bound to the eucharistic assembly over which he presides. The eucharistic unity of the local church implies communion between him who presides and the people to whom he delivers the word of salvation and the eucharistic gifts. Further, the minister is also the one who "receives" from his church, which is faithful to tradition, the word he transmits. And the great intercession which he sends up to the Father is simply that of his entire church praying with him. The bishop cannot be separated from his church any more than the church can be separated from its bishop.

The bishop stands at the heart of the local church as minister of the Spirit to discern the charismata and take care that they are exercised in harmony, for the good of all, in faithfulness to the apostolic tradition. He puts himself at the service of the initiatives of the Spirit so that nothing may prevent them from contributing to building up koinonia. He is minister of unity, servant of Christ the Lord, whose mission is to "gather into unity the children of God". And because the church is built up by the eucharist, it is he, invested with the grace of priestly ministry, who presides at the latter.

But this presidency must be properly understood. The bishop presides at the offering which is that of his entire community. By consecrating the gifts so that they become the body and blood the community offers, he celebrates not only for it, nor only with it and in it, but through it. He appears then as minister of Christ fashioning the unity of his body and so creating communion through his body. The union of the community with him is first of all of the order of mysterion and not primordially of the juridical order. It is that union expressed in the eucharist which is prolonged and given practical expression in the "pastoral" relations of teaching, government and life. The ecclesial community is thus called to be the outline of a human community renewed.

4. There is profound communion between the bishop and the community in which the Spirit gives him responsibility for the church of God. The ancient tradition expressed it happily in the image of marriage. But that communion lies within the communion of the apostolic community. In the ancient tradition (as the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus proves) the bishop elected by the people who guarantee his apostolic faith, in conformity with what the local church confesses receives the ministerial grace of Christ by the Spirit in the prayer of the assembly and by the laying on of hands (chirotonia) of the neighboring bishops, witnesses of the

faith of their own churches. His charism, coming directly from the Spirit of God, is given him in the apostolicity of his church (linked to the faith of the apostolic community) and in that of the other churches represented by their bishops. Through this his ministry is inserted into Apostolic succession, therefore, means something more than a mere transmission of powers. It is succession in a Church which witnesses to the apostolic faith, in communion with the other Churches witnessing to the same apostolic faith. The see (cathedra) plays an essential role in inserting the bishop into the heart of ecclesial apostolicity. On the other hand, once ordained, the bishop becomes in his church the guarantor of apostolicity and the one who represents it within the communion of churches. That is why in his church every eucharist can only be celebrated in truth if presided over by him or by a presbyter in communion with him. Mention of him in the anaphora is essential.

Through the ministry of presbyters, charged with presiding over the life and the eucharistic celebration of the communities entrusted to them, those communities grow in communion with all the communities for which the bishop has primary responsibility. In the present situation the diocese itself is a communion of eucharistic communities. One of the essential functions of presbyters is to link these to the eucharist of the bishop and to nourish them with the apostolic faith of which the bishop is the witness and guarantor. They should also take care that Christians, nourished by the body and blood of him who gave his life for his brethren, should be authentic witnesses of fraternal love in the reciprocal sacrifice nourished by the sacrifice of Christ. For, according to the word of the apostle, "if someone sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" The eucharist determines the Christian manner of living the paschal mystery of Christ and the gift of Pentecost. Thanks to it there is a profound transformation of human existence always confronted by temptation and suffering.

III

1. The body of Christ is unique. There exists then only one church of God. The identity of one eucharistic assembly with another comes from the fact that all with the same faith celebrate the same memorial, that all by eating the same bread and sharing in the same cup become the same unique body of Christ into which they have been integrated by the same baptism. If there are many celebrations, there is nevertheless only one mystery celebrated in which all participate. Moreover, when the believer communicates in the Lord's body and blood, he does not receive a part of Christ but the whole Christ.

In the same way, the local church which celebrates the eucharist gathered around its bishop is not a section of the body of Christ. The multiplicity of local synaxes does not divide the church, but rather shows sacramentally its unity. Like the community of the apostles gathered around Christ, each eucharistic assembly is truly the holy church of God, the body of Christ, in communion with the first community of the disciples and with all who throughout the world celebrate and have celebrated the memorial of the Lord. It is also in communion with the assembly of the saints in heaven, which each celebration brings to mind.

2. Far from excluding diversity or plurality, the koinonia supposes it and heals the wounds of division, transcending the latter in unity.

Since Christ is one for the many, as in the church which is his body, the one and the many, the universal and local are necessarily simultaneous. Still more radically, because the one and only God is the communion of three persons, the one and only church is a communion of many communities and the local church a communion of persons. The one and unique church finds her identity in the koinonia of the churches. Unity and multiplicity appear so linked that one could not exist without the other. It is this relationship constitutive of the church that institutions make visible and, so to speak, "historicize".

3. Since the universal church manifests itself in the synaxis of the local church, two conditions must be fulfilled above all if the local church which celebrates the eucharist is to be truly within the ecclesial communion.

a) First, the identity of the mystery of the church lived by the local church with the mystery of the church lived by the primitive church - catholicity in time - is fundamental. The church is apostolic because it is founded on and continually sustained by the mystery of salvation revealed in Jesus Christ, transmitted in the Spirit by those who were his witnesses, the apostles. Its members will be judged by Christ and the apostles (cf. Lk 22:30).

b) Today mutual recognition between this local church and the other churches is also of capital importance. Each should recognize in the others through local particularities the identity of the mystery of the church. It is a question of mutual recognition of catholicity as communion in the wholeness of the mystery. This recognition is achieved first of all at the regional level. Communion in the same patriarchate or in some other form of regional unity is first of all a manifestation of the life of the Spirit in the same culture, or in the same historical conditions. It equally implies unity of witness and calls for the exercise of fraternal correction in humility. This communion within the same region should extend itself further in the communion between sister churches.

This mutual recognition, however, is true only under the conditions expressed in the anaphora of St. John Chrysostom and the first Antiochene anaphoras. The first condition is communion in the same kerygma, and so in the same faith. Already contained in baptism this requirement is made explicit in the eucharistic celebration.

But it also requires the will for communion in love (agape) and in service (diakonia), not only in words but in deeds.

Permanence through history and mutual recognition are particularly brought into focus in the eucharistic synaxis by the mention of the saints in the Canon and of the herds of the churches in the diptychs. Thus it is understood why these latter are signs of catholic unity in eucharistic communion, responsible, each on its own level, for maintaining that communion in the universal harmony of the churches and their common fidelity to the apostolic tradition.

4. We find then among these churches those bonds of communion which the New Testament indicated: communion in faith, hope and love, communion in the sacraments, communion in the diversity of charisms, communion in the reconciliation, communion in the ministry. The agent of this communion is the Spirit of the risen Lord. Through him the church universal, catholic, integrates diversity or plurality, making it one of its own essential elements. This catholicity represents the fulfillment of the prayer of Chapter 17 of the Gospel according to John, taken up in the eucharistic epicleses.

Attachment to the apostolic communion binds all the bishops together, linking the episkope of the local churches to the college of the apostles. They too form a college rooted by the Spirit in the "once for all" of the apostolic group, the unique witness to the faith. This means not only that they should be united among themselves by faith, charity, mission, reconciliation, but that they have in common the same responsibility and the same service to the church. Because the one and only church is made present in his local church, each bishop cannot separate the care for his own church from that of the universal church. When, by the sacrament of ordination, he receives the charism of the Spirit for the episkope of one local church, his own, by that very fact he receives the charism of the Spirit for the episkope of the entire church. In the people of God he exercises it in communion with all the bishop who are here and now in charge of churches and in communion with the living tradition which the bishops of the past have handed on. The presence of bishops from neighboring sees at his episcopal ordination "sacramentalizes" and makes present this communion. It produces a thorough fusion between his solicitude for the local community and his care for the church spread throughout the world. The episkope for the universal church is seen to be entrusted by the Spirit to the totality of local bishops in communion with one another. This communion is expressed traditionally through conciliar practice. We shall have to examine further the way it is conceived and realized in the perspective of what we have just explained.