THE SACRAMENT OF ORDER IN THE SACRAMENTAL STRUCTURE OF THE CHURCH WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE IMPORTANCE OF APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION FOR THE SANCTIFICATION AND UNITY OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

Uusi Valamo (Finland), June 26, 1988

Introductory note

The Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church approved in its fifth plenary session at the monastery of New Valamo, Finland, June 19-27, 1988, a new common statement entitled, "The Sacrament of Order in the Sacramental Structure of the Church, with particular Reference to the Importance of the Apostolic Succession for the Sanctification and Unity of the People of God".

This theme was chosen by the joint commission during its third session in Crete in 1984. Immediately afterwards, in 1984 and 1985, the theme was studied simultaneously by three subcommissions. In June 1985 in Opole, Poland, the joint coordinating committee, on the basis of the studies produced by the subcommissions, elaborated an organic synthesis.

The proposed document was given a preliminary examination by the joint commission in the first phase of the fourth plenary session in Bari in June 1986 and a number of amendments were proposed. Therefore the draft was revised by a joint editorial committee which met in Rome September 22-26, 1986.

Consequently the draft of the document reached the fifth plenary session of the commission in Finland already in a highly developed form. Nevertheless, the joint commission reexamined it paragraph by paragraph before approving it unanimously.

This is the third document produced by the joint commission, in which the fourteen autocephalous and autonomous Orthodox Churches are taking part, and which was created on the occasion of the visit of His Holiness John Paul II to the Ecumenical Patriarchate on November 30, 1979.

With strict theological coherence, the document on the sacrament of Order and Apostolic succession is linked to the first two already published, the first entitled "The Mystery of the Church and of the Holy Eucharist in the light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity" (Munich, 1982), and the second entitled "Faith, Sacraments and the Unity of the Church" (Bari, 1987).

The Joint Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church chose as the theme of the first phase of the dialogue a study of the sacraments in their relation to the unity of the Church, proposing and desiring the use of a positive method, intending, that is, to begin with those common elements which unite Catholics and Orthodox.

The document which is now being published is, along with the two earlier ones, a valuable result of the work of this international joint commission. As such, for the time being it engages the responsibility only of the members of the commission.

The competent authorities of the Catholic Church, for their part, while permitting publication of the document as an encouragement to the conversations underway, reserve to themselves the right to express in the future their official position on the results already obtained, on the possible need to subsequently clarify some aspects, and on the need to address other points in the dialogue. The authorities of the various Orthodox Churches engaged in this dialogue will do the same.

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Introduction

1. Having expressed our idea of the mystery of the Church as a communion of faith and sacraments, pre-eminently manifested in the eucharistic celebration, our commission now addresses the crucial question of the place and role of ordained ministry in the sacramental structure of the Church. We will deal, then, with the sacrament of order as well as with ordination to each of the three degrees of episcopate, presbyterate and diaconate. We rely on the certitude that in our Churches apostolic succession is fundamental for the sanctification and the unity of the people of God.

2. Our Churches affirm that ministry in the Church makes actual that of Christ himself. In the New Testament writings, Christ is called apostle, prophet, pastor, servant, deacon, doctor, priest, episkopos. Our common tradition recognizes the close link between the work of Christ and that of the Holy Spirit.
3. This understanding prevents us seeing in the economy Christ in isolation from the Spirit. The actual presence of Christ in his Church is also of an eschatological nature, since the Spirit constitutes the earnest of the perfect realization of God's design for the world.
4. In this perspective the Church appears as the community of the New Covenant which Christ through the Holy Spirit gathers about himself and builds up as his Body. Through the Church, Christ is present in history; through it he achieves the salvation of the world.
5. Since Christ is present in the Church, it is his ministry that is carried out in it. The ministry in the Church therefore does not substitute for the ministry of Christ. It has its source in him. Since the Spirit sent by Christ gives life to the Church, ministry is only fruitful by the grace of the Spirit. In fact, it includes many functions which the members of the community carry out according to the diversity of the gifts they receive as members of the Body of Christ. Certain among them receive through ordination and exercise the function proper to the episcopate, to the presbyterate and to the diaconate. There is no Church without the ministries created by the Spirit; there is no ministry without the Church, that is to say, outside and above the community. Ministries find their meaning and grounds for existence (raison d'être) only in it.

I. Christ and the Holy Spirit
6. The Spirit, which eternally proceeds from the Father and reposes on the Son, prepared the Christ event and achieved it. The incarnation of the Son of God, his death and his resurrection, were accomplished in fact according to the will of the Father, in the Holy Spirit. At the baptism, the Father through the manifestation of the Spirit inaugurates the mission of the Son. This Spirit is present in his ministry: the announcing of the Good News of salvation, the manifesting of the coming of the Kingdom, the bearing witness to the Father. Likewise, it is in the same Spirit that, as the unique priest of the New Covenant, Christ offers the sacrifice of his own life and it is through the Spirit that he is glorified.
7. Since Pentecost, in the Church which is his Body, it is in the Spirit alone that those who are charged with ministry can carry out the acts which bring the Body to its full stature. In the ministry of Christ as in that of the Church, it is the one and the same Spirit which is at work and which will act with us all the days of our life.
8. In the Church ministry should be lived in holiness, with a view towards the sanctification of the people of God. So that the whole Church and especially its ordained ministers might be able to contribute to "the perfecting of the saints for the work of ministry for building up the body of Christ", different services are made possible by many charisms (Eph 4:11-12; cf. 1 Cor 12:4-28; Rom 12:4-8).
9. The newness of the Church's ministry consists in this: Christ, servant of God for humanity, is present through the Spirit, in the Church, his Body, from which he cannot be separated. For he himself is "the first-born amongst many brothers". It is according to this sacramental way that one must understand the work of Christ in history from Pentecost to the Parousia. The ministry of the Church as such is sacramental.
10. For this reason Christ's presence in the Church is also eschatological. Wherever the Spirit is at work, he actually reveals to the world the presence of the Kingdom in creation. Here is where ecclesial ministry is rooted.
11. This ecclesial ministry is by nature sacramental. The word sacramental is meant to emphasise here that every ministry is bound to the eschatological reality of the Kingdom. The grace of the Holy Spirit, earnest of the world to come, has its source in the death and resurrection of Christ and is offered, in a sacramental manner, by means of sensible realities. The word sacramental likewise shows that the minister is a member of the community whom the Spirit invests with proper functions and power to assemble it and to preside in the name of Christ over the acts in which it celebrates the mysteries of salvation. This view of the sacramentality of ministry is rooted in the fact that Christ is made present in the Church by the Spirit whom he himself has sent to the Church.
12. This nature of ecclesial ministry is further shown in the fact that all ministries are intended to serve the world so as to lead it to its true goal, the Kingdom of God. It is by constituting the eschatological community as Body of Christ that the ministry of the Church answers the needs of the world.
13. The community gathered in the Spirit around Christ exercising his ministry for the world has its foundation in Christ, who is himself the cornerstone, and in the community of the Twelve. The apostolic character of Churches and their ministry is understood in this light.
14. On the one hand, the Twelve are witness of the historic life of Jesus, of his ministry and of his resurrection. On the other, as associated with the glorified Christ, they link each community with the community of the last days. Thus the ecclesial ministry will be called apostolic because it is carried out in continuity and in fidelity to what was given by Christ and handed on in history by the apostles. But it will also be apostolic because the eucharistic assembly at which the minister presides is an anticipation of the final community with Christ. Through this double relationship the Church's ministry remains constantly bound to that of the Twelve, and so to that of Christ.

II. The priesthood in the divine economy of salvation

15. The entire divine economy of salvation culminates in the incarnation of the Son, in his teaching, his passion, his glorious resurrection, his ascension and his second coming. Christ acts in the Holy Spirit. Thus, once and for all, there is laid the foundation for re-establishing the communion of man with God.

16. According to the epistle to the Hebrews, Christ by his death has become the one mediator of the New Covenant (Heb 9:15) and having entered once for all into the Holy Place with his own blood (Heb 9:12), he is forever in heaven the one and eternal High Priest of this New Covenant, "so as to appear now in the presence of God on our behalf" (Heb 9:24) to offer his sacrifice (Heb 10:12).

17. Invisibly present in the Church through the Holy Spirit, whom he has sent, Christ then is its unique High Priest. In him, priest and victim, all together, pastors and faithful, form a "chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people he claims as his own" (1 Pt 2:9; cf. Rv 5:10).

18. All members of the Churches, as members of the Body of Christ, participate in this priesthood, called to become "a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God" (Rom 12:1; cf. 1 Pt 2:5). Head of the Church, Christ has established, to make himself present, apostles chosen among the people, whom he endowed with authority and power by strengthening them through the grace of the Holy Spirit. The work and mission of the apostles are continued in the Church by the bishops with the priests and deacons who assist them. By ordination, the bishops are established successors of the apostles and direct the people along the ways of salvation.

19. Grouped around the glorified Lord, the Twelve give witness to the presence of the Kingdom already inaugurated and which will be fully manifested at the second coming. Christ has indeed promised them that they would sit on twelve thrones, judging with the Son of Man the twelve tribes of Israel (Mt 19:28).

20. As historic witnesses of what the Lord accomplished, the ministry of the Twelve is unique and irreplaceable. What they laid down was founded therefore once for all and no one in the future could build except on the foundation thus established (Eph 2:20; Rv 21:14).

21. But the apostles remain at the same time the foundations of the Church as it endures through the ages, in such a way that the mission they received from the Lord always remains visible and active, in expectation of the Lordss return (cf. Mt 18:18 and, earlier, 16:19).

22. This is why the Church, in which God's grace is at work, is itself the sacrament par excellence, the anticipated manifestation of the final realities, the foretaste of God's Kingdom, of the glory of the God and Father, of the eschaton in history.

23. Within this sacrament which is the Church, the priesthood conferred by ordination finds its place, being given for this Church. In fact, it constitutes in the Church a charismatic ministry (leitourg-ma) par excellence. It is at the service of the Church's life and continued existence by the Holy Spirit, that is to say, of the unity in Christ, of all the faithful living and dead, of the martyrs, the saints, the just of the Old Testament.

III. The ministry of the bishop, presbyter and deacon

24. In the celebration of the eucharist, the entire assembly, each according to his or her status, is "liturge" of the Koinonia, and is so only through the Spirit. "There are varieties of ministries, but the same Lord (É). To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good". (1 Cor 12:5,7). The various ministries converge in the eucharistic synaxis, during which they are conferred. However, their diversity is ordered to the entire life of the community: fidelity to the Word of God, abiding in harmony and fraternal charity, witness before "those outside", growth in holiness, constancy in prayer, care for the poorest.

25. Since it culminates in the celebration of the eucharist in which Christian initiation is completed, through which all become one Body of Christ, the ministry of the bishop is, among all the charismas and ministries which the Spirit raises up, a ministry of presiding for gathering in unity. In fact, bearing the variety of gifts of the Spirit, the local Church has at its centre the bishop, whose communion realizes the unity of all and expresses the fullness of the Church.

26. This unity of the local Church is inseparable from the universal communion of the Churches. It is essential for a Church to be in communion with the others. This communion is expressed and realized in and through the episcopal college. By his ordination, the bishop is made minister of a Church which he represents in the universal communion.

27. Episcopal ordination, which, according to the canons, is conferred by at least two or three bishops, expresses the communion of the Churches with that of the person selected: it makes him a member of the communion of bishops. In the ordination the bishops exercise their function as witnesses to the communion in the apostolic faith and sacramental life not only with respect to him whom they ordain, but also with respect to the Church of which he will be bishop. What is fundamental for the incorporation of the newly elected person in the episcopal communion is that it is accomplished by the glorified Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit at the moment of the imposition of hands.

Here we are only considering ordination under its sacramental aspect. The problems raised by the manner of electing a bishop will be studied later.

28. Episcopal ordination confers on the one who receives it by the gift of the Spirit, the fullness of the priesthood. During the ordination the concelebration of the bishops expresses the unity of the Church and its identity with the apostolic community. They lay hands and invoke the Holy Spirit on the one who will be ordained as the only ones qualified to confer on him the episcopal ministry. They do it, however, within the setting of the prayer of the community.
29. Through his ordination, the bishop receives all the powers necessary for fulfilling his function. The canonical conditions for the exercise of his function and the installation of the bishop in the local Church will be further discussed by the Commission.
30. The gift conferred consecrates the recipient once for all to the service of the Church. This is a point of the traditional doctrine in East and West, which is confirmed by the fact that in the event of disciplinary sanctions against a bishop followed by canonical reintegration, there is no re-ordination. On this subject, as on all the essential points concerning ordination, our Churches have a common doctrine and practice, even if on certain canonical and disciplinary requirements, such as celibacy, customs can be different because of pastoral and spiritual reasons.
31. But ecclesial ministry is exercised through a variety of functions. These are exercised in interdependence; none could replace another. This is especially true of the fundamental ministries of the bishop, the presbyter and the deacon, and of the functions of the laity, all of which together give structure to the eucharistic community.
32. Throughout the entire history of our Churches, women have played a fundamental role, as witnessed not only by the most Holy Mother of God, but also by the holy women mentioned in the New Testament, by the numerous women saints whom we venerate, as well as by so many other women who up to the present day have served the Church in many ways. Their particular charisms are very important for the building up of the Body of Christ. But our Churches remain faithful to the historical and theological tradition according to which they ordain only men to the priestly ministry.
33. Just as the apostles gathered together the first communities, by proclaiming Christ, by celebration the eucharist, by leading the baptised towards growing communion with Christ and with each other, so the bishop, established by the same Spirit, continues to preach the same Gospel, to preside at the same eucharist, to serve the unity and sanctification of the same community. He is thus the icon of Christ the servant among his brethren.
34. Because it is at the eucharist that the Church manifests its fullness, it is equally in the presiding at the eucharist that the role of the bishop and of the priest appears in its full light.
35. In the eucharistic celebration, in fact, believers offer themselves with Christ as a royal priesthood. They do so thanks to the ministerial action which makes present in their midst Christ himself who proclaims the Word, makes the bread and the cup become through the Spirit his Body and Blood, incorporating them in himself, giving them his life. Moreover, the prayer and the offering of the people incorporated in Christ are, so to speak, recapitulated in the thanksgiving prayer of the bishop and his offering of the gifts.
36. The eucharist thus realizes the unity of the Christian community. It also manifests the unity of all the Churches which truly celebrate it and further still the unity, across the centuries, of all the Churches with the apostolic community from the beginnings up to the present day. Transcending history, it reunites in the Spirit the great assembly of the apostles, of martyrs, of witnesses of all periods gathered around the Lamb. Indeed, as the central act of episcopal ministry it makes clearly present the world to come: the Church gathered in communion, offering itself to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit.
37. He who presides at the eucharist is responsible for preserving communion in fidelity to the teaching of the apostles and for guiding it in the new life. He is its servant and pastor. The bishop is also the guide of the entire liturgical life of his local Church and, following his example, this Church becomes a community of prayer. He presides at its praise and at its intercession, and he himself prays unceasingly for all those entrusted to him by the Lord, knowing that he is responsible for each one before the tribunal of God.
38. It also rests with him to see to it that there be given to his people, by preaching and catechesis, the authentic content of the Word of God given to the apostles "once for all". He is in fact the primary one responsible for the preaching of the Word of God in his diocese.
39. To him also belongs the task of leading this people towards proclaiming to all human beings salvation in Jesus Christ, and towards a witness which embodies that proclamation. Therefore, it is for him to govern his Church in such a way that it always remains faithful to its Christian vocation and to the mission deriving therefrom. In all this, however, he remains a member of the Church called to holiness and dependent on the salvific ministry of this Church, as St Augustine reminds his community: "For you I am a bishop, with you I am a Christian". At his ordination the bishop makes his own the faith of the whole Church by solemnly confessing it and thus becomes father to the extent that he has fully become its son by this confession. It is essential for the bishop to be the father of his people.
40. As successor of the apostles, bishops are responsible for communion in the apostolic faith and fidelity to the demands of a life lived according to the Gospel.
41. It is in presiding over the eucharistic assembly that the role of the bishop finds its accomplishment. The presbyters form the college grouped around him during that celebration. They exercise the responsibilities the

bishop entrusts to them by celebrating the sacraments, teaching the Word of God and governing the community, in profound and continuous communion with him. The deacon, for his part, is attached to the service of the bishop and the priest and is a link between them and the assembly of the faithful.
42. The priest, ordained by the bishop and dependent upon him, is sent to fulfil certain definite tasks; above all he is sent to a parish community to be its pastor: he presides at the eucharist at the altar (consecrated by the bishop), he is minister of the sacraments for the community, he preaches the Gospel and catechizes; it is his duty to keep in unity the charisms of the people (laos) of God; he appears as the ordinary minister of the local eucharistic community, and the diocese is thus a communion of eucharistic communities.
43. The diaconate is exercised at the service of the bishop and the priest, in the liturgy, in the work of evangelization and in the service of charity.

IV. Apostolic succession
44. The same unique ministry of Christ and his apostles remains in action in history. This action is, through the Spirit, a breakthrough to "the world to come", in fidelity to what the apostles transmitted about what Jesus did and taught.
45. The importance of this succession comes also from the fact that the apostolic tradition concerns the community and not only an isolated individual, ordained bishop. Apostolic succession is transmitted through local Churches ("in each city", according to the expression of Eusebius of Caesarea; "by reason of their common heritage of doctrine", according to Tertullian in the De Praescriptione, 32, 6). It is a matter of a succession of persons in the community, because the Una Sancta is a communion of local Churches and not of isolated individuals. It is within this mystery of koinonia that the episcopate appears as the central point of the apostolic succession.
46. According to what we have already said in the Munich Document, "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, witnesses of the same apostolic faith. The "sees (cathedra) plays an important role in inserting the bishop into the heart of ecclesial apostolicity" (Munich Document, II, 4). More precisely, the term "cathedra" is used here in the sense of the presence of the bishop in each local Church.
47. "On the other hand, once ordained, the bishop becomes in his Church the guarantor of apostolicity, the one who represents it within the communion of Churches, its link with the other 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" (ibid).
48. "Attachment to the apostolic communion joins together all the bishops, maintaining the episkope of the local Churches, to the college of the apostles" (ibid., III, 4). The bishops are thus rooted in the "once for all" of the apostolic group through which the Holy Spirit gives witness to the faith. Indeed, as the foundation of the Church, the Twelve are unique. Even so, it was necessary that other men should make visible their irreplaceable presence. In this way the link of each community would be maintained with both the original community and the eschatological community.
49. Through his ordination each bishop becomes successor of the apostles, whatever may be the Church over which he presides or the prerogatives (presbeta) of this Church among the other Churches.
50. Incorporated into the number of those to whom the particular responsibility for the ministry of salvation has been entrusted, and so placed in the succession of the apostles, the bishop ought to pass on their teaching as well as model his whole life on them. Ireneaeus of Lyons puts it thus: "It is where the charisms of God have been planted that we should be instructed in the truth, that is among those in whom are united succession in the Church from the apostles, unassailable integrity of conduct and incorruptible purity of doctrine" (Adv. Haer. IV, 26, 5). Among the essential functions of the bishop is that of being in his Church through the Spirit a witness and guarantor of the faith and an instrument for maintaining it in apostolic fidelity. Apostolic succession is also a succession in the labours and sufferings of the apostles for the service of the Gospel and in the defence of the people entrusted to each bishop. According to the words of the first letter of St. Peter, the apostolic succession is also a succession in the presence of mercy and understanding, of defence of the weak, of constant attention to those entrusted to their charge, with the bishop thus being a model for the flock (cf. 1 Pt 5:14; 2 Cor 4:8-11; 1 Tm 4:12; Tt 2:7).
51. Furthermore it belongs to the episcopal ministry to articulate and organize the life of the Church with its service and offices. It is his task also to watch over the choice of those who are to carry out responsibilities in his diocese. Fraternal communion requires that all the members, ministers or lay people, listen to each other for the good of the people of God.
52. In the course of its history, the Church in East and West has known various forms of practising communion among bishops: by exchange of letters, by visits of one Church to another, but principally by synodal or conciliar life. From the first centuries a distinction and a hierarchy was established between Churches of earlier foundation and Churches of more recent foundation, between mother and daughter Churches, between

Churches of larger cities and Churches of outlying areas. This hierarchy of taxis soon found its canonical expression, formulated by the councils, especially in the canons received by all the Churches of the East and West. These are, in the first place, canons 6 and 7 of the Ist Council of Nicea (325), canon 3 of the 1st Council of Constantinople (2nd ecumenical Council, 381), canon 28 of Chalcedon (4th ecumenical Council, 451), as well as canons 3, 4 and 5 of Sardica (343) and canon 1 of the Council of Saint Sophia (879-880). Even if these canons have not always been interpreted in the same way in the East and in the West, they belong to the heritage of the Church. They assigned to bishops occupying certain metropolitan or major sees a place and prerogatives recognized in the organization of the synodal life of the Church. Thus was formed the pentarchy: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem, even if in the course of history there appeared apart from the pentarchy other archbishops, metropolitans, primates and patriarchs.

53. The synodal character of episcopal activity showed itself especially in questions under discussion which interested several local Churches or the Churches as a whole. Thus in each region different types of synods or local and regional councils and conferences of bishops were organized. Their forms could change according to different places and times, but their guiding principle is to manifest and make efficacious the life of the Church by joint episcopal action, under the presidency of the one whom they recognized as the first among them. In fact, according to canon 34 of the apostolic canons, belonging to the canonical tradition of our Churches, the first among the bishops only takes a decision in agreement with the other bishops and the latter take no important decision without the agreement of the first.

54. In ecumenical councils, convened in the Holy Spirit at times of crisis, bishops of the Church, with supreme authority, decided together about the faith and issued canons to affirm the Tradition of the apostles in historic circumstances which directly threatened the faith, unity and sanctifying work of the whole people of God, and put at risk the very existence of the Church and its fidelity to its Founder, Jesus Christ.

55. It is in this perspective of communion among local Churches that the question could be addressed of primacy in the Church in general and, in particular, the primacy of the bishop of Rome, a question which constitutes a serious divergence among us and which will be discussed in the future.

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