

# Doctrine of sacraments

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## V. Doctrine of Sacraments

### *V/1 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. Jn. 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 realisation 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 psycho-somatic 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, October 3, 1985*

*Signatures*

## *V/2 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” (Mt. 28:18–20). Without being born again of water and the Spirit man cannot enter the Kingdom of God (Jn. 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.

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*Amersfoort, October 3, 1985*

*Signatures*

### *V/3 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 fol-

lowed 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 wherewith 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.

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*Amersfoort, October 3, 1985*

*Signatures*

#### *V/4 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. Mt. 26:26–29; Mk. 14:22–25; Lk. 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 7th 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. 1st 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” (Mk. 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” (Jn. 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.*

*Amersfoort, October 3, 1985*

*Signatures*

#### *V/5 Penance*

1. In the sacrament of Penance the sins committed by those believers who sincerely repent and confess them to a priest are forgiven. “The manifold mercy of God reaches out to a fallen mankind not only in the grace of Baptism, but the healing remedy of Penance also restores the hope of eternal life” (Leo I of Rome, ep. 108 – PL 54.1011).

2. The Lord promised the authority to forgive sins to the Apostles (Mt. 16:19; 18:18) and invested them with this authority after the resurrection: “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (Jn. 20:23). This authority was

passed on by the Apostles to their successors. On the basis of this authority, the sacrament of Penance developed as a God-given, permanent institution in the life of the Church, as is attested to by the writings of the Fathers and the liturgical and canonical tradition of the Church.

3. Administrators (liturgists) of the sacrament of Penance are the bishop and those priests authorized by him.

4. Sincere hearty repentance and confession to a priest are indispensable for the forgiveness of sins. The original form of public penance was later replaced by a form of private confession before a priest.

5. God offers forgiveness of sins to the penitent through the priest: “What is done below by priests, God makes into a reality above; and so the Lord confirms the judgement of his servants” (John Chrysostom, sac. 3.5 – PG 48.643). “Whatever has been loosed by these keys (of the Church) on earth, has every promise of also being loosed in heaven” (Augustine, sermo 351.5/12 – PL 39.1549).

6. The priest who dispenses the sacrament of Penance may, in his pastoral judgement, impose an act of penance not only on those on whom forgiveness of sins has not yet been pronounced, but also on those who have already been forgiven. The imposition of an act of penance, as attested to in Scripture and tradition (cf. 2 Cor. 2:6–8; Apostolic Constitutions 2.16, 18, 41 – PG 1.625ff, 629ff, 696ff), aims at the spiritual improvement of the sinner and is designed to help guard against a repetition of the same sin. Penance, therefore, does not have the character of punishment but rather of a means of grace (Basil the Great, Can. 65 – PG 32.797).

7. The sacrament of Penance was instituted for all baptized who, after Baptism, committed venial or mortal sins and then demonstrated remorse for their failings. There are no sins or failings which, after repentance has been expressed, cannot be forgiven through the sacrament of Penance. “For the Lord who forgave all sins did not exclude any transgression” (Ambrose of Milan, paen. 1.2/5 – PL 16.467).

*In the view of the Joint Orthodox–Old Catholic Theological Commission, the above text on “Penance” represents the teaching of the Orthodox and Old Catholic Churches.*

*Kavala, October 17, 1987*

*Signatures*

## V/6 *Unction*

1. During his redeeming ministry on earth our Saviour healed those who suffered from diseases of body and soul. He commissioned his disciples to do the same (cf. Mk. 6:7,13; 9:35). Following the example of the Lord and of the Apostles, the Church performs the sacrament of Unction [Anointing the sick], in which the faithful are prayed for and anointed with oil for the healing of body and soul: “We pray to you, Lord of all might and power, send forth the healing power of the Only-begotten from heaven on this oil, so that it may be to those who are anointed with it the means for driving out every form of sickness and weakness ... every form of fever and suffering, for healing grace and the forgiveness of sins, as the medicine of life and salvation for the healing and wholeness of soul, body and spirit, and for complete and total strengthening” (Serapion of Thumis, euch. 29(17).1; cf. Innocence I of Rome, ep. 25.8/11 – PL 20.560).

2. The Apostle James affirms: “Is any among you sick? Let him call for the presbyters of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven” (Jas. 5:14–16).

3. Anointing the sick with oil consecrated for this purpose, and prayer, are required for the performance of this sacrament. The administrators of this sacrament are the leaders of the Church, i.e. the bishop and the priests. If possible there should be, as James suggests, more than one administrator participating, although one will suffice if no more are available.

4. The fruits of this sacrament are the healing of diseases and the forgiveness of sins. Due to this twofold healing effect, the Orthodox Church also makes this sacrament available to its people in good health preparing themselves for Holy Communion; however, this does not serve as a substitute for the sacrament of Penance.

5. The sacrament of Unction is to be received by all baptized, not only those suffering from terminal conditions.

*In the view of the Joint Orthodox–Old Catholic Theological Commission, the above text on “Unction” represents the teaching of the Orthodox and Old Catholic Churches.*

*Kavala, October 17, 1987*

*Signatures*

## *V/7 Ordination*

1. The ordained ministry (*ordo*) is a fundamental institution in the life of the Church and has its origin and continuing basis in the commissioning of the Apostles by the resurrected Lord who bestowed on them the Holy Spirit for the fulfillment of their mission. This ministry must be understood in connection with apostolic succession (cf. Commission Text III/7), through which the saving work of Christ in the Church continues. The New Testament witnesses that through prayer and the laying on of hands the Apostles transmitted to other men the authority conferred on them and that through this prayer and laying on of hands the latter were granted by God the gifts of grace necessary for the spiritual office (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6–14; 2:2; Acts 14:23; 20:28–32).

2. That special apostolic characteristic, namely the apostolic ministry itself as a service to the entire Church which the Apostles embody as universal shepherds of the Church, is not part of the authority of the office of bishop received from the Apostles in the consecration as bishop. No single bishop has received this apostolic office for himself on the basis of [apostolic] succession, but rather, all bishops share in the apostolicity in and through the Church.

3. In spite of a certain degree of unclarity in the vocabulary used, the ordained ministry as a special spiritual function appears quite early in the form of bishop, priest (presbyter) and deacon. The bishop as teacher, liturgist and shepherd of the local Church under his guidance, guards and preserves its unity and the truth of its teaching. Since he possesses the fullness of ordained ministry, he also performs all sacramental acts and other liturgical functions, and exercises the work of shepherd in all its fullness. The priests (presbyters) support the bishop by performing the sacraments (with some specific exceptions) and other liturgical functions and participate in the proclamation of the Gospel and the spiritual instruction of the faithful. The deacons assist the bishop and the priests (presbyters) in the performance of sacraments, participate in social ministries and assist in the work of the Church in general.

4. Except for the as yet not fully understood arrangement of deaconesses, the undivided Church did not permit the ordination of women.

5. The candidate who has been determined to be worthy for ordained ministry is ordained by the bishop, with prayer and the laying on of hands, in a eucharistic gathering of the Church, whereby the

bishop prays, together with the clergy and the faithful gathered, that the grace of the Holy Spirit who heals what is sick and supplies what is lacking, may descend on the ordinand. The practice attested to in the “Apostolic Tradition” of Hippolytus (c. 7f) and known only in the West that the priests (presbyters) present lay their hands on the head of the ordinand together with the bishop is a sign of their union with the bishop and their approbation of the admission of the ordinand to their collegium. This is not intended to raise any doubt about the full and exclusive authority of the bishop in matters of ordination. The prayer of the entire congregation and the approbation expressed in this prayer also demonstrates the cooperation and participation of all the people.

6. The divine grace received in Ordination grants the authority for a particular service in the proclamation of the Gospel, in the liturgical-sacramental life of the Church and in the gathering and upbuilding of the faithful. This service has differing form and purpose depending on whether it is performed by a bishop, a priest (presbyter) or a deacon. The gift of ordained ministry granted in the grace of ordination has a threefold purpose because it continues the three-fold ministry of the Lord in the Church: the kingly, the sacerdotal and the prophetic.

7. The efficacy of the sacraments administered by those in ordained ministry is not dependent on their personal holiness or unworthiness, “for it is God who sanctifies us in his mysteries” (John Chrysostom, hom. 8.1 in 1 Cor. – PG 61.69).

*In the view of the Joint Orthodox–Old Catholic Theological Commission, the above text on “Ordination” represents the teaching of the Orthodox and Old Catholic Churches.*

*Kavala, October 17, 1987*

*Signatures*

### *V/8 Marriage*

1. Marriage is an institution given by God. It was founded by God at creation as a fellowship of love and for the mutual support of husband and wife (Gen. 2:18), then reaffirmed by the Lord (Mt. 19:4–6) and blessed by his presence at the wedding at Cana (Jn. 2:1–11).

God created man as male and female (Gen. 1:27) and placed their common life under his special protection and blessing. Already under

the Old Covenant the marital union represents a characteristic image of the union between God and his people. Under the New Covenant, marriage, in which union man and woman are bound together in mutual love and in faith, represents as an image the great mystery of the love and unity which exists between Christ and the Church he founded (cf. Eph. 5:32).

2. In his blessing of the first human couple God has associated the propagation of children with marriage: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen. 1:28). In bringing children into the world and raising them in the “discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4), man has become a partner of God in continuing God’s work of creation. Through children, man experiences the gift of fatherhood and motherhood and, together, spouses and children form a family which is a kind of a small church, the house church.

Marriage is the mystery of love par excellence (cf. John Chrysostom, *laud.Max.* 3 – PG 51.230). It fulfills its purpose as a fellowship of love of spouses, not only by bearing children and sharing life (cf. Eph. 5:25; 1 Sam. 1:8). This love and unity between spouses as the principal purpose of marriage is achieved when they remain in the grace of the Holy Spirit.

3. The Church, which has blessed marriage since ancient times, “so that it responds to the Lord and not to lust” (Ignatius of Antioch, *Polyc.* 5.2 – PG 5.724), is not simply giving its blessing to the natural union of man and woman, but rather is uniting the new couple in the eucharistic fellowship and thereby placing the marriage in the context of the mystery of the Church. The consent of the bridal couple is indispensable for marriage which is concluded as a sacrament by the blessing of a lawfully ordained minister.

4. The sanctity of marriage and the spiritual character of the union and fellowship of persons in a marriage blessed according to the pattern of the union between Christ and his Church is the basis for the Church’s conviction that marriage is a life-long union and indissoluble. The Lord proclaimed the sanctity and indissolubility of marriage (Mt. 19:6), but admitted the possibility of its dissolution for reasons of adultery (Mt. 5:32; 19:9). The Apostle Paul says that a second marriage after the death of a spouse is permissible, although he expresses his preference that widowed persons not marry again (1 Cor. 7:39).

In the strict sense, therefore, a marriage cannot be dissolved for reasons other than adultery or the death of one of the spouses; but the Church, out of forbearance and love for people, acknowledges other,

analogous reasons. In its pastoral care the Church is guided by divine commandment and the divine disposition to forgive as it deals with marriages which have failed due to human shortcomings.

5. In its pastoral care the Church emphasizes the fact that husband and wife are equally (cf. 1 Cor. 7:3f; Eph. 5:21–33; 1 Pet. 3:1–7) responsible for the grace which is theirs in marriage as well as in their vocation to glorify God also in their bodies (1 Cor. 6:12–20; cf. also Heb. 13:4).

6. Marriage and ordination are not mutually exclusive. The ancient Church allowed the ordinand a free choice between marriage and celibacy and forbade only widowed persons from marrying after ordination. With regard to marriage after ordination, the tradition of the ancient Church held the “promise of celibacy” at ordination as an impediment to marriage. Marriage and celibacy are not placed in opposition to each other nor do they abrogate each other. They represent parallel paths of Christian perfection.

*In the view of the Joint Orthodox–Old Catholic Theological Commission, the above text on “Marriage” represents the teaching of the Orthodox and Old Catholic Churches.*

*Kavala, October 17, 1987*

*Signatures*