

Catholic Teaching on Apostolic Succession: A Challenge to the Churches

Introduction

In 1973 the International Theological Commission issued a document with the title “Catholic Teaching on Apostolic Succession”, whose scope was to “throw light on the *concept* of apostolic succession, on the one hand, because a clear presentation of the Catholic doctrine would seem to be useful to the Catholic Church as a whole, and, on the other hand, because it is demanded by ecumenical dialogue”.¹ The document dealt with several issues in trying to reconstitute the history of the concept of succession from New Testament texts alone. This is obviously a hermeneutical problem that any “concept” will have since the NT texts are written and received according to diverse criteria in different periods of time. Therefore there is a critical question of finding continuity between the NT and the Church’s Tradition while respecting the normative nature of Scripture for all ages. Next there is the problem of the 12 Apostles and what they taught. Is succession related only to the imposition of hands or are there other factors to be considered?

Certainly the “classical” definition of apostolic succession was the line of bishops stretching back to the apostles. This view is based on several assumptions elaborated from a later period in time which I hope we will see needs to be nuanced since it is based on later definitions of such terms as for example, “bishop” onto what the apostolic and sub-apostolic periods read with a different lens. Another issue which complicates a simple reading of succession is that theological changes were admitted in different geographical zones of the early developing church. These are represented by three patristic traditions: Greek, Latin, and Syriac – all of these formed the *Una Sancta* of the first millennium.

A final note on method to be considered. The Second Vatican Council adopted a method of first seeing a wider context before considering specific elements with that context. For example *Lumen gentium* first defines the church as the People of God, the Body of Christ and the Temple of the Holy Spirit before dealing with the hierarchy as a service to the Church of God. This same method needs to be employed for our subject. First we need to conceive of the apostolic continuity of the church and place apostolic succession in the context as service to the continuity. Historically, apostolic succession was taken out of context from apostolic continuity. The ITC text rightly notes that when dealing with the concept of apostolic succession we have both an historical dimension and a spiritual dimension to be kept in mind.²

Setting the context

Let us consider the context of the historical characteristic of the witness of the New Testament about ministers: plurality, articulation between all and some in the foundation of the church.

We need to already make a first notation, namely the key concept used to describe what how these witnesses fulfill their task: **διακονία**. The Greek New Testament concordance shows its meanings as *service* which takes plural forms:

¹ INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, “Catholic Teaching on Apostolic Succession” in MICHAEL SHARKEY, (ed.), *Texts and Documents 1969-1985* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989) 93-104, here p. 93. My emphasis. Hereafter cited *ITC*.

² *ITC*, 97.

- a) practical service
- b) service at tables
- c) ministry of the Twelve and their helpers
- d) the preaching and communicating of the Gospel

There is no single form or pattern of ministry in the New Testament. We see rather a fairly random distribution of names, titles and functions in relation to ministry, and theological appreciations of its significance which vary considerably. For example, there are different ways that forms of ministry are seen to originate in the New Testament:

- some are commissioned directly by Jesus or given gifts of ministry by the Spirit;
- some are appointed by other Christians;
- for some there is no evidence of how they came into being at all.

A unified view or pattern is not found until the end of the New Testament period well into the second century. This means that we need to take a **diachronic** reading according to internal developments of the NT followed by a **synchronic** reading to have a vision of what is involved in the eventual succession in ministry.

A diachronic reading according to internal developments of the NT

I want to look at the three phases of development which took place in a very schematic way: life with Jesus before the resurrection; the witness of the Apostles; and the subapostolic period of the development of the church.

a) The public ministry of Jesus: disciples, the Twelve, Peter.

-Jesus surrounded himself by a group of disciples, chosen by him so that they “could be with him”.

-*Disciples* (70/72 [Lk 9:1-6; 10:1-6]) – these were to bring signs of the kingdom: to cure the sick, announce a time of grace, shake dust off their feet to indicate the judgment against those who did not offer hospitality. Note that the 70/72 refer to the elders who were associated to Moses’ ministry (Nb 11:16s) of prophetic ministry.

-*The Twelve* – are called in view of the immanent judgment (Mt 19:28; Lk 22:28s) and so they represent the 12 tribes of the new Israel. They share with Jesus the *eschatological rule* of the people of God (cf. Dn 7). **As such they have a proper role which is not transferable.** They constitute the foundation of the church. They are witnesses of Israel and are sent to all the world to proclaim the Good News, to baptize.

PETER – the chief of the 12, who is called to exercise a **prudent control** (ἐπισκοπή) in the name of the Lord (Mt 16:19; 16:18).

-The keys are a messianic attribute (Ac 1:18; 3:7; cf. Is 22:22). As formerly with the giving of the keys of David to Eliakim, the “giving of the keys to Peter” signifies the office of *episkopē* which the apostles are called to carry out. They must be faithful superintendents (Mt 24:45-51) having mainly the task to prepare the return of the Lord: administering his goods, indicating the path to be walked, announcing his message.

b) The primitive community of Jerusalem: Matthias, the Seven, the flight to Pella.

MATTHIAS – substitute for Judas. Judas is replaced not because of his death but because of his betrayal. The witness of the 12 must be transmitted to the people intact and untainted. In and of itself the death of one of the 12 carries no change in the reality of the 12. Even after all of them are gone, the college of the 12 will remain as a gift and a promise made to the

church.

The substitution of Judas with Matthias bears witness to and establishes the apostolic succession. The principle this substitution points to is *not so much that of the historical continuity* of witnesses succeeding the 12 but rather the **eschatological mission** of the 12, of that unique and lasting event which assumes decisive importance for the history of salvation.

-The reality of the 12 indicates the beginning of the *realization of the promise*: in eschatological times all of Israel will once again be reunited.

THE SEVEN: The 7 were “men of good reputation, filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom” (Ac 6:3) They were Hebrews formed in the Hellenistic culture and converted to Christ.

-The redactor of Acts says that they are zealous in “*servi*ng at table” but their engagement in preaching emerges clearly There is good reason to believe that for the “Hellenists”, these 7 were that which the 12 were for the “Hebrews”: *spiritual directors* of the original group to which they belonged It seems that these individuals represented the synagogue of the Hebrews of the diaspora, who were established at Jerusalem and they were organized in conformity to their own tradition, *even before the apostolic era*.³

PELLA: The Jewish revolt against Rome in the late 60's seems to have been decisive for Jewish-Christians who refused entirely to join the revolt and withdrew across the Jordan to **Pella**. The destruction of the temple and the end of priestly sacrifices was a threat to Jewish identity and served to limit Jewish pluralism (Eusebius III.5.3)

Structures change and so roles are amalgamated. We no longer see the 12 present in the life of the community after Pella.

c) *The apostolic Church: **apostles, prophets, and doctors** at Antioch; **presbyters** of judeo-christian churches; **episkopoi** of the gentile-christian churches.*

APOSTLES: Stephen, Paul and Barnabas are called apostles because they have a similar vocation as that of the apostles. The community **did not appoint** these but received these from God just as she receives PROPHETS AND DOCTORS or teachers. They are **all charisms** which are essentially God given.

Like the apostle, the PROPHETS AND DOCTORS express and interpret the tradition in a way which exposes the Gospel and creates the Christian response to it.

PRESBYTERS (elders) from Judeo-Christian churches (1Pt 5:1; Jas 5:14; Ac 11:30)

EPISKOPI of the Gentile-Christian churches (Ac 20:17. 28; Phil 1:1; Tit 1:5ff)

A Synchronic reading

Some general norms: this reading is presenting events together which come from different places, separate domains, relative to different aspects of the same reality.

³ Why 7? According to Hebrew tradition a community of 120 men were allowed to elect a local council of 7. It is probable that the 7 elders constituted a Greek synagogue, next to the Hebrew one. The imposition of hands that the 7 received from the 12, underlines the unity of the whole group in Jerusalem, among Christians of Judea and those of the diaspora.

a) *The ministries are situated in the line of gifts of the Spirit: taking situation, ministry and charism together*

Spiritual authority which needs to be understood as being at the *service of Christian freedom* to make possible the free use of the spiritual competence given in the common priesthood of all baptized⁴ and in their participation in the prophetic, priestly and royal function of Jesus Christ **in view of the edification of the community** and to assure their exercise in the life of the ecclesial community. This is why the ministry is part of these delicate moments of the church which discover in a special way that which is essential and non-essential in the church.⁵

In the New Testament, *diakonia* is the word which embraces all that is profound about ministry. The general notion of ministry is described the most often as *diakonia* (2Co 3:8; 6:3; 2 Tm 4:5) but also as *charis* (Rm 1:5; 1Co 3:10; Gal 2:9) and as *exousia* (Mc 3:15; 2Co 10:8; 13:10). The ministry as the sense of *service* in the community finds in Jesus its reference and its orientation (Lk 22:27; Mk 9:33-37; 10:41; Jn 13:1-17). The service which is addressed to the community finds a particular accentuation in the Pauline expression of *charisms* (also 1Pt 4:10).

Charisma derives from the same root *char* as *charis*=grace; *charein*=to rejoice, greet someone *charizesthai* (χαριζεσθαι) = offer. Like *charis* this word means grace, but in the plural, unlike *charis*, it also means gracious gift.

In relation to ministry, understood as service to the community, *charisma* like *exousia* connotes a “full power”. In fact the two concepts overlap even though the Palestinian concept of *exousia* which is found in the Synoptics is manifested as a “messianic expression”, while the Greek and Pauline concept of *charisma* rather has a **pneumatic concept**. Moreover both are “the full power given to the disciples” (Mk 6:7; Mt 11:27; 28:18; 10:8) and the free gifts (charisms) of participation in the dignity of Jesus (Lk 10:16) and the gifts coming from Christ (Eph 4:8).

When the services and free gifts (1Co 12:4-6) – that which we call today “ministry” – are employed in their relation to the community, we call this the people of God, the body of Christ and the temple of the Spirit. This is so even if at times, in the current language of the church, ministry seems to be separated from the charisms and services; there are three things to remember:

- 1) All Christians are first members of the one people of God;
- 2) Each Christian possesses a charism offered by the Spirit in his vocation to communicate in faith with Jesus Christ and to follow him (1Co 12:12-31);
- 3) In such a way that, each Christian in his/her way, and the “minister”, in the strict sense, must be seen essentially in his/her relation to the whole body of Christ; he must be integrated in the service of the body of Christ (1Co 12-14) and must not neglect the gift which has been imparted (1Tm 4:14; 2Tm 1:6).

⁴ See *ITC* 95f.

⁵ Starting from its horizon of *worldly* understanding, the notion that one has of ministry risks being confused or amalgamated by the association of ideas with that of a “ministry” (or administration) in a state like **amt** in German used for ministry or administration such as the ministry of the post office.. From the *theological* point of view or that of the philosophy of religion, the problematic of ministry is played out “in its institutionality and the tendency which is linked to the *monopolization* of the communication of salvation,” as well as to the tension which results between ministry and charism, law and spirit, institution and person, organized installation and spiritual power which result. This is why it is best that we interrogate the Bible on the characteristics of ministry.

- b) *These charisms structure the Church.* Therefore there is **no opposition between charism and ministry** or structure.
- c) *Their authority is a service, a diakonia.*
- d) *This service can be an expression of the authority of Christ himself:*⁶
 - e) *... according to his Word.*
 - f) *... in communion.*
 - g) *... without monopoly, even if it is last appeal.*
 - h) *... centered on others and on the task.*
 - i) *... ordination is already attested to in the Pastoral epistles.*
 - j) *... women have an important place in Christian services when the society allows it.*

Establishing the theological grounding: Apostolic continuity and Apostolic succession

A. WESTERN TRADITION: APOSTLES CONSIDERED AS MISSIONARIES

1. *Scripture*

The Apostles are seen as being sent by Christ to **preach** the Gospel, **ordain** ministers and **establish** churches.⁷ From this aspect they were considered as **individuals dispersed** all over the world much like the Jewish *shaliach*. This way of seeing the Apostles leads to the understanding of apostolic continuity and succession in terms of **linear history**: God sends Christ → Christ sends the apostles → the apostles transmit the Gospel and establish churches and ministries.

This linear continuity is seen in: Jn 20: 21; Lk 10:16; Mt 28:18-20; Rm 10:13-17; 2 Tm 2:2; Tt 1:5. Hence we are not surprised to see Christ himself called “apostle” Heb 3:1.

2. *Patristic era*

a) I Clement (95AD)

“Following the instructions of our Lord Jesus Christ, fully convinced by his resurrection and firm in their faith in the word of God, the apostles went with the assurance of the Holy Spirit to announce everywhere the good news of the coming of the kingdom of heaven. In the various villages and cities they proclaimed the word and thus made their premises and ...established *episkopous kai diakonous* for the future believers” (42:2-4)

This position is used to support of the idea of apostolic succession.⁸ I Clement is explicit:

“Our apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be quarrels concerning the ministry of *episkopē*. For this reason they ... established the forementioned (ministers) and made provision that when they die other worthy men should succeed their ministry”. (44:1-2)

This conception of succession is based on the belief that the **church is a historical institution**,

⁶ See *ITC* 101.

⁷ See *ITC* 97.

⁸ See *ITC* 99.

whose essential function is to perpetuate mission.⁹

Historicity, dispersion and mission constitute fundamental ecclesiological presuppositions of this concept of apostolic succession. To this must be added a fourth characteristic transmission of authority through the notion of *vicariousness or representation*. This is the link to the Jewish ministry of *shaliach*.

The ministry of the *shaliach* contains the notion of the 'plenipotential' i.e., someone invested with authority to represent someone fully and in all matters, eg Jn 20:21 ("As my Father has sent me so do I send you"); Lk 10:16 ("he that hears you hears me and he who rejects you rejects me, while he that rejects – or disobeys – me, disobeys the one who has sent me").

b) Hippolytus of Rome – Apostolic Tradition

This third century bishop¹⁰ synthesizes two trends: one presenting apostolic succession as a *succession of Christ* and another regarding succession as a *continuity of the ministry* of the apostles.

This document is from the 3rd century but represents practices and ecclesiological ideas going back to the mid-2nd century. Here Hippolytus thinks of the bishop as **both** an *image of the Christ* and of *the apostle*. The ordination prayer for bishop prays (a) to give the ordinand the "princely Spirit" which, according to Ps 51 (50):10, was given to Christ, thus making the bishop an "image of Christ" or one acting *in persona Christi* and (b) to receive "the authority God gave to the apostles".¹¹

The rubrics later state that the bishop offers the Eucharist and presides over it (TA3), thus acting *in persona ecclesiae*. We see that the bishop, according to Hippolytus, succeeds or "images" Christ as the one who offers the Eucharist, while his capacity as *apostolus* relates to his power to "bind and lose" sinners and teach the people.

What is important to note is that Hippolytus preserves the notion of I Clement but combines it with a *Christological view* of succession, i.e., with the *belief that succession perpetuates and affirms also the presence of Christ as head of the community*, especially in its eucharistic form.

NB, this latter is important because it clearly implies that succession passes through the community and is not a matter simply of transmission of authority from one individual to another.

c) Irenaeus of Lyon – Adversus Hæreses

We find Irenaeus in the same line of reasoning as Hippolytus since he insisted on the continuity of apostolic teaching through episcopal succession as a reaction against the claim of the Gnostics who claim to have some kind of secret succession of teaching that goes back to the apostles (were the Gnostics the first to insist on apostolic teaching?).

⁹ Furthermore the "idea of apostolic succession" is derived "from the unity of the word, the unity of the mission, and the unity of ministry of the Church". ITC 99.

¹⁰ Concerning the document and the authorship of Hippolytus of Rome, see the study JAMES F. PUGLISI, *The Process of Admission to Ordained Ministry. A Comparative Study*, Vol. 1: *Epistemological Principles and Roman Catholic Rites* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1996) 10ff. Especially informative is A. BRENT, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church in Third Century. Communities in Tension Before the Emergence of a Monarch-Bishop* (Leiden/NY/Cologne: E.J. Brill, 1995).

¹¹ See BERNARD BOTTE, *La Tradition apostolique de saint Hippolyte. Essai de reconstruction*, 5th ed. improved by A. GERHARDS and S. FELBECKER (Münster: Aschendorff, 1989) TA 2. Hereafter cited TA.

Irenaeus speaks of the bishops possessing a certain *charisma veritatis*; to be understood in the light of his insistence on the correspondence between *veritas* and Eucharist:

“our opinion (γνώμη), i.e., faith or doctrine, agrees with our Eucharist and our Eucharist agrees with our faith” (*Adversus Hæreses* IV, 18, 5).

The bishop is the successor of the apostles *not simply and purely as a teacher*, but as the **head of the eucharistic community**. Hippolytus insisted that the church was not a school as the heretics treat it but a *community structured eucharistically* (*Philos.* 9, 12, 20).

To sum up, theologically, the *episkopoi* succeed to the ministers whom the apostles established, and **not** to the apostles themselves since the apostles are unique and no one can succeed them.¹² Rather the bishops succeed to the seat (*cathedra*) in a local community since they are also the head of the Eucharistic gatherings of their community.¹³ Irenaeus often insists on the fact that episcopal succession takes place *in the Church*.¹⁴ From about 150, the *episkopē* is exercised by a single person in each Church, in continuity with other such men as Timothy, Titus and others who have received the responsibility to ensure sound doctrine. Nonetheless, others in the community share this function with the bishop (i.e., the presbyters). In all this it is implicit that the *episkopē* has served as the basis for a greater unity between the Churches in the communion of apostolic faith.¹⁵

d) Cyprian of Carthage

Cyprian has the view that the structure of the church is based on the *cathedra Petri*. This, however, is not to be understood as an “universalistic ecclesiology” since he understands the term, *not in relation* to the church universal but *to every local church* headed by a bishop (*Letter* 69 (66) 5; 43 (40) 5; *De ecclesiae unitate* 4).

Every bishop sits on the *cathedra* of Peter, hence not only all bishops are essentially equal, but they are all *equally successors of the entire apostolic college* headed by Peter. This view differs from that of Hippolytus in an *essential way*; **it is missing the Christological view** since Cyprian identifies the bishop fully and exclusively with the office of apostle and says so explicitly: “*apostulus id est episcopus*” (*Letter* 3:3).

This is the view that seems to have won the day in the West. The Hippolytan synthesis according to which succession involves also a representation of Christ as head of his community *has been lost*.

e) Later implications

What happens in the Middle Ages, is that we encounter two ideas that are absent from the first centuries. *First*, the view that apostolic succession passes from an individual apostle to an individual bishop and not from the entire apostolic college headed by Peter as well as Christ – which means that (a) each bishop is the successor of *all* the apostles, and (b) each succession involves the *community* of the church headed by Christ. The second consequence

¹² Note that in the episcopal lists no apostle was called *episkopos*.

¹³ Adv Hær. III, 3–4,1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, III,2 2; 3,3; IV, 26, 2; 32, 1 etc.

¹⁵ See JAMES F. PUGLISI, *The Process of Admission...*, *op. cit.*, 20f.

is the *loss of this christological dimension of succession* created the need to look for a *vicarius Christi* **outside** and independently of the apostolic college.

Please note that these consequences were not intended by Cyprian who believed that the apostolic college is unbreakable in its succession to every bishop.¹⁶

B. ORIENTAL TRADITION

1. Ignatius of Antioch

For Ignatius, the church is realized in her fullness whenever and wherever the faithful of a certain place following their bishop as Christ himself unite under his presidency in one eucharistic community.¹⁷

The belief that the bishop sits “in the place of God” and is the living “icon of Christ” is central to his ecclesiology. For Ignatius, **there is no connection of the bishop with the office of the apostles**. The place of the apostles is occupied by the *college of the presbyters* (*Ad Magnesianos* 6, 1). Therefore, the continuity of the church is *not* realized through historical continuity as is the case with I Clement, but through the *gathering of the faithful* for the celebration of the Eucharist.

In the gathering for the Eucharist, Ignatius sees the image of the eschatological community. This means that for him the *Church's continuity passes through the experience of the eschata* and **not** through the retrospective reference to the past. This is a continuity involving a remembrance of the future. In this way, we can speak of *succession and continuity* coming to us **not** from the past **but** from the future, the **eschaton**. This is a eucharistic view of the church.

For this reason, Ignatius is usually never referred to when speaking of apostolic succession, since his is a different view than that of I Clement.¹⁸ In Ignatius, the apostles are **not** individuals dispersed in order to preach the Gospel and ordain ministers as their successors, rather they form a *college surrounding Christ in his eschatological function*. Their function is to “sit on the 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel” (Mt 19:28) and this they can do **only** in the context of the gathered people of God and under the headship of Christ.

Succession in this case has a christological dimension and requires the community of the church in order to function. It is a succession of *communities* and **not** of individuals. If the bishop is crucial in this kind of succession it is because **he is head of a community** imaging the eschatological gathering of all around Christ and **not** because he has received apostolic authority as an individual.

2. *Didascalia Apostolorum* – 3rd century Syro-Palestinian

In this important text for the East, we find the same position: no reference to the bishop as apostle. The presbyters surround the bishop as his “council” (συνέδριον) which passes final

¹⁶ Note that the document of the *ITC* has overlooked these theological subtleties in their presentation of the Catholic understanding. These are fundamental and important points in the correct understanding of the Catholic position. We will see that there are other important omissions for a complete and correct understanding of succession and continuity.

¹⁷ JOHN D. ZIZIOULAS, *L'eucharistie, l'évêque et l'église durant les trois premiers siècles* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1994).

¹⁸ Even though *ITC* speaks of the apostolic ministry as an eschatological institution, it never refers to Ignatius nor does it draw the theological consequences from this important fact in correcting the Catholic understanding of succession. See *ITC* 97f.

judgement on all matters dividing the members of the community before they can take part in the Eucharistic communion.¹⁹ In other words, we have the view that the church is an eschatological community in which the apostolic ministry is exercised by the apostles headed by Christ in the presence of the community gathered together.

Apostolic continuity and succession take place in and through the entire structure of the community.

3. Pseudo-Clementine literature – Syria late 3rd and early 4th centuries

To complete the circle of the Patristic traditions that make up the *Una Sancta*, we need to briefly consider the Syriac tradition, a tradition derived from the semetic roots of the first communities of apostolic nature.

a) apostolic succession occupies a central place in this document which presents Peter as establishing bishops in areas he visits, for example Zacchaeus in Caesarea (Ps Clementine, *Homiliae* III, 63), Clement in Rome (*Epistle of Clement to James*, 2).²⁰

b) Peter establishes only one bishop in each place – echoes Nicaea, Can 8, that states there is to be only one bishop in each city (related to Ignatian idea of one eucharistic assembly in each place)

c) James, brother of Jesus occupies a central and important place in the structure of the church and in apostolic succession. It calls James “lord and bishop of the church” (*Epistle of Peter to James*, Preface) or “lord and bishop of bishops” (*Epistle of Clement to James*, Preface). Just as Aaron is the head of the priesthood in Israel because he is the brother of Moses in the same way James is the head of the Church’s priesthood because he is the brother of Jesus, who is likened to Moses. James succeeds Jesus in his function of High Priest (*Epistle of Peter to James*, I-III)

d) reason for the importance given to James is because of the importance given to *the church of Jerusalem* in apostolic succession. According to this literature, Peter receives bishops he installs in the churches he visits from a group of presbyters of the church of Jerusalem. (*Homiliae* XI, 36; XX, 2, etc.). This means the author of the homilies sees in each local church *a continuity with the original community of Jerusalem whose structure is transferred and copied with James as the top of it.*

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| 1. Gospel | Jesus Christ surrounded by the Twelve |
| 2. Acts | “James and the Apostles” (early chapters) |
| 3. Acts | “James and the presbyters” (later chapters) |
| 4. Ignatius | “Bishop and the presbyters” (see <i>Didascalia</i>) |
| 5. Ps-Clementine | The bishop as successor of James and the Presbyters of Jerusalem |

The Syrian tradition understands succession as a transmission **not** of certain authority from *individual to individual* but of the *original Jerusalem community* in its entire structure having Christ as its head replaced in the first place by his brother James and finally by the bishop of every local church. It is a **continuity of communities**.

¹⁹ In fact this position corresponds to the ordination prayer for a presbyter in the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus whose epiclesis reads: “Look upon this your servant and grant him the Spirit of grace and the counsel of presbyter, so that he may support and govern your people with a pure heart”. TA 7.

²⁰ F. STANLEY JONES. *An Ancient Jewish Christian Source on the History of Christianity: Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions* 1. 27-71 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995); *Les homélies clémentines*, trad. ANDRÉ SIOUVILLE (Lagrasse: Verdier, 1991).

e) *Theological implications*²¹

Each local church in its eucharistic structure is the image of the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven, i.e., a repetition and a copy of Jerusalem as the point on which the dispersed people of God were expected to gather in the last days – *eschatological rather than historical outlook*. In each succession we have a continuity with Jerusalem as the image of the eschatological community in which Christ occupies the throne of God imaged on earth by the bishop. The bishop, as successor of James in the living “icon of Christ” – an idea strongly promoted by the Ps Clementine Homilies (*Homiliae* III, 70) – not as an individual but as the head of his community which in turn is the image of the community of the New Jerusalem of the last days.²²

4. *Note on the first episcopal lists of apostolic succession*

While it is not possible to exam these lists in depth here, it is useful to take note of the observations that the Metropolitan of Pergamon, John Zizioulas has made in regards to the most ancient list found in Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History*, (IV, 22 also II, 23), namely that of Hegesippus who speaks of “successions (plural) in every city as the law and the prophets and the Lord declare”. The author visited Rome during the pontificate of Anicetus and researched and compiled a list of the bishops of Rome and of Jerusalem.

He knew well the judeo-christian community of Jerusalem and idealized it to be the prototype of the church. He regards James as the first bishop of Jerusalem but speaks of him as having succeeded Christ immediately after his ascension. For him, too, the succession of James is not a succession in apostolicity, strictly speaking, but in the high priesthood of Christ (*Eccl. Hist. IV, 22, 5*). *The bishops are according to Hegesippus, successors not of the cathedra Petri as in Cyprian but in the cathedra Christ (occupied in the first instance by James)*.

It is significant that all episcopal lists reported by Eusebius, namely those of Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome, have on the top of them not Peter but James. This must be a remnant of the original form of such lists. However, when we come to Eusebius’ own version we find at the top of these lists a certain apostle. This contradiction in Eusebius’ presentation of the succession lists, namely on the one hand having James at the top of all the lists, and on the other putting a certain apostle as the head of each particular list, reveals the transition from an earlier to a later stage in the development of the idea of apostolic succession, even in Palestine.

From 4th century onwards it is difficult to find a view of apostolic succession other than the classic one we are all used to, namely that the bishops succeed a certain apostle in the linear historical sense of continuity. Moreover, the idea of a bishop as “icon of Christ” has survived mainly in the East but may also be seen in the West since it is not without significance that all ordinations take place in the context of the Eucharist, i.e., in the presence and participation of the entire community. *This means that succession has to come to us not only from the past but also from the future, from the eschatological community with which it is meant to relate each local church at a given time in history*. Combined with this is the fact that no ordination to the episcopate is possible without the mention of the place to which the

²¹ For this last section, we have drawn on the work of JOHN D. ZIZIOULAS, “Apostolic Continuity of the Church and Apostolic Succession in the First Five Centuries” in James F. Puglisi and Dennis J. Billy, *Apostolic Continuity of the Church and Apostolic Succession* (Leuven: Faculty of Theology, 1996) 161ff.

²² In *Lumen gentium* we find the concept expressed in the idea of the *communio ecclesiarum* and not with the idea of *communio personarum*.

ordained bishop is attached, it becomes clear that succession means in fact continuity of communities, not individuals.²³

C. CONCLUSION

-In speaking of continuity and succession we normally have in mind a linear historical sequence coming to us from the past to the present and involving the psychology of a retrospective *anamnesis*. In a non biblical cultural formation *anamnesis* cannot but refer to the past. Biblical thought not only refers to the past but also of the remembrance of the future, of the last days of the eschatological state of the church and the world. **This dual sense of *anamnesis* is at work in the question of apostolic continuity and succession:**

- on the one hand, there is evidence in the West, of an understanding of succession in strictly historical terms (I Clement, Cyprian some what Hippolytus).
- on the other, there seems to have been in the early church a strong tradition of a view of continuity and succession that *does not involve historicity* in the usual sense but is interested mainly in securing a *continuity of identity of each local church with the eschatological community* as it was originally expected in and through the original church of Jerusalem and as it is, ever since the destruction and dispersion of this community, experienced in the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven, in the community of the Eucharist.

It is mainly this second view that accounts for the fact that apostolic continuity came to be expressed exclusively as episcopal succession (there are no presbyteral lists). If we miss this we are in danger of misunderstanding what episcopal succession is about. This misunderstanding occurs in the first, linear model when it became sufficient to speak of a continuous chain of episcopal ordinations in order to establish apostolic succession. It became a matter of transmission of power and authority from one individual to another. It also led to an understanding of the apostolic college as something standing outside and above the communities of the church and transmitting prerogatives of a self-perpetuating cast. It led to the appearance of titular and assistant bishops in a massive way as something normal ecclesiologically, and in brief, *it removed succession from its natural place which is the community of the church.*

The result is the loss of the Christo-centric and eschatological approach to apostolic continuity and a replacement by the solely historical view. What is needed is a synthesis of the two approaches.

A holistic view:

- we cannot isolate apostolic succession from apostolic continuity. Faith as well as sacramental life and ministry all form part of what is received and transmitted in and by the church. There is no true apostolic succession if the historic chain of ordination is maintained but there is deviation from the right faith nor can we have apostolic succession when there is only episcopal succession while the rest of the ministries, including the laity, are not participating in it.
- ordination as a sign and visible means of apostolic succession must be an insertion into the life of the community. When this happens the ordained bishop both gives and receives apostolicity from the community into which he is inserted. Apostolic continuity cannot be created *ex nihilo* through episcopal ordination unless it is somehow already there. And it cannot be taken for granted unless it is somehow

²³ See JOHN D. ZIZIOULAS, *L'eucharistie, l'évêque et l'église...*, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

affirmed, sealed and proclaimed through episcopal ordination.²⁴

- there is no apostolic succession which could be limited to the episcopal college as such or to some form of apostolic collegiality. Every bishop participates in the episcopal college via his community, since it is a question of *communio ecclesiarum*, not directly because it is not a question of a *communio personarum*. Apostolic succession is a succession of apostolic communities via their heads.²⁵

If we take seriously the Syro-Palestinian view by understanding apostolic succession as succession of communities rather than individuals, we implicitly raise the question of the special role in apostolic succession of particular apostolic sees.²⁶ If the historical view of succession is not conditioned by the eschatological one, this kind of argumentation acquires predominance. This does not exclude the possibility that a particular local church and its bishop may have a special function in the realization of apostolic continuity through each local community. Apostolic continuity is not something that concerns a particular local church taken by itself; it is a matter concerning *all* the local churches at a regional or even a universal level.²⁷

The church is an entity that receives and re-receives what her history transmits to her (*paradosis*), but this transmission is never a purely historical affair; it takes place *sacramentally* or better eucharistically, i.e., it is experienced as a gift coming from the last days, from what God has promised and prepared for us in His Kingdom. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, i.e., to bring about the last days (Ac 2:17).

What I have tried to do is to take the classical Catholic understanding on the question of apostolic success and put it into a wider and richer context of the apostolic continuity of churches. I have tried to point out that the *Una Sancta* has more than just one tradition in interpreting the ministerial succession in a church and its apostolic value. The Western tendency to use a purely historical linear approach today needs to be expanded because of our ecumenical research, discussions, and experience of encountering each other and that we need to realize that the question of recognizing the ministries of other needs to take into consideration other factors such as if their ministry preserves a communion in apostolicity (prophecy, martyrdom, holiness), preserves the Gospel and the sacraments, then as Sister Susan Wood has written: "it would appear that we can argue for the authenticity of that ministry (by their fruits...)"²⁸

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²⁴ JAMES F. PUGLISI, *The process..., op. cit.*, 78-84 and see also the section "Institutional dissociation between ministry and *ecclesia*", 171-178. ID., "The Sacramentality of Orders. The Contribution of Sacramental Theology to the Pressing Ecumenical Question of the Recognition of Each Other's Ministry", in MARTHA MOORE-KEISH & JAMES W. FARWELL, (eds.), *Companion to the Sacraments and Sacramentality* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark), 2022. "Ordination: A Catholic Ecclesiological Approach", *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, Online 2016.

²⁵ BERNARD-DOMINIQUE DUPUY, "La succession apostolique dans la discussion œcuménique", *Istina* 12 (1967) 398.

²⁶ In the 2nd century, the Pascal controversy, Rome appealed to special authority because of Peter and Paul, equally, so did the churches of Asia Minor.

²⁷ JOHN D. ZIZIOULAS, *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church*, (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1985) 201ff & 236f.

²⁸ SUSAN K. WOOD, "The Correlation between Ecclesial Communion and the Recognition of Ministry", *One in Christ* 50 (2016) 238-249.