

Apostolic Tradition and Apostolic Succession in the Mystery of the Church

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In a previous article I announced that I was going to publish a text in which I would attempt to interpret what the Apostolic Tradition and the Apostolic Succession are within the mystery of the Church. This is the purpose of this present article, which does not claim to be authoritative, but emphasises a few truths and is open to correction. In any case, in the Church we always remain in the fear of God and in a state of discipleship. The Apostles of Christ have continued as Disciples of Christ for ever.

From time to time different ecclesiological issues arise on account of contemporary problems, and an attempt is made to deal with them and resolve them in the best manner. Thus ecclesiological issues emerge in our day as well, and many responses are formulated.

The decisions of the Local and Ecumenical Councils are significant and divinely inspired. They show how the Fathers resolved the issues that arose in their time, according to the words of the Apostle Peter, “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us” (Acts 15:28). The illumination of the Holy Spirit is sought, which is given to the Saints, who are vessels of the Holy Spirit and instruments of God.

We have absolute respect for these decisions and we interpret them ecclesiastically. I say this because there are some people today who invoke the sacred Canons in a rationalistic spirit, as though they were laws of the state and provisions of the constitution. One ought, however, to see the spirit of the sacred Canons: to accept them without overlooking them, and to struggle to find the spirit that gives life, not the letter of the law that “kills” (2 Cor. 3:6).

Prompted by the so-called “Ukrainian issue”, there is very widespread discussion about how it should be resolved. I have observed recently that many people have concentrated their interest on the extent to which the bishops who constituted the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church have Apostolic Succession, because they come from excommunicated, schismatic and “self-ordained” bishops.

The fact is, however, that for many people it remains obscure what the Apostolic Tradition and the Apostolic Succession are, and, above all, what the mystery of the Church is. Some associate all these things with an established human institution, and they do not see the theology that lies behind them. They think that the Apostolic Succession is **only** a series of ordinations, independent of the mystery of Pentecost and the mystery of the Apostolic Tradition and deposit that is given to the Church.

Also, some people speak about the extent to which the bishops who made up the Ukrainian Autocephalous Church have Apostolic Succession. It is necessary, however, to examine what the Apostolic Tradition is, and, primarily, whether these people consider at that same time that Western Christians (Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Protestants) and Oriental

Christians (Monophysites, Monothelites) have Apostolic Succession, belong to the Church and have sacraments.

Those Primates and Councils who speak about the loss of the Apostolic Succession in the schismatic clergy of Ukraine ought to take courage and reply to the question of whether the Roman Catholics and heretics in general have Apostolic Succession. They cannot use two measures and two standards when judging. They cannot hold that the Ukrainian schismatics lack Apostolic Succession, while at the same time teaching that the Roman Catholics and other Christians have Apostolic Succession, and consequently have sacraments.

In the last analysis, what is Apostolic Succession? Is it only a “series of ordinations”, regardless of the Apostolic Tradition, in other words, of Pentecost? And, more generally, what is the mystery of the Church?

Some answers will be provided in the following pages, with no claim to the infallibility possessed by the deified saints, who make decisions synodically. I would ask readers to make sure that they have a good understanding of the first points, and then to interpret what is set out in the fourth part in the same spirit.

1. The Mystery of the Church

First of all, it is essential to look at what the mystery of the Church is.

The Church is the Body of Christ and the communion of deification. Christ assumed human nature, mortal and passible but utterly pure, in order to overcome the devil, sin and death. The Church is before all ages, eternal, but it was manifested in the flesh of Christ.

The Church is the Body of Christ, which means that, according to the Apostle Paul, Christ is the head of the Church. “And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:22-23).

The Apostle Paul writes in the same Epistle: “Christ...loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:25-27).

This means that the Church is holy, spotless and pure, and this is due to her head, who is Christ. The Church as the Body of Christ has no spot or wrinkle, but is holy and without blemish. It is understood by this that the holiness of the Church comes from, and is due to, her holy head, and not to the holiness of her members. The members of the Church, the members of Body of Christ, do not sanctify the Church but are sanctified by her, above all by her head, by Christ.

By extension, the sins of the members of the Church and the unworthiness of her clergy – bishops, priests and deacons – do not “defile” the Church. Rather, the clergy, even if they are unworthy, remain within the Church and officiate, when no canonical act of the Church has been issued for their suspension or removal from office, and in due course they are cast out from the Church, just as the human body casts out all alien elements that cannot be assimilated.

St Gregory of Sinai interprets the following passages from the Apostle Paul: “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually” (1 Cor. 12:27) and “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called” (Eph. 4:4-5). He writes that, just as the body without the spirit is dead and without feeling, so someone who has been deadened by neglecting the commandments after his baptism “becomes inactive and unilluminated by the Holy Spirit and by the grace of Christ.” This Christian has the Spirit, through the faith and the regeneration that he received at Baptism, but the Spirit is inactive and immobile within him, as he is spiritually dead.

He goes on to use the example of the relationship between the soul and the body. The soul is one and there are many members of the body. The soul sustains and gives life to them all, and animates those which are receptive to life. When, however, some members have been deadened and cannot move due to an illness, the soul retains them, but they are lifeless and without feeling. The same happens with the members of Christ in the Church. “The Spirit of Christ is wholly present in all who are members of Christ, activating and giving life to all who are capable of participating in it, and He still mercifully keeps as his own those who through infirmity cannot participate.”

St Gregory of Sinai concludes by saying that every believer who remains within the Church, which is the Body of Christ, shares through faith in adoption to sonship by the Spirit, but he may remain inactive and unilluminated through negligence and lack of faith, deprived of the light and life of Jesus. Every Christian, therefore is “a member of Christ and possesses the Spirit of Christ, but he may remain inactive and unmoving, and incapable of sharing in grace.”

This is a remarkable passage and it gives a theological explanation of our relationship with Christ in the Church. It is absolutely clear here that if a member of the clergy has not been deposed or a layperson has not been excommunicated, yet he sins, he remains in the Church, but he is not a living member, as he is incapable of sharing in divine grace and is spiritually dead. Obviously, his presence in the Church does not defile the Church.

On the day of Pentecost the Disciples became members of the Body of Christ, as all those who have believed in Christ, been baptised and received the Holy Spirit have also become members. The Church as the Body of the God-man Christ is the great mystery above all others. The Apostle Paul writes: “Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory” (1 Tim. 3:16).

The first Christians, as described in the Acts of the Apostles but also in the Epistles of the Apostles, lived in the Church united with Christ in the Holy Spirit. When we read these texts we are amazed at their way of life. We find the same things in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers of the second and third centuries, as well as in the first martyrologies.

When some Christian theologians began to be influenced by philosophy and became secularised, the Church, through the Local and Ecumenical Councils, laid down dogmas and Canons to preserve the members of the Church from heresy and schisms. The decisions of the Ecumenical Councils originated from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Just as the Church in the first period lived without the Holy Scripture, which took shape with the passage of time, so it also lived without the sacred Canons, which were formulated later on to preserve the unity of the Church. This means that we cannot bypass the sacred Canons, but neither can we set them above the Church. It is the Church, as the mystery of Christ, that writes the Holy Scripture through the holy Apostles and Fathers, and lays down the sacred Canons. And the Church, through the Fathers, resolves every issue that arises. Academics may make proposals, but the Church in Council makes the relevant decision.

Also, the Fathers of the Church expressed various opinions in their writings about contemporary pastoral problems, and many of these patristic opinions were subsequently adopted by Quinisext Ecumenical Council in its second Canon (Archim. George Kapsanis).

This means that the Fathers, mainly by deliberating in Council, interpret the sacred Canons with divine inspiration and adapt them to various contemporary problems, using strictness or economy as appropriate, as is most advantageous to mankind, in accordance with Christ's words: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27).

Consequently, the Church as the mystery of Christ is wider than Holy Scripture and is revealed in Holy Scripture; she is wider than the sacred Canons and is revealed in the Canons; and she is wider than the Sacraments and is revealed in the Sacraments. "This experience of the Church goes further than either the Scripture or the tradition, and is only reflected in them" (Fr Georges Florovsky).

There are cases in which those who were torturing martyrs believed in Christ, confessed Christ, were martyred for Him, and were included in the Church's calendar of saints without having been baptised, without having been chrismated, without have taken Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Christ, and without having being numbered among the saints by a particular act.

It is evident that this happens because the Church herself, as the Body of Christ, as she is expressed by the deified saints and in Council, is the great mystery. There are many Sacraments or Mysteries in the Church, but the Church herself is the great mystery.

According to St Dionysius the Areopagite, the hierarchy is an image of divine beauty, which performs "the mysteries of illumination" through priestly orders and knowledge, but the "mysteries of illumination" are the real mysteries in the Church.

I accept the Canons of the Church absolutely, but I cannot ignore the fact that the Church is above them. The Church interprets them correctly, lives and conducts herself with the abundant grace of Christ, and acts through them. When I speak about the Church, I do not mean a human institution, but the theanthropic Body of Christ, and the revelation of the Holy Spirit Who illumines the deified and divinely inspired saints and works through them, within the conciliar institution of the Church.

The ever-memorable Archimandrite George Kapsanis, Abbot of the Holy Monastery of St Grigoriou on the Holy Mountain, notes with reference to the sacred Canons: "The sacred Canons do not of themselves save the believer. But they help him to remain in the Church in union with the other members, so that it is possible for him to be saved." He remarks, however,

that “Canons as boundaries do not exhaust the great mystery of the Church, but without them the Church is not expressed as a community of love, as God-given order and union, as the harmonious Body of Christ” (Archim. George Kapsanis).

Consequently, we respect the Local and Ecumenical Councils, but we respect absolutely the great mystery of the Church, within which the mystery of man’s salvation is accomplished.

2. Apostolic Tradition and Apostolic Succession, according to Fr Georges Florovsky

Fr Georges Florovsky was a great theologian of the twentieth century who lived in Russia, Europe and America, where he encountered various Christian currents, which he dealt with, for the most part, with an Orthodox ecclesiastical mentality. He had to express his views on heretics and schismatic Christians, on heresies and schisms, and his words were remarkable for their sobriety and their lack of legalism and moralising.

Among other things, Fr Georges Florovsky interprets what Pentecost is within the Church, and links Pentecost with the Apostolic Tradition and the Apostolic Succession.

The Church, according to Fr Georges Florovsky, is one, in the sense that it constitutes a unity, and this relates to the fact that it is the Body of Christ and is linked with Pentecost. He writes: “Pentecost, therefore, is the fulness and the source of all sacraments and sacramental actions, the one and inexhaustible spring of all the mysterious and spiritual life of the Church. To abide or to live in the Church implies a participation in Pentecost.”

Pentecost, which is the life of the Church, “becomes eternal in the Apostolic Succession, that is in the uninterruptibility of hierarchical ordinations in which every part of the Church is at every moment organically united with the primary source.” This means that Pentecost is not transmitted and experienced invisibly, but through the Apostolic Succession. This “Apostolic Succession is not merely, as it were, the canonical skeleton of the Church,” as “the hierarchy is primarily a charismatic principle, that is a ‘ministry of the sacraments’, or ‘a divine economy’.” The hierarchy “an organ of the Catholic unity of the Church. It is the unity of grace. It is to the Church what the circulation of the blood is to the human body.”

The bishops are “the organ of Apostolic Succession” and have responsibility for the unity of the Church, by celebrating the Sacrament of the Divine Eucharist and Sacrament of Ordination. “The Last Supper and Pentecost are inseparably bound up with one another.” From this perspective, each bishop constitutes the unity and the centre of the local Church, but it is mainly the bishop who shares in this “catholicity (*sobornost*)” of the Body of the Church in every age.

The ordination of a bishop is performed by two or three bishops, who do not act individually but as participants in this catholicity of the Church, and the realisation, or extension, of the Apostolic Succession comes about in the uninterrupted catholicity of the whole Church.

“Apostolic Succession can never be severed or divorced from the organic context of the life of the entire Church, although it has its own divine root.” For this reason, Apostolic

Succession “should never become reduced to an abstract enumeration of successive ordainers,” but should be regarded as participation in the grace and catholicity of the Church. “Apostolic Succession does not represent a self-sufficient chain or order of bishops. It is an organ and a system of Church oneness.”

Apostolic Succession, therefore, is not simply a succession of ordinations, but is inseparably linked with the Apostolic Tradition and Pentecost. Referring to the sacred Canons, on which the unity of the Church is based, he writes, “For every rupture of canonical bonds simultaneously implies a certain loss of grace, namely – isolation, estrangement, neglect, mystical forgetfulness, limitation of Church outlook, and decrease of love. For Apostolic Succession has been established for the sake of unity and *sobornost*, and must never become the vehicle of exclusiveness and division.”

Linking the Apostolic Succession with Pentecost, he writes: “Apostolic Succession must not be severed from Apostolic Tradition, and in fact never can be.” This tradition is not historical reminiscence or a museum of the past, but “the memory of the Church. It is, firstly, an uninterrupted current of spiritual life proceeding from the Upper Room... Faithfulness to Tradition is similarly a participation in Pentecost, and Tradition represents a fulfilment of Pentecost... Tradition is the power to teach, confess, witness, and proclaim out of the depth of the experience of the Church, which remains always the same and unimpaired.”

The teaching and witness of the Church is provided primarily by the hierarchy, which performs this task “as an organ of the Church”, and it is limited by the “consent of the Church [*e consensus ecclesiae*], and again not so much in the order of canonicity as of spiritual life and evidence.” Therefore, the bishop teaches the people and bears witness to the experience of the Church, and he receives this authority from Christ, not from his flock.

Pentecost is the life of the Church and of her whole fabric. And those who remain in the Church must share in the experience of Pentecost. “All the meaning and grandeur of the Christian life lies in the acquiring of the Spirit. We enter into communion with the Spirit in the sacraments, and we must strive to be filled with the Spirit in prayer and action. This constitutes the mystery of our inner life. But even in this it is assumed that we belong to the Church and are part of its very texture.” When the Apostolic Tradition is separated from the continuity of the spiritual life, the Apostolic Succession cannot be preserved.

He also notes that the sacraments do not depend on the faith of those who celebrate them and participate in them:

“Generally speaking, the efficacy and the reality of the sacraments does not depend on the faith of those who partake of them. For the sacraments are accomplished by the power of God, and not of man, and the frailty and imperfection of an individual priest is made good by the mysterious participation of the entire Church in his actions – the Church which has appointed him and authorized him to fulfil the ‘ministry of the Sacraments’. However, in spite of this, it is hardly possible to isolate completely the objectively-gracious moment of the sacraments. For example, how can Apostolic Succession be preserved when Apostolic Tradition has been broken together with the continuity of the spiritual life? In any case an injury to faith cannot but be reflected in one way or another in the hierarchy of such communities in

which the Apostolic ‘deposit of faith’ has not been safeguarded, and where the fulness of Tradition has been diminished by breaches in historical continuity.”

He goes on to refer to the possibility of the Apostolic Succession continuing in communities when they split away from the Church and when they return to her.

“Still more equivocal is the continuity of the Apostolic Succession in schismatic bodies, particularly if it has been continued, or even ‘re-established’ precisely for the sake of making the separation permanent. How can the hierarchical chain persist in division, when its very *raison d’être* is unity? And how can schismatic hierarchs act on behalf of and in the name of the Catholic Church? Yet Church life in practice witnesses to the fact that this is possible, and that the life in grace in schismatical bodies is not extinguished and exhausted, at any rate, to be sure, not immediately. However, we cannot think it possible that it should go on unimpaired, precisely for the reason that one cannot sharply isolate different aspects of the organic whole of Church life. Human and historical isolation even if they do not altogether lead to the severing of Apostolic Succession must at any rate weaken it mystically. For the unity in grace can only come to be revealed in the ‘mystery of freedom’, and only through a return to Catholic fulness and communion can every separated hierarchical body recover its full mystical significance. Simultaneously with this return there is the acceptance of the Apostolic ‘deposit of faith’ in all its completeness.”

This means that, although the life of grace does not immediately cease in schismatic situations, the Apostolic Succession is nevertheless weakened, and it is manifested by returning to the fulness and communion of the catholic Church.

“In any case an injury to faith cannot but be reflected in one way or another in the hierarchy of such communities in which the Apostolic ‘deposit of faith’ has not been safeguarded, and where the fulness of Tradition has been diminished by breaches in historical continuity.”

Fr Georges Florovsky’s conclusion is that “Apostolic Succession is only strengthened by faithfulness to and fulfilment of Apostolic Tradition. In their inseparableness lies the fulness of Pentecost.”

This means that Pentecost, the Apostolic Tradition and the Apostolic Succession are inseparably linked, and are activated within the Church and its catholicity, which is the great mystery. It is in this framework that the bishop performs his task and bears witness by confessing the faith.

This connection presupposes bishops who share in the deifying energy of the Holy Spirit in the mystery of Pentecost, who have the Apostolic Tradition and Apostolic Succession, who are members of the hierarchy of their Churches, and who express themselves synodically. In this case they are true shepherds of the people of God, who rightly divide the word of truth.

3. Apostolic Tradition and Apostolic Succession, according to Fr John Romanides

Fr John Romanides, a great dogmatic theologian of the twentieth century, was a pupil of Fr Georges Florovsky during his student years, and subsequently his colleague and friend.

He saw the mystery of the Church and everything that takes place within her through the experience of the deified saints of the Church. He gave a clear analysis of the views of Fr Georges Florovsky, which we looked at above.

To enable us to consider his thinking and to understand it, it should be made clear that in the early Church reference is made continually to the “deposit of faith”, to the “Apostolic Tradition”, and to the “Apostolic life”. Many such passages can be identified in the Epistles of the Apostle Paul: “O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust” (1 Tim. 6:20), “That good thing which was committed to you...” (2 Tim. 1:14), and “hold the traditions which you were taught...” (2 Thess. 2:15).

The Apostolic Tradition is the life that the Apostles received from Christ in the Holy Spirit, principally on the day of Pentecost, when they attained to divine vision, and they taught it to the Christians and passed it on through words and through the sacraments that they performed.

When, however, various heretics appeared, such as the Gnostic Christians, who pretended to have received from Christ another knowledge, beyond that recorded by the Apostles, and essentially amalgamated the revelation with philosophy and an Oriental way of thinking, the Apostolic Fathers spoke about “Apostolic Succession”. This work was mainly accomplished by St Irenaeus Bishop of Lyons, who showed that the Apostolic Tradition is transmitted through the Apostolic Succession, and outside this Apostolic Succession there is no real Apostolic Tradition.

At that critical period, St Irenaeus Bishop of Lyons proved himself to be the theologian of the unwritten and written tradition. He asks: “If the Apostles had not left any Scripture at all, would it be necessary for us to deny the tradition that they passed down to those to whom they entrusted the Church?”

St Irenaeus writes that the Church received the preaching and the faith, and keeps it carefully “as if living in one house”, “although spread throughout the world.” “And she also believes these things, as if she had one and the same heart, and accordingly it is these things that she preaches and teaches and hands down, as though with one mouth.” The Church is the Body of Christ and possesses all truth, which was handed down to the Apostles at Pentecost, with one heart she preaches this truth, teaching it and passing it on with one mouth. Thus the Church possesses the truth.

According to St Irenaeus, the members of the Christian communities that are scattered throughout the world constitute the Church, but they have God’s truth and God’s Spirit that exist within the Church. This truth is handed down through the episcopal charisma, by the succession of bishops, according to the good pleasure of the Father. The Apostolic Tradition and life that exist within the Church are therefore transmitted through the Apostolic Succession. The Orthodox faith is closely linked with the Church and the Divine Eucharist.

St Irenaeus actually drew up lists of bishops for the Churches of Smyrna, Ephesus and Rome, with which he was acquainted, in order to make a clear connection between the truth of the Apostolic Tradition and the Apostolic Succession, and thus to confront the heresy of

Gnosticism, which claimed that it had inherited another tradition different from the tradition of the Apostles.

The proof that the Apostolic Tradition and truth is connected with the Apostolic Succession of bishops, according to the teaching of St Irenaeus, is clear from the dismissal hymn that is sung at commemorations of holy Bishops.

“You shared the Apostles’ ways and succeeded to their thrones; you found praxis a means of ascent to theoria, O divinely-inspired Father; rightly dividing the word of truth, you struggled bravely in faith to the point of shedding your blood, Bishop and Martyr...”

It is clear from this troparion, which is sung for the holy Fathers and holy Bishops, that one must first share the Apostles’ ways, and then be a successor to the Apostles’ thrones. This is linked with praxis and theoria. Praxis, practical virtue, is the purification of the heart, and theoria, beholding God’s glory, is illumination of the nous and deification. Then the bishop rightly divides the word of truth and bears witness even by shedding his blood. If he has not attained to the vision of God, he follows those who have.

This praxis of the Church is conveyed through the service for the ordination of a bishop. Once the bishop has been elected, he is then tested as to whether he believes correctly, and subsequently, during the service of ordination, he first confesses that he will observe the decisions of the Ecumenical and Local Councils, and then he is ordained bishop. Thus the Apostolic Tradition and Pentecost are inseparably linked with the Apostolic Succession of the episcopate.

Fr John Romanides stated this connection between the Apostolic Tradition and the Apostolic Succession. He spoke about the “deposit of faith”.

“The deposit is the manifestation of the uncreated grace and energy of God and of the hypostatic union in Christ of the divine and human nature, which is the work of the infallible energy of the Holy Spirit, Who illumines the Prophets, Apostles and saints to guide the faithful to observe God’s will and participate in the glory of Christ.”

Essentially, the deposit is the mystery of faith that is revealed to the saints and handed down by them to their spiritual children.

“The deposit of the Tradition existed before the creation of the world. It was revealed to the Prophets in the Old Testament and completed by the incarnation of the Word. It activates the purification, illumination and deification of the faithful in the Church. This means that the deposit of faith, that is to say, Holy Tradition, is not different from Holy Scripture, but is included within it. Although it is not different from Holy Scripture, it is not the same thing, because the deposit or Tradition is identified with the Church. Also, the deposit of Holy Tradition exists in Holy Scripture, when Holy Scripture is read and interpreted in the Church.”

Thus, the deposit of Faith, the sacred Tradition, is wider than Holy Scripture and is experienced within the Church. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit.

“The deposit of faith is the centre of the Holy Tradition and the power that shapes it. It presupposes a giver, Who is the Triune God, a gift, which is participation in the glory of God

– of the unincarnate Word in the Old Testament and of the incarnate Word in the New Testament – and recipients, keepers and transmitters of the divine gift, who are the Prophets, Apostles and saints of the Church.”

The holy Tradition and deposit, which is the mystery of the unincarnate and incarnate Word, is found in the Church. It is partly treasured up in Holy Scripture, and it is contained in the all the redemptive and conciliar liturgy and function of the Body of Christ, the Church. It is expressed by the hierarchy and is interpreted by the saints, but at the same time it remains a mystery.

The sacred Tradition “remains a mystery, because divine glory, like participation in this glory, transcends understanding and sense perception, although the whole human being is glorified and deified in God.”

Christ Himself is the deposit which the Church passes on through the hierarchy down the centuries, “during the Divine Eucharist to bishops and priests on the day of their ordination, to be kept and transmitted through the bishops and priests for the sanctification and deification of the faithful. Christ Himself, however, preserves, transmits and passes on the deposit, which is Himself, together with His friends.” Anyone who is cut off from the Church “ceases to be a bearer of the deposit.”

According to Fr John Romanides, the Apostolic Tradition is the experience of Pentecost, which means that the bearer of the Apostolic Tradition knows how to guide people to the mystery of Pentecost.

“So, what is the Apostolic Tradition? The early Fathers spoke about the Apostolic Tradition, not about the Apostolic Succession. The Apostolic Tradition is the tradition of diagnosis and treatment, and the clergy existed for that purpose. They diagnosed and treated correctly. Nothing else. There is no other purpose.”

Next, the Apostolic Succession is the transmission of the Apostolic Tradition. Fr John Romanides says:

“What does the Apostolic Succession mean for us? It means not only the consecration of bishops, but also the purpose for which the bishop is consecrated. This is not the same thing. Nowadays we equate the Apostolic Succession with the consecration of the bishop. There is nothing magical about the consecration of the bishop. The bishop is consecrated for a purpose. For what purpose? To diagnose and to cure. Why does a doctor become a doctor? We appoint someone as a doctor. Why do we appoint him as a doctor? Because he has become a doctor; he has become a doctor, so we appoint him as a doctor.”

All this is indispensable to enable us to understand what follows.

4. Ecclesiastical Consequences

Some conclusions can be drawn from all the above.

Firstly. The Church is the great mystery, the mystery of mysteries. Those who become her members through Baptism and Chrismation must live in Christ and participate in the

Sacrament of the Divine Eucharist. If they do not live as Christ wishes, they may remain within the Church, but they are lifeless and without feeling, like withered branches of a tree.

The bishops have Apostolic Succession. They are instruments of the Apostolic Succession and they do not act individually, but as sharers in the catholicity of the Church. In other words, they belong to one Church with the Primate, and they experience the mystery of the Church. Apostolic Succession is not merely a series of ordinations, but is closely connected with the Apostolic Tradition and Pentecost, which are experienced within the Church.

Secondly. The Church is the Body of Christ, which means that Christ is the head of the Church. He sanctified the Church and gives her life through the Holy Spirit. The holiness of the Church does not depend on her members, but on Christ's holiness. And the unworthiness of members of the Church, whether clergy or laity, does not defile the Church. When we partake unworthily of the Body and Blood of Christ, Christ is not defiled, but we are condemned.

Consequently, if the Church, by economy, receives someone from outside the Church by Chrismation, without Baptism, as was decided by the Orthodox Council of 1484, the Council which denounced the Council of Ferrara-Florence of 1439/40, this does not mean that the Church is defiled. Even St Mark Eugenicus, the champion of Orthodoxy, receives heretics by Chrismation. He wrote: "We chrismate those of them (Latins) who come to us...as being heretics." This does not mean that the reception of heretics in the Church by Chrismation, without Baptism, in accordance with the opinion of St Mark Eugenicus, is a defilement of the Church. And if the Church accepts a schismatic 'member of the clergy' by the imposition of hands or in some other way, this does not mean that Christ's priesthood is defiled. That is an ecclesiological blasphemy and amounts to the ancient heresy of the Novationists.

In such a case, those who go beyond the limits of economy in organising things bear responsibility and are accountable to God, but the priesthood of Christ itself and the Church, which is the Body of Christ, are not defiled. The Church, as a living organism, keeps even her sick members for the time being, and will cast them out finally in a way known to her alone. This also happens with unworthy members of the clergy who received the priesthood or the office of bishop in a canonical manner. In this case Christ's priesthood is not defiled. The Church is not a human association but the theanthropic Organism.

St Basil the Great, in one of the prayers of the Divine Liturgy that he composed, writes: "By the power of the Holy Spirit, enable us to perform this service, so that standing without condemnation before Your holy glory, we may offer You a sacrifice of praise; **for You alone accomplish all things in all men.**" And in the prayer of consecration he writes, "Therefore, most holy Master, we also, Your sinful and unworthy servants, whom you have permitted to minister at Your holy altar, **not because of our own righteousness** (for we have done nothing good on earth), **but because of Your mercy and compassion**, which You have so richly poured out on us, we now dare to approach Your holy altar."

Thirdly. The Apostolic Tradition is the truth, the "deposit of faith" that is kept within the Church; and this Church is the Body of Christ, according to the Apostle Paul and the "communion of deification" according to St Gregory Palamas. Within the Church, which

preserves the truth, the faithful are led towards Pentecost through “practical philosophy” or purification, “natural theoria” or illumination, and “mystical theology or deification (the vision of God), according to the great teacher and Father, St Maximus the Confessor.

Fourthly. The Holy Spirit, Who is within the Church, ordains the bishop, who has, or receives, the Apostolic Tradition in order to lead Christians to participation in this purifying, illuminating and deifying energy of God. This explains the passage in the Acts of the Apostles about the Apostles choosing the deacons, who were full of the Holy Spirit. The Apostolic Tradition, therefore, is closely united with the Apostolic Succession.

When a member of the Clergy publicly repudiates the Apostolic Tradition, or falls into sins against the Canons, the Church, which is the bearer of the Apostolic Tradition, deals with him appropriately in order to cure him and to protect the other members of the Church. Then the Church synodically, through her instruments, imposes canonical penalties: excommunication, removal from office, and finally exclusion from the Church. And in the case of an ecclesiastical community, it is erased from the Diptychs. In these cases, the Church, the Body of Christ, makes the charisma of the priesthood inoperative. Those concerned cannot perform sacraments, and if they continue to do so, these sacraments are unsubstantial and the one who performs them is accountable, but so are the others who follow him. It is not possible then for the Apostolic Succession to function.

It should be noted that, as St Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain explains, the expressions used in the sacred Canons, “let him be deposed”, “let him be excluded”, and “let him be anathema”, are expressed in the third person, and those to whom they apply are awaiting trial, until they are finally accused and judged before God. This is not the same thing as when a Council actually brings about the deposition of priests, or the exclusion and anathematisation of lay people, in which case the Canon is expressed in the second person, and should be accepted by everyone.

Fifthly. When a Local Orthodox Church, which is connected with all the Orthodox Churches, holds the faith and confesses it, but ordains someone who, although he confesses the faith outwardly, denies it inwardly, or who has impediments that prevent him from being a priest, St John Chrysostom’s statement applies, that God does not ordain all, but he works through all.

In one of his homilies he praises priests and regards them as angels of the Lord. He says that someone who despises a priest does not despise the priest himself, but God Who ordained him. If, as some people say, God did not ordain him, then the Christians are not baptised, nor do they partake of the sacraments, nor do they benefit from the blessings, so no one is a Christian. He goes on to answer the question “Does God ordain everyone, including the unworthy?” by saying “God does not ordain all, but He works through all, although they be unworthy, so that the people may be saved.”

A bishop, therefore, who neither has Apostolic Succession nor lives according to the Tradition of the Church, but who has not been deposed by the Church to which he belongs, performs the sacraments in accordance with the Canons, because God works through him, since

Christ is “He Who offers, and He Who is offered, He Who receives and He Who is received.” The bishop himself, however, is not saved.

According to St Nicholas Cabasilas, the grace of God works in a twofold way. The first way that divine grace works is in the Divine Liturgy through the priest. The bread and wine are sanctified and become the Body and Blood of Christ. The second way is that divine grace sanctifies the priest through partaking of the Precious Gifts, or it condemns him.

Thus, the Apostolic Succession remains, but when the priest is deposed or excluded from the Church, the charisma of the priesthood and the Apostolic Succession become inactive.

Sixthly. There are bishops who have the Apostolic Succession, which is a series of ordinations, but they do not have the Apostolic Tradition and life, and God works through them, if they have not been deposed. And there are saints who have the Apostolic Tradition and life, without possessing the Apostolic Succession, such as blessed monks who have not been ordained. Again, there are pseudo-bishops who have neither the Apostolic Tradition nor the Apostolic Succession, since they have not been ordained in a canonical fashion. And there are also bishops who have both the Apostolic Tradition and the Apostolic Succession. Those who belong in this last category are the key to resolving various issues.

Seventhly. When a Christian Community loses the Apostolic Tradition, as participation in the truth and experience of Pentecost, then the Apostolic Succession is not active, because the Apostolic Succession presupposes the Apostolic Tradition and the truth of the faith, either as participation in Pentecost, or as acceptance and confession of the teaching of the Prophets, Apostles and Fathers, as this was expressed at the Ecumenical Councils.

When a heretic or schismatic returns to the Orthodox Church, the Church decides synodically about the way in which he is to be received, on the basis of the Orthodox Tradition, which was expressed at the Ecumenical and Local Councils. In every case, the Church is expressed synodically and not individually or anthropocentrically. And the sacred Canons are not interpreted legalistically but ecclesiastically, according to the spirit. That is why we do not have a Pope in the Orthodox Church, as the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has repeatedly stated. Neither do we have ‘popes’: clergy, monks and laypeople who act individually and not synodically. The Church functions synodically; her regime is “synodically hierarchical and hierarchically synodical”. And this is judged by faithfulness to the Tradition of the Church.

Eighthly. Those who claim, in an anti-Orthodox and anti-ecclesiastical way, that the reception by the Church of some schismatic “members of the clergy”, in the manner referred to in the Tradition of the Church, “defiles” the priesthood and the Church, and who themselves fear this “defilement”, on the one hand express an ecclesiological heresy and, on the other, they ought to examine what happened in other cases.

For example, what happened during the seventeen years (1833-1850) when the Church of Greece was schismatic? To be sure, the bishops at that time did not ordain other bishops, but they performed Sacraments. Have those who came afterwards, including ourselves, been “defiled”?

What happened in the Church of Bulgaria, which was in schism from 1872 until 1945? Has the whole of Orthodoxy been defiled?

What happened in the case of the reception as metropolitans of two Old Calendarist ‘bishops’: Christopher Hatzis and Polycarp Liosis, who became Metropolitans of Dryinoupolis and Sissanion respectively? They had previously been deposed as bishops by the Synodical Court of the Church of Greece and returned to the rank of priests, and yet, at a Court of Appeal, the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece restored them as canonical bishops, without reordination, taking the view, according to economy, that their ordination in 1935 was canonical. Perhaps they defiled the body of the hierarchy of the Church of Greece, when they took part in the elections and ordinations of other bishops? It is unacceptable to say this. There is abundant material on this issue in the minutes of the meetings of the Hierarchies of the Church of Greece in past years.

Of course, those who commit canonical transgressions, those who ordain unworthy clergy and are unconcerned about unworthy clergy, and those who misuse economy with regard to the return of heretics and schismatics to the Church are accountable and will answer to God. But in no way can we speak about “defilement” of Christ’s Church and His priesthood. That is blasphemy.

Ninthly. The bishops are the “the administrators of the Churches”, and they make their decisions in Council, because there ought not to be confusion and departure from “ecclesiastical order”. Canon 6 of the Second Ecumenical Council clearly states:

“Since many, wishing to confuse and overturn ecclesiastical order, contentiously and slanderously fabricate charges against the Orthodox bishops who are the administrators of the Churches, intending nothing other than to stain the reputation of the priests and stir up disturbances amongst the peaceful laity...”

The Church has her bishops, who are the “administrators of the Churches”, and they, of course, will answer to God for manner in which they administer the Churches. The Church is not an anarchical community, but a “hierarchically synodical communion”.

Tenthly. The Ukrainian issue is complicated and longstanding, and unfortunately it has become involved with ecclesiastical and political expediencies. The Patriarch of Moscow bears a great deal of the responsibility, a fact that those who criticise the Ecumenical Patriarch overlook, because, among other things, he undermines the institution of the First-Throne Patriarch. I have analysed this in various articles, including:

‘The Problem of Ukraine’, eleven years ago (July 2008); ‘Is there a “Third Rome”?’ (October 2018); ‘The Institution of Autocephaly in the Orthodox Church’ (October 2018); ‘The Debate over the Declaration of Autocephaly in a Church’ (October 2018); ‘Sacred Canons and the Ecumenical Patriarchate’ (November 2018); ‘The Myth of the “White Hood”’ (February 2019), and in my document addressed to the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece (March 2019).

As for the issue that concerns me in the present article, ‘Apostolic Tradition and Apostolic Succession in the Mystery of the Church’, I note that those who judge severely the

Ecumenical Patriarchate overlook the views of the Patriarch of Moscow on the Apostolic Tradition, the Apostolic Succession and the mystery of the Church. These views are made clear in various decisions by the Patriarchate of Moscow, but also in the ‘Joint Declaration of Pope Francis of Rome and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia’ in Havana (Cuba) on 12 February 2016.

In particular, it makes a great impression on me that they judge the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and yet they pardon all the ecumenistic initiatives and other actions by the Patriarchate of Moscow. But this will be the subject of another article that I shall write.

Personally, I dwell on the Orthodox teaching about the relationship between the Apostolic Tradition and the Apostolic Succession in the mystery of the Church. As for the issue of the reinstatement of the schismatic and ‘self-ordained’ bishops, what I wrote in my document of 30 April 2019 to the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece holds true:

“As regards the issue of how the Ecumenical Patriarchate accepted the ‘episcopal rank’ of the bishops who were ‘ordained’ by deposed bishops and schismatics, or were ‘self-ordained’, our Church, before making a decision, ought to ask the Ecumenical Patriarchate about the manner in which these ‘bishops’ were reinstated.”

I wrote this because, before we decide as a Church on this issue, we ought to hear officially how the Ecumenical Patriarchate dealt with this matter. Unfortunately, however, I notice that those who have judged me have either overlooked or misinterpreted this suggestion.

I have written all the above in order to emphasise that contemporary ecclesiological problems should be resolved on the basis of the sacred Canons drawn up by the divinely inspired Fathers of the Local and Ecumenical Councils. However, these Canons ought not be interpreted in a legalistic spirit – something that the Fathers did not do. The Fathers, as spiritual physicians who possessed the Holy Spirit, having participated in the purifying, illuminating and deifying energy of God, took care of every problem that arose, and did so synodically. An anti-Orthodox Council, a pseudo-council, can be corrected by another Orthodox Council, in which there are bishops with the Apostolic Tradition and Apostolic Succession. Ecclesiastical tradition bears witness to this.

It is, therefore, unreasonable and unethical for some people to tailor the words of the sacred Canons to suit themselves, in order on every occasion to support their views, which they form according to each case.

In general, we should live the mystery of the Church, with praxis and theoria, as we sing in all the troparia of the Church, so that we may have an ecclesiastical way of thinking. The mystery of the Church is the highest mystery and is inseparably linked with the mystery of the incarnation of the Son and Word of God, with the mystery of the divine Economy and the mystery of man’s deification.

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