

Archpriest Georges Florovsky (1893-1979)

The Sacrament of Pentecost*

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THE CHURCH IS ONE. This does not merely mean that there is only one Church, but that the Church is a unity. In it mankind is translated into a new plane of existence so that it may perfect itself in unity in the image of the life of the Trinity. The Church is one in the Holy Spirit and the Spirit "construes" it into the complete and perfect Body of Christ. The Church is predominantly one in the fellowship of the sacraments. Putting it in another way, the Church is one in Pentecost, which was the day of the mysterious foundation and consecration of the Church when all the prophecies about her were fulfilled. In that "terrible and unknown celebration" the Spirit-Comforter descends and enters the world in which He was never present before in the same way as He now begins to dwell. Now He enters the world to abide in it and to become the all-powerful source of transfiguration and deification. The bestowal and the descent of the Spirit was a unique and unrepeatable Revelation. On that day, in a moment, an inexhaustible source of living water and Life Eternal was disclosed here on earth.

Pentecost, therefore, is the fullness and the source of all sacraments and sacramental actions, the one and inexhaustible spring of all of the mysterious and spiritual life of the Church. To abide or to live in the Church implies a participation in

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Pentecost. Moreover, Pentecost becomes eternal in the Apostolic Succession; that is, in the uninterruptedness of hierarchical ordinations in which every part of the Church is at every moment organically united with the primary source. The lines of power proceed from the Upper Room. Apostolic Succession is not merely, as it were, the canonical skeleton of the Church. Generally speaking, the hierarchy is primarily a charismatic principle; that is— a "ministry of the

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sacraments," or "a divine economy." And in this capacity precisely the hierarchy is 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. Apostolic Succession is not so much the canonical as the mystical foundation of Church unity. It is associated with the divine rather than with the human side of the Church. Historically the Church remains actually one in its priesthood. It is precisely by this Apostolic uninteruptibility of successive ordinations that the whole Church is bound into a unity of the body from a unity of the Spirit. And there is only one way and one approach: to draw near and to drink from the one spring of life, once revealed.

The peculiar function of bishops is to be the organ of Apostolic Succession. The bishop differs from the priest in his power to ordain, and in this alone. Nor is this only a canonical privilege and only a power of jurisdiction. It is a power of sacramental action beyond that possessed by the priest. In the celebration of the Eucharist the bishop has no precedence over the priest and can never have it, for the priest has full power to celebrate, every priest being primarily appointed for the purpose of offering the Eucharistic Sacrifice. It is as the celebrator of the divine Eucharist that the priest is the minister and the builder of Church unity. The unity of the Body of Christ springs from unity in the Eucharistic meal. But in addition to this the bishop has his own particular duty in the building up of Church unity, not as the offerer of the Bloodless Sacrifice but as the ordainer. The Last Supper and

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Pentecost are inseparably bound up with one another. The Comforter descends when the Son has been glorified in His death on the Cross. But still they are two sacraments which cannot be merged the one into the other.

The same applies to the two degrees in orders: the bishop is above the priest and it is through the episcopate that Pentecost becomes universal and eternal. Moreover every particular Church through its bishop, or, to put it more exactly, in its bishop, is included in the Catholic fullness of the Church as a whole. Through its bishop it is linked up with the past and with antiquity. Through its bishop it forms a part of the living organism of the Body of the Church Universal. For every bishop is ordained by many bishops in the name of the undivided episcopate. In its bishop every single Church outgrows and transcends its own limits, and comes into contact with and merges into other Churches, not in the order of brotherly love and remembrance alone, but in the unity of mysterious and gracious life.

Every local Church therefore finds its center and its unity in the bishop, not so much because he is its local head and pastor, but because through him it is included in the mysterious "*sobornos*" ["catholicity"] of the Church-body for all times. "We affirm that the order of bishops is so necessary for the Church that without it the Church is not a Church and a Christian is not a Christian, and that they cannot be even so called. For the bishop is a successor of the Apostles through the laying on of hands and invocation of the Holy Spirit, having successively received

the power bestowed from God to loose and to bind. He is a living image of God on earth, and owing to the divine activity and power of the Holy Spirit is the abundant source of all the sacraments of the Church Universal through which salvation is obtained. We consider that a bishop is as essential to a Church as breath is to man and the sun to the world" (the Epistle of the Eastern Patriarchs to the Bishops of Great Britain, 1723, par. 10).

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On the Day of Pentecost the Spirit descends not only on the Apostles, but also on those who were present with them; not only on the Twelve but on the entire multitude (compare Chrysostom's *Discourses* and his interpretation of *Acts*). This means that the Spirit descended on the whole of the Primitive Church then present in Jerusalem. But though the Spirit is one, the gifts and ministrations in the Church are very varied, so that while in the sacrament of Pentecost the Spirit descends on all, it is on the Twelve alone that He bestows the power and the rank of priesthood promised to them by Our Lord in the days of His flesh. The distinctive features of priesthood do not become blurred in the all-embracing fullness of Pentecost. But the simultaneity of this Catholic outpouring of the Spirit on the entire Church witnesses to the fact that priesthood was founded within the *sobornost* of the Church.

It is with this that the direct prohibition of ordination in a "general" or "abstract" sense (viz., without a definite appointment to a Church or a congregation) is directly associated (4 Oecum., rule 6). Secret ordination is also prohibited. It must always be public and open, in the Church itself, before the people and with the people. Moreover, a participation of the "people" in the ordination itself is required, and not only as reverent spectators who follow the prayers. The binding "*aksios* [*axios*]" or "*amen*" is not merely an accompaniment, but also a witness, and an acceptance. The power to ordain is bestowed on bishops and on bishops alone. But it is given to them within the Church as to the pastors of a definite flock. And they can and should realize this power only in the *sobornost* of the Church and in agreement with the entire Body— namely, the priests and the people— and not in a "general" or "abstract" way. This means that the bishop should abide in the Church, and the Church in the bishop.

The ancient stipulation that a bishop should be ordained by two or three bishops is especially significant (Apost. 1). The implication of this requirement is quite obvious (cf.

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Mt. 18:16, "that at the mouth of two witnesses or three every word may be established"). But to what do the bishops who ordain witness? In the ordination of a bishop no separate bishop can act for himself as a bishop of a definite and particular local Church for as such he remains an outsider so far as any other diocese or bishopric is concerned. He acts as a representative of the *sobornost* of the co-bishops, as a member and sharer of this *sobornost*. In addition to this it is implied that these bishops belong to a particular diocese and as ruling bishops are not

separated and indeed are inseparable from their flocks. Every co-ordainer acts in the name of Catholic *sobornost* and fullness (cf. 1 Oecum., rule 4: "it is most seemly for a bishop to be appointed by all the bishops of that region; but if this happens to be inconvenient either for some special reason or owing to the distance, let at least three of them assemble in one place, and let those who are absent signify their acquiescence in writing, and then let them proceed with ordination").

Again, these are not only canonical, or administrative, or disciplinary measures. One feels that there is a mystical depth in them. No realization or extension of Apostolic Succession is otherwise possible, apart from the unbreakable *sobornost* 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. In the Roman rite one bishop alone ordains, but the presence of "witnesses" or "assistants" is required, who thus confirm the fullness and the *sobornost* of the sacramental act. The main point lies here in the co-operation of the whole Church, even though it may be taken for granted and represented symbolically. Under normal conditions of Church life Apostolic Succession should never become reduced to an abstract enumeration of successive ordainers. In ancient times Apostolic Succession usually implied first of all a succession to a definite cathedra, again in a particular local *sobornost*. Apostolic Succession does not represent a self-sufficient chain or

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order of bishops. It is an organ and a system of Church oneness. Moreover, not only "holy orders" [*ordo*], but also the "priestly power" [*jurisdictio*] are congruent in grace. "Jurisdiction" signifies the concreteness of the bishop's power and dignity, and it stands precisely for *sobornost*, viz.— organic unity with a particular body of Church people. Therefore, apart from "jurisdiction," that is in the mere self-sufficiency of the episcopal rank, the power to ordain cannot be practiced. If such an "abstract" ordination cannot be recognized as "valid" [*valida*], it is, nevertheless, not only "illegal" [*illicita*], but also mystically defective. 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.

The Apostolicity of the Church is not exhausted by the uninterruptedness of this priestly succession from the Apostles. Apostolic Succession must not be severed from Apostolic Tradition, and in fact never can be. Apostolic Tradition is not only a historical reminiscence, nor does faithfulness to Tradition mean simply an obstinate insistence on what is ancient, still less does it demand an archaic adaptation of the present to the manners or standards of the past. Tradition is not Church archeology but spiritual life. It is the memory of the Church. It is, firstly, an uninterrupted current of spiritual life proceeding from the Upper Room. Nor is faithfulness to

Apostolic Tradition faithfulness to antiquity alone, but a living link with all the fullness of Church life. Faithfulness to Tradition is similarly a participation in Pentecost, and Tradition represents a fulfillment of Pentecost— "Howbeit when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come. He shall guide you unto all truth" (Jn. 16:13). Generally speaking, Tradition is not so much a safeguarding and conservative principle, as a progressive and educible one— the

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beginning of life, renewal, and growth. Apostolic times are not only an external example for imitation or repetition, but an eternally renewed spring or experience and life in grace. 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. And this "power to teach" [*potestas magisterii*] is included in Apostolic Succession and based on it. The power to teach is conferred precisely on the episcopate— it is the most apostolic "power."

But this "power" is a function of the Catholic fullness of the Church. "*De omnium fidelium ore pendeamus, quia in omnem fidelem Spiritus Dei spirat.*" The hierarchy in its teaching capacity represents, as it were, the lips of the Church. This does not mean that the hierarchy acquires its teaching credentials from the people of the Church, for it has them from the Holy Spirit, as an "anointing of truth" [*charisma veritatis certum*], according to the expression of St. Irenaeus of Lyons, in the sacrament of ordination. But this is the right or power to express and witness to the faith and experience of the Church. The hierarchy teaches as an organ of the Church. Therefore it is limited by the "consent of the Church" [*e consensu ecclesiae*], and again not so much in the order of canonics as of spiritual life and evidence. To the hierarchy alone is given the right to teach and witness in the Church. But the hierarchy is not a self-sufficient and complete "teaching body" in the Church. The hierarchy then only teaches in a Catholic way when it truly holds and contains the Church within itself. Every local Church has the right to a "teaching voice" only in the person of its bishop, which, however, does not exclude the right to freedom of opinion. On the other hand the bishop also has the "power to teach" only within the Church, only within the actual *sobornost* of his people and flock. The bishop receives this power and ability to teach, not from his flock, but from Christ Himself, in Whose ministry of teaching he participates through the grace of Apostolic Succession. But the power to be, as it were, the

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heart of his people is conferred on him, and therefore the people also have a right and duty to witness, to consent, and to refuse consent, in the search for full unanimity and the fullness of *sobornost*.

The power to teach is therefore based on a two-fold continuity. Firstly, the uninterruptedness of spiritual life in the Church as the "*fullness of Him that filleth all in all*" (Eph. 1:23). 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. Each individual way of life is also included in *sobornost*, and this means that it is conditioned and limited by Apostolic Succession. Secondly, a universal communion for all time or a union in the sacraments is only possible through the uninteruptibility of priestly succession. The historical development of the Church, its organic integrity in revealing the fundamental "*depositum fidei*" are alike based on Apostolic Succession. The Catholic fullness of the teaching of the Church is only possible for us through Apostolic Succession which supersedes the historical relativity of separate epochs, and which also acts as a check for an inner differentiation between what is varying and what is permanent. The freedom of theological investigation and opinion finds support and a foundation for itself in this hierarchical "anointing of the truth." It is precisely Apostolic Succession which allows us in our theology to rise above and beyond the spirit of our times and enter into the fullness of truth.

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

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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 fullness of Tradition has been diminished by breaches in historical continuity. Especially does this apply to cases where the injury affects the basic motives of the "succession" itself, when Eucharistic faith becomes dimmed, and when the idea of priesthood becomes vague. One might add that in such cases the empirical link with the fullness of Church life both past and present is usually severed, and the community becomes self-contained and isolated, so that an empirical separation or schism takes place. Such a will to isolation and, as it were, solitude cannot but affect that ministry of the Church the whole meaning of which lies in the preservation and expression of unity. Again this is not only a question of legality or "jurisdiction." Not so much canonically as mystically every priest acts on behalf of and in the name of the whole Church— and only thus is his Divine ministry full of mystical value. The Eucharist is one and undivided and can only be celebrated within the mystical limits of the Catholic Church. How can a "dissenter" celebrate the Eucharist?

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

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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 fullness 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. Apostolic Succession is only strengthened by faithfulness to and fulfillment of Apostolic Tradition. In their inseparability lies the fullness of Pentecost.

Consensus Ecclesiae*

[Two explanatory notes to Professor Florovsky's article on "The Sacrament of Pentecost."]

1. *"To the hierarchy alone is given the right to teach and witness in the Church."* This does not mean that the clergy and laity are merely destined to an unconditional and formal obedience to the episcopate. It does not similarly imply that "the right to teach" is conferred on the bishops apart from the people. On the contrary, there should be no room for exclusiveness in the Church. In this way the sharp contrast which exists in the Roman Church between the "teaching" and the "learning" Church is relinquished. It is more correct to speak of the *co-ordination* between all the strata, or elements, within the Church. I emphasize again "the bishop also has the "power to teach" only within the Church, only within the actual *sobornost* of his people and

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flock." Everyone in the Church is called not only to obedience but also to understanding. Precisely in questions of faith and dogma everyone is constrained by personal responsibility. It is preferable not to speak of "responsibility"—the term is too formal—it is better to say that everyone should *dwell in truth*. The flock must not only listen but also acquiesce. It is not authority that decides so much as an inner evidence of spiritual life. Within the boundaries of unbroken *sobornost* there exists an allocation of activities and tasks. *At any rate, everyone is called to be a living example and witness to his faith and trust, to teach and help everyone*. This is not the question at issue. Nor is it even one of theological research, which formally cannot be delimited by any position in the Church. *The question is one of the right of dogmatic witness on behalf of the Church*.

Again, the power of the hierarchy does not assume that truth, as it were, is revealed automatically to the bishop, by force of his ordination and dignity, or that he can discover it without consultation and communion with that Church outside of which he loses all "power," generally speaking. However, only to him, and to him alone, is given the right to speak in a *Catholic way*. It is not only a canonical privilege or right. It is bound up with the fact that the bishop as such is a mystical center of his flock, which unites in him in the oneness of sacramental fellowship. The fact that not infrequently bishops are not sufficiently good theologians does not contradict this statement. In such a case they are forced to find support in other priests who are more learned than they. This has been the case from the most ancient times: we have merely to recall Eusebius of Caesarea, whose chief councillor was Basil the Great. This is no greater contradiction than the simple fact that there do exist unworthy bishops and even unworthy Christians, generally speaking. Even laymen can and must study, discuss, preach, write, and argue; they can similarly disagree with bishops. *But to witness on behalf of the Church is given only to the bishop*. One can also put it

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thus: the *right of an opinion and of advice* is given to all, but the *"power to teach"* is bestowed on the hierarchy alone—of course, in the unbreakableness of *sobornost* fellowship. The scarcity of learned bishops in the Orthodox Church in recent times is to be greatly regretted, but it is in no way linked with this main postulate.

As regards *"lay theologians"* in Russia, it can be hardly said that they have the power to teach on behalf of the whole Church—which does not in any way limit their great historical significance. For the voice of laymen must be heard in the Orthodox choir. The leader of the choir, however, can only be a bishop. There are various gifts, and all gifts are necessary. Only one, however, is appointed shepherd and the staff is entrusted to him. *"And the sheep follow Him: for they know His voice"* (Jn. 10:4).

II. The disunity within the Christian world implies, of course, its mystical weakness, and here nothing is clear. I would only like to emphasize one point. *The very fact of division in the Church*

is a paradox and an antinomy. A falling away from the Church is more comprehensible than division in the Church, while the very efficacy of the sacraments in schism [*raskol*] does not in itself do away with the undoubted fact that even the spirit of division is an unhealthy symptom. It is not easy to develop this point of view, for it is precisely a paradox. However, I think that the West separated itself *from the East*, and that the guilt of the West is greater. All the history of Roman deviations witnesses to this, and they continue to burden the Anglican Church as well. However, this brings us to a new and very complicated theme, namely, that of the division of the Churches, and it will be wiser to return to it separately on another occasion.