

Great Lenten Lecture Series 2016

“Diocesan” Structure in the Ancient Church

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Definition of “Church”

- “Ekklesia” (Greek)
 - Assembly
 - Gathering
- “Kahal” (Hebrew)
 - Same as “ekklesia” on one level, but deeper and more mystical meaning in Greek
 - Best explained by Biblical images

Definition of “Church”

IMAGE OF THE GRAPEVINE AND BRANCHES:

I am the true vine and My Father is the Husbandman. Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit... Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in Me, I am the Vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without Me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned... Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples. (John 15:1-8)

Definition of “Church”

IMAGE OF THE SHEPHERD AND THE FLOCK

Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep..... Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep... I am the door by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and go out, and find pasture ... I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep ... I am the good shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of mine ... and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd. (John 10:1-16)

Definition of “Church”

IMAGE OF THE HEAD AND THE BODY

The Father hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is His Body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. (Ephesians 1:22-23)

IMAGE OF THE BUILDING UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone—in Whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord; in Whom ye also are builded for a habitation of God through the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19-22)

Definition of “Church”

IMAGE OF A HOUSE OR A FAMILY

That thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the Truth (I Timothy 3:15).

Christ as a Son over His own house, Whose house are we. (Hebrews 3:6)

Definition of “Church”

- Fishing Net
- Field sown with seed
- Vineyard
- Body of Christ
- Fathers: Church in the World as a Ship on the Sea
- St. Paul: Marriage
- Fr. Michael Pomozansky: “The Church is completely distinct from any kind whatever of organized society on earth.”

Founding of The Church

- Advent of Christ
- Theophany
- Preaching
- Apostles and Disciples
- PENTECOST
- Eternal: “I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18)

What is The Church?

- St. Ignatius the God-bearer: “Where the bishop is, there is Christ”
- St. Cyprian of Carthage: “If they are not with the Bishop, they are not in the Church.”
- St. Cyprian of Carthage: “He who does not have the Church as his mother cannot have God as his Father.”
- New Martyr Hilarion (Troitsky): “Just as the faith in the Church is inseparably linked with the acknowledgement of the divinity of Christ the Savior, so the denial of the Church unfailingly leads ultimately to the denial of the incarnation of the Son of God, the denial of the divinity of Jesus Christ.”

What is The Church?

- New Martyr Hilarion (Troitsky): The idea of the Church as a new, perfect community as distinct from a community of the state organization is profoundly and beautifully expressed in the kontakion for the feast of the Descent of the Holy Spirit, when the Church recalls and celebrates its beginning. **"When the Most High came down and confused the tongues, He divided the nations, but when He distributed the tongues of fire, He called all into unity. Therefore, with one accord we glorify the All-holy Spirit."** Here the creation of the Church is placed into opposition to the Tower of Babel and the "confusing of tongues," at which time God, the Most High, came down, confused the tongues and divided the nations.

What is a Bishop?

- For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not self-willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre... (Titus 1:7)
- A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behavior, given to hospitality, apt to teach... (I Timothy 3:2)

Apostolic Canon 41

We ordain that the bishop have authority over the goods of the Church: for if he is to be entrusted with the precious souls of men, much more are temporal possessions to be entrusted to him. He is therefore to administer them all of his own authority, and supply those who need, through the presbyters and deacons, in the fear of God, and with all reverence. He may also, if need be, take what is required for his own necessary wants, and for the brethren to whom he has to show hospitality, so that he may not be in any want. For the law of God has ordained that they who serve at the altar should be nourished of the altar. Neither does any soldier bear arms against an enemy at his own cost.

What is a Diocese?

- Ancient Church: Community of Unity and Love
 - New Martyr Hilarion (Troitsky): “According to the witness of the compiler of the Acts, the first Christian community was the almost complete realization of this concept of the Church. The company of the faithful, we read in the Acts of the Apostles were "of one heart and of one soul" (Acts 4:32). **It is remarkable that during the fourth century, while the dogma concerning the Holy Trinity was being explained, certain of the holy fathers used the analogy of the early Christians to describe the unity of the Holy Trinity**

What is a Diocese?

- St. John of Kronstadt: “The Bishop in his diocese is, after God and the Theotokos, the source of sanctification for all the Christians of his flock, and this is why they should all have great esteem and love for him as the most perfect celebrant of the Holy Mysteries.”
- Fr. Alexander Schmemman: “But is it not the very purpose and function of a Diocese to keep the parishes together, to make them living parts of a greater whole, indeed, the Church? A parish, left to itself, can never be truly catholic, for it is of necessity limited by the concerns and interests of its people.”
- St. Ignatius of Antioch: “The Bishop in each Church presides in the place of God... Where the Bishop appears there let the people be, just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic Church”

What is a Diocese?

- Early Christians gathered around bishops who were consecrated by the the Apostles and their successors (apostolic succession was important)
- This was the community: bishop, presbyters, people in eucharistic communion with each other and Christ
- Few details of early community, but we know what the the community consisted of: tended to be only one “church” or “parish” in each local area – this was the early proto-diocese
- As the Church grew, it was necessary to organize more, and first dioceses were formed - process accelerated after Edict of Milan
- Zonaras: dioceses of 4th Century were similar to Metropolitan Districts in Russia today – quite large (several bishops)

What is a Diocese Today?

- Compendium of Laws ROCOR
- Note Please:
 - 40. The Russian Orthodox Church Abroad is divided into dioceses whose boundaries are established by the Synod with definitive confirmation by the Sobor of Bishops.
 - Diocese is a Geographical Division
 - 41. Every diocese is under the administrative control of its Diocesan Bishop.
 - Again with the bishop as head – as in the ancient Church

What is a Diocese Today?

- Compendium, note please continued:
 - 43. Every diocese should have a Diocesan Council to assist the Diocesan Bishop in the administration of the diocese and it should be under his direct control and be subject to him.
 - As in Ancient Church: bishop, clergy, laity
 - 45. The Diocesan Bishop, as the head of a local church (the diocese), enjoys, by divine ordinance, the complete fullness of episcopal power, that is, to teach, to perform divine services, to administer a court and give judgment, within the boundaries of his diocese.
 - As in Ancient Church
 - 46. The Diocesan Bishop possesses the right of initiative and direct leadership in all aspects of diocesan life.
 - As in Ancient Church

What is a Diocese Today?

- Compendium, note please continued:
 - 52. A Diocesan Bishop has no episcopal rights within the borders of another diocese, otherwise than with the leave and permission of the local Diocesan Bishop.
 - As in Ancient Church
 - Section VI: Diocesan Assemblies – to support bishop and diocese, not a “check” as in “check and balance”
 - Section VII: Diocesan Council – to assist bishop and diocese, not a “check” as in “check and balance”

Further Reading

- St. Cyprian of Carthage: “On the Unity of the Church”
- St. Hilarion (Troitsky): “Christianity or the Church?”
- Fr. Alexander Schmemmman: Problems of Orthodoxy in America
- Fr. Michael Pomazansky: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology
- Compendium of Regulations, Statutes, and Laws of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, 2006