

## THE ONE, HOLY, CATHOLIC AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH

What do we mean when we use the word *Church*? Look at the tremendous variety of groups that call themselves *Churches*. In fact, anyone can establish a *Church* for himself. There are many cults and other groups today that use the name *Jesus* and *Church* very freely. You'll hear them calling themselves *Jesus People* or *Jesus Church*, etc. But are they truly churches? Were they founded by Jesus and the apostles? What kind of historical connection do they have with the apostles and the early Church? If the Devil appears as an angel and quotes Scripture, then he can use even *Churches* to lead people away from the one true God and His plan of salvation.

We need to define our terms carefully. Exactly what do we mean when we say *Church*? We Orthodox Christians mean by Church the Body through which Jesus is present and active in the world today. It was founded by Christ through the apostles and has maintained a living, historical connection with the apostles through the ordination of its clergy. The fact that the bishop who ordains an Orthodox priest today can trace his ordination historically all the way back to the apostles and through them to Christ is a guarantee that the Orthodox Church was not founded by someone called Joe Smith a few centuries ago but by Christ Himself and traces its existence historically back to Jesus. We call this *Apostolic Succession*. It means that our Church is the authentic and genuine Church or Body of Christ in the world today. It continues to teach not one man's interpretation of the faith but the complete deposit of faith as it was handed down to the apostles by Jesus.

So there are some very important questions to ask when one hears the word *Church*. Was this *Church* founded by God or by man? Does it have an unbroken historical connection with the early Apostolic Church? How else can we be certain that what it teaches is truly apostolic, truly Christian, truly the Word of God and not one man's interpretation, or misinterpretation of that faith?

A group of evangelicals banded together recently to seek to find what they feel is lacking in their tradition: a living connection with the early Church. They call themselves *The Orthodox Evangelicals* and they are in conversation with leaders of the Orthodox Church. Let me share with

you what they are saying, "We are, for the most part, a people without roots. Some of us can only trace the beginnings of our denomination or Church to some time in this century—arising over a split in this or that doctrine, or maybe even a personality clash between two strong leaders. Most of us have no sense of the past, no understanding of where we came from..."\* They are seeking their roots in the early Apostolic Church of which the Orthodox Church is an historical continuation.

### AN UNBROKEN HISTORICAL CONNECTION

In order to be used as evidence in court, the bullet used in the attempted assassination of President Reagan some time ago had to have an unbroken connection with the bullet that was removed from the president's body. Accordingly, a secret service agent was present during surgery. He witnessed the removal of the bullet. The surgeon signed a statement upon giving the bullet to the agent. The agent signed another statement when he delivered the bullet to the laboratory, etc. Such evidence of an unbroken connection between a bullet and a body is required in a court of law. Equal evidence is required to show that a church is indeed the genuine church founded by Jesus: the evidence of an unbroken historical connection with the Apostolic Church.

A church is the true Church of Christ if it can show historically that it was founded by Christ and has maintained a living connection over the centuries with that early Church. We need this historical connection in order to be assured that the deposit of the faith has not been tampered with but has been handed down to us in its entirety.

Fr. Theodore Stylianopoulos, Professor of New Testament at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Theological Seminary, writes:

*...the Orthodox Church is the true Church of God on earth and maintains the fullness of Christ's truth in continuity with the Church of the apostles. This awesome claim does not necessarily mean that Orthodox Christians have achieved perfection: for we have many personal shortcomings. Nor does it necessarily mean that the other Christian Churches do not serve God's purposes positively: for it is not up to us to judge others but to live and proclaim the fullness of the truth. But it does mean that if a person carefully examines the history of Christianity he or she will soon discover that the Orthodox Church*

alone is in complete sacramental, doctrinal and canonical continuity with the ancient undivided Church as it authoritatively expressed itself through the great Ecumenical Councils.\*

## CHANGELESSNESS

One of the distinguishing features of the Orthodox Church is her changelessness. The Orthodox Church baptizes by a three-fold immersion as was done in the early Church. It still confirms infants at baptism bestowing upon them the "seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit." It still brings baptized babies and small children to receive Holy Communion. In the liturgy the deacon still cries out, "The doors, the doors," recalling early days when none but baptized members of the Christian family could participate in the liturgy of the faithful. The Nicene Creed is still recited without the later addition of *filioque*. The Orthodox Church has two distinctive features: (1) her changelessness; (2) her sense of living continuity with the Church of the early apostles.

## THE NICENE CREED

In the Nicene Creed we confess, "I believe in one, holy, catholic and Apostolic Church." What do these words mean?

ONE. Means that the Church is one because God is one. "There is one body, and one Spirit...one hope...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all" (Eph. 4:4-6). In His great Priestly Prayer, Jesus prayed that the Church may be *one* even as He and the Father are one (John 17:22).

HOLY. The Church is holy because our Lord made her so. "Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:25-27). Not only is the Church holy but it is also her purpose to make us holy, i.e., different from the world, conformed to God's will.

CATHOLIC. The Orthodox Church is catholic, meaning whole, because she has preserved the wholeness of the faith of Christ through the centuries without adding or subtracting to that divinely revealed faith. For

this reason she has come to be known as the *Orthodox* Church, i.e., the Church that has preserved the full and true faith of Christ. Orthodox Christians believe that the Church, which has Christ Himself as Head and which is the temple of the Holy Spirit, cannot err. Her voice is the voice of Christ in the world today. The word *Orthodox* is applied to the Orthodox Church to designate that it has kept the true "faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3).

Catholic means also that the Church is universal. It embraces all peoples, the entire earth. "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son..." Just as there are no distinctions within the love of God, so the Church stretches out her arms to the world. "Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:11). God's love is all inclusive; so the Church is catholic.

APOSTOLIC. The Church is apostolic because she teaches what the apostles taught and can trace her existence historically directly back to the apostles.

It was the Apostle Paul, for example, who established the Christian Church in Greece through his early missionary journeys. His letters to the Corinthians, the Thessalonians, the Philippians were written to the churches he had established in those Greek cities. The Church he founded there has never ceased to exist. It is known today as the Greek Orthodox Church. The Apostle Paul founded the church in Antioch which exists to this day as the Antiochian Orthodox Church. Other apostles established the church in Jerusalem, Alexandria and Cyprus. The Eastern Orthodox Church has existed in these places since the days of the apostles. From these cities and countries, missionaries brought the Gospel (Good News) of Jesus to other countries: Russia, the Ukraine, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, etc. This self-governing family of churches is known today as the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Thus, the Orthodox Church is the legitimate and historical continuation of the early Church. She has the same faith, the same spirit, the same ethos. "This is the Apostolic faith, this is the faith of the Fathers, this is the Orthodox faith, this faith has established the universe" (From the Sunday of Orthodoxy vespers).

The Church is both visible and invisible. The visible Church is the Church Militant on earth. The invisible Church is the Church Triumphant in heaven, "the heavenly Jerusalem...innumerable angels in festal

\* *Christ in Our Midst* (Brookline, MA: Dept. of Rel. Education, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese).

gathering...the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven” (Hebrews 12:22-23).

Christ has promised that the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church (Matthew 16:18) and that He would be with it until the end of the world (Matthew 28:20). St. Paul calls the Church “the pillar and ground of truth” (1 Tim. 3:15).

## SOURCE OF AUTHORITY

The highest authority of the Eastern Church is the Ecumenical Council, involving the whole Church. When the bishops of the Church define a matter of faith in an Ecumenical Council, a requisite for its recognition is the acceptance and consent of the whole Church. Only then can it be considered infallible, or inspired of the Holy Spirit, who resides in the whole Church, consisting of clergy and laity, to guide it to all truth. This makes every person within the Church responsible for Christian truth. There have been instances where decisions of the bishops meeting in Council have not been accepted because they were later rejected by the Church as a whole.

## THE ORTHODOX CHURCH TODAY

Originally the early Church consisted of the five ancient Patriarchates: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. These cities constituted the chief centers of Christianity in the early days. Between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, Rome became separated from the other Patriarchates due to the former's insistence on supremacy. The other ancient patriarchates considered the bishop of Rome “first among equals,” granting him a primacy of honor but not of jurisdiction. Constantinople then rose to primacy among the other Patriarchates since it was the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire. The primacy of Constantinople, however, has always been a primacy of honor, not of jurisdiction.

Through the years new Orthodox Churches were established in many lands through missionary work so that the present family of Orthodox Churches covers the globe as shown in the outline listed below:

### A. Ancient Patriarchates

1. Constantinople which includes Turkey, Crete, the Dodecanese Islands and the Diaspora.
2. Alexandria which includes Egypt and the rest of Africa.
3. Antioch which includes Syria, Lebanon, Iran and Iraq.
4. Jerusalem which includes Israel and Jordan.

### B. National Churches (some of which are newer Patriarchates)

1. The Church of Russia
2. The Church of Cyprus
3. The Church of Greece
4. The Church of Bulgaria
5. The Church of Romania
6. The Church of Serbia
7. The Church of Albania
8. The Church of Georgia
9. The Church of Czech Lands and Slovakia
10. The Church of Poland
11. The Church of Sinai

### C. Missionary Churches

1. Korea
2. Uganda and Kenya
3. China
4. Australia
5. South America
6. Western Europe
7. North America

### D. Churches in the Diaspora

1. The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America
2. The Orthodox Churches in the U.S.A., including the OCA
3. Japan
4. Finland
5. China

Metropolitan Kallistos Ware writes:

*In the East there were many Churches whose foundation went back to the Apostles; there was a strong sense of the equality of all bishops, of the collegial and conciliar nature of the Church. The east acknowledged the Pope as the first bishop in the Church, but saw him as the first among equals. In the west, on the other hand, there was only one great see claiming apostolic foundation—Rome—so that Rome came to be regarded as the Apostolic See...the Church was seen less as a college and more as a monarchy—the monarchy of the Pope.\**

The insistence on the monarchy of the Pope aggravated by the atrocities the Crusaders inflicted on the population of Constantinople in 1204 led to a lamentable estrangement and separation of the Eastern Churches and Rome which we pray will be healed in time since the two Churches are apostolic and have so much in common.

## WHAT IS THE CHURCH

The early Jews believed that God dwelled in a box which they called the tabernacle. They carried the box with them always. The box, of course, contained the stone tablets on which God had written the Ten Commandments. No one was ever to touch this sacred box. Once, a man did touch it by accident and was immediately struck dead. At another time when the box was captured by the Philistines, the Jews felt it was the end for them because they had lost their God. Later, they built a tent to house this box. Still later when Solomon built his famous temple in Jerusalem, the box or tabernacle was placed in the Holy of Holies.

R.L. Bruckburger writes, "In the deserts, God lived beneath a tent, in His tabernacle, and often during the night a column of fire stood above that tent among all the others, revealing to every eye that glory of His reassuring and terrible Presence. When His people were settled in the Promised Land, God continued for a long time to be satisfied with a tent, close to the palace of the king and the houses of man. It was only with regret, as it seemed, that He left His tent for the magnificent Temple that Solomon built."\*\*

Ever since Solomon built the Temple to house the tabernacle, people have had the impression that the Church is a building. Yet when

Solomon dedicated his Temple he said in his prayer of dedication, "But will God dwell indeed with man on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain Thee; how much less this house which I have built" (2 Chron. 6:18). How can God live in a building when even the whole universe is not big enough to contain Him? Solomon knew that God cannot be boxed in a house, no matter how magnificent it is. God is everywhere, in the streets, in factories, in schools, on lonely roads, in rooming houses. He cannot be contained or limited to a temple or a church. The whole universe is His Church.

God does not need this building we call a church, but we do. We need places that are specially dedicated to God, where people meet together with the one purpose of praising God and seeking to know His will. Of course, we can worship God on the golf course but we don't. We need a house of worship where everything: architecture, icons, music, vestments, chalices, sermon, incense, candles conspire to help us worship by bringing God into focus. A woman called a church one day and asked, "Will the President be in your church tomorrow?" The answer she received was, "I don't know if the President will be here, but God will." Truly God is always present in His Church. He speaks through the Scripture readings. He offers Himself to us through the Eucharist. It is indeed His house. The ever-present danger, however, is that we will confine God to this house, imprison Him there and feel that the building is the only place where God is present, that it is His only house. It is not.

## THE PEOPLE OF GOD

The God who lived in a tent with His people in the Old Testament, pitched His tent in a Person in the New Testament. This is the literal meaning of the word *eskinose* or *dwelt among us* in John 1:14. "And the Word became flesh and pitched his tent among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld His glory, glory as from the only Son from the Father." The Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, took on a human nature. "God has moved from the Temple of Jerusalem into the human nature of Jesus, as formerly He had moved from the Tabernacle into the Temple of Solomon."\* God now lives not in a Temple but in a human person. The Lord Jesus becomes the living Temple of God.

The same Jesus in turn comes to pitch his tent in us through the great Sacrament of Holy Communion. "He who eats My flesh and drinks

\* Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (New York, NY: Viking-Penguin Press).

\*\* R.L. Bruckburger, *The History of Jesus Christ* (The Viking Press).

\* R.L. Bruckburger, *The History of Jesus Christ* (The Viking Press).

My blood abides in me, and I in him" (John 6:56). Through the Sacrament of Chrismation (Confirmation) we receive within us God the Holy Spirit which prompts St. Paul to say, "Do you not know that you are God's temple, and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" Now God abides in His people. Each one of us becomes a temple, a walking church.

So the Church is not only a building; it is also the people in whom God dwells. The building is not merely the house of God; it is even more so the house of God's people. The people are the Church. (By people we mean clergy and laity together constituting the fullness of the Church.) During the first three centuries of Christianity some Christians even worshipped underground in catacombs because of the persecutions. Yet the Church existed—and even flourished—despite the lack of church buildings; for, you see, the Church is God's people. There was also a period when the early Christians worshipped in private homes. Again the Church was not identified with a specific building; the Church was God's people. If your church building is ever destroyed, this will not mean that your Church will cease to exist. The people are the Church. They will worship in homes or in a hall. The Church is not primarily a building; it is a group of people who have responded to God's call and gather every Sunday to be with Him. The Greek word for Church EKKLESIA means "those who have been called out." A Christian is one who has been called out of the world and belongs to Christ.

In the Old Testament God had chosen the Jews to be His people. They were to be a new community through which God would save the world. He revealed Himself to them that they in turn may reveal Him to the other nations. When the old Israel refused to believe in Jesus as the Promised Messiah, the Church was called by God to be the *new Israel*, the new chosen people, the new saving community that is to spread the *good news* of what God has done in Christ to all people across the face of the earth. We the people became the Church, the tabernacle of God's saving presence in the world. "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). Human beings, not stone and mortar, were to be the symbol of God's presence in the world. God has chosen man himself as His Temple.

## YOU ARE CHRIST'S BODY

Desiring to work among us, God the Son took on a human body like ours. We call this the Incarnation: With and through that body God acted in Christ during the 33 years that He lived in this world. He taught; He healed; He forgave; He offered Himself on the Cross for our salvation; He was resurrected. Then on Ascension Day His body left the earth and was no longer active among us.

If God intended, after the Ascension, to do any more work among us, He must either bring that body back again (as He will do when He comes at the Last Judgment), or else He must use some other body. He has chosen to do the latter. This time it is not a physical body like the one born of the Virgin Mary. It is instead an organism which St. Paul likens to a body when he says, "You are Christ's body." All those Christians who have been baptized, who have received the Holy Spirit, who share in the life of Christ through the Eucharist, make up the Body that is to be the instrument of Christ's work on earth. In other words, Christ lives and works today through all those who make up this new Body in the world, i.e., the Church. We are the Church.

## "WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?"

Jesus asked Peter one day, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Then Jesus said to Peter, "Blessed are you Simon.... You are Peter, and on this rock I will build My Church." What did Jesus mean by *rock*? Did he mean that the Church was to be built on Peter the man? Or did He mean Peter's confession of faith in Jesus? We believe it was both. The Church is founded on Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. It is also founded on Peter and the other apostles as true believers, fully surrendered to Jesus. It is on such believing, surrendered people that God has done His building down through the ages. It is on them that He is building now.

## THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE AND THE PILLARS

St. Paul compared the Church to a structure. The chief cornerstone is Jesus (Eph. 2:20-22). "Other foundation can no man lay than that

which is laid" (1 Cor. 3:10-11). The foundation consists of the apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20). The *living stones* that make up the structure are the believers. The first of these living stones are Peter, Andrew and the other apostles who were first to confess Jesus as the Messiah.

The picture of the Church as a structure whose cornerstone is Christ brings to mind the saying of a Spartan king. He had boasted that no nation in the world had walls like Sparta. But when a visitor came to visit Sparta he saw no walls at all, and asked the Spartan king where the walls were. The king pointed to a group of Spartan soldiers, "These are the walls of Sparta," he said, "and every man of them a brick." In exactly the same manner, every Christian is a living stone built into the structure of the Church.

Jesus says in Revelation, "He who conquers, I will make a pillar in the house of My God." In the old days it was customary when an eminent leader had finished his years of service that the highest honor to be paid him was to have a pillar erected in one of the pagan temples. Sometimes those pillars, such as the Porch of the Maidens on the Acropolis in Athens, were actually sculptures of the persons being honored. They were literally holding up the roof and walls of the temple. Each one of us is called to be such a living pillar in the Church of Christ doing our share to hold up the canopy of God's witness in the world.

### BODY OF CHRIST

We have said that the Church is more than a building; it is the people of God. As the people of God we make up the Body of Christ that is active in the world today. Through Holy Baptism we are grafted into the Body of Christ and made members of it. Through Holy Communion we receive the Body and Blood of Jesus within us. Thus the Body of Christ is constituted. "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor. 10:17). As Christ was present in the world in His physical body for thirty-three years, so today He continues to be present in us, the members of His mystical body, in whom He dwells. As God humbled Himself by taking the form of a human being and concealing His divinity under the figure of a suffering and crucified Servant, so now He humbles Himself by allowing this body of believers, this weak and imperfect body, which is the Church, to represent Him on earth, to speak, to judge, and to prophesy in His name.

All this means that Christ is dependent on the Church. As St. Chrysostom said, "So great is Christ's love for the Church that He, as it were, regards Himself as incomplete, unless He has the Church united to Him as a body." This means that we are the instruments through which Christ must work in the world today. As Annie Johnson Flint wrote:

*He has no hands but our hands  
To do His work today,  
He has no feet but our feet  
To lead men on His way.  
He has no voice but our voice  
To tell men how He died,  
He has no help but our help  
To lead men to His side.*

### BE THE CHURCH

It is clear, then, that the Church is more than a building, it is people; believing people; baptized people; chrismated people; surrendered people; people in whom Christ dwells; people who listen to and obey the voice of God; people who have truly committed their lives to Him as Lord; people who have a personal praying relationship to Him, who listen to and obey His voice.

As Bishop Dmitri writes, the Church is "the company of those who have put on Christ by being baptized in Him, sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit in *Chrismation*, forgiven of their sins in *Confession*, and nurtured by the Heavenly Food in the *Holy Mystery* of His *Body* and *Blood*.... The Church is a divinely instituted unity of people, united by the Orthodox Faith, the law of God, the hierarchy, and the Holy Mysteries. It is the Mystical Body of Christ."<sup>\*</sup>

Someone said, "The holiest moment of the Church service is the moment when the Church—God's people—strengthened by preaching and sacrament—go out the church door into the world *to be the Church*. We don't merely go to church; we are the Church.

Recently a student was telling his pastor about a conversation he had with a fellow student in the dormitory. The fellow student did not believe in God. The student said to the pastor, "How can I get this fellow

<sup>\*</sup> Bishop Dmitri, *Orthodox Christian Teaching* (Syosset, NY: Dept. of Christian Education, Orthodox Church in America, 1980).

to church, so he can get some help?" The pastor replied, "Don't try to get him to come to church. He'll probably refuse anyway. *You must be the Church to him where you are...* in the wash room, in the locker room, in the class, in the dorm, on the playing field. You are the Church to that fellow student."

The reason we come to church every Sunday is to listen to Christ, to praise Him, to receive Him within us that we may go out into the world and be the Church the rest of the week.

*O when will you start being the church;  
Stop making the church a place to go to,  
And make it something to be.\**

## A LIFE-GIVING STREAM

The Prophet Ezekiel (Chapter 47:1-2) sees a vision of the river of life. It flows from the altar of the Temple into the world. As the stream flows on, it gets deeper and deeper. As a result, the stale waters of the dead sea are revived and the sea swarms with fishes. Wherever the stream flows, there is life as it makes trees and plants grow. What is this but a picture of the refreshment, the renewal and the life that Christ wishes to bring to the world through His Church, i.e., through us His people, the members of His Body, His saving community.

## CHRIST WITH US

A person who visited West Germany following the Second World War said that in visiting the bombed-out cities he noticed that people were coming out of the basements of wrecked buildings, gathering bricks and building first not factories to restore the economy, but churches. When asked why, the reply he received was, "We build churches first because it is here that our people will get the spirit to rebuild."

The Church is a source of strength because it is none other than Christ prolonging Himself through space and time; Christ continuing to be present with us; Christ continuing to save us; Christ continuing to fill us with the fullness of God's life.

There is a legend about Zacchaeus the dishonest tax collector whom Jesus called down from a sycamore tree one day to have dinner with

him. Zacchaeus, as you recall, was converted as a result of this personal encounter with the Master. In later years, the legend says, Zacchaeus used to rise early every morning, carry a bucket of water to this tree and carefully water its roots. On one occasion his wife followed him and when asked the reason for this strange concern over an old sycamore tree, Zacchaeus replied, "This is where I found Christ." The Church is where we find Christ. There we are baptized. There we hear His Word. There He comes to dwell in our hearts when we receive Him in the Holy Eucharist. This is why we love the Church. This is why we support it. This is why we work for it. This is why we go out into the world every Sunday to be the Church wherever we are.

## SUMMARY

1. The Church is the Body of Christ in the world today. Through this Body, Christ continues to be present and active in the world.
2. In order to be genuine, the Church must have an unbroken historical connection with the early Apostolic Church that was founded by Jesus.
3. The Orthodox Church, one, holy, catholic and apostolic, is the true Church of God on earth. It has kept the fullness of Christ's truth, the complete deposit of faith, in continuity with the Church of the apostles.
4. The decisions of an Ecumenical Council, formulated by the bishops under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and accepted by the clergy and the laity, constitute the highest authority of the Orthodox Church.
5. The Church is not to be identified with a building but with God's people in whom God dwells and through whom He is active in the world.
6. The Body of Christ is constituted through Holy Baptism, Chrismation and the Eucharist. Through Holy Baptism we are grafted into the Body as members; through Chrismation we are sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit; through the Eucharist Christ comes to dwell in us making us truly members of His Body, the Church. In the words of St. John Chrysostom, "Christ is the Head of the Body, but of what use is the Head without hands, without eyes, without legs, without ears?"

\* J. Elliott Corbett, *The People on Main Street* (John Knox Press)

7. As members of Christ's Body, as God's people, we are called to be the Church wherever we are. We leave the liturgy and go out into the world to be the Church.

Fr. Lev Gillet, a French Orthodox monk, who wrote many books on Orthodoxy, described the Orthodox Church as follows:

*Equally far removed both from authoritarianism and individualism, the Orthodox Church is a Church both of tradition and freedom. She is above all a Church of love...a strange Church so poor and so weak...a Church of contrasts at the same time so traditional and so free, so archaic and so alive, so ritualistic and so personally mystical, a Church where the pearl of great price is so preciousy preserved, sometimes under a layer of dust, a Church which has often been unable to act but which can sing out the joy of Easter like no other....\**

## WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT THE NICENE CREED

The word *creed* is derived from the Latin word *credo* meaning, "I believe." What you believe and base your life on is your creed. And everyone—even the atheist—has a creed, because everyone bases his life on something. Sartre, for example, an atheist and an existentialist, had his creed. He expressed it this way, "Life is absurd. Love is impossible."

The Old Testament creed was the Shema, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one..." (Deut. 6:4).

Orthodox Christians also have a creed. Some of the earliest Christian creeds are found in the Bible. For example, John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have life everlasting." This is a creed. Another very early Christian creed that we find several times in the Scriptures is the simple declaration, "Jesus Christ is Lord" (1 Cor. 12:3).

## A SYMBOL OR PASSWORD

The Christian creed is also called a symbol. The term *symbol* comes from a word that meant a watchword or a password in a military camp. Thus for the early Christian the creed or symbol was a password which identified him as a true Christian.

The creed has also been defined in terms of a map. A. Leonard Griffith writes, "Creeds are to religion what maps are to geography. The early explorers who landed on the shores of North America drew maps of the regions through which they traveled.... So through the centuries men have experienced something of God...and of what they have experienced they have formulated creeds, religious maps for the guidance of future generations."\*

Others have compared the Christian creed to the Pledge of Allegiance. It's sort of a summary of what we believe, and when we recite it, it's like making our pledge of allegiance to God.

A password, a map, a summary of our faith, a pledge of allegiance—all of these tell us something of what the creed is. Now we come to the question:

\* Sermon given by Fr. Lev Gillet at the anniversary service for the death of Mgr. Irenee Winnaert (March 1970) in Vincent Boume *La Quete de Verite & Irene Winnaert* (Geneva 1970).

A. Leonard Griffith, *What is a Christian?* (Abingdon Press, 1962).