

# **The Church of Christ: The Concept of the Church of Christ on Earth**

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In the literal meaning of the word, the Church is the "assembly," in Greek, ekklesia, from ekkaleo, meaning "to gather." In this meaning it was used in the Old Testament also the Hebrew (kahal). In the New Testament, this name has an incomparably deeper and more mystical meaning which is difficult to embrace in a short verbal formula. The character of the Church of Christ is best explained by the Biblical images to which the Church is likened.

The New Testament Church is the new planting of God, the garden of God, the vineyard of God. The Lord Jesus Christ, by His earthly life, His death on the Cross and His Resurrection, introduced into humanity new grace-giving powers, a new life which is capable of great fruitfulness. These powers we have in the Holy Church which is His Body.

The Sacred Scripture is rich in expressive images of the Church. Here are the chief of them:

- a) The image of the grapevine and its branches (John 15:1-8). 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.
- b) The image of the shepherd and the flock (John 10:1-16). 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.
- c) The image of the head and the body (Eph. 1:22-23, and other places). 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.
- d) The image of a building under construction (Eph. 2:19-22). 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.

e) The image of a house or 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 Tim. 3:15). Christ as a Son over His own house, Whose house are we (Heb 3:6).

To this same thing refer likewise other images from the Gospel: the fishing net, the field which has been sown, the vineyard of God.

In the Fathers of the Church one often finds a comparison of the Church in the world with a ship on the sea.

The Apostle Paul, comparing the life of the Church of Christ with a marriage, or with the relationship between man and wife, concludes his thoughts with these words: This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:32). The life of the Church in its essence is mystical; the course of its life cannot be entirely included in any "history." The Church is completely distinct from any kind whatever of organized society on earth.

### **The Beginning of the Church's Existence, Its Growth, and Its Purpose**

The Church of Christ received its existence with the coming to earth of the Son of God, when the fulness of the time was come (Gal. 4:4), and with His bringing of salvation to the world.

The beginning of its existence in its complete form and significance, with the fulness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, was the day of Pentecost, after the Ascension of the Lord. On this day, after the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, in Jerusalem there were baptized about three thousand men. And, further, the Lord each day added those being saved to the Church. From this moment, the territory of the city of Jerusalem, then of Palestine, then of the whole Roman Empire, and even the lands beyond its boundaries, began to be covered with Christian communities or churches. The name "church" which belongs to every Christian community, even of a single house or family, indicates the unity of this part with the whole, with the body of the whole Church of Christ.

Being "the body of Christ," the Church increaseth with the increase of God (Col. 2:19). Comparing the Church with a building, the Apostle teaches that its building is not completed, it continues: All the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord (Eph. 2:21). This growth is not only in the sense of the visible, quantitative increase of the Church on earth; in even greater degree, this is a spiritual growth, the perfection of the saints, the filling up of the heavenly-earthly world through sanctity. Through the Church is accomplished the dispensation of the fulness of times foreordained by the Father, so that He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth (Eph. 1:10).

In the sense of its earthly growth, the Church develops in the spheres of Divine services and the canons; it is made richer by Patristic literature; it grows in the outward forms which are necessary for its earthly conditions of existence.

The Church is our spiritual Home. As with one's own home—and even more than that—a Christian's thoughts and actions are closely bound up with the Church. In it he must, as long as he lives on earth, work out his salvation, and make use of the grace-given means of sanctification given him by it. It prepares its children for the heavenly homeland.

As to how, by the grace of God, spiritual rebirth and spiritual growth occur in a man, in what sequence these usually occur, what hindrances must be overcome by him on the way of salvation, how he must combine his own indispensable labors with the grace-given help of God—special branches of theological and spiritual learning are devoted to all these matters. These are called moral theology and ascetic theology.

Dogmatic Theology proper limits the subject of the Church to an examination of the grace-given conditions and the mystical, grace-given means furnished in the Church for the attainment of the aim of salvation in Christ.

### **The Head of the Church**

The Saviour, in giving authority to the Apostles before His Ascension, told them very clearly that He Himself would not cease to be the invisible Shepherd and Pilot of the Church. I am with you always, even unto the end of the world (every day constantly and inseparably; Matt. 28:20). The Saviour taught that He, as the Good Shepherd, had to bring in also those sheep who were not of this fold, so that there might be one flock and One Shepherd (John 10:16). All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations (Matt. 28:18-19). In all these words there is contained the idea that the highest Shepherd of the Church is Christ Himself. We must be aware of this so as not to forget the close bond and the inward unity of the Church on earth with the Heavenly Church.

The Lord Jesus Christ is also the Founder of the Church: I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18).

Christ is also the Foundation of the Church, its cornerstone: Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ (I Cor. 3:11).

He also is its Head. God the Father gave Him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all (Eph. 1:22-23). The Head is Christ, from Whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of Itself in love (Eph. 4:16). As all the members of our body comprise a full and living organism which depends upon its head, so also the Church is a spiritual organism in which there is no place where the powers of Christ do not act. It is "full of Christ" (Bishop Theophan the Recluse).

Christ is the Good Shepherd of His flock, the Church. We have the great Shepherd of the sheep, according to the Apostle Paul (Heb. 13:20). The Lord Jesus Christ is the Chief of Shepherds. Being examples to the flock, the Apostle Peter entreats those who have been placed as shepherds in the Church, as their co-pastor (Greek syn-presbyteros), when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away (I Peter 5:1-4).

Christ Himself is the invisible Chief Bishop of the Church. The Hieromartyr Ignatius the God-bearer, an Apostolic Father, calls the Lord the "Invisible Bishop" (Greek: episkopos aoratos). Christ is the eternal High-Priest of His Church, as the Apostle Paul explains in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The Old Testament Chief Priests were many, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death. But this one, because He continueth forever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them (Heb. 7:23-25).

He is, according to the Apocalypse of St. John the Theologian, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth and no man openeth (Apoc. 3:7).

The truth that Christ Himself is the Head of the Church has always in lively fashion run through, and continues to run through, the self-awareness of the Church. In our daily prayers also we read, "O Jesus, Good Shepherd of Thy sheep" (The Prayer of St. Antioch in the Prayers Before Sleep of the Orthodox Prayer Book).

Chrysostom teaches in his Homilies on the Epistle to the Ephesians as follows: "In Christ, in the flesh, God placed a single head for everyone, for angels and men; that is, He gave one principle both to angels and men: to the one, Christ according to the flesh, and to the other, God the Word. Just as if someone should say about a house, that one part of it is rotten and the other part strong, and he should restore the house, that is, make it stronger, placing a stronger foundation under it; so also here, He has brought all under a single head. Only then is union possible; only then will there be that perfect bond, when everything, having a certain indispensable bond with what is above, will be brought under a single Head" (Works of St. Chrysostom in Russian, v. 11, p. 14).

The Orthodox Church of Christ refuses to recognize yet another head of the Church in the form of a "Vicar of Christ on earth," a title given in the Roman Catholic Church to the Bishop of Rome. Such a title does not correspond either to the word of God or to the universal Church consciousness and tradition; it tears away the Church on earth from immediate unity with the heavenly Church. A vicar is assigned during the absence of the one replaced, but Christ is invisibly present in His Church always. The rejection by the ancient Church of the view of the Bishop of Rome as the Head of the Church and Vicar of Christ upon earth is expressed in the writings of those who were active in the Ecumenical Councils.

The Second Ecumenical Council of bishops, after the completion of their activities, wrote an epistle to Pope Damasus and other bishops of the Roman Church which ended thus: "When in this way the teaching of Faith is in agreement, and Christian love is established in us, we will cease to speak the words which were condemned by the Apostle: I am of Paul, I am of Apollo, I am of Cephas. And when we will all be manifest as of Christ, since Christ is not divided in us, then by God's mercy we will preserve the Body of Christ undivided, and will boldly stand before the throne of the Lord."

The leading personality of the Third Ecumenical Council, St Cyril of Alexandria, in his "Epistle on the Holy Symbol," which is included in the Acts of this Council, writes: "The most holy Fathers ... who once gathered in Nicaea, composed the venerable Ecumenical Symbol (Creed). With them Christ Himself presided, for He said, Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them (Matt 18:20). For how can there be any doubt that Christ presided at this Holy and Ecumenical Council? Because there a certain basis and a firm, unvanquishable foundation was laid, and even extended to the whole universe, that is, this holy and irreproachable confession. If it is thus, then can Christ be absent, when He is the Foundation, according to the words of the most wise Paul, Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 3:11).

Blessed Theodoret, in a homily which was also placed in the Acts of the Third Ecumenical Council, addressing the heretics, the followers of Nestorius, says: "Christ is a stone of stumbling and a scandal for unbelievers, but does not put the believers to shame; a precious stone and a foundation, according to the word of Isaiah when he said that Christ is the stone which the builders rejected and which has become the cornerstone. Christ is the foundation of the Church. Christ is the stone which was taken out not with

hands, and was changed into a great mountain and covered the universe, according to the prophecy of Daniel; it is for Him, with Him, and by the power of Him that we battle, and for Whose sake we are far removed from the reigning city, but are not excluded from the Kingdom of Heaven; for we have a city on high, Jerusalem, whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11:10), as the Apostle Paul says."

Concerning the rock upon which the Lord promised the Apostle Peter to found His Church. St Juvenal, Patriarch of Jerusalem, in his epistle to the clergy of Palestine after the Fourth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon writes: "When the chief and first of the Apostles Peter said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God, the Lord replied, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it (Matt. 16:17-18). On this confession the Church of God is made firm, and this Faith, given to us by the holy Apostles, the Church has kept and will keep to the end of the world."

### **The Close Bond Between the Church of Christ on Earth and the Church of the Saints in Heaven**

The Apostle instructs those who have come to believe in Christ and have been joined to the Church as follows: Ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company any of angels, company I to the general assembly and church of the first born, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant (Heb. 12:22-24). We are not separated from our dead brothers in the faith by the impassable abyss of death: they are close to us in God, for all live unto Him (Luke 20:38).

The Church hymns this relationship in the kontakion of the feast of the Ascension of the Lord. "Having accomplished for us Thy mission and united things on earth with things in heaven, Thou didst ascend into glory, O Christ our God, being nowhere separated from those who love Thee, but remaining ever present with us and calling: I am with you and no one is against you."

Of course, there is a distinction between the Church of Christ on earth and the Church of the saints in heaven: the members of the earthly Church are not yet members of the heavenly Church.

In this connection the "Epistle of the Eastern Patriarchs" (17th century), in reply to the teaching of the Calvinists concerning the one invisible Church, thus formulates the Orthodox teaching about the Church: "We believe, as we have been instructed to believe, in what is called, and what in actual fact is, the Holy, Catholic, Apostolic Church, which embraces all those, whoever and wherever they might be, who believe in Christ, who being now on their earthly pilgrimage have not yet come to dwell in the heavenly homeland. But we do not in the least confuse the Church in pilgrimage with the Church that has reached the homeland, just because, as certain of the heretics think, one and the other both exist, that they both comprise as it were two flocks of the single Chief Shepherd, God, and are sanctified by the one Holy Spirit Such a confusion of them is out of place and impossible, inasmuch as one is battling and is still on the way, while the other is already celebrating its victory and has reached the Fatherland and has received the, reward, something which will follow also for the whole Ecumenical Church."

And in actuality, the earth and the heavenly world are two separate forms of existence: there in heaven is bodilessness, here on earth are bodily life and physical death, there, those who have attained, here, those seeking to attain; here, faith, there, seeing the Lord face to face; here, hope, there, fulfillment. Nonetheless, one cannot represent the existence of these two regions, the heavenly and the earthly, as completely separate. If we do not reach as far as the saints in heaven, the saints do reach as far as us. As

one who has studied the whole of a science has command also over its elementary parts, just as a general who has entered into a country has command also over its borderlands; so those who have reached heaven have in their command what they have gone through, and they do not cease to be participants in the life of the militant Church on earth.

The holy Apostles, departing from this world, put off the earthly body, but have not put off the Church body. They not only were, but they also remain the foundations of the Church. The Church is built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20). Being in heaven, they continue to be in communion with believers on earth.

Such an understanding was present in ancient Patristic thought, both of East and West Here are the words of Chrysostom: "Again, the memorial of the martyrs, and again a feast day and a spiritual solemnity. They suffered, and we rejoice; they struggled, and we leap for joy; their crown is the glory of all, or rather, the glory of the whole Church. How can this be? You will say. The martyrs are our parts and members. But, whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; and one member be honored, all the member's rejoice with it (I Cor. 12:26). The head is crowned, and the rest of the body rejoices. One becomes a victor in the Olympic games, and the whole people rejoices and receives him with great glory. If at the Olympic games those who do not in the least participate in the labors receive such satisfaction, all the more can this be with regard to the strugglers of piety. We are the feet, and the martyrs are the head, but the head cannot say to the feet, I have no need of you (I Cor. 12:21). The members are glorified, but the preeminence of glory does not estrange them from the bond with the other parts: for then especially are they glorious when they are not estranged from the bond with them." "If their Master is not ashamed to be our Head, then all the more, they are not ashamed to be our members; for in them is expressed love, and love usually joins and binds things which are separate, despite their difference in dignity" (St John Chrysostom, "Eulogy for the Holy Martyr Romanus").

"For the souls of the pious dead," says Blessed Augustine, "do not depart from the Church, which is the Kingdom of Christ. This is why, on the altar of the Lord, their memorial is performed in the offering of the Body of Christ ... Why should this be done if not because the faithful even after death remain members of it (the Church)?"

The ever-memorable Russian Pastor, St John of Kronstadt, in his "Thoughts Concerning the Church" writes: "Acknowledge that all the saints are our elder brothers in the one House of the Heavenly Father, who have departed from earth to heaven, and they are always with us in God, and they constantly teach us and guide us to eternal life by means of the church services, Mysteries, rites, instructions, and church decrees, which they have composed—as for example, those concerning the fasts and feasts—, so to speak, they serve together with us, they sing, they speak, they instruct, they help us in various temptations and sorrows. And call upon them as living with you under a single roof; glorify them, thank them, converse with them as with living people; and you will believe in the Church" (St. John of Kronstadt, "What Does It Mean To Believe In The Church? Thoughts About the Church and the Orthodox Divine Services").

The Church in its prayers to the apostles and hierarchs calls them her pillars, upon which even now the Church is established. "Thou art a pillar of the Church"; "ye are pillars of the Church"; "Thou art a good shepherd and fervent teacher, O hierarch"; "ye are the eyes of the Church of Christ"; "ye are the stars of the Church" (from various church services). In harmony with the consciousness of the Church, the saints, going to heaven, comprise, as it were, the firmament of the Church. "Ye do ever illumine the precious firmament of the Church like magnificent stars, and ye shine upon the faithful, O divine Martyrs, warriors of Christ" (from the Common Service to Martyrs). "Like brightly shining stars ye have mentally shone

forth upon the firmament of the Church, and ye do illumine the whole creation" (from the Service to Hieromartyrs).

There is a foundation for such appeals to the saints in the word of God itself. In the Apocalypse of St. John the Theologian we read: Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God (Apoc. 3:12). Thus the saints are pillars of the Church not only in the past, but in all times as well.

In this bond of the Church with the saints, and likewise in the Headship of the Church by the Lord Himself, may be seen one of the mystical sides of the Church. "By Thy Cross, O Christ, there is a single flock of angels and men; and in the one assembly heaven and earth rejoice, crying out, O Lord, glory to Thee" (Octoechos, Tone 1, Aposticha of Wednesday Matins).

The ninth article of the Symbol of Faith indicates the four basic signs of the Church: "We believe in One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church," These attributes are called essential, that is, those without which the Church would not be the Church.

### **The Unity of the Church**

In the Greek text the word "in One," is expressed as a numeral (en mian). Thus the Symbol of Faith confesses that the Church is one: a) it is one as viewed from within itself, not divided, b) it is one as viewed from without, that is, not having any other beside itself. Its unity consists not in the joining together of what is different in nature, but in inward agreement and unanimity. There is one body and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Eph. 4:4-6).

Depicting the Church in parables, the Saviour speaks of one flock, of one sheepfold, of one grapevine, of one foundation stone of the Church. He gave a single teaching, a single baptism, and a single communion. The unity of the faithful in Christ comprised the subject of His High-Priestly Prayer before His sufferings on the Cross; the Lord prayed that they all may be one (John 17:21).

The Church is one not only inwardly, but also outwardly. Outwardly its unity is manifested in the harmonious confession of faith, in the oneness of Divine services and Mysteries, in the oneness of the grace-giving hierarchy, which comes in succession from the Apostles, in the oneness of canonical order. The Church on earth has a visible side and an invisible side. The invisible side is: that its Head is Christ; that it is animated by the Holy Spirit; that in it is performed the inward mystical life in sanctity of the more perfect of its members. However, the Church, by the nature of its members, is visible, since it is composed of men in the body; it has a visible hierarchy; it performs prayers and sacred actions visibly; it confesses openly, by means of words, the faith of Christ.

The Church does not lose its unity because side by side with the Church there exist Christian societies which do not belong to it. These societies are not in the Church, they are outside of it.

The unity of the Church is not violated because of temporary divisions of a nondogmatic nature. Differences between Churches arise frequently out of insufficient or incorrect information. Also, sometimes a temporary breaking of communion is caused by the personal errors of individual hierarchs who stand at the head of one or another local Church, or it is caused by their violation of the canons of the Church, or by the violation of the submission of one territorial ecclesiastical group to another in accordance with anciently established tradition. Moreover, life shows us the possibility of disturbances within a local Church which hinder the normal communion of other Churches with the given local Church until the outward manifestation and triumph of the defenders of authentic Orthodox truth. Finally, the bond between Churches can sometimes be violated for a long time by political conditions, as has often

happened in history. In such cases, the division touches only outward relations, but does not touch or violate inward spiritual unity.

The truth of the One Church is defined by the Orthodoxy of its members, and not by their quantity at one or another moment. St. Gregory the Theologian wrote concerning the Orthodox Church of Constantinople before the Second Ecumenical Council as follows:

"This field was once small and poor ... This was not even a field at all. Perhaps it was not worth granaries or barns or scythes. Upon it there were no stacks or sheaves, but perhaps only small and unripe grass which grows on the housetops, with which the reaper filleth not his hand, which do not call upon themselves the blessing of those who pass by (Ps. 128:6-8). Such was our field, our harvest? Although it is great, fat, and abundant before Him Who sees what is hidden ... still, it is not known among the people, it is not united in one place, but is gathered little by little as the summer fruits, as the grape gleanings of the vintage; there is no cluster to eat (Micah 7:1). Such was our previous poverty and grief" (Farewell Sermon of St. Gregory the Theologian to the Fathers of the Second Ecumenical Council).

"And where are those," says St. Gregory in another Homily, "who reproach us for our poverty and are proud of their wealth? They consider great numbers of people to be a sign of the Church, and despise the small flock. They measure the Divinity (the Saint has in mind here the Arians, who taught that the Son of God was less than the Father) and they weigh people. They place a high value on grains of sand (that is, the masses) and belittle the luminaries. They gather into their treasure-house simple stones, and disdain pearls" (St. Gregory the Theologian, Homily 33, Against the Arians).

In the prayers of the Church are contained petitions for the ceasing of possible disagreements among the Churches: "Cause discords to cease in the Church; quickly destroy by the might of Thy Holy Spirit all uprisings of heresies" (Eucharistic Prayer at the Liturgy of St. Basil the Great). "We glorify Thee ... Thou one rule in Trinity, and beg for forgiveness of sins, peace for the world, and concord for the Church ... Grant peace and unity to Thy Church, O Thou Who lovest mankind!" (Sunday Canon of Nocturne, Tone 8, Canticle 9).

### **The Sanctity of the Church**

The Lord Jesus Christ performed the work of His earthly ministry and death on the Cross; Christ loved the Church... 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). The Church is holy through its Head, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is holy, further, through the presence in it of the Holy Spirit and His grace-giving gifts, communicated in the Mysteries and other sacred rites of the Church. It is also holy through its tie with the Heavenly Church.

The very body of the Church is holy: If the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root be holy, so are the branches (Rom. 11: 16). Those who believe in Christ are "temples of God, temples of the Holy Spirit" (I Cor. 3:16; 6:19). In the true Church there have always been and there always are people of the highest spiritual purity and with special gifts of grace—martyrs, virgins, ascetics, holy monks and nuns, hierarchs, righteous ones, blessed ones. The Church has an uncounted choir of departed ones of all times and peoples. It has manifestations of the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit, both visible and hidden from the eyes of the world.

The Church is holy by its calling, or its purpose. It is holy also by its fruits: Ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life (Rom. 6:22), as the Apostle Paul instructs us.

The Church is holy likewise through its pure, infallible teaching of faith: The Church of the living God is, according to the word of God, the pillar and ground of the truth (I Tim. 3:15). The Patriarchs of the Eastern Churches, concerning the infallibility of the Church in its teaching, express themselves thus: "In saying that the teaching of the Church is infallible, we do not affirm anything else than this, that it is unchanging, that it is the same as was given to it in the beginning as the teaching of God" (Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarch, 1848, par. 12).

The sanctity of the Church is not darkened by the intrusion of the world into the Church, or by the sinfulness of men. Everything sinful and worldly which intrudes into the Church's sphere remains foreign to it and is destined to be sifted out and destroyed, like weed seeds at sowing time. The opinion that the Church consists only of righteous and holy people without sin does not agree with the direct teaching of Christ and His Apostles. The Saviour compares His Church with a field on which the wheat grows together with the tares, and again, with a net which draws out of the water both good fish and bad. In the Church there are both good servants and bad ones (Matt 18:23-35), wise virgins and foolish (Matt. 25:1-13). "We believe," states the Encyclical of the Eastern Patriarchs, "that the members of the Catholic Church are all the faithful, and only the faithful, that is, those who undoubtingly confess the pure faith in the Saviour Christ (the faith which we have received from Christ Himself, from the Apostles, and from the Holy Ecumenical Councils), even though certain of them might have submitted to various sins ... The Church judges them, calls them to repentance, and leads them on the path of the saving commandments. And therefore despite the fact that they are subject to sins, they remain and are acknowledged as members of the Catholic Church as long as they do not become apostates and as long as they hold to the Catholic and Orthodox Faith."

But there is a boundary, which if sinners go past it, they, like dead members, are cut off from the body of the Church, either by a visible act of the Church authority or by the invisible act of God's judgment. Thus, those do not belong to the Church who are atheists or apostates from the Christian faith, those who are sinners characterized by a conscious stubbornness and lack of repentance for their sins, as it says in the Catechism (ninth article). Also among those who do not belong to the Church are heretics who have corrupted the fundamental dogmas of the faith, schismatics who out of self-will have separated themselves from the Church (the 33rd Canon of the Council of Laodicea forbids prayer with schismatics). St Basil the Great explains: "The ancients distinguished between heresy, schism, and an arbitrary assembly. They called heretics those who have completely cut themselves off and have become foreigners in the faith itself; they called schismatics\* those who have separated themselves in their opinions about certain ecclesiastical subjects and in questions which allow of treatment and healing, and they called arbitrary assemblies those gatherings composed of disobedient priests or bishops and uninstructed people."

The sanctity of the Church is irreconcilable with false teachings and heresies. Therefore the Church strictly guards the purity of the truth and herself excludes heretics from her midst.

### **The Catholicity of the Church**

In the Greek text of the Nicæan Constantinopolitan Symbol of Faith (the Creed), the Church is called "catholic" (in the Slavonic translation, *sobornaya*). What is the significance of this Greek word? The word *catholikos* in ancient Greek, pre-Christian literature is encountered very rarely. However, the Christian Church from antiquity chose this word to signify one of the principle attributes of the Church, namely, to express its universal character. Even though it had at its disposal such words as *cosmos* (the world), or *oikoumene* (the inhabited earth), evidently these latter words were insufficient to express a

certain new concept which is present only to the Christian consciousness. In the ancient Symbols of Faith, wherever the word " Church" appears, it is unfailingly with the definition "catholic." Thus, in the Jerusalem Symbol of Faith we read. "And in one, holy, catholic Church"; in the Symbol of Rome: "In the holy, catholic Church, the communion of the Saints"; etc. In ancient Christian literature, this term is encountered several times in St. Ignatius the God-bearer, an Apostolic Father, for example when he says, "Where Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic Church." This term is constantly to be found in the Acts of all the Ecumenical Councils. In the direct translation of the word, it signifies the highest degree of all-embracingness, wholeness, fullness (being derived from cath ola, meaning "throughout the whole"). Side by side with this term, there was also used with the meaning of "universal," the word oikoumenikos. These two terms were not mixed. The Ecumenical Councils received the title Oikoumenike Synodos, from oikoumenikos, meaning from all the inhabited earth—in actual fact, the land which belonged to Greco-Roman civilization.

The Church is catholic. This corresponds to the Apostolic words, the fullness of Him that filleth all in all (Eph. 1:23). This concept indicates that the whole human race is called to salvation, and therefore all men are intended to be members of the Church of Christ, even though not all do belong to her in fact. The Longer Orthodox Catechism, answering the question, "Why is the Church called catholic, or which is the same thing, universal?" replies: "Because she is not limited to any place, nor time, nor people, but contains true believers of all places, times and peoples" (Eastern Orthodox Books ed., p. 50). The Church is not limited by place. It embraces in itself all people who believe in the Orthodox way, wherever they might live on the earth. On the other hand it is essential to have in mind that the Church was catholic even when it was composed of a limited number of communities, and also when, on the day of Pentecost, its bounds were not extended beyond the upper room of Zion and Jerusalem. The Church is not limited by time: it is foreordained to bring people to faith "unto the end of the world." I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world (Matt. 28:20). The Spirit, the Comforter, will abide with you forever (John 14:16). The Mystery of the Eucharist will be performed until the Lord comes again to earth (I Cor. 11:26).

The Church is not bound up with any conditions of civil order which it would consider indispensable for itself, nor with any definite language or people.

### **The Apostolic Church**

The Church is called "Apostolic" because the Apostles placed the historical beginning of the Church. They spread Christianity to the ends of the earth and almost all of them sealed their preaching with a martyr's death. The seeds of Christianity were sown in the world by their word and watered with their blood. The unquenched flame of faith in the world they lit by the power of their personal faith. The Apostles preserved and transmitted to the Church the Christian teaching of faith and life in the form in which they had received it from their Master and Lord. Giving in themselves the example of the fulfillment of the commandments of the Gospel, they handed down to the faithful the teaching of Christ by word of mouth and in the Sacred Scriptures so that it might be preserved, confessed, and lived. The Apostles established, according to the commandment of the Lord, the Church's sacred rites. They placed the beginning of the performance of the Holy Mysteries of the Body and Blood of Christ, of baptism, and of ordination.

The Apostles established in the Church the grace-given succession of the episcopate, and through it the succession of the whole grace-given ministry of the church hierarchy, which is called to be stewards of the Mysteries of God, in accordance with I Cor. 4:1.

The Apostles established the beginning of the canonical structure of the Church's life, being concerned that everything should be done decently and in order; an example of this is given in the fourteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, which contains directions for the assemblies where church services are celebrated.

Everything we have said here concerns the historical aspect. But besides this there is another, inward aspect which gives to the Church an Apostolic quality. The Apostles were not only historically in the Church of Christ, they remain in it and are in it now. They were in the earthly Church, and they are now in the Heavenly Church, continuing to be in communion with believers on earth. Being the historical nucleus of the Church, they continue to be the spiritually living, although invisible, nucleus of the Church, both now and forever, in its constant existence. The Apostle John the Theologian writes: ... Declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ (I John 1:3). These words have for us the same force as they had for the contemporaries of the Apostle: they contain an exhortation to us to be in communion with the ranks of Apostles, for the nearness of the Apostles to the Holy Trinity is greater than ours.

Thus, both for reasons of an historical character and for reasons of an inward character, the Apostles are the foundations of the Church. Therefore it is said of the Church: It is built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20). The naming of the Church as "apostolic" indicates that it is established not on a single Apostle (as the Roman Church later taught), but upon all twelve; otherwise it would have to bear the name of Peter, or John, or some other. The Church as it were ahead of time warned us against thinking according to a "fleshly" principle (I Cor. 3:4): "I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas." In the Apocalypse, concerning the city coming down from heaven it is said: And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb (Apoc. 21:14).

The attributes of the Church indicated in the Symbol of Faith "one, holy, catholic and apostolic," refer to the militant Church. However, they receive their full significance with the awareness of the oneness of this Church with the Heavenly Church in the one Body of Christ: the Church is one, with a unity that is both heavenly and earthly; it is holy with a heavenly-earthly holiness; it is catholic and apostolic by its unbroken tie with the Apostles and all the saints.

The Orthodox teaching of the Church, which in itself is quite clear and rests upon Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, is to be contrasted with another concept which is widespread in the contemporary Protestant world and has penetrated even into Orthodox circles. According to this different concept, all the various existing Christian organizations, the so-called "confessions" and "sects," even though they are separated from each other, still comprise a single "invisible Church," inasmuch as each of them confesses Christ as Son of God and accepts His Gospel. The dissemination of such a view is aided by the fact that side by side with the Orthodox Church there exists outside of her a number of Christians that exceeds by several times the number of members of the Orthodox Church. Often we can observe in this Christian world outside the Church a religious fervor and faith, a worthy moral life, a conviction—all the way to fanaticism—of one's correctness, an organization and a broad charitable activity. What is the relation of all of them to the Church of Christ?

Of course, there is no reason to view these confessions and sects as on the same level with non-Christian religions. One cannot deny that the reading of the word of God has a beneficial influence upon everyone who seeks in it instruction and strengthening of faith, and that devout reflection on God the Creator, the Provider and Saviour, has an elevating power there among Protestants also. We cannot say that their prayers are totally fruitless if they come from a pure heart, for in every nation be that feareth Him... is

accepted with Him (Acts 10:35). The Omnipresent Good Provider God is over them, and they are not deprived of God's mercies. They help to restrain moral looseness, vices, and crimes; and they oppose the spread of atheism.

But all this does not give us grounds to consider them as belonging to the Church. Already the fact that one part of this broad Christian world outside the Church, namely the whole of Protestantism, denies the bond with the heavenly Church, that is, the veneration in prayer of the Mother of God and the saints, and likewise prayer for the dead, indicates that they themselves have destroyed the bond with the one Body of Christ which unites in itself the heavenly and the earthly. Further, it is a fact that these non-Orthodox confessions have "broken" in one form or another, directly or indirectly, with the Orthodox Church, with the Church in its historical form; they themselves have cut the bond, they have "departed" from her. Neither we nor they have the right to close our eyes to this fact. The teachings of the non-Orthodox confessions contain heresies which were decisively rejected and condemned by the Church at her Ecumenical Councils. In these numerous branches of Christianity there is no unity, either outward or inward—either with the Orthodox Church of Christ or between themselves. The supra-confessional unification (the "ecumenical movement") which is now to be observed does not enter into the depths of the life of these confessions, but has an outward character. The term "invisible" can refer only to the Heavenly Church. The Church on earth, even though it has its invisible side, like a ship a part of which is hidden in the water and is invisible to the eyes, still remains visible, because it consists of people and has visible forms of organization and sacred activity.

Therefore it is quite natural to affirm that these religious organizations are societies which are "near," or "next to," or "close to," or perhaps even "adjoining" the Church, but sometimes "against" it; but they are all "outside" the one Church of Christ. Some of them have cut themselves off, others have gone far away. Some, in going away, all the same have historical ties of blood with her; others have lost all kinship, and in them the very spirit and foundations of Christianity have been distorted. None of them find themselves under the activity of the grace which is present in the Church, and especially the grace which is given in the Mysteries of the Church. They are not nourished by that mystical table which leads up along the steps of moral perfection.

The tendency in contemporary cultural society to place all confessions on one level is not limited to Christianity; on this same all-equalling level are placed also the non-Christian religions, on the grounds that they all "lead to God," and besides, taken all together, they far surpass the Christian world in the number of members who belong to them.

All of such "uniting" and "equalizing" views indicate a forgetfulness of the principle that there can be many teachings and opinions, but there is only one truth. And authentic Christian unity—unity in the Church—can be based only upon oneness of mind, and not upon difference of mind. The Church is the pillar and ground of the Truth (I Tim. 3:15).

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