

The Creed: What We Believe and Why It Matters

8. One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church

Sunday, March 6, 2005

10 to 10:50 am, in the Parlor.

Everyone is welcome!

St. John in the Wilderness

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquility the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

THE CREED



WHAT CHRISTIANS BELIEVE
AND WHY IT MATTERS

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Introduction

- **We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.**
- **We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.**
- **We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come**

Introduction

A Scandal of Appearance

- To recite the Creed requires us to overcome many “Scandals of Appearance:”
 - Faith involves perceiving the unseen in what can be seen.

Introduction

A Scandal of Appearance

- We confess **God as Creator**
 - Although the world often *seems* meaningless or random.
- We confess **God a Judge**
 - Although the world often *seems* one where evil is triumphant.

Introduction

A Scandal of Appearance

- We confess **God as Savior**
 - Although it *seems* we are not worth such infinite concern,
 - Although it *seems* most unlikely any God would enter into our material world or our fragile bodies,
 - Although it *seems* most unlikely any God would save through a broken, crucified Messiah.
- We confess **God as Sanctifier**
 - Although it *seems* we are untransformed and unsanctified.

Introduction

A Scandal of Appearance

- We confess the **Church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.**
 - Although the Church is often not one, holy, catholic, or apostolic.
 - Is often a stumbling block to faith.
 - Has often sinned against God and humans, and continues to do so.
 - Has sometimes been an instrument of evil.

Introduction

The Church

- The Church
 - Word from the Greek word for assembly.
- In the Creed, we are proclaiming that:
 - God is active in the complex, messy, all too human institution we call the Church;
 - The Church, an assembly of frail human beings, is one of God's chosen instruments to transform the world.

Introduction

What Should the Church Be?

- What should the Church be?
- “the continuation of the incarnation, the embodied presence of the resurrected Jesus”
(p. 256)
- “God’s laboratory for communal life before God.”

Introduction

What Should the Church Be?

- The place where we embody what Paul calls “the mind of Christ” or the “law of Christ” = the “bearing of one another’s burdens.”
 - Paul says the Church is where the mystery of God is being revealed.
 - Meaning: the Church is “the sacrament of the world’s possibility.”

Introduction

What Should the Church Be?

- The Church is the place where the triune God seeks to express and embody outwardly in creation God's own inner life of mutual emptying out and constant, fruitful exchange.

Introduction

The Reality of the Church

- The reality over the past 2000 years, and today, is that the Church:
 - Is frequently a stumbling block to faith.
 - Is prone to every human vice.
 - Frequently sins against God and humans.
 - Is sometimes an instrument of evil.

Introduction

The Reality of the Church

- How and why then should we remain loyal to the idea of the Church?
- Why not just live our individual lives, follow Jesus, and not mess with a “Church”?
- Why should we believe that God wants us to belong to the often corrupt assembly of frail humanity we call the Church?

Introduction

The Concept of Church

- The Church is a “critical theological concept.”
 - **Critical Theological Concept:** something we cannot prove directly, but which if we deny, leads to the loss of essential other truths.
- We cannot prove that the Church is one of God’s chosen instruments to transform the world, but to deny it leads to a loss of other truths.

Introduction

The Concept of Church

- If we deny the Church, we deny that God seeks expression in a community of faith and love.
- If we deny that, then what is the meaning of:
 - God seeking expression in creation, in the coming to be of visible reality moment by moment.
 - God seeking expression by making human beings that reflect God's own image.
 - God seeking expression in the incarnation, by becoming embodied in Jesus (in whom the "fullness of God dwells bodily," Col. 2:9)

Introduction

The Concept of Church

- If we deny the Church, then we deny God desires to form a people of God on earth.
 - Yet in the Hebrew Scripture, we find God seeking to shape a people who would be “a light to the Gentiles,” who would reveal God glory to the world.
 - Yet in the New Testament, we find God empowering a community to be a temple of the living God through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Introduction

The Concept of Church

- If we deny the Church, we deny the Scriptural idea of salvation. In Scripture:
 - Salvation is not just about saving individuals, but is communal.
 - Salvation is in part:
 - “belonging to a people within which God’s own life is powerfully at work” (p. 257),
 - being part of the arena where God is working out our salvation (Phil. 2:12-13).

Introduction

The Concept of Church

- The Scriptural answer to the question, “Are you saved?” is:
 - “Yes, I am among the people whom God is saving.” (p. 257)

Introduction

The Four Marks of the Church

- In the Creed we proclaim four “marks of the Church”:
 - **One**
 - **Holy**
 - **Catholic**
 - **Apostolic**

One

One

Two Concepts of “One”

- Two concept of “one”
 - (1) The Church is unique.
 - (2) The Church lives a life of unity.

One

The Church is Unique

- The Church is *unique*. There is *only one* Church, just as there is *only one* God.
- This claim can be (and frequently is) turned into a claim of privilege:
 - Some churches claim there is only a single unique Church – and they are it -- and all others are deficient, inadequate, or false.

One

The Church is Unique

- The *one, unique single Church* can also be thought of as simply everywhere people “call on the name of the Lord with faith and love” (1 Corinthians 1:2; Romans 10:15)
- This fundamental definition of the Church is a defining vision, towards which today’s diverse but separate expressions of that vision should be moving.

One

The Church Lives a Life of Unity

- The Church is “one:”
 - Not only in the sense that there is *only one, single, unique* church,
 - But also in the sense that it *lives a life of unity*, that is, a *life united under the Holy Spirit*.

One

The Church Lives a Life of Unity

- The Church should live a life of unity under the Holy Spirit, as Paul tells the Ephesians:
- Make “...**every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the 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 all.**” (NRSV Eph. 4:3-6)

One

The Church Lives a Life of Unity

- A life of unity under the Holy Spirit is:
 - not a life where everyone sees everything in the same way,
 - but a life where each member has the same “way of thinking” embodied in Jesus Christ: a life where each member looks more to the interests of others than their own interests. (Phil 2:1-4)

One

The Church Lives a Life of Unity

- Such *unity*, living a life unified under the Holy Spirit, is not the same as *uniformity*. There is still diversity.
- A life under the unity of the Spirit in fact *requires* diversity.

One

The Church Lives a Life of Unity

- **“But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift... The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” (NRSV, Eph. 4:7, 11-12)**

One

The Church Lives a Life of Unity

- Reality: the Church has wavered between extremes of:
 - Uniformity
 - A sameness in ritual and thought.
 - Deviance
 - Not every form of diversity is legitimate.

One

The Church Lives a Life of Unity

- Saint Augustine's dictum for living a life of unity under the Spirit:
- **“in essentials, unity; in nonessentials, freedom; and in all things, charity.”**

Holy

Holy

“Be ye holy as I am holy”

- Leviticus 11:44-45: God addressed Israel as a community: **“Be ye holy as I am holy.”**
 - God’s holiness describes God’s “otherness” from all created things.
 - In Leviticus, God calls Israel to be “other” within creation.

Holy

“Be ye holy as I am holy”

- In the New Testament, the community of God’s people, the Church, is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit = the holy temple of God.

Holy

“Be ye holy as I am holy”

- Two facets of the holiness or “otherness” of the Church:
 - (1) The Church is a community where individual saints (ourselves) become personally sanctified and transformed, growing into the image of Jesus, so that the “mind of Christ” and the “law of Christ” becomes our mind and heart.

Holy

“Be ye holy as I am holy”

- (2) The Church is a community that, as an institution:
 - witnesses to the world the presence and power of the resurrected and enthroned Jesus,
 - is a “sacrament of the world’s possibility.”

Holy

A Sacrament of the World's Possibility

- How can the Church be “other” within the world, witnessing to the presence and power of God, being a sacrament of the world's possibility?
- Not through a particular organizational structure, diet, or set of clothing, but through worship and moral practice.

Holy

A Sacrament of the World's Possibility

- *The problem:* there has been *no* consensus on which worship and moral practices are essential, and which are optional expressions of the Spirit:
 - Is observing Holy Day essential? Or is not observing Holy Days essential?
 - Is obedience to a Pope essential? Or is not being obedient to a Pope essential?
 - Is having bishops essential? Or is not having bishops essential?
 - Is infant baptism essential? Or is not having infant baptism essential?

Holy

Holiness versus Oneness

- So the impulse to **holiness** has often drawn the Church away from the impulse to **oneness**.
- Our challenge is to:
 - Understand that **holiness** (being “other” within the world) is a way of **living in unity** under the Holy Spirit.
 - Understand that **living in unity** under the Holy Spirit can encompass diverse understandings of **holiness**.

Catholic

Catholic

“Throughout the Whole”

- Catholic: “throughout the whole.”
 - Note: does *not* mean *Roman Catholic* (an oxymoron).
- Two aspects of being “catholic:”
 - (1) Universality of extent.
 - (2) Inclusiveness.

Catholic

Universal in Extent

- The Church is **universal in extent**. It exists *everywhere*, not just in one place. It has no address.

Catholic Inclusive

- The Church is **inclusive**. The ideal church should embrace the diversity and differences within its life of unity under the Spirit:
 - Males and females,
 - Whites and blacks,
 - Democrats and Republicans.

Catholic Inclusive

- Jesus showed us the ideal of **catholicity** (inclusiveness) when he gave table fellowship to sinners.
- The first century Church showed **catholicity** (inclusiveness) when it decided to include Gentiles.

Catholic Inclusive

- Paul: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (NRSV Gal. 3:28)
 - Paul here names three great differences in antiquity that gave status by exclusion.

Catholic Inclusive

- Today, as we understand more about the distinctions and differences that separate us as human beings, the Church is called to continue to find ways of expanding its catholicity, its inclusiveness.

Catholic

Inclusiveness and Reconciliation

- Inclusiveness does *not* mean *ignoring* or *obliterating* our differences, but *reconciling* them.
- Paul tells two groups in Ephesus: **“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.. he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law... that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God...”** (NRSV Eph 2:13-14)

Catholic

Catholic as Holy

- The world about us is a place of rivalry and competition, envy and pride, murder and war, fueled by distinctions people make to define themselves by exclusion.
- The Church is called to be “other” in this world, by being a community where differences do not separate but find reconciliation, a place where people can grow into the “new humanity” embodied in Jesus.
- To be inclusive = catholic = a place where differences do not separate, is a form of holiness, a way of being “other” in the world

Catholic

The Challenge of Being Catholic

- The challenge of the Church to be **catholic** (inclusive) is:
 - Fighting the human tendency to gather on the basis of similarity.
 - Not to achieve its inclusiveness “cheaply.” It cannot reconcile itself to patterns of sin and idolatry. Catholicity cannot be:
 - A lack of standards.
 - Acceptance of the standards of the larger society.

Apostolic

Apostolic

Two Senses of Apostolic

- The ideal Church is identifiable with the Church of the Apostles.
- Two senses of being apostolic:
 - A conservative, historical sense.
 - A radical, prophetic sense.

Apostolic

Conservative, Historical Sense

- An essential mark of the authentic Church is whether its teachings and morals are in continuity with the lives of the apostles.
 - Such continuity can be demonstrated historically by tracing the line of succession of Church leaders (bishops; the episcopate) from the time of the apostles.
 - The name of our own Church – The Episcopal Church – highlights its conviction that it is such an authentic Church.

Apostolic

Conservative, Historical Sense

- We must ask of any “innovation:”
 - Is it apostolic?
 - That is: does it have a precedent in the tradition tracing back to the early Church of the apostles?
- The legitimacy of asking such a question is clear: many movements, like Gnosticism, have obviously violated tradition, as well as the New Testament Scriptures.

Apostolic

Radical, Prophetic Sense

- There is also a danger in the **conservative, historical sense of apostolicity**: the name of tradition and precedent may be used to squelch movements of the Holy Spirit that God intends to lead the church to greater maturity.
- A **radical, prophetic sense** of being apostolic is also important: the Church *in every age* must also measure itself by a direct appeal to the New Testament.

Apostolic

Radical, Prophetic Sense

- Compare the Church of today with the Church in Acts of the Apostles!
- This is the sense of apostolicity used by Martin Luther in confronting the medieval Church.
- Where in Acts of the Apostles do we find:
 - A Pope, or cardinals?
 - Mandatory celibacy for priests?
 - Indulgences?

Apostolic Radical, Prophetic Sense

- The Church must *not* presume its tradition is *identical* with truth, but rather must “seek the truth that God reveals at every moment through the working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of people.” (p. 274)
- However, the **radical prophetic sense of apostolicity** must take care not to be reflexively hostile to institution and authority.