

Order of the Most Holy Mary Theotokos

“The Old Catholic Marianists”

Christian Church, Catholic Church, or One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church

The term Christian Church, Catholic Church, or One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, as it was called by 110 AD, refers to the "universal company of believers". It means every person who has ever accepted or ever will accept the Christian Faith. The idea is that all these people together make up one "body" called "the Church". "The Church" (in this sense) is not thought of by Christians as an ordinary human organization. It is thought of as being part of God's way to bring people close to him. "The Church" was begun by Jesus in the 1st century AD. It is called "The Christian Church" because Jesus was called "The Christ" (or holy one from God).

"Churches" as Christian organizations were begun by Jesus' followers. Today there are many churches in the sense of "church organizations". The different organized churches are called Christian denominations (or in some cases, jurisdictions).

The main Christian beliefs are held by all major Christian denominations. These beliefs are often said aloud by Christian people in a "statement of faith" which is called the Creed. The Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, Anglican Communion, and other Protestant churches all believe that God is the "creator and eternal father of all things", that Jesus was the "Christ" and son of God who died to save people from the punishment for their sins, and that the Holy Spirit is God's gift to help and comfort Christian people. Christians believe that these are three parts of One God.

There are many other beliefs that are different between different denominations. These differences have sometimes caused arguments and have caused the organized church to split into denominations. The different opinions are called controversies.

The English word church comes from the Greek κυριακή (kyriake) meaning "Master's (house)", or "Lord's (house)". In modern English the word

"church" is used for both a church building and "the Christian Church" throughout the world.

In 381 AD, at a meeting of bishops known as the First Council of Constantinople, the Nicene Creed (a statement of beliefs) that was used at the time was changed to include a description of the Church. The words that were added to the Nicene Creed are "One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church". This important addition describes what the four most important things that Christians were to believe about the Christian Church.

The One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church is the Church of Jesus Christ, against which he promised the gates of hell would not prevail. Specifically, One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church is the creedal form of belief in the Church. What is implied in that belief is commonly called the marks of the Church: unity, sanctity, catholicity, and apostolicity.

These are the four words that are used in the Nicene Creed:

The Church is One (Unity). This means that there is only one true Christian Church. It is "universal". The Church is Christ's mystical body; just as he cannot be divided, neither can his body. There is one Church, not many; and it is united, not divided. This may seem naïve or callous given the present realities of Christians separated for nearly a thousand years. In the face of this real division, modern men are tempted to despair and speak of a "divided Church," abandoning the creedal faith.

The Church is Holy (Sanctity). This means that it is the Church of the true and living God. God makes her members holy by union with him. God sanctifies the Church by drawing her into his divine life, supremely through the union affected by the Incarnation. The faith and life of the Church participates in the holiness of God by expressing the divine life in doctrine, sacraments, services and saints --- men and women whose lives have been recognized for their holiness.

The Church is Catholic (Catholicity). This means that the Church includes "everyone" who is a true Christian believer. The Church is the fullness of Christ's body on earth. As a term, catholicity means fullness or perfection, wholeness. Only God is perfect wholeness, the fullness of being. God makes the Church to be catholic by its participation in his full, divine life.

The Church is Apostolic (Apostolicity). This means that it was begun by the Twelve apostles of Jesus and that Christian believers follow in their footsteps. The Church has been sent into the world, to bring the world into communion with God. Just as the Son was sent by the Father, and the Spirit sent by the Son, the Church has been sent by the Holy Trinity into the world.

One important controversy is simply the definition of the Christian or Catholic Church. To some degree this controversy comes from the Nicene Creed with its words One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church which means universal church. Many denominations believe that all denominations are part of a world-wide Christian Church and think that the most important thing is the "common faith" and not a common organization or tradition. ("Common faith" means "the faith that is the same". The word "common" does not mean "ordinary" in this sense.)

Our prayer for the Christian Church is that we dwell not on our differences and the controversies that divide and separate us, but rather on our common faith and the things that unite us as the Universal Church.

As there are many parts or limbs that make up the human body, there are like-wise many parts (denominations or jurisdictions) that make up the world-wide Christian Church. Though we have many various and sundry organizational structures, we are all part of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.

And that is the most important thing...that is what makes us One. May we always dwell together in a spirit of truth, unity, concord, peace, and love.