

## The Church Is Power

## E Pluribus Unum

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The words of **The Church's Creed** include these: "... and [we believe] in One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church ...."

The object of the verb *believe* in the phrase just quoted is not the adjectives *One, Holy, Catholic or Apostolic*. It is the noun, *Church*.

**Tyrants announce** the object of the verb *believe* as one or more of the adjectives *One, Holy, Catholic or Apostolic*, all of which they imply or announce are they. The assertion contained in the announcement, however, is not to be. The assertion is made, it terrorizes, horrifies, and inflicts harm, but it cannot be real because it is not true.

No creature of finitude is, can be, or can become *One, Holy, Catholic or Apostolic*. Finitude is **VUCA**. It is partial, incomplete, conflicted, ambiguous, fleeting, corruptible and unstable. Only infinitude is. Finitude merely exists -- conditioned by time, space and causation -- and then it does not. The object of the verb *believe* is the noun *Church*.

The Scylla and Charybdis of tyrannies in the modern lexicon, namely, National Socialism and Communism, lack stability. They are not self-supporting. They exist on condition of having an opponent (actually, an endless series of opponents) and in the end they succumb to their opponent, no matter how many they choose, because their constant need for opponents uses them to exhaustion. Being bad is a horrible master.

Tyrannies of all kinds, left, right and center, top and bottom, lack power. They are not self-sustaining. They sustain themselves by choosing fights, fixing and finishing (they think) opponents. If they cannot do that, tyrannies cannot exist. The reality of tyrannies is that they are not real.

This fact illustrates one of many excellences of the Nicene Creed. The Church is *One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic* because The Church is real. The Church not only has power, it is Power.

In his later years at least, when I read Early Church History under him, the renowned **Cyril C. Richardson**, Washburn Professor of Church History at The Union Theological Seminary, New York City, lectured and answered questions from a dais with his eye balls rotated upward so that he was looking at the ceiling. Richardson was unique in the perpetual unanimity of reverence accorded him by generations of Union students, this one not excepted.

Near the end of my Senior Year, some faculty, agitated to the purpose by **James A. Sanders**, who later went to Claremont (where I grew up), gathered for public debate on the soundness and modern desirability of the **Doctrine of the Holy Trinity**. As I recall, six faculty members participated, facing each other three-by-three across a table on a stage, probably the chancel of James Chapel. Sanders led one side of the table and Richardson the other.

Sanders, a junior Old Testament prof, argued that the doctrine of the Trinity should be cast away in favor of a unitarian doctrine agreeable to modern sensibilities, those of Old Testament profs in particular, for whom he seemed to be speaking. His slogan, oft repeated as a cutting cute jab, was, "The New Testament is secondary literature."

Richardson -- then, if I recall correctly, senior member of the Union faculty -- argued that while it contains real difficulties, the doctrine of the Trinity expresses real concerns that no unitarian doctrine can address. He said trinitarian doctrine is here to stay despite its intrinsic discomfitures and left the impression among some auditors that wanting to cast it away betook of petulant immaturity.

Richardson's side of the table carried the evening.

Cyril C., as we called him privately, gazed upward and slightly forward. Of course, one day a classmate taped a Playboy Centerfold to the spot on the ceiling most frequented by that gaze. Nowadays the image would be of a gender tramp.

One day during a lecture I attended, Professor Richardson posed the question, "Why was Christianity successful in the Roman Empire, to the point of becoming its dominant religion?" Students advanced answers, none of them completely convincing but none vacuous, either. After a few minutes, Dr. Richardson rendered his answer: Christianity dominated the Roman Empire because of its moral superiority.

His point was that Christians' morality attracted a world groaning under the tyranny of immoralities numerous, ubiquitous and powerfully entrenched. He cannot have been wrong, for, human nature knows it when violated or traduced and rightly associates those forcings with immorality, which defines tyranny. The legitimacy of the Self is self-evident to the Self which has no second.

However, never doubting the truth of Dr. Richardson's answer to the question he himself posed, I have never felt that answer told the whole story, either.

If morality attracts respect -- and it does; it also attracts defiance and assault -- it has power to do that. The root of attraction is power. Thus we speak of the power of morality, the power of truth, the power of justice, the power of intelligence, the power of love, the power of sensuality, intoxication, infatuation, etc. It is power of which we speak, not its countless expressions. Morality, truth, justice, love, etc., are guises, masks worn by power to enact the characters -- Greek *prosopon*/Latin *persona* = mask; compare Greek *hypostasis* -- of plays power itself writes, produces and directs.

Power (*hypostasis*) is indicated, not guises (*prosopon*). This is the case also with respect to trinitarian doctrine. Its subject is power (*hypostasis*), or better, Power, not "Persons" called Father Son and Holy Spirit (*prosopon/persona*). Trinitarian doctrine treats of dialectics, not cosmology. Its drivers are existential, soteriological concerns, not philosophical ones. The intrinsic heresy of Arianism (modernly, Mormonism) is its lack of depth, not its failure of grasp.

In the same way that trinitarian doctrine treats of dialectics, and for the same reason, the subject of the Creedal phrase quoted at the start of this essay is *The Church*, not *Oneness, Holiness, Catholicity or Apostolicity*.

Morality does not stand on its own, does not have power to shake, grasp and hold the allegiance of affections. The uncertainties and ambiguities of life quickly and easily overwhelm resolve for morality -- and also resolve against it. What is morality, after all? Laws? Customs? Intentions? Consequences? Well, yes, all of those things but more as well one feels, and not amiss.

Nor did Christianity dominate the Roman Empire by force of arms, as the proponents of Mohammedanism do and must wherever they deigned to venture -- revealing thereby, by the way, the weakness of their so-called religion. Such force of arms as "Christians" employed were deployed by pseudo-Christians whose subversion of truth compelled the convention of the First Ecumenical Council, at *Nicaea*: specifically the *Arians* but also *Docetists, Manicheans* and *Gnostics*.

To dominate the Roman Empire, which could also be regarded as the "Greco-Roman world," Christianity must have been more powerful than it was. In fact, it must have been Power Itself. It was something Rome was not and had not.

In the first few centuries AD, the Greco-Roman world was no model of decency even though it was a respected model of order and customarily attempted to be just, although not entirely in terms acceptable to Christian or modern Secularist standards of refinement respecting that word. Christianity brought forth a higher standard of morality than obtained widely in the Empire while it also reminded some Romans, felicitously, of Pythagorean and Stoic ideals they imbibed from cynosures such as *Cicero, Virgil, Pythagoras, Heraclitus* and *Zeno*.

What Power (*hypostasis*) expressed itself as Christianity (*prosopon*) more than as the Roman Empire or Greco-Roman Civilization? That question occurs only when *its answer is in view*: the Power that is the Holy Spirit.

Christianity turns on the Power of the Crucifixion of the Christ. The Church turns on the Power of The Holy Spirit. Culture and Morality turn on the Power of Reunion. Religion, Culture and Morality of any name turn on the Self-Expression (The Holy Spirit) of God through whichever of His countless Names one cherishes. One repeats that Name without ceasing.

Christian doctrine and the power of the churches turn on the Pauline Doctrine of Spirit. Without that doctrine as their core, the churches slump into vacillation between legalism and sentimentalism, as we see them today. Power Itself is The Holy Spirit and The Church.

The Church is The Spiritual Community driven by and comprising The Holy Spirit. The churches express The Church insofar as their core belief reflects the Pauline Doctrine of Spirit. Morality is the strength which holds the consciousness bound to truth.