ON THE DOGMA OF THE CHURCH

AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE SOURCES OF ECCLESIOLOGY



New Hieromartyr Saint Hilarion Troitsky (1886-1929) Scroll reads: "Without the Church there is no salvation."

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An Historical Overview of the Sources of Ecclesiology

St. Hilarion (Troitsky) the Hieromartyr

Translated by Fr. Nathan Williams



Uncut Mountain Press

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To my dear Nikolai Petrovich Sapozhnik on his nameday, with my sincere wishes that he will serve the Church under another name, from the author. 1912, XII, 6.



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FOREWORD

Printed from the publication Essays on the History of the Dogma Concerning the Church ["Очерки из истории догмата о Церкви"] (Sergiev Posad: 1912), authored by Vladimir Troitsky, acting senior lecturer at the Moscow Theological Academy. . . . The text is printed with slight stylistic corrections; words added for clarity are in square brackets. Citations from Holy Scripture are placed in double quotes. Words stressed by the author are in boldface type.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

St. Hilarion (Troitsky) the Hieromartyr

Upon graduating from the theological academy in 1910 with a Ph.D. in theology, Vladimir Troitsky stayed on as a professorial fellow. A year later he was appointed to the post of senior lecturer of the department of the Holy Scripture of the New Testament. It may be presumed that it was about this time when work began on his master's dissertation, "Essays on the History of the Dogma Concerning the Church"—a topic to which the author would repeatedly return and which became one of the most important in the theological and literary legacy of the hieromartyr.

Individual chapters of the future dissertation were published in *Bogoslovsky Vestnik* in May–October of 1912 as separate articles: "The Concept of the Church in Anti-Jewish Polemics with Donatism," "The Question of the Church in Dogmatic Polemics with Donatism: Optatus of Milevis," and "The Question of the Church in the Polemics of the Blessed Augustine against the Donatists" (unfinished). The chief theses of the future dissertation were examined in the work "The New Testament Doctrine Concerning the Church," published in *Golos Tserkvi* in the March, May, and June editions for 1912. Written when the author was still a very young man (26 years of age), this work astounds by its author's scholarly and theological maturity and profound knowledge of the source material, especially the works of the holy fathers and literature of the early Church.

Work on the master's dissertation lasted two years. In the spring of 1912 it was completed and presented for the approval of the reviewers: S.S. Glagolev, professor of the department of apologetics at the Moscow Theological Academy, and M.D. Muretov, professor of the department of the Holy Scripture of the New Testament. On September 25 of the same year, on the feast day of the venerable Sergius of Radonezh, Vladimir Troitsky wrote a foreword to his dissertation and submitted it to the synodal printshop in Sergiev Posad. In late November the appointed reviewers gave their responses. In his review S.S. Glagolev in particular stated, "Books such as that of Mr. Troitsky rarely appear in Rus. Its advent marks a red-letter day for theological scholarship." Prof. M.D. Muretov noted that the work by Mr. Troitsky "not only supplements, but wholly surpasses the works of his Russian predecessors," and concluded his review with words of high praise: "If it were up to me, without the slightest hesitation I would declare Troitsky's dissertation fully worthy not only of a master's degree, but of a Ph.D." See the minutes of the assemblies of the board of the Moscow Theological Academy for 1912, Bogoslovsky Vestnik [1913], Nº 7–8, 584, 589; M.D. Muretov, critical bibliographical note on the book by VI[adimir] Troitsky, "Essays on the History of the Dogma Concerning the Church" [Sergiev Posad: 1912], Bogoslovsky Vestnik (1913), February, March. For additional reviews see "There is No Christianity without the Church" ["Без Церкви нет христианства"], Donskoy Pravoslavny Vestnik (1915), Nº 3; A. Pologov, Dushepoleznava Chtenie (1913), Nº 4; concerning the defense of the dissertation on December 11, 1912, see Tserkovnye Vedomosti, addendae (1912) Nº 50. For responses concerning the awarding of the degree, see "A Red-Letter Day for Theological Scholarhip," Russkoe Slovo (1913), Nº 12.

The defense of the dissertation took place on December 11, 1912, at the assembly of the Board of the Moscow Theological Academy in the presence of its rector, Fyodor (Poldeyevsky), bishop of Volokolamsk, and the entire academic body. In keeping with tradition, the defense took place in the form of a debate. On January 16, 1913, the Holy Synod confirmed Vladimir Troitsky's master's degree in theology and his post as senior lecturer. In March of the same year his master's thesis received the Macarius Award.

PREFACE

The dogma concerning the Church may be termed the self-identification of the Church. It is this dogma that determines what the Church is and what distinguishes it from all that is not the Church. The Church is not a phenomenon of the natural earthly order: the mysterious depths of church life, in accordance with the unfailing promise of Christ the Savior, are always and invariably enveloped by the grace-filled power of the Holy Spirit. The full depth of this mystical life of the Church is not of course subject to logical definitions and scholarly research: it is given directly to him who participates in it, as Hilary of Poitiers expressed in the words: "Hoc ecclesiae proprium est, ut tunc intellegatur, cum arguitur" (*On the Trinity* 7.4). For this reason we may say that the self-identification of the Church is experienced specifically by one who dwells in the Church and is a living member of her living body.

Nevertheless, since the inception of the Church the theological thought of church writers has undertaken, among other things, to define the essence of the Church and its properties in concepts comprehensible to the human mind. The brief definition of the Church presented in its Symbol of Faith could not be sufficient, since inevitable questions arose regarding the understanding of the credal definition itself, and the very life of the Church insistently demanded that these questions be answered. The life of each person and his outward actions is intimately linked to his self-identification. Likewise, the outward life of the Church in many of its manifesta-

^{1 &}quot;This is the peculiar property of the Church, that when she makes herself known, then she is understood."

tions is determined by the Church's understanding of itself—that is, by the dogma concerning the Church. The questions that arose throughout history concerning church practice roused church theological thought to a more detailed clarification of the very concept of the Church. The same was required by the distortion of the true understanding of the Church wrought by heretics and schismatics. The first centuries of Christianity are peculiar in that throughout them the Church frequently had to contend with errors that deviated from the truth specifically in the doctrine concerning the Church. In the first centuries of church life we see several fairly complex movements founded on ideas linked in one way or another to the dogma concerning the Church. This is why, more than at any other time, ecclesiastical theological thought in the first centuries focused its attention on clarifying the concept of the Church. The heresies and schisms that appeared in the Church merely spurred the fathers and teachers of the Church, "having received wisdom from God, to set forth dogmas, which of old the fishermen set down in simple words, through the power of the Spirit in understanding; for thus was it fitting to acquire a simple exposition of our Faith" (sessional hymn, January 30).

The Essays on the History of the Dogma Concerning the Church here presented are therefore devoted to a study of the pivotal points in the efforts of early church theological thought toward expounding and elucidating church doctrine concerning the Church. These pivotal points are determined by the most prominent anti-Church movements, founded on a distorted understanding of the Church, with which the theologians of the early Church did literary battle. These movements are Judaistic Christianity, Gnosticism, Montanism, Novatianism, and Donatism. We therefore preface this study of the church writers' dogmatic struggle against these anti-Church phenomena with a brief overview of the New Testament teaching concerning the Church.

Each of the above phenomena in its own right could be the subject of a whole series of scholarly studies. Hence, in our essays we will not be pursuing monographic exhaustiveness. Rather, we will primarily focus on studying those dogmatic outcomes on the

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question of the Church that resulted from dogmatic polemics motivated by one or another of the above phenomena. In our essays the ends in view will be not those of church history, but rather of the history of dogma. Only by thus limiting the task will it become possible to unite all the essays here presented into a single study, since the most prominent anti-Church movements of old which we have noted may only be combined from the standpoint of dogmatic history—from the standpoint of the Christian teaching concerning the Church that unfolded in the struggle to combat them.

It is the author's view that a study of various questions from the history of the dogma concerning the Church is of vital importance to church life and the duty of church theological scholarship. The question of the Church is always an interesting and important question. One ought always to proceed from the concept of the Church when resolving questions of church life, and frequently these questions essentially comprise a repetition or modification of old ones. The gates of hell, arrayed against the Church in the uprising of heresies and errors, to this day give rise to numerous anti-Church phenomena. Combating these phenomena is the task of the ecclesiastical figures of the day, but this fight must be grounded in the ancient Church and linked to the treasury of the theological knowledge of the catholic Church. One cannot help but notice how in our time questions arise and are discussed that have long been quite sufficiently resolved by the writers of the ancient Church. Who is not aware that the question of the Church is the chief, principle question in modern polemics with sectarianism in various forms? And of course, in conducting these polemics one must always bear in mind the dogmatic conclusions reached by the theological thought of the ancient Church. This is why a study on the history of the dogma concerning the Church is able to meet the modern needs of church life.

Western scholars have long and extensively been engaged in scholarly research of the history of the dogma concerning the Church—Catholics and predominantly Protestants, people who are strangers to the Church; for Alexei Khomyakov quite justifiably called Catholicism and Protestantism "heresies against the dogma of the essence of the Church, against its faith in its own self." The conclusions drawn by scholarship outside the Church in studying the history of the dogma concerning the Church are what oblige theological scholars within the Church to take up this important subject themselves. We people of the Church believe and confess that we belong to that Church which Christ and His holy apostles established. In the Symbol of Faith we call our church "apostolic." The history of the dogma concerning the Church is for us nothing less than the history of the academic and theological elucidation of the ever unified and unchanging concept of the Church. The Church and her self-identification have remained unified and unchanged from the time of Christ and the apostles to our own. Only scholarly and theological elucidation of the dogma concerning the Church has altered in its breadth and depth. But scholarship outside the Church takes an entirely different stance. Die Entstehung der altkatholischen Kirche [The Rise of the Old Catholic Church] is the title of a work by Albrecht Ritschl, which more than half a century hence laid the groundwork for that resolution of questions of church history and dogmatic history which—with certain amendments—is advanced to this day by adherents of the Ritschl school, predominantly in Protestant scholarship. The very title of the work is highly typical. To the question, "What is the origin of the ecumenical Church?" one who is within the Church may answer concisely and definitively: "The Church was founded by our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and His holy apostles." If however entire exhaustive studies can be written on the origin of the Church, it is apparent that the authors of these studies take a completely different view of the Catholic Church. Similarly titled Protestant works chronologically span over two hundred years; clearly, in the opinion of their authors, the Church "originated" over the course of entire centuries. Christ and the apostles did not establish the catholic Church; if indeed they did establish any Church at all, it was certainly not the one that later became known as the catholic Church. The latter Church originated on its own out of various elements, influenced by numerous conditions, and in the final analysis actually contradicts Christ and the apostles. It was not heretics and

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schismatics who distorted the concept of the Church, but rather the Church itself gradually altered its essence, retreating from its former self-identification. For many Protestant scholars, the ancient anti-Church heretical movements we mentioned before are vestiges of the ancient concept of the Church, as surmised based on scant and ambiguous information. Thus, it was not heretics who distorted the ancient doctrine concerning the Church, but the Church itself which, in condemning Montanism, for example, condemned and declared as heresy something that was formerly ecclesial—its own doctrine concerning the Church. The Church as Christ and His apostles envisioned it lasted for a very short time: by the second century the catholic Church that had "originated" declared it a heresy, destroyed it, and usurped its place. What was formed was not the apostolic Church, but a Church hostile to that of the apostles. Along with historical events in the life of the Church, changes of the most radical kind were also taking place in the very concept of the Church. For example, in the third century a doctrine of the sanctity of the Church was developed in total contradiction to what had been said on the subject in the second century.

It seems it would not be an overstatement to say that this kind of idea of the history of the dogma concerning the Church kills and undermines all faith in the Church. If we agree with the Protestant exposition of the history of the dogma concerning the Church, we must discard the ninth article of the Symbol of Faith, which combines the catholic Church with the apostolic Church. It is therefore the duty of theological scholarship within the Church to give its own exposition of the history of the dogma concerning the Church, which may be used to counter how that history is framed outside the Church. To this day, we might observe, this duty remains almost entirely undischarged. There have been works devoted to the history of the dogma concerning the Church, but these have long become obsolete and do not at all consider the new questions that have arisen in this arena of scholarly knowledge over the last several decades.

It is this circumstance that determines the nature of the present work. On various questions pertaining to the history of the dogma concerning the Church we are preceded by scholars outside the Church with whom we have a significant and fundamental difference of opinion. By the same token, there are a great many works dealing in one way or another with the history of the dogma concerning the Church, since the history of the dogma concerning the Church is intimately linked to the history of various aspects of church life, and the teaching of various church writers concerning the Church has its explanation in the historical circumstances of their lives and their ecclesiastical and literary work. For this reason nearly every scholarly book on the history of the Church or patristic theology has proven to have some bearing on certain questions, often minute and highly particular, in our own study. Such an abundance of scholarly literature renders us completely unable to systematically review all the opinions expressed on each of the multitudinous and very nearly innumerable questions in our study. If we were to undertake not to leave a single stated opinion without exposition and analysis, we would have to write an entire study on each separate question. Only by adopting a different approach can we combine an entire series of complex, intertwined questions of the greatest importance in a single study. We therefore choose the approach of historical criticism of the primary sources. Our attention will be concentrated primarily on remnants of early church literature—on essays by the writers of the ancient Church who undertook to elucidate the teaching of the Church. The multitudinous scholarly works we have studied served merely as our aids in achieving this stated goal. Nevertheless, we hold it impossible to completely pass over in silence all the variety and richness of content of these frequently monumental, informative, and interesting works, and at times we will not be sparing with quotes and citations therefrom. We merely do not undertake their complete and systematic usage; else we would constantly be obliged to stray far from the topic at hand. We will concentrate only on the most general ideas, most frequently encountered among modern scholars of church history and dogmatic history, and, holding the majority of these ideas inadmissible for theological scholarship within the Church, in our study of the primary sources along with a positive exposition

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and explanation of their substance we will point out facts within them that disprove or at least shake the foundations of Protestant scholarship's prevailing representation of the history of the dogma concerning the Church.

In our desire to discern the development of ecclesial self-identification in the writings and theological literature of the ancient Church in the course of our study, we may at times have erred from the truth by incorrectly conveying the thinking of the ancient Church and passing off our own folly as church doctrine. We can therefore do no better than to say in the words of the blessed Augustine: "Quod vera esse perspexeris, tene, et Ecclesiae catholicae tribue; quae falsa, respue et mihi qui homo sum ignosce" (On True Religion 10:20). The author holds all doubt as to the perfect truth of the one Orthodox Church of Christ to be unacceptable; such doubt may result either from ignorance or from sinfulness. Laboring on the question of the Church has taught the author to read the prayer for the Church from the daily commemorations with particular love and trepidation of heart:

"Among the first remember, O Lord, Thy Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, which Thou hast preserved by Thy precious Blood, and establish, strengthen, and expand, increase, pacify, and keep Her unconquerable by the gates of hades; calm the dissensions of the churches, quench the raging of the nations, and quickly destroy and uproot the rising of heresy, and bring them to naught by the power of Thy Holy Spirit."

September 25, 1912 Commemoration of the Venerable Sergius

^{2 &}quot;As many things as you will have ascertained to be true, keep, and bestow them to the catholic Church; those that you will have perceived to be false, spit them out, and forgive me who am a man."



FIRST ESSAY

The New Testament Doctrine Concerning the Church

Introductory Note: The New Testament doctrine concerning the Church could be the subject of a separate study. Even in Russian theological literature there are special works devoted to it, such as Ivan Mansvetov's The New Testament Doctrine Concerning the Church ["Hobosaветное учение о Церкви"] (Moscow: 1879) and the work by E. Akvilonov, Scholarly Definitions of the Church and the Apostolic Doctrine Concerning It as the Body of Christ ["Научные определения Церкви и апостолькое учение о ней как о Теле Христовом"] (Saint Petersburg: 1894). In this study, the subject of which is the history of the dogma concerning the Church, we naturally can provide only a very general outline of the doctrine of the New Testament, which, having no independent and absolute scholarly value, can only serve as a kind of introduction to the history of **dogma** proper concerning the Church. Nevertheless, in the chapters of our study that follow we will sometimes have to turn to the sacred books of the New Testament. In addition, the very history of the dogma concerning the Church is, in a sense, a commentary on the doctrine of the New Testament.

It was a great and solemn moment in the history of mankind when the Lord Jesus Christ exclaimed in His prayer as high priest: "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. ... Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us" (Jn. 17:11, 20–21).

These words of Christ's prayer already give a clear definition of the essence of the Church. Christ came to earth to save the world;³ hence, Christianity likewise is not merely a teaching received by the intellect and maintained differently by each. No, Christianity is life, in which individual persons are so greatly united among themselves that their union may be likened to the essential unity of the Persons of the Holy Trinity. It was for this, that men might be made a unity, the Church, that the Lord Iesus Christ prayed to His Heavenly Father. Christ places love as the foundation for men's unification in the Church. Pointing to the unanimity of the Persons of the Holy Trinity as the ideal of the Church, in the same prayer He said: "[Let] the love wherewith thou hast loved me be in them, and I in them" (cf. In. 17:26).4 It was this incomparable mutual love of the Persons of the Holy Trinity that the Lord Jesus Christ exhorted His disciples to emulate in His parting conversation with them: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (In. 13:34-35; cf. 15:2).

But that men might enter this union of love, that they might be united into the Church, **human nature itself had to be recreated**, as it had become contaminated by sin which always opposes any human unity. In His conversation with Nicodemus the Lord Jesus Christ talks about how a man must be born anew.⁵ It is for this very rebirth of human nature, for this recreation thereof, that the incarnation of the Son of God and His death on the cross were needed.⁶ In the person of Christ mankind became participant in the divine nature; for without the incarnation of the Son of God the unification of men in the Church would have been impossible.

The Church has as its foundation the incarnation of the Son of God, Christ the God-man. When the apostle Peter confessed Jesus Christ to be the Son of the Living God, Jesus answered

³ See Jn. 3:17.

⁴ See Jn. 15:10: "Ye shall abide in my love; even as I abide in his love."

⁵ See Jn. 3:3, 5, 7.

⁶ See Jn. 3:13-17.

him: "Upon this rock I will build my church" (Mt. 16:18). Only through the incarnate Only-begotten Son of God do people receive true life, the life that is eternal, and hence "he that believeth not" in the Only-begotten Son of God "is condemned already" (Jn. 3:18): for him true life is impossible. In order to be a living member of reborn mankind, one must have a real connection with Christ the God-man. For this reason Christ said: "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" (Jn. 15:4–6). Lest the latter occur, Christ promised to abide with His Church "even unto the end of the world" (Mt. 28:20).

The life of reborn mankind, the life of the Church, is sustained by its constant connection with God. The life of the Church is a supernatural life. In order to enter the Church, one must be born from on high, born of water and the Spirit (cf. Jn. 3:3, 5); he must be begotten of the Spirit.8 For the natural man this rebirth is so incomprehensible that it seems as impossible as it would be to "enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born" (In. 3:4). While Jesus was not yet glorified, His followers did not have the Spirit, but even then He spoke in veiled language, citing the Old Testament prophecies, speaking "of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive ("περί τοῦ πνεύματος, οδ ἔμελλον λαμβάνειν οἱ πιστεύοντες εἰς αὐτόν," Jn. 7:39). But the Lord Jesus Christ especially spoke of the Holy Spirit and of being reborn of Him throughout His entire parting conversation. Here the Lord's speech is perfectly clear and distinct: "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever. ... But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (In.

⁷ See 1 Jn. 5:12.

⁸ See Jn. 3:6.

14:16, 26). "He, the Spirit of truth ... will guide you into all truth (ὑμᾶς εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν ἀλήθειαν," Jn. 16:13). Consequently, the Holy Spirit will guide (ὁδηγήσει) all Christians and the entire Church on the path of the fullness of the truth—that is, not only theoretical truth, but also moral truth. Πᾶσα ἡ ἀλήθεια [all truth]—this is the whole life of the born-again man, and this life is of the Holy Spirit. Before His ascension Christ also said to His disciples that in a few days they would be "baptized with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 1:5), Who would endue them with "power from on high" (Lk. 24:49). 10

Thus, according to the teaching of Jesus Christ Himself, His Church is the supernatural grace-filled joining of men reborn by the God-man into a union of love.

In its historical manifestation this grace-filled community naturally must differ significantly from all other, natural human coalitions into communities. This is the Kingdom of Heaven; it is "not of this world" (Jn. 18:36);11 it is not worldly in nature; it is not like political kingdoms, founded upon power and coercion. When certain of Christ's disciples, not understanding the nature of the new unification of men which He preached, asked for themselves ordinary earthly power in His kingdom, He answered them: "Ye know not what ye ask. ... Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be ... chief among you, let him be your servant" (Mt. 20:22, 25–27; cf. Mk. 10:38, 42-44; Lk. 22:25-26). In Christ was fulfilled the prophecy concerning the meek king: He entered into Jerusalem not upon a horse, but upon an ass,12 and He entered to suffer for men. In the desert Christ rejected the devil's temptation to convert all men by force.¹³ The Lord sent His apostles not as fearsome conquerors,

⁹ Vgl.: Paul Wolff, Die Entwickelung der einen christlichen Kirche durch Athanasius, Augustin, Luther. Eine kirchen-und dogmengeschichtliche Studie (Berlin: 1889), 2–6.

¹⁰ See Acts 1:8: "Λήψεσθε δύναμιν ἐπελθόντος τοῦ ἁγίου Πνεύματος ἐφ' ὑμᾶς" ("ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you").

¹¹ See Jn. 14:27; 15:19; 17:14, 16.

¹² See Mt. 21:5-7; Mk. 11:2, 7; Lk. 19:30, 35.

¹³ See Lk. 4:6; Mt. 4:6, 9.

but simply as humble preachers who possessed nothing but their preaching, who could only conquer the hearts of men. The Church is joined only by one who responds to the word of preaching with uncoerced faith;14 hence, to call down fire from heaven upon the unbelievers would have been infidelity to the new spirit of Christ. 15 In the Church itself there can be no external authority. 16 But the new source and the new grace-filled basis for unification establish a community in which the members are far more closely linked than in any natural community. Jesus Christ Himself envisioned this community as a tree;¹⁷ that is, He spoke of the organic unity of all believers, so that even the very life of the reborn man is unthinkable outside this organic unity. This contrast of the Church to worldly kingdoms causes its members to be as though set apart from the world and no longer to belong to it. For this the world hates them and persecutes them in diverse ways, 18 but the Church vanquishes the world only by a "spirit of meekness" (1 Cor. 4:21).¹⁹

This being its nature, the Church can only be one. Two separately growing trees are not connected in any way: only the branches of a single tree are organically connected to each other. The existence of two separate Churches would contradict the very essence of church unity. Even Christ Himself spoke of one fold and one Shepherd.²⁰ Upon the rock of Peter's confession Christ built the Church (τὴν ἐκκλησίαν), not the Churches. All believers are "brethren" (Mt. 23:8). The Lord spoke of this same unity in His high priestly prayer, asking "that they all may be one" (Jn. 17:21).

Being one, the Church of Christ encompasses the entire world: it knows no territorial or national bounds. The Old Testament, which was limited to the Jewish nation alone, has come to an end. After

¹⁴ See Mk. 16:16.

¹⁵ See Lk. 9:54-56.

¹⁶ See Mt. 23:8-10.

¹⁷ See Jn. 15:4-6.

¹⁸ See Jn. 15:16, 18-21; 16:2-4, 20, 33; 17:14, 16.

¹⁹ See Mt. 5:5; Lk. 12:32.

²⁰ See Jn. 10:16.