

“ARE YOU A GOOD CATHOLIC?”
OCTOBER 2007

The Parchard family lived just down the street from my parents' house while I was growing up in Michigan. My brothers and I spent many hours playing with the three Parchard children. They were good Roman Catholics and attended St. Patrick's Catholic Church. One day, Carol Parchard took me on a tour of her church. It was the first time that I had ever been inside of a Roman Catholic Church building. I was amazed at the statues, the kneeling rails, and the altar. It was so different from the Dutch Reformed Church that my family attended. The ornate sanctuary seemed so foreign to me. I was used to the simple interiors of Calvinistic Churches. My Sunday School teachers had emphasized that we worship God "in spirit and in truth" and not with elaborate rituals.

After my tour of St. Patrick's Catholic Church, I was a little uneasy when The Apostles' Creed was recited in my home church. It seemed strange that I confessed belief in "the holy catholic Church." What did that mean? I certainly did not feel at home when I visited St. Patrick's. It was too elaborate and ornate for my Dutch Calvinist taste. Whenever the Parchards talked about the pope or the saints or the Virgin Mary, it was like they were speaking a foreign language. I was used to the preacher quoting the Bible as he talked about Jesus.

Was I a good Catholic? I didn't think so. I later learned that the word "catholic" in The Apostles' Creed comes from the Greek word that means "universal." In the Creed, we are simply affirming that the Church of Jesus Christ is a universal, worldwide Church. It is a home open to all people. Everyone who follows Jesus as Lord is welcome. You don't have to speak a certain language or live in a particular country. As Protestants, we can affirm that the Church is "catholic" without endorsing the Roman Catholic Church.

If you have questions about this part of The Apostles' Creed, I invite you to join us on Sunday mornings at 9:30 a.m. in Smead Hall for my ten-week class on the Creed. We will affirm the "catholic" or "universal" nature of the Church when we celebrate World Communion Sunday on October 7th. Millions of Christians around the globe will celebrate the Lord's Supper on that Sunday. We will follow the mandate of Scripture,

*"Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.
Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his
presence with singing." (Psalm 100:1-2)*

Let's follow this biblical teaching and be good "catholics." We worship a God whose arms are open to all races, peoples, and nationalities.

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