

## CHAPTER V

### MYSTERIES OF FAITH AND PRINCIPAL CREEDS

The ground of our Faith, as we have seen, is the Divine veracity : we believe revealed truths, and this without the least shadow of doubt, on the testimony and word of God: "*Faith is the evidence of things that appear not* " (Heb.xi. 1). When God speaks, His word excludes all possibility of error.

#### **Mysteries of Faith**

Now God, as St. Paul assures us, has made Himself known to us by revealing Himself to us through the Patriarchs and the Prophets of old, and last of all through his only-begotten Son. "*No man has seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him*" (John i. 18). The Revelation, then, which God has given us concerning His infinite Being and attributes must contain truths which are above our reason, seeing that it is only finite, and therefore altogether incapable of grasping the infinite. Such revealed truths are what we call the Mysteries of Faith.

#### **Mysteries in nature**

And our belief in religious mysteries is reasonable enough, since reason itself compels us to admit the truth of many things which we cannot fully understand, but of whose existence we can have no doubt. In the order of nature we believe in many facts which do not admit of explanation, and which must ever remain deep mysteries even to the most learned; for example, who can explain the life we know to be in the smallest blade of grass? or how it is that the tiny seed cast into the soil can grow up into a plant and produce fruit a hundred-fold? How much more, then, should we expect to find mysteries in Religion! And if our weak intellects fail to grasp even created things, or can arrive only at an imperfect knowledge of them, how can they possibly understand mysteries of Religion, which are infinitely above all created things? Yet no one considers himself unreasonable in believing many things that he does not understand; on the contrary, he would be regarded as one bereft of reason were he to refuse to believe many of the things around him simply because he could not understand them. It is the same in regard to the mysteries of Faith. Our intellects are too weak to comprehend God, who is infinite.

#### **A Mystery not contrary to reason**

We are told in the Catechism that a Mystery of Faith "*is a truth which is above reason, but revealed by God.*" Now *above* reason does not mean *contrary* to reason; it merely implies

that our reason, being finite or limited, is unable to grasp a mystery which is beyond its reach. But God who is the author of reason is also the author of Revelation: He has spoken, and His word is infallible. And as I believe in natural mysteries, although I fail to understand them, so I believe in revealed mysteries, even if I cannot understand them, because they come to me on the authority of God.

### **The Apostles' Creed**

What, then, are the chief mysteries of Faith revealed to us by God? Again we find a ready answer in the Catechism: "*The chief mysteries of Faith which God has revealed are contained in the Apostles' Creed.*"

The Apostles' Creed (Latin, *credo*, I believe) contains the leading articles of our Faith, and is the most ancient abridgment of the doctrines of the Catholic Church. Tertullian speaks of "A Rule of Faith descending from the tradition of the Apostles," who are said to have composed it before separating "to go into the whole world to preach the Gospel to every creature." Yet the Creed did not assume its present form till many centuries later. By means of this short abridgment, the Apostles' Creed, all Christians were easily able to learn, from the very first, the most important truths of Religion, and to make a clear profession of one and the same Faith: "*Hold the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me in faith, and in the love which is in Jesus Christ*" (2 Tim. i. 13).

### **General Councils**

In the course of the history of the Church heretical doctrines sprang up at different times. Whenever this happens it becomes necessary for the Church to warn the faithful against the prevailing error, to expound and declare the truth in clear and unmistakable language, and to condemn the heresy. And just as the Apostles had once assembled in Jerusalem under the presidency of St. Peter when differences had arisen in regard to Religion, so afterwards their successors, the Bishops of the Church, assembled under the presidency of the Pope, or his delegate, to settle disputes regarding the truths of Faith. Such an assembly of Bishops, presided over by the Pope, is called a General Council; and the decisions it arrives at in matters of Faith or Morals, when confirmed by the Pope, are infallible, formulated as they are under the guidance of the Spirit of Truth, which Christ promised should remain with His Church for ever.

### **The Nicene Creed**

One of the most famous Councils was that held at Nice in Bithynia, A.D. 325, after Arius had begun to propagate his heresy in which he denied the Divinity of our Lord, by maintaining that Jesus Christ was neither co-equal nor co-eternal with the Father. The Council condemned the heresy, and drew up the Creed called the Nicene Creed.

### **The Creed of Constantinople**

In the year 381 a General Council was held at Constantinople to proclaim the Divinity of the Holy Ghost against the false teaching of the Macedonian heresy. The Council confirmed and extended the Nicene Creed, which, thus enlarged, is sometimes spoken of as the Creed of Constantinople, and is that which is used in the Mass.

### **The Athanasian Creed**

Another Creed, known as the Athanasian, was for a long time thought to have been drawn up by St. Athanasius, patriarch of Alexandria (*d.* A.D. 373); but it probably belongs to a later period. It is now commonly admitted to have first appeared in Spain during the first half of the fifth century. The title "Athanasian" may have been given to it from the fact that it sums up the teachings of St. Athanasius against the Arian heresy, since it explains and develops the doctrines of the Blessed Trinity and of the Incarnation, or the twofold nature in the one Divine Person of God the Son, doctrines which were so vigorously defended by this great saint against the Arians.

### **The creed of Pope Pius IV**

The last of these great summaries of the Catholic Faith, adopted throughout the universal Church, was that of Pope Pius IV.

This Creed was directed against the errors of the Reformation, and was drawn up A.D. 1564 immediately after the Council of Trent.