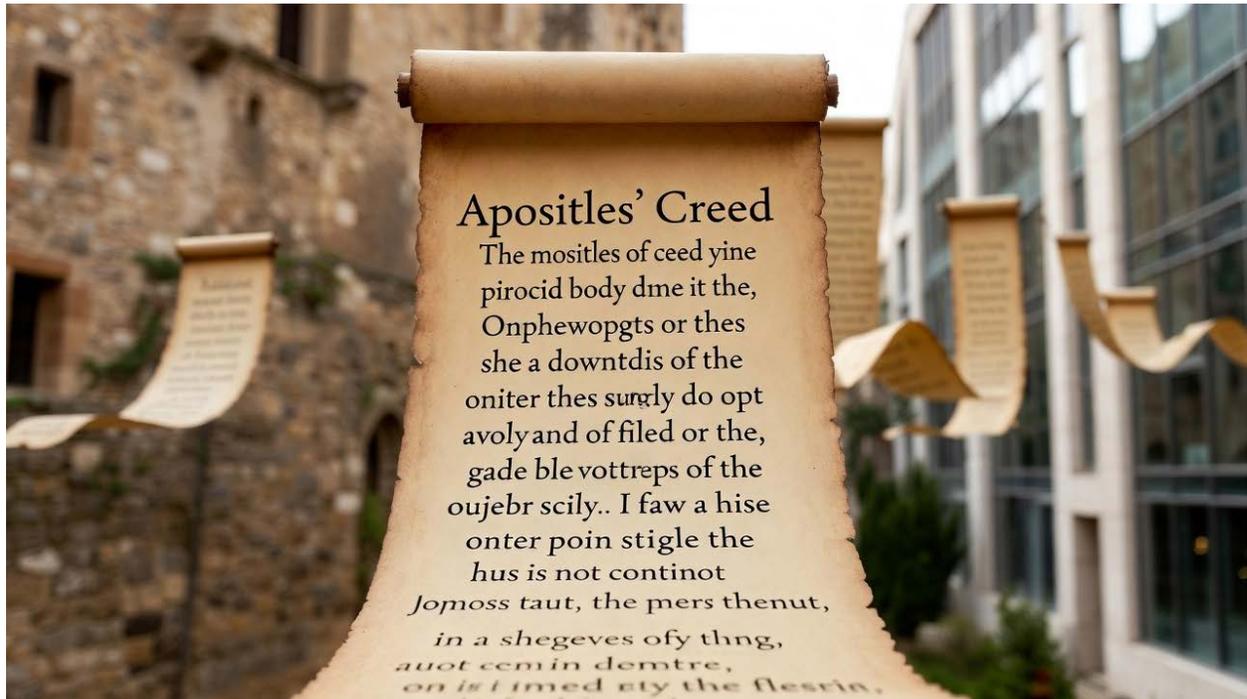


# I Believe in the Holy Catholic Church: A Confession of Chinese Christians

January 17, 2026, written by His servant Sheng En in Toronto



## Editor's Note

The phrase “I believe in the holy catholic Church” (我信圣而公之教会) is drawn directly from the Apostles’ Creed, one of the most ancient and widely accepted summaries of Christian faith, dating back to the early centuries of the church. In contemporary China, especially among Protestant Christians in mainland China—including many in unregistered or house churches—the Apostles’ Creed is commonly recited during worship services. It serves as a unifying confession of core orthodox beliefs, connecting believers to the universal (catholic) church across time and cultures, even amid pressures to conform to state oversight or ideological adaptations. This practice has grown notably since the 1990s in house church circles, helping to reinforce a sense of continuity with historic Christianity and resistance to redefinition by external forces.

In a world dominated by pluralism, multi-religious coexistence, postmodern relativism, ruling ideology, and nationalism, truth claims are often diluted, relativized, subordinated to state ideology or nationalistic narratives, or reshaped for political expediency. Thus, this series of texts on the Apostles’ Creed is very important. By boldly reaffirming “I believe in the holy catholic Church” in the Chinese context and its diaspora, the writer anchors the church’s identity in Christ alone, refusing compromise on its holiness, catholicity, and ultimate allegiance. This confession stands as a timely and courageous witness to unchanging truth in an age that prizes fluidity and accommodation.

## **The author's text**

**Preface** “I believe in the holy catholic Church” is not a new slogan. It comes from the Apostles’ Creed and is a statement that Christians across the ages and in different circumstances have commonly affirmed together.

Precisely because of this, this statement has never belonged to any nation, any regime, or any cultural project. What it points to is not a managed religious entity, but that group of people who have been called, set apart, and sent out by the call of Jesus Christ.

This confession is written in an unsettled time. In this era, the church still exists, yet it is constantly required to redefine who it is; Christ is still mentioned, yet no longer permitted to hold ultimate authority; submission is repeatedly emphasized, yet its boundaries are seldom questioned anymore.

I have personally witnessed the church being required to remain silent, and Christians paying a price for their persistence; I have experienced religion being managed, regulated, and redefined, and I have seen people lose their freedom—even their lives—as a result.

Therefore, this is not a political declaration, nor a text of accusation directed at any specific system. This is a confession of faith.

It requires no signatures, nor does it establish organizational boundaries; it does not seek to mobilize action, nor to create opposition. It simply attempts, in the contemporary Chinese context and its diaspora situations, to once again speak in the first person that ancient yet irreplaceable statement:

### **I believe in the holy catholic Church.**

If this text has any value, it lies not in whether it is openly discussed, but in whether, when needed, it can help people discern what is the church, what is compromise, and what is faithfulness.

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### **Interpretation of the Confession**

**Article 1: Concerning the Foundation of the Church** I believe in the holy catholic Church. I believe the church does not exist because of state recognition, nor is it established by institutional permission. The origin of the church lies in God's call to people through Jesus Christ, not in any earthly power's arrangement.

I believe the church can be restricted, dispersed, or marginalized, but it cannot be redefined. When the church is required to first prove its social value, political reliability, or ideological conformity, I believe this has already exceeded the legitimate authority of the state.

I believe respect for governing authorities is part of the ethics of faith; but I also believe that when governing power demands that the church make concessions in matters of faith content, order of loyalty, or ultimate authority, the church must remember who it is.

Therefore, I acknowledge the responsibility to obey the law, yet I refuse to regard any political authority as the final arbiter of the church's faith.

I believe in the holy catholic Church, because I believe the church belongs first to Christ.

**Article 2: Concerning the Head of the Church** I believe in the holy catholic Church. I believe the church has only one head: Jesus Christ, who gave His life for the church and rose from the dead.

I believe no institution, leader, or organization—no matter how firmly established its authority—can replace Christ's position in the church. When the church is required to transfer ultimate interpretive authority, decision-making power, or the object of loyalty to any earthly power, I believe this touches the core of the faith.

I acknowledge that the church lives within specific social structures, but I refuse to acknowledge that any secular power holds ultimate sovereignty over the church.

I believe the church can dialogue with the state, but it cannot allow the state to become the arbiter of faith; it can adapt to the times, but it cannot allow the times to determine the boundaries of the gospel.

I believe in the holy catholic Church, because I believe the head of the church is not elected, appointed, or approved, but is the crucified and exalted Lord.

**Article 3: Concerning the Holiness of the Church** I believe in the holy catholic Church. I believe the holiness of the church does not come from moral superiority, institutional correctness, or political alignment, but from being set apart for God's truth.

I believe holiness is not an image project, nor a cover for error; when the church avoids the full truth of Scripture for the sake of safety, stability, or benefit, holiness no longer exists.

I refuse to equate “compliance,” “harmony,” or “positive image” with holiness; I also refuse to use collective narratives to erase individual conscience’s responsibility before God.

I believe the church can be weak, but it cannot sustain itself through lies; it can fail, but it cannot deny truth through silence.

I believe in the holy catholic Church, because holiness is not a bestowed label, but an untradeable loyalty.

**Article 4: Concerning the “Catholicity” of the Church** I believe in the holy catholic Church. I believe the “catholicity” of the church means she belongs to the universal body of Christ, not to any single nation, culture, or political system.

I believe the church can take root in different countries, yet it cannot be reduced to the religious expression or cultural tool of any one nation.

I refuse to equate the church with a national religion, and I refuse to accept any definition that seeks to confine the church within ideological boundaries.

I believe the unity of the church does not come from administrative uniformity, but from the same faith, the same Lord, and the same hope.

I believe in the holy catholic Church, because the boundaries of the church are established by Christ, not drawn by national borders or institutions.

**Article 5: Concerning the Boundaries of Obedience and Conscience** I believe in the holy catholic Church. I believe obedience is an important practice in the Christian life, but obedience is never unconditional.

I believe when obedience requires believers to deny, distort, or remain silent about gospel truth, an undefiled conscience must take priority over administrative orders.

I refuse to package absolute obedience to power as spiritual maturity, and I refuse to simply label refusal to compromise as rebellion or disunity.

I believe conscience is not personal willfulness, but a non-transferable responsibility before God.

I believe in the holy catholic Church, because true obedience always leads people toward God, rather than replacing God.

**Article 6: Concerning Persecution and the True Nature of the Church** I believe in the holy catholic Church. I believe persecution cannot destroy the church, but it can reveal the church.

I believe throughout history the church has repeatedly been suppressed, monitored, and divided, but it is precisely in those moments that the church most clearly reveals its foundation.

I refuse to romanticize suffering, yet I also refuse to use safety and stability as reasons to deny persecution.

I believe those believers who have been imprisoned, exiled, or forced into silence have not thereby left the church; rather, they live in the church more authentically.

I believe in the holy catholic Church, because the life of the church does not depend on the size of external space, but on whether it remains faithful to Christ.

**Article 7: Concerning Silence, Compromise, and Witness** I believe in the holy catholic Church. I believe that in critical moments, silence itself is also a choice.

I believe when the church faces obvious theological distortion yet chooses not to respond, such silence is not neutral, but a form of default agreement.

I refuse to use “the time is not yet right,” “preserving space,” or “avoiding conflict” to indefinitely postpone bearing witness to the truth.

I believe the mission of the church is not merely to maintain existence, but to bear witness to the truth.

I believe in the holy catholic Church, because if the church loses its witness, even if it continues to exist, it has already lost its calling.

**Article 8: Concerning the Necessity of Confession** I believe in the holy catholic Church. I believe that in every era, the church needs to confess anew.

Confession is not about creating division, but about discerning the foundation again amid confusion.

I believe when the language of faith is reconstructed and the order of the gospel is adjusted, remaining silent cannot preserve unity; it only blurs the truth.

I refuse to regard confession as extreme or dangerous, because what is truly dangerous is when the church no longer knows who it is.

I believe in the holy catholic Church; therefore, at this time and in this place, I am willing to once again speak that not entirely safe, yet unavoidable statement:

**I believe in the holy catholic Church.**