

For the

# LIFE of the WORLD

January 1999. Volume Three, Number One



I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day he rose again from the dead. He



Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen

ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian

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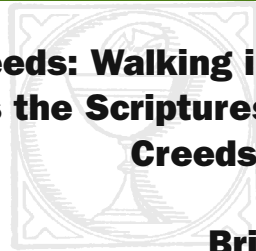
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THEOLOGICAL  
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P R E S S

## the Creeds:

# Walking in the Faith of

When the word Creed is mentioned, we generally associate with it a fixed body of statements which were formulated and accepted at a specific point in time by the Christian church and transmitted in its history as important articles to which believers continue to pledge their allegiance. Three important creeds immediately come to mind, namely the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed. Upon opening the Book of Concord, wherein all important documents of the Lutheran church are contained, the reader will find these creeds referred to as the "three chief or ecumenical symbols" and placed alongside seven other documents of the Lutheran church: the Augsburg Confessions, its Apology, the Smalcald Articles, the Treatise, the Small and Large Catechism, and finally the voluminous Formula of Concord. These three creeds enjoy a very special status in the Christian church not only because of their old age but also because they are ecumenical in character, that is, they have been accepted by the Christian church worldwide and not only by a single church body. Thereby, they have become for all Christians signs or symbols which remind us that fundamental questions were both raised and decisively answered in the period between the days of the apostles and those of the reformers. Noteworthy, therefore, is the fact that the reformers quoted the Creeds with the specific purpose to prove to their opponents they were not innovating new doctrines of a church-divisive nature, but shared the ecumenical faith of the ancient church. As a token of acknowledging their revered status, posterity gave the three creeds alone the exclusive title creeds whereas all other important documents of the church were called confessions.

### **The Creeds Have Their Roots In Scripture**

Together with the other confessions in the Book of Concord, the creeds share a relationship to Scripture, not as being infallible in character, but nonetheless as true explications of Scripture. In fact, they do not only illuminate the Bible's true meaning, but they have their roots in Scripture from both a phenomenological and historical perspective. If we examine the word Creed etymologically, that is by tracing the origin of the word, we discover that it is derived from the Latin word credere which means nothing other than "to believe." We can say that creeds are statements of what Christians' believed at a particular moment in time. Such statements of faith are infinite in number in Scripture and very old in origin. Creeds are as old as the church; yes as old as God's people on this earth. Already the nation of Israel, in allegiance to its God Jahwe, the Creator and Redeemer, expressed its faith in brief statements such as "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord" (Deuteronomy 6:4). In the New Testament, believers shared Peter's confession that Christ is the "Messiah (Christ), the Son of

the living God," which was his answer to Jesus' question, "But who do you say that I am?" (Matthew 16: 15-16). In similar fashion also the eunuch in his desire to be baptized by Philip declared his faith with the words, "I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God" (Acts 8:37).

### **Confessing The Creeds May Lead To Persecution**

Yes, to affirm one's trust and allegiance in Jesus Christ as Lord was without doubt both a very personal and audible expression in whom salvation is believed to be found. As we are told by Paul, "because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). However, in doing so, the believer very often puts his own life on the line. Stephen, the martyr, may serve as the most placid example where his bold and outspoken belief cost him his life. In fact, this may explain why in the time of persecution in the early church, Christians chose the symbol of the fish to express their faith in this cryptic form. For if spelled out, the letters for a fish, I CH TH YS, stood in for the abbreviated Greek words, Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior. To this day, inscriptions of this symbol can be seen in the catacombs beneath the city of Rome where the remains of many a Christian's tortured and mutilated body rest in peace.

### **The Creeds Are Structured According To The Faith In The Triune God**

It was not only the one person, Jesus Christ, who stood in the focus of the Christians' faith. At times, God the Father and the Son were confessed together (Romans 4:24) in what we identify today in scholarly terms as bipartite structured statements. On other occasions, all three persons of the Trinity were confessed in the form of tripartite structured statements as can be found in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19) or in what we call the Pauline pulpit blessing, "Grace and peace be with you from God our Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (2 Corinthians 13:13). Naturally, the Creeds themselves were a direct outflow of these brief confessions to the Triune God but of a more elaborate structure and content.

### **The Creeds Versus The Privacy Of Faith**

In conducting a comparison between such brief expressions of faith in the Bible and the long and elaborate statements of the ecumenical Creeds, the fixed and rigid formulations of the latter hardly seem to reflect the personal and spontaneous character of the former. This may give rise to a number of objections so common to this day and age. Without doubt, many a Christian's battle cry can be heard, "The Bible, the bible only is the religion of us Lutherans" and not some later formulas passed by the church. Others might place greater demands on a person's ethical expres-

# Our Fathers

By the Rev. Dr. Detlev Schulz

sions where what you do becomes the hallmark of true Christianhood rather than what is confessed and believed, particularly such formal statements as the creeds. Others, while finding the setting and statements of the creeds from a historical perspective appealing, reject their validity for today's time and situation.

Opponents to the creeds, such as those mentioned above, seem to be oblivious of the basic claim of the ecumenical creeds. They never want to represent a movement away from the personal and brief statements of faith in Scripture, but rather a radical return to their deepest meaning and implications as these were opened afresh by controversial and problematic attacks. Indeed, it may be said the ecumenical creeds are once again successful attempts at finding answers to the fundamental question Jesus asked Peter, "Who do you say I am?" in a given context. Faith is never confessed in a vacuum, but relates to important events and challenges within a Christian's life.

## **The Creeds Must Remain Personal Statements Of Faith**

The three ecumenical creeds will never be relegated to antiquity. According to the motto, "There is nothing new under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:1), they may be used as an important yardstick to address contemporary questions and problems which are often not so new after all, but mere repristinations of former old heresies. This advice applies in particular to young churches in the mission field who may be relieved in having these creeds in their possession to combat new controversies on the Triune God. But, we too, must include the creeds in the personal expression of our faith as we continue to seek answers to the question, "Who do you say I am?" The most apparent evidence of our commitment to the creeds, apart from having received them

into the Book of Concord, is that they are given a special seat in the liturgy of our church. The Apostles' Creed is confessed most often in the worship service be it at baptism or after the reading of the Gospel. The Nicene Creed is reserved for important church

festivals or Sundays. Unfortunately, the Athanasian Creed has been relegated to near obscurity. Though hardly confessed in the church, it fortunately has found a special seat in Trinity Sunday with which the lengthy Trinity season begins. This shows that the creeds are still very much in use today. Their important seat in the liturgy of the Christian church has always included their value for pre-baptismal catechetical instruction and confirmation.

## **The Creeds Belong To Faith As Light Does To Fire**

In view of the creeds, two further reasons may justify their validity for today. There is the saying "the person who belongs to God also understands who God is" and that "a church without a past has no future." The creeds, were for the Christians, a means to openly publicize their faith in the Triune God to the outside unbelieving Grecian and Roman worlds. Just as the quality of a trumpet depends on its clear sound, so too, our faith may keep nothing back of the truth about God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who has set us free. All Christians "are chosen to tell about the excellent qualities of God" (I Peter 2:9). In this way, our faith and the creeds belong together just as fire and light are inseparable from each other. May they again become for us a means of instructing our erring neighbors and enlightening the faith of the unbelievers.



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