

CHAPTER ONE: THE CREEDS OF THE CHURCH

THE word *creed* comes from the Latin *credo*, which means “I believe.” The church composed creeds to clarify right belief or *orthodoxy* in response to the emergence of wrong belief or *heresy*.

The church uses two ancient creeds in worship: The Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed. **The Apostles’ Creed** is the earlier of the two. Though it did not reach its final form until the A.D. 400’s, some form of the Apostles’ Creed was likely in use in the 2nd Century (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:3-4). **The Nicene Creed** is the product of two ecumenical councils: Nicaea in A.D. 325 and Constantinople in A.D. 381. A third creed, **The Athanasian Creed**, is named after the church father St. Athanasius, though it probably was not written by him. It was once required to be read on certain feast days, but has fallen into disuse. However, it remains an authorized statement of right belief, especially regarding the Trinity and the divinity and humanity of Jesus.

Why the Creeds?

People who say they believe in God have vastly different understandings of who God is. What at first glance appears to be a common faith in God, on further review, is shown to be a cause of great division. The creeds summarize the essential points of God’s identity and help distinguish Christian faith from other, contrary notions of God.

A right understanding of the doctrine about God necessarily precedes a relationship with God. For example, a woman cannot love a man if she does not know who he is or has false notions of his character. Just so, we cannot love and trust God if we are not clear about who he is and what he is like. True religion involves both head and heart.

But we have the Bible. Why do we need creeds? From the beginning of the church, there have been false teachers who twist the teachings of the Bible to their own ends (cf. 1 Timothy 4:1, Acts 20:29-30, 2 Peter 3:16). The church wrote creeds to distinguish true, biblical teaching from false teaching. The creeds are the church’s authoritative summaries of biblical doctrine on the central points of faith. They reflect the truth into which the Holy Spirit led the church (John 16:13). They are statements of faith to which the whole church says, “Amen.” Consequently, they are to be distinguished from sectarian “confessions” of faith, which highlight the distinctive beliefs of one church or another.

The Creeds and Tradition

The Creeds are part of the tradition of the church. “Tradition” is sometimes seen as a negative thing because of Jesus’ criticism of the Pharisees in passages like Matthew 15:6, “You have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.” But the New Testament also speaks in a positive way about tradition. St. Paul wrote, “Stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.” (2 Thessalonians 2:15, cf. 3:6).

Tradition teaches us what the early church believed about Bible passages that are unclear. Tradition informs us what the early church believed and practiced in areas where the Bible is silent. For example, St. Paul talks about having established the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23f.), but he never says exactly how the church was celebrating it. We can look to the tradition of the church in the writings of the church fathers to see what worship was like.

Of special importance for understanding tradition are the Seven Ecumenical Councils. These are gatherings of the church that took place between A.D. 325 and A.D. 787 (see addendum for a summary of these councils). The Ecumenical Councils met for the purpose of clarifying right doctrine in response to heresy. Since these councils met before the later divisions in the church, their decisions reflect the ancient consensus about the faith. As mentioned above, the Nicene Creed is the product of the first two of these councils.

The ancient and universal consensus that is called Tradition is to be distinguished from practices that may become "a tradition" in a church. We should examine the practices of the church in the light of the Bible and the ancient Tradition. For example, the English Reformation rejected the medieval "Romish Doctrine concerning Purgatory, Pardons, etc..." (Article XXII, BCP 607) because it was a departure from the faith of the Bible and the ancient Tradition.

A Look at the Creeds

Both creeds are composed of three paragraphs (shown side by side below); one each for the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Nicene Creed expands on the shorter paragraphs of the Apostles' Creed, reflecting the church's need to clarify orthodox faith as new heresies surfaced over time.

The Apostles' Creed

IBELIEVE 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 Ghost, Born of the Virgin Mary: Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried: He descended into hell; The third day he rose again from the dead: He ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty: From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost: The holy Catholic Church; The Communion of Saints: The Forgiveness of sins: The Resurrection of the body: And the Life everlasting. Amen.

The Nicene Creed

IBELIEVE in one God the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things
visible and invisible:

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God; Begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God; Begotten, not made; Being of one substance with the Father; By whom all things were made: Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, And was made man: And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried: And the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures: And ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of the Father: And he shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; Whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, The Lord, and Giver of Life, Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son; Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; Who spake by the Prophets: And I believe one Catholic and Apostolic Church: I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins: And I look for the Resurrection of the dead: And the Life of the world to come. Amen.

PARAGRAPH ONE - GOD THE FATHER

I Believe in One God...Maker of Heaven and Earth

Paragraph one of both creeds summarizes the monotheism (belief in one God) that is the foundation of the Old Testament revelation. Genesis 1, the creation narrative in the Bible, was written as a refutation of ancient polytheism or belief in many gods. Genesis teaches that the one and only God spoke into existence the very aspects of nature that the pagans believed were divine. There are other spiritual beings (angels) who were created by God but there is only one, eternal God. Every thing else, visible and invisible, was created by him.

The Bible teaches us that God was motivated by love when he created the world. The word used to describe the Holy Spirit “hovering” or “moving” over the face of the waters in Genesis 1:2 is a word that elsewhere describes a mother bird hovering over her young. Job 38:7 tells us that was joy among the angels over God’s creation. This contrasts with ancient pagan notions that the world was created by angry, warring deities and the modern notion that the creation of the world was a random occurrence, without meaning or purpose.

Our view of life is defined by our view of the origin of the world. If we think the world was created by forces that are hostile to us, we will live with a certain fear, not being able to trust that things will work out for our good. If we think the world is merely the product of random occurrences, then we will be uncertain about the present and future and life will seem meaningless. But if we believe the world was created and is sustained by a loving, all powerful God, we can trust that he intends things to work out for our good.

The Bible also teaches that the creation is “good” (Genesis 1:10, 12, 31). The problems in the creation result from man’s decision to disobey God (Genesis 3). Sin causes man to take the good things God made and use them for evil. This contrasts with the teaching of some religions that physical bodies and physical things are inherently bad. Some religions teach that to be saved we have to be freed from the physical creation. The Bible teaches us that the Son of God became a part of the creation and that the creation itself will be saved (Romans 8:21).

The Father

Both creeds state that God is Father. Whatever may be the limitations of gender distinctions applied to God, it remains the clear fact of revelation that God has chosen to reveal himself as Father, not as mother or in an androgynous category. The Bible makes it clear that gender is central to the revelation. God is a Father who has a Son. And God created man as male and female. The institution of marriage in Genesis 2:24 is used in the New Testament in Ephesians 5:31-32 as the pattern for understanding the union of Christ the Bridegroom (John 3:29) and his Church the Bride.

This is the principal reason the church does not ordain women as priests. The opposition to women’s ordination has nothing whatsoever to do with ability or equality. It has to do with an accurate repre-

sentation of the being and nature of God. The apostolic ministry represents Christ the Bridegroom (cf. John 3:29) at the altar. Because the mystery of our salvation is revealed in categories that involve gender, it is necessary that the apostolic ministry represent the maleness of Christ. To say that a woman can represent a man is to say that gender is interchangeable. This is the root of homosexual behavior. The ordination of women and the acceptance of homosexual behavior are related theological errors and it is no coincidence that they have appeared in the church at the same time.

Almighty

Both creeds state that God is Almighty. Almighty means all-powerful. It means that God is in control. There is no equal and opposite force of evil that can thwart the will of God. Revelation 12 reveals that the being who stands opposite of Satan is Michael the Archangel. God has no equal.

We can only trust God because he is Almighty. If God were not Almighty, how could we trust him to do what he says he is going to do? If God were not Almighty, and if Jesus were not Lord of all, some other, competing power or authority might be able to undermine our hope and salvation.

Of course, it is not self-evident that God is Almighty. There is crime and war. There is severe persecution of Christians in many lands. Sin and unbelief are rampant. Our world is marred by tragedy, misfortune, sickness and death. The Bible teaches us that all of the evil in the world is the result of human sin. God became man in order to conquer sin and redeem the world. The work of redemption has begun, but is not yet completed. The definitive victory in the battle against Satan, sin and death has been won on the cross, but the effects of that victory are not yet recognized universally (cf. Hebrews 2:8, 1 Corinthians 15:25-6).

The Bible teaches that Jesus will appear in glory and forcefully subdue all evil (cf. Philippians 3:21). Now is the time of mission and witness, when salvation is freely offered to all. Now is the time when hearts and minds can be changed by the grace and power of God.

The omnipotence of God is governed by the love of God. The love of God requires some continued measure of human freedom. God wants hearts to respond to his love, shown on the cross, with love. The free response of love can only be given by people who are also free to reject love. Indeed, acts of genuine sacrifice and holiness can only be carried out by people who are also free to do what is selfish and evil.

Nonetheless, the Bible teaches us that God's almighty power will prevail. Just as God brought the glory of resurrection out of the evil of Good Friday, so God will bring a glorious salvation out of all human sin. Almighty God is at work in the world right now, causing "all things to work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). God's almighty power is shown in this: He is able to bring the creation and each of our lives to the redemptive end he has planned for us. He is almighty, and thus, we can trust him.

PARAGRAPH TWO - GOD THE SON

Jesus: Fully Man

The earliest issue in the church, addressed by the Apostles' Creed, was whether Jesus is genuinely human or "man." An early heresy held that Jesus, the Son of God, only appeared to be man for the purpose of revealing God, but was not genuinely human. The cadenced phrases in the second paragraph of the Apostles' Creed address this error. They assert that Jesus was conceived and born; that he suffered, died and was buried and that he descended into hell. These assertions highlight his genuine humanity.

The things said about Jesus in the Apostles' Creed pertain to every human. We are all conceived and born. We all die and are buried. At death, our spirits go to the place where departed spirits go. There are two exceptions to the general lot of humanity in the life of Jesus. First, he was conceived by the Holy Ghost. His mother was Mary, but he had no human father. He was conceived in the womb of Mary when the Holy Spirit came upon her (cf. Luke 1:35). Therefore, he is the Son of God. Second, Jesus rose from the dead the third day, unlike any human being before him. His resurrection expands the horizon of human life and gives us the hope of our own resurrection (cf. John 5:28-29, 1 Corinthians 15:52, 1 Thessalonians 4:16).

The genuine humanity of Jesus is different from our humanity in that Jesus is without sin (Hebrews 4:15). This is no small difference. When we talk about someone being "human," we usually mean that person is flawed or weak. However, Jesus is the New Man. He came to solve the problem that was created by the sin of the first man (see Romans 5:15-19, 1 Corinthians 15:21-22). His perfect humanity is the model for the Christian life. Salvation means not only becoming like God; salvation also means becoming genuinely human—that is, free from the defects of human nature that are caused by sin.

Jesus: Fully God

By the time of the Council of Nicea in A. D. 325, the pressing issue was no longer whether Jesus was truly man. The question was, "Is Jesus truly God?" Some in the church (most notably, a priest in Alexandria named Arius and his followers) taught that Jesus was the most exalted and important being in the creation, but was not God. These "Arians" taught that in the great divide that exists between God and the creation, Jesus belongs on the side of the creation.

The second paragraph of the Nicene Creed expands the second paragraph of the Apostles' Creed in order to deal with this error. In certain key statements ("begotten of the Father before all worlds," "begotten not made," "being of one substance with the Father") it affirms that Jesus is really and truly God.

The Son of God is eternal, like the Father. To use an ancient phrase, "There never was a time when the Son was not." In the New Testament, John's Gospel refers to Jesus as the "Word" of God. John 1:1-3 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. All

things were made through Him and without Him nothing was made that was made.” We see in Genesis that God created the world by speaking. The Father created the world through his Son, who is the “Word” of God.

Thus, Jesus is fully God and fully man. He is God because he is “begotten of the Father before all worlds.” He is man because he was “born of the Virgin Mary.” The English word that is used to refer to his divinity and humanity is “nature.” **Jesus has a divine nature and a human nature, which are united in his one person.** Because Jesus is God, his teaching carries the very authority of God (cf. Hebrews 1:1-2). Because Jesus is man, he can identify with the human condition and intercede with the Father on our behalf (cf. Hebrews 7:25). God and man are reconciled in the person of Jesus.

PARAGRAPH THREE - GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is God

Genesis 1:2 says, that in the beginning “the Spirit of God moved over the face of the waters.” The Spirit was present in the beginning with the Father and the Son. In Acts 5:3-4, lying to the Holy Spirit is described as lying to God. The Nicene Creed affirms the divinity of the Holy Spirit when it says, “who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified.” Since only God can be worshiped, the Nicene Creed is saying that the Holy Spirit is God.

God is Trinity: Three Persons, One Substance

Thus, the creeds teach that God is Trinity. The English word used to distinguish the three is “person.” The doctrine of the Trinity states that the one God who created the world exists, from eternity, in three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, who are united in one substance of being.

A note: The word *substance* comes from the Greek word, “homoousious,” which means “one substance” or “one essence.” At the council of Nicea in 325, the Arians (those who did not believe that Jesus is God) taught that Jesus was of “like substance” or “homoiousious” with the Father. Thus, the difference between orthodoxy and heresy was one Greek vowel, the “i” or “iota.”

One way to understand the Trinity is provided by the church father, St. Augustine. He pointed out that a relationship of love requires three: a lover, a beloved and love itself. The Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Father and the Holy Spirit is the personification of their love (cf. Romans 5:5). Thus, God is love because he is, within his own being, a loving relationship. He is not merely an abstract principle of love. God created the world because of his desire to share his love with created beings. Love is also the motive for the cross (John 3:16). By contrast, a unitarian God might create out of a need for someone to love. Indeed, pagan stories taught that the god created or acted out of need or malice. The Bible and the creeds reveal one God whose motive is love.

All Christian theology builds upon these two cardinal doctrines: Jesus is fully God and fully man, and God is Trinity. Errors with regard to these doctrines are called, in classical Christian terms, heresies.

OTHER TEACHINGS OF THE CREEDS

He Descended into Hell

The word “hell” in the Apostles’ Creed is the English translation of the Greek word *hades*. This is the intermediate state of the dead. It is the equivalent of the Old Testament *Sheol*. **To say that Jesus descended into hell or hades is to say that Jesus died a normal death.** His body went into the ground and his spirit went to the place where departed spirits go. In *hades*, Jesus preached the gospel to the dead (cf. 1 Peter 3:19) and made it retroactive, confirming the salvation of the elect and confirming God’s judgment on the disobedient. The word *hades* is to be distinguished from the word *Gebenna* which refers to the place of eternal punishment (cf. Matthew 5:13).

The New Testament teaches that the redeemed are separated from the rest of the dead in the intermediate state (see the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, Luke 16:19-31). The New Testament teaches that at death the souls of the faithful departed go to a place described as “paradise” (Luke 23:43), “present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8), “with Christ” (Philippians 2:23) or “asleep” (1 Thessalonians 4:15). This reflects the teaching that in his descent into *hades* and subsequent resurrection, Jesus “led captivity captive” (Ephesians 4:8). He took those who were his out of *hades*, which is a state of captivity to death, and into Paradise to be with him.

He Shall Come Again, with Glory, to Judge

When Jesus ascended into heaven, the promise was given that he would return in the same manner as he left. (Acts 1:11). When he comes again he will judge the world. As Romans says, “God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ” (2:16). This is an important teaching to take to heart because we live in a world in which people frequently assume they will not be held accountable for their actions. All sin will be accounted for, either through repentance and the forgiveness that Jesus offers us through the cross, or on the Day of Judgement.

The Holy Catholic Church

The various statements of belief in the third paragraph of the creeds are listed after the Holy Spirit because they are things that we receive through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit created the Church when the Spirit descended upon the first believers (Acts 2).

The Four Marks of the Church

The Book of Common Prayer has the following questions and answers about the Church (BCP 291):

Question. How is the Church described in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds?

Answer. The Church is described in the Creeds as One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic.

Question. What do we mean by these words?

Answer. We mean that the Church is
One; because it is one Body under one Head;
Holy; because the Holy Spirit dwells in it, and sanctifies its members;
Catholic; because it is universal, holding earnestly the Faith for all time, in all countries, and for all people; and is sent to preach the Gospel to the whole world;
Apostolic; because it continues steadfastly in the Apostles' teaching and fellowship.

These are called the four marks of the Church.

The Communion of the Saints

The Apostles' Creed also expresses belief in the Communion of the Saints. This means that the Holy Spirit unites the members of the church into one, common body that cannot be separated by time and space. As Hymn 207 says, "One body we, one body who partake, with all thy saints on earth and saints at rest." This union answers the human need for genuine, intimate and mutually fulfilling relationships with others, as opposed to the false, shallow and selfish nature of fallen human relationships.

The greater part of the communion of the saints consists of those who have already died. Because death does not divide the Church, the Church prays for the faithful departed in the Liturgy, "beseeching thee to grant them continual growth in thy love and service." The Church also believes that the departed saints pray for the living, inasmuch as they are able. However, because the Bible is silent on this issue and because of historical abuses with regard to the invocation of saints (cf. Article XXII, BCP 607), Anglicans tend to be cautious about how they express this doctrine.

The Resurrection of the Body and the Life Everlasting

The Christian hope is not merely that we will die and go to heaven. Death is the separation of the spirit from the body. The body is buried and the spirit goes to be "with Christ" (Philippians 1:23) or "in paradise" (Luke 23:43). This is the intermediate state of the soul—the state of the soul after death and before resurrection. Resurrection is the reunion of the spirit with the body. When Jesus comes again in glory he will give us new bodies like his resurrection body and bring us into his eternal kingdom (cf. Corinthians 15:52). Eternal life is life in a transformed body (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:2-4).

Additional Thoughts on the Resurrection of the Dead

Given the misunderstandings about the Christian hope that are so common and pervasive, some additional clarifications are necessary concerning “The resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.” Many, perhaps most, Christians think of the Christian hope as the promise that we will go to heaven when we die. Heaven is seen as the end-point of faith. We will live forever, with God, in heaven.

This is wrong. The Christian hope is resurrection. It is the hope that what happened to Jesus will happen to us. Jesus died on Good Friday. His spirit left his body. Jesus rose on Easter as his spirit and body were reunited. Likewise, our spirits and our bodies, separated in death, will be reunited when Jesus returns and the dead are raised. This is the central New Testament hope. It is proclaimed in passages such as Philippians 3:20-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-54. We do not hope for a disembodied “spiritual” existence. We hope to live forever in bodies that have been transformed after the pattern of Jesus.

The “going to heaven” part of the Christian hope is what is called the “Intermediate State.” It is what the New Testament calls being “in Paradise,” (Luke 23:43) “with Christ” (Philippians 1:23 or “asleep” (1 Thessalonians 4:13). It is intermediate because it is not final. The final state is resurrection. Those who are asleep in Christ, in Paradise, also await the resurrection.

The resurrection hope is not that we will live in heaven forever. The resurrection hope is that Jesus will return and establish his kingdom on earth. The whole creation will also participate in the resurrection (Romans 8:21). The resurrection of Jesus is the pattern for the whole creation, not just for individual believers. The Bible promises a new creation, a new heaven and a new earth (Isaiah 65:17, 1 Peter 2:1, Revelation 21:5).

The Christian hope is for the fulfillment of the creation. It is for life in a body in a physical world, about which God will again say, “It is very good” (Genesis 1:31). This is why Revelation 22 sounds so much like the Garden of Eden. The new creation restores what was lost through sin.

Many Christians speak of going to heaven in a way that implies that salvation is an escape from the physical world. That is actually an eastern, Hindu concept of salvation. The Hindus believe that one is reincarnated until all the bad karma is gone. Then one will not come back. One will have finally escaped from the physical world and become pure spirit. This is not the Christian hope!

The popular errors concerning the Christian hope make it hard for many to desire what God promises. Few people want to live as a spirit, floating on a cloud, playing a harp, and this is not what the Bible promises. The Christian hope is for the fulfillment of life in the body. There is no truly good thing in this life that does not have some corresponding fulfillment in the life that is to come. The good things in this world point us to the good things in the resurrection.

The biblical hope has been undermined by what is sometimes called “dispensationalist theology,” and a fictitious event referred to as “the rapture.” The idea, based on a misreading of 1 Thessalonians 4:17, is that salvation involves an escape from the creation. The church will be caught up or raptured, so they say, and taken away. However, the point of being “caught up in the air to meet the Lord in the clouds” in 1 Thessalonians is to join Christ in his triumphant return as the creation rejoices over the revealing of the sons of God (Romans 8:19). Those caught up are not to be spirited off to some distant place. They are coming with Christ to earth to reign with Christ in the new creation. As the prophet Zechariah says, “The LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with thee.” 1 Thessalonians 4:17 is talking about resurrection, not “rapture.”

False views of the Christian hope are not just harmless differences of opinion. They can be harmful because they can lead people to live in the wrong way. If we believe the world will be completely destroyed and we will live forever in a non-physical state, we may come to despise the current physical creation. But if we see the whole creation as something that is being redeemed, we can affirm the goodness of God’s creation, even as we look for its renewal.

Because the resurrection hope proclaims the redemption of the whole creation, it leads us to ministry in the world. The kingdom of God has already broken into this world through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit. Jesus is now Lord of the creation. “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ” (Revelation 11:15). At the resurrection, this conquest will be completed. As we pray, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,” we also work, by grace, to make it so.

(For a more thoroughgoing exposition of the biblical hope of resurrection, I recommend *Surprised by Hope*, by N. T. Wright.)

Bible Passages Related to the Creeds

God as Creator/Almighty: Genesis 1 & 2, Revelation 1:8

On the Divinity and Humanity of Christ: John 1:1-14, Galatians 4:4, Colossians 1:15-18, Hebrews 1

On the Crucifixion and Resurrection: Matthew 27-28, Mark 15-16, Luke 23-24, John 19-21

On the Ascension and Second Coming of Jesus: Acts 1:9-11, Titus 1:13, Philippians 3:20-21

On Christ as Judge: 1 Corinthians 4:5, 2 Corinthians 5:10, 2 Timothy 4:1, 1 Peter 4:5, 2 Peter 2:9

On the Holy Spirit: Genesis 1:2, Acts 2, Acts 5:3-4, John 20:21-23, Romans 5:5, 1 Corinthians 12:13

On the Communion of the Saints: Ephesians 4:4-6

On the Resurrection of the Body: 1 Corinthians 15

The Athanasian Creed

WHOSOEVER will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the Catholic Faith. Which Faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the Catholic Faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity. Neither confounding the Persons, nor dividing the Substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Ghost is all One, the Glory Equal, the Majesty Co-Eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father Uncreated, the Son Uncreated, and the Holy Ghost Uncreated. The Father Incomprehensible, the Son Incomprehensible, and the Holy Ghost Incomprehensible. The Father Eternal, the Son Eternal, and the Holy Ghost Eternal and yet they are not Three Eternals but One Eternal. As also there are not Three Uncreated, nor Three Incomprehensibles, but One Uncreated, and One Uncomprehensible. So likewise the Father is Almighty, the Son Almighty, and the Holy Ghost Almighty. And yet they are not Three Almighties but One Almighty.

So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. And yet they are not Three Gods, but One God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Ghost Lord. And yet not Three Lords but One Lord. For, like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by Himself to be God and Lord, so are we forbidden by the Catholic Religion to say, there be Three Gods or Three Lords. The Father is made of none, neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Ghost is of the Father, and of the Son neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.

So there is One Father, not Three Fathers; one Son, not Three Sons; One Holy Ghost, not Three Holy Ghosts. And in this Trinity none is afore or after Other, None is greater or less than Another, but the whole Three Persons are Co-eternal together, and Co-equal. So that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Unity is Trinity, and the Trinity is Unity is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved, must thus think of the Trinity.

Furthermore, it is necessary to everlasting Salvation, that he also believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right Faith is, that we believe and confess, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man.

God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and Man, of the substance of His mother, born into the world. Perfect God and Perfect Man, of a reasonable Soul and human Flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching His Manhood. Who, although He be God and Man, yet He is not two, but One Christ. One, not by conversion of the Godhead into Flesh, but by taking of the Manhood into God. One altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by Unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one Man, so God and Man is one Christ. Who suffered for our salvation, descended into Hell, rose again the third day from the dead. He ascended into Heaven, He sitteth on the right hand of the Father, God Almighty, from whence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies, and shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting, and they that have done evil into everlasting fire. This is the Catholic Faith, which except a man believe faithfully and firmly, he cannot be saved.

Addendum on the Ecumenical Councils

The early church developed its authorized tradition as it encountered false teaching. When someone began to teach false doctrine, the church was forced to more clearly define what is right. In the first thousand years of Christianity, the undivided church convened seven councils for the purpose of clarifying doctrine. The councils are called The Seven Ecumenical Councils. Each of these councils clarified some aspect of doctrine. They can be summarized as follows:

Nicea: A.D. 325. Affirmed that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, against the heresy of a priest named Arius and his followers who taught that the Son of God was created. The Nicene Creed (named after this council) says that the Son of God is “the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds. God of God. Light of light. Very God of very God. Begotten not made. Being of one substance with Father, by whom all things were made.”

Constantinople: A.D. 381. Affirmed that Jesus was fully human, against the Apollinarian heresy, which taught that Jesus was not genuinely human. This doctrine complements the teaching of Nicea. Jesus has been the Son of God from the beginning. Jesus became man about two thousand years ago. He is fully God and fully man. Constantinople also affirmed the divinity of the Holy Spirit, adding to the Nicene Creed the words, “who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified.”

Ephesus: A.D. 431. Affirmed that Jesus is one person, against the heresy of Nestorianism, which held that Christ could be separated into distinct divine and human persons. This council gave Mary the title “Theotokos”(meaning “God bearer” or “Mother of God”) because it insisted that Mary gave birth to the Son of God, not merely to a human part of Jesus that could be separated from his divinity.

Chalcedon: A.D. 451. Affirmed that Jesus is one person with two natures. In Christ, the divine nature and the human nature are united in one person. This was against the Monophysite heresy that said that the Jesus’ divine nature overwhelmed his human nature so that only the divine nature remained.

In the first four Councils, the church affirmed the orthodox understanding of the nature of God and Jesus Christ. God is three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, yet only one God. The three persons are united in one substance or essence of being. Jesus is fully God and fully man. His two natures are united in his one person.

Constantinople II: A.D. 553. Affirmed the earlier decisions about the person of Christ by condemning the writings of three theologians sympathetic to the Monophysites and Nestorians.

Constantinople III: A.D. 680-1. Affirmed that Jesus has two wills, one divine and one human, in opposition to the monothelites, who taught that he has only a divine will. This was a natural extension of the teaching of Chalcedon.

Nicea II: A.D. 787. Affirmed the use of pictures and images in worship, in opposition to the Iconoclasts, who objected to the use of pictures and images in worship and went about destroying and defacing them. The use of pictures and images was affirmed as an extension of the Incarnation. Because God has taken on human form, it is okay to use physical objects as aids in worship.

Questions for Review

1. Why did the church write the creeds? Why is it important to have an accurate understanding of who God is?
2. What is the significance of the biblical belief that God is “Almighty?” What would be some implications if he were not?
3. How can we reconcile God’s almighty power with the current state of the world?
4. Finish this sentence: Jesus is fully_____and fully_____. What does this enable him to do for us that he could not do otherwise?
5. How is the humanity of Jesus different from our humanity? Why is this important?
6. What is meant by “the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ”? How is this stated in the Creeds?

