



Love INC

Love In the Name of Christ

**Position Paper  
on the  
Apostles' Creed**



## INTRODUCTION

What does a centuries-old creed have to do with the Movement of Love In the Name of Christ in the twenty-first century? The original purpose of most ancient Christian creeds was to affirm one's belief in the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and to define the main doctrines of Christianity. In the early first centuries of the Christian Church, the creeds helped to define the identity of the Christian faith in the midst of a wide variety of religions that competed for the world's attention. An additional use of the ancient creed, which we know today as the Apostles' Creed, was as an educational tool to train new believers in the central doctrines of Christianity, which they affirmed as a personal declaration of their faith at the time of their baptism by reciting the Creed.

As false teachings circulated in the Early Church, the Apostles' Creed took on another role, that of supporting and reinforcing particular points of doctrine that were under attack. For that reason there is a great deal of content about the Person and work of Jesus Christ expressed in the Apostles' Creed and relatively little about the Holy Spirit. Likewise, the Creed is all but silent regarding the Scripture, the sacraments, church government, and eschatology (the end times). In the same way that the Apostles' Creed was used by the Latin-speaking Western Christian Church, the Nicene Creed was used first by the Greek-speaking Eastern Christian Church to counter the false teachings of the Arian movement.

In today's world, we experience similar ignorance about the main doctrines of the Christian faith, and the Church faces repeated attacks by false teachers seeking to undermine the tenets of the faith by introducing new forms of old heresies. The first core value of Love In the Name of Christ states that, *"We are Christian. Everything we think, say, and do is in the name of Christ."* In other words, being Christian is at the heart of the Love INC Movement. It defines who and what we are, and who we include as partner churches.

When churches and other organizations approach our affiliates about partnering with us, we ask them to sign a statement that they are in agreement with the Apostles' Creed. Why? Because the Apostles' Creed contains the central teachings and beliefs of the Christian faith, and we want to safeguard the integrity of our mission, namely, that the ministry of Love In the Name of Christ is carried out in Jesus' name and to the glory of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!



## I BELIEVE

The Latin words *Credo in Deum* are traditionally translated “I believe in God.” However, the word *credo* means more than “I am of the opinion that there is a God.” More accurate translations would be “I put my trust in” or “I trust in God.”<sup>1</sup> “That is to say, over and above believing certain truths *about* God, I am living in a relation of commitment *to* God in trust and union. It is both a response of personal surrender to Jesus Christ, and a response to the message that He communicates in and through the Church. When I say ‘I believe in God,’ I am professing my conviction that God has invited me to this commitment and declaring that I have accepted His invitation.”<sup>2</sup>

### Key Bible Passages:

Hebrews 11:1 Definition of faith as “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”

Hebrews 11:1-12:3

Matthew 9:20-22, 27-30 Two examples of faith during the ministry of Jesus

## IN GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

### THE FATHER

Any idea of God being only an impersonal being or force is dismissed when we speak of God as “Father.”<sup>3</sup> He is referred to as the “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” in Ephesians 1:3, but also as “the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named” in Ephesians 3:14. Those who believe in Him are adopted into His family, as John claims: “To all who did receive Him [Jesus], who believed in his name, He gave power to become children of God, who were born...of God” (John 1:12-13).

Jesus told His disciples, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (John 20:17). Therefore when Christians recite the first clause of the Apostles’ Creed, they put these two concepts together and confess God as both the Father of their Savior, Jesus Christ, as well as their own Father, having been adopted into His family through Jesus Christ – a Father who now loves them as He loves His only begotten Son.”<sup>4</sup>

### Key Bible Passages:

Matthew 6:9-13

Galatians 4:1-7

### ALMIGHTY

The word “almighty” was originally translated from the Greek to mean “all-ruling” – to express that God’s sovereign authority and rule extend over heaven and earth. When Rome eventually moved from Greek to Latin, the word was translated as “omnipotent” or “all-powerful.”



### **Key Bible Passages:**

Psalm 135:6  
Psalms 93, 96, 97, 99:1-5, 103  
Acts 4:23-31  
Ephesians 1:11

### **MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH**

The false teaching of the Gnostics in the second century claimed that everything spiritual was good, but that everything material was evil. This false teaching was countered by the Apostles' Creed stating that God is the "maker of heaven and earth." This meant that God is the creator of both the spiritual and the physical. He is creator of what we see and understand, i.e., earth, and also of what we do not see or understand, i.e., heaven. This means that matter is not evil in itself; nor is the spiritual any better than the physical.<sup>5</sup>

When second-century Christians declared that God is "almighty" – literally, "all-ruling" – they meant that God rules over all: both matter and spirit, that both matter and spirit are good, and that both matter and spirit are the object of the divine and loving purposes of salvation."<sup>6</sup> Even in today's world, there are many who think that God is only concerned with "spiritual" matters. At the same time, many believe that the only thing that matters is the material world. So the phrase "almighty maker of heaven and earth" still serves to correct false beliefs today.

### **Key Bible Passages:**

Genesis 1 & 2  
Psalms 8, 19, 104  
Jeremiah 10:12  
Colossians 1:16

## ***IN JESUS CHRIST, HIS ONLY SON OUR LORD***

The second and longest part of the Apostles' Creed focuses on Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Trinity. This claim of Jesus Christ being the only Son of God is "...central to the Christian faith, because we could not know about the Trinity or salvation or resurrection and life everlasting apart from Jesus Christ. It was Jesus Christ, in His redemption of all God's people, Who was the revealer of all these truths."<sup>7</sup>

As the whole New Testament was written to make and justify the claim, we should not be surprised when we find the Creed stating it with fuller detail than it states anything else.<sup>8</sup>

### **JESUS**

The word means "God saves" or "God is Savior." The name Jesus identifies Him as a real, historical person. Matthew and Luke list His genealogies. For at the core of the Christian faith is a person, not a set of abstract ideas or beliefs.<sup>9</sup> His mother Mary was commanded to give



Him the name Jesus: “You are to give Him the name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

## CHRIST

Christ is the Greek version of the Hebrew word Messiah or “anointed one.” Throughout the Old Testament, Israel looked forward to the coming of God’s promised Messiah or anointed one, who would restore and surpass the kingdom of David, destroying the enemies of God and Israel. Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit at His baptism and sent by His Father “...to preach good news to the poor...proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind...release the oppressed...proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19 quoting Isaiah 61:1-2).

## HIS ONLY SON

The Bible tells us that “...the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). What an astounding claim! Theologian J. I. Packer writes:

When [the Apostles’ Creed] called God “maker of heaven and earth,” it parted company with Hinduism and Eastern faiths generally; now, by calling Jesus Christ God’s only Son, it parts company with Judaism and Islam and stands quite alone. This claim for Jesus is both the touchstone of Christianity and the ingredient that makes it unique.<sup>10</sup>

We believe that as God’s only Son, Jesus is truly and fully divine, just as His Father is. Thus Christians reject any efforts by Unitarianism and the cults to deny the deity of Jesus Christ. He is not merely a good man, a prophet, or even a super-angel (as claimed by the Arians in the 4<sup>th</sup> century or the Jehovah’s Witnesses today. God demands that “all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father” (John 5:23).

### Key Bible Passages:

Matthew 3:17; 17:5

John 1:14, 18; 3:16

Colossians 1:13-23

## OUR LORD

The word *kyrios* was used to refer to God in the Old Testament (*Yahweh* was translated *kyrios* when the Old Testament was translated into Greek). Jesus referred to His Father as “the Lord” throughout the Gospels. But then in the New Testament, Jesus Himself is regularly referred to as “the Lord” as well (Philippians 2:11; 3:8; Colossians 2:6), signifying that He has been given the same status as God Himself. Thus Jesus has the same right to exercise lordship over us as God does. When we confess Jesus as our Lord, we are saying that our ultimate commitment is



not to family, not to nation, not to church, but to Him.<sup>11</sup> The lordship of Jesus Christ supersedes and limits every other allegiance that we may have.

### **Key Bible Passages:**

John 17:1-26

Acts 2:21, 36

Romans 1:3-4; 10:9

Philippians 2:5-11

## **WHO WAS CONCEIVED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY**

There are two natures in the Person of Jesus Christ; He has a fully human nature, as well as a fully divine nature. On the one hand, He is a human being, just as we are, having been born of a human mother (Galatians 4:4). Mary was a virgin, confirming the Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah:

“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call Him Immanuel” *Isaiah 7:14*

The words “born of the Virgin Mary” emphasize both the uniqueness and the reality of the birth of Jesus: the uniqueness making Him the Lord of all and the reality making Him like one of us.

Like us, Jesus went on to suffer and die. So Jesus is fully human, and we can identify with Him in His humanness: He experienced hunger (Matthew 4:2), was thirsty (John 19:28), had real blood flowing through his arteries (John 19:34), and suffered (Luke 22:44). The heresy (i.e., belief or opinion contrary to orthodox Christian doctrine) of docetism claimed that Jesus was not fully human, but only appeared human in His outward appearance. So the Apostles’ Creed affirms the human nature of Jesus.

But in addition to His human nature, Jesus has a divine nature, which we confess when we say that He was conceived by the Holy Spirit. His Father is indeed God Himself. Thus Jesus is free from sin, i.e., He neither inherited original sin like the rest of the human race, nor did He commit any sin (John 8:29, 46; Romans 5:18-21; Hebrews 4:15; 7:26; 1 Peter 2:22-24). Since Jesus is without sin, death could not hold Him once He had sacrificed Himself on the cross.

The Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. went on to fully articulate that Jesus Christ is one Person with two natures – human and divine. Alister McGrath expresses the importance of Jesus being both fully human and fully God:

...if He is just a man, like the rest of us, He shares our need for redemption – in other words, He can’t redeem us. He is part of our problem, not the solution to it...On the other hand, if Jesus is God, and God alone, He has no point of contact with us. He cannot relate to those who need redemption. His humanity



provides that point of contact....In short, the central Christian idea of the incarnation, which expresses the belief that Jesus is both God and man, divine and human, portrays Jesus as the perfect mediator between God and human beings. He, and He alone, is able to redeem us and reconcile us to God.<sup>12</sup>

Thus Jesus, as a human being, is able to fully identify with us (Hebrews 4:15-16), but beyond that, being God, He is able to fully save us (Hebrews 7:26-28).

**Key Bible Passages:**

Matthew 1:1-25

Luke 1:26-56

2 Corinthians 8:9

Philippians 2:5-11

***SUFFERED UNDER PONTIUS PILATE, WAS CRUCIFIED, DEAD, AND BURIED***

The mention of Pontius Pilate, governor or procurator of Judea from 26-36 A.D., “firmly anchors the Creed to history. It affirms that we are dealing with an event – the crucifixion of Jesus Christ – that actually happened in history<sup>13</sup> (Luke 3:1-3). God Himself chose to act and enter into our history in order to redeem us. The reference to Pilate serves an additional purpose:

Mention of Pilate also brings out the public nature of Jesus’ trial, suffering and crucifixion. Pilate here represents the witness of the world to the suffering and death of its unacknowledged Savior. The final days of Jesus’ ministry took place in full public view, where all could see what was happening. The crucifixion, for example, took place in public, under the gaze of the citizens of Jerusalem. It was thus impossible for anyone to deny that these things had happened.<sup>14</sup>

The suffering of Jesus from the point of His arrest until His last breath on the cross is well documented in the Bible. Peter Vaghi writes, “From the Gospels, we know the horrifying details of Christ’s suffering: agony in the garden, the scourging, the crowning with thorns, the carrying of the cross, and ultimately the horrible death by crucifixion.”<sup>15</sup>

When we confess that Jesus was crucified, we understand that His death was decreed by God the Father from all eternity. It was not a random event that somehow escaped the Father’s notice; it was designed as the ultimate act of love and grace. Jesus said, “The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life....but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me”(John 10:17; 14:31).



And so God's only Son ultimately died, just as all who were crucified died. His body was placed in a tomb donated by Joseph of Arimathea, who "took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid" (Luke 23:50-53). Alistar McGrath writes:

You can feel an immense sense of despair as you read the Gospel accounts of the death of Jesus. Perhaps the disciples were hoping for a miracle. Yet there seemed to be no trace of God's presence or activity at Calvary. As Jesus became weaker, the disciples must have become increasingly despondent. There was no sign of God intervening to transform the situation. Finally Jesus died. That would probably have been the darkest moment in the lives of the disciples."<sup>16</sup>

### **Key Bible Passages:**

Matthew 27; Luke 23  
Isaiah 52:13-53:12  
Philippians 2:6-8  
1 Corinthians 15:3-4

## **HE DESCENDED INTO HELL/THE DEAD**

The Creed states that Jesus descended into *infernus* – literally, "the lower places." Some interpreted "the lower places" to mean hell or hades; others took it to mean the place of the dead, i.e., the grave. Peter writes that Jesus "was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built" (1 Peter 3:18-20). Thus Jesus proclaimed His victory over sin and death to those who had lived during the time of Noah.

Most churches recite the Apostles' Creed with the statement that Jesus "descended into hell" or "descended to the dead." Some, for example those from the Wesleyan tradition, do not. Justo González writes:

The reason for this discrepancy is not really a theological difference or disagreement; it is only a disagreement as to what version of the Creed to employ. John Wesley...knew that it was not included in most creeds until a relatively late date – the fourth century in one particular case, but generally the sixth to the eighth centuries. By the beginning of the ninth it was included in the official version of the Apostles' Creed. Even so, Wesley –



while recognizing that the phrase itself was a late addition to the Creed – affirmed the doctrine.<sup>17</sup>

Ephesians 4 explains that Jesus descended to hell or the place of the dead – the dwelling place of evil – in order to defeat it:

...“When He [Jesus] ascended on high,  
He led captivity captive,  
And gave gifts to men.”

Now this, “He ascended” – what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things. *Ephesians 4:8-10*

Justo González comments on the passage, saying:

...there were many in the early church who saw the human predicament as a bondage to sin and to the devil, and therefore the work of Christ as a victory over them – a victory that then frees us to be what God intends us to be. From this perspective, what Ephesians means by declaring that Jesus “made captivity itself a captive” is precisely that He conquered and made captive the one [Satan] who had held sway over us. In a similar vein, early Christians referred to the work of Christ as having “killed death.”<sup>18</sup>

### **ON THE THIRD DAY HE ROSE AGAIN FROM THE DEAD**

The Creed mentions that Jesus’ resurrection took place “on the third day,” in order to emphasize that the event is a fact of history. Since at that time parts of a day were counted as whole days, the Creed states that Jesus was in the tomb for three days – part of Friday, all of Saturday, and part of Sunday.

Can we be sure it happened? The evidence is solid. The tomb was empty, and nobody could produce the body. For more than a month afterward, the disciples keep meeting Jesus alive, always unexpectedly, usually in groups (from two to five hundred).<sup>19</sup>

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was a bodily, physical resurrection. It is central to the Gospel and to our faith, and so the writers of the Apostles’ Creed placed the event at the center of the Creed’s structure as well:



One can imagine what the Creed says about Jesus as opening with three descending steps: “was born...suffered...descended to the dead.” One can then imagine the Creed closing with three steps showing His power and victory: “He ascended...is seated at the right hand of the Father...will come again to judge.” Between the first three and the last three stands the resurrection...The center of what the Creed says about Jesus is the resurrection. The resurrection is not just God’s affirmation that this one who was crucified is indeed God’s Son. It is not just a final miracle among many showing the power and authority of Jesus. It is the very heart of the Gospel!<sup>20</sup>

The resurrection of Christ is the basis of our own hope. For we serve not only a crucified Lord, but a risen one as well, and in His victory lies our own victory over sin and death. “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:14). For the resurrection power is at work in our lives today, rolling away the stone from the tombs of our suffering and bondage to sin (Ephesians 3:20-21).

Additionally, the resurrection authenticated Jesus Christ and His mission. It validated that Jesus was in fact the Son of God (Romans 1:4) and vindicated His righteousness (John 16:10). The resurrection was the demonstration of His victory over death (Acts 2:24), and the guarantee of our sins being forgiven (1 Corinthians 15:17; Romans 4:25) and our own resurrection to come (1 Corinthians 15:18).

#### **Key Bible Passages:**

Matthew 28:1-20

John 20:1-18

1 Corinthians 15:1-28

1 Peter 1:3-4

### ***HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN, AND IS SEATED AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE FATHER***

Having come down to earth from heaven in humility, Jesus then returned to heaven in triumph and glory, having accomplished our salvation.<sup>21</sup> “Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name...” (Philippians 2:9). To say that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father is to affirm that, since His ascension, Jesus shares in the power and authority of God the Father over all creation. John Calvin explains:

This is as if it were said that Christ was invested with lordship over heaven and earth, and solemnly entered into possession of the government committed to Him – and that He not only entered



into possession once for all, but continues in it, until He shall come down on Judgment Day.<sup>22</sup>

Instead of being absent from our world since His ascension, Jesus Christ now actively rules over it:

...Christ really rules it...He has won a decisive victory over the dark powers that had mastered it, and...the manifesting of this fact is only a matter of time. God's war with Satan is now like a chess game in which the result is sure, but the losing player has not yet given up, or like the last phase of human hostilities in which the defeated enemy's counterattacks, though fierce and frequent, cannot succeed and are embraced in the victor's strategy as mere mopping-up operations.<sup>23</sup>

In addition, Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father, interceding for us (Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25) as our Advocate (Hebrews 9:25; 1 John 2:1). He ensures that we receive grace to help us in our time of need (Hebrews 4:16). For those in Christ, human nature now is raised to the right hand of God; all who are united to Him, "in Christ," are placed in the very presence of God the Father Himself, and will be fully reigning with Christ in all eternity.

#### **Key Bible Passages:**

Acts 1:1-11

Ephesians 1:15-2:10

1 Timothy 2:5

### ***HE WILL COME AGAIN TO JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD***

Jesus is coming again! The Creed affirms this hope when we profess, "He will come again." J.I. Packer states:

In one sense, Christ comes for every Christian at death, but the Creed looks to the day when He will come publicly to wind up history and judge all [of the human race] – Christians as Christians, accepted already, whom a... reward awaits according to the faithfulness of their service; and rebels as rebels, to be rejected by the Master whom they rejected first.<sup>24</sup>

The Bible tells us that "man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). The role of judging was given to Jesus Christ in view of His accomplished work as our Mediator (Matthew 25:31-46; Acts 17:31), and He will judge with the full authority of God the Father (Matthew 28:18; John 5:22,27). The entire human race will be resurrected in order to face His judgment (Revelation 20:11-15), both believers and unbelievers:



The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in His hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him. *John 3:35-36*

While both believers and unbelievers will be judged, as Christians, we need not fear the Lord's judgment, as Jesus has already paid the price for our sins and will not hold them against us (Matthew 25:33; Matthew 10:32).

...it is important to remember that the one who will come is the one whom we already know – the one who for our sakes was born, suffered, and was crucified, dead and buried, and rose again on the third day. As we look at the throne of judgment, we shall not see there an alien, harsh judge. We shall see one who has borne our pain and suffered our infirmities.<sup>25</sup>

The Westminster Catechism comments well on the Lord's judgment of believers in Matthew 25:34-40, where not a single one of their sins is even mentioned, only their good deeds:

On the judgment day, the righteous will be caught up with Christ in the clouds and placed on His right, where they will be publicly acknowledged and acquitted....<sup>26</sup>

Thus the Apostles' Creed affirms that there is a direct continuity between how we live this earthly life and the consequences at the final judgment. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

#### **Key Bible Passages:**

Matthew 25:31-46

Acts 10:42

1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

2 Peter 3

### ***I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT***

The third paragraph of the Creed begins with these words. Having addressed God the Father's work of creation, and God the Son's work of redemption, it now turns to the re-creating work of God the Holy Spirit, by which we are made new in Christ.<sup>27</sup> This re-creating includes "the church (new community), forgiveness (new relationship), resurrection (new existence), and eternal life (new fulfillment. But first comes a profession of faith in the Spirit..."<sup>28</sup>



As the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is divine, and as Early Church Father Athanasius of Alexandria wrote in his *Letters to Serapion on the Holy Spirit*, equal in power and glory with God the Father and God the Son.<sup>29</sup> The Bible states that the Holy Spirit, in unity with the rest of the Trinity, was actively involved in the creation of the world and generation of life (Genesis 1:2; Job 33:2; Psalm 104:30), and in inspiring prophecy and the writers of the Bible (2 Peter 1:20-21; 2 Timothy 3:16).

The Holy Spirit is actively involved:

- in enlightening our understanding of God and convicting us of our sin (John 16:7-11; 1 Corinthians 2:11-16)
- in applying the redemption to us purchased by Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection (Titus 3:5 1; Corinthians 12:3; 1 John 2:20)
- as a pledge and assurance of our salvation, guaranteeing what is to come (Romans 8:16-17; 2 Corinthians 1:22; 2 Corinthians 5:5; Ephesians 1:14)
- in the ongoing work of sanctification (Romans 8:12-15; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Philippians 2:12-13)
- in giving to every Christian one or more gifts for the building up of the body of Christ and promoting His kingdom (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, 28; Ephesians 4:11-13)
- in teaching and applies to us the truth of the Gospel message (John 16:13-15; Ephesians 1:17-19; 1 John 2:27)
- in praying and interceding for us (Romans 8:26-27)
- in comforting us – the Holy Spirit is referred to as the Paraclete, i.e., “called alongside” in Greek (John 14:16; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4)
- in our eventual resurrection when Christ returns (Romans 8:11)

#### **Key Bible Passages:**

John 7:37-39; 14:15-26; 16:7-15

Acts 2:1-21

Galatians 5:22-23

## **THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH**

To profess belief in the *holy* Church is to acknowledge that it is consecrated to God. To scan the history of the Church is to quickly discover that, though consecrated to God, the Church is still capable of sinning. But most important, to profess belief in the *holy* Church is “to claim for it and for its members the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit....Ultimately it is the Spirit, and not its moral purity, or its martyrs, or its devout people that makes the Church holy.”<sup>30</sup> Peter Vaghi agrees:



It is Jesus, in the power of His Holy Spirit, who continues to entice and draw each one of us to His Church. We are His people...No human explanation can begin to account for the longevity of the

Church. Think of the empires, countries, and corporations that have arisen and disappeared from the face of the earth in a much shorter time....Speaking of the work of the apostles, the lawyer Gamaliel said: “For if this endeavor or this activity is of human origin, it will destroy itself. But if it comes from God, you will not be able to destroy them; you may even find yourselves fighting against God” (Acts 5:38-39)<sup>31</sup>

When we state that we believe in the holy *catholic* Church, we do not mean that the Church is Roman Catholic. The Greek word *katholikos* means “according to the whole,” “to the full,” or “universal.” So when we confess that the Church is *catholic*, we mean that it includes all Christians, i.e., all who have been “called...out of darkness into His wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9). After all, the Greek word for church, *ekklesia*, does not refer to a building, but instead means “those who are called out.”

The Apostles’ Creed states that we believe in the “the Church” and not “the churches.” All Christians base their faith on the one and only foundation of Jesus Christ, and as members of His Church confess that Jesus Christ is the Head (Colossians 1:18). In essence, we are confessing that the Church is one.<sup>32</sup>

There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:4-6).

#### **Key Bible Passages:**

1 Corinthians 12:4-31

Ephesians 2:11-4:16; 5:25-33

Colossians 1:18

1 Peter 2

## **THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS**

The word *communion* is the old English word for “fellowship,” related to the Greek word *koinonia*. It has the basic meaning of fellowship or sharing. The word *saint* means someone who is holy or consecrated, i.e., consecrated or set apart to God. In today’s world, we refer to *saints* more commonly as “believers.” So when we state that we believe in “the communion of saints,” we affirm that we belong to the “fellowship of believers.” This fellowship of believers is a fellowship of forgiven sinners who are in the process of pursuing holiness. After all, Jesus



claimed, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:17).

To declare that we believe in “the communion of saints” does not mean that we believe in a holy club; it means that we believe in a holy God who has called us as individuals into a community, within which His work of renewal and regeneration can take place. To be called by God is deeply humbling and is not in any way a cause for pride or arrogance. God calls us while we are sinners into a community within which His work of healing can begin.<sup>33</sup>

When we affirm our faith in “the Church” and “the communion of saints,” we remind ourselves that we are not alone on our faith journey. We sense the support and encouragement of not only those who worship with us, but the universal Church around the world, and even the “great cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1) who have preceded us, cheering us on as we run the race. What a comfort for those Christians who are isolated in their work place, school, or neighborhood – or even ridiculed or persecuted for their faith! That support and encouragement can be expressed in concrete ways, as we use the gifts that God has given us for His purposes, building up the body of Christ and becoming mature in Him (Ephesians 4:11-16).

#### **Key Bible Passages:**

Acts 4:32-37 The example of the early Church

Romans 12:3-11 How Christians are to relate to each other

Ephesians 4:11-16 The role of leadership in the local church

Hebrews 11:1-12:3 The roll call of Christians who have gone on ahead of us

## **THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS**

Forgiveness is often referred to as the *treasure of the Church*. Why? The psalmist captured the essence, writing, “If You, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with You there is forgiveness...” (Psalm 130:4).

Ever since Adam and Eve, the human race has been characterized by a sin nature. Sin is:

...lawlessness in relation to God as lawgiver, rebellion in relation to God as rightful ruler, missing the mark in relation to God as our designer, guilt in relation to God as judge, and uncleanness in relation to God as the Holy One...It appears in desires as well as deeds, and in motives as well as actions.<sup>34</sup>



Sin separates us from a holy God:

It's your sins that have cut you off from God.  
Because of your sins, he has turned away  
and will not listen anymore. (Isaiah 59:2 New Living Translation)

The only way to escape God's judgment and return to union with God was for Him to send His own Son to save us from our sins. Isaiah wrote, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him [Christ] the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). In fact, Jesus not only paid the price for our sins, but He became sin for our sake as well: "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Martin Luther once wrote to a man who was distressed about his sin, saying:

Learn to know Christ and him crucified. Learn to sing to him, and say, "Lord Jesus, You are my righteousness, I am Your sin. You have taken upon Yourself what is mine and given me what is Yours. You have become what You were not so that I might become what I was not."<sup>35</sup>

The barrier of our sin and its bondage can be broken down, and indeed has been broken down. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ set us free from our bondage to sin and death. It is God's greatest gift to His people; it is precious and costly.<sup>36</sup> So when we confess "I believe in the forgiveness of sins," we affirm that we ourselves have been forgiven:

We declare the forgiveness of sin because without such forgiveness we would not be here, we would not be confessing this faith, we would not be part of this company....The church is the community of those who have experienced – and continue experiencing – the forgiveness of sins.<sup>37</sup>

**Key Bible Passages:**

Psalm 130:4; Psalm 51

Isaiah 59:1-15 The need for forgiveness

2 Corinthians 5:18-21 Sharing with others the treasure of God's forgiveness

Ephesians 4:32 God's call to forgive others as He has forgiven us



## THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY AND THE LIFE EVERLASTING

The Apostles' Creed concludes by affirming the wonderful hope that Christians have: we will one day personally share in the Lord's glorious resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:20-23; Romans

8:17; 1 John 3:2). He will "transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body" (Philippians 3:21). Jesus Himself promised:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms....I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, that you also may be where I am. *John 14:1-3*

Our resurrection bodies will never experience physical or emotional sickness, death, or decay (John 11:25-26). Eternal life will not be an endless extension of our biological existence (the Greek word *bios* translated as "life"), but rather a transformation of that existence. The "abundant life" (the Greek word *zōē* is used for "life") that Jesus offers in John 11:25-26 begins when we come to faith in Him.<sup>38</sup> But its fulfillment comes at the Last Day, when our resurrected bodies are reunited with our souls to spend eternity with the Lord, in whose presence is "fullness of joy" (Psalm 16:11).

The Westminster Larger Catechism describes the resurrection life of Christians well:

They will join Christ in the judgment of reprobate angels and men and be received into heaven. There they will be completely and forever freed from all sin and misery, filled with unimaginable joy, and made perfectly holy and happy in body and soul, in the vast company of each other and the holy angels; they will be particularly blessed in the visual presence and enjoyment of God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, forever. Such is the perfect and complete fellowship the members of the invisible church will enjoy with Christ in glory at the resurrection and judgment day.<sup>39</sup>

### Key Bible Passages:

John 11:21-27

1 Corinthians 15:35-58

Philippians 3:20-21

Revelation 21:1-22:6



## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Alister McGrath, *I Believe : Exploring the Apostles' Creed* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 20.
- <sup>2</sup> J.I. Packer, *Affirming the Apostles' Creed* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008), 25-26.
- <sup>3</sup> McGrath, 26.
- <sup>4</sup> Packer, 42-43.
- <sup>5</sup> Justo L. González, *The Apostles' Creed for Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 22-23.
- <sup>6</sup> González, 21.
- <sup>7</sup> Packer, 60.
- <sup>8</sup> Packer, 59.
- <sup>9</sup> McGrath, 37.
- <sup>10</sup> Packer, 59.
- <sup>11</sup> González, 32-33.
- <sup>12</sup> McGrath, 47-48.
- <sup>13</sup> McGrath, 55.
- <sup>14</sup> McGrath, 56.
- <sup>15</sup> Peter J. Vaghi, *The Faith We Profess : A Catholic Guide to the Apostles' Creed* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2008), p.62.
- <sup>16</sup> McGrath, 68.
- <sup>17</sup> González, 48.
- <sup>18</sup> González, 50-51.
- <sup>19</sup> Packer, 92.
- <sup>20</sup> González, 54-55.
- <sup>21</sup> McGrath, 74.
- <sup>22</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 2.16.16, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, LCC (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1:524.
- <sup>23</sup> Packer, 99-100.
- <sup>24</sup> Packer, 106.
- <sup>25</sup> González, 68.
- <sup>26</sup> Philip Rollinson, et al., *Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms in Modern English* (Livonia: Evangelical Presbyterian Church, 2011), 78.
- <sup>27</sup> Packer, 113.
- <sup>28</sup> Packer, 113.
- <sup>29</sup> Athanasius, *The Letters of Saint Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit*, trans. C.R.B. Shapland (London: Hazell Watson and Viney, 1951), 1:50.
- <sup>30</sup> González, 79.
- <sup>31</sup> Vaghi, 104.
- <sup>32</sup> McGrath, 92.
- <sup>33</sup> McGrath, 96.
- <sup>34</sup> Packer, 129.
- <sup>35</sup> Moritz Meurer, *The Life of Martin Luther : Related from Original Authorities* (New York: H. Ludwig & Company, 1848), 34.
- <sup>36</sup> McGrath, 102.
- <sup>37</sup> González, 84.
- <sup>38</sup> McGrath, 104-105.
- <sup>39</sup> Rollinson, 78.