

An Essay: The Unifying Creeds of The Early Christian Church

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I. INTRODUCTION WITH THE ANGLICAN 39 ARTICLES OF FAITH

Who is JESUS CHRIST and how is He related to GOD The Father and The HOLY SPIRIT? Article II of the traditional Anglican Church's "Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion" answers, "The Son, Which is The Word of The Father, begotten from everlasting of The Father, The very and eternal GOD, and of one substance with The Father, took Man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin [Mary], of her substance: so that two whole and perfect Natures, that is to say, The Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided, whereof is one [JESUS] CHRIST, very GOD, and very Man..."¹

This is an affirmation by The Founding Fathers of The Church of England at the dawn of The Protestant Reformation, which reaffirms the orthodox Christian Faith of The early Catholic Church Councils – particularly the Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon – on The nature of The Person of our Lord JESUS CHRIST. The Creeds became necessary for confession of common orthodox Faith by Christians in The Church, both to enhance us as One Body of CHRIST, and to address heresies that arose in the early centuries.

II. EARLY UNDIVIDED CHURCH COUNCILS COUNTER HERESIES

The early Church, answering heretics from within her midst, grappled with the questions of Who JESUS CHRIST is in His Person and natures. For instance there were the Arians, who claimed of JESUS CHRIST that "There was a time when The Son did not exist; The Father preexisted The Son; The hypostasis or substance of The Son differs from that of The Father; The Son is a creature similar in every way to the other creatures...; The Son is subject to alterations and moral change."²

The Council of Nicea, in responding to the Arian controversy, in 325 AD declared that JESUS CHRIST is One Person of two natures, fully GOD and fully Man but without sin: "We believe in one GOD, The Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord JESUS CHRIST, The Son of GOD, begotten of The Father [The only-begotten; that is of the essence of The Father, GOD of GOD], Light of Light, very GOD of

¹ Anglican Book of Common Prayer, Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, Article II, p 609.

² Erickson, The Council of Nicea, "Arian tenets that are explicitly denied in The Nicene Creed," p 55.

very GOD, begotten, not made, being of one substance (homoousious) with The Father...”³

A century later controversy again arose over the Person and natures of CHRIST - focused around The Churchman Eutyches (375-454 AD) - who declared to the Synod of Constantinople, “that whereas CHRIST had two natures before The Incarnation, there was but one afterward.” This opened the door to various heresies on the natures of The Saviour. Was the post-Incarnation of CHRIST “...some type of hybrid, neither divine nor human, or ...[is] the humanity [of JESUS] swallowed up by the divinity?”⁴

The Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD reaffirmed the Nicene Council’s declared understanding of CHRIST’s one Person in two natures: “We ...confess one and the same Son, our Lord JESUS CHRIST, The same perfect in Godhood and also perfect in manhood; truly GOD and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [coessential] with The Father according to The Godhood, and consubstantial with us according to The Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of The Father according to The Godhood...”⁵

The Council of Chalcedon continued, “One and The same CHRIST, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person (prosopon) and one Subsistence (hypostasis), not parted or divided into two Persons, but One and The same Son, and only begotten, GOD The Word, The Lord JESUS CHRIST...”⁶

³ Erickson, The Council of Nicea, “The Nicene Creed, p 55.

⁴ Erickson, Eutychianism, paragraph 1, p 64.

⁵ Erickson, The Council of Chalcedon, p 65.

⁶ Erickson, The Council of Chalcedon, p 65.

III. THE EARLY CONFSSIONAL CREEDS OF FAITH

A. The Apostles' Creed

The Apostles' Creed confesses both CHRIST's Divinity and humanity. Of His preexisting Divinity, we have "I believe in GOD The Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth. And in JESUS CHRIST His only Son, our Lord." Of His Incarnation we have, "Who was conceived by The HOLY GHOST, Born of the Virgin Mary."⁷

And of His true humanity we see, not only in His being born of the seed of the woman, but also in His suffering and death, in that He "Suffered under Pontius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended into hell;" But then His victorious Divinity is again confessed: "The third day he rose again from the dead, He ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of GOD The Father Almighty..."⁸

"I believe in GOD, The Father Almighty,
Creator of Heaven and earth.

I believe in JESUS CHRIST, GOD's 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 to the dead.
On The Third Day He rose again;
He ascended into Heaven,
He is seated at The Right Hand of The Father,
and He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in The HOLY SPIRIT,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. AMEN."⁹

⁷ Book of Common Prayer, Apostles' Creed, para 2, p 16.

⁸ Book of Common Prayer, Apostles' Creed, para 2, p 16.

⁹ Creeds.net, "The Apostles' Creed, Modern English Version."
<http://www.creeds.net/ancient/apostles.htm>.

B. The Nicene Creed

The Nicene Creed confesses faith in CHRIST's Divinity and humanity in greater detail. Of His preexistent Divinity, we confess faith "... 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:"¹⁰ Then comes confession in The Lord's Incarnation: "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."¹¹

Note that The Nicene Creed confesses CHRIST's true humanity, not only in that He was born of the seed of the woman, but that He "... was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried,"¹² But then again we have our confession of CHRIST's Deity: "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..."¹³ Being GOD Incarnate, The Son took up His Divinity again and **ascended** into Heaven by His Own Power, not **assumed** by Divine Power reaching down to earth as Tradition and Scripture tell us of Moses, Elijah and Mary:

"We believe in One GOD,
The Father, The Almighty,
Maker of Heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, JESUS CHRIST,
The only Son of GOD,
eternally begotten of The Father,
GOD from GOD, Light from Light,
true GOD from true GOD,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with The Father;
through Him all things were made.

¹⁰ Book of Common Prayer, Nicene Creed, para 2, p 16-17.

¹¹ Book of Common Prayer, Nicene Creed, para 2, p 17.

¹² Book of Common Prayer, Nicene Creed, para 2, p 17.

¹³ Book of Common Prayer, Nicene Creed, para 2, p 17.

For us and for our salvation
He came down from Heaven,
was incarnate of The HOLY SPIRIT and The Virgin Mary
and became truly Human.
For our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On The Third Day He rose again
in accordance with The Scriptures;
He ascended into Heaven
and is seated at The Right Hand of The Father.
He will come again in Glory to judge the living and the dead,
and His Kingdom will have no end.

We believe in The HOLY SPIRIT, The Lord, The Giver of Life,
Who proceeds from The Father and The Son,
Who with The Father and The Son is worshiped and glorified,
Who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for The Resurrection of the dead,
and The Life of The World to Come. AMEN.”¹⁴

C. The Athanasian Creed

The Athanasian Creed gives greater confessional detail of Who CHRIST is: the first part declares the doctrine of The Trinity and the second part the doctrine of The Incarnation. “...For the true 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 [Mary], born in 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.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Creeds.net, “The Nicene Creed – English Language Liturgical Commission Translation.” <https://www.creeds.net/ancient/nicene.htm>.

¹⁵ Book of Common Prayer, Athanasian Creed, part 2 on The Incarnation, para 1-4, p 38.

Note that The Athanasian Creed introduces the concept of the hypostatic union proclaimed by The Council of Chalcedon: “Who although He is 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 unto 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...”¹⁶

“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 uncreate, The SON uncreate, and The HOLY GHOST uncreate. 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 Incomprehensibles, nor three Uncreated, but One Uncreated, and One Incomprehensible.

So likewise The FATHER is Almighty, The SON Almighty, and The HOLY GHOST Almighty. And yet They are not three Almighties, but One Almighty.

¹⁶ Book of Common Prayer, Athanasian Creed, part 2 on The Incarnation, para 5-8, p 38.

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 both 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 in Trinity and The Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.
He therefore that will be saved must think thus 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 SO 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 in 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 at The Right Hand of The
FATHER, God Almighty, from whence he will come to judge the
quick and the dead.

At Whose coming all men will 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,
he cannot be saved. AMEN.”¹⁷

IV. IN CONCLUSION

We began by asking “Who is JESUS CHRIST, and how is He related to GOD The Father and The HOLY SPIRIT?” We have found our answers in the unifying Confessions of The early Church Fathers and Councils, namely The Apostles’ Creed, The Nicene Creed and The Athanasian Creed. GOD The Son is coequal with GOD the Father and GOD The Spirit, bound together in a The Perfect Relationship of Trinitarian Love.

GOD The Father created us to call us to Himself in Love, in this life and forever. He has made all good things for mankind and sends His Providence. He guides prophetic history to bring those who seek His face into The Presence of His Perfect Love, now and forever.

GOD The Son restores our relationship to The Divine by paying the price for our sins which we can never pay. By His offer of Grace to help us towards – and keep us within – His Pasture of Salvation – we cooperate with humble and open hearts, covered by The Blood of The Lamb. From The Greatest Evil in prophetic history, the crucifixion of The Messiah JESUS, comes The Greatest Good that redeems us now and forever.

¹⁷ Anglicansonline.com, “The Athanasian Creed.”
<http://anglicansonline.org/basics/athanasian.html>.

GOD The Spirit enlivens us with New Birth in Baptism, guides The Church, makes inerrant The Holy Scriptures, recreates us to be Living Temples of The Lord on earth and prepares us to enter into The Church Triumphant in Heaven when our time comes. With His help, in accordance with His will for us, there is no mission or event in this life that will ever separate us from His Love. As it is written:

PSALM 28:7

“The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in Him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise Him.”¹⁸

I JOHN 5:5

“Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that JESUS is The Son of GOD?”¹⁹

As we come together in Church and live out our daily lives as His People, carrying The Name of “Christian,” we may take strength, embrace our life vocations and see clearly who we are in The Divine Mercy of The Cross of our Redeemer, The Messiah JESUS, empowered by The HOLY SPIRIT as in The Creeds.

The world, the flesh, the Devil, the reprobate society in which we now live in The West, and most shamefully the apostate portions of The Church Herself – all these would have us deny our orthodox Christian Faith and embrace the darkness. But in confessing and living The True Christian Faith as in our Creeds, we may be assured of walking faithfully on The Way to Eternal Life! AMEN.

¹⁸ KJV, PSALM 28:7.

¹⁹ KJV, I JOHN 5:5.