

II. The Three Ecumenical or Universal Symbols.

8. Ecumenical Symbols.

The Ecumenical (general, universal) Symbols were embodied in the Book of Concord primarily for apologetic reasons. Carpzov writes: “The sole reason why our Church appealed to these symbols was to declare her agreement with the ancient Church in so far as the faith of the latter was laid down in these symbols, to refute also the calumniations and the accusations of the opponents, and to evince the fact that she preaches no new doctrine and in no wise deviates from the Church Catholic.” (*Isagoge*, 37.) For like reasons Article I of the Augsburg Confession declares its adherence to the Nicene Creed, and the first part of the *Smalcald Articles*, to the Apostles’ and Athanasian Creeds. The oath introduced by Luther in 1535, and required of the candidates for the degree of Doctor of Divinity, also contained a pledge on the Ecumenical Symbols. In 1538 Luther published a tract entitled, “The Three Symbols or Confessions of the Faith of Christ Unanimously Used in the Church,” containing the Apostles’ Creed, the Athanasian Creed, and the Te Deum of Ambrose and Augustine. To these was appended the Nicene Creed.

In the opening sentences of this tract, Luther remarks: “Whereas I have previously taught and written quite a bit concerning faith, showing both what faith is and what faith does, and have also published my Confession [1528], setting forth both what I believe and what position I intend to maintain; and whereas the devil continues to seek new intrigues against me, I have decided, by way of supererogation, to publish conjointly, in the German tongue, the three so-called Symbols, or Confessions, which have hitherto been received, read, and chanted throughout the Church. I would thereby reaffirm the fact that I side with the true Christian Church, which has adhered to these Symbols, or Confessions, to the present day, and not with the false, vainglorious church, which in reality is the worst enemy of the true Church, having introduced much idolatry beside these beautiful confessions.” (St. L. 10, 993; Erl. 23, 252.) Luther’s translation of the Ecumenical Symbols, together with the captions which appeared in his tract, were embodied in the Book of Concord. The superscription, “*Tria Symbola Catholica seu Oecumenica*,” occurs for the first time in Selnecker’s edition of the Book of Concord of 1580. Before this, 1575, he had written: “*Quot sunt Symbola fidei Christianae in Ecclesia? Tria sunt praecipua quae nominantur oecumenica, sive universalia et authentica, id est, habentia auctoritatem et non indigentia demonstratione aut probatione, videlicet Symbolum Apostolicum, Nicaenum et Athanasianum.*” (Schmauk, *Confessional Principle*, 834.)

9. The Apostles’ Creed.

The foundation of the Apostles’ Creed was, in a way, laid by Christ Himself when He commissioned His disciples, saying, Matt. 28, 19, 20: “Go ye therefore and teach all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” The formula of Baptism here prescribed, “In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,” briefly indicates what Christ wants Christians to be taught, to believe, and to confess. And the Apostles’ Creed, both as to its form and contents, is evidently but an amplification of the trinitarian formula of Baptism. Theo. Zahn remarks: “It has been said, and not without a good basis either, that Christ Himself has ordained the baptismal confession. For the profession of the Triune God made by the candidates for Baptism is indeed the echo of His missionary and baptismal command reechoing through all lands and times in many thousand voices.” (*Skizzen aus dem Leben der Kirche*, 252.)

But when and by whom was the formula of Baptism thus amplified?—During the Medieval Ages the Apostles' Creed was commonly known as "The Twelve Articles," because it was generally believed that the twelve apostles, assembled in joint session before they were separated, soon after Pentecost drafted this Creed, each contributing a clause. But, though retained in the Catechismus Romanus, this is a legend which originated in Italy or Gaul in the sixth or seventh (according to Zahn, toward the end of the fourth) century and was unknown before this date. Yet, though it may seem more probable that the Apostles' Creed was the result of a silent growth and very gradual formation corresponding to the ever-changing environments and needs of the Christian congregations, especially over against the heretics, there is no sufficient reason why the apostles themselves should not have been instrumental in its formulation, nor why, with the exception of a number of minor later additions its original form should not have been essentially what it is today.

Nathanael confessed: "Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel," John 1, 49, the apostles confessed: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," Matt. 16, 16; Peter confessed: "We believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God," John 6, 69; Thomas confessed: "My Lord and my God," John 20, 28. These and similar confessions of the truth concerning Himself were not merely approved of, but solicited and demanded by, Christ. For He declares most solemnly: "Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven," Matt. 10, 32, 33. The same duty of confessing their faith, *i.e.*, the truths concerning Christ, is enjoined upon all Christians by the Apostle Paul when he writes: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved," Rom. 10, 9.

In the light of these and similar passages, the trinitarian baptismal formula prescribed by Christ evidently required from the candidate for Baptism a definite statement of what he believed concerning the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, especially concerning Jesus Christ the Savior. And that such a confession of faith was in vogue even in the days of the apostles appears from the Bible itself. Of Timothy it is said that he had "professed a good profession before many witnesses," 1 Tim. 6, 12. Heb. 4, 14 we read: "Let us hold fast our profession." Heb. 10, 23: "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering." Jude urges the Christians that they "should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints," and build up themselves on their "most holy faith," Jude 3, 20. Compare also 1 Cor. 15, 3, 4; 1 Tim. 3, 16; Titus 1, 13; 3, 4–7.

10. Apostles' Creed and Early Christian Writers.

The Christian writers of the first three centuries, furthermore, furnish ample proof for the following facts: that from the very beginning of the Christian Church the candidates for Baptism everywhere were required to make a confession of their faith; that from the beginning there was existing in all the Christian congregations a formulated confession which they called the rule of faith the rule of truth, etc.; that this rule was identical with the confession required of the candidates for Baptism; that it was declared to be of apostolic origin; that the summaries and explanations of this rule of truth, given by these writers, tally with the contents and in part, also with the phraseology of the Apostles' Creed; that the scattered Christian congregations, then still autonomous, regarded the adoption of this rule, of faith as the only necessary condition of Christian unity and fellowship.

The manner in which Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp, Justin, Aristides, and other early Christian writers present the Christian truth frequently reminds us of the Apostles' Creed and suggests its

existence. Thus Justin Martyr, who died 165, says in his first Apology, which was written about 140: “Our teacher of these things is Jesus Christ, who also was born for this purpose and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea, that we reasonably worship Him, having learned that He is the Son of the true God Himself, and holding Him in the second place, and the prophetic Spirit in the third.” “Eternal praise to the Father of all, through the name of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Similar strains, sounding like echoes of the Second Article, may be found in the Epistles to the Trallians and to the Christians at Smyrna written by Ignatius, the famous martyr and bishop of Antioch, who died 107.

Irenaeus, who died 189, remarks: Every Christian “who retains immovable in himself the rule of the truth which he received through Baptism (ὁ τὸν κανόνα τῆς ἀληθείας ἀκλινη̃ ἐν ἑαυτῷ κατέχων, ὃν διὰ τοῦ βαπτίσματος εἴληφε)” is able to see through the deceit of all heresies. Irenaeus here identifies the baptismal confession with what he calls the “rule of truth, κανὼν τῆς ἀληθείας,” *i.e.*, the truth which is the rule for everything claiming to be Christian. Apparently, this “rule of truth” was the sum of doctrines which every Christian received and confessed at his baptism. The very phrase “rule of truth” implies that it was a concise and definite formulation of the chief Christian truths. For “canon, rule,” was the term employed by the ancient Church to designate such brief sentences as were adopted by synods for the practise of the Church. And this “rule of truth” is declared by Irenaeus to be “the old tradition,” “the old tradition of the apostles”: ἢ τε ἀπὸ τῶν ἀποστόλων ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ παράδοσις. (Zahn, *l.c.*, 379f.) Irenaeus was the pupil of Polycarp the Martyr; and what he had learned from him, Polycarp had received from the Apostle John. Polycarp, says Irenaeus, “taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true.” According to Irenaeus, then, the “rule of truth” received and confessed by every Christian at his baptism was transmitted by the apostles. The contents of this rule of truth received from the apostles are repeatedly set forth by Irenaeus. In his *Contra Haereses* (I, 10, 1) one of these summaries reads as follows: “The Church dispersed through the whole world, to the ends of the earth has received from the apostles and their disciples the faith in one God, the Father Almighty, who has made heaven and earth and the sea and all things that are in them, and in one Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who has proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the bodily assumption into heaven of the beloved Christ Jesus our Lord, and His manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father.” It thus appears that the “rule of truth” as Irenaeus knew it, the formulated sum of doctrines mediated by Baptism, which he, in accordance with the testimony of his teacher Polycarp, believed to have been received from the apostles, at least approaches our present Apostolic Creed.

11. Tertullian and Cyprian on Apostles’ Creed.

A similar result is obtained from the writings of Tertullian, Cyprian, Novatian, Origen and others. “When we step into the water of Baptism,” says Tertullian, who died about 220, “we confess the Christian faith according to the words of its law,” *i.e.*, according to the law of faith or the rule of faith. Tertullian, therefore, identifies the confession to which the candidates for Baptism were pledged with the brief formulation of the chief Christian doctrines which he variously designates as “the law of faith,” “the rule of faith,” frequently also as *tessara*, watchword and *sacramentum*, a term then signifying the military oath of allegiance. This Law or Rule of Faith was, according to Tertullian, the confession adopted by Christians everywhere, which distinguished them from unbelievers and heretics. The unity of the congregations, the granting of the greeting of peace, of the name brother, and of mutual hospitality,—these and

similar Christian rights and privileges, says Tertullian, “depend on no other condition than the similar tradition of the same oath of allegiance,” *i.e.*, the adoption of the same baptismal rule of faith. (Zahn, 250.)

At the same time Tertullian most emphatically claims, “that this rule of faith was established by the apostles, aye, by Christ Himself,” inasmuch as He had commanded to baptize “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” (Zahn, 252.) In his book *Adversus Praxeam*, Tertullian concludes an epitome which he gives of “the rule of faith” as follows: “That this rule has come down from the beginning of the Gospel, even before the earlier heretics, and so, of course before the Praxeas of yesterday, is proved both by the lateness of all heretics and by the novelty of this Praxeas of yesterday.” (Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 2, 18.) The following form is taken from Tertullian’s *De Virginibus Velandis*: “For the rule of faith is altogether one, alone (*sola*), immovable, and irreformable, namely, believing in one God omnipotent the Maker of the world, and in His Son Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, crucified under Pontius Pilate, raised from the dead the third day, received into the heavens, sitting now at the right hand of the Father who shall come to judge the living and the dead, also through the resurrection of the flesh.” Cyprian the Martyr, bishop of Carthage, who died 257, and who was the first one to apply the term *symbolum* to the baptismal creed, in his Epistle to Magnus and to Januarius, as well as to other Numidian bishops, gives the following as the answer of the candidate for Baptism to the question, “Do you believe?”: “I believe in God the Father, in His Son Christ, in the Holy Spirit. I believe the remission of sins, and the life eternal through the holy Church.”

12. Variations of the Apostles’ Creed.

While there can be no reasonable doubt either that the Christian churches from the very beginning were in possession of a definite and formulated symbol, or that this symbol was an amplification of the trinitarian formula of Baptism, yet we are unable to ascertain with any degree of certainty what its exact original wording was. There has not been found in the early Christian writers a single passage recording the precise form of the baptismal confession or the rule of truth and faith as used in the earliest churches. This lack of contemporaneous written records is accounted for by the fact that the early Christians and Christian churches refused on principle to impart and transmit their confession in any other manner than by word of mouth. Such was their attitude, not because they believed in keeping their creed secret, but because they viewed the exclusively oral method of impartation as the most appropriate in a matter which they regarded as an affair of deepest concern of their hearts.

It is universally admitted, even by those who believe that the apostles were instrumental in formulating the early Christian Creed, that the wording of it was not absolutely identical in all Christian congregations, and that in the course of time various changes and additions were made. “Tradition,” says Tertullian with respect to the baptismal confession, received from the apostles, “has enlarged it, custom has confirmed it, faith observes and preserves it.” (Zahn, 252. 381.) When, therefore, Tertullian and other ancient writers declare that the rule of faith received from the apostles is “altogether one, immovable, and irreformable,” they do not at all mean to say that the phraseology of this symbol was alike everywhere, and that in this respect no changes whatever had been made, nor that any clauses had been added. Such variations, additions, and alterations, however, involved a doctrinal change of the confession no more than the Apology of the Augsburg Confession implies a doctrinal departure from this symbol. It remained the same Apostolic Creed, the changes and additions merely bringing out more fully and clearly its true, original meaning. And this is the sense in which Tertullian and others emphasize that the rule of faith is “one, immovable, and irreformable.”

The oldest known form of the Apostles' Creed, according to A. Harnack, is the one used in the church at Rome, even prior to 150 A.D. It was, however, as late as 331 or 338, when this Creed, which, as the church at Rome claimed, was brought thither by Peter himself, was for the first time quoted as a whole by Bishop Marcellus of Ancyra in a letter to Bishop Julius of Rome, for the purpose of vindicating his orthodoxy. During the long period intervening, some changes, however, may have been, and probably were, made also in this Old Roman Symbol, which reads as follows:—

Πιστεύω εἰς θεὸν πατέρα παντοκράτορα· καὶ εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν [τὸν] υἱὸν αὐτοῦ τὸν μονογενῆ, τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν, τὸν γεννηθέντα ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου, καὶ Μαρίας τῆς παρθένου, τὸν ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου σταυρωθέντα καὶ ταφέντα, τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἀναστάντα ἐκ [τῶν] νεκρῶν, ἀναβάντα εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς, καθήμενον ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ πατρὸς, ὃθεν ἔρχεται κρῖναι ζῶντας καὶ νεκρούς· καὶ εἰς πνεῦμα ἅγιον, ἁγίαν ἐκκλησίαν, ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, σαρκὸς ἀνάστασιν (Herzog, *R. E.* 1, 744.)

13. Present Form of Creed and Its Contents.

The complete form of the present *textus receptus* of the Apostles' Creed, evidently the result of a comparison and combination of the various preexisting forms of this symbol, may be traced to the end of the fifth century and is first found in a sermon by Caesarius of Arles in France, about 500.—In his translation, Luther substituted “Christian” for “catholic” in the Third Article. He regarded the two expressions as equivalent in substance, as appears from the *Smalcald Articles*, where he identifies these terms, saying: “Sic enim orant pueri: Credo sanctam ecclesiam catholicam sive Christianam.” (472, 5; 498, 3.) The form, “I believe a holy Christian Church,” however, is met with even before Luther's time. (Carpzov, *Isagoge*, 46.)—In the Greek version the received form of the Apostles' Creed reads as follows:—

Πιστεύω εἰς θεὸν πατέρα παντοκράτορα, ποιητὴν οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς. Καὶ εἰσε Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν, υἱὸν αὐτοῦ τὸν μονογενῆ, τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν, τὸν συλληφθέντα ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου, γεννηθέντα ἐκ Μαρίας τῆς παρθένου, παθόντα ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου, σταυρωθέντα, καὶ ταφέντα, κατελθόντα εἰς τὰ κατώτατα, τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ ἀναστάντα ἀπὸ τῶν νεκρῶν, ἀνεληθότα εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς, καθεζόμενον ἐν δεξιᾷ θεοῦ πατρὸς παντοδυνάμου, ἐκεῖθεν ἔρχόμενον κρῖναι ζῶντας καὶ νεκρούς. Πιστεύω εἰς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, ἁγίαν καθολικὴν ἐκκλησίαν, ἁγίων κοινωνίαν, ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, σαρκὸς ἀνάστασιν, ζωὴν αἰώνιον. Ἀμήν.

As to its contents, the Apostles' Creed is a positive statement of the essential facts of Christianity. The Second Article, says Zahn, is “a compend of the Evangelical history, including even external details.” (264.) Yet some of the clauses of this Creed were probably inserted in opposition to prevailing, notably Gnostic, heresies of the first centuries. It was the first Christian symbol and, as Tertullian and others declare, the bond of unity and fellowship of the early Christian congregations everywhere. It must not, however, be regarded as inspired, much less as superior even to the Holy Scriptures; for, as stated above, it cannot even, in any of its existing forms, be traced to the apostles. Hence it must be subjected to, and tested and judged by, the Holy Scriptures, the inspired Word of God and the only infallible rule and norm of all doctrines, teachers, and symbols. In accordance herewith the Lutheran Church receives the Apostles' Creed, as also the two other ecumenical confessions, not as *per se* divine and authoritative, but because its doctrine is taken from, and well grounded in, the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments. (CONC. TRIGL. 851, 4.)

14. The Nicene Creed.

In the year 325 Emperor Constantine the Great convened the First Ecumenical Council at Nicaea, in Bithynia, for the purpose of settling the controversy precipitated by the teaching of Arius, who denied the true divinity of Christ. The council was attended by 318 bishops and their assistants, among whom the young deacon Athanasius of Alexandria gained special prominence as a theologian of great eloquence, acumen, and learning. “The most valiant champion against the Arians,” as he was called, Athanasius turned the tide of victory in favor of the Homoousians, who believed that the essence of the Father and of the Son is identical. The discussions were based upon the symbol of Eusebius of Caesarea, which by changes and the insertion of Homoousian phrases (such as ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ πατρὸς γεννηθεῖς, οὐ ποιηθεῖς ὁμοούσιος τῷ πατρί) was amended into an unequivocal clean-cut, anti-Arian confession. Two Egyptian bishops who refused to sign the symbol were banished, together with Arius, to Illyria. The text of the original Nicene Creed reads as follows:—

Πιστεύομεν εἰς ἕνα θεόν, πατέρα παντοκράτορα, πάντων ὁρατῶν τε καὶ ἀοράτων ποιητήν. Καὶ εἰς ἕνα κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ, γεννηθέντα ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς μονογενῆ, τουτέστιν ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ πατρὸς, θεὸν ἐκ θεοῦ, φῶς ἐκ φωτός, θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ γεννηθέντα, οὐ ποιηθέντα, ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρί, δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο, τὰ τε ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς· τὸν δι’ ἡμᾶς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν κατελθόντα καὶ σαρκωθέντα καὶ ἐνανθρωπήσαντα, παθόντα, καὶ ἀναστάντα τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ, καὶ ἀνελθόντα εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς, καὶ ἐρχόμενον πάλιν κρῖναι ζῶντας καὶ νεκρούς. Καὶ εἰς πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον. Τοὺς δε’ λέγοντας, ὅτι ἦν πότε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν, καὶ πρὶν γεννηθῆναι οὐκ ἦν, καὶ ὅτι ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων ἐγένετο, ἢ ἐξ ἐτέρας ὑποστάσεως ἢ οὐσίας φάσκοντας εἶναι, ἢ κτιστόν, ἢ ἀλλιωτόν, ἢ τρεπτόν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ, τούτους ἀναθεματίζει ἡ καθολικὴ καὶ ἀποστολικὴ ἐκκλησία. (Mansi, *Amplissima Collectio*, 2, 665 sq.)

15. Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed.

In order to suppress Arianism, which still continued to flourish, Emperor Theodosius convened the Second Ecumenical Council, in 381 at Constantinople. The bishops here assembled, 150 in number, resolved that the faith of the Nicene Fathers must ever remain firm and unchanged, and that its opponents, the Eunomians, Anomoeans, Arians, Eudoxians Semi-Arians, Sabellians, Marcellians, Photinians, and Apollinarians, must be rejected. At this council also Macedonius was condemned, who taught that the Holy Spirit is not God: ἔλεγε γὰρ αὐτὸ μὴ εἶναι θεόν, ἀλλὰ τῆς θεότητος τοῦ πατρὸς ἀλλότριον. (Mansi. 3, 568. 666. 673. 577. 600.) By omissions, alterations, and additions (in particular concerning the Holy Spirit) this council gave to the Nicene Creed its present form. Hence it is also known as the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. The Third Ecumenical Council, which assembled at Toledo, Spain, in 589, inserted the word “Filioque,” an addition which the Greek Church has never sanctioned, and which later contributed towards bringing about the great Eastern Schism. A. Harnack considers the Constantinopolitanum (CPanum), the creed adopted at Constantinople, to be the baptismal confession of the Church of Jerusalem, which, he says, was revised between 362 and 373 and amplified by the Nicene formulas and a rule of faith concerning the Holy Ghost. (Herzog *R. E.*, 11, 19f.) Following is the text of the CPanum according to Mansi:—

Πιστεύομεν εἰς ἕνα θεόν, πατέρα παντοκράτορα, ποιητήν οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς, ὁρατῶν τε πάντων καὶ ἀοράτων. Καὶ εἰς ἕνα κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν, τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ τὸν μονογενῆ, τὸν ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς γεννηθέντα πρὸ πάντων τῶν αἰώνων, φῶς ἐκ φωτός, θεὸν ἀληθινὸν ἐκ θεοῦ ἀληθινοῦ, γεννηθέντα, οὐ ποιηθέντα, ὁμοούσιον τῷ πατρί, δι’ οὗ τὰ πάντα ἐγένετο, τὸν δι’ ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους καὶ διὰ τὴν ἡμετέραν σωτηρίαν κατελθόντα ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν, καὶ σαρκωθέντα ἐκ πνεύματος ἁγίου καὶ Μαρίας τῆς παρθένου, καὶ ἐνανθρωπήσαντα, σταυρωθέντα τε ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν

ἐπὶ Ποντίου Πιλάτου, καὶ παθόντα, καὶ ταφέντα, καὶ ἀναστάντα τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ κατὰ τὰς
 γαφάρας, καὶ ἀνελθόντα εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς, καὶ καθεζόμενον ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ πατρὸς, καὶ πάλιν
 ἐρχόμενον μετὰ δόξης κρῖναι ζῶντας καὶ νεκρούς, οὐ τῆς βασιλείας οὐκ ἔσται τέλος. Καὶ εἰς
 πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, τὸ κύριον, τὸ ζωοποιόν, τὸ ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκπορευόμενον, τὸ σὺν πατρὶ καὶ υἱῷ
 συμπροσκυνούμενον καὶ συμδοξαζόμενον, τὸ λαλῆσαν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν, εἰς μίαν ἁγίαν
 καθολικὴν καὶ ἀποστολικὴν ἐκκλησίαν. Ὁμολογοῦμεν ἓν βάπτισμα εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν·
 προσδοκῶμεν ἀνάστασιν νεκρῶν, καὶ ζωὴν τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος. Ἀμήν. (3, 565.)

16. The Athanasian Creed.

From its opening word this Creed is also called *Symbolum Quicunque*. Roman tradition has it that Athanasius, who died 373, made this confession before Pope Julius when the latter summoned him “to submit himself to him [the Pope], as to the ecumenical bishop and Supreme arbiter of matters ecclesiastical (*ut ei, seu episcopo oecumica et supremo rerum ecclesiasticarum arbitro, sese submitteret*).” However, Athanasius is not even the author of this confession, as appears from the following facts: 1. The Creed was originally written in Latin. 2. It is mentioned neither by Athanasius himself nor by his Greek eulogists. 3. It was unknown to the Greek Church till about 1200, and has never been accorded official recognition by this Church nor its “orthodox” sister churches. 4. It presupposes the post-Athanasian Trinitarian and Christological controversies.—Up to the present day it has been impossible to reach a final verdict concerning the author of the *Quicunque* and the time and place of its origin. Koellner’s *Symbolik* allocates it to Gaul. Loofs inclines to the same opinion and ventures the conjecture that the source of this symbol must be sought in Southern Gaul between 450 and 600. (Herzog, *R. E.*, 2, 177.) Gieseler and others look to Spain for its origin.

Paragraphs 1, 2, and 40 of the Athanasian Creed have given offense not only to theologians who advocate an undogmatic Christianity, but to many thoughtless Christians as well. Loofs declares: The *Quicunque* is unevangelical and cannot be received because its very first sentence confounds *fides* with *expositio fidei*. (H., *R. E.*, 2, 194.) However, the charge is gratuitous, since the Athanasian Creed deals with the most fundamental Christian truths: concerning the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, and His work of redemption, without the knowledge of which saving faith is impossible. The paragraphs in question merely express the clear doctrine of such passages of the Scriptures as Acts 4, 12: “Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved;” John 8, 21: “If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins;” John 14, 6: “Jesus saith unto him, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me.” In complete agreement with the impugned statements of the Athanasian Creed, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession closes its article “Of God” as follows: “Therefore we do freely conclude that they are all idolatrous, blasphemers, and outside of the Church of Christ who hold or teach otherwise.” (103)

In the early part of the Middle Ages the *Quicunque* had already received a place in the order of public worship. The Council of Vavre resolved, 1368: “Proinde *Symbolum Apostolorum* silenter et secrete dicitur quotidie in Completorio et in Prima, quia fuit editum tempore, quo nondum erat fides catholica propalata. Alia autem duo publice in diebus Dominicis et festivis, quando maior ad ecclesiam congregatur populus, decantantur, quia fuere edita tempore fidei propalatae. *Symbolum* quidem Nicaenum post evangelium cantatur in Missa quasi evangelicae fidei expositio. *Symbolum* Athanasii de mane solum cantatur in Prima, quia fuit editum tempore quo maxime fuerunt depulsa et detecta nox atra et tenebrae haeresium et errorum.” (Mansi, 26, 487.) Luther says: “The first symbol, that of the apostles, is indeed the best of all, because it contains a concise, correct and splendid presentation of the articles of faith and is easily learned

by children and the common people. The second, the Athanasian Creed, is longer ... and practically amounts to an apology of the first symbol.” “I do not know of any more important document of the New Testament Church since the days of the apostles” [than the Athanasian Creed]. (St. L. 10, 994; 6, 1576; E. 23, 263.)

17. Luther on Ecumenical Creeds.

The central theme of the Three Ecumenical Symbols is Christ’s person and work, the paramount importance of which Luther extols as follows in his tract of 1538: “In all the histories of the entire Christendom I have found and experienced that all who had and held the chief article concerning Jesus Christ correctly remained safe and sound in the true Christian faith. And even though they erred and sinned in other points, they nevertheless were finally preserved.” “For it has been decreed, says Paul, Col. 2, 9, that in Christ should dwell all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, or personally, so that he who does not find or receive God in Christ shall never have nor find Him anywhere outside of Christ, even though he ascend above heaven, descend below hell, or go beyond the world.” “On the other hand, I have also observed that all errors, heresies, idolatries, offenses, abuses, and ungodliness within the Church originally resulted from the fact that this article of faith concerning Jesus Christ was despised or lost. And viewed clearly and rightly, all heresies militate against the precious article of Jesus Christ, as Simeon says concerning Him, Luke 2, 34, that He is set for the falling and the rising of many in Israel and for a sign which is spoken against; and long before this, Isaiah, chapter 8, 14, spoke of Him as ‘a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.’ ” “And we in the Papacy, the last and greatest of saints, what have we done? We have confessed that He [Christ] is God and man; but that He is our Savior, who died and rose *for us*, etc., this we have denied and persecuted with might and main” (those who taught this). “And even now those who claim to be the best Christians and boast that they are the Holy Church, who burn the others and wade in innocent blood, regard as the best doctrine [that which teaches] that we obtain grace and salvation through our own works. Christ is to be accorded no other honor with regard to our salvation than that He made the beginning, while we are the heroes who complete it with our merit.” Luther continues: “This is the way the devil goes to work. He attacks Christ with three storm-columns. One will not suffer Him to be God; the other will not suffer Him to be man, the third denies that He has merited salvation for us. Each of the three endeavors to destroy Christ. For what does it avail that you confess Him to be God if you do not also believe that He is man? For then you have not the entire and the true Christ, but a phantom of the devil. What does it avail you to confess that He is true man if you do not also believe that He is true God? What does it avail you to confess that He is God and man if you do not also believe that whatever He became and whatever He did was done for you?” “Surely, all three parts must be believed, namely, that He is God, also, that He is man, and that He became such a man for us, that is, as the first symbol says: conceived by the Holy Ghost born of the Virgin Mary, suffered, was crucified, died, and rose again, etc. If one small part is lacking, then all parts are lacking. For faith shall and must be complete in every particular. While it may indeed be weak and subject to afflictions, yet it must be entire and not false. Weakness [of faith] does not work the harm but false faith—that is eternal death.” (St. L. 10, 998; E. 23, 258.)

Concerning the mystery involved in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, the chief topic of the Ecumenical Creeds, Luther remarks in the same tract: “Now, to be sure, we Christians are not so utterly devoid of all reason and sense as the Jews consider us, who take us to be nothing but crazy geese and ducks, unable to perceive or notice what folly it is to believe that God is man, and that in one Godhead there are three distinct persons. No, praise God, we perceive indeed that

this doctrine cannot and will not be received by reason. Nor are we in need of any sublime Jewish reasoning to demonstrate this to us. We believe it knowingly and willingly. We confess and also experience that, where the Holy Spirit does not, surpassing reason, shine into the heart, it is impossible to grasp, or to believe, and abide by, such article; moreover, there must remain in it [the heart] a Jewish, proud, and supercilious reason deriding and ridiculing such article, and thus setting up itself as judge and master of the Divine Being whom it has never seen nor is able to see and hence does not know what it is passing judgment on, nor whereof it thinks or speaks. For God dwells in a 'light which no man can approach unto,' 1 Tim. 6, 16. He must come to us, yet hidden in the lantern, and as it is written, John 1, 18: 'No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him,' and as Moses said before this, Ex. 33: 'There shall no man see Me [God] and live.' ” (St. L. 10, 1007; E. 23, 568.)¹

¹Lutheran Church. Missouri Synod. (1997). *Concordia Triglotta - English : The symbolic books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. Includes Historical Introductions by F. Bente and indexes of subjects. (electronic ed.) (Pages 9-15). Milwaukee WI: Northwestern Publishing House.