

**And I look for the Resurrection of the dead, And the Life of the world to
come.**

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In this most solemn week of the Church's most penitential season, it might be good to preface this presentation with a minor but none the less important confession. It had been my intention to download the accounts of all of the sessions that had gone before and read them all thoroughly before putting a word of my own on paper. To do this would have given me a sense of the tone and direction the series was acquiring, and more importantly, knowledge of what already had been imparted on the Creeds in general. This would have prevented me from needless repetition and enabled me to impart comments on areas that had not been covered in any detail. Dr. Bloomquist certainly did his part in providing the scripts in a very timely manner, but I fear that time and circumstance, as well as an absence of a certain amount of discipline on my part, delegated this good intention to the path or road where I have been told as a boy, so many of our good intentions ultimately lead us.

I think the idea for this **We Believe** series is an excellent one and quite worthy as a project for St. George's anniversary year. The BCP states quite emphatically in the Order for Confirmation "*The Church has thought good to order that none shall be confirmed, but such as can say the Creed, the Lord's Prayer the Ten Commandments and are further instructed in the Church Catechism, set forth for that purpose*". It further states "*and there*

shall none be admitted to holy Communion, until such time as they be confirmed, or be ready and desirous to be confirmed”.

While I realize that such admonition is a “strange survival of a vanished age”, and that less than one percent of the approximately 12,000 persons I have confirmed since becoming a bishop in 1993, could even come close to filling that requirement, the fact that the Creed comes first in that line of prerequisites reflects on its importance in our tradition. (I should also say that less than 10% of those I confirmed ever had any further contact with the church, which in itself is a very sobering reflection on how one of our “Lesser Sacraments” can degenerate into little more than a social “Rite of Passage”.

At my own Confirmation almost sixty years ago now, I was required to quote these formularies parrot fashion, and because I had a good capacity for memory by rote, getting confirmed was no great struggle, and I still can recite huge chunks of the Catechism without blinking an eye, even though I probably understand their implication now not much more than I did then.

I was grateful that it was the Apostle’s Creed that required memory and not the much longer Nicene version. When I asked as to why we had “two creeds” (I still had not been exposed to the third) I was told that the Apostles wrote the first one when the church was small and mistakes had not occurred (“mistake” was a much more gentle word than “heresy” to a 12 year old) but three hundred years later when this was not the case a much longer version to explain the first profession of faith in more detail was written by a Church Council.

It was sometime later that I learned there even was a “third” creed which made the other two put together short by comparison. When the Canadian BCP of 1962 came out (now referred to as the “old” Prayer Book), this was relegated to page 695 under the title *Creed of Saint Athanasius (Commonly So Called)* and its position, just preceding the *Articles of Religion*, should have given us concern, even in these comparatively halcyon days.

These Articles of Religion, usually referred to as the 39 Articles are a fascinating study in themselves. Article VIII is quite specific concerning the Creeds:

The Three Creeds, Nicene Creed, Athanasius’s Creed, and that which is commonly called the Apostle’s Creed, ought thoroughly to be received and believed: for they may be proved by most certain warrants of holy Scripture.

Their authority in the Church cannot be made more clear.

We have been dealing with what is generally called the Nicene Creed, though even its name is somewhat of a misnomer.

It is factual that the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD drew up a creed which came with the authority of one of the seven ecumenical councils of the undivided Church. However, as it may have been pointed out, that is not the document we today call the Nicene Creed. As I understand it, scholars (of which I obviously am not one) refer to it as **N**.

The Creed we have been studying came on the scene almost a century later and officially was proclaimed at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD where they attributed it to the Council of Constantinople of 381 AD. In fact, it sometimes is referred to by scholars as the **Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed** and referred to as **C**.

But as interesting as all of this is (at least to some people) that is as far as I intend to go with it - with the exception of a few more comments at the end.

And so, at last, we come to the final phrase that rounds out this Creed, as indeed an almost identical one does the earlier Apostle's Creed (although it is not found in **N**.)

And I look for the Resurrection of the dead, And the Life of the world to come.

Having declared our faith in God the Father in the first paragraph, we moved into the longest of the three sections, declaring belief in one Lord Jesus Christ, going from his Incarnation and Nativity, his crucifixion and death under Pontius Pilate, His Resurrection and Ascension, it concludes with a glimpse of His Second Coming when He will judge the "quick and the dead".

The last section progressively then moves to the Holy Spirit with the controversial **Filioque Clause** officially added as late as 1000 AD, but I am sure that subject will continue to be debated, even though the Lambeth

Conference of 1988 recommended that it be omitted.. Then, after asserting a belief in the (One) Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, and a belief in Baptismal Regeneration, this creed comes to a triumphant ending by asserting an expectation of the Resurrection of the Dead and the Life of the world to come.

Unlike the Apostle's Creed that proclaims belief in "the resurrection of the body" our declaration here is that we look for the "resurrection of the dead".

Although the concept of resurrection is fundamental to most Christian believers, it does not get much support in scripture **until** Christ own resurrection, combined with his teaching on the world to come, especially in His discourses in John's Gospel, [*John 11: 25,26 / John 14: 1,2*] and in his post resurrection promises and appearances. The evangelists make a point of recording that it was his body (as opposed to a spirit) that they were able to touch and feel, and although that body now had supernatural power, it still could and did eat and it was the resurrected Christ in all of his wholeness that ascended into heaven as a cloud received him out of their sight.

Although there are a number of references to an existence after death in the Old Testament, they are for the most part vague [*e.g. Job 19: 23*]. Saul visiting the witch of Endor also comes to mind, and the Samuel she conjures up is more in keeping with the concept of shades from the underworld found often in Greek and other ancient mythologies [*1 Samuel 28*].

It is Paul who, after his encounter on the Damascus Road with the Living Christ, then becomes the great champion of Resurrection theology. His

eschatology does evolve from an expectation that the parousia will come in his own lifetime, (“ we shall not all sleep”) [*1 Cor. 15*] to a much more futuristic one as the end of his life draws near. Frequently in the Acts of the Apostles he is able to draw upon the division that existed within Judaism and pit the Pharisees and Sadducees against one another, [*Acts 23: 6ff*] at times to his won advantage. On the other hand, many who can accept much of what he says about Jesus fulfilling propesies, draw the line and scoff at him when it comes to talking about the resurrection. [*Acts 17:32*]

Still, proclaiming the Lord’s Resurrection until He comes again was the keynote of the early apostolic church, and is incorporated into its two major Sacraments. In Baptism we die with Christ and rise and again to the new life. In the Holy Eucharist, we remember his precious death until His coming again. Maranatha.

Yet, as comforting as it is, the concept of the “life of the world to come” still brings much division among His followers. The starkness of the judgment in Calvinism to the concept of universal salvation of the revisionists, with so much in between, makes for lively debate in theological colleges today as it did when I attended one over 50 years ago.

During most of my ministry, the four Sundays of Advent already had their themes, namely, The Four Last Things: Death; Judgment; Heaven; Hell. There it was in a nutshell: death was inevitable and after that there would be the judgment when the sheep would be separated from the goats. Those found worthy would go to heaven and those who did not measure up to the

mark would be consigned to hell. This teaching certainly can be supported by Holy Scripture with parables of sheep and goats, wheat and chaff

The Creed of St. Athanasius is very clear on this (probably a reason for its lack of popularity in the western Anglicanism today), to the degree that a rubric was added in our 1962 BCP .

For the removal of doubts, and to prevent disquietude in the use of this creed, it is solemnly declared

1. That the Confession of our Christian Faith, commonly called the Creed of St. Athanasius, does not make any addition to the Faith as contained in holy Scripture, but warns against errors, which from time to time have arisen in the Church of Christ.

2. That as holy Scripture in divers places promises life to them that believe, and declares the condemnation of them that believe not, so the Church in this Confession declares the necessity, for all who would be in a state of salvation, of holding fast the Catholic Faith, and the great peril of rejecting the same. Wherefore the warnings in this Confession of Faith are to be understood no otherwise than the like warnings in holy Scripture; for we must receive God's threatenings, even as his promises, in such wise as they are generally set forth in holy Writ. Moreover, the Church does not herein pronounce judgment on any particular person or persons, God alone being the Judge of all.

I always had great difficulty when it came around to preaching about judgment and hell and the concept of suffering that would go on forever. Milton and Dante and similar poets did not provide me with much consolation to offer either, other than that you made your bed and you will lie on it throughout eternity with the righteous getting a certain glee in watching this suffering as a recompense for the deprivations they endured going through life by being good.

During my student days I was introduced to the writings of Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy (a padre in World War I) affectionately known to the troops as Woodbine Willie. He was neither an exceptional theologian (he flirted with Christian Science) nor a poet destined to find a place in the Canon and yet some of his poetry with its implied teaching had an extremely profound impact on my life and teaching.

I intend to share now his views on this topic as expressed in his poem “Well” – a soliloquy or dramatic monologue by a soldier in the trenches after a bloody battle.

If I had my way, Studdert-Kennedy and George Herbert (though completely different) would be required reading in every theological college.

Of course, Heaven is equally difficult to “preach” especially with much nonsense flowing from TV evangelists and well meaning Christians attempting to console the bereaved after a death in the family. The most difficult case I frequently experienced was to deal with the death of a child when well meaning comforters would talk in terms of God needing another

angel and so He picked little Amy to be with him. At a time like that I found it easier to nod my head in muted compliance and resolve to do better teaching on the creation of “angels and men in a wonderful order” at a time when people are not so emotionally overcome.

Yet I often personally have been much comforted by a simple, basic faith I was privileged to witness from time to time around a deathbed. While it might not stand the rigors of too deep a theological scrutiny, I personally found it so very restorative in an era when so many committed followers still are skeptical over the words of Jesus “Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise” and spoke more in terms of “sorry for your loss” or “so and so got his over with”.

An elderly lady wanted her daughter to promise her in my presence just days before her death that this daughter would make sure she was buried in a certain blue spangled dress. Her husband who had gone before several years previously always loved it on her and she could imagine his pleased look when he saw her coming to greet him.

Or an elderly gentleman in the same parish who realizing he only had a week left to live, telephoned five or six families who had bereavements during that year to see if they had any special message for him to deliver to their loved ones on the other side.

Far, far too simplistic many of you are saying, and yet I believe with all the depth I am capable of, that both of these episodes were fulfilled. Did not our Lord say something about us becoming as little children? [*Luke 18 ; 17*]

I once heard a memorable lecture given by Sir Bernard Lovell, the director of the world famous Jodrell Bank Observatory and a leading authority on the “black holes” in space, respond to a very negative question of a scientist in the audience who was being sarcastic about the existence of God. He obviously was assuming that Lovell, great scientist that he was, would support him. Instead, this learned man closed his lecture notes and quoted these lines from Frederick Faber’ Hymn which we often used at Communion:

*Out beyond the shining
of the furthest star
Thou are ever stretching
Infinitely far.*

*Yet the thoughts of children
Hold what words cannot
And the God of wonders
Loves the lowly spot.*

I feel much comforted that the both the Apostle’s and the Nicene creeds conclude on such notes of hope and triumph. In a world rampant in materialism, where success is measured entirely on what the world deems as security and outward prosperity, as we regularly stand and recite collectively **We Believe** and declare individually, **I Believe** , we are affirming that for us “what’s past is prologue”, and like the dear lady who requested to be viewed

in her coffin with her dessert spoon in her hand, we know the best course, is still to come.- living forever in the presence of Jesus.

When ends life's transient dream

When death's cold sullen stream

Shall o'er me roll

Blest Saviour, then in love

Fear and distrust remove;

O bear me safe above

A ransomed soul.