

Credo (Clark Carlton, Author, Philosopher and Theologian)

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First council of Nicaea

The Westminster Confession of Faith-the principle doctrinal statement of English-speaking Calvinists-begins with an affirmation of the sole authority of the Holy Scriptures. Similarly, the London Confessions and all subsequent Baptist confessions of faith begin with an affirmation of belief in the authority of the Bible. Indeed, with very few exceptions<the Lutheran Augsburg Confession being the most notable> Protestant confessions and creedal statements almost always begin with a statement affirming the authority of the Bible¹.

It is not an exaggeration to say that for Protestants, Evangelical Protestants, at any rate, the Bible is an *object* of faith. That is to say, Protestants do not merely believe what is written in the Bible; they believe in the Bible.

For an Evangelical, this is axiomatic.

The belief in the Bible as an *object* of faith and as a *subject* of Credal affirmation, however, represents a radical departure from the faith of the early Church.

None of the ancient creeds of the Church begins with a statement about the Bible; rather, all begin with an affirmation of belief in one God, the Father. This is true of the Roman baptismal creed known as the Apostles Creed, the sixth-century Gallican Creed, and, of course, the fourth-century Nicene Creed.³ These ancient creeds, however, do contain an affirmation of belief which is not found in modern Protestant confessions: belief in the Church. Indeed, if you examine the Nicene Creed carefully, you will see that the Church confesses belief in one God, the Father Almighty; in one Lord, Jesus Christ; in the Holy Spirit; and in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. Thus, for the ancient Church, the Church Herself was an object of faith and a subject of Credal affirmation. The early Church confessed belief in the Church Herself, even as She confessed belief in God. 4

In Accordance with the Scriptures

This is not to suggest that the early Church had any doubts about the authority of the Scriptures—far from it! The Creed does mention the Scriptures, and that reference is the key to understanding how the early Church viewed and used the Bible. Speaking of Christ's Incarnation and work on earth, the Nicene Creed affirms:»and He rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures.»

Though it may seem to be no more than a passing reference, this phrase is pregnant with meaning.»According to the Scriptures» assumes the authority of the Scriptures. It means that Christ was incarnate, lived, died, and rose again just as the Scriptures testify. The Scriptures, therefore, are the witness to what God has done for man in Christ.

The phrase *according to the Scriptures*⁵ is a direct quotation from St. Paul: *For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures* (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

St. Paul was referring to the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the Messiah. Everywhere he went, he preached to the Jews using the Old Testament as the basis for his message:

And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto

you, is Christ (Acts 17:2-3).

When Paul preached to the Jews, the New Testament did not exist. The eye-witness accounts of the Apostles to the life of Christ were circulated orally. The veracity of these eye-witness accounts was checked against the witness to the Messiah given by the prophets. Thus, we read of the Jews of Berea: *These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so (Acts 17:11).*

The key concept here is that of *witness*. The prophets of the Old Testament and the Apostles of the New were witnesses of Christ: *This is the Disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true (John 21:24).* The testimony of the Scripture is true-the Church has never doubted this, but the object of faith is, and has always been, the subject of the testimony, not the testimony itself. Thus, the Church believes without question the witness of the Scriptures, but the Church does not believe *in* the Scriptures, because the Bible is not God.

The Breaking of the Bread

After Jesus' Resurrection, He appeared to Luke and Cleopas on the road to Emmaus, but they did not recognize Him (Luke 24:23ff.). *Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He [Jesus] expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.* Even then, however, they did not recognize Him to be the Risen Lord. It was not until He broke bread with them that they understood:

And it came to pass, as He sat at meat with them, He took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew Him; and He vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and while He opened to us the Scriptures?

While their hearts burned as Christ explained the Scriptures to them, they still did not *know* Him. It was only at the breaking of the bread that their eyes were opened: *«And they told what things were done in the way, and how He was known to them in the breaking of the bread. «*

In the writings of St. Luke, the phrase *the breaking of the bread* is «code-language» for the Eucharist. He uses the phrase again in the book of Acts: *And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and the fellowship, and in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers. (Acts 2:42).*

The Scriptures bear witness to Christ. Our hearts burn within us as they are read and as the Gospel is preached. The Scriptures, however, are not Christ. It is only in the Eucharist – that event in which the Church expresses the very essence of Her life – that we truly know Christ, that we have communion with Him. *He that eateth My Flesh, and drinketh My Blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him* (John 6:56). Consider also the words of St. Paul:

The Cup of Blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the Blood of Christ? The Bread which we break, is it not the communion of the Body of Christ? For we being many are one Bread, and one Body: for we are all partakers of that one Bread (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

St. Luke's account of the encounter on the road to Emmaus gives us a clear picture of how the early Church understood Her communion with the Risen Christ. Every ancient liturgy of the Church follows the same pattern as St. Luke's account: the reading and explanation of the Scriptures is immediately followed by the breaking of the Eucharistic Bread and communion with the Risen One.

The Fathers of the Church saw an inherent connection between the Eucharist and the doctrine of the Incarnation. The union of God and man in the Incarnation is not confined to the thirty-three years in which Christ walked on the earth. Communion with the God Who became man involves not merely the intellect, but a literal participation in His humanity. United to His Body through Baptism, every member of the Church enters into real communion with the Incarnate, Crucified, and Risen Lord through participation in the Eucharist.

I Am With You Always

When the Scribes and Pharisees brought the woman caught in adultery to Christ, St. John records that Jesus stooped over and *with his finger wrote on the ground* [John 8:6). As far as we know, this is the only thing Jesus ever wrote. He did not write a book. He did not leave behind an academy as did Plato. The *only* thing He left behind was the Church.

Before His Ascension, our Lord promised His abiding presence in the Church: *Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world* (Matt. 28:20). He promised to send the Holy Spirit upon His Disciples:

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you (John 14:26).

Notice that our Lord did not say, »I will send you a book, which will tell you everything you need to know.« Rather, He promised the Spirit, even *the Spirit of truth*, Who guides the Church *into all truth* (John 16:13).

When God created the world, He did so by His Word and His Spirit: *By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the Spirit of His mouth* (Psa. 32[33]:6). At the Annunciation to the Holy Virgin, the Spirit came upon her and she conceived the eternal Word of the Father in the flesh (Luke 1:35). At Christ's Baptism in the Jordan River, when He was manifested to the world as the Messiah, the Holy Spirit alighted upon Him in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy: *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me* (Isaiah 61:1; cf. also Luke 3:21-22, 4:17ff.). Likewise, when the Holy Spirit descended upon the Disciples on the Day of Pentecost, He anointed them to be the Church, the very Body of Christ (cf. Acts 2).

None of this is meant to disparage the Bible. Indeed, *all Scripture is given by inspiration of God* (2 Tim 3:16). The point is, however, that the Church is the Body of Christ, not the Bible. The Divine Scriptures were written within the Church, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so that through their testimony men might *come to the knowledge of the truth* (1 Tim. 2:4) and be united with Christ *in the Church*. The Church, not the Bible, is *the pillar and ground of the truth* (1 Tim. 3:15). The Church, not the Bible, is *the fulness of Him that filleth all in all* (Eph. 1:23).

There is a very real sense in which Protestantism has *replaced* the Church with the Bible, substituting the living Body of Christ with a text, albeit a divinely inspired text. The difference between Protestant confessions of faith and the ancient creeds of the Church illustrates the fact that they are two fundamentally different belief systems. They manifest two very different approaches to the nature of the Christian faith.

Christology, Ecclesiology, and Heresy

Even if one is willing to grant that the Divine Scriptures are not Christ and should not be the object of belief, it is another matter altogether to assert that the Church *is* an object of faith and a subject of Credal affirmation. Yet, this is precisely what Orthodox Christians profess when they recite the Nicene Creed.

It is common place for modern commentators to play down this Credal affirmation. Belief *in* the Church, so it is often argued, is not to be taken literally. One is to believe only in God, and the Church – whatever excellent things may be said about Her – cannot be the object of such faith.

Ironically, one of the most forceful presentations of this position comes, not from a Protestant theologian, but from the German Catholic Hans Kung. In his book, *The Church*, Kung argues that belief in the Church as an object of faith is a distortion of the image of the Church.⁷ Kung writes:

» To say that we do not believe in the Church means that the Church is not God. The Church as a fellowship of believers is, in spite of everything positive that can be said about it, neither God nor a god-like being. Of course, the believer is convinced that God works in the Church and in the work of the Church. But God's work and the Church's are neither identical nor overlapping, there is indeed a functional distinction between them.»

For Kung, the Credal affirmation regarding the Church has to do with the Spirit, Who works in the Church, not with the Church Herself as an institution.⁹

Although Kung's analysis seems convincing, it is born of a mindset that is not only foreign to that of the Fathers of the Church, but wholly antithetical to the faith of the early Church. In short, it manifests an ecclesiology that is blatantly heretical.

Arius taught that the Logos was a created being because his rationalistic concept of God had no room for a God who could become man. Thus, the Word, Who became flesh, was a creature to begin with. In the same way, Nestorius posited two subjects in Christ: the Divine Logos and the Assumed Man. It was the Assumed Man Jesus Who was born of the Virgin and Who suffered and died on the Cross. Nestorius, working with the same rationalistic concept of God as Arius, could not conceive of God being born in a manger or dying on the Cross. In other words, he could not conceive of God as a genuinely personal being Who could truly take humanity upon Himself and make the life of man His own.

To say that we do not believe *in* the Church because the Church is not God sounds perfectly reasonable. It sounds as though we are safeguarding ourselves from any pagan confusion between Creator and creature. Yet, this obsession with protecting the »honor« of God was precisely the motivation behind both the Arian and Nestorian heresies. Indeed, this is nothing else than the application of Nestorian theology to the doctrine of the Church.

The humanity of Christ had no existence of its own apart from its union with Him. There was no Man Jesus prior to the Incarnation. The eternal Son and Word of God the Father is the Man Jesus, and the Man Jesus is none other than the Logos of God. Thus, the Church decreed at the Council of Ephesus (A.D. 431) that one *must* confess the Virgin Mary to be the Mother of God, for the One Who was born of her was God Himself, not simply a man joined to God. Likewise, the Church confesses that it was God Himself Who suffered and died on the cross in the flesh.¹⁰

According to St. Paul, the Church is nothing less than the Body of Christ, *the fulness of Him that filleth all in all* (Eph. 1:23). He goes on to say, *For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones* (Eph 5:30). Likewise, Christ Himself said, *He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him* (John 6:56).

Nestorius could not conceive of a genuine union of God and man, so he denied that the Son of God could be born of a woman. He eventually agreed to accept the term *Theotokos* (God-bearer), but only if understood metaphorically, not literally. Similarly, those who deny that the Church is a proper object of faith are forced by the logic of their theology to interpret St. Paul's words about the Church metaphorically.

If in Christ there is a true and indissoluble union of God and man, then His body must be worthy of the one and undivided glory due to the Son and Word of God. Therefore, if one denies that the Church is a proper object of belief-because»the Church is not God»-then it must be the case that the Church is not the Body of Christ in any real sense of the term.

For the Church of the first two centuries, there was an unbreakable link between the doctrine of the Incarnation and the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.¹¹ To deny one was to deny the other. This fact has tremendous ecclesiological implications, for the Eucharist is that which most clearly and profoundly manifests the nature of the Church. Thus, the Incarnation, the Eucharist, and the doctrine of the Church are all bound together-or, more precisely, they are three sides of one and the same doctrine: the true union of God and man in Christ.

For the Orthodox Church, therefore, Christology and ecclesiology are inseparable. Christ implies the Church, for the Incarnate Lord cannot be without His Body. This explains why Kung's attempt to shift the emphasis in the Creed from the Church to the Spirit working in the Church, is absolutely unacceptable.

At what time did the Spirit ever act»on His own»? At the Annunciation to the Virgin,

the Spirit came upon her and she conceived the Son of God in the flesh. At the Baptism of the Lord, the Spirit alighted upon Him and anointed Him to be the Christ. At Pentecost, the Spirit descended upon the Apostles and made them to be not merely disciples, but the Church, the very Body of Christ. At the Holy Eucharist, the Spirit consecrates the bread and wine to be the Body and Blood of the Lord, through which we have true communion with Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 10:16).

To say that we believe not in the Church, but in the Spirit, Who works in the Church is the same as saying that we believe not in the historical Jesus, but in the Spirit, Who anointed Him. Indeed, the parallel with the Nestorian controversy is striking: the ninth of St. Cyril of Alexandria's famous twelve anathemas was directed against anyone who says «that the one Lord Jesus Christ was glorified by the Spirit, as if He exercised a power alien to Himself which came to Him through the Spirit...»

Summation

«The Church is God's Christ Himself, the Kingdom of God which is within us' (Luke 17:21).»¹² This statement by a renowned abbot in Greece is, on first hearing, shocking to Protestant ears. Yet, it succinctly expresses the self-understanding of the Orthodox Church. The tragic mistake of Protestantism is that the Church-the very Body of Christ on earth-has been replaced, both in theory and in practice-by a book.

Regardless of its divine origin-the Orthodox Church has never denied that the Bible is wholly inspired by God-the Bible is a book. A book is a book; the Church is life-life in Christ. To grasp this is to grasp the real difference between Orthodoxy and Protestantism. *The Way: What Every Protestant Should Know about the Orthodox Church* explores this thesis in great detail, demonstrating that Orthodoxy and Protestantism are two fundamentally different conceptions of the nature of Christianity.

By Clark Carlton

Excerpted first by The Christ Activist Vol. 11 from Clark Carlton's Regina Press Book, The Way: What Every Protestant Should Know about the Orthodox Church (Buy Here: <http://www.reginaorthodoxpress.com/way.html>). Posted here with permission.

Notes:

1 Cf. Pelickan, *Reformation*, pp. 207-208. Some confessions, including the Calvinist Belgic Confession refer to the Scriptures in the second article.

2 There is an inherent problem in trying to describe what Protestants in general believe about anything. We speak of «the» Protestant Reformation, but in reality, the sixteenth century witnessed a series of reformations. The Lutheran, Calvinist, English, and Radical Reformations differed among themselves on as many issues as they agreed upon. Indeed, their primary tie to each other was their opposition to Rome. Central to this opposition, however, was their insistence on the centrality of the Bible—even though the *exact* role that the Bible played in each tradition varied considerably. In this volume, I am primarily concerned with the development of Evangelical Protestantism as we know it today.

3 By «Nicene Creed» I mean the final text attributed to the Second Ecumenical Council in A.D. 381. This is the same creed that is used today by the Orthodox Church. The text of these creeds may be found in Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 2nd. Ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 23-26. For a far more complete selection of creeds, as well as excellent introductory notes, see J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd Ed. (New York: David McKay Co., 1972). For an even more extensive treatment, albeit somewhat dated, see Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols... (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1877).

4 The Greek text of the Creed makes this clear.»We believe (Pisteuovmen)» is followed by «in (eij~)» four times: eij~ e{na qeovn, eij~ e{na kuvrion, eij~ tov Pneu`ma tov {Agion, and eij~ mivan...’Ekkhlhsivan. The remaining articles of the Creed are clearly distinguished from the above by the introduction of new verbs: JOmologou`men (We confess) and Prosdokw`men (We look for).

5 In Greek, katav tav~ grafav~. All quotations in Greek are taken from The Greek New Testament, published by the United Bible Societies (3rd Ed., 1975).

6 The King James Version of both texts omits the definite articles. In both Luke 24:35 and Acts 2:42 the text reads th` klavsei tou` a[rrou. I have rendered the verses literally.

7 Garden City, NY: Image Books [Doubleday], 1976), pp. 53ff. This book must surely be as much of an enigma for Protestants as it is for conservative Roman Catholics. Kung’s understanding of the Church could hardly be more Protestant, yet the book received the *Nihil Obstat* and *Imprimatur* of the Roman Catholic Church. Kung, of course, is no stranger to conflict with the Vatican, particularly since the accession of John Paul II to the papal throne. There is an old story, the veracity of

which I cannot confirm, that when Karl Barth read one of Kung's books he exclaimed that if it represented official Roman Catholic doctrine, then the Reformation was over! I first encountered this book in a course on ecclesiology at the Southeastern Baptist Seminary.

8 Kung, pp. 56-57.

9"Do we Christians then believe in the Church? No, that would be to take the Church too seriously; at most we would say this in a very loose sense. It is striking that in general the creeds speak of believing *in* God and *in* the Holy Spirit, but of believing *the* Church (D 2, 6, 86, etc.). Almost invariably in the third article of faith the Church is linked with the Holy Spirit. According to this, the Christian believes in God and in the Holy Spirit; the Church is the place where the Spirit is at work; the resurrection of the flesh is the final act of the Spirit» (pp. 54-55). The reference in the text is to H. Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 30th Ed. (Freiburg-Barcelona, 1955). Kung bases his conclusion on the Latin texts of early Christian creeds. At this point we should note a serious discrepancy between the Greek and Latin texts of the Nicene Creed. The original Greek text explicitly affirms belief *in* the Church (eij~ mivan... 'Ekkhsivan), but Latin translations invariably omit the preposition *in*. Kung is correct in asserting that the (Latin) creeds speak of believing *the* Church rather than *in* the Church, but this conveniently ignores the fact that the original text of the Nicene Creed-the text still used by the Orthodox Church today- affirms belief *in* the Church. Indeed, the grammatical structure of the Creed clearly indicates that this clause cannot simply be written off as a subset of the article on the Holy Spirit.

10"Christ is understood as the Heavenly Man, not as if He brought down His flesh from on high and out of heaven, but because the Word who is God came down from out of heaven and entered our likeness, that is to say, submitted to birth from a woman according to the flesh, while ever remaining what He was, that is one from on high, from heaven, superior to all things as God even with the flesh. Indeed the mystery of Christ runs the risk of being disbelieved precisely because it is so incredibly wonderful. For God was in humanity. He who was above all creation was in our human condition; the invisible one was made visible in the flesh; He who is from the heavens and from on high was in the likeness of earthly things; the immaterial one could be touched; He who is free in His own nature came in the form of a slave; He who blesses all creation became accursed; He who is all righteousness was numbered among transgressors; life itself came in the appearance of death. All this followed because the body which tasted death belonged to no other but to Him who is the Son by nature.» St. Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Unity of Christ*,

Tr. by John McGuckin (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1995), p. 61.

11 Keep in mind St. Ignatius and St. Irenaios began with the Church's experience of Christ in the Eucharist and used that as the basis for affirming the reality of the Incarnation.

12 Archimandrite Vasileios, *Hymn of Entry: Liturgy and Life in the Orthodox Church* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1984), p. 46.