

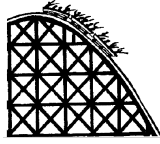


New Creeds
for
Today's Needs



*Creating
Relevant, Artistic, and Biblical
Responses to Contemporary Issues*

Philip M. Bickel



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CHAPTER 1

THE WORLD AND ITS QUESTIONS

It is Sunday morning. Around the world Christians are confessing their faith in the words of the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed. During the education hour, a group of inquirers are taught by the pastor from a student manual based, in part, on the statements from these same creeds.

These activities are so common and so ancient that it may not have occurred to us to ask: Is this the only way for believers to confess their faith? Should we base our instruction and outreach exclusively on creeds which answered questions which were at issue centuries ago? Consider the issues that Christians face every day.

Brenda, a widow in a small, mid-western town is concerned about Cliff, her recently deceased husband. A friend at work has assured Brenda not to worry, because Cliff will be reincarnated some day, somewhere. Brenda never really considered this option until now. What in the traditional creeds will specifically and clearly inform Brenda about the truth value of reincarnation?

Hector, a real estate agent in Mexico City, came across the Spanish version of Erik von Daniken's best-selling book *Chariots of the Gods*. Pseudo-archeologist von Daniken proposes that belief in supernatural beings resulted from the intergalactic visits of extraterrestrials to this planet centuries ago.

Over the years, Hector’s worldview has been influenced by several other books on the subject, as well as films such as *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *E.T.* When Hector goes to Mass on occasion, he recites the creeds, and even though they contradict his “gods from outer space” philosophy, he fails to take the creedal statements seriously.

Robert and Fatima are Indonesian Christians who hear that a neighbor has visited a shaman to place a curse on them. They debate whether to tell their missionary pastor about it, “He just doesn’t seem to understand these matters. Perhaps we should seek out a stronger shaman to protect us.” While contemplating this decision, they attend worship and confess their faith by means of a Trinitarian Creed composed 1500 years ago. Although the words are beautiful and true, they do not provide Robert and Fatima a clear direction regarding their dilemma.

❖ ❖ ❖
May we tell
the old, old story
in new ways?
❖ ❖ ❖

Terry, an Afro-American Christian in Detroit, has taken notice of the new mosque down the street and the billboard on Michigan Avenue which declares: “Read God’s final revelation—the Qur'an!” “Maybe Islam is superior to my Christian beliefs,” he wonders to himself. Reviewing his catechism, based on the Apostles Creed, he fails to find anything which directly compares the two religions.

CHAPTER 2

THE NEED FOR NEW TOOLS

Reincarnation. God's from outer space. Black magic. Islam. These issues—and a host of others—confront the Christian Church today. By looking to the ancient creeds, believers can find some help in responding to such issues. For example, the Nicene phrase “begotten of his Father before all worlds” can be used to explain to a Muslim that God did not beget a child through physical union with a human woman. Again, the idea of Christ judging the living and the dead indicates that reincarnation and karma are false doctrines. If we view creeds as tools, we should praise the usefulness of the ancient creeds which have served the Church down through the centuries and still have some use for confronting today's false teachings. Like a favorite old hammer or drill in a carpenter's tool box, we have no reason to set them permanently aside.

Even so, we need to recognize that the creeds composed in the early centuries of church history came into being in response to questions and issues of that day, not our own. Therefore, they are not the best suited tools for answering the concerns of our day. If we limit ourselves to the ancient creeds, we become like nostalgic wood workers who refuse to use a tool less than a century old. To speak to the doctrinal and evangelistic challenges of today with precision and boldness, we need new tools, including modern creeds. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to promote the creation of contemporary creeds which address modern issues more precisely than our standard “tools of confession.”

At this point, the word “iconoclast” (image breaker) might be popping into the mind of some readers. Iconoclasm is not my goal. Our tried-and-true tools, the ancient creeds, do not need to be destroyed. My goal is “iconofabrication”, that is, that the Christians would continually produce new tools, new confessions of the faith in answer to the questions of each generation and of each place where it is attempting to penetrate the darkness with God’s light.

Many denominations in North America have a tradition of being confessional churches. This means that they know what doctrines they stand for because they have been written down in statements called confessions. The ancient historic creeds will always be part of our confession. But we must not only confess what the ancient Church fathers confessed. We must also confess as they confessed, building on their example of addressing the issues of their time. In other words, just as they had the privilege and duty of confessing biblical truth in response to the questions of their day, so we too must not only parrot their words, but follow their example, by composing succinct, biblical responses to the issues of our day.

Here are five reasons why current creeds are needed in our present era. First, as always, missionaries must know how to proclaim the Good News to people of other faiths. Often the best way to accomplish this is not through reciting old confessions, but by designing new ones crafted for the concerns and objections of a particular religion.

Second, confessing the faith to adherents of non-Christian religions is no longer a privilege limited to overseas missionaries, because the Lord is bringing the nations right into our local neighborhoods. Indeed, the United States and Canada are becoming more internationalized with each passing day.

Third, “Christian” North America is considered a mission field by proclaimers of other religions. Muslims, Hindus, New Agers, and a host of others are hawking their philosophical wares to the local populace. Christians must know how to defend their

own beliefs and how to respond to the claims of Muhammad, Eastern gurus, Oprah's multiple guests, and others.

Fourth, in an age of increasing religious pluralism, secular humanists insist that all religions should lay aside their obsolete claims to distinctiveness and settle for a short list of common beliefs and values. Such a creed, lacking key Christian elements like the Trinity, incarnation, justification, and resurrection, would leave us with a faith as mobile as a Buick up on blocks in a parking lot, stripped of tires and engine by thieves.

Fifth, the Western Church is now in a post-Constantinian era. Government, society, and culture are no longer supportive of the church and its mission of confessing the faith. Secularists want to relegate the spiritual to the realm of mere personal opinion. In this new situation, believers in Christ must find new ways to speak and act and witness in the context of a hostile environment.

❖❖❖
“The Church is
always in a state
of crisis, and ...
only occasionally
aware of it.”
Hendrick Kraemer
❖❖❖

Nearly a half century ago, Hendrik Kraemer mused, “Strictly speaking, one ought to say that the Church is always in a state of crisis and that its greatest shortcoming is that it is only occasionally aware of it.”¹ In answer to the many crises around us, the church will benefit greatly from the crafting of new creedal tools.

CHAPTER 3

WHAT SHOULD CREEDS DO?

What is a creed? The word comes from the Latin credo which means “I believe.” Therefore, a creed is a statement of faith. It can be as simple as “Jesus is Lord.” It can be two pages in length like the Athanasian Creed or as hefty as the 636 pages of Lutheran confessional writings collected in *The Book of Concord of 1580*.

What should a creed do? What should it accomplish?

Building on the insightfulness of Bob Scudieri, we can say that a creed should be both apostolic and apostolic.² First of all, a creed should be apostolic in the sense that it is consistent with the New Testament teachings of the apostles. This is the traditional meaning of the term in Christian circles. However, Scudieri urges us to recognize the original meaning of the word apostle. Apostles are sent ones, missionaries sent out by the resurrected Christ to take the Gospel to all the nations of the earth. Creeds are to be both apostolic, that is, biblically based, and apostolic, missionary in nature. Creeds are defensive, maintaining sound teaching. Creeds are also offensive, communicating the truth clearly to those who do not know it. Thinking in terms of the worship setting, creeds should both help worshipers keep their faith on an even keel doctrinally and equip them to share their faith with the lost world. Thinking in terms of Christian instruction, creeds should deliver biblically accurate Christian doctrine to students, as well as respond to the questions and doubts of the world which children, teens, and adults ponder as they study God’s Word.

New creeds which are geared to answer the questions of our day will help believers be more bold in their witnessing. Limiting ourselves to a few standard creeds, however, may hinder lay people's ability to enunciate their faith to their contemporaries. Back when I was a student at Concordia College in Seward, Nebraska, I participated in an Ambassadors Weekend in a county seat in western Iowa. Usually an Ambassadors Weekend consisted of visiting unbelievers in the community. Our assignment this particular weekend was different. We were to visit the members of the local Lutheran parish, share our faith with them, and then listen to their response as they witnessed back to us. Unfortunately, it didn't work out that way. My calling group, consisting of two other students and myself, shared the Gospel in about fifteen church members' homes that weekend, but not a single person ever spoke to us about their Savior. A few people said something like, "Oh, isn't that wonderful," but that was as far as their ability to witness could take them. The closest anyone came to sharing their faith was a sweet old lady who told us, "I would love to talk with you about these things, but I learned the catechism in German." Although she had spoken English for decades, she only knew how to confess her faith, how to theologize, in the German tongue. The others folks fared no better.

This true story substantiates Eugene Bunkowske's observation that self-theologizing "is more important and basic to indigenous church planting than the well worn three-self concept that includes self support, self governance and self propagation."³ Although the folks in western Iowa were church goers, they were unable to theologize in everyday conversation. The same is true of many places in the world. Those who confess Christ in a worship service often do not know how to confess Christ outside the sanctuary. They only know their faith in the "Christian-ese" in which they were instructed. They must learn how to speak it in their own words, to self-theologize. The challenge of composing new creeds will assist them in their mission task of sharing the saving faith with a confused and lost world.

CHAPTER 4

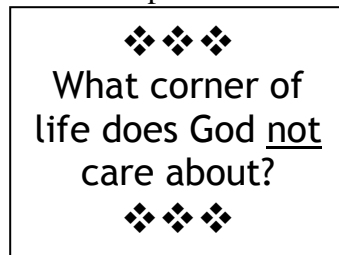
TOPICS WORTHY OF ATTENTION

Robert Banks, an Australian theologian, is the author of *All the Business of Life: Bringing Theology Down to Earth* (Albatross, 1987). In this far-sighted book, Banks argues that virtually every topic in the public arena is worthy of theological attention. Some of the topics he mentions include work, commuting, chores, sport, family, health, security, hobbies, bills, sleep, waiting, friendship, gardening, food and eating. Here are others.

- Islam
- Other world religions
- New Age religions
- Cults
- Evolution, creation
- Generational issues
- Mass media
- Arts and literature
- Popular music
- Animal rights
- After-death experiences
- Sci Fi, the future
- Spiritism, the occult
- Pro-life issues
- Substance abuse
- Child, sexual, & spousal abuse
- Sex, marriage, divorce, singleness
- Gay, Lesbian, etc.
- Money and property
- Clothes and fashion
- World hunger
- Poverty, oppression
- Prejudice and racism
- Education
- Work, career, joblessness
- Family, home, homelessness
- AIDS, disease, death

- Ethics in the workplace
- Sexual harassment
- Aging, retirement
- And the list goes on...

The potential exists for creeds to be composed regarding each of these topics. Sub-topics could also be addressed. For example, reincarnation, which is present in Hinduism, Buddhism, and New Age thought, could be dealt with as a separate creedal topic. Or under the heading of arts and literature, someone could compose a confession in response to the philosophies expressed in a popular comic strip such as “Calvin and Hobbes.”



Each church and missionary team should produce its own list of topics which merit confessional consideration. Thinking of Venezuela where I served in the 1980s, several topics come immediately to mind: spiritism and in particular the cult of Maria Lionza; the practice of *ensalmar* (the magical use of Psalms); materialism; gambling/horse racing; crime; social justice; violence; government graft; urban living; the meaning and purpose of youth; legalism in the Church; the many alleged appearances of the Virgin Mary; and Christo-paganism.

In 1994, twenty-one leaders of the Lutheran Church of Venezuela composed “The Güigüe Accord,” which addresses the practice of spiritism and the occult. Below is the text of this document, offered as an example of a modern creed. Güigüe (GWEE-gway) is the town where the document was approved.

The Güigüe Accord

We, Lutheran pastors, leaders, and missionaries working in Venezuela and conscious of our responsibility to guide the flock of the Lord, care for and protect it from every threat and danger, present to the members of the Lutheran communities in Venezuela the following affirmations and counsel. We affirm:

1. That in spite of the opinions of modern thinkers who deny the existence of demonic powers, there does exist a spiritual power, a person who in the Bible is called Satan, the Devil, or the Evil One. John 8:44; Revelation 12:7-9
2. That this spiritual being is the leader of a whole army consisting of fallen angels, also called demons. Eph. 6:12
3. That these evil spiritual beings constitute a danger for human beings, because their principal functions are to influence, to blind, to tempt, and to deceive mankind. 2 Corinthians 4:4 and 11:14-15; 1 Peter 5:8
4. That these functions can lead to demon possession of individuals. Mark 5:2
5. That, notwithstanding the power of the demonic forces, Jesus Christ, by his death, resurrection, and ascension to the right hand of God, has conquered Satan and has received supreme authority over Satan and his demons. Ephesians 1:20-22; Hebrews 2:14-15
6. That Christ's power and authority are available to the members of his Church. Eph. 2:6; Col. 1:13-14
7. That, nevertheless, God permits Satan and his demons to have certain freedom to act until Christ's return. Matthew 4:1-11; 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12; 1 Peter 5:8-11
8. That, in that day, Satan and his demons will be once and for all stripped of their power and eternally imprisoned in Hell. Revelation 20:10; 19:21
9. That we perceive Satanic activity in two areas: the social area (political corruption, destruction of the family, wars, drug abuse, violence, sexual immorality, etc.) and in the spiritual area (the appearance of false sects, the proliferation of different occult practices, attacks which destroy fellowship within churches, departure from Christian faith and practices, etc.) Ephesians 6:10-12; 1 John 4:1-3

Inasmuch as some Satanic activities have caused harm in our Lutheran communities in Venezuela, we counsel:

1. That no member of our communities participate in groups such as the Rosicrucians, the Gnostics, the New Acropolis, metaphysical groups, spiritists, image-worshippers, etc.
Revelation 21:8
2. That no member of our communities participate in such practices as consulting witch doctors, conjuring up the dead, reading of horoscopes, of cards, of tobacco leaves, of urine, and of coffee, Ouija boards, curing by incantations, etc.
Deuteronomy 18:9-12
3. That no member of our communities use such objects as trinkets, talismans, amulets, magic packets, magnetic crosses, or any other object which has been used in pagan or Satanic rites. Acts 19:18-20; 1 Corinthians 10:20-22
4. That no member of our communities keep in his house books of magic, pornographic literature and videos, terror literature and videos, recordings of Satanic groups, idols of any type, etc. 1 Timothy 4:1
5. That the members of our communities not give a place to Satan by anger, hatred, unconfessed sins, jealousy, etc.
1 Corinthians 7:5; 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Ephesians 4:26; 1 Timothy 3:6
6. That no members of our communities participate in ceremonies of exorcism alone, or without the orientation and authorization of his church. Ephesians 1:18-23; Revelation 12:10-11
7. That each community, as the Church of Christ, act with love and discernment in the Spirit, carefully and prudently. 2 Timothy 1:7; 1 John 4:1-6 and 2:18-23

❖❖❖
Luckily, none of
this is relevant in
North America.
NOT!
❖❖❖

8. That in each community there be members equipped in spiritual care who can minister to those who suffer from spiritual afflictions. Joshua 1:9; 2 Tim. 2:1-2; James 4:7-8
9. That our communities be careful not to fall into an obsessive fascination with the demonic and thus give more time and importance to the Enemy than to Jesus Christ. *That Christ be the center and the motive for all our activities.* John 6:40 and 14:6; Romans 8:31-39; 2 Corinthians 5:17
10. That in each community there be taught the importance that each member be prepared to emerge victorious in the spiritual war, assuming his position of authority with Christ by means of the use of all the armor which God offers. Ephesians 6:10-20; Colossians 2:15; 3:5-10
11. And we urge that all the members of our communities fortify themselves by means of daily meditation on the Word, constant and fervent prayer, sincere confession of sin, praise through songs, remembering daily their baptism, and the constant participation in public worship and in Holy Communion. John 5:24; 2 Corinthians 4:8-18; Galatians 3:26-27; Hebrews 10:12-18, 23-27
12. That those who have participated in occult practices be urged to experience the freedom from guilt and the peace of conscience through confession and absolution. Matthew 12:43-45; 2 Corinthians 3:17; Galatians 5:22-24; 1 Thessalonians 5:19

CHAPTER 5

WHO SHOULD WRITE CREEDS?

Who do you think should develop new creeds? Many Christians assume creed writing is strictly the responsibility of a committee, or council which has been granted the institutional authority to do so. Although creeds have been written by such bodies, they are not the only candidates for the task.

Look at Martin Luther. Without official institutional authority, he wrote two catechisms which included elaborate explanations of the Apostles' Creed. God blessed his efforts. But who gave him permission to do that? Obviously, the authority to confess the faith does not lie in an institution.

From the 16th to 18th centuries, Protestants often thought that they had no authority to send missionaries to foreign lands, because no European bishop had institutional jurisdiction over the places to which missionaries needed to be sent. How blinded they were by their institutional view of authority. They failed to perceive that the authority to confess the faith rests in Christ (Mt.28:18), in the Word (Luke 24:46-48), and in the Holy Spirit who leads and empowers the mission (Acts 1:8).

Even so, some people assume that if creed development is not a matter of institutional authority, then it must be a matter of theological training, and, therefore only for pastors and other professional theologians. Although these people surely have much to offer, they are not the only candidates for the task.

Consider Acts 11:19-26. Some unnamed people from Cyprus and Cyrene started the church in Antioch. Although they

apparently had no academic credentials, they found ways to say, “I believe” to the Gentile community. God blessed their efforts. But who gave these non-professionals permission to start that church? Well, what are the first seven letters of the word “professional”? Profess. All Christians have the ability and duty to profess their faith. Composing a creed for a specific issue or audience is a big challenge. Both professionals and average Christians who rise to that challenge will grow in their faith and in their ability to speak the name of Christ to a lost world, as did those unnamed people from Cyprus and Cyrene.

Any Christian who has the interest should be free to participate in the process of producing creeds, but this does not mean that creed writing must be a solo activity. Even when one person composes a creed, he or she will share it with others, and these brothers and sisters will naturally comment and make suggestions for improvement. In fact, probably the best setting for creed writing is a small group of people with a variety of skills. Together they address an issue and then seek the affirmation of other believers. Confessing the faith is not an individual sport, but a team sport.

◆◆◆
Do you dream of being
on a Creed Team?
◆◆◆

Some may argue that the result would be disorder and confusion. If we wish to address the world, this is a risk worth taking. Disorder and confusion can be avoided if local spiritual leaders and creedal task forces work together in a spirit of cooperation and humbleness before the Lord whom they confess. That’s what happened with the church in Antioch. When the Apostles in Jerusalem heard something was cooking in Antioch, they sent Barnabas to check it out. The saints in Antioch welcomed his review of their ministry. Barnabas, the encourager, so appreciated the Gentile church’s confession of the Gospel, that he remained in Antioch. They, in turn, so valued his counsel and sound teaching that they accepted him as one of their teachers and later sent him with Paul on a missionary journey.

CHAPTER 6

HOW TO DEVELOP A CREED

Assuming that you are on a creed writing team that already has a topic in mind, how might you go about composing a creed? Probably the first step is to familiarize yourselves with existing creeds and statements of faith to see how others have approached the task. In particular, you need to research whether your topic has already been dealt with by someone else. Perhaps you can build on the work of others, or perhaps you will find that the job has already been done quite adequately. In that case, try another topic.

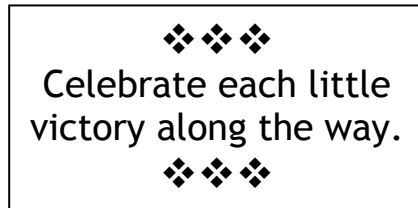
Before composing the creed, your team needs to reach agreement on some key issues. First, who is your audience? Is your creed intended for believers, for non-Christians, or for both? Are you aiming for a particular age group, social group, religious group?

Second, how do you intend to use the creed? Will it be used in a worship service? Printed as a tract? Placed on a billboard? Read on the radio? Displayed in an art gallery?

Third, what medium do you wish to use? We tend to think of creeds as verbal, written documents, but don't limit your options to an 8 1/2 by 11 sheet of paper. Other possibilities may be available. Consider the gifts and talents of your team. Perhaps God has equipped you to create a creed that is more musical or visual than it is verbal. One of my yet-to-be-developed ideas is to confess Christ through a video-based, interactive game that can be played by groups of people in homes, cafeterias, or dorm rooms.

Fourth, settle questions of length, style, and level of language. Are you aiming for something thirty seconds long, five minutes, or an hour? Will the style be formal or casual? Will you use existing terms, or do you need to invent new ones? Will you use the Queen's English, or modern lingo? Here are general guidelines regarding content and style.

1. As in any witnessing situation, continually pray for the Holy Spirit to give you the ideas and the words.
2. Balance Law and Gospel; the bad news of sin and death, and the good news of forgiveness, redemption, and life in Christ.
3. Know your topic and its beliefs.
4. Be aware of concepts or values held in common with unbelievers which may enable you to build bridges to them.
5. Identify distinct issues and differences which need attention.
6. For clarity, perhaps state what you do not believe (antitheses).
7. At each stage of outlining and writing several drafts, seek input from believers and unbelievers. Revise as needed.
8. Don't raise barriers by smug or vicious language. Raise interest with a positive and appealing attitude.
9. Avoid straw men, that is, the portrayal of the beliefs of others in an unfair or inaccurate manner.
10. Avoid red herrings: words or concepts that distract attention from the real issues. (From the practice of drawing a red herring across a trail to confuse hunting dogs.)
11. Continue to use your creed. Revise and fine tune as needed.
12. Rejoice and praise God for the opportunity to confess him.



When you finish, decide whether to tackle another project.

CHAPTER 7

RESPONSE TO A THEOLOGIAN

I would like to thank Dr. Arand for providing several insights which complement the contents of my essay.⁴ I believe the two pieces together present a well-rounded discussion of creeds and the Church's confession of the biblical faith before the world.

Dr. Arand and I differ in regard to the scope of our definitions of the word "creed." He claims that today "creed" is almost exclusively a technical term, referring to the Apostle's, Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds. I, on the other hand, while recognizing the unique place of these creeds, permit "creed" to also refer to other statements of faith which may be used either liturgically or evangelistically. Arand may be correct that in the private dictionary within the brain of each Christian, the first definition listed under "creed" is "a concise, authoritative statement of important Christian beliefs." But even so, is this the only way we can use the word? No. Consider two questions and an accompanying Bible verse from a recent catechism.

1. What is a creed? A creed is a statement of what we believe, teach, and confess.

Rom. 10:10 It is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

2. What three creeds are used by the church? The Apostles', the Nicene, and the Athanasian.⁵

Question #1 uses the broad definition, Question #2 the narrow. If “creed” always and solely meant only one of the three creeds listed in question #2 above, then adjectives such as “classic,” “historic,” and “ecumenical” usually would be unnecessary. But we all use such adjectives, including Arand, because we realize that the big three creeds are not the only ones. I do not wish to wrangle about this. I just think we should be allowed the freedom to use the broad meaning of the word. The main thing is that we recognize our continual responsibility to boldly and clearly respond to the questioning, lost people in our world today. In spite of our preferred usages of the word “creed,” both Dr. Arand and I share that concern.

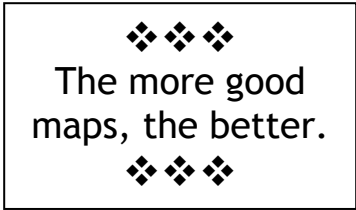
Arand expresses a couple concerns to which I would like to briefly respond. First, he says, “...to suggest that we rewrite the creeds can only introduce confusion.” He is correct that the historic and ecumenical creeds should not be jettisoned or rewritten. However, at no point in my essay do I ever suggest that we rewrite the historic creeds. My aim is not to refashion the classic creeds. My goal is that the Christian Church, as it confesses the one, true faith both to itself and to the world, would branch out into other topics not covered in our historic creeds.

Second, Arand says, “...the call for ‘new creeds for today’s needs’ sounds as if the ‘old creeds’ are no longer relevant or useful.” My desire is not to lay the historic creeds aside. They are perennially useful as teaching tools and as confessional, unifying tools, as Arand ably describes in his text. I wholeheartedly endorse the continued use of the historic creeds for these purposes. However, as tools for instructing the faithful in response to today’s false teachings and as tools for confessing the faith to unbelievers today, the ancient creeds have their limitations. The issue is not either/or, but both/and. We can both utilize the strengths and advantages of the classic creeds, and compose new ones to speak to current concerns. Every good carpenter knows that the more tools you have at hand (each with its own specialized use), the better you can do a variety of jobs.

Ultimately, Dr. Arand and I agree about the need to tackle modern issues. I believe that much of what may appear to be disagreement actually stems from the unique perspectives from which we are viewing the same topic. Focusing on the historic creeds, he is stressing completed products of the church's confessional task. Meanwhile, I am stressing the process that leads to such products. Like an art historian urging students to admire classic examples of fine art, Arand advises us to use and learn from the historic creeds. Like an art teacher urging students to create their own works, I am encouraging Christians to experience for themselves the challenge, the risk, and the fun of composing creeds. This is what self-theologizing is all about. In time, some of today's contemporary art will become classic pieces to admired in later centuries. It is the same with creeds. Some contemporary creedal projects will eventually become widely accepted.

Arand rightly points out that the historic creeds are compendiums or maps which "point us to the 'must see' sights of the Scriptures."

A point well expressed. In contrast, many of the topics I propose for creedal treatment are not core elements of the biblical faith. Some readers may conclude, therefore, that the creeds I am proposing are not really creeds at all. I am not claiming Arand said this, but simply noting that this concern could arise. Just because the historic creeds are brief and focused on core doctrines is no reason why all creeds must do the same. Some maps depict the whole world or an entire nation. Other maps detail every street and major site in a selected area. Although they have different purposes, they are all maps. The historic creeds are somewhat like a world map, revealing the "big picture." Many of the creeds which I am suggesting Christians develop are more like detailed maps which focus on a relatively small area. People are wandering down dead end streets of false religions and unbiblical value systems. New creeds focused on these issues can help direct those trapped in such dead ends to the way, the truth and the life. May it be so!



CHAPTER 8

GREATERTHINGS

In John 14:12-13, Jesus Christ gave his followers an amazing promise: “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.” How can this be? We can’t match his sinless life or his sacrificial death. So, how can Jesus’ disciples do greater things than he did?

At dusk in an Ifugao village on the Philippine island of Luzon, hundreds of people gather in front of a large white cloth. When a portable electric generator kicks into action, light pierces the darkness and images dance on the cloth. What’s happening here? The crowd is watching Christian videos produced in their heart language and performed by folks from their own people group.

After the film showings local Filipino evangelists preach for more than an hour, and invite people to respond to the gospel. Both the actors and the evangelists speak the local languages like natives, because they are natives. These videos are produced by Vernacular Video Mission, a Filipino Christian organization that produces and shows videos using equipment provided by Christian sponsors in the USA. Over a dozen Filipino evangelists serve with VVM, both in Luzon and in the southern island of Mindanao. VVM has produced dozens of videos in the minority languages of the local people. Each film is a creed, giving a biblical answer to a particular issue within the local indigenous culture. By God’s grace, VVM productions and film showings are part of the greater things Jesus promised we would do. (Learn more at www.vvmi.org.)

Film production requires the kind of Creed Team described in earlier chapters. For a relevant, artistic, and biblical result, many skills are needed.

1. Storyboarding
2. Script writing
3. Biblical teaching
4. Music, song, dance
5. Cast selection
6. Acting
7. Directing
8. Cinematography
9. Editing
10. DVD and package design

Did Jesus ever make a movie? No, but his disciples in the Philippines have. Did Jesus ever learn the cultures of the Filipino tribal people so he could go and preach to them? No, but teams of Filipino disciples proclaim his grace through culturally relevant films. Similar things are happening in place after place as Christians with various skills network together to accomplish more of the greater things that Jesus promised.

Will we accomplish these greater things because we are more brilliant or creative than Jesus? No. Jesus clearly says the reason is because He was going to the Father, who will do whatever we disciples ask in his name so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. “I am going to the Father” refers to the ascension and to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit who enables and empowers our witness. Jesus’ promise concerning prayer highlights that success will only be realized when we humbly and prayerfully seek God’s blessings on our efforts.

❖❖❖
Did Jesus ever
write a play,
sculpt a statue, or
design a web page?
No.
He left these
“greater things”
for us to do.
❖❖❖

Year after year, and in place after place, we disciples are called to create new creeds, new expressions of faith. Thus we continue to do things greater than what Jesus did during his days on earth. Through prayer and the Spirit:

- We enter new regions.
- We translate the Scriptures into more languages.
- We utilize new technologies.
- We implement innovative strategies.
- We use more and more art forms.
- We bring God's light to new corners of the earth.

And the result? The Son brings glory to the Father.

Wouldn't it be amazing if a local church regularly formed creedal task forces to address contemporary issues? The result would be a church knowledgeable about its community and able to self-theologize and communicate the word of God to its neighbors.

Let's dream even more broadly. What if creed writing teams were formed all over the world? What if by means of computer technology we could share those creeds with believers at all corners of the globe? Creedal e-mail. What if teams agreed to place their creeds in the public domain, so that they could be used without restrictions of copyrights and usage fees? What if the creeds of Arab Christians in Iraq helped believers reaching out to Muslims in North America? What if North American Christians wrote a creed about materialism which proved useful to believers in Beijing? What if Christians of different denominations and lands were able to dialogue regarding such creedal statements, so that we learned to understand, appreciate, and love each other better than we do today?

The result would be a global church attempting to be what God called it to be—both apostolic and apostolic, both biblically sound and sounding forth the gospel. It can be done. With God’s good gifts and promises, it will be done.

Since the first edition of this booklet was published in 1999, I have been working with my church and with other friends to make such dreams a reality. By 2005, we developed a strategy called NET Fishing. NET stands for Network of Evangelistic Teams. In 2007, we started a ministry called Door2Hope Network. You can learn about NET Fishing and Door2Hope at www.door2hope.org/partners.

We launched Door2Hope with a focus on the topic of Depression and Hope. People are working hard to add the topic of Maturity and Aging, and then Music, Arts, and Creativity. I can hardly wait for us to launch Love and Marriage in 2010, because I’ve written a play called *I Married You*, which I hope will touch people’s hearts and lead them to consider Christ.

Artists, in particular, are invited to join the fun through a subdivision of Door2Hope Network called artREACH. Learn how you can participate at www.artreachtoday.org.



Footnotes

1. Hendrik Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, 1947, pp. 24. Quoted in David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 2.)
2. Robert J. Scudieri, *The Apostolic Church: One, Holy, Catholic and Missionary*, (Fort Wayne, Indiana: The Lutheran Society for Missiology Book Series, 1996), 15-28, and 71-82.
3. Eugene W. Bunkowske, "Trends in Missiology Today," *Missio Apostolica* 1 (May 1993): 12-13.
4. Charles P. Arand, "The Vitality of the Historic Creeds: A Response to Philip M. Bickel," *Missio Apostolica* Vol. IV, No. 1 (May 1993): 35-39.
5. *Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1991), 99, 100.

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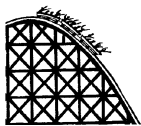
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