

A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO THE APOSTLES' CREED -- 9.

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**I BELIEVE in God the Father Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth:**

**And in Jesus Christ his only Son our
Lord: Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,
Born of the Virgin Mary: Suffered under Pon-
tius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried:
He descended into hell; The third day he rose
again from the dead: He ascended into heaven,
And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father
Almighty: From thence he shall come to judge
the quick and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Ghost: The holy
Catholic Church; The Communion of Saints:
*The Forgiveness of sins: The Resurrection of
the body: And the Life everlasting. Amen.***

We have previously said that the three paragraphs of the Creed deal successively with the Three Persons of the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity. Thus, from this perspective, the third paragraph deals especially with the work of the Third Person of that Trinity, God the Holy Spirit.

From the time of Pentecost, the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and therefore upon the Church, and continuing until Christ's Second Coming, one of the most important ways that Holy Spirit manifests Himself in this world is through the Church.

Thus this third paragraph necessarily considers some aspects of that Church and of the work of salvation which that Church mediates to the world. The most important goal of that work of salvation is the *Salvation* of the individual Christian. Thus it includes among its most important effects the forgiveness of the individual worshipper's sins, a forgiveness which leads ultimately to the resurrection of that worshipper's body and to his or her enjoying everlasting life.

“The forgiveness of sins:”¹

The tenth section of the Apostles' Creed deals with the problem of sin, to which we are always prone. “We sin because we ‘frustrate the grace of God,’ (Gal. 2. 21) and receive the grace of God in vain.’ (2 Cor. 6. 1)”² God's forgiving of our sins is one of the two bases for His Salvation of us; the other is His uniting us to Him in eternal life, which itself presupposes that we have first been made worthy of that uniting by His doing away with the obstacle that would otherwise be imposed by our accumulation of sinful acts and attitudes.

“Health” actually means “wholeness”. In the New Testament, the healing of physical infirmities is intimately linked to the forgiveness of sins. We are reminded of it today in *The Order for the Visitation of the Sick*,³ where once the sick person has confessed his or her sins to the Priest and the Priest has absolved him or her of any sins, the Priest expressly announces that link:

The Almighty Lord, who is a most strong tower to all those who put their trust in him, to whom all things in heaven, in earth, and under the earth, do bow and obey; Be now and evermore thy defence; and make thee know and feel, that there is none other Name under heaven given to man, in whom, and through whom, thou mayest receive health and salvation, but only the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.⁴

This link was illustrated when Jesus was first appealed to on behalf of the man who lay sick of the palsy, He told that man that his sins were forgiven him.⁵ Only after the bystanders questioned His right to declare the man's sins forgiven did Christ show the divine authority for His declaration of forgiveness by healing the man's physical infirmity.⁶

When Christ handed on to His Apostles the leadership of His Church, He expressly conferred on them the power to forgive sins in His Name:

... Then said Jesus unto them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed⁷ on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.⁸

These Apostles, in turn, passed this "Power of the Keys" over to their successors, and so on down the Apostolic Succession, so that the fullness of this Power resides in today in the Bishops of the Church as the successors to the Apostles.

To better carry out this mandate, each Bishop who has jurisdiction over a Diocese of the Church provides Priests to serve as his assistants. At the most central moment of that Bishop's ordaining one of these Priests to that service, he lays hands upon the ordinand's head and declares:

Receive the Holy Ghost for the Office and Work of a Priest in the Church of God, now committed unto thee by the Imposition of our hands. *Whose sins thou dost forgive, they are forgiven; and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained.*⁹

The use of that power in the ordinary pastoral ministry is well illustrated by the directions given to such a Priest in *The Order for the Visitation of the Sick*:¹⁰

¶ *Here may the Minister inquire of the sick person as to his acceptance of the Christian Faith, and as to whether he repent truly of his sins, and be in charity with all the world; exhorting him to forgive, from the bottom of his heart, all persons that have offended him; and if he hath offended any other, to ask them forgiveness; and where he hath done injury or wrong to any man, that he make amends to the uttermost of his power.*

¶ *Then shall the sick person be moved to make a special confession of his sins, if he feel his conscience troubled with any matter; after which confession, on evidence of his repentance, the Minister shall assure him of God's mercy and forgiveness.*

¶ *Then Minister shall say,*

Let us pray.

O Most merciful God, who, according to the multitude of thy mercies, dost so put away the sins of those who truly repent, that thou rememberest them no more; Open thine eyes of mercy upon this thy servant, who most earnestly desireth pardon and forgiveness. Renew in *him*, most loving Father, whatsoever hath been decayed by the fraud and malice of the devil, or by his own carnal will and frailness; preserve and continue this sick member in the unity of the Church; consider *his* contrition, accept *his* tears, assuage *his* pain, as shall seem to thee most expedient for *him*. And forasmuch as *he* putteth *his* full trust only in thy mercy, impute not unto *him* his former sins, but strengthen *him* with thy blessed Spirit; and, when thou art pleased to take *him* hence, take *him* unto thy favour; through the

¹⁵ This section is heavily indebted to, not to say drawn from, E.J. BICKNELL AND H.J. CARPENTER, A THEOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE THIRTY-NINE ARTICLES OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND 3rd Ed. 99-101 (1961).

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 99.

¹⁷ This section owes much to both STALEY, *op. cit.*, and BICKNELL, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ BICKNELL, *op. cit.* 58.

¹⁹ STALEY, *op. cit.* 184.

²⁰ 2 Peter 3:9 (KJV).

²¹ Ephesians 1:10 (KJV).

²² The texts quoted in connection with notes 19-21 demonstrate why the Calvinist belief in “double predestination” is actually an *heresy*, not merely a mistaken belief or a pious opinion of dubious merit. It is heretical because it elevates the product of mere human logic and analysis to a level where it is permitted directly to contradict the plain and unmistakable teaching of Scripture.

²³ Ephesians 4:30 (KJV); *cf. id.* 1:13.

²⁴ Ephesians 1:13-14.

²⁵ Installment number 8, at note 21 and accompanying text.

²⁶ Revelation 7:9-17.

We simply do not need to know all the technical details of those alternate destinations. All we as Christians need to understand, in order to prepare ourselves properly to face the Judgements, is that (1) there are truly two possible endings to life here on earth and (2) no rational person who accepts the reality of those possibilities would willingly chose to be separated from God.

“Amen.”

The Creed is not just a statement, it is a prayer. Therefore it ends with the acclamation that is customary for a prayer: “amen”, a Hebrew word meaning “truly”, *i.e.*, “let it be so”.

¹ This section is heavily indebted to, not to say drawn from, VERNON STALEY AND BRIAN GOODCHILD, *THE CATHOLIC RELIGION* 30th Ed. 166-172 and 185 (1983).

² *Ibid.* 185.

³ *THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* 305-320 (PECUSA 1928).

⁴ *Ibid.* 314. Conversely, Archdeacon Donald B. Rice pointed out that in the Eucharist we pray “for the *whole* state of Christ’s Church” by which we are also praying for the *healthy* state of that Church. *Cf. id.* 74-75 (emphasis supplied).

⁵ St. Matthew 9:2; St. Mark 2:3-5; St. Luke 5:18-20.

⁶ St. Matthew 9:3-8; St. Mark 2:6-12; St. Luke 5:21-26.

⁷ For the original readers of this Gospel, a pun drove home even more clearly the essential connection between the Holy Spirit and the beneficial effect of this Sacrament of Penance. Hebrew and Greek each use but one word for the two concepts, “spirit” and “breath” or “wind”; the word in Greek is *pneuma* (πνεῦμα). Thus when Christ “breathed on” the Apostles, He “in spirited” them. We see this same usage when Scripture declares that “the Spirit bloweth where it listeth”; the original hearers would have understood this to mean that “as the wind bloweth where it listeth, so too does the Spirit bloweth where it listeth”.

⁸ St. John 20:21-23 (KJV).

⁹ *The Form and Manner of Ordering Priests*, *THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* 546 (PECUSA 1928) (emphasis supplied).

¹⁰ *THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER* 305-320 (PECUSA 1928).

¹¹ *Ibid.* 313-314.

¹² Psalm 51:17 (MCV).

¹³ 1 John 1:9 (KJV).

¹⁴ St. Matthew 3:8 (KJV).

merits of thy most dearly beloved Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*¹¹

If you will examine closely the “rubrics” or Italicized service directions at the head of that prayer, you will see that implicit in this process of the forgiving of sins are several prerequisites. First, the person to be forgiven must express *contrition*, that is, must show that he or she is truly sorry for whatever sinful it was that he or she did: “The sacrifice of God is a troubled spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God, shalt thou not despise.”¹²

Then he or she must confess his or her sins: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”¹³ Third, the one to be forgiven must show evidence of a real amendment of life, that is, of self-correction of the errors concerned: “Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance....”¹⁴

Finally, at least in the case of the formal Sacrament of Penance, the penitent must be assigned and accept a suitable penance and then must perform that penance. Contrary to the belief of some uninstructed persons, the function of this penance is not to “pay” God for our sin but, instead, to serve as a concrete reminder to us that we have offended Him and, despite our offense, He has received us back into His fellowship.

“The Resurrection of the body:”¹⁵

The eleventh phrase of the Creed deals not with the Resurrection of Christ in His human body after His death on the cross but rather with the resurrection of each individual Christian in his or her individual body that will occur after the General Judgement. It is a very different thing to say “I believe that there is such a thing as the Resurrection of the body” and to say “I believe *in* the Resurrection of the body”.

The first is merely an assent to a statement of fact; the second acknowledges that this fact is a reality in the life of the one making the statement. Before I can expect to participate in that

Resurrection myself, it must be a present reality in my life, not merely an abstract bit of knowledge such as my acceptance that there are such things nuclear physics and three Laws of Thermodynamics, even though my own life never seems actually to be directly touched by any of them.

The Resurrection is regarded as the pledge of man's resurrection (1 Cor 15¹² ff., Rom 8¹¹, 1 Thess 4¹⁴. Not only do Christians here and now receive new life (Eph 2⁵⁻⁹, Col 3¹) as sharing the life of the Risen Christ, but from the first (Acts 4²) the Resurrection has been proclaimed as the assurance of a resurrection from the dead that will quicken the whole man and that is yet to come (cp. 2 Tim 2¹⁸).¹⁶

The Church has always taught that each individual Christian's body so resurrected will be restored to at least the state it was in when it functioned best, and perhaps even to a more perfect state. Further, this restoration will occur despite any decay of that body after normal burial or even the effect of the body's complete destruction, whether in an accident or incident of warfare, or by voluntary cremation.

This central doctrine of the bodily resurrection of the individual makes it impossible for a Christian to accept the Oriental notion of reincarnation or, as it is sometimes called, the "transmigration of souls". In Christianity's view, each soul that comes into existence is, as a matter of its individual being, united to one particular body and one only.

As an essential aspect of their humanity, that body and that soul operate together as one indivisible being during that being's physical stay here on earth. Ultimately that soul and that body are reunited, in more perfect forms but still in an essential way, for eternity in heaven. This leaves no room either for that soul to be recycled for another term on earth or for it to be lent to a body other than the one for which it was destined by God.

"And the Life everlasting."¹⁷

The twelfth and final phrase of the Creed deals with the principal *consequence* of Salvation, that is, with the permanent and unending dwelling in the presence of God that will be enjoyed by each Christian who is successfully faces the Judgements. "What we need, and what Christ has proved Himself to be, is a redeemer, one who restores and quickens the soul from within, and one who can save from sin."¹⁸

"God 'will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.' (1 Tim. 2. 4)";¹⁹ "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."²⁰ Thus we are assured it is God's purpose "That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth, even in him".^{21, 22}

Because we, as Christians, are in our baptisms "sealed unto the day of redemption",²³ we are accepted by God as Christ's own.²⁴ Thus we know we will enjoy eternal life with God. In fact, as has been noted in a previous installment of this series,²⁵ we now dwell, in a real although still imperfect way, in that end time. At baptism we are inducted into eternity and live there now, even though the manner of that life often falls short of what it should be.

We are not told much about the precise nature of this eternal life. Nevertheless, the Church, following St. John's great vision of the throne of God surrounded by the multitudes of those whose sins had been washed away by the blood of Christ,²⁶ has always taught that the essence of the life everlasting is being in some real way in the presence of, and in fellowship with, God. Contrariwise, the essence of eternal damnation has always been viewed as spending eternity out of the presence of, and cut off from fellowship with, God.