

The Creeds

Part 5: In One Holy Catholic Church

Old Roman Symbol (2 nd Century)	Apostles' Creed (3 rd – 7 th Centuries)	First Council of Nicaea (325)	First Council of Constantinople (381)
the holy Church,	The holy universal church, the communion of saints		<i>In one holy catholic and apostolic Church;</i>
the remission of sins,	The forgiveness of sins		<i>we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins;</i>
the resurrection of the flesh	The resurrection of the body		<i>we look for the resurrection of the dead,</i>
(the life everlasting).	And life everlasting. Amen		<i>and the life of the world to come. Amen.</i>
		[But those who say: 'There was a time when he was not;' and 'He was not before he was made;' and 'He was made out of	

		nothing,' or 'He is of another substance' or 'essence,' or 'The Son of God is created,' or 'changeable,' or 'alterable'— they are condemned by the holy catholic and apostolic Church.]	
Blue: Old Roman Symbol	Red: Apostle's Creed Addition	Green: First Nicaea Addition	Orange: Second Nicaea Addition

Bad Church Theology

One of the earliest influential writers in my life was the American Baptist pastor and Bible teacher named **Clarence Larkin** (1850-1924). Converted at the age of 19, he took a job at a bank, then left the bank at 21 to attend college where he became a mechanical engineer and professional draftsman—that is an engineering technician who makes **detailed technical drawings** (blueprints) for machinery, buildings, and so on. After this, he left to become a **teacher**

of the blind, which cultivated his descriptive abilities. These would in turn complement his artistic style developed as a drafter.

At age 32, Larkin who was converted into the Episcopal Church, began to see his view of infant baptism challenged. He spent two years studying the subject and this led to his becoming a Baptist. He saw that he had grown to love theology and was soon ordained as a Baptist minister. He would serve in two churches in Pennsylvania. Near the end of his life, he wrote his most famous book. Published in the highly unusual 10 x 10 in. format to accommodate the astounding charts that he and his movement would become known for, the title of the book says it all: *The Greatest Book on Dispensational Truth in the World* (also called *Dispensational Truth or God's Plan and Purpose for the Ages*).

Larkin was a conservative, Bible-believing, God-fearing man. But he was untrained and self-taught. He was especially influenced by John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), and his contemporaries C. I. Scofield (1843-1921) and William Eugene Blackstone (1841-1935), three towering pillars of the first 100 years of the Dispensational movement. Of all the things Dispensationalism is popularly

known for, including obviously its dispensational reading of history as seven distinct stages, supposed “literal” reading of Revelation, and the Pre-Tribulational Rapture theory, it is actually something that has deeply influenced modern Protestantism in ways that most are totally unfamiliar with that lies at the core of the theology.

Charles Ryrie (1925-2016), former dean of doctoral studies at Dallas Theological Seminary and one of the most influential American theologians of the 20th century (due in large part to his *Ryrie Study Bible*) wrote an important book called *Dispensationalism Today* in which he asks, “What marks off a person as a dispensationalist? What is the *sine qua non* (the absolutely indispensable part) of the system? ... A dispensationalist keeps Israel and the church distinct.”¹

It is into this that I want to give a quote from Larkin, who was so influential in my own early theological development.

The Church is ... the “**BODY OF CHRIST.**” In Eph. 1:22–23, we read—“And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him (Jesus) to be the ‘Head’ over all things to the Church which is His **BODY.**” The context shows (vs. 20)

¹ Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966, 95), 32-33.

that this “Headship” was not possible until Jesus had been raised from the dead, and seated at the right hand of the Father. *The Church then could not have been in existence before there was a “Head,”* for God does not make headless things. The Church then is the “Body” of which Christ is the “Head.” In 1 Cor. 12:12–13 we are told how this “Body” is formed: “For as the body is one, and hath many members; and all the members of that one body being many, are one body; so also is Christ. For by one ‘**Spirit**’ (Holy Spirit) are we all baptized into ‘**ONE BODY,**’ whether we be Jew or Gentile, whether we be bond or free.” From this we see that it is the “Baptism of the Spirit” that incorporates us into the “Body of Christ.” *That is, there could be no Church until the “Day of Pentecost.”*² [Bold original; italics mine]

This idea that *the church was utterly new* was truly a novel innovation of Dispensationalism in church history, although it clearly keyed in on certain differences between Israel and the church that had been discussed for the past 1800 years. Nevertheless, this kind of thinking has had a profound influence on movements such as Christian Zionism, ideas that the modern state of Israel is God’s chosen

² Clarence Larkin, *Rightly Dividing the Word* (Philadelphia, PA: Clarence Larkin, 1921), 46.

people and can do no wrong, and, for our purposes, **ecclesiology and the doctrine of the church**.

In Larkin, I **do not believe** that this ever came from anything other than theological and historical ignorance. He had no nefarious purpose to undermine the Trinity or to instill some kind of *mean God of the OT* vs. *nice God of the NT* theology that has resulted in some circles from such thinking. I learned a great deal about the Bible from Larkin, but I have come to believe that this kind of radical separation of the church and the OT is **novel, unbiblical, and even dangerous** in what it implies about God and his plans for his people throughout the ages.

“We Believe”

As we enter **the final Article** of the Creeds (the way I’m breaking them up), our thoughts transition **from the Holy Trinity to Christ’s church**, or as Larkin has pointed out, from **the Head to the Body**. This is a natural transition, although it is not found in the First Nicene Creed or several of the Fathers’ early creeds, which essentially end at the Holy Spirit (i.e. Irenaeus, Tertullian, Eusebius, etc.).

The creeds make the transition with **the Holy Spirit**. We saw last time that this made good sense given the context of *the place* where the Holy Spirit dwells in the two Testaments. In the OT, his dwelling was “**in the midst**” of his people in the middle of the Tabernacle and Temple. In the NT, his dwelling is now “**in**” his people. This was predicted throughout the OT, the creeds teach us, by the Holy Spirit through the prophets. They pointed forward to a new thing that God would do in sending his spirit to “**all flesh**,” not just Jews, but also Gentiles.

As **the Spirit is our transition to the church**, let's notice that he does not merely indwell the individual believer, but the church too. In fact, it really isn't possible to think of “church” and just one person. The word itself has as its intrinsic meaning an “**assembly**” of “**called out ones**,” as we will see again shortly. You can't have an assembly of one. We've spent the last three weeks thinking about **saving faith**, and because salvation is first and foremost an individual activity, it made good sense to speak of the kind of saving faith that a Christian must have in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We keyed off the very first words of the creeds to do this: “**I believe.**”

However, it is important now to notice that there is a difference in the way the Old Roman Symbol, Apostles' Creed, and the liturgical forms of the Nicene creeds read *vs.* the original Greek of the two Nicene creeds. For, they do not begin with “**I believe**” (*Gk: Pisteuō*, *Lat: Credo*), but “***we believe***” (*Pisteuomen*). This is the first-person **plural**, not singular. This “we” runs throughout the second Nicene creed as it continues, “***We acknowledge (homologoumen) ...***” and “***we look for (prosdokoumen)...***”

“**We**” is a group. The creeds are really all about groups. They **were fashioned by groups**, the first apparently being the Apostles themselves in Jerusalem with subsequent churches and councils drafting very similar creeds later. They are meant to be **confessed not just as individuals, but together with the group**.

What is that group? It is **the church**. Christianity is not just *me 'n Jesus*. It is about us, together, confessing a common faith at the most essential level. It is not just that I bear the name Christian, but that together *we* bear the name Christians. Together *we* take the name of Christ upon us. Together *we* confess this God. Together *we* move out into the world to make disciples. God gathers his elect *together*

from the four corners of the earth. Together *we* have fellowship and communion. Together *we* are eager to maintain the of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Together *we* are adopted as brothers and sisters into the royal household and a holy priesthood. Together *we* shall dwell in eternity as the family of God.

We saw in the introductory sermon that **many think that creeds create division**. But this is only true when heretics, schismatics and, and cultists are concerned. On essential things, the opposite is true (we allow for differences of opinion on secondary issues). It is **our collective confession that demonstrates a common faith**, a **unity** of thought, and a **singularity** of purpose. Thus, this plural pronoun in the Nicene creeds is vitally important not just for our faith in Christ, but for **perpetuating and propagating the Faith once** for all delivered to the saints to each subsequent generation. The creeds are the foundational doctrines that bind all Christians together in both space and time. With that, let's turn to this final Article of the Creeds and what they say about us together.

We Believe in the Holy Catholic Church

The Holy Catholic Church

The three creeds that continue past confessing the Holy Spirit each begin with a short statement about **the church**. The Old Roman Symbol simply says, “... **the holy church**.” The noun is “**church**.” Because of the confusion that exists around the **meaning and origin** of this term, and because of how foundational it is to this last section of the creed, we need to spend some time here.

Let’s **work our way backwards**. The **English** word “**church**” has a fascinating etymology. It comes from the Old English *circe* (*cirice*), which is a “**place of assemblage set aside for Christian worship**.” Notice: *assembly*. This in turn comes from the Proto-Germanic *kirika* (which gave rise to the Old Saxon *kirika*, Old Norse *kirkja*, Dutch *kerk*, and others). This in turn seems to have been borrowed from an unrecorded Gothic word from the Greek *kyriake* (*oikia*)—“**the Lord’s (house)**.” “Lord” is the word “*kurios*” (*kyrios*).³ So when you say, “We are going to the Lord’s House,” you

³ See “Church (n.),” *Online Etymology Dictionary*, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/church>.

are literally saying, “We are going to church,” the assembly of God’s people locally.

“Church” translates the Greek word *ekklesia*. The word is a compound of *ek* (“out”) and *kaleō* (“to call, summon”). So, it is literally a calling forth or **summoning**. Curiously, this hints at **two different ideas** behind the word. In Scripture, God effectually calls his chosen people (“**those whom he predestined he also called;**” **Rom 8:30**). This calling goes **to individuals** and when they hear, they must respond. So it speaks to what we call the *invisible church*, those elect who have been or will be brought to faith in Christ. But the summoning idea hints at a more **corporate** meaning. God summons many (**Matt 22:14**). This speaks to what we call the *visible church*, those professing believers who gather to worship God locally.

The word **first appears in the NT** in **Matthew 16:18**, “**And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.**” It will be important to notice for later on a word-play here between “**Peter**” (*Petros*) and “**rock**” (*petra*). Peter is an **Apostle** of Jesus. His name used to be Cephas, but Jesus

changed it to Peter, which means Rock. Hence, the word-play.

However, what “this rock” upon which Jesus builds is has been the subject of debate for centuries. I believe it is a deliberately vague **triple-entendre**. That is, Jesus is going to build his church *upon Peter, the Apostle*, upon **Peter’s Confession or Creed**, which two verses earlier was, “**You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God**” (16:16, this confession of Peter’s is directly reflected in the ecumenical creeds), and upon the literal rock upon which they are standing when he says it—**Mt. Hermon**. We are not meant to choose between these; they are not mutually exclusive.

The language that Jesus will build has also been a source of confusion, especially to Mr. Larkin who, along with many others, seems to believe that **there was no such thing as the church prior to this**. In a sense, this is true. In another sense, it is not true. The sense in which it is true is that Jesus has now **come in human flesh** and done everything necessary to bring Holy Spirit to indwell his church. This had never happened before.

However, it is vital to understand that this word *ekklesia* **does not arise in a vacuum**. The Greeks had a long history of

ekklesia, dating back to ancient times when they would call the *assembly* of male citizens in the city-states, especially in Athens. In 594, Solon, Plato's ancestor, allowed all Athenian citizens to participate, regardless of their class. This assembly could do things such as declare war, elect city officials, and had the final say on legislation.⁴

More important, *ekklesia* is the Greek word that the LXX translates from the Hebrew word *qahal*. *Qahal* means “an assembly,” so *ekklesia* is a great choice of word to use. It is found throughout the OT, first appearing in **Deuteronomy 4:10**, “the day when you stood before the Lord our God at Horeb, the day of *the assembly (ekklesia)*, when the Lord said to me, ‘Gather the people to me and let them hear my words that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the land, and you shall teach their sons.’”

Curiously, Brenton's English LXX only translates the word as “church” once (Lexham has zero) out of its 100 or so times that it appears. This is **Psalm 22:22 (21:23 LXX)**.⁵

⁴ “**Ecclesia (ancient Greece)**,” *Wikipedia*, last accessed Nov 14, 2022, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecclesia_\(ancient_Greece\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecclesia_(ancient_Greece)).

⁵ Curiously, virtually no English translation renders this as “church.” I only found the Douay-Rheims Vulgate (1899) that has “church.” Before that, I had to go back to the Middle English Wycliffe Bible (1388), “I shal telle thi name to my brethren; in the miyddel of the *chirche* I shal

The reason? It must be because [Hebrews](#) quotes this verse saying, “I will declare thy name unto my brethren; in the midst of the church I will sing praise unto thee.” Even here, many English translations do not render *ekklesia* as “church” but as “congregation” or “assembly.” You can start to see [why there’s so much confusion](#) about the origins of the idea. There is great inconsistency in how it is translated.

However, if [Hebrews](#) is citing the Psalm as prophecy, and if it is using *ekklesia*, which itself comes from a translation two centuries prior to the NT, then it stands to reason that [people before the time of Christ understood](#) something of Christ’s church even back then. In fact, it is Jesus himself (as [Jude 5](#) might put it) who assembled Israel around Mt. Sinai in the first “church” in the LXX. In this sense—the fact that Jesus assembled his people in the OT and does so in the NT with the very same word, and that all these people are always saved by faith alone in him, [Jesus’ church is not new at all](#). What we see in the NT is like the oak tree that has grown out of the acorn.

[Theologically](#), what do we mean by the church? We’ve already seen the visible-invisible distinction. Berkhof says,

preise thee.” And before that the Old English Vespasian Psalter, “[Ic secgu noman ðinne broðrum minum in midle *cirican* ich ergo ðe.](#)” (8th century).

“The Reformed conception is that Christ, by the operation of the Holy Spirit, unites men with Himself, endows them with true faith, and thus constitutes the Church as His body, the [communion of the faithful or saints].”⁶ He goes on to say that in,

Roman Catholic theology, however, the discussion of the Church takes precedence over everything else, preceding even the discussion of the doctrine of God and of divine revelation. The Church, it is said, has been instrumental in producing the Bible and therefore takes precedence over it; it is moreover the dispenser of all supernatural graces. It is not Christ that leads us to the Church, but the Church that leads us to Christ. All the emphasis falls, not on the invisible Church as the [communion of the faithful], but on the visible Church as the [mother of the faithful]. The Reformation broke with this Roman Catholic view of the Church and centered attention once more on the Church as a **spiritual organism**. It emphasized the fact that there is no Church apart from the redemptive work of Christ and from the renewing operations of the Holy Spirit.⁷

⁶ **Louis Berkhof**, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans publishing co., 1938), 553.

⁷ Ibid.

In using “Apostle” and “Rome” and other ideas here, we are foreshadowing more confusion that people find as they go further into the creeds. It is enough to say here that yes, the plan of the Father and the work of the Son and Spirit are the grounds upon which the church exists. When we confess that we believe in the church, we are confessing that she is the work and object of affection of our Triune God.

The Roman Symbol also has an adjective attached to the church. It is the same adjective as is attached to the Spirit—*Holy*. This word binds the Spirit and the Church together. Both are holy. It is the work of Christ through his Spirit that does this. Ephesians 5:27 says it is “so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such things, that she might be holy and without blemish.” This is an ongoing work of the Lord rooted in the once-for-all death of Jesus. “He has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him” (Col 1:22). On what condition? “If indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard” (23). This means that just because something has the label “church” slapped onto it, it does not necessarily mean

anything. This was Jesus' own warning to the church at Ephesus, "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent" (Rev 2:5).

It is into this that we need to think of a second adjective. This one comes from the Apostles' and Second Nicene Creeds, and it has caused many protestants great consternation. The word is "catholic." It is important here to distinguish between *catholic* (small "g") and *Catholic* (capitol "G"). The latter refers to a very specific church—the church at Rome. This church has obviously planted many churches throughout the world over the last 2,000 years. But when the creeds were all written, this hardly referred to the Roman Catholic church. Why not? Because all the churches from all over the place were represented. It is ludicrous to think that the churches at Jerusalem, Ephesus, Antioch, Lyons, Alexandria, and so on would confess that they believe in the Roman church. This is why it is good to compare creeds. The Old Roman Symbol simply saying the "holy church" proves this.

Instead, the creeds refer to the former. “Catholic” simply means “universal.” It comes from the Latin *catholicus*, meaning “universal, general” and from the Greek *katholikos* which comes from *kata* (“about”) + *holos* (“whole”).⁸ We find something very close to this in Acts 9:31. It reads, “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.” “Church throughout” is *ekklēsia kath’ holēs*. It essentially means “the church all over” or the church “universal,” which is easily seen by all the locations Luke tells us about here.

William Perkins explains that “the largeness of the church is noted in the word *catholic*. That is, general or universal ... the church is catholic in respect of time, place, [and] persons and as such it ministers endless comfort to us, for no order, degree, or state of men are excluded from grace in Christ, unless they will exclude themselves.”⁹ Therefore, when you confess that you believe in the holy catholic

⁸ “Catholic (adj.),” *Online Etymology Dictionary*, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/catholic>.

⁹ William Perkins, *An Exposition of the Symbole or Creed of the Apostles according to the Tenour of the Scriptures, and the Consent of Orthodoxe Fathers of the Church*. By William Perkins, Early English Books Online (Cambridge: John Legatt, 1595), 505. Spelling and grammar modernized.

church, you are therefore confessing that you believe that Jesus has one church, not thousands. “One” is the first of two adjectives unique to the Second Nicene. Of course, this also carries the caveat said previously about continuing in the Faith.

We might also talk about the catholic church as the “ancient church.” This takes us to the second adjective added by Nicaea: *Apostolic*. We believe “in one holy catholic and apostolic church.” This is a terribly important word, for it sets this universal church temporally at ground zero.

The word “apostle” simply means a messenger, and as such it is a kind of synonym with “angel.” The word can be used generically or in a special sense. Used in a special sense, it refers to those disciples chosen by Christ himself who knew him personally in his days in the flesh. Every book of the NT had at least this criterion: was the writer an Apostle or of such close acquaintance to an Apostle that the Apostle had final say over the material? (cf. Rom 1:1; 2Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 2Tim 1:1; Tit 1:1; 1Pe 1:1; 2 Pet 1:1). Matthew and John were Apostles. Luke was not, however, he spent decades with Paul the Apostle on his

missionary journeys.¹⁰ Mark was not an Apostle, however, he appears to have had Peter's own authority when he wrote his Gospel.

Paul tells the church at Ephesus that the church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (Eph 2:20). Jesus, of course, is the stone upon which the entire structure is built. Adding the prophets here shows the connection of the church to the OT. As for the Apostles, they are the ones whom Jesus specifically sent out to begin this initial missionary journey to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:16, 19).¹¹

The earliest church was built by the Apostles and then the job of everyone after them was very simple. Carry on the teachings and traditions of the Apostles until Jesus returns. Paul tells the Corinthians, “Maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you” (1Cor 11:2). He tells the Thessalonians, “Brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken

¹⁰ In this way, one could argue that a book such as Ephesians or Hebrews was written by someone like Luke (I think he had a hand in both), but he did it under the authority of the Apostle to such a degree that his writing could be said to be Paul's (Eph 1:1).

¹¹ Lucian of Antioch and Eusebius both have creeds that say something to the effect of, “And in the Holy Ghost given for consolation and sanctification and perfection to those who believe; as also our Lord Jesus Christ commanded his disciples, saying, ‘Go, teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.’”

word or by our letter” (2Thess 2:15; cf. 3:6). They were “entrusted” (1Th 2:4) with the once-for-all Faith (Jude 3) as “stewards” (Tit 1:7). One of the greatest gifts the Apostles gave to us was the creeds, which we have seen tradition tells us came from them directly at the council of Jerusalem. As such, when we confess the Apostolic church, we are confessing that we stand in a line of local churches that go back 2,000 years to the very beginning, without gaps of centuries, for Christ has always had his church. There is no authority greater than theirs, not councils or synods or diets or elders or church boards or charismatic pastors or cult leaders. As Jesus founded his church on these Apostles, our job is to know as best we can what he and his Apostles taught, rooting our Faith in Scripture alone, using history, church tradition, reason, and wisdom to understand where she has stayed firm and where she has strayed over the years, returning to the truth where ever we can.

The Apostles’ Creed also has a line that is found in none of the other three: “*the communion of saints.*” This line exists as a kind of synonymous parallelism to the holy universal church. It both describes what the church is (a communion of

saints) and what we are to do (have communion and fellowship with one another and with God) together.

The Forgiveness of Sins

We've spent **an inordinate amount of time on this first line** of this last Article, but it was necessary to lay a foundation, including the history, meaning, and basic doctrine of the church. Because we now have this foundation, we can **move on** to the second statement. The Old Roman Symbol simply says, "*The remission of sins.*" The Apostles' Creed says, "*The forgiveness of sins.*" The Second Nicene adds something important, "*We acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins.*"

While **two different English words** are used, "remission" and "forgiveness" is just **one word in the original** (*aphesis*). To remit is to forgive. This line gets at **the heart of the gospel**. Paul says, "In [Christ] we have redemption, *the forgiveness of sins*" (**Col 1:14**). John says, "I am writing to you, little children, because *your sins are forgiven* for his name's sake" (**1Jn 2:12**). Luther gives **Eph 1:7** as his proof-text. "In him we have redemption through his blood, *the forgiveness of*

our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.” These each point out a vital fact. Our sins are forgiven by grace alone, for the sake of Christ alone. You do not have forgiveness of your sins because somehow you only did 49% bad things in this life or even .00001% bad things.

Forgiveness comes through faith in Christ Jesus alone, recognizing that what he underwent for you satisfied God’s wrath no matter what sins you have or will commit. The creeds show no hint of forgiveness by works or merit. This does not mean that our lives as Christians are spent sinning so that grace will increase. Jesus teaches us to pray, “Father ... forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us” (Matt 6:12). This is not God forgiving you only if you first forgive someone else, but rather that we forgive out of thankfulness for his forgiveness. If we refuse to forgive others, it can only be because we have forgotten or never personally or corporately knew the forgiveness of God for our massive debt against him.

Peter thought that he was pretty special going to his Lord and saying, “How often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” (18:21). I mean, most people might forgive once, not seven times!

Jesus responded, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-times seven” (22). His point is not to keep a record of wrongs so that if you reach that number, you no longer need to forgive. Rather, his point is that you have no idea how many millions of times God has forgiven you, so then you can forgive others their many less offenses.

It is knowing that you are totally forgiven, freed, pardoned, released, and liberated of all your sins that allows you to move forward in this life to be progressively sanctified and made holy. It is just here that it is good to talk about the baptism addition in the Second Nicene creed.

If there is a third misunderstood comment in the creeds, it is surely this. When we confess that there is one baptism for the remission of sins, are we confessing baptismal regeneration like Rome teaches? Does this put salvation into the direct hands of priests? Is it teaching something other than salvation by faith alone?

To answer this question, it is helpful to understand the history of this creed, and that it seems to come from Cyril of Jerusalem’s *Catechetical Lectures*. Of all the ante-Nicene creeds, his is the one that says this almost verbatim, “And in one baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.”

Fortunately, we have Cyril's Lectures on this very subject that can inform what he meant.

He begins talking about baptism by **bidding you**, “*May the souls of all of you be found ‘not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.’*” But lest anyone think that this baptism will save you he corrects you, “*I do not mean before you have received the grace (for how could that be true of you who are called for the remission of sins?) but that, the grace given, your conscience, being found blameless, may be suitable for grace*” (**Cyril**, *Catechetical Lectures* 3.2).¹² Cyril very clearly has **sanctification** in mind throughout this lecture.

He says, “*Yet after the grace of the Spirit, Scripture says that Peter “ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:48), that after the soul had been regenerated by faith, the body also, by means of the water, might share the grace*” (*Lectures* 3.4). Again, he says, “*If a man does not receive baptism [he speaks of water baptism], he does not attain salvation, excepting only the martyrs, who, even without the water, receive the kingdom*” (3.10). He

¹² **Cyril of Jerusalem**, *The Works of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem*, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari, trans. Leo P. McCauley and Anthony A. Stephenson, vol. 61, *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1969), 109.

can't be talking about baptismal regeneration, since martyrs are not baptized into water, and yet are saved.¹³ In fact, he continues by explaining that this whole line of thinking is directed at those who “scorn baptism” and pretend to piety (11). One should not shun Jesus' command to be baptized.

What Cyril is teaching about baptism for the remission of sins is that we are “sprinkled with hyssop, and cleansed by the spiritual hyssop, and by the power of Him who, in His Passion, was offered drink on the stalk of hyssop” (1). This sprinkling with hyssop is our baptism into salvation and it alone is the work of God by his Holy Spirit. Therefore, because we have been saved he says, “Let the heavenly powers rejoice and let the souls who are to be united with their spiritual Spouse prepare themselves.” He views baptism as a preparation for eternity for one already Christ's bride.

He cites Jesus himself who was baptized, “not that He was baptized to receive the remission of sins—for He was without sin—but being sinless, he nevertheless baptized, that He might impart grace and dignity to those who receive

¹³ He goes on to cite [Mark 10:38](#) and Jesus' own baptism into death by his blood, thus he argues that the martyrs are baptized in body when they die.

the sacrament.” “Jesus was baptized that we, in turn, herein also made partakers with Him, might receive *not only salvation, but also the dignity*” (11). Dignity differs from salvation. The dignity of what? Of a powerful, sanctified life. **Water baptism is the beginning of this, our first act of obedience** as Christ’s Bride. He says that Jesus crushed the heads of the dragon (citing **Job 40:18**), and because of his work, our baptism gives us the power to tread upon serpents and scorpions. He is talking about water baptism being the physical setting apart of our bodies that already happened to our hearts when the Spirit baptized them.

Thus, **when we confess one baptism for the remission of sins**, we confess that Jesus by his own work and through the Holy Spirit regenerates us through the spiritual baptism, and through water performed through that Bride—the church—he shows that he does not leave the body to itself, but rather in washing the body begins the preparations to receive his Bride—the church—by empowering her with supernatural power that will eventually see her united to him in eternal marital bliss. It’s really quite a beautiful addition and it is not teaching that water baptism saves you.

The Resurrection of the Body

The third line of this article ties us back to Jesus. The Roman Symbol says, “The resurrection of the flesh” (*sarkos*.)” The Apostles’ Creed says, “The resurrection of the body” (*sarx*). The Second Nicene says, “*we look for the resurrection of the dead*” (*nekrōn*). Flesh and body are the same word. What we are affirming is that these bodies that we are in right now are going to be resurrected. The Nicene is adding that because we die, we are to look forward to this resurrection of the dead.

It isn’t just Jesus’ resurrection that is the center of our faith. Because we are united to Christ as a husband to a bride, *we must live again* as he does. Jesus’ body was raised from the dead. Therefore, his bride will be raised from the dead. Jesus is *not a necromancer*. He is Life itself, and he is *able to give life to our mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in us* (**Rom 8:1**).

The Righteous Judgment of Souls and Bodies

Luther’s proof-text is another good one. Jesus said, “*Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are*

in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to *the resurrection of life*, and those who have done evil to *the resurrection of judgment*” (Jn 5:28-29). This nicely leads to something that Epiphanius’ Second Formula adds to these ecumenical creeds. After “one baptism of repentance,” his church taught, “and in a righteous judgment of the souls and bodies.” This is what Jesus is talking about.

It is good to think of this here, even though we basically saw this at the end of the second Article on Christ. This is *the compliment to the resurrection* from the dead. We are not raised to nothing. We are *raised to face the Judge* of living and the dead. All people will have to face God for what they did in the body, whether good or bad. This judgment is going to be *a righteous judgment*. It will not be partial. There will be no bribes taken. The Judge won’t care if you are rich or poor, Jew or Gentile, black or white, male or female. He will judge solely on what is right and wrong.

It will be a judgment that, again, *integrates* the whole human. Bodies and souls will be judged. Together, they will go off to the eternal reward or the eternal punishment. Tertullian’s creed said, “*He will come again with glory to*

take the saints into the enjoyment of eternal life and the celestial promises, and to judge the wicked with eternal fire after the resuscitation (resurrection) of both, with the restitution of the flesh” (Tertullian, *Against Heretics* 13).

This is as inevitable as your next breath or tomorrow’s sunrise. Injustice will not go on forever. All people must think through both this coming judgment and the resurrection more than they do. Sadly, many are not thinking about either, including many Christians. But our great hope is that we have the forgiveness of sins—now, that we have already been judged in Christ’s death—now, and that when we are raised from the dead, Jesus will tell every Christian, “Well done by good and faithful servant.” This is the grace of God and the work of God from beginning to end.

The Kingdom of Heaven

A second thought found in some of the earlier creeds at this point confesses “the kingdom of heaven.” We find it in Epiphanius, the Apostolic Constitutions, and others. I

wanted to mention this here because it is a nice complement to the forgiveness of sins.

The Kingdom of heaven is the eternal realm that all believers will be citizens of for eternity in their resurrected state. Even Abraham waited for it (Heb 11:10). Jesus ushered it in and it was here through his ministry (Matt 12:28; Luke 11:20), though it was not observable with human eyes, for “the kingdom of heaven is within you” (Luke 17:21). How is it “within you?” By faith in Christ, it’s King (17:19). And what must happen to you? You must be transferred from one kingdom to another and forgiven. Thus, Paul says, “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:13-14).

And Life Everlasting

This takes us to the final statement in the creeds. It is either “... and life everlasting. Amen” (Apostles’ and Roman Symbol) or “... and the life of the world to come. Amen” (Second Nicene). *World to come* reminds us very much of the kingdom of heaven language that we just

discussed. *Life* teaches us about not only about the *resurrection*, but about its purpose. *Everlasting* teaches us about its time-frame. A zombie can live after death, but it is the “undead.” A revenant can come back to life for a moment in time, but not eternally. A ghost has an appearance of life, but it has no body. What is promised here in this last phrase is eternal life in the world to come. It is possible to conceive of a greater gift and blessing, a greater promise and hope than this? All Christians should remember and keep this hope before them on a daily basis.

As a concluding note, I found it interesting that Cyprian has this in his creed. “I believe the forgiveness of sins, and eternal life through the holy Church.” Of course, it was Cyprian who made famous the phrase, “He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the church for his mother” (Cyprian, *On the Unity of the Church* 6). This is a great way to encapsulate everything that we’ve seen today, which has focused on the church. But Cyprian, who died in 258 AD, was not talking about Rome. He was talking about the universal church, the Bride of Christ, the one for whom he especially died so that he might save her and wash her and purify her and take her to be his eternal wife.

Love Christ's Church Together

The point of this last section of the creeds is that **you fall in love with Christ's church**. Not merely as an individual or even a family, but as God's family, *together*. She has fallen on very hard times in these last days. Most in the West want **nothing to do with corporate religion**. They do not want and indeed cannot perpetuate and propagate the Faith once for all delivered to the saints, because they are too busy running away from the saints because they are sinful and hurt one another and let each other down. In this, they think far too highly of themselves, who, like those they run from, are just as guilty of these same sins. But we can't run away from ourselves. Neither should we run from the church. Only together, in unity, can we reform things that have broken down. Only together can we shine the light to the world that is increasing darkness. But together is precisely the point of the church.

The NT knows nothing of purely individual Christianity. Indeed, the OT knows nothing of this either. **Only corporately** do we truly represent Christ's Bride as **one**

body with many parts and many gifts. Jesus promises that he will preserve and care for her until he returns to take her with him to heaven. He promises to preserve our unity if we will but become part of her in a local expression of her universal nature. Each of these last sections of the creeds are nothing without the church, indeed, they have their meaning collectively in her.

Better Church Theology

But this means we must have better theology than what we saw at the beginning, where some think the church this brand-new organism that had no form of existence at all prior to Jesus. This just isn't true, since it was Jesus who assembled his people in the first place there at Mt. Sinai. While it more like the acorn than the oak in the OT, it was still present. And it behooves us to think better about the church in such difficult days.

I have this belief that as the church goes, so goes the world. Christians blame the world far too much and too easily. The world is what it has always been. That will never change. But the church? She is the light of Christ, the city

on the hill, the salt of the world. Not America. The church. If the world has gone to hell, we should look no farther away than our own doorstep. **Judgment begins with the house of God.**

This is true on a micro or macro level. If a local church is healthy and well, her people will be healthy and well. If the church is making a strong impact on the world through its **proclamation of the law and gospel, taking care of its own, caring for the poor and downtrodden**, its fighting for unity in truth, passing down the Faith once-for-all entrusted no matter the cost, then she is a light shining in the darkness. Luther can help us think better here as he has with the rest of the creeds.

What is meant by this Article?

Answer. ... [as] the Holy Spirit hath called me through the gospel, enlightened me by his gifts, and sanctified and preserved me in the true faith; in like manner as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and preserves it in union with Jesus Christ in the true faith; in which Christian church he daily forgives abundantly all my sins, and the sins of all believers, and will raise up me and all the dead at the last day, and will grant

everlasting life to me and to all who believe in Christ. This is most certainly true.

Of course, this necessitates that **the church herself has no meaning apart from the Triune God** who has worked so diligently and perfectly for her redemption. Thus, we can see how it is the totality of the creeds coming together that form the most essential doctrines of our Christian faith.

Look to the totality of the creeds, confessing these essentials of what it means to be a Christian. Confessing them by faith, together and as individuals, that God would have mercy and shower his grace upon us for Christ's sake. That's why we have them. May God bless you as you endeavor to put into practice those words of Augustine,

Receive, my sons, the rule of faith which is called the Creed. When you have received it, write it on your hearts; recite it daily to yourselves. Before you go to sleep, before you go forth, fortify yourselves with your Creed ... Let your memory be your codex that you may be able to review it if it should happen that forgetfulness effaces what diligence has given you. You will believe what you hear yourself saying, and your lips will repeat what you believe. The Apostle says

truly: ‘For with the heart a man believes unto justice, and with the mouth profession of faith is made unto salvation’; this is the Creed that you will be going over in your thoughts and repeating from memory. These words that you have heard are scattered throughout the divine Scriptures. They have been assembled and unified to facilitate the memory of dull mankind in order that everyone will be able to say the Creed and adhere to what he believes. ¹⁴

Now that you are done, go back and read the sermon according to the outline I had in my mind when I wrote it:

Main Outline:

- A. Bad Church Theology
- B. Faith and “We” Believe
- C. I Believe in The Holy Catholic Church**
- B’. Love Christ’s Church Together
- A’. Better Church Theology

Sub-Outline (Under “C. I believe in The Holy Catholic Church”):

- A. Holy Catholic Church
- B. The Forgiveness of Sins (one baptism) (Col 1:14)
- C. The Resurrection of the body**
- C’. A righteous judgment of souls and bodies**
- B’. Kingdom of heaven (Col 1:13)
- A’. Life Everlasting (through the church)

¹⁴ **Augustine of Hippo**, “The Creed,” in *Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects*, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari, trans. Marie Liguori, vol. 27, *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1955), 289.

Appendix:

Luther's Smaller Catechism, The Third Article: Of Sanctification¹⁵

John 14:16, 17–26. 1 Cor. 6:11.

I believe in the Holy Ghost¹; the² holy³ Christian⁴ Church⁵, the communion⁶ of saints⁷; the forgiveness of sins⁸; the resurrection of the body⁹; and the life everlasting¹⁰ Amen¹¹.

What is meant by this Article?

Answer. I believe that I cannot¹ by my own reason² or strength³ believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to him⁴; but the Holy Spirit⁵ hath called me⁶ through the gospel⁷, enlightened⁸ me by his gifts⁹, and sanctified¹⁰ and preserved¹¹ me in the true faith¹²; in like manner as he calls¹³, gathers¹⁴, enlightens¹⁵, and sanctifies¹⁶ the whole¹⁷ Christian church¹⁸ on earth¹⁹, and preserves²⁰ it in union with Jesus Christ in the true faith²¹; in which Christian church²² he dail²³ forgives²⁴ abundantly²⁵ all my sins²⁶, and the sins of all believers²⁷, and will raise up me and all the dead at the last day²⁸, and will grant everlasting life²⁹ to me and to all who believe in Christ³⁰. This is most certainly true³¹.

¹⁵ Luther has only three Articles, while I have divided his third into two parts.

¹ Acts 2:1–4. John 15:26.

² 1 Cor. 12:12, 13.

³ Eph. 5:25–27.

⁴ 1 Cor. 3:11.

⁵ Eph. 1:22, 23.

⁶ 1 John 1:3.

⁷ Eph. 2:19.

⁸ Eph. 1:7.

⁹ John 5:28, 29.

¹⁰ John 6:40.

¹¹ 2 Cor. 1:20.

¹ John 3:5, 6,

² 1 Cor. 2:14.

³ 2 Cor. 3:5.

⁴ John 6:44.

⁵ Gal. 4:6.

⁶ 2 Tim. 1:9.

⁷ Rom. 1:16.

⁸ Eph. 1:17, 18.

⁹ 1 Cor. 12:1.

¹⁰ 2 Thess. 2:13.

¹¹ 1 Thess. 5:23, 24.

¹² Eph. 4:14.

¹³ Eph. 5:14.

¹⁴ Eph. 2:20–22.

¹⁵ 2 Cor. 4:6.

¹⁶ Eph. 1:3, 4.

¹⁷ 1 Cor. 12:11.

¹⁸ 1 Tim. 3:15.

¹⁹ 1 Pet. 5:10.

²⁰ Phil. 1:6.

²¹ John 17:11, 20, 21.

²² Heb. 12:22–24.

²³ Ps. 86:3.

²⁴ 1 John 1:8, 9.

²⁵ Rom. 5:20.

²⁶ Col. 1:14.

²⁷ Acts 10:43.

²⁸ Rom. 8:11. Phil. 3:20, 21.

²⁹ John 3:16.

³⁰ John 3:36.

³¹ Rom. 8:38, 39.

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