

Belief Systems

The Christian Faith

Ideas often take time to develop. People need to spend time thinking, discussing, building, putting forth theories and then striking them down in favor of others all over a great length of time for us as humans to find what is true. Luckily for us, the Christian Faith has had approximately 2000 years of this process to bring to us a system of belief and truth.

These core beliefs about Christianity have been developed by believers and have been proclaimed through the centuries, empires rose and fell, governments rose up and then were overthrown, the way we understand ourselves and the world through science and philosophy has been completely reestablished many times, and yet there are the essential truths that remain unchanged in the way that we understand who the person of God is, what that means, and the work that he is doing in the world.

The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed

During the 4th century AD, the Church had a great deal of debate over who Jesus Christ was, namely was Jesus Christ God becoming human flesh. Some held the belief that Jesus was not God, but the very first and greatest thing that God ever created a powerful and holy spiritual being, “the firstborn of all creation” (Col. 1:15). Others later argued that Jesus could not have been fully human but was God who appeared for a time to be human as it would be beneath the divine dignity, or even impossible, for the Almighty God to be subject to the limitations of a human mind, a human body, human pain, and a true human death.

The Church held two major Councils to establish the truth in these core doctrines, the First Ecumenical Council in Nicea in 325, and the Second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 381 (Ecumenical meaning universal, spanning many different churches, areas and traditions. In the modern sense this would mean crossing denominations, but this was a period in church history before specific denominations had split off from one another).

Between these two councils the Nicene or Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed was created which affirmed that God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit are One God that exists in three persons who are fully distinct yet entirely inseparable. And they affirmed that when God sent Jesus to fulfill the broken covenants of the Old Testament, he did not order a perfect aspect of his creation to

suffer in place of the imperfections of the rest of creation, nor did he give us an incomplete image of who God is. Rather God Almighty, the uncreated creator became completely human submitting to life in a human body, and death on a cross to fulfill the promises of Scripture.

I believe in One God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible:

And in one Lord Jesus Christ the only-begotten Son of God, Begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father, By whom all things were made:

Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, And was made incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, And was made man, And was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried, And the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, And ascended into heaven, And sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead:

Whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, The Lord and giver of life, Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, Who spake by the Prophets. And I believe in one Catholic and Apostolic Church. I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sin. And I look for the Resurrection of the dead, And the life of the world to come.

The Apostles' Creed

The Apostles' Creed was developed out of what's called the Old Roman Creed, which was used as early as the second century as the statement of belief given before baptism. Like the Nicene Creed, the Apostles' Creed outlines the essential beliefs which unite all believers across the holy universal (catholic) Church following the tradition of the first apostles.

*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 Spirit
born of the Virgin Mary,
Suffered under Pontius 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 at the right hand of 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.*

On the Triune God

The great beauty and mystery of the Christian Faith has much to do with the nature of the identity of God. One of the fundamental issues that drove the way the creeds were written is to affirm that God is One Divine Being, existing in three distinct persons who are in relationship with one another and yet are inseparably one, the Father Almighty, his only Son who is our Lord, and the Holy Spirit. This three-who-is-also-one is called by Christians the trinity, from tri for three and unity. In John 17:24 Jesus says of the Father “you loved before the creation of the world.” God is referred to frequently in the New Testament as being who is loved and is in a constant state of loving, three people who are one God who are in an eternal state of loving one another perfectly.

Out of this relationship God created the heavens and the earth, the Father who is the Creator, through the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit, together as one they created everything. God created humanity as an image of God, to join with God as a partner in ruling over all the other created things on

earth (Gen 1:26). Humanity denied the goodness of this partnership and went their own way in rebellion against God. The Bible tells the stories of how God is reconciling the relationship between himself and humanity, through his covenant people the Israelites, creating the expectation and prophecy of one great messiah (anointed one) who would once and for all be the priest who intercedes with God for his people, the king who rules in love and justice, and the prophet who shows the people the exact image of God. The Father sent the Son to humanity as one who is more fully and completely human, the one human being who represented what it should look like. Jesus submitted himself to the evil that humanity had created, to death on the cross, and was raised again from the dead as a conqueror of death, so that he could invite us back into the partnership with God, to enter into the eternal loving partnership shared between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The bible project has a very useful video summing this up, and I would encourage the reader to explore any and all of their videos, articles, or podcasts to understand many of the fundamental ideas found in the bible and in the Christian Faith. <https://thebibleproject.com/explore/god/>

The Relationship of the Church

Many people, when thinking about the church, imagine a building, sometimes one with tall old spires and stained glass windows, sometimes newer buildings where people hold potlucks on folding chairs in a gymnasium, sometimes a completely different building. But while this is one aspect of what church means it is only one aspect of the full picture, the church is for all of time, through the whole world, for every person that is called Christ. There are four words in the Creeds used to describe the Church: One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic. These are all words used to describe the complex relationship of the church, like God, a diversity and unity at the same time.

The Church is One

- This emphasises the unity of the Church, while the Church is made up of individual people, of individual communities, and of individual denominations, which each have their own identities and focus on different aspects of the faith, the church is also united through God as one being or entity.

The Church is Holy

- The Church is made Holy through the power and blessing of God. The church are called by the Father to join the family of God, united as the Body of Christ, and filled with the life giving power of the Spirit.

The Church is Universal (Catholic)

- This focuses on the spread of the Church over all of time and space. The church exists in the whole world, in “a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Rev. 7:9).
- This also references the spread over time. From the first apostles who were eyewitnesses to the resurrected Christ, to the return of Christ the Church is universal

The Church is Apostolic

- This refers to the tradition of the Church, it is Apostolic because it is built upon the traditions of the Apostles and carries out their teachings in a unified tradition. This is an important aspect of evaluating Church doctrines, they remain unchanged from the days of the first Apostles until today.
- In the Catholic Church (the denomination rather than the universal church) an essential part of this is that the Church is built on the foundation of St. Peter, as declared by Jesus (Matthew 16:18) and that the head of the Catholic Church, the Pope, is the spiritual successor of St. Peter.
- In other denominational traditions the church is considered in the tradition of the through the study of and commitment to their teachings and the power of the Holy Spirit unifying the Church over all of time.

Learn More

Get a copy of the Bible.

- Most local churches will give you a copy of the bible for free, there are also several online resources like the Gideon Project, FreeBibles.net, Bibles Canada. There are likely several copies of the bible at your local library, and some libraries also have programs where you can keep one for free. You can also read the bible online through websites like Bible Gateway, or apps like You Version.

Find a Church Near You

- A quick google search should give you a list of churches that exist in your area. This article gives a list of things you might want to consider when deciding which to attend.

<https://www.learnreligions.com/how-to-find-a-church-700487>

The Bible Project: <https://thebibleproject.com/>

- The bible project is a group of Christians who have created articles, videos, and podcasts that give great information on the bible as a “unified story that leads to Jesus.” These are all great resources for learning about all kinds of ideas in the bible that are vital to the Christian Faith

Find an Alpha Course: <https://www.alphacanada.org/try/>

- Alpha is free course that involves people getting together, sharing a meal, hearing a talk about the big questions of Christianity, and having a discussion about it. This course is offered in a variety of areas, churches, universities, cafes, and community centers. This link will help you find if there is a course happening near you.

Do Some Reading

- Over the years thousands of books have been written trying to make sense of the Christian Faith. Here is a short list of those that you could take a look at.

<https://waynation.com/7-books-that-helped-me-understand-christianity/>

Works Cited:

Felker Jones, Beth. *Practicing Christian Doctrine*.

Quash, and Ward. *Heresies and How to Avoid Them*.