

The Nicene Creed



The Nicene Creed was formulated at the Council of Nicea in 325 CE and was adopted in its final form at the Council of Constantinople in 381 CE. This creed carefully defined the relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Used most widely in the eastern Orthodox church, its primary theme strives to clarify the orthodox understanding of the trinitarian nature of God.

THE CROSS WHICH IS ALSO A SWORD. A symbol for the Emperor Constantine, and his successors, because he called the ecumenical council which began the process of thinking which resulted in this creed, because he was the first Christian emperor, and because he began the tradition of imperial Christianity.

THE GREEN TRIANGLE AND THE THREE SYMBOLS WITH IT. The doctrine of the Trinity formalized in the Nicene Creed.

THE HAND REACHING DOWN. God, the Father.

THE CHI RHO MONOGRAM. Christ—the first two letters of the Greek word for Christ, used by Constantine on shields and helmets of his army.

THE DOVE. The Holy Spirit.

THE CROWNS. The rule and glory of God.



The Apostles' Creed

By legend, this creed is attributable to the original apostles. Its present form cannot be verified until the 6th or 7th century, but it probably dates back to an ancient Roman baptismal creed of the 2nd century. It is used most widely in the Western or Roman churches.

THE SOMBER BROWN COLOR. The difficulty and rigor of early Christianity under persecution; also the monastic tradition.

THE PURPLE ARCHES. The entrances to caves or catacombs, where early Christians met in secret; also, the shape of Gothic church windows.

THE ANCHOR CROSS. Security in Christ, as found by the apostles, some of whom were fishermen.

THE FISH. An ancient symbol for the Christian faith, perhaps a secret code mark. Letters of the Greek word for fish can be used as first letters in the phrase "Jesus Christ God's Son Savior."

THE CHALICE. The Lord's Supper, and thus the earnest and simple fellowship of the early church.

THE UPSIDE-DOWN CROSS. Peter, chief of the apostles, who, in legend, is said to have been crucified upside down because he thought himself unworthy of a death like his Master's.



The Scots Confession

Written by John Knox and a commission in Scotland, 1560, the Scots Confession is a fresh, clear, sweet spirited summary of the Reformed faith as held in common by Protestants of England, Switzerland, France, and Holland. Its primary theme contrasts the differences between Reformed faith and Roman Catholic doctrine.

THE BLUE OF THE SHIELD - The background color of the Church of Scotland.

THE TARTAN, X-SHAPED CROSS - A form called St. Andrew's Cross, he being the apostle who brought the gospel to Scotland. The tartan, or plaid, is that of the Hamilton clan in honor of the first martyr of the Scottish Reformation, Patrick Hamilton.

THE CELTIC CROSS - Another ancient form associated with Christians of the British Isles.

THE SHIP - A symbol for the Church; the Confession contains a remarkable, strong doctrine of the Church.

THE BIBLE AND THE SWORD - Paul called the word of God "The sword of the Spirit," and the sharpness of John Knox's preaching of the Word was a major power for reformation in Scotland.

THE BURNING BUSH WHICH IS NOT CONSUMED - Reminding us of Moses' Sinai experience, thus a symbol of God's presence and call: the chief symbol of the Church of Scotland.



The Heidelberg Catechism

The Heidelberg Catechism was written by Zacharia Ursinus and Casper Olevianus in Germany in 1563. It presents the essential tenets of the Reformed faith, and was widely used for instruction of youth, preachers, and teachers, and for use in public worship.

THE REGAL RED AND GOLD - A tribute to the rule of Frederick III, who ordered the writing of the Catechism for followers of John Calvin in Germany.

THE CROWN OF THORNS, THE "GERMAN" CROSS AND THE TABLETS - Symbol of Misery, Redemption and Thankfulness - the three basic themes of the Catechism. The tablets stand for the Ten Commandments, which appear in the Catechism where it teaches that obedience is the proper form of thankfulness.

THE TWO LIGHTS AND THE FIRE - The Trinity - with the Hebrew name of God on the left orb, the Greek monogram for Jesus on the right orb, and the flame standing for the Holy Spirit. There is a long discussion of the Trinity in the Catechism.



The Second Helvetic Confession

Written by Heinrich Bullinger, a Reformer from Zurich, in 1566, this confessional statement contrasts Reformed Belief with Lutheran Belief, and presents a moderate summary of central affirmations.

THE BLUE AND WHITE - Heraldic colors of ancient Switzerland.

THE CROSS - Again dominant on this banner because of the extensive discussion of salvation in the Confession.

THE HAND AND THE BURNING HEART - A traditional symbol for John Calvin, father of Presbyterianism in its Swiss homeland.

THE LAMP - Knowledge and discipline, two of the themes of the Helvetic which make it unique.

THE SHEPHERD'S CROOK AND THE PASTURE - The pastoral ministry and flock's care for its own members.

THE CHALICE AND THE WAVES - Holy Communion and Baptism.



The Westminster Confession

Parliament called an Assembly, which met from 1643-1649, at Westminster Cathedral in London to deal with the issues raised by the Puritan Conflict. The resulting Westminster Confession, and the larger and shorter catechisms, deal with the sovereignty of God and our response to God. This is the most influential confessional standard in the English-speaking Reformed churches.

THE THREE LONG PANELS AND THE MAROON TRIANGLE - The Trinity.

THE EYE - God's providence and control of all life and history - a dominant theme of Westminster.

THE CROWN - God's Rule.

THE OPEN BIBLE - The authority of the written Word, basic to this Confession's teachings.

THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA - The A and Z of the Greek alphabet, the first and last - referring to Christ and his death for us as central to our faith.



The Barmen Declaration

This was written to contradict the nationalist “German Christian Party,” which was a perverted blend of historic Christianity and Nazi Nationalism. The “Confessing Church” gathered in Barmen to compose this document in 1934. Its primary theme is that Jesus Christ, not any government, is the sole Head of the Church.

THE SWASTIKA CROSSED OUT AND THE CROSS RISING - A protest and witness against Nazi tyranny and any effort to take the role of God and control of the church.

THE FIRE - The suffering and death which follows from defense of the faith against tyranny, as for some of the Barmen signers. But the cross survives such persecution and crisis of war, rising out of the flames.



The Confession of 1967

Composed by Presbyterians from the former Northern branch of American Presbyterianism, its aim was to restate the historic position of the Reformed church in light of the secular upheavals of the 1960s. Its primary theme is the reconciliation of People in Christ.

THE BLUE, THE RED AND THE GOLD - Colors of the official seal of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.

THE GOLDEN, DOWN-REACHING HAND (Repeated from the Nicene Banner.) - God, relating to his world.

THE CROWN (repeated from the Westminster Banner) and the NAIL-SCARRED HAND - The death and victory of Christ as he reconciles the world.

THE FOUR HANDS OF DIFFERENT COLORS, THE CLASPED HANDS AND THE GREEN CIRCLE - The reconciled world at the foot of the cross - God's act of reconciliation being the starting point and theme of the Confession of 1967.

THE STARS AND PLANETS ON THE BLUE BACKGROUND - The Space-Age setting of this Confession.

The Confessional Banners of the Presbyterian Church symbolize nine creeds and confessions from the early Christian era to the twentieth century. These historic statements of faith represent our Christian heritage from the Roman Empire to the Reformation, including contemporary reflections of faith in our own time.

The Confessions which these banners represent are part of the *Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA)*.

When the *Book of Confessions* was adopted, Richard K. Avery, pastor and Donald S. Marsh, choir director of the Port Jarvis, New York, Presbyterian Church devised eight banners symbolic of the confessions.

A Brief Statement of Faith became a part of *The Book of Confessions* following its approval by the 203rd General Assembly in 1991. Gay M. Sorenson, member of the First Presbyterian Church, Port Charlotte, Florida, designed a banner appropriate for use with *A Brief Statement of Faith*. Only the first eight comprise the collection displayed here.

The banners displayed here belong to the Presbytery of Cayuga-Syracuse, and are currently on loan to Westminster Presbyterian Church. They were created by a group of volunteers from several churches in the early 1990s as a gift to the presbytery to celebrate our confessional traditions and to educate and inform worshipers of the Presbyterian faith heritage.

