

**ANCCI University**  
P.O. Box 1980, Amarillo, TX 79114  
TH 107 The Christian Creeds

## **THE CHRISTIAN CREEDS**

**INSTRUCTOR:** The Rev. Martin M. Davis, Ph.D. Candidate in Theology

### **RATIONALE**

The ancient creeds of the Christian faith are precise, summary statements of the essential beliefs of historic, orthodox Christianity, articulated by the community of faith under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (4<sup>th</sup> century) is endorsed by all major branches of the Christian Church, including Protestant, Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Evangelical. The Creed encapsulates the essential tenets of the evangelical faith of the ancient catholic (universal) Church, as well as the faith of Christians throughout the centuries, and throughout the world today. Thus, the student of theology and Church history must be knowledgeable in regard to the origin, development, and meaning of the ancient Christian Creed.

The Creed provides guidelines for the modern student of theology and biblical interpretation. The Creed encapsulates the wisdom of the early Church and acts as a guiding light to guard our understanding of the essential tenets of the historic, orthodox Christian faith. Without a thorough grounding in the ancient Creed, theological and biblical studies easily degenerate into an individualistic, idiosyncratic interpretation of Scripture that has all too frequently found expression in unorthodox, quasi-Christian cults, particularly those who deny the Triune nature of God or the full divinity of Jesus Christ. Thus, the modern student of theology and biblical interpretation cannot afford to ignore the teachings of the ancient, evangelical catholic Church as expressed in the Creed under the superintendence of the Holy Spirit.

### **OBJECTIVES**

Students will examine the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. Students will trace the origin and development of the Creeds, beginning with the credal statements found in Scripture and continuing through the baptismal and catechetical formulas of the early Church to their full and final expression in the Creed.

Particular emphasis will be given to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (4<sup>th</sup> century). Each element of the Creed will be examined in detail, particularly in regard to the theological controversies that necessitated the articulation of a particular credal statement. Special attention will be given to the Arian controversy and the

consequent orthodox creedal assertion that Jesus Christ is “of one being with the Father” (*homoousios to Patri*). Students will develop an understanding and appreciation of the epistemological and evangelical significance of the Nicene *homoousion*.

Because the Creed is set within an over-arching Trinitarian framework, with special attention given to the Person of Jesus Christ, students will be expected to develop a general knowledge of the doctrines of the Trinity and the hypostatic union (the union of the divine and human natures in the one Person, Jesus Christ).

At the end of the course, students will be able to provide general answers to the following questions (this list is not exhaustive):

- What biblical passages appear to contain early creedal statements?
- What is meant by “the Rule of Faith,” and how does it apply to biblical interpretation and Christian living?
- What is the relationship between Holy Scripture and ecclesiastical tradition?
- How is the Creed the “symbol of faith” and what does that mean?
- What are the functions of the Creed in relation to community worship and piety?
- How is the Creed related to the ancient baptismal formula of the early Church?
- What is the relationship between the Creed and the doctrine of the Trinity?
- What is the meaning of the creedal assertion that Jesus Christ is “of one being with the Father” (*homoousios to Patri*)?
- What is the epistemological and evangelical significance of the Nicene *homoousion*?
- Why are the ancient Creeds important for modern Christians?

## **STRATEGY**

The student's primary task will be to complete the required readings. In addition to the required text book, extensive use will be made of material developed by the instructor in the course of his graduate studies in theology, particular in regard to the doctrine of the Trinity and the Nicene creedal assertion that Jesus Christ is "of one being with the Father" (*homoousios to Patri*). These materials will be provided at no cost to the student via email. Wherever possible, the course will use additional instructional material available online, at no cost to the student, via the Internet.

The student will be expected to provide written (typed) answers to essay questions regarding the content of the course. Academic papers of three or more pages in length (Times New Roman or equivalent, 12 pt font, 1.5 line spacing, 1 inch margins) may be required, depending on the academic level at which the course is taken. The required length of papers may vary according to subject matter and the academic level at which the course is taken. Academic papers are not required for Associate or Bachelor's level students.

## **REQUIRED READING (available through Internet book sellers)**

Johnson, L.T. 2003. *The Creed: What Christians Believe and Why It Matters*. New York, NY: Image Books. 324pp. Additional material may be provided the student, at no cost, via resources available from the Internet.

## **EVALUATION**

All Nations Anglican Seminary system of grading will be employed.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER READING**

Myers, K.N. 2009. *What Christians Believe* (The Foundation Series, vol 1). Sherman, TX: Mayeux Press. 196pp. This is a good introductory level text.

Olson, R.E. 1999. *The Story of Christian Theology*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP. 652pp.

Pelikan, J. 2005. *Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. 672pp.

Torrance, T.F. 1995. *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church*. London: T & T Clark. 345pp. This book is an explication of the Nicene Creed and is highly recommended for Master's and Ph.D. level students.