

## **Confession(s) of Faith** **Brad Jersak**

What follows is a confession of faith that clarifies the doctrines to which I subscribe.

**The difficulty of such confessions** is four-fold.

1. The very idea of a *personal* doctrinal statement seems to me oxymoronic, in that the Christian faith was ‘once for all delivered’ (Jude 1:3) – a particular Gospel received by and passed on to the Church (1 Cor. 15:3). The best we can do is to identify the heart of that faith and consent to it, rather than composing our own private or even denominational belief systems.
2. The idea of a *single* confessional statement is also problematic in that both the Bible and the early Church orbit around several summary hymns and creeds, which comprise a constellation of affirmations that all orthodox believers agreed on for the first three centuries of Christianity.
3. The apostles and their successors did not always agree and were willing to speculate freely and broadly about theology. But to maintain unity, they kept dogma (what one *must* believe) to a bare minimum ... just eight sentences after three centuries! To venture beyond the brief historic creeds led to the schisms that fractured unity.
4. Finally, various confessions answer different sets of questions, sort of like asking what suit is ‘trump’ in a game of blackjack or how many points a ‘free throw’ gets in a hockey game. So please forgive me if the following confession answers different sets of questions than the reader might be asking.

### **The Symbol of Faith (the Nicene Creed)**

As an Orthodox believer, I believe in what the historic Church has called ‘the symbol of faith,’ a doctrinal statement that was formalized in 325 and finalized in 381 – all Christians at that time agreed upon these dogmas as the essentials of our faith. We pray this creed together every Sunday morning during the Divine Liturgy and I attempt to pray it daily, because I believe theology is primarily derived from prayer and worship. You will notice that it is also communal, not private, in that we say ‘we believe’:

1. We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.
2. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten, begotten of the Father before all ages. Light of Light; true God of true God; begotten, not made; of one essence with the Father, by whom all things were made;

3. Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man.
4. And He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried.
5. And the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again with glory to judge the living and the dead; whose Kingdom shall have no end.
6. And [we believe] in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.
7. In one Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins.
8. I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

With the Nicene Creed, the Church came to the climax of her Christian confessions, but we cannot help but also look back further, to the Root – to Jesus himself, who alone embodied perfect theology.

### **Jesus is the only perfect theology**

John 1:14 (NIV)

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:18 (NIV)

No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and\* is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

John 14:9 (NIV)

Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

Colossians 1:15 (NIV)

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

Colossians 2:9 (NIV)

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.

Hebrews 1:1-3 (NIV)

1 In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he

appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. 3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

### **Jesus is our final authority**

Believing and confessing that Jesus is Lord, he is thus also our final authority for faith and practice. Three interdependent witnesses affirm, confirm and communicate the will of Christ and together, exalt and establish his word and work in the world, in the church and in our lives. These are:

1. *The written word of God*—the Holy Scriptures—inspired by the Spirit and interpreted Christo-centrally through the lens of the Gospel testimony;
2. *The body of Christ*—the Church local and universal—empowered by God as witnesses to receive and proclaim on the faith once for all delivered through and to the saints;
3. *The Spirit of Truth*—the Holy Spirit—whose ministry extends all that Jesus began to do and to say in the earth, through his grace-empowered disciples (Acts 1:1).

### **The Finished Work of Christ**

As the Incarnate Word made Flesh, Jesus words and works, recorded in the four Gospels, reveal the nature of the triune God. The 'finished work of Christ' actually extends throughout Jesus' whole life and ministry, climaxing in Jesus Passion—including his death on the Cross and his Resurrection on the third day—and his subsequent ascension and heavenly enthronement. Reflecting on these events, the apostles saw and proclaimed why Christ had come and what he has accomplished. They proclaim:

1. Christ's *definitive self-revelation* of the cruciform God who is, by nature, the co-suffering, radically forgiving Lord of unfailing love and mercy. This God was in Christ, the living Sacrifice who emptied himself and laid down his life to reconcile us to himself (Rom. 5:6–10; Phil. 2:5–11; 1 John 4:9–10; 2 Cor. 5:19).
2. Christ's *decisive victory* over the power of sin, the condemnation of the law, the bondage of the devil and the sentence of death (John 12:31; 16:11; Col 2:13–15; Heb. 2:15). He is the risen King who holds the keys to death and hades (Rev. 1), which were swallowed up in his victory (1 Cor. 15:54).
3. Christ's *complete identification* with humankind. Assuming and participating fully in human nature (Heb. 4:14–15), Christ stood in as substitute—doing for us what we could not do for ourselves—loving God and fulfilling the law of

love perfectly, while overcoming Satan, sin and death on our behalf. He identified with us so that we might identify with him—we die with him that we might rise with him. And so we experience his grace and participate in his divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). As we behold him, we are transfigured into the image and likeness of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18) by the power of the Holy Spirit.

## **The Jesus Creed**

Just as I have attempted to lay out the central dogmas of the apostolic church, so Jesus himself both confessed (probably many times daily) and fulfilled the *Shema*, the Jewish creed that he summarized as follows:

“Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul,  
with all your mind, and with all your strength.”

This is the first and greatest commandment.

And the second is like it:

“Love your neighbor as yourself.”

All the Law and Prophets hang on these two commandments.

(Matt. 22:37-40)

Alongside this, I believe that the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7), Jesus’ first recorded sermon in the NT, includes the heart of his teaching. In it, he distills and again fulfills the whole of the Law and the Prophets, and lays the foundation for the Kingdom of God. I endeavor to live and pray two portions of that text daily, as central to my confession of faith:

## **The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–12)**

Blessed are *the poor in spirit*, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are *those who mourn*, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are *the meek*, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are *those who hunger and thirst for righteousness*, for they shall be filled.

Blessed are *the merciful*, for they shall obtain mercy.

Blessed are *the pure in heart*, for they shall see God.

Blessed are *the peacemakers*, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are *those who are persecuted* for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of  
against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your  
reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

“In this manner, therefore, pray:

‘Our Father in heaven,

Hallowed be Your name.

Your kingdom come.

Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.

Amen.”