



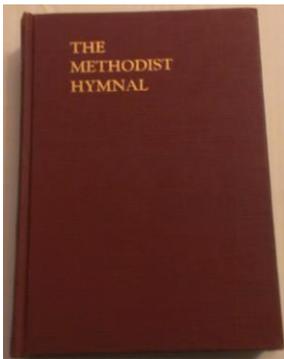
“From Where I Sit ...”

“What Do We Believe? ... Affirmation or Recitation?”

More than 40 years ago, shortly after earning my undergraduate degree at the University of Cincinnati, while still living in my off campus apartment, a pair of Jehovah’s Witnesses (a young woman and a young man) knocked at my door late one morning. After inviting them in and briefly engaging in some basic generalities they got down to the business of attempting to challenge my faith as a Methodist. They were young people about my age who seemed to follow a script similar to what some businesses provide to new employees who are sent out on cold calls. The script appeared to be designed such that, if permitted, the intent was to undermine my present faith and to create within me a receptivity to their beliefs. Their first specific question was *“Did I believe in the Trinity?”* As soon as the word *“Yes”* escaped my lips, they immediately pounced, questioning how I could believe in three gods when everyone knows that even our own bible says there is only one God. Having recently completed both my 2nd and my 3rd year tests as a local preacher on trial, I just happened to be well-prepared to defend my answer by saying *“I only believed in one God whose majesty was so incomprehensibly great as to be able to manifest his God’s self in ‘three’ persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit).”* Unprepared in their script for such a defense as my answer to their first question, they immediately moved on to a deeper question, *“What did I believe?”* My response was instant and dynamic as I began to affirm my faith by stating the Apostles’ Creed. Totally unprepared for these responses, the young woman (who had thus far led the discussion) now, somehow in the midst of their visit, determined that I was a busy person and that they should no longer detain me from my many responsibilities and then asked if I would be willing to receive a call later during the week to further continue this discussion. Of course I said yes and since that day in August of 1970 I have been waiting for the call that for some reason has never come.



I like to tell this story, because it reminds me not only of the importance of being prepared to defend your faith but also the importance of knowing what you believe. Since my early conversion as a child I always expected that the challenge to my faith would come in the person of an evil, ominous, devilish creature. I was in no way prepared for my faith to be challenged by two young people, about my own age, who had come into my home as religious persons. Knowing the Apostles’ Creed gave me the edge I needed to rise above the mask of the confusion intended to be caused by those who came in my own form to challenge my faith. Since that day,



affirmations of faith have come to have a greater meaning to me as a growing Christian. As a child, I grew up in a small, rural church in Southwest Alabama that didn’t have many of the modern attributes of larger churches like worship bulletins. Our hymnals were the old books of the Methodist Episcopal Church before it became the United Methodist Church [The Methodist Hymnal, © 1939, © renewal 1960]. As an acolyte and an altar boy who often participated in the leadership of worship by reading the scriptures, offering prayers and reciting the special readings from the hymnal during the offering period, I also had the opportunity to read and learn the four different affirmations or statements of faith (the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Modern Creed, and the Korean Creed). As I would read and compare these similar, yet different credal statements, I found their messages and the intents of their messages enlightening. From that

point forward, whenever I quoted one of the affirmations, I recognized that I was doing more than just reciting what the leader of worship had led. I realized that I was reaffirming my promise of faith in the One God whose majesty manifested itself in the three-forms that were necessarily intended to enhance the life I must live and my Christian walk of faith.

However, today as I share in worship with others, I am often baffled by the way I see us as Methodists participate in our affirmation of our faith. First of all, in almost 99% of the occurrences, the affirmation of faith most often chosen is the Apostles' Creed. Now I have no problem with the Apostles' Creed. It has always been the stalwart of my faith. What troubles me are the disengaged expressions I see on faces and the detached attitudes of those who appear to be expressing their faith by just "going through the motions." This creedal statement should be for us as Christians as is the pledge of allegiance to us as Americans. If I am correct, then what I continue to see in church after church is more of a recitation rather than an affirmation of a creedal statement. I believe for most of us, the call to affirm our faith on Sunday morning has become an opportunity for us to recite, in unison with others, what we may have learned in a New Member Class or from a copy printed in a worship bulletin. We say it to get through it without any thought of what we are saying and after it has been said there is no after thought of what it may have meant.

This brings us to the question of "What can be done about it?" I believe that the affirming of our faith is not just an affirmation. It is also a Wesleyan Means of Grace as in the sharing of our faith. As such, perhaps some time should be set aside in a congregational setting to focus (or refocus) on the meaning and importance of affirmations of faith (the Apostles' Creed or otherwise). It could be in Sunday School, in weekly Bible Study, perhaps briefly during a worship service, or at another time. Also, occasionally (once a year, once a quarter or at special times of the year) substituting the Modern Creed or the Nicene Creed may encourage parishioners to focus more closely on the Affirmation of Faith as a creedal statement that can be expressed in several different forms. And finally, just as in all other aspects of life, it is important that we teach each generation and re-teach older generations the significance of these statements and what it means to make or state an affirmation. For the sake of the 99% who have been limited to only the Apostles' Creed, here following are the Modern Creed and the Nicene Creed:

A Modern Affirmation

Minister: Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is one true Church, apostolic and universal, whose holy faith let us now declare:

Minister and People: We believe in God the Father, infinite in wisdom, power, and love, whose mercy is over all his works, and whose will is ever directed to his children's good.

We believe in Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of man, the gift of the Father's unfailing grace, the ground of our hope, and the promise of our deliverance from sin and death.

We believe in the Holy Spirit as the divine presence in our lives, whereby we are kept in perpetual remembrance of the truth of Christ, and find strength and help in time of need.

We believe that this faith should manifest itself in the service of love as set forth in the example of our blessed Lord, to the end that the kingdom of God may come upon the earth. **AMEN.**

The Nicene Creed

Minister: Let us unite in this historic confession of the Christian faith:

Minister and People: 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 the 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, through whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also 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, the giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets. And I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins. And I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. **Amen.**

Those of you who have attended the Annual CME Unity Summit and its forerunner, the Annual CME Convocation, have already been exposed to these different creedal statements. On occasions we have also found them in the worship programs of our other Connectional meetings. These were times when the Church would come together in worship and praise and these were times when we have interspersed the Modern Creed or the Nicene Creed with the Apostles' Creed. In these settings, our worship experiences were also examples of how we could enhance our worship in the local churches. We should know what we believe and we should know how to defend our faith, but if all we do is just call the words without any real meaning, then it surely will not matter which creedal statement we recite. It's important what we say and it's important how we say it. Or at least that's the way it looks to me ...

"From Where I Sit"

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(Copies of earlier articles may be found on the

Personnel Services Webpage of the CME Website at www.thecmechurch.org)