

The Church Guardian

— EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR: —

L. H. DAVIDSON, D.C.L., MONTREAL.

— ASSOCIATE EDITOR: —

REV. EDWYN S. W. PENTREATH, B.D., Winnipeg, Man.

Address Correspondence and Communications to
the Editor, P.O. Box 504. Exchanges to P.O.
Box 1008. For Business announcements
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Special Notice.

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CALENDAR FOR NOVEMBER.

- Nov. 1st—ALL SAINTS,
“ 6th—22nd Sunday after Trinity.
“ 13th—23rd Sunday after Trinity.
“ 20th—24th Sunday after Trinity.
“ 27th—1st Sunday in ADVENT. [Notice of
St. Andrews.
“ 30th—ST. ANDREWS, A. & M. (Athanasian
Creed).

A DEFENCE OF CREEDS.

From a Sermon by the Rt. Rev. W. C. Magee,
D.D., Lord Bishop of Peterborough.

“If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”—Rom. x. 9, 10.

“With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

It is quite clear from these words that the Church to which they were addressed must have had a creed, must have had a public confession of faith, a form of words in which men with the mouth confess their belief in Jesus Christ. Even if these words do not tell us this, we know as a matter of historical fact and certainty that this Church and all the early Churches had their creeds, their public confession of faith, had that faith once delivered to the saints, that creed which the Apostle says we are earnestly to contend for, had some form of words such as he speaks of also given to the saints. No doubt beyond any manner of question the only Churches from the very first had each one of them a public confession of faith. But these words of the Apostle are remarkable, not merely for telling us what we might have known from other sources, that all the early Churches had creeds, but for telling us something very remarkable about the importance and the necessity of creeds, for telling us how vital and how essential a thing it is that a Church should have a creed. If you observe, the Apostle says, “For with the heart a man believeth,” but that is not enough for salvation—with the heart he is to believe unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. The Apostle here distinctly tells us that salvation is, if not entirely, largely dependent upon the fact of a public creed, for by a public confession of faith man's salvation is helped. That is what the Apostle tells us here.

A Church, then, a society of men who shall believe in Him, the Founder of that Church,

was the way Christ pleased men should be brought to salvation. It might have pleased Him otherwise to make each man believe on Him, but it did not so please Him, and, in order to take men out of the world and save them, He founded a Church.

A Creed, then, is the very idea of Christ's society or Church, for surely a religious society founded on the rock of confession, of Jesus Christ's divinity, that He is the Son of God, must have that for its very basis of existence. It must be a Church or society that believes in Him. In fact, we cannot conceive to ourselves any society or association that has not some central principle meant to distinguish it from other societies. You could not form a society to-morrow political or social, that would not have its creed. Now the Lord says, My society has its creed, its fixed principle and basis of belief, and that is to be publicly professed by those who join. And our Lord says baptism is to be the entrance to His Church: “Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” Therefore by the law which Christ impressed upon His Church from the very first, it had its creeds, for in this law we read these two things, that man to be saved according to the ordinary rule of God's dealing in the matter must enter the Church of Christ through baptism, and that those baptized into the Church must believe in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and must, therefore, in their baptism make a public profession of their belief. The Apostle, then, is only proclaiming the basis of Christ's Church when he says that the mouth confesses salvation.

Then go further, and see how this profession of belief in the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is not only the law of Christ for His Church, but we will see in what way it is helpful to the salvation of men. First, it is helpful to them if it is necessary for them to be saved, that they should think rightly of God and Christ, and it is so necessary. If that be necessary, surely it is no small help for them that they are not left to find out for themselves what they are to believe of God and Christ, but from the very first they are certainly taught in Christ's Church the great facts which they are to believe. Those who disparage creeds are commonly in the habit of saying, “I believe in no creed of man's invention; I believe in the Bible, and nothing else.” My good friend, be very thankful to God that is not your case if you think it is—you are not left to find out for yourself your creed from the Bible. There is not a man in this world who believes in a creed that he or she has learned from the Bible. You learned your creed, I hope, long before you read the Bible, from your parents, from your Sunday-school teachers, learned it by heart, and repeated it in Church; if, instead of that, you had been left to search out for yourselves all these facts and doctrine of the Creed, the probability is that your creed would have been too long and too short, that it would have included many things unnecessary to salvation and left out some that are. Men talk of preaching the Gospel, the pure Gospel, of believing only the Gospel, and not troubling themselves with creeds and formulas, and they are really ignorant that the Gospel taught by the Apostles was little less or little more than what we call the Apostles' Creed. It was a great fact that the Father in heaven, and the Son on earth, and the great Spirit came down from heaven; it was the great facts of the Creed that was the Gospel that the Apostles preached. St. John speaks of his gospel. What was it? “Christ rose on the third day according to my gospel.” The Gospel was the Creed; it was the great truths of fact, of Christianity, and we cannot be too thankful for this, that we have them in the Creed, and are not left to gather them for ourselves. True, and most true it is, that these rest on the authority of the Bible; true, and most true, as our Church tells us,

they are to be received because they can be proved by God's Holy Word. But proving a truth and discovering a truth are not one and the same thing. They are taught us by the Church first; we prove or test them by the Bible afterward, just as in the early days of the Church the Creed preceded the New Testament part of the Bible. Men learned creeds and were baptized, and were admitted to the Holy Communion before a line or a letter of gospel or epistle was ever written; but the gospel and the epistle are the document in which we prove and learn to understand fully all the deep meaning of our Creed; and, I repeat it, it was not the purpose or intent of God that we were to learn our Creed from the Bible, each one of us for ourselves. We are thankful, then, for the help to salvation that our creeds are to us, and that we are not left to find out our faith for ourselves.

Next let us see how this public repetition and profession of the Creed help our salvation. By repeating for years the great truths of the Christian Church, learned not in later years, when the mind is distracted with the cares of life, but in early youth, when the mind is wax to receive and marble to retain impressions; on the sacred knees of a mother the child is taught, and remembers them ever after; deep printed on the child's heart, on the child's memory, are the saving truths of the Creed, and we repeat them again and again in public, and they abide with us. So, for the teaching of our religion, for the very remembering of our religion, the Creed is of priceless value, and helps us to our salvation.

And here we may remark upon the insufficiency of the objections that are so commonly made to creeds. I have dealt with one—that we put the Creed in the place of Scripture. We do not. The Scripture proves the Creed, and the Creed is gathered out of Holy Writ. We are told, “Your creeds are so strongly intolerant; you tell men it is necessary to their salvation to believe them.” We do, undoubtedly. We have not made it so necessary—we believe that God has made it so necessary—that having sent His Son into the world to die for men, and having raised Him up for their salvation, He has not done this for nothing, and left it a matter of indifference whether man should believe in that. For, the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and the descent of His Holy Spirit, and the great fact of our redemption, are facts which it is as necessary for us to know and believe as it is necessary for us to know other things, and know them for safety's sake for our body and mind. We do not think that a doctor is intolerant because he says this or that mode of life, or this or that remedy, is needful for our health—we think his advice helpful wise, but not intolerant. We do not think it intolerant for an arithmetician to tell us that we must believe that two and two make four, and not two and two make five; we do not think an astronomer intolerant who tells us that we must believe that the earth goes round the sun, and not the sun round the earth; and why should we hold a Christian teacher an intolerant man, who, being firmly convinced of the creeds in his faith as the arithmetician or the astronomer of his science, says, I am intolerant on this point because I hold this principle, that truth is intolerant of error? A man may be tolerant where he doubts, but no man can be intolerant where he distinctly believes. If you say a thing is that or this you must be intolerant of the assertion that the thing is not this or that. You may say, “I don't know it;” you may be tolerant of this or that, but if I am convinced it is true I must say in common charity, “This is true and important, and it is dangerous for you to doubt or deny it.”

There is another objection to our creeds, that they are set and formal; more than that that we should trust to the guidance of God's Holy Spirit, and not to creeds and formularies. Undoubtedly our creeds are formal. But it is not