

CREEDS AND STATEMENTS OF FAITH

Edward Fudge

An inquirer asks, "What is the difference between creeds and statements of faith, and why do the Churches of Christ generally oppose both?"

The English word "creed" comes from the Latin verb "credo," meaning "I believe," so the word itself points to a "statement of faith." From a practical standpoint, churches (or denominations) usually have creeds, while all sorts of parachurch organizations have "statements of faith," although there are exceptions in both regards. Most denominations accept into membership people who do not subscribe to their creed, but do require its acceptance by those serving as official leaders (pastor, elder, deacon) and by those who would be church teachers.

Thomas and Alexander Campbell, founding fathers of the Churches of Christ, did not oppose "the use" of creeds (to identify and locate a church on the theological landscape, or as a teaching tool), but they strongly oppose "the abuse" of creeds (as a measure of Christian soundness or to identify a "true Christian"). When creeds were "abused," in the Campbells' view they became divisive and did more harm than good. Churches of Christ have traditionally gone further than the Campbells did, and have rejected the "use" of creeds as well. Interestingly, we have sometimes fooled ourselves on this point, having simply substituted an unwritten creed for a written one, then used it in a way our pioneers would have considered abusive.

The so-called Apostles' Creed, which dates in some form to the second century, is widely used across the entire Christian spectrum and can be used comfortably by any Christian congregation, if one remembers that the word "catholic" simply means "universal" and refers to all of Christ's people through the centuries and around the world. Some Churches of Christ today are joining believers of other denominations in using the Apostles' Creed, consciously expressing a sense of place in the universal Christian Church.

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