

Creeds & Confessions of Faith in Orthodoxy

Presented at “Faith of Our Fathers: A Colloquium on Orthodoxy for Lutherans”

A Lutheran who sincerely and fairly examines Orthodoxy will find commonality in more areas than not; he will be intrigued by many ceremonies and not a few doctrinal nuances; he will bump up against some things that are flatly contradicted in Lutheranism; he will be surprised by what he learns about his own faith; he will cry out for a lexicon as he attempts to navigate his way through new or similar sounding terms; and he will scratch his head in bewilderment at several points. But my experience has taught me that a Lutheran’s greatest frustration will be attempting to make adequate comparisons. For the first instinct a Lutheran has is to look for a document or a series of documents in Orthodoxy which resemble the 1580 Book of Concord. Perhaps, in his investigation, a Lutheran will come across a list of “Orthodox confessional documents” such as those provided by Bishop Kallistos Ware in his book, *The Orthodox Church*. And perhaps in his search the Lutheran will come across a multitude of Orthodox catechisms, which differ widely in format and arrangement and which are quite unlike the concise, well conceived *Small Catechism* of Martin Luther. And then perhaps he will be cheered by the systematic manner in which Patriarch Jeremias responds to the Tübingen theologians—a pattern that closely resembles the outline of the *Augsburg Confession*. Nevertheless his frustration will remain and, like not a few, he will conclude in despair that Orthodoxy has no doctrinal standard, or that its doctrinal standard is similar to nailing jello to a wall.

Let me state plainly and bluntly from the start that Orthodoxy *does* have a doctrinal standard. That standard, which like much in Orthodoxy does not measure up to post-reformational standards, is the Tradition of the Church. What that means I shall describe in this presentation, as well as how it relates to Orthodoxy’s understanding of creeds and confessions of faith. Let it suffice, however, that the Tradition of the Church can be most easily accessed in the Church’s Liturgy. In the words of Anastasios Kallis, “The identity of Orthodoxy consists neither in a doctrine nor in an organizational system, but in the correct praise of the Triune God, which has its center in the celebration of the Eucharist, or simply in the *Liturgy*, through which the one congregation assembled in the name of Christ becomes his body, his church.”¹ According to Jaroslav Pelikan (a former Lutheran), Orthodoxy’s particular view of liturgy as prayed creed indicates “a principal reason for [the] ambivalent position of ‘symbolical books’ within...Orthodoxy.” Let us understand, however, that Orthodoxy sees the liturgy as of the Spirit; and that for Orthodoxy liturgy is within the matrix called Tradition. While the comparison is not precise, the frustrated Lutheran might consider Tradition comparable to his Book of Concord. Therefore, to compare apples to apples, he might want to examine Orthodoxy’s liturgy alongside Lutheranism’s confessional documents.

While Orthodoxy’s liturgy may be the easiest way for a Lutheran both to compare doctrinal content and to access the Church’s Tradition, one must understand the overall place, use and purpose of creeds and confessions of faith in Orthodoxy. That is what I will endeavor to describe and illustrate in my presentation. I shall first begin by describing how confessing the Faith is a doxological act and not merely a series of propositions. I shall then

¹ In Pelikan, *Credo*, p. 405.

briefly describe how the Orthodox teaching of the Church underlies the confession of the Faith. And finally I will describe how creeds and confessions of the faith are part of the greater matrix that is the Church's Tradition. In all this, I ask the Spirit by the prayers of Your Eminence and my learned brethren to correct and guide me should I, a novice, misrepresent in any way the mind of Holy Mother Church.

I.

Creedal statements and confessions of faith have a long and storied history in the Church and among other Christian communions. Some of the Church's creeds or confessions are very simple and straight-forward. Others are rather long and complex. Some have been formulated chiefly for liturgical use—such as the *Apostolic Creed* used in the Western Orthodox baptismal rite. Others have been formulated in the face of heresy—such as the *Definition of Faith of the Council of Chalcedon*. And one in particular serves double duty: formulated in the face of heresy to describe the Orthodox faith, the *Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed* also is recited at least every Sunday at the Church's Mass or Divine Liturgy. All creeds or confessions of faith, even the shortest and “simplest,” employ technical theological and philosophical language which, in turn, requires further explanation, instruction or interpretation. Some employ words that are invented, resurrected, redefined, or highly nuanced in order to explain difficult or unthinkable concepts.

Yet the key question is not how to classify or distinguish creeds or confessions. The key question is, “What is the purpose and role of a creed or confession of faith?” The Church's answer has consistently been that creeds and confessions of faith provide the ὑΠΩΤ ὑΠΩΣΙΝ, the pattern or “form of sound words...in faith, and in the love which is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Tim 1.13) As such, creeds and confessions establish acceptable phrases while simultaneously circumscribing unacceptable patterns of speech. These patterns of sound words, in turn, are multivalent in their application to theology. As an example, consider the phrase “begotten, not made.” With these three words the *Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed* declares that the Arian notions of the creation by God of His latter-made Son are outside the boundary of the Orthodox faith. The phrase, however, also establishes the notion that the “begottenness” of the Son refers not to the commencement of a new essence or being, but to the eternal relationship between two consubstantial persons. At the same time, the words “begotten, not made” provide an hermeneutic for certain seemingly difficult passages (e.g., Prov 8.22-31). Finally, that little phrase becomes the common linguistic coin of all anti-Arians—the terse, simple way of recalling what the Church confesses and believes about the Son of God.

As one becomes acquainted with the history, the immediate context and the early use of the various creeds or confessions of faith, one is tempted to conclude that the “pattern of sound words” in creeds or confessions of faith are primarily, if not exclusively, a summary of theological data drawn either from the Bible or from interpretations of the Bible. To be sure, creeds and confessions are summaries. However, to see them chiefly as summaries of data runs the risk of locating creeds and confessions of faith within an unOrthodox concept of a “development of doctrine.” For it seems reasonable that, if creeds and confessions collect and summarize theological data, then creeds and confessions do not articulate and describe the norm “which always, at all times, by everyone” has been believed (*quod semper, quod ubique, quod ab omnibus*). Rather, they give one perspective—

perhaps even a very important perspective—of the Faith. If that is the case, then creeds and confessions of faith do not articulate what has always been believed, but rather provide a forum by those in control to determine, delineate and promulgate what *should* be believed based on approved interpretations. Many historians of church doctrine and theology, trained as they are in the critical science of history, have concluded precisely this; namely, that creeds and confessions of faith are chiefly means of imposing, from a position of might, a particular theological conclusion on the aberrant or the “party not in power.” Frankly, some of the behavior at councils and synods seems to bolster the historian’s case. However, despite the machinations of politically savvy bishops or emperors, the Church has accepted various creeds and confessions not because she acquiesced to either majority rule or a desire for peace. For the Church, creeds and confessions serve not pride but faith. Therefore, the Church embraces particular creeds and confessions because they articulate that which the Church believes, confesses and teaches.

When one considers this triadic role that creeds and confessions play—the role of articulating what the Church believes, confesses and teaches everywhere, by all, and at all times—Jaroslav Pelikan reminds us that most often the emphasis has landed rather heavily on doctrine, rather than on believing and confessing.² When doctrine takes center stage and becomes the lead character, creeds and confessions are squeezed into an academic mold—a mold that is concerned chiefly with precision; that seeks to distinguish sometimes to the point of schism; that reveres the classroom; that sees catechesis as the Church’s chief activity; and that eventually sees liturgy as one among several educational exercises. It is not Orthodox to belittle doctrine, or to seek to subjugate doctrine to mystical experience or mysticism. The greatest mystics were men of doctrine and catechesis; men who considered, explained and described the experience, the living, of the faith. Yet they also realized the proper place of doctrine; namely, that teaching, *per se*, does not lead to faith, but rather comes from what is believed and confessed. In other words, while creeds or confessions of faith state what is believed, doctrine then teaches what is confessed.

The Holy Apostle Paul states that *if thou confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in thy heart that God hath raised him up from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For, with the heart, we believe unto justice; [and] with the mouth, confession is made unto salvation.* (Rom 10.9-10) He then continues by speaking about preaching—the act of proclaiming or teaching the *kyregma*; that is, content of what is believed and confessed. Let me suggest that we do well to pay attention to the ordering of the concepts by the holy apostle. It is not unlike the order of the words when the Lord says, *You are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen: that you may know, and believe me, and understand that I myself am.* (Is 43.10) The word order the Lord chooses indicates theological priority: we know (γινωσκεις) and believe and understand. In other words, we do not understand in order to believe so that we might know. Rather, we understand what we believe due to the knowing—the profound relationship—we have in and with God. In the same way, the Holy Apostle states that believing begets confessing which, in turn, begets proclaiming and teaching. In other words, the triad is “believe, confess and teach.”

Now I freely admit that I may be parsing the triad of “believe, confess and teach” a bit too finely; for I will also freely admit that the three—believing, confessing and teaching—are symbiotically intertwined and therefore cannot always be neatly separated.

² Pelikan, *Credo*, 53.

Nevertheless, to understand the Orthodox view of creeds and confessions, it is necessary to understand that doctrine does not form creeds but springs from them; and therefore the primary purpose of creeds or confessions of faith is to articulate doxologically what is believed, rather than to provide content for instruction; and that while creeds or confessions of faith are norms and boundaries for what is taught, that is not their primary role. The primary role of creeds and confessions of faith—and their rightful home—is not the classroom, but the liturgy. I say this not because this is what some of them have become, but because that is where they came from. Consider the two chief confessions of faith—the Apostolic and the *Niceno-Constantinopolitan* Creeds. Both begin as regional baptismal creeds—the rite where we come to know the Lord, and where we confess the Lord who makes Himself known to us. I do not consider that coincidental, but elemental to understanding the nature of these creeds that they two in particular began in the liturgy and, to this day, remain in the baptismal liturgies of the Eastern and Western rites of the Church. This doxological use suggests that creeds and confessions of faith do not chiefly systematize theological constructs but describe what it means to *know the Lord*. (Jer 31.34; Heb 8.11; Hos 6.3) Hence, they are not chiefly about what we know about God or how we describe that knowledge (ἐπιστημη); rather they are about knowing God intimately and faithfully (γνωσις). Put yet one more way, creeds and confessions of faith first aid the heart and mouth, and then also the mind, in articulating the God we know (γνωσις) in the profound relationship that the words “faith” and “believing” and “trust” describe.

To illustrate this crucial point, let me offer two brief asides. The first is historical. It is significant that when the floodgates of catechumens were opened after St Constantine legalized and legitimized Christianity, the means of receiving catechumens did not change. This was not because the bishops were caught off-guard or because Orthodoxy is, by definition, slow to change. Rather, it is because this theological priority still held fast. If the lectures of St Cyril of Jerusalem are any indication, understanding, particularly as it related to the sacred mysteries, clearly took a back seat. To be sure, the catechumens were instructed prior to their initiation and incorporation into the Church’s sacramental life. However, first they had to make confession. And then they were instructed chiefly on the basis of what they had seen and heard in the liturgy. In other words, catechesis was not a systematic attempt to instill understanding or cognitive knowledge. Rather, it was an explanation of the relationship that they had entered as catechumens—the relationship or knowing of God which they experienced in the liturgy. Yet they stood, as it were, in the narthex and so were dismissed before the sacred mysteries were dispensed. They were dismissed, not because practice had not caught up with the new political situation, but because the consummation of their knowledge, their relationship, had to wait. As they waited, they were instructed in the Faith, but not yet in the sacraments they would receive—something that might seem rather odd to us. That explanation of the sacraments waited until after they had received them, after they had experienced them, after they entered into the next stage of the relationship, after they had returned, as it were, from the honeymoon. So the catechumens were not instructed or made to understand so that they could better receive and believe what was coming; rather, they were granted understanding after they had come to the knowledge of Truth Himself—a knowledge they came to in the sacred mysteries.

And now, my second aside which is also historical—personal history. Because understanding does not bring us to believing or the relationship called “knowing the Lord,” we cannot read ourselves into the Church. Yet that is precisely what many think. “First I must understand; first I must have all of my nagging questions answered; first I must make sure all the pieces fit. Then I’ll commit.” That is what I firmly believed and stubbornly thought for nearly 20 years. It is a seductive temptation. I once thought that I could read myself into the truth of Orthodoxy. And I was hoping that, as I searched, I would stumble across the right book, the right set of words or the right argument that would make everything click. Yet in time I realized two things. First, that line of thought is not unlike trying to conjure a vision so that you might believe. But vision conjuring is putting God to the test. And reading yourself into Orthodoxy is forcing the Church to be an academic endeavor when, in fact, the Church is a living entity. Second, I came to realize that no matter how little or how much one has read, when one stands before the altar he is not asked what he knows but if he believes; and if believing, will he trust and obey. That is what the Church asks of all infants, regardless of age. All the Church asks is that you trust Truth Himself—and the fact that, by His Spirit, He comes alive in the Church and, therefore, she will not steer you wrong.

II.

This, in turn, leads to the chief question: What is the Church? That question ultimately underlies the Church’s understanding of the place and use of creeds or confessions of faith. For the Church is not a creation of creeds or confessions. Neither is it an organization of those who hold certain truths to be self-evident. Rather, the Church is a living organism—Christ Himself animated by the Holy Spirit in the lives of the saints and faithful.

As a living organism, the Church is not bodiless. It is the body of Christ. And as the body of Christ, the Church has a human “nature” as well as a “divine nature.” In other words, the Church on earth and the Church in heaven are one. Moreover, there is truly an identifiable, material organism called “The Church.” So the organizations called “church” are not (*à la* Plato) cheap copies of an ideal Church in heaven. Neither are they some sort of outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual fellowship of believers. Rather, there is one identifiable communion of churches that is the ongoing continuation of those 3000 whom the Apostles baptized on the first Pentecost Sunday.

This belief in the true visible Church is necessary for two reasons. First, it is christologically necessary. The Church confesses that Christ is both human and divine. It knows no other Christ. While it may speak speculatively or chronologically about a pre-incarnate Logos, the Church does not *know* (γινωσκεις) a pre-incarnate Logos. Rather, the Church *knows* only the One who is both eternally begotten of the Father and born of the Virgin Mary. Hence, His body, which the Church is, must also have both aspects of the human and divine. Not human in the sense that the body of Christ is found in unidentifiable believers scattered in disparate communions; but human in the same sense that Christ is human—in a discernable, visible body. To the world the true Church looks like (and regrettably often acts like) all other mortal and flawed organizations; yet Christ also looked like a mortal and flawed person since He was capable of suffering, endured wounds and died. But to faith the Church is seen to be no different than Christ: of the Father animated

by the Spirit; mortal yet immortal; receiving sinners and living with sin, yet holy and perfect; flawed yet infallible; suffering yet glorified. But above all, the Church is seen to be one. Not one by virtue of what will be, but one in being and in truth. Not one because here and there people have determined to be “church” or “church-like,” but one because there is one communion of bishops to whom the faithful have been sacramentally attached. This, then, is the true Eucharistic fellowship. Not pockets of places where the Gospel is rightly preached and the sacraments rightly administered; but the intercommunion of bishops who rightly divide the word of Truth Himself.

This belief in the true visible Church is necessary not only christologically, but also soteriologically. If the church is only those who have determined to be “church” and who have gathered themselves and called for themselves ministers who will do “church,” then salvation comes not from the Father through the Son in His Spirit. Rather, salvation comes from the ground up—from those creatures who have located or formed or gathered together to do what the Lord has said. Please do not misunderstand. It is necessary for Christians to obey the Lord; and obedience is the way of salvation. However, the Lord’s mercy precedes obedience; and God’s spirit comes before forming, establishing and doing; and the Father’s love begets, sends and bestows His Life through those whom He has chosen. Were it otherwise—were “churches” the building block of the Church—then it would be possible, and in fact probable, that the gates of hell would prevail. But the Lord has guaranteed that *the gates of hell shall not prevail against His Church* (Mt 16.18).

III.

When one ponders that sturdy, unshakable promise which Our Lord makes, one is tempted to believe that it was made as a result of a creed or confession of faith. To be sure, Simon declared of Jesus, “Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus immediately answered that declaration with the blessing of changing his name to the holy Apostle Peter. Yet that blessing came not as a result of St Peter’s rightly chosen words, but in recognition of the Father’s revelation which Simon had received, embraced, welcomed and then repeated. In other words, Christ did not guarantee the permanence of His one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church because the chief apostle had spoken well for the company of the disciples. Rather, Christ’s guarantee was a confirmation of St Peter’s confession of faith; and as such a confirmation of an apostolic creed. It’s as if Our Blessed Lord had said: “If I am the living God, the immortal Son, the anointed Savior, then so is My body. It is immortal, filled with the same Spirit and the anointed, chosen people of God.”

Notice, then, how creeds and confessions of faith work. They are more than summaries of prophecies, digests of promises, and synopses of inspired revelations. They are statements of who Truth is, and what the Spirit has granted us to know, to believe and to understand. If you will, we may call them cataphatic acclamations and affirmations of the God who is eternally apophatic. As such, they don’t declare new insight as much as they articulate the Truth which has always been. And the chief purpose of creeds or confessions of faith is not to define what must now be believed or legislate what must now be confessed or taught; rather, they describe and depict and express—perhaps in new words, perhaps in familiar terms—the unchanging Truth. And they are met, not with new guarantees, but with

reaffirmations of promises, of mercies, and of blessings that have always been available, and always bestowed.

Since creeds and confessions of faith are descriptions more than definitions of the Faith, one statement or one set of statements can never be *the* norm or *the* rule of faith. To be sure, there is a “canon of the Faith” (ὁ κανὼν τῆς πιστῆς) or *regula fidei*. However, this term refers not to one particular statement, or even to a series of approved and authorized statements. Rather, among the earliest theologians—including those who learned from the apostles—“the canon of the Faith” (ὁ κανὼν τῆς πιστῆς) refers to a matrix of items which we may loosely group around these headings: creeds, confessions of faith, Scriptures, liturgy, accepted interpretations of the fathers, and ethical norms. These groups, while not necessarily exhaustive, are neither interchangeable nor independent. Rather, they are interdependent; and they coexist and cohere in each other. As a unit they are ὁ κανὼν τῆς πιστῆς, the *regula fidei*, which has also been called the Tradition. They can be dogmatically, practically and historically distinguished, but they all convey Truth. Yet it is not true statements or propositional truth that creeds have in common. Rather, what they have in common is the Spirit of Truth, whom Christ sends from the Father, who proceeds from the Father, who bears witness of the Son. (Jn 15.26) *This Spirit of Truth the world cannot receive because it seeth Him not nor knoweth Him.* (Jn 14.17) And so those of the world can neither see nor believe how this matrix of creeds, liturgy, Scriptures, confessions of faith, church fathers and ethical norms can be one and the same Canon or Tradition. And often, in our critical science-tending minds, we struggle with the same difficulty, wanting to compare creed and confession, or pit church father against Scripture, or pull Scripture out of Tradition, or denigrate liturgy as man-made and therefore correctable and editable as a product of doctrine.

To aid our understanding, perhaps this analogy borrowed from Vladimir Lossky (of blessed memory) will prove helpful. Lossky argues that Tradition aims not at supplying precise doctrinal content as much as it aims at relationship. So for Lossky, “tradition in its primary notion is the faculty owed to the Holy Spirit, who renders the church capable of knowing [γινώσκεις] the Incarnate Word in his relationship with the Father.” To illustrate what he means, Lossky states that “it is only in the church that one is able to recognize in full consciousness the unity of inspiration of the sacred books, because the church alone possesses the tradition—the knowledge in the Holy Spirit of the Incarnate Word.”³ Apart from the church, one is forced to find connections which are not always unitive or satisfying, and which produce differences in interpretations because of different spirits. Yet, as Lossky states, it is the one Spirit—the Spirit of Truth—who enables the faithful to see the coherence of disparate kinds of sacred writings written in vastly different times and places by known or completely unknown authors. Furthermore, it is this Spirit of Truth which led the Church finally to accept, to receive and to embrace what is now known as the “canonical Scriptures.” In the same way, precisely because He abides with the Church and in the Church, this same Spirit of Truth has led the Church to see, to embrace and to acknowledge not only the coherence in the Scriptures, but also the coherence of Scriptures, liturgy, creeds, church fathers, confessions of faith and ethical norms as ὁ κανὼν τῆς πιστῆς or Tradition. This understanding of ὁ κανὼν τῆς πιστῆς or Tradition has a profound impact on how Orthodoxy views creeds or confessions of faith.

³ Lossky, “Tradition and Traditions” in Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Theology: A Contemporary Reader*, p. 136.

In other Western communions, most notably the confessional or creedal communions, creeds or confessions of faith are seen primarily as doctrinal statements—that is, statements that determine what is to be taught, more than statements that doxologically depict the God who is known. Perhaps this view traces to the particular theological history of the Middle Ages which, both in Eastern and Western churches, produced what Christos Yannaras has termed the “technology of truth” which “[transformed] religious faith into an ideology consisting of a strictly determined world view and obligatory methodology... grounded truth in the syllogism and in the defense of theses by the systematic refutation of contrary statements.”⁴ Clearly, Yannaras engages in overstatement. For, like many, he suggests that the problem is East versus West; yet the questions and problems are not geographical. Nevertheless, his historical hyperbole may help us see some of the broad outlines of the shift from doxological creeds to doctrinal confessions, from Sacred Canon to canon law, from Tradition as the unifying spirit to tradition as another authority. The several confessions of faith produced in reaction to the errors or excess of the church of Rome, as well as Rome’s own “counter-reformation” council, all position themselves not as doxological creeds, but as legally binding doctrinal statements that define what is to be taught in the cities, regions and states; and in the churches and schools. As such, each confesses what each communion believes to be true; but the emphasis, as Pelikan noted, lands squarely on doctrine. This is seen most clearly in the use of thetical and antithetical statements in order to define systems of belief. In this regard, these reformational documents participate in Yannaras’ “technology of truth.”

Of all the post-reformation documents, standing above the rest is, in my estimation, the 1580 Book of Concord and particularly its irenic *Confessio Augustana* (Augsburg Confession). The patristic underpinning, the desire to work within the given ecclesiastical structure, the hesitancy at innovation, and the memory of and longing for earlier doctrine and practice are, to a greater or lesser extent, evident in the documents that comprise the 1580 *Concordia*. Above all, the Book of Concord and especially the Augsburg Confession breathe a spirit not to be right but to hold to the truth. Without a doubt, the Book of Concord presents itself as a confession of what is to be believed both by Lutheran clergy and Lutheran laity. However, functionally and principally, the use and purpose of both the Book of Concord and most (if not all) other confessional documents is prescriptive and proscriptive rather than descriptive. In other words, they do not chiefly describe the tradition (understood as practice as well as doctrine). Rather, they are used by a communion to define its doctrine; that is, the confessional statements prescribe what may be taught and proscribe what may not be taught. Hence, these documents chiefly govern and judge doctrine, they distinguish truth from falsehood, they define one communion against other communions, and they give a standard for doctrinal fitness. The result is that they effectively tear apart Tradition, subdividing it into part which must then be ranked.

That this is true can be seen from the disagreements that arise from time to time concerning the standing of later documents or confessions of faith. Most often, these disagreements revolve around the norming character of the document(s) as it pertains to judging doctrinal disputes. These disagreements are usually fought, and occasionally resolved, by a catena of passages from the Scriptures, the confessional documents and select quotations of favorable forefathers. How these various passages are arranged is

⁴ Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the West*, 2006, p. 12.

enlightening. Usually they are set in a definite, often pre-determined, pecking order: the Scriptures are first, then the earliest creeds, then later confessional documents and then select forefathers. This hierarchy of documents bespeaks not one Tradition where Word and Spirit work in perichoretic harmony. Rather it causes a communion either to work from a preponderance of evidence, or to make doctrinal determinations on the basis of binding, legal interpretations and definitions of a communion's doctrine; or in some cases both.

IV.

While the churches of the East endured—and to some extent still endure—their varied scholasticisms and medievalisms, these churches have never determined to produce legal, binding confessional documents. That is not to say that creeds or confessions of faith have been unimportant in Orthodoxy or that they do not have some definite role. Jaroslav Pelikan reminds us that

they have been at least as powerful within Eastern Christendom since the schism between East and West as they have been in the West, even in the West since the Reformation with its plethora of confessions. And yet, during most of the history of Eastern Orthodoxy, those factors did not produce a vast corpus of confessions of faith, as they had done in the early church and as they went on doing in the West especially during and since the Reformation, but only a select few statements of faith that became more or less official (and usually “less” rather than “more” official). As a result, to a degree that would not be true of most other communions that have official confessions, it is possible for two scholars almost exactly a century apart to speak about the “identity” of Orthodoxy without so much as mentioning these statements of faith.⁵ (399-400)

Creeds or confessions of faith can quickly take on a life of their own, reversing the triad of “believe, confess and teach.” When doctrine takes the lead, then it is not so much that “whore reason” has taken control; rather, it is that an unhealthy imbalance has been established between Logos and Pneuma; between Christ and the Spirit; between the Life of the Living and the Lord and Giver of Life; between the Word of God and the Breath who carries the Father's Word. This balance is properly maintained not by subjugating Scripture to Tradition, but by setting them in the earliest understanding of Tradition—where Scriptures, liturgy, creeds, church fathers, confessions of faith and ethical norms are the various means by which the Spirit of Truth conveys and maintains the true Faith. Hence, the Church has creeds and confessions of faith; but they are not one tier of greater or lesser quality than the other tiers. Rather, the creeds and confessions are part of the matrix called ὁ ΚΑΝΩΝ ΤΗΣ ΠΙΣΤΗΣ or Tradition. And these are a few of the “primary principles” within that matrix: The Faith is ultimately doxological rather than dialectical; it is of the heart and mouth before it is of the mind; it is descriptive rather than prescriptive; and while it may be articulated on any number of papers, it is ultimately limited by our feeble words since it is cataphatic expressions of an eternally apophatic mystery.

Let no one think, however, that because she refuses to rank creeds or confessions, the Church has no doctrinal standard. Most certainly she does. For when questions or disputes

⁵ Pelikan, *Credo*, 399-400.

arise, she continues to return to the well-spring of Tradition where the Spirit, in His wisdom, guides her into all Truth. In this way, the Orthodox Church is not *semper reformanda* but is most certainly *semper paenitentiam*.

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