

# The Creed: What We Believe and Why It Matters

## 3. We Believe in One God

Sunday, January 30, 2005  
10 to 10:50 am, in the Parlor.

*Everyone is welcome!*

**Almighty and everlasting God, you govern all things both in heaven and on earth: Mercifully hear the supplications of your people, and in our time grant us your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.**

**Book of Common Prayer  
Collect for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany**

# THE CREED



WHAT CHRISTIANS BELIEVE  
AND WHY IT MATTERS

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**The Creed. What  
Christians Believe  
and Why It  
Matters, Luke  
Timothy Johnson,  
Doubleday, 2003,  
ISBN 0-385-  
50247-8**



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# Introduction

# Introduction

## The Radical Profession

- The Creed's most radical and important profession:

**We believe in one God,  
the Father,  
the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen**

# Introduction

## The Radical Profession

- We mean God of Scripture, the Living God of Israel, the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ.
- No language about God is adequate: **“All language about God reaches into a mystery it cannot grasp or comprehend.”** (p. 66)

# Introduction

## The Radical Profession

- In declaring this section of the Creed, “**We believe in One God...**,” we are saying:
  - God exists.
    - And so we separate ourselves from agnostics and atheists.
  - God is one.
    - And so we situate ourselves in the biblical story of God’s chosen people
  - God is Father.
    - And so we declare our relationship to the Son of God as God’s adopted children.

# Introduction

## The Radical Profession

- In declaring this section of the Creed, “**We believe in One God....**,” we are saying:
  - God is almighty.
    - And so we respond to the mystery of evil and suffering.
  - God is the maker of heaven and earth.
    - And so we declare that the mystery that anything exists at all is the mystery of God.

**God Exists**

**We believe in one God,**  
the Father,  
the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen

# God Exists

## A Basic Posture Towards Everything

- When we say “God exists,” we commit ourselves to a fundamental posture towards everything else.
- It means we believe:
  - The world we see points to a power or powers beyond our senses.
  - That the physical world is not all that there is, and is contingent on the power beyond our senses

# God Exists

## The Mystery at the Heart of the World

- The reality beyond the senses cannot be measured.
  - We cannot prove it exists.
  - This does not mean it is an empty reality, but only that human measurement is inadequate.
- While we cannot account for the existence of the reality beyond the senses, we also cannot account for the existence of the physical world purely on the basis of itself.

# God Exists

## The Mystery at the Heart of the World

- “There is a mystery at the heart of the world, a mystery that does not yield to direct examination, that refuses to be measured or manipulated, yet suggests its presence in every single thing that we can feel and taste and see and hear and smell in the world.” (p. 68)
- The believer thus dwells in a “magical as well as mythic world”.

# God Exists

## Atheism

- Declaring “God exists” separates us from the atheist.
- We may distinguish two kinds of atheism.

# God Exists

## Two Kinds of Atheism

- 1. **Humanistic Atheism:** A refusal to believe in God based on philosophic and moral grounds.
- 2. **“Practical Atheism.”** A decision of the heart rather than the mind that “There is no God,” and therefore one is free to live an utterly selfish life of corruption and perversity.

# God Exists

## Humanistic Atheism

- We can distinguish two varieties of **humanistic atheism**.
- The first type says:
  - Belief in God is wish fulfillment, and believers are deceiving themselves.
  - Better to accept the reality that existence is “nasty, short and brutish,” and make the best of it by living freely and fully as human persons.

# God Exists

## Humanistic Atheism

- The second variety of humanistic atheism:
  - Rejects belief in God because of the sheer weight and pervasiveness of **evil** in the world.
  - They are morally outraged, and say with Montaigne: **“God’s only excuse is that he does not exist.”**

# God Exists

## Humanistic Atheism

- While the Christian rejects humanistic atheism, we can:
  - Sympathize with their moral and philosophical concerns,
  - Acknowledge that our faith must guard against:
    - Self-delusion.
    - Callousness towards suffering and evil.

# God Exists

## “Practical” Atheism

- Psalm 14: “**The fools says in his heart, “There is no God.”** and lives a life of corruption.
- Practical atheists choose another or other “gods” on which to center their lives. Their lives therefore are lives of **idolatry**.
- To them, the world is no longer an open universe filled with a great power and presence, but a closed system of brute cause and effect that one must learn to play to one’s advantage.

# God Exists

## The Power of Idolatry

- Scripture (see Book of Wisdom 13:1-7, and Romans 1:18-21) both tell us one of the awesome powers of idolatry is to:

**“shape the structures of society so that they suppress the possibility of perceiving the world in any way other than idolatrously.” (p. 71)**

# God Exists

## The Power of Idolatry

- Our world today is filled with powerful structures that channel us into **idolatry**.
- Our society:
  - Fosters radical individualism.
  - Declares competition is the supreme value of life.
  - Rewards greed, emphasizes the acquisition of meaningless things.
  - Enslaves families to an insatiable drive for higher productivity and work, without time for rest and spiritual growth, and camouflages that enslavement with diverting entertainment.

# God Exists

## The Power of Idolatry

- **“What makes the present situation truly distinctive and threatening is that the idolatrous structures can so exercise their control, reinforced by the powers of the electronic media, that people are increasingly incapable of experiencing the “natural” world in ways that would expose as empty idolatry’s claim to absolute control.” (p. 72)**

**God is One**

**We believe in one God,**  
the Father,  
the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen

# God is One

## Reference to the *Shema*

- The *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4): “**Hear O Israel, the LORD your God is One.**”
- The echo of the *Shema* in the Creed reminds us:
  - When we profess the Creed, we are talking about the living God of Israel and the Old Testament.
  - We cannot understand what the Creed says about God and Jesus without the Old Testament.

# God is One

## The Living God of Israel

- Israel probably first thought of YHWH (~“Yahweh”) as the chief tribal of the Hebrews.
  - **Henotheism** (our God is superior to other gods)
  - **Monotheism** (God is the only God)
- Gradually they came to understand that their “top God” was the “only God.”
- Isaiah 44:6 **“I am the first and I am the last; beside me there is no god.”**

# God is One

## The Living God of the New Testament

- Christianity emphasized the One God's sovereignty over all people, not just Israel.
- Peter in Acts 10:54-55:  
**“I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.”**

# God is One

## The Challenge of Dualism

- The declaration “**God is One,**” makes it difficult to explain the “Problem of Free Will,” and the “Problem of Evil.”
  - If the One God is the source of all, how can people be free?
  - If the One God is the source of all, is not God then responsible for evil as well as good?

# God is One

## The Challenge of Dualism

- The Creed specifically rejects the explanation of **dualism** as the explanation for the “Problem of Free Will” and the “Problem of Evil”
- Marcion and Gnosticism had explained these problems by saying there were *two* Gods:
  - (1) The evil God of the Old Testament, who made the evil material universe.
  - (2) The good God Jesus of the New Testament, who came to rescue us from the evil material world and transport us to a purely spiritual realm.

# God is One

## A Oneness with Plurality

- For Jews and Muslims, God's **Oneness** is the same as God's **singleness**.
- Christians differ from Jews and Muslims in asserting that the One God, the one ultimate power who is the source and goal of everything, has within the Godself a complexity, a plurality bearing the names Father, Son and Spirit.
  - We will discuss the Trinity later in this series.

**God is Father**

**We believe in one God,  
the Father,  
the Almighty,  
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of all that is, seen and unseen**

# God is Father

## Chief God as “Father”

- For ancient people, “Father” was a natural designation for a chief god.
  - The people recognized a “Father’s” authority.
  - They could expect the “Father” to govern well, defending the weak, especially his children.

# God is Father

## God as “Father” in Scripture

- The title “Father” for God is firmly rooted in:
  - The prayer life and prophecy of Israel.
  - The prayer life and perceptions of Jesus.
  - The prayer life and experiences of the First Christians.

# God is Father

## God as “Father” in the Old Testament

- God, in the book by the prophet Hosea, says:
  - “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son... it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love, I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them.”

# God is Father

## God as “Father” in the New Testament

- In the New Testament, “Father” is the dominant way of designating God. Involves both:
  - 1. God’s paternal relationship with human beings.
  - 2. God’s relationship with his son, Jesus Christ.

# God is Father

## God as “Father” in the New Testament

- The complex and mysterious relationship between:
  - Jesus as God’s Son,
  - God as the Father of Jesus,
  - The human path to God by becoming the adopted children of God through Jesus
- Can be seen in John 14:6, 10:

# God is Father

## God as “Father” in the New Testament

- “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him... I am in the Father and the Father is in me.”

# God is Father

## Meaning of Calling God Our “Father”

- The meaning for Christians of calling God “Our Father:”

**“Christians approach God not as an impersonal force but as one having in the highest degree those qualities of knowing and loving that we associate with persons.” (p. 81)**

# God is Father

## Meaning of Calling God Our “Father”

- God our Father:
  - Has power and authority.
  - Brings to life, and raises to New Life.
  - Blesses everything with goodness (Matt 5:45-48).
  - Cares for all (Matt 6:26).
  - Reveals his will to the little ones and the ignorant.
  - Shares his rule with the poor in spirit, the meek, the sorrowful, the pure of heart, those who hunger for justice, the peacemakers, the rejected. (Matt 5:5-11).

# God is Father

## Meaning of Calling God Our “Father”

- God our Father:
  - Can see the hearts of his creatures and judge not by appearances, but by reality (Matt 6:4—6:16).
  - Knows what we want before we do (Matt 6:8).
  - Wishes us to receive what is really good for us (Matt 7:11).

# God is Father

## The Problem of Language

- Calling God our “Father” is intended to be personal and positive. But there are problems:
  - It projects on God other male qualities that then become colored with “divinity.”
    - Thus can reinforce arrangements favoring the status and authority of males over females.
    - Mary Daly: **“If God is male, then the male is God.”**
  - Incorrectly implies human female qualities cannot be ascribed to God.

# God is Father

## The Problem of Language

- Remedies:
  - 1. Remove all gendered language about God.
  - 2. Replace male language with female language.
  - 3. Supplement male names with female names.
- Dr. Johnson favors (3) because:
  - It is supported by Scripture.
  - God is as much female as male.
  - It allows us to retain the symbolism of the biblical witness.

# God is Father

## The Problem of Language

- All positive language about God must be balanced by negative or **apophatic** language.
  - God is Father, but God is *not* Father as we understand fatherhood.
- No single name – even those used by Jesus – can adequately capture the fullness of God:
  - **“...before the mystery of God, all language must eventually fall way, and worship must fall silent to be true.”** (p. 86).

**God is All Powerful**

**We believe in one God,  
the Father,  
the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen**

# God is All Powerful

## Biblical Witness

- The idea that God is Almighty or All Powerful is present throughout Scripture. In the New Testament, we have passages such as:
  - Jesus in the Garden: **“Abba, my Father, all things are possible to you; take this cup away from me.”** (Mark 14:36)
  - Gabriel to Mary: **“there is no deed that will be impossible for God.”** (Luke 1:37)
  - Jesus on the rich entering the Kingdom of Heaven: **“the things that are impossible for humans are possible for God.”** (Luke 18:27)

# God is All Powerful

## The Premise of Prayer

- That God is All Powerful is one premise for praying.
  - What good is praying if God does not have the power to grant our appeals?

# God is All Powerful

## The Problem of Evil

- Paul says: “**we know that God co-works all things towards good for those who love him.**” (Romans 8:28-30).
- *Problem:* this is not at all obvious in a world filled with evil and suffering.

# God is All Powerful

## The Problem of Evil

- Epicurus (341-270 BC):
  - Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?

# God is All Powerful

## The Problem of Evil

- Some modern movements attempt to solve the problem of evil by saying God is *not* really all powerful:
  - Process theology
  - Liberation Theology

# God is All Powerful

## The Mystery of Evil

- Paul's solution:
  - O the depth of the richness and the wisdom and the knowledge belonging to God! How inscrutable are his judgments and how undiscoverable his ways. For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his fellow-counselor? Or who has ever given him something first so that he might repay him? For all things are from him and through him and for him. To him be glory forever. Amen

- Romans 11:33-36

# God is All Powerful

## The Mystery of Evil

- Luke Timothy Johnson:
  - “By reducing the mystery of God’s power and knowledge to the level of a problem, by insisting also that the “problem” of free will and the “problem” of evil must be understood within the frame of ordinary human understanding, such theologies diminish both the majesty and mystery of God, and diminish both the tragedy and hope of human existence.” (p. 90)

# God is All Powerful

## The Mystery of Evil

- Confronted with the mystery of evil, we must:
  - Bow before God's unutterable majesty and power, the source and goal of all.
  - Stop looking at the mystery as a problem human understanding must be capable of solving.
  - Instead **“accept the mystery as that which has caught us up, that which defines us, and that within which we celebrate and suffer our human existence”** (p. 92)

# God is All Powerful

## The Mystery of Evil

- We are like people “**who are now seeing through a mirror, in a riddle.**” (1 Cor. 13:12).
  - We confess God’s power, even though from where we stand, that power often does not seem effective.
  - We confess God’s goodness, even though from where we stand, evil often appears triumphant.

**God is the Maker of All  
Things Visible and  
Invisible**

**We believe in one God,  
the Father,  
the Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all that is, seen and unseen**

# Maker of All Things

## Grounds the Creed

- God as maker of all things grounds the rest of the Creed:
  - Since God is the source of the world and all that is in it, God can be the revealer, savior, sanctifier, judge of that world and its creatures.
    - God's has a "maker's knowledge:" God can "see the heart" (Acts 1:24).
    - The world is the bodily expression of God's Spirit, so God can transform and sanctify it.

# Maker of All Things

## Continuous Creation

- The dominant Scriptural witness is that God' creating is not just an act in the past, but a *constant* and *present* activity of God.
- God is **“the breath that breathes through the world, giving it life at every moment. God causes the world to be at every moment.”** (p. 96)
- God is totally in touch with the world, because it is by God's “making” that it continues “to be” and changes moment and by moment.

# Maker of All Things

## Continuous Creation

- God's continuous creation is expressed most radically in the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Paul describes:
  - The Resurrection as a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians. 6:15).
  - Christ as the “last Adam” (1 Corinthians 15:45) = a new kind of humanity.

# Maker of All Things

## Continuous Creation

- Scripture tells us God's continuous creation will someday renew the present universe. In Revelation 21:1-5:
  - **Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and first earth had passed away and the sea was no more... and he who sat upon the throne said "Behold, I make all things new."**

# Maker of All Things

## Continuous Creation

- When we confess God as maker, we acknowledge:
  - God is revealed not only in the “whatness” of things, but also in the “isness” of things.
  - **“That anything exists at all is the primordial mystery that points us to God.”**  
(p. 96)

# Maker of All Things

## Continuous Creation

- The Christian view of reality:
  - Everything that is, is wondrous and magical.
  - Everything that is, is held in being by God's continuous "making."
  - Every moment of being is thus a miracle.
  - **"God creates heaven and earth new every day"** (p. 97).

# Maker of All Things

## Evolution

- This Christian view of reality is fully compatible with scientific theories of the evolution of the universe and the evolution of the species,  
**“the evolutionary sense of the world as constantly becoming, constantly in process”** (p. 96).

# Maker of All Things

## The Goodness of All

- In confessing that God makes absolutely everything, visible and invisible, we are also declaring that everything is *good*:
  - **“Everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with thanksgiving; for then it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer”** (1 Timothy 4.4-5)