

**THE APOSTLES' CREED: A  
SKETCH OF ITS HISTORY  
AND AN EXAMINATION  
OF ITS CONTENTS**

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The Apostles' Creed: A Sketch of Its History and an Examination of Its Contents by Theodor Zahn

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**THE APOSTLES'  
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# The Apostles' Creed

A Sketch of its History and  
an Examination of its Contents  
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LICHFIELD

✠  
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TO THE MEMORY  
OF  
PAUL CASPARI

## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

IT is too often taken for granted that the trend of modern criticism is destructive of the ancient literal acceptance of the Creed which we revere as the faith of our fathers, and as the faith which we ourselves confess in our daily prayers. We have been accustomed to call it "The Apostles' Creed" because we believed that it truly represented the substance of Apostolic teaching, though we did not argue that the Apostles wrote it in so many words. But the undisputed fact that, in the course of its long history the form has received certain additions, has led men to question whether the enlarged form set the old faith in a new light, or whether its value had vanished with its ancient simplicity.

Objections are raised, first to one article and



then to another. "He descended into hell" is put aside as unintelligible to the mind of a nineteenth century critic. "The resurrection of the flesh" is explained away. Finally, the doctrine of the Incarnation itself, which is the foundation truth of Christianity, is denied outright. We are not surprised to hear of a professor who whittled down his creed to the words "I believe," thus reconciling credulity and scepticism.

At the recent Bradford Church Congress, Professor J. A. Robinson called attention to the fact that, in regard to the dating of the earliest Christian documents, criticism had retraced its steps.<sup>1</sup>

This result of scientific investigation is a fact of great importance because, though it does not put an end to controversy, it enables us to see, as the smoke of previous conflicts clears away, where the new attack upon the fortress of our

<sup>1</sup> *The Guardian*, Oct. 5, 1898, p. 1556.

faith is likely to be made. The question is now one of *interpretation*. The critics are agreed in regarding the chief books of the New Testament as contemporary testimonies to the beliefs of the early Christians. But how did the early Christians understand those books? Are we to follow the opinion of those who would have us think that the interpretation which they put upon the more important dogmatic passages in these books differed completely from our own? Did they worship Christ only as an adopted Son of God? Did they regard the Holy Spirit as an impersonal gift?

At this critical moment it is a fact of great importance that loyal churchmen should be able to claim Professor Theodor Zahn as an ally in the great campaign. That he is one of the foremost German theologians is acknowledged on all hands; and the University of Cambridge has recently recognised it by conferring on him the honorary degree of Doctor in Literature. The manly straightforwardness of the faith, expressed

in the following pages, will commend itself to "all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."

It only remains to point out that the teaching of an orthodox Lutheran on "the Church" necessarily differs from ours. But it is not likely that any English Churchman, sufficiently instructed to appreciate the argument of this book, will be led to dissent from the teaching of our formularies. We believe more definitely in the necessity of a visible Church because, in the continued existence of the Christian Society, we find, to use a technical phrase, "the extension of the Incarnation," the bond of Christian fellowship, and the pledge of sacramental grace.

It may also be noted that Bishop Lightfoot, in his Dissertation on "The Brethren of the Lord,"<sup>1</sup> has shown that it is improbable, taking the Scriptural notices alone, that the so-called Brethren were truly sons of the Blessed Virgin, and that such a view cannot plead the prestige

<sup>1</sup> *The Epistle of St. Paul, Galatians*, ed. 7, p. 252.