

all people, through preaching and sacrament, the message of the free grace of God.

We reject the false doctrine that with human vainglory the Church could place the Word and work of the Lord in the service of self-chosen desires, purposes and plans.

The Confessing Synod of the German Evangelical Church declares that it sees in the acknowledgment of these truths and in the rejection of these errors the indispensable theological basis of the German Evangelical Church as a confederation of Confessing Churches. It calls upon all who can stand in solidarity with its Declaration to be mindful of these theological findings in all their decisions concerning Church and State. It appeals to all concerned to return to unity in faith, hope and love.

**Verbum Dei manet in aeternum.  
The Word of God will last for ever.**

**If you were to compose a Declaration of faith today as a polemic against ‘false doctrines’ and beliefs in the world – what would you include?**

### **CONCLUSION (5 MINS)**

**The challenge over the coming months will be to write your own Credo: I believe.... That is always done in context of a person’**

**End by reciting a Creed!**

**Or read the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church (See rejoice and Sing Hymn Book No 761)**

Study based on Donald K. McKim’s book, ‘Introducing the Reformed Faith’ (pub. WJK 2001)

# CREDO – I BELIEVE!

## 1. Believing in God: Confessing our Faith

### **Introduction (2 MINUTES)**

Early Christians confessed their faith at baptism. Candidates for baptism, called catechumens, learned about the Christian faith and after this time of instruction were ready to profess their own Christian faith. Their profession consisted of reciting a ‘creed’ from the Latin *credo* meaning ‘I believe’ that summarized what the church believed and what they believed.

Over the course of these studies the hope is that you will look at all the major Christian beliefs (doctrines). You will have the biblical basis for these beliefs and a basic understanding of how they have developed in history and how the Reformed Church understands them. We will also consider the contemporary significance of these beliefs and the issues relating to them.

By the end of the course hopefully you will be able to write your own *Credo – I believe...*

### **Starter: (5 MINS)**

Discuss either or both of the following statements:

*‘It doesn’t matter what you believe so long as you are sincere’.*

*And/or*

*‘People with strongly held beliefs are intolerant of those who don’t share those beliefs. That’s why religion causes war. It is best to be agnostic!’*

Sub questions:

Does it matter what you believe?

Is belief the same as faith?

What is the relationship between faith and belief?

Why are some people reluctant to speak about their beliefs?

### **Bible Passages (15 MINS)**

From the early days people have spoken of their faith. At times of great importance, the people of God paused to speak their faith. They summarized and declared what they believed most deeply.

For example read: **Deuteronomy 6.4-25**.

The context of this chapter is the giving of the ten commandments to Moses and the bringing together of the Hebrew slaves from Egypt to form the Israelites, the People of God, called out of slavery to form a new nation. What beliefs are contained in these verses and what are the people instructed to do about those beliefs?

New Testament Christians also confessed their faith.

Read **Matthew 16. 13-20**.

What is Peter's confession of faith? What does Jesus say about how Peter was able to make such a confession and what are the consequences of such a confession?

The earliest Christian creed is simply 'Jesus is Lord' (1 Cor. 12.3). The apostle Paul passed along several summary statements of what early Christians believed about Jesus – his life, death and resurrection. Look at Romans 1.3-4 and 1 Cor 15.3-4. Paul called on others to say so – to confess their faith – read Romans 10.9, 1 Cor 12.3. When you become a member of the United Reformed Church, you have to publicly declare your faith. Is this necessary?

4. "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to have authority over you must be your servant." *Matt. 20:25-26*

The various offices in the Church do not provide a basis for some to exercise authority over others but for the ministry [lit., "service"] with which the whole community has been entrusted and charged to be carried out.

We reject the false doctrine that, apart from this ministry, the Church could, and could have permission to, give itself or allow itself to be given special leaders [Führer] vested with ruling authority.

5. "Fear God. Honour the Emperor." *1 Pet. 2:17*

Scripture tells us that by divine appointment the State, in this still unredeemed world in which also the Church is situated, has the task of maintaining justice and peace, so far as human discernment and human ability make this possible, by means of the threat and use of force. The Church acknowledges with gratitude and reverence toward God the benefit of this, his appointment. It draws attention to God's Dominion [Reich], God's commandment and justice, and with these the responsibility of those who rule and those who are ruled. It trusts and obeys the power of the Word, by which God upholds all things.

We reject the false doctrine that beyond its special commission the State should and could become the sole and total order of human life and so fulfil the vocation of the Church as well.

We reject the false doctrine that beyond its special commission the Church should and could take on the nature, tasks and dignity which belong to the State and thus become itself an organ of the State.

6. "See, I am with you always, to the end of the age." *Matt. 28:20* "God's Word is not fettered." *2 Tim. 2:9*

The Church's commission, which is the foundation of its freedom, consists in this: in Christ's stead, and so in the service of his own Word and work, to deliver

Jesus Christ, as he is attested to us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God whom we have to hear, and whom we have to trust and obey in life and in death.

We reject the false doctrine that the Church could and should recognize as a source of its proclamation, beyond and besides this one Word of God, yet other events, powers, historic figures and truths as God's revelation.

2. "Jesus Christ has been made wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption for us by God." *1 Cor. 1:30*

As Jesus Christ is God's comforting pronouncement of the forgiveness of all our sins, so, with equal seriousness, he is also God's vigorous announcement of his claim upon our whole life. Through him there comes to us joyful liberation from the godless ties of this world for free, grateful service to his creatures.

We reject the false doctrine that there could be areas of our life in which we would not belong to Jesus Christ but to other lords, areas in which we would not need justification and sanctification through him.

3. "Let us, however, speak the truth in love, and in every respect grow into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body is joined together." *Eph. 4:15-16*

The Christian Church is the community of brethren in which, in Word and Sacrament, through the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ acts in the present as Lord. With both its faith and its obedience, with both its message and its order, it has to testify in the midst of the sinful world, as the Church of pardoned sinners, that it belongs to him alone and lives and may live by his comfort and under his direction alone, in expectation of his appearing.

We reject the false doctrine that the Church could have permission to hand over the form of its message and of its order to whatever it itself might wish or to the vicissitudes of the prevailing ideological and political convictions of the day.

### **Creeds and Confessions (30 MINS)**

As the Christian church expanded its mission and ministry throughout the Mediterranean world, the Christian communities found it important to establish a common body of belief and affirm their faith as witnesses to their Lord and Saviour. Confessional statements, in varying amounts of detail emerged. Often they were written as a polemic (to argue a theological case in a particular context with a particular adversary in mind))

The Apostles Creed developed by the fifth century as a basic summary of Christian faith.

Theological controversies in the fourth century led to two important church councils, the Council of Nicaea (AD325) and the Council of Constantinople (AD 381). These two councils were crucial in establishing official teaching on the doctrines of who God is (the Trinity), who Jesus Christ is (Christology) and who the Holy Spirit is (Pneumatology). We will come to those doctrines in due course!

#### ***Have a look at the Nicene Creed.***

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

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the only Son of God,  
eternally begotten of the Father,  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made,  
of one Being with the Father.  
Through him all things were made.  
For us and for our salvation

he came down from heaven:  
by the power of the Holy Spirit  
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,  
and was made man.  
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;  
he suffered death and was buried.  
On the third day he rose again  
in accordance with the Scriptures;  
he ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.  
With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified.  
He has spoken through the Prophets.  
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.  
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.  
We look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

This was written to witness to the church's faith but also to identify orthodox, or 'right' Christian belief over against 'heresy' (the choosing of another way). It was written to bring the different churches of the Christian community together in solidarity. It would enable that summary of teaching to be passed down the generations. It was and still is used in worship and praise. However it also had the effect of excluding those who didn't agree with it.

**Question: Are Creeds and Confessions a good thing or a bad thing? What use do they serve? What are their limitations?**

### **Look at the Barmen Declaration (READ IT TO YOURSELF):**

The Barmen Declaration, 1934, was a call to resistance against the theological claims of the Nazi state. Almost immediately after Hitler's seizure of power in 1933, Protestant Christians faced pressure to "aryanize" the Church, expel Jewish Christians from the ordained ministry and adopt the Nazi "Führer Principle" as the organizing principle of church government. In general, the churches succumbed to these pressures, and some Christians embraced them willingly. The pro-Nazi "German Christian" movement became a force in the church. They glorified Adolf Hitler as a "German prophet" and preached that racial consciousness was a source of revelation alongside the Bible. But many Christians in Germany—including Lutheran and Reformed, liberal and neo-orthodox—opposed the encroachment of Nazi ideology on the Church's proclamation. At Barmen, this emerging "Confessing Church" adopted a declaration drafted by Reformed theologian Karl Barth and Lutheran theologian Hans Asmussen, which expressly repudiated the claim that other powers apart from Christ could be sources of God's revelation. Not all Christians courageously resisted the regime, but many who did—like the Protestant pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Roman Catholic priest Bernhard Lichtenberg—were arrested and executed in concentration camps.

### **THE BARMEN DECLARATION**

In view of the errors of the "German Christians" and of the present Reich Church Administration, which are ravaging the Church and at the same time also shattering the unity of the German Evangelical Church, we confess the following evangelical truths:

1. "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life; no one comes to the Father except through me." *John 14:6*

"Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold through the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved." *John 10:1,9*