

“CREEDS”

By Lee Moses

As a young child being reared in denominationalism, this writer clearly recalls the practice in worship of the recitation of creeds. Those assembled would recite various creeds, particularly the so-called “Apostles’ Creed.” Of course, one would assume that a creed called the Apostles’ Creed would have been instituted by the apostles. However, the Apostles’ Creed in its actual form was not framed until at least 300 years after the death of the last apostle, although other supposedly Christian creeds had been written as early as the second century AD.

What is the purpose of a creed? A creed is defined as “a formal statement of religious belief.” A creed is designed by a particular religious group in order to make clear what it is they believe and to define parameters of what is acceptable doctrine. Virtually all denominations have creeds by which they abide, although many of the “lay members” may not be aware of their own creeds. However, their creeds dictate what they are taught from their pulpits and in their classrooms. The Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia attempts to justify creeds by saying, “In the Protestant system the creed is not to coordinate with, but always subordinate to, the Bible.”

But the Protestant denominations which fled from Roman Catholicism and its binding of human tradition fell into the same trap when they decided to base faith upon anything other than the Bible alone. Jesus promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would guide them into “*all truth*” (John 16:13) and through the apostles gave to man “*all things that pertain unto life and godliness*” (2 Peter 1:3).

When men adopt a creed, they accept that which is different from the Bible. Either a creed will have less than the Bible, more than the Bible, or the same as the Bible. What Christ gave is completely sufficient; but if one accepts a creed which is less than the Bible, he no longer has that which is sufficient as his guide (Psalm 119:105, 130; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). If one accepts a creed which is more than the Bible, he has added to the word of God and brought himself under a curse (Proverbs 30:6; Revelation 22:18-19). If one accepts a creed which is the same as the Bible, someone has wasted his time in trying to write a creed.

A curse awaits any who bring a doctrine different from the Bible (Galatians 1:6-9), yet creeds are intrinsically different from the Bible. The doctrine which Christ gave us is our only acceptable system of belief (2 John 9-10).

Creeds deny that all can understand the Bible alike, or at least admit that those who adhere to their particular creed cannot understand it alike without being given a standard that supersedes the word of God.

We cannot accept the beliefs of any man as our authority. Only the word of God is “*able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified*” (Acts 20:32), and only by this word will one be judged (John 12:48).

On September 28, 2004, the federal mint will release a brand new fifty-dollar bill. The new bill, which was unveiled in April, will have subtle background colors of red and blue, along with a blue-silver star. While the appearance of the bill has many new features, one thing that has not changed can be found on the back. Prominently displayed above the picture of the federal capital building will be the words "In God We Trust" – words that are found on most American currency. Those words first appeared on the 1864 two-cent coin after Congress passed the Act of April 22, 1864.

The motto was partially the result of increased religious sentiment exhibited during the Civil War. Many individuals wrote letters to then Secretary of Treasury, Salmon P. Chase desiring that America acknowledge its dependence on Deity in some form or fashion. The barrage of letters prompted Chase to write James Pollock, director of the Philadelphia mint, encouraging him to prepare a motto. In a letter dated November 20, 1861 Chase wrote: Dear Sir: No nation can be strong except in the strength of God, or safe except in His defense. The trust of our people in God should be declared on our national coins. You will cause a device to be prepared without unnecessary delay with a motto expressing in the fewest and tersest words possible this national recognition. Having received the mint director's proposal, Secretary Chase wrote back on December 9, 1863 altering Pollock's initial proposal to "In God We Trust."

After the Act of April 22, 1864 passed, Congress approved another on March 3, 1865, allowing the mint director (with the Secretary's authorization), to inscribe the motto on all gold and silver coins that "shall admit the inscription thereon." The words "In God We Trust" have appeared uninterrupted since, on almost all of America's coinage. Almost 100 years later, in 1956, the 84th Congress passed legislation establishing "In God We Trust" as the national motto of the United States. The following year, in 1957, the phrase began appearing on paper money. Interestingly, the idea of paying homage to Deity on American currency can be traced back to time long before 1865. Coins from the 1780s – just after the Revolutionary War – known as Constellation Nova Coppers, also gave credence to God. These coins typically featured an "eye" on one side, with rays stretching out to thirteen stars, which represented the thirteen colonies. The eye represented the all-seeing "providential eye" of God. Thus, the rays symbolized God's looking down on each of the new thirteen colonies. That same eye can be found today, sitting on top of the pyramid on the back of the one-dollar. The eye is located just under the Latin words, *Annuit Coeptis* – which means, "He (God) has favored our undertakings." This all-seeing eye suggests the importance of divine guidance in favor of the American cause. How foreign that phrase seems in a country filled with materialism. Many individuals place their real trust in things, bank accounts, or investment accounts. At what point will America really put their trust back into God? What will it take for "In God We Trust" to be more than just a familiar "catch phrase?" Could it be that as more and more currency rolled off the press, Americans lost more and more trust in God and placed it instead in the freshly printed bills?

By Brad Harrub, PhD

