

Catechism and the Creed

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[0 : 0 0] Holy Father, in your mercy, send the Spirit of your Son, we pray, into our hearts to give us insight into the strategy of your kingdom and wisdom to discern our own place in that strategy. And so make us fruitful servants of yours, faithful children too. So lead us in the way everlasting, we pray, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Amen. Well, good morning everyone. You heard Bill say that this is the second of a pair of talks under the overall title called to catechize. And you can see from the very shape of the title that the overall thrust of my talks is that here is a task, a project, an obligation which our Lord Jesus has given to the Church and in which all of us have some role to fulfill. And I hope that that will come out again in the things that I'm going to say right now.

If you were here last week, you'll recall my telling you that in the second century, perhaps even before the second century opened, the Christian Church faced up to the fact that its calling was to win the world, to evangelize, that is, the whole Roman Empire. And they went about it in a practical way, not only sending out pioneer preachers to found churches. They did a lot of that.

And by the end of the first third of the second century, there were churches all over the Roman Empire, from Spain in the far west to Persia in the far east. But on top of that, church by church, they established catechetical classes with persons called catechists running them. These were classes regularly operating in the last two, year in, year out. First, for the instruction of people who had an interest in finding what Christianity was all about. And second, for the purpose of disciplining in a preliminary way, those folk who were persuaded that the Christian message was true, and who wanted to join the Church. And the people in this second category might find themselves in a course of instruction lasting a full two or even three years, a course of instruction, that is, which made sure that they knew their Christian stuff, and also that they knew how to distinguish between Christian truth and secular error, which surrounded them all the time. I mean, the Roman Empire was full of superstitions, full of cults. And there was a particular body of cultic opinion called Gnosticism that made a set, a dead set at Christianity right from the start. It's already mentioned in the New Testament, and its thesis was similar to the thesis of the mainstream liberals of our time.

Namely, that apostolic Christianity is crude and undeveloped, and at certain points goofy, and needs total revision in the light of the wisdom which Gnostics bring to the study of religion. Wisdom that starts by acknowledging that matter is evil and that salvation is a matter of our being delivered from the material order altogether.

[5 : 1 3] Sin and grace didn't come into it. Gnosticism was a message about getting free from the material world order, said the Gnostics. That's what real Christianity is all about. And here are our prescriptions for adjusting the apostolic faith to fit. I'm not saying that modern liberals are concerned to to separate us from the material order. That is not a point of resemblance. The point of resemblance that I'm trying to make vivid to you is the mental attitude of the folk who come along and say, oh, the apostolic teaching needs updating, needs revising, needs re-angling and adjusting, and we are the people to do it.

Well, facing Gnosticism and all the other types of the Roman Empire in the early second century, the catechism classes had their hands full. But there seems no doubt that they worked with a will, they understood that this teaching and defensive ministry in which they were engaged, that is teaching the truth and defending it against error, that this was a vital part of the Church's life. And, well, by the time of Constantine, Christianity was the strongest religion in the empire, as well as the most widespread.

And so Constantine was not doing anything remarkably outrageous, let me put it that way, when he made Christianity the most favored religion of the empire, which you know he did about the year 315 when he took over.

Well, that institution of the catechism class, the catechist who regularly runs it, and the program of instructing persons of, I can say, persons with casual interest, and preparing for the baptism of those who had a committed interest, that was right at the center of the strength, the real strength of the Church in those early centuries.

And when the catechism, when the catechism, when the catechetical dimension fell out of Church life, as it did towards the end of the 5th century, then the Church lost its power. It was by now part of the social establishment.

[8 : 45] So, during the Dark Ages, which followed the collapse of the Roman Empire, the Church didn't entirely vanish, and there was a revival of Christian studies in abbeys and universities in the Middle Ages.

And that was still part of the scene when the Reformers came along in the 16th century. But the Church, during the previous thousand years, had not been reaching out, not been evangelizing, not been engaged in any activity beyond what we nowadays call maintenance, keeping itself going as part of the social scene.

Then came the 16th century, when once again the importance of a catechizing ministry was seen.

The Reformers, writing in, as I think I said last week, on the backs of the Renaissance scholars, that they discerned that they were facing a very ignorant laity, and that education at every level, from the very young right up to old age, was vitally necessary if the Church was to have any life and force in the future.

So, they brought back catechizing in spades, is what one might say. Now, the pattern that they followed was to put everything in which instruction was to be given into question-and-answer form.

[10 : 46] I talked about that last week, I remember. And we looked at the question-and-answer catechism for children, which still occupies eight pages of our prayer book.

It goes right back to the middle of the 16th century, almost word for word, not quite, but almost. And we saw that it contains, well, things that the children need to be grounded in.

The baptismal covenant, whereby they are committed to the Christian faith and the Christian life. The apostles' creed, which states the central doctrines which a believer holds.

The Ten Commandments, which give you the principles of Christian behavior, Christian ethics. The Lord's Prayer, which is the template, you might say, the pattern, really, for all our praying.

We should have that clear in our minds, friends. Praying is never right unless you can truly say, if asked, well, I am praying the Lord's Prayer in application to whatever it specifically is that I'm praying about.

[12 : 20] Let me just divert a moment. At the 7.30 communion service, Michael Bentley was talking about the lawsuit in which the Church is involved, seeking to maintain its stewardship of the property that we now occupy, seeking to do that for the furtherance of the ministry here, and he was making the point that it costs money, and he was appealing for contributions to the legal fighting fund.

Well, that is a matter on which prayer is appropriate. Appropriate just because to ask God to bless our lawsuit, and to that end to give us the funds that the lawyers will need.

That is a specific, I mean, a particular application of, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, and hallowed be thy name, which is a way of expressing the thought of glory be to God.

Well, as I say, all praying ought to be, in one way or another, application of the principles of the Lord's Prayer, because the Lord Jesus gave us the Lord's Prayer as the pattern.

And that's in the Catechism. And there's a little preliminary instruction in the sacraments, and Canada's Revisors in 1962 added a little bit more about the Church, and Church life, and the rule of life, which adults, at any rate, should embrace as a foundational scheme of behaviour to guide them in shaping their lives day by day.

[14 : 32] So, in the Catechism, as you can see, what is being passed on is the two realities, the two connected realities, which nowadays we call orthodoxy, that is, belief of the truth, sound conviction, and orthopraxy, which means sound behaviour, a moral life that matches the call of God and brings honour to him.

Orthodoxy and orthopraxy are the two basics, the sort of twin pillars of Christian education in all its forms, and catechising, as we see, is basic Christian education, neither more nor less.

Basic Christian education, I'd better add, with a practicum. Orthopraxy is the practicum, the putting into practice of the principles of doctrine that are taught from Scripture, according to the apostles.

Well, all of this was understood and was a big part of church life in the 16th century, and in various forms went on being so right into the 19th century, right up to the end of the 19th century, I think one can fairly say.

But in the 20th century, and so far in the 21st, catechising, as a regular ingredient in church life, has pretty much dropped out.

[16 : 34] And as I told you last week, I am carrying the torch for its renewal in some form. I say some form because I don't want anyone to stumble first step, so to speak, but through thinking of catechism as a question-and-answer form of instruction, essentially and inescapably, I'm prepared to grant that question-and-answer instruction, where you have to memorize the instruction and then parrot it off in answer to the questions.

That isn't a very attractive prospect for anyone in this 21st century. In days, when parents and schoolteachers and others in community leadership were regarded as having almost unlimited authority, the kids bit on the bullet, and if their parents said, you must learn the catechism, and if their teachers at school said, you must learn the catechism, and if the clergy said, you must learn the catechism, well, they just gritted their teeth and labored to learn it.

But in these days, as we know very well, leadership in the community, call it that, doesn't carry the authority for individuals that it used to carry.

Children defy their parents, children don't bother about what the clergy tell them. Children stop their ears to a great deal of what their teachers try to instill in them at school.

This is the kind of community that we live in nowadays, and so there has to be a certain amount of sweetening of the pill, a certain amount of attraction in the way in which things are taught.

[18 : 57] Interest has to be allured, and interest has to be maintained. And the bottom line is that the simple question-and-answer method won't do it, and when I talk about a renewal of catechesis, I am not talking about necessarily a renewal of question-and-answer at all, although, let me say, I value the question-and-answer method simply because it is so precise.

If you think, to have a set form of words which you learn, and then to be cross-questioned on the meaning of that form of words, leaves you with a very precise understanding of what is and is not being taught, being affirmed, and that precision is something precious which we do need.

If we're not going to use question-and-answer as our method of instruction, well, we can't settle for leaving everything to open discussion, let it wander where it will.

There has to be some means of securing precision in teaching and learning. I'm not going to go into methods which might be employed at this point.

I'm simply going to say, without that, any attempt at teaching the basics of the faith will be less than fully successful because there will be fuzz and smudges around the edge of everything that is taught and everything that is learned.

[20 : 59] But nonetheless, I am carrying the torch, as I said, for a renewal of a ministry, of ministry which seeks to do what the catechetical ministry of past days sought to do.

And, I guess I made the plane last week and here I am hammering away at it today. So, if you forget everything else that I said, I hope that you will remember Packer's last crusade, as I think I described it last week, was a plea for the renewal of catechesis, that is, serious learning of the faith and learning of the principles of Christian love in this 21st century in which we so need these things because the culture is so contrary to Christian faith and life and we, all of us, have to live our lives in the culture where the winds that blow and the influences that are exerted are constantly undermining

Christian basics. Now, I see you looking grave as I say that. Well, I think it's something to look grave about, friends.

I hope that you're actually agreeing with me that sadly this is true. Okay. So, in some shape or form, a renewal of Christian education for all persons in the church of all ages is called for today.

Indeed, it's overdue and time spent begging for this and trying to pioneer it in whatever way we can is not time wasted.

[23 : 08] It's a very strategic move, I believe, for the well-being of the people of God as this century goes on. And now, let me add something that I didn't say last week.

We have thought this through domestically so far, but I want now to say this is even truer globally than it is domestically, by which I mean that whereas in Canada, here at home, if one wants exact clear instruction in Christian faith and behavior, one can find it.

The books exist, the magazines exist, faithful preachers of the Bible are scattered all over the country.

Faithful Christians, mature Christians, who know their Bibles, are also scattered all over the country. If you want to find a reliable source of instruction in these things here in Canada, well, you can do that.

But in many parts of Africa, Asia, and other parts of the world too, as a matter of fact, and when I say Asia, I wasn't thinking, for instance, of the underground churches of China, which contain perhaps 40 million believers, if you put them all together.

[24 : 58] in these parts of the world where the coming of the gospel in power is a recent thing, and the founding of the congregations that exist is also a relatively recent thing, they are terribly short of instructors, that is, of instructors who really know their stuff, they are terribly short of literature, and still many of the folk in village situations can't read, and if there's a real need here in Canada, it's much greater in some of these younger churches.

so my crusade has a global dimension, as well as a local one. All right, those are the perspectives, plus my globalizing of the issue, the perspectives that we went over last time I talked to you.

Now, the title for today's talk is The Creed and the Catechism, and the big point that I want to make is that the church needs its creeds, just as it needs its catechism.

It needs its creeds in the first instance to repel attacks on or underminings of its orthodoxy and its orthopraxy, but it also needs the creeds to provide a frame within which the basic catechetical instruction can be shaped and given.

In that sense, the creeds protect sound catechizing, just as sound catechizing furthers the true Christianity that's enshrined in the creeds.

[27 : 12] There's a kind of symbiotic relationship here, at least ideally there is, and part of Packer's last crusade is to restore that particular perspective.

With catechesis in renewal, we need the creeds renewed as a focus for study and appreciation.

So, let me now spend a little time on the creeds, trying to show you, frankly, how good they are. I'm saying creeds in the plural, and I'm proposing to talk about both the apostles and the Nicene creeds.

they had a different origin, you should know that perhaps right from the start. The Apostles' Creed, so-called, wasn't composed by the apostles, but gained its name because it embodies apostolic doctrine, every word and every phrase.

It was originally the universally accepted syllabus for catechetical instruction in the catechetical classes and schools.

[28 : 36] And different forms of the creed, that is, forms differing in minor details, not in major substance at all, but in minor details, they are found in Christian literature from the second century, and it's pretty clear that by the end of the second century, the wording, which is translated into our Apostles' Creed in English, that wording was well established and was universal to Christendom.

So, the Apostles' Creed, it was an educational resource right from the start. The Nicene Creed, by contrast, was put together in face of fundamental error.

People led by a man named Arius, who have gone down to history as the Arians, their children, I should say, are the modern Unitarians, Christians.

And they were revising Christianity from the inside, and revising it in such a way as effectively to destroy it.

the this wasn't seen at the time, because Arius was a very charming speaker, and the Arians were good communicators.

[30 : 14] One of the things that they did was explore the possibilities of spreading their doctrine by popular songs. It's a little bit like the choruses that are used in Christian education of the young these days.

And people simply didn't see what was wrong with Arianism at first. But let me say in a couple of sentences how the Arians made their point, and then you'll see it straight away.

Said the Arians, and this is dating from the latter years of the third century, 200 years in other words, after the end of the apostolic age.

Arians said, for 200 years, we have been trying to find a straightforward formula for God. And we've tied ourselves in knots because we've been trying to express it in terms of three co-equal persons within the unity of the one God.

[31 : 34] Well, that's not the way to do it, said Arians. I offer you a simple way of expressing the truth about God, a way which doesn't even appear to have incoherence and contradiction at the heart of it, which is what they've always said, people have always said about any form of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Said Arians, the truth is that when God, the one God, the one divine person, resolved to make the world, he brought into being by his own creative word a creature, a wonderful creature, a top creature, who should be his agent in creation.

And then he brought into being a second creature, second only to the top creature, who would help the top creature in the tasks that he was going to be set.

The top creature is called the Son of God, we know him as Jesus of Nazareth. The second top creature is the Holy Spirit whom Jesus sends to his followers.

So, here you have it, plain and straightforward, one God and two creatures who are so grand, glorious, powerful, that it's perfectly proper to worship them the way that we do and think of ourselves as the people who believe in the one, in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

[33 : 32] But the Son and the Holy Spirit are top creatures. Think that and all the problems with regard to the Trinity resolve themselves.

You have no intellectual problems, you have no apparent tensions, everything is as straightforward as can be. Well, more thoughtful Christian teachers deserve that that was ruinous doctrine because it has us worshipping creatures and, further thought, if the top creature isn't God, God in person, well, whatever else he brings us in salvation, he cannot communicate the life of God to us by uniting us with himself.

Why not? Well, because he hasn't got the life of God in himself as part of his own being. He is dependent on God, same as we are dependent on God.

And at that point there is total incoherence, indeed, total nonsense. The Council of Nicaea was called by the Emperor Constantine to resolve the debates that were springing up all over the Christian world about this heresy.

And at the Council of Nicaea, a man named Athanasius, a young man, a man in his middle twenties, became very prominent, very famous by the insistence and the clarity with which he articulated these points against the Arians.

[35 : 41] Bible forbids us to worship creatures. So, if the Son and the Spirit are creatures, we shouldn't be worshipping them, and if it's part of the apostolic faith that we should worship them, and the Bible shows it is, then we should acknowledge that they are divine, just as the Father is divine.

and the New Testament, the apostolic witness, going back to Jesus himself, says that we share in the resurrection life of Christ, which is the life of God, giving us a life quality which will last to all eternity.

this couldn't be true if Jesus Christ were not personally divine. Well, Athanasius argued these points at Nicaea, the council went with him, and out of the council came the first version of the Nicene Creed, I say the first version because it didn't have in it the section about the Holy Spirit, which was added at the council of Constantinople in 381.

So there you've got the story of the Nicene Creed set up as a bulwark against heresy with regard to God.

Well, all right, when you go through both the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed, you realize they can, both of them be declared, I mean, recited, in terms of the opening formula, I believe.

[37 : 42] I believe, by the way, in Latin is credo, and that's where the word creeds comes from. You can recite the two creeds, beginning with the formula, I believe, and the recitation can be part of the church's worship.

So the creeds very soon got used in the liturgy for doxology, that is, the giving of glory to God, which, after all, is what, at heart, Christian worship is all about.

But the creeds could be used for other purposes as well, and altogether, in the history of the church, there have been five purposes for which the creeds have been used.

And the packer mind kicks into gear at this point, and offers you an alliteration to help you remember the five points.

The creeds are of use for, first of all, definition. A Christian identifies himself as a believer by declaring his faith in the things that the creed affirms.

[39 : 04] Secondly, then, the creeds are useful for declaration, declaration, witness, on the part both of individuals and of the church.

The church is the community committed to the creed. And in witness, it's appropriate to make reference to the creeds as embodying the teaching of the Bible, just as it's appropriate to make reference to the Bible, use it talking and explaining, because the Bible is the word of God.

creeds echoed the Bible. In addition to these two roles of definition and declaration, the creeds can be used and have been used for detection, detection of error.

In the fourth century, when the Nicene Creed was first put together, all the clergy in all the churches were required to subscribe it.

That's something, you know, which we've retained in Anglicanism until this day, although, alas, the meaning of subscription is not always taken seriously in these days, as we know very well, that when you're ordained to ministry in Anglicanism, you have to subscribe the 39 articles which embody the creeds.

[40 : 46] Well, what are you doing? You are testifying to your orthodoxy, and if you couldn't sign the creed, your unsoundness of faith, your error, would be detected.

And that was the, shall I say, the name again, in the fourth century AD, when the practice of clerical subscription was introduced. And following on detection, there's the practice of discipline, that is, the creeds embody the truth in which we're all to be disciplined, and the creeds can fulfil a corrective discipline towards those who, lay folk now, who believe erroneously.

sin. And then finally, there's the purpose of doxology, to which I referred at the beginning, the giving of glory to God, which we do when, in our services, we say, stand and say, I believe, and declare the faith to which God, in his mercy, has brought us.

we declare this faith to the glory of the God, by whose grace all these realities are real, and by whose grace we have come to believe in them.

Okay, well, that said, now, I have said that in order to put you in the picture, with regard to the origin of the two great creeds, and to alert you also to the uses that have been made of them, and can be made of them, I believe, still today.

[42 : 56] Now, the catechism, which makes reference to the apostles, well, at least the Anglican catechism, Preble catechism, makes reference to the apostles' creed, the catechism is instruction in orthodoxy and orthopraxy, instruction that is put together within the frame that the creeds establish, just as the creeds themselves are put together in the frame that the scriptures establish.

Think of it in that way. The scriptures embody the doctrine which the creeds focus, and the catechism teaches the doctrine which the creeds focus.

So it's scriptures, creeds, catechism. And this is the catechetical reality for which I'm campaigning.

Look at the creeds a little more precisely. What do we find in them? Let's just do a quick inventory of their content. both of them, to start with, are trinitarian in structure.

I believe in God, in Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Spirit. Three persons, one God. Both creeds are explicit about creation.

[44 : 47] God created all that is, things that are visible and invisible, things that are material, as well as things which, in our ordinary sense of the word, are immaterial.

Well, since the creed, like the Bible, is now going on to tell us how God redeemed his world following its lapse into disorder, it's obviously logical and straightforward to affirm creation right at the outset.

And the creed does so. I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. That's how Nicene Creed puts it.

So, within the trinitarian frame, you have creation affirmed. this is God's world and he made everything that's in it. And then, within that frame, the creed, both creeds zero in on the news concerning Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ the Redeemer.

the Nicene Creed says quite a bit about the reality of his divinity, because that was what was being challenged at Messiah, and so special assertion of it was needed.

[46 : 31] And it's unfortunate, you know, that in our English translation of the Nicene Creed, the key words here don't immediately carry the meaning that they're intended to carry, simply because of the way that the key English word has changed its meaning over the centuries.

The key phrase is begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father.

being of one substance, which in modern renderings of the Creed put in the phrase of one being with the Father, it's not too bad, but it's not very good, I don't think.

So I'll talk about it in terms of the form of words that we used to. So being of one substance with the Father, that is a translation of the key phrase in Greek, which it's claimed that Athanasius suggested, whether he did or whether he didn't is actually not quite certain, but it's a phrase that most certainly expressed what he was laboring to say all through the Council of Nicaea.

it's a phrase which in Greek links two thoughts. First of all, the thought of co-equality, the Son and the Father are on the same footing.

[48 : 17] And the phrase also with that expresses the thought of unity, the unity of the Father and the Son as being in a fundamental sense, one being, one entity, one reality as distinctly two.

The Father and the Son then are two persons within one reality. I'm saying reality, that's what the word in English, that in English is translated substance, is expressing.

When we say substance, of course, we just think of solid stuff of some kind, and the thought stops there. In Greek, the word translated of one substance, me, in, as I say, aspects of a single entity.

The entity, goodness, or reality, those are feeble enough words to express God. I think they are, in English, the best words that we've got.

So, in the Nicene Creed, as I said, you have special stress on the fact that here you have two persons within the one being that we call God.

[49 : 47] God, and to think of the Lord Jesus, God incarnate, as anything less than this, is to go off the track.

So, the Creed goes on, and he was incarnate by the Holy Ghost, the Virgin Mary, and was made man, that is, as the Scripture teaches, think of the prologue of John's Gospel, he added to himself, as the divine person that he was, all that's involved in being human, body, human brain, human mind, human emotions, and he lived through his humanness, all the time that he was on earth.

But he doesn't cease to be God when it says he was made man, there's no diminution implied, only augmentation, so that he became more than he was before, but not less.

Yes, he was made man, and he was crucified also for us, under Pontius Pilate, for us men, and our salvation.

And then it continues, death, burial. The point, by the way, of the creed's emphasis on burial is that in those days, some of the Gnostics were saying what people like D.H.

[51 : 30] Lawrence have said in the 20th century, surely he didn't die on the cross, surely all that happened was that he fainted because of the pain, he was taken down from the cross, and then he revived, so he'd never really been dead.

As against that Gnostic idea, both the apostles and the Nicene Creed insist. He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered, died, was buried, and then the third day he rose again from the dead.

According to the scriptures, so forth. Well, there you have then three basic ingredients in the creeds, the Trinity, the creation, and the doctrine of Christ, Christology as it's technically called.

And following that comes affirmation of the Holy Spirit, well yes, that's part of the truth, of the Trinity, which began to be affirmed right at the outset, and then the Church, belief in the Holy Catholic Church.

What was the point of saying that? Well, the point was that the Church really is, according to the scriptures, a new creation which exists because all of us who make up the Church, all of us believers, are united to Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit, and so are sharers in his risen life, in his divine human risen life.

[53 : 23] life. We don't become divine, of course, but we share in the life that is Christ's, and so in our togetherness in him, we are as a body a new creation, and the Church as a body is a new creation.

Paul makes quite a lot actually of the picture of the Church as the body of Christ, his spiritual body, as it's sometimes explained.

And there's only one Church because there's only one Christ. So the way to think about distinct congregations, St. John's, Holy Trinity, whatever, is to say each of them is, you have to use an illustration here, and I will use three that I think are good.

It's an outcrop of the one Church. It's a sample of the one Church. It's a microcosm of the one Church.

Those are the best words I can find to express what Scripture assumes in all the things it says about the Church. An outcrop?

[54 : 48] Well, yes, you know how it is when you're walking on what basically is hard rock, maybe on a hillside or on a cliff by the sea.

There's grass over the surface nearly everywhere, but there is an outcrop of rock here, another one there. The outcrop is when you see the rock that is actually the reality under the surface, hundreds of thousands of tons of it, and the outcrop reminds you of the reality of all the rest.

That's one image that I think points to the reality. I said it's a sample, every local church is a sample of the one church of Christ.

Yes, I think the New Testament is clear on that. Paul, in 1 Corinthians, addresses that church, that local assembly.

How many members do you suppose it had? I'll bet there weren't more than a hundred. But Paul addresses them as the body of Christ. You are the body of Christ and you all belong to it.

[56 : 07] He doesn't mean that they are the whole of the body of Christ, the only Christian church there is in the world. What he means is that you are a sample, there are many samples of the one church of Christ.

And that's part of the basis on which he says, and you must live in a way that shows that you are true disciples of Christ and that he is your life.

That's the obligation of every local church, which, as I said, is a sample and is called to be a good sample of the whole worldwide body.

The third image that I used is the image of the microcosm. You know what the microcosm is? it's a small-scale presentation of a large-scale reality.

And that's what the local church is. So, the church, wherever you find it, wherever the local congregation is, the church has a transcendently important role.

[57 : 27] It's to show forth Christ, the life of Christ, the power of Christ, and so bring glory to Christ and to his Father. So, I believe in the church.

It's a very important element in the creed. And then the creed ends with the personal salvation, forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the flesh, our re-embodiment, shall I say, and the life everlasting.

Well, you recognize, I hope, the reality of the basic Christian faith in what I've been saying. If you said, well, how does this relate to the 39 articles?

I would say at once, well, the 39 articles are a domestic creed. They are necessarily long-winded. They have only local authority.

I mean, the authority that they're given by Anglican churches, which are not the only churches in the Christian world. In those ways, the 39 articles are different from the creed.

[58 : 40] They affirm the creeds and so are subordinate to the creeds. However, there are correspondences here because the articles like the creed or the creeds are both testimonies and tests.

Testimonies, I mean, to the truth concerning the Lord Jesus and tests of the persons who come into the church's fellowship and offer themselves within the fellowship as brother believers, sister believers.

And within the frame of all of this, well, the reality of catechism is due to happen. I must, I had my time and I must close.

Let me return as I close to my belief that the rediscovery, the renewal, the re-establishing of Christian catechism, that is to say, theological education in the church alongside Bible study in the church.

church. They're two complementary things, but they are distinct. This is one of the most urgent calls to us all at this present time.

[60 : 12] We need, I think, an international Anglican project for the renewal of catechism, a project, I mean, which will benefit the folk in Anglican dioceses and provinces in Africa and Asia in particular, where the need of basic instruction for ordinary church people is even greater than here in Canada.

Well, all of this is part of what I'm concerned to beat the drum about in these closing years of my life. Catechizing has to do with the basic dimensions of discipling, which are first, the imparting of true doctrine, and second, the imparting of true discipline, the true habits of behavior, which all Christians need to learn, and which has to do thirdly with the directions for living, that is to say, the perspectives for the living of life, which every Christian needs to learn to display and embody.

I am talking about living life to the glory of God, being concerned to measure our lives by the question, does this make for the glory of God?

Is this a way of hallowing God's name? This is whatever it is that I am being asked to do, or committing myself to do at this present time.

And another direction, or directive, for Christian living is one that you have heard from me very often, never let the good be the enemy of the best. It is a very basic maxim of Christian wisdom.

[62 : 21] And I think a lot of people in our churches fall short just because they settle for what's good enough. And they just don't ask, is this the best that could be?

We are for the best. We ever must be. The best option in every situation. And then the final direction that I would give again is one that you've heard from me more than once, I'm sure.

That's the joy directive. J-O-Y, Jesus first, others second, you last. Live by those directives, and you will honour your Lord.

Live in the church by those directives, and you will be a channel of vitality and doxology, I think.

People will appreciate the way that you're living, and they will praise God for you. Live by these principles as a servant in the church, and take your place in the church's learning and teaching ministry, teaching and learning ministry, truth, as that place opens up.

[63 : 48] That last three minutes was very much foreshortened, I'll tell you friends, in relation to what I thought I would have time to say, but that's the heart of the matter as I see it.

So, back to where we started. We are all called to catechise. Catechising involves all that I've said. May God further the cause of catechising in this our day, and may God show us where we, as leaders, in some sense or other, I made the point last time, we're all of us leaders to somebody, may we as leaders pull our weight in this renewal of faithful, biblical, fruitful, and very fruitful ministry.

And that's my peroration, brothers and sisters. Monologue may now give way to dialogue. I would like to know what you think about these things, and if you've got questions or hesitations about things that you've heard me say, well, this is the time to indicate.

Two hands go up simultaneously there. You have to acquire paper first. All right, I don't mind. The Apostles Creed mentions Jesus descending into hell.

Yeah. Do you want to comment on that? Well, actually, I don't need to, because in the prayer book itself, I'll turn up the catechism, I'll have it in a minute.

[65 : 34] But in the prayer book itself, when you get to the descent into hell, there's a little note put in, and the little note says, that's on page 545 of the prayer book, if you want to look it up afterwards, but the note says, note that the words in the creed, he descended into hell, are considered as words of the same meaning as he went into the place of departed spirits.

And what the prayer book says there is what scholars in full consensus will say. The Greek word used, you see, in the creed, and translated as hell in our 16th century English version of the creed, is actually the Greek word for the place of the departed, and it doesn't imply anything more specific than that.

Jesus' teaching shows that in the place of the departed, right from the time of leaving this world, there is joy. What's his name?

Lazarus in Abram's bosom knew that joy, and Jesus promised it, you remember, to the penitent thief on the cross, today you'll be with me in paradise. That's joy.

And their sorrow, the rich man in Jesus' story, is in agony already. This is before resurrection day. This is in what we call the intermediate or the interim stage or phase between the time of our death and the coming of Jesus to raise us all from the dead.

[67 : 30] But already our persons are in joy or sorrow, even though we're disembodied. It's hard to imagine, indeed it's impossible to imagine, it's a state of being of which we have no experience at all.

But the idea is clear. For Christians in this life, it's good, and in that interim state it's better.

Just as in heaven, where we're re-embodied and all together in the city of God, that'll be best. Whereas for those who turn their back on the gospel, life actually in this world is bad, and in the next world will be, or in the interim state, will be worse, and after the resurrection will be worst of all.

see. Does that cover it? And Sheila, you have something to say. You mentioned that the Holy Spirit was not added to the Nicene Creed until what we'd like to be about 50 years.

chapter? Yes, that's right, 381. And even nowadays in the Apostles' Creed, he only gets a subordinate clause. We don't really learn anything about him.

[68 : 59] Now, were they struggling with the idea of the Trinity and where to fit him, or was there some confusion about what his work was, or why his big gap? Well, in the Apostles' Creed that stood there, which, you remember, dates from the second century, there wasn't any dispute about either the divinity of the Holy Spirit or his work.

And that, I suppose, is why nothing is elaborated about the Spirit in the Apostles' Creed.

In the Nicene Creed, in the first version, they focused at the Council of Nicaea, that is, in itself, they focused exclusively on negating Arianism with regard to Jesus Christ.

Then, in 381, they realized that this testimony, which the Orthodox had maintained right through, there wasn't any doubt about the divinity of the Spirit except among the Arians, but this testimony to the Spirit's divinity ought to go into the Creed for balance, for clarity, as a basis for teaching about the Holy Spirit in people's lives.

So, these extra sentences were added. That's the whole story there. But, in the church, there's enough evidence to say, well, the Spirit's ministry to the individual came to be appreciated more and more.

[70 : 42] It's a sort of steady upgrade in perception from the beginning of the second century to Augustine, who was, you know, end of fourth century, beginning of fifth century.

Augustine was extremely strong and clear on what the Holy Spirit does, transforming us. That's what was happening in the church. Phil? I'm sure we are all, you really captured our attention on the need for teaching.

And I think we respond to it by saying, how can we do this under modern conditions? And I'm thinking of your axiom that any serious formal instruction has to be examinable.

So I'm wondering how that could be done. Could it be something like this, that, for example, in each morning service, you had five minutes of instruction on some aspect of the creed, accompanied perhaps by one side of one page of notes.

And once a year, a serious formal examination to which the entire congregation could be invited to sit, an examination which would change every year, and which would give us that exercise of recalling precisely the teaching degree.

- [72 : 06] Thank you, Professor. Is this going to be an exam? No. If you submitted that proposal to the top authority in this church, I would support it 100% and be delighted.
- Delighted to think that it's happening. Quite seriously, I could do something with that idea. I could do more, I think, with five minutes in every service than I could with the annual exam for the whole congregation.
- I think we might have some difficulty in establishing that. I think we would have to say over and over again to the congregation, look, this examination is to help you even more than it's to help us appreciate what it is that you've learned.
- It's also extremely good for the people who make up the exam. Well, yes. some of you may be feeling very dubious about this exchange between the professor and myself.
- I suppose I'm a professor, well, I'm a professor too, and I'll just well admit it. This exchange then between the professors. But, yes, the ideal is absolutely right.
- [73 : 45] Thank you, Phil, for proposing it. My bias in this comes up from hearing discussions from time to time. We ought to have a course on so-and-so. And the first question is how would that subject be examinable?
- I was invited to teach a course in a British university, and before I even arrived at the site, I was asked to submit my final examination. And I thought there was some good sense on that.
- Well, I can't top that. I'm just delighted to hear it, and delighted with the vision for action in the church that's coming out of the experience.
- Thank you, Phil, for putting that idea into the hospital. I was going to say that we would all take it for credit, wouldn't we? Yeah.
- Yes. Well, I think we'd have to negotiate that.
- [74 : 53] Phil. What would you advise, or what could you say to someone who has faithfully attended church, believed all that he or she has been taught for a long enough time to have done that, but lacks assurance?
- What could you say to the individual about that? Well, to people who lack, Christians who lack assurance, I say two things together.
- one is, you know, the basis of our assurance is not anything that we believe about ourselves, but something that we believe about God, namely that he is faithful to his own promises.
- He has said he will keep us. The Lord Jesus has said specifically that he will keep us. He is the good shepherd who knows his sheep and keeps his sheep, and no one will pluck them out of his hand, no one will pluck them out of his father's hand, by echoing John 10, as I guess you will realize.
- So, the first question to the person who lacks assurance, do you have a problem in taking God's word that he'll keep you?
- [76 : 36] And the second thing that I would say to the person is, look, in the letter, the first letter from John, and one or two other places in the New Testament, the point is very heavily made that if you aren't living the Jesus way, well, your profession of faith in Jesus ought to be judged phony, and you ought to be the first to recognize that it's phony.
- But if you're living the Jesus way, in a life that seeks every day to love God and love one's neighbor, and to keep clear of sin, well, that in itself shows that your heart has been changed, you are a genuine believer, and that new heart of yours, out of which spontaneously comes the desire to live in love to God and love to others, that is evidence that God is preparing you for glory.

that's the second line of thought that I would take. And the third thing I might say to some individuals who were suffering in the way that you've described is, well, I'd ask them a question.

I'd say, look, are you living in regular fellowship with others of the people of God, in the church, in groups, whatever?

And I would say I ask this because one of the things that Satan does in order to undermine assurance is, first of all, to separate us from other Christians, and then, secondly, to tie our minds in knots while we are on our own.

[78 : 55] And if a person thus tied in knots comes back into the fellowship and finds himself or herself in the company of Christians who are not having a problem about assurance, but are experiencing the joy of the Lord, some of that can rub off onto the Christian in trouble, and he or she will find that my doubts are dissolving away because these are my people and I'm with them, seeking to travel the same route that they're seeking to travel.

so that's the third thing that I would say, and then depending on how someone responded to that much from me, I would respond as seemed appropriate, but that's how I would start.

That corresponds to a chair so many of them. These are the three things that one tries to say right at the outset of the conversation. Thank you.