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God, the Creed, and Me

A Reflection

The LPMP winter quarter 2007-2008 has given me great enlightenment, an epiphany of sorts, for which I shall always be deeply grateful and, I hope, a better Catholic Christian.

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.”¹ This simple prayer, a statement of faith, the *Sh'ma*, is on the lips and in the heart of practicing Jews when they enter or leave their homes touching their *Mezuzah* and kissing their fingers. It is a beautiful rite both in its simplicity and in its devotion to the truth of their belief. For most of us, the frequent reiteration of the most basic of the tenants of our philosophy serves to drive them deeper into our inner being where they become the essence of the person we are and the person we are becoming. Growth in faith, and growth as created beings, then, depends on the internalization of faith principles to the point where they are as much a part of us as our spleen or our lungs. Understanding, in an intellectual sense, might or might not help us get to heaven but, surely, “... whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.”² Clearly, far more is needed for our salvation than just the ability to recite the Creed but it is certainly the foundation that gives us the fortitude to live faithfully all the teachings of the Church.

Our Catholic Creed is at once a simple *Sh'ma* and a complex formula of building blocks for the structure of our entire system of beliefs. It can be understood by almost

¹ Deuteronomy 6:4

² Mark 10:15

everyone: Children, intellectuals, and the majority of those of us struggling to get through this life with our souls intact. Unless we internalize the beliefs fundamentally stated in the Creed, we will never be able to fully live and enjoy the life Christ gave us. We will never have that strength of conviction that allows us to move mountains or persevere in the face of adversities.

Is there a better teaching tool than the Nicene Creed? Does it not embody the entire wealth of the Kingdom? Will we not be excellent witnesses to Christ's love if we live every moment in total awe of the truths the Creed teaches us? Can we not fully explain our faith by simply reciting our articles of faith?

An intellectual approach to understanding all the nuances of the statements in the Creed is certainly fun and, for many of us, a necessary segment in our journey toward a richer appreciation and expression of our Catholic existence. Indeed, the Creed does appeal to the intellect. However, even more importantly, the Creed resonates with our spirit, with something in our soul and heart, in that place where God put his law before we were born.³

A few days ago, while reading *The Creed, The Apostolic Faith in Contemporary Theology*⁴ and pondering the connection between the Hebrew Sh'ma and our own Creed, I decided to build a *Mezuzah* of my own. I made a small scroll of the Apostle's Creed⁵ and put it in a box mounted beside my front door. Now, imitating the Jews but with new hope founded in Jesus Christ, I touch the box, kiss my fingers, and leave my home with my faith statement foremost in my mind and heart: "I believe in God, the Father

³ Romans 2:13-16

⁴ Berard Marthaler (Mystic, CT, Twenty Third Publications, 1998)

⁵ Roman Sacramentary of 1985

almighty, creator of heaven and earth.” It is a plain statement and the silent recitation of all the statements following it serves to do exactly what the early Israelites sought to do with their holy incantations; that is, to make real the prayer I pray each day: “Oh, Lord, if I must die today, please let it be with deep gratitude for your love for me and with the endeavor to love you better.”