

**ABSTRACT**

**CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE AS A MEANS OF**

**CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL FORMATION**

by

John Andrew Breon

The purpose of this research was to discover how *What Christians Believe*, a twelve-week study based on the Apostles' Creed, influenced the spiritual lives of participants at First United Methodist Church in Eufaula, Oklahoma. The Christian Spiritual Participation Profile (CSPP) was used as a pretest, posttest measure of observed changes in participants. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with a sample group of participants.

The study demonstrated that persons who study basic Christian doctrine can experience a sense of spiritual growth expressed in stronger commitment to spiritual disciplines. Participants' scores indicated weak participation on the scales used in the CSPP, thus demonstrating a need for spiritual growth. Significant difference in scores from pretest to posttest indicated that studying Christian doctrine and theology has potential to aid spiritual formation. The study also found that church members struggled to think through and articulate Christian doctrine as they were more interested in practical and concrete expressions of belief rather than abstract doctrines.

## DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled  
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John Andrew Breon

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CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE AS A MEANS OF  
CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL FORMATION

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of  
Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the requirements for the Degree  
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by

John Andrew Breon

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## CHAPTER 1

### PROBLEM

#### Introduction

People find spiritual nurture in a variety of places. C. S. Lewis describes the differences and similarities between books of doctrine and books of devotion:

Now the layman or amateur needs to be instructed as well as to be exhorted. In this age his need for knowledge is particularly pressing. Nor would I admit any sharp division between the two kinds of book. For my own part, I tend to find the doctrinal books often more helpful in devotion than the devotional books, and I rather suspect that the same experience may await many others. I believe that many who find that “nothing happens” when they sit down, or kneel down, to a book of devotion, would find that the heart sings unbidden while they are working their way through a tough bit of theology with a pipe in their teeth and a pencil in their hand. (205)

My own experience echoes what Lewis describes as I have found that doctrine and theology can be spiritually nourishing and can be important aspects of Christian spiritual formation. As such, theology is more than rational formulations; it also connects people with spiritual reality. Simon Chan calls for theological works to be devotional and for devotional works to be theological. He sees freedom of movement between doctrine and devotion. “Theological reflection and prayer are no longer discrete activities but exist in a dynamic, ongoing relationship in which one activity enriches the other, stimulating the Christian to new insights and greater fervor” (24). Larry D. Hart concurs, stating that theology’s ultimate purpose is to help persons truly know God and not just know about God. Hart calls for theologians to recover and articulate “the personal, experiential dimension of Christian faith,” leading to the inclusion of both objective and subjective elements of faith (9). Interestingly, the arrangement and content of St. Augustine’s *Confessions* suggest that theology should express itself by prayer or at least begin in

prayer (21; Pine-Coffin 15-16). Debra Dean Murphy sees Augustine holding together praise and knowledge in the *Confessions*. She goes on to point out that, for Augustine, “to learn, to know, is to be *transformed* [original emphasis]—it is to implicate our selves, our very bodies, in the actions and practices of learning and coming to know” (100-01).

Doctrine plays a role in Christian spiritual formation from the outset and throughout the Christian life. Robert E. Webber claims that Christian formation in the Church’s early centuries involved believing, behaving, and belonging (*Ancient-Future Evangelism* 23-24). Webber calls for a recovery of the ancient Church’s practice of forming disciples of Jesus (46-53). William J. Abraham sees evangelism as a comprehensive process of Christian initiation in which “conversion, baptism, and morality” along with “the Creed, spiritual gifts, and disciplines” all play a part (*Logic* 118, 142). Including an intellectual or cognitive aspect in Christian initiation is significant. The Church sometimes overlooks this doctrinal component of Christian beginnings and growth. Church members are unclear regarding what they believe, so they hesitate to share the good news with others, and they miss out on the formative and nurturing influence of a robust and lively expression of Christian faith.

While the Church needs to emphasize the value of doctrine in spiritual formation, it must also recognize the danger of dead orthodoxy or dogma that inhibits change and growth. Human beings are more than mere brains; therefore, Christian faith and life should include more than mere intellectual assent to doctrines. Writing about the Trinity, Maxie Dunnam concludes that humans will never probe all the depths of God’s mystery; however, believers are to love God with their *minds* as well as with heart, soul, and strength. Consequently, believers reflect on their faith and seek to articulate what they

believe. Despite this valid effort to articulate belief, persons do not have relationships with statements of belief; rather, they relate to the God whom the belief statement affirms (68-69).

C. Fitzsimmons Allison describes the dynamic by which believers begin to see an expression of truth as the truth itself. For example, the Church's creeds express and symbolize God's saving action. Christians believe the creeds in the sense of believing what the creeds express. However, "[t]he creeds did not hang on a cross for sinners. The human tendency to confuse symbols with what they represent causes the loss of their passion and power, the loss and dissipation of their energy" (22). Important as creeds are, they do not replace the living God or lively faith in God. Theology, doctrine, and intellectual pursuit comprise only one resource for spiritual formation. Still, sound doctrine does have a place in Christian life and, thus, in the Church's ministry.

Ellen T. Charry's book *By the Renewing of Your Minds* presents the beneficial effects of doctrine by exploring biblical material as well as the work of several Christian theologians up to John Calvin. Charry draws out the pastoral and formative influence of Christian doctrine. For this reason, Charry's writing provides much of the background of this study.

Joey Koskie asserts that theology can be a means of grace. Following John Wesley, Koskie measures soundness of theology by whether it leads to love of God and neighbor (3). In the Wesleyan tradition, persons do not learn theology in a narrowly cognitive way. "Knowledge of God *requires* [original emphasis] holiness; knowledge of God *leads* [original emphasis] to holiness" (5). Wesley valued theological reflection and study. From 1749 through 1755 he published a fifty-volume theological resource called

the *Christian Library*, which he describes as “Extracts From the Abridgements of the Choicest Pieces of Practical Divinity” (Langford 20). Commenting on the *Christian Library*, Thomas A. Langford notes that for Wesley, theology’s importance lies in its contribution to Christian formation. Never an end in itself, theology is instead a means for understanding and developing transformed living. Wesley was little interested in speculative theology. “He consistently turned theological reflection to practical service. Theology, in his understanding, was to be preached, sung, and lived” (20-21). Still, as Langford says of the Wesleyan revival, “the cause had content. There was a message to be proclaimed, a word to be heard” (19).

Another example from Wesley shows how he employed doctrine to encourage spiritual formation. Steve Harper states that Wesley’s sermons “represent the heart of his theology and ministry,” and he demonstrates that Wesley’s sermons function as “spiritual formation documents” (“Wesley’s Sermons” 131). Wesley’s background included several influences that perceived preaching as an act that shapes and influences people. Thus, Wesley chose to publish his sermons in order to make them accessible to more people for the purpose of nurture and reflection. Wesley’s decision to have a collection of sermons serve as doctrinal standards for a popular religious movement reveals how Wesley perceived himself as a spiritual director of “the people called Methodists” (132). Finally, Harper shows that Wesley’s selection and ordering of the standard sermons highlights soteriology. “The standard sermons are Wesley’s most normative statement regarding the nature of salvation” (133). For Wesley, salvation includes sanctification, which is the broader context for spiritual formation (Porter 415).

These references to Wesley's view of theology and his use of theological statements to provide for spiritual formation serve as examples that Christian doctrine and theological study can be effective means of Christian spiritual formation. Wesleyan theology is an important part of my theological background and so was a component in this study; however, the study did not focus narrowly on Wesley.

Since the early days of Christianity, the Church has recognized the need for summaries of its teaching. The creed-like *Shema* of Judaism (Deut. 6:4-5) provides the background for various creed-like statements in the New Testament. Later Christians developed these statements into a "rule of faith" and statements of faith for catechesis, baptism, worship, and defining Christian faith in the face of heresies (L. Johnson 11-39). While Christians still debate the value of creeds, many believers find creeds useful for summarizing and teaching the faith and, therefore, use them in worship and study.

Abraham suggests that the Nicene Creed "should be handed on as a symbol and summary of the faith" (*Logic* 147). He chooses the Nicene over the Apostles' Creed because early Church councils including both the eastern and western branches of the Church officially adopted the Nicene Creed; therefore, the Nicene Creed enjoys more ecumenical endorsement today. Still, Abraham does not want to make too much of this choice. The early creeds share enough similarity that the basic issues do not change from one creed to another (147). Other Church leaders opt for the Apostles' Creed because it provides a more concise outline of Christian faith (Dunnam 11-14; González, *Apostles' Creed* xi-xii; Howell xi-xiii; McGrath 9-10; Van Harn xii). This study used the Apostles' Creed because church members were more familiar with it. Further, the brevity of the Apostles' Creed makes it easier to study.

Several factors motivated this study. The need for spiritual formation in churches and in individual Christians' lives led me to this concentration. I also wanted others to share my experience of finding spiritual nourishment and direction in the study of Christian doctrine. In contrast to my experience, I have found that many United Methodists emphasize the practical side of Wesley's "practical divinity" and neglect the divinity or theology, with the result that faith becomes almost entirely pragmatic. This pragmatism is one component of what Roger E. Olson calls folk Christianity, which truncates the faith and reduces it to bumper-sticker clichés (*Questions* 14-18). As an antidote to folk Christianity, Olson recommends reflective Christianity and states that "robust, public, influential Christianity needs an intellectual side, and an intellectual side is impossible without critical thought" (18). My hope was to integrate thinking and study more fully in Christian experience without losing the necessary practical connection to real life.

Often in Sunday school, Bible studies, or conversations, church members downplay their knowledge of the Bible and Christian teaching. Especially when a variety of interpretations or viewpoints exists, people get confused and quit trying to work through the issue, or they cut off discussion in order not to seem disagreeable. Getting along with each other is usually more important than getting at the truth in most of the settings in which I have served. The impulse to be humble and to get along is good, but is problematic when it devalues truth and sound teaching. One of the hopes for this study was that it would raise awareness of the need for clear thinking and sound doctrine as part of Christian faith and life. As a result, church members would see the practicality of



Christian doctrine as it contributes to greater knowledge of God and increasing spiritual growth.

In the parlance of FUMC members, and most other church members I have known, spiritual formation is not a commonly used term. Some church members are familiar with the idea of spiritual formation through their involvement in the annual conference or their own reading. When I use the phrase, I usually explain that it refers to spiritual growth or development, and these terms seem to communicate more clearly. Descriptions of the church's mission refer to making disciples, and I include formation as an element in that process. This study offered the opportunity to expose more church members to the idea of spiritual formation and at the same time hopefully increase their desire and commitment to being more deeply formed in the image of Christ.

### **Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of this research was to discover how *What Christians Believe*, a twelve-week study based on the Apostles' Creed, influenced the spiritual formation of participants at First United Methodist Church in Eufaula, Oklahoma. As such, this study hypothesized that learning Christian doctrine and theology was an effective means of Christian spiritual formation. Sustained theological study not only increases knowledge but can also nurture spiritual development. Further, this research suggested that such development manifests itself in persons' deeper sense of closeness to God and their higher level of commitment to such spiritual disciplines as worship, prayer, study, and service.

### Research Questions

1. What understanding of and appreciation for basic Christian doctrine do participants display following the class *What Christians Believe*?
2. How do participants perceive the relationship between Christian doctrine and Christian spirituality following their involvement in the class *What Christians Believe*?
3. Does sustained study of the Apostles' Creed affect participants' perception of an increase in their knowledge of Christian doctrine and aid their spiritual formation?

### Definitions of Terms

*Basic Christian doctrine* describes the core content of the Christian faith as contained, for example, in the Apostles' Creed. The Church derives this content from Scripture and expresses it in a variety of ways through sermons, hymns, creeds, and other writings.

Human beings include cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions. *Spirituality* deals with the human spirit (Thayer 195). Recognizing the spiritual dimension and its relation to the cognitive is the basis for O. Jane Thayer's measure of spirituality that this study uses. *Christian spirituality* "represents ... the revelation of God manifested in *Jesus Christ* [original emphasis] through the Holy Spirit" or "the lived experience of Christian belief" (Collins, *Exploring Christian Spirituality* 13). Such specific focus is necessary to distinguish Christian spirituality from a more generic view of spirituality or the understanding of human spirituality in other religions.

*Christian spiritual formation* is "the process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others" (Mulholland, *Invitation* 12). This meaning is explored

further in the first part of Chapter 2. Thayer discusses spiritual formation in terms of spiritual growth, development, and transformation (196).

### **Ministry Intervention**

The ministry intervention in this study consisted of a twelve-week class during the fall of 2007 on *What Christians Believe* based on the Apostles' Creed. Participants included the adult Sunday school classes of First United Methodist Church (FUMC) in Eufaula, Oklahoma. Further, I encouraged members to invite unchurched friends who might be interested in learning about Christian beliefs. Fifty-nine people attended at least one session, with an average attendance of thirty-seven. Of those who attended at least once, twenty-four were male and thirty-five were female. The classes met together during the Sunday school hour each of the twelve weeks. Justo L. González's book *The Apostles' Creed for Today* was the basis for study and discussion in the class. I opened each session by reading a theme scripture and praying. Then I provided some context and background for the day's topic. If class members needed clarification about something in the reading, I tried to provide it. While I sought to avoid simply lecturing, some subject matter required a good deal of description and clarification. Several participants felt free to interact, asking questions and raising concerns during the class sessions. In addition to questions at the end of González's chapters, I wrote questions and guides for further study to be part of each session (see Appendix A). The class divided into four or five smaller groups to discuss the study questions. Prior to the first session and following the last session, participants responded to the Christian Spiritual Participation Profile (CSPP), a measure used to predict spiritual growth (see Appendix B). A class evaluation attached to the posttest instrument also gave participants an opportunity to express if and how the

class helped them grow spiritually (see Appendix F). Additionally, following the study I conducted interviews with ten participants to inquire about their experience of faith, their view of doctrine, and their perception of doctrine's relationship to spirituality (see Appendix H).

### **Context**

The study group consisted of three combined Sunday school classes. The Discoverers began as a young adult class and had been meeting for some time when I arrived at FUMC in 2003. I began teaching the Discoverers Class in the fall of 2003. At the time of the study, the class included a mix of generations and ages from mid-thirties to around eighty. Its average attendance was approximately ten members per week. The Seekers Class averaged ten to fifteen people per week; nearly all members were retired, with ages ranging from early sixties to eighties. A former Baptist missionary with a PhD in education was their teacher for a time. Then some members began taking turns teaching the class. A woman active in the church for many years taught the Wesley Class, a long-standing group in the church; this class ranged in age from late sixties to eighties.

FUMC claims to be Oklahoma's "oldest Methodist Church with continuing service" ("Church History"). The Methodist mission to this region began in 1831, and FUMC marks 1847 as its beginning, when Methodists established the Asbury Manual Labor School in Indian Territory. The original school building served as school and church until the church relocated to the town of Eufaula in 1879 ("Church History"). Methodists and United Methodists have been a presence serving in this community for more than 160 years. Tradition is important for the church, especially for its diminishing

long-time membership. The church's membership at the time of the study was 349. Average attendance was 110 in worship and forty-nine in Sunday school.

Eufaula is the county seat of McIntosh County and has a population of approximately 2,500 people. Another ten to fifteen thousand people live in the surrounding region on Lake Eufaula, Oklahoma's largest lake. Eufaula is a popular recreation and retirement community. In addition to long-time members, the church includes several people who have relocated to the area during the past ten to fifteen years. While many of these people are retired, some younger families are active in the church. In recent years community growth has required new buildings for the local elementary and middle schools; this trend evidenced the presence of many younger families in the area. People in the congregation possess a variety of church backgrounds including traditional mainline Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, and Baptist or other congregational traditions.

Fondness for local church tradition does not guarantee awareness of or appreciation for the Church's classic ecumenical tradition (Oden, *Living God* 1, 11) or the "story of Christian theology" (Olson, *Story* 13). United Methodist churches especially may suffer from this lack of connection with the Church's doctrinal tradition. Efforts to recover a healthy sense of doctrine in recent years have had some success (Abraham, *Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia*; Jones). Still, many church members see doctrine as hard to understand or not actually useful for their lives. This study aimed to help increase both understanding of and appreciation for Christian doctrine and theology.

## **Methodology**

This study combined qualitative and quantitative research. The Christian Spiritual Participation Profile (CSPP), an instrument that intends to predict spiritual growth by measuring members' participation in ten spiritual disciplines, provided a quantitative element. The CSPP was a pretest/posttest measure of participants' commitment to the various spiritual disciplines. The goal was to identify changes in responses following the class and to determine whether participation in the class resulted in increased commitment to the disciplines, which would indicate spiritual growth. Qualitative elements included my interaction with the class and observations during the study sessions. Personal interviews with ten of the participants provided insight into their self-perception of personal spiritual commitment and maturity as well as their grasp of Christian doctrine and its relation to Christian spirituality.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were members and constituents of Eufaula FUMC who decided to attend a twelve-week class entitled *What Christians Believe* using *The Apostles' Creed for Today* by González. Fifty-nine persons attended at least one class session. Twenty-four participants (40.6 percent) were male, and thirty-five were female (59.32 percent). This ratio was similar to that for the church as a whole: 349 members, 43.84 percent male and 56.16 percent female. The average age of respondents was 69.66, which reflects the congregation as a whole.

### **Variables**

Variables included engagement with Christian theology/doctrine and spiritual growth as perceived by participants and reflected in various acts of devotion and service.

The independent variable was the twelve-week study of *The Apostles' Creed for Today*. Dependent variables included the effects of the study on participants' understanding of and appreciation for basic Christian doctrine and their perception of the relationship between doctrine and spiritual life. Another dependent variable was the effect of the study on participants' spiritual formation.

### **Instruments**

The study utilized the CSPP to test the hypothesis that increasing knowledge of basic Christian doctrine aids in spiritual growth. Assuming an analogy between “growing and maturing in the spiritual dimension and growing and maturing in the cognitive/affective dimensions,” Thayer used learning theory and theology to develop the CSPP as “a measure to predict spiritual growth” with the focus on how intensely a person is involved in a process leading to desirable change (195-96).

Attached to the CSPP posttest was a class evaluation that included items asking participants to rate how the class had influenced them.

Semi-structured interviews conducted with ten participants following the class inquired about when participants' first came to faith, what they thought helped them grow, their understanding of Christian doctrine, and what relationship they perceived between doctrine and spirituality. The interviews also included questions regarding participants' personal perception of how their believing helped them grow spiritually and what actions their beliefs led them to take.

### **Data Collection**

Participants responded to the CSPP questions before and after the twelve-week class on *What Christians Believe*. I hypothesized that participants' scores would be

higher following the class. Those results would indicate a higher degree of involvement in the process of spiritual formation and the practices that promote spiritual growth.

Following each class session, I took notes on the discussion. Those observations along with conversations with various participants provided insight into how people were responding to the material and the class process.

The class evaluation attached to the post-class CSPP asked participants to rate their responses to twelve items dealing with the class content and discussion as well as participants' appreciation for the subject and their perception of its effect on them. I tabulated those responses to determine whether any explicit changes occurred in participants' lives.

In addition to administering the CSPP pre- and post-class, I interviewed participants in January 2008, about six weeks after completion of the class. These semi-structured interviews were intended to provide more insight into how participants perceived their Christian commitment, understanding of basic Christian doctrine, involvement in Christian practices, and progress in spiritual growth. The interviews also gave participants the opportunity to articulate how they perceived the relationship between what they believed and their spiritual growth.

### **Delimitations and Generalizability**

Because this study was limited to the experience of an intact group at one church, the results do not represent a wide variety of congregational contexts. Generalizability may be limited to churches of a similar size, socioeconomic background, and theological commitment. The content of the class was a component that could be generalized as it consisted of basic universal Christian affirmations found in the Apostles' Creed.



González, the author of *The Apostles' Creed for Today*, is a mainline Protestant writing primarily for other mainline Protestants; however, his work is accessible to Christians from other traditions. Other studies of the Creed might be appropriate for different ministry settings. Finally, while Thayer developed the CSPP primarily for evangelical churches, Christians from many traditions practice the spiritual disciplines it includes.

### **Biblical-Theological Background**

Scripture and Christian tradition provide rich resources for spiritual formation. This section explores the idea of spiritual formation in Scripture, the role of pastor-teachers, the importance of community, and the Trinity as a model for Christian spiritual formation.

### **Spiritual Formation in Scripture**

Themes of spiritual formation and direction are present throughout the Bible. *The Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible* includes a summary of God's formation of God's people:

The aim of God in history is the creation of an all-inclusive community of loving persons with God himself as the very center of this community as its prime Sustainer and most glorious Inhabitant (Eph. 2:19-22; 3:10). The Bible traces the formation of this community from the creation in the Garden of Eden all the way to the new heaven and the new earth. Come, join us as we explore the many dimensions of this *with-God* [original emphasis] history—from individual to family to tribe to people to nation to all humanity—and apply what we learn to our own spiritual formation. (Foster et. al., 1)

Scripture offers numerous examples of spiritual formation, such as God's forming Adam, the formation and direction of Israel as God's people through prophets, liturgy, and kings, and Jesus' directing and forming his followers. Paul's writings provide the major biblical foundation for the purpose of this study. One example is Paul's use of

“form” and its cognates in some of his letters. Paul writes to the Galatians, “My dear children, for whom I am again in the pains of childbirth until Christ is formed [morphothē] in you” (Gal. 4:19, NRSV). Paul refers to God’s purpose for his people “to be conformed [summorphous] to the likeness of his Son” (Rom. 8:29). Later, he writes, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed [metamorphousthē] by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will” (Rom. 12:2). Finally, Paul tells the Corinthians, “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed [metamorphoumetha] into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18).

Ephesians provides another example of the Pauline perspective on formation. In Ephesians 4:11-16, the ideas of the body of Christ being built up and growing, of maturity in Christ, and growing up into Christ are relevant. Ephesians 4:11-16 emphasizes ministries of the Word for equipping, ministering, building up, bringing the church to maturity, and protecting from “wind and wave” of doctrine as well as human deceit and cunning. This emphasis provides part of the basis for understanding sound biblical and theological teaching as an important element in spiritual formation. M. Robert Mulholland, Jr. finds in this passage a basis for his insights regarding the role of Scripture in spiritual formation. The gifts of ministers of the Word whom Christ gives to the church help all God’s people experience God’s working through the word to transform their lives (*Shaped by the Word* 90-91).

In Ephesians 4:13 Paul points toward the goal of building up the body: “until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, *to maturity*

[emphasis mine], to the measure of the full stature of Christ.” The phrase translated “maturity” [*eis andra teleion*] means, literally, “to the mature person.” Andrew T. Lincoln views this verse as referencing the whole Church. Paul emphasizes the mature adulthood of this person in contrast to the children he mentions in the next verse. “The Church, which has already been depicted as one new person (*anthropos*) in Christ (2:15), is to attain to what in principle it already has in him—maturity and completeness” (256; see also O’Brien 307; Patzia 220). Christ’s grace and gifts as well as the ministry done in and by the whole Church lead to the whole Church’s growth into the likeness of Christ. All together are involved in spiritual formation.

Referring to the gifts in verses 12-13, Arthur G. Patzia states, “Christ gave these offices to the church for the specific function of having the church attain its full maturity in him” (217). God seems intent on continuing to provide for the equipping of saints for the work of ministry and the building up of the body of Christ. Paul specifically says that these gifts are for the purpose of equipping saints and building up the body. Ephesians 4 continues to guide the Church’s life and ministry including helping all the members of Christ’s body work together toward the building up of the body “until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph. 4:13).

The ministry of the original apostles continues as people hear their witness in Scripture. Apostolicity was one of the criteria for a writing’s inclusion in the canon and is also one of the key marks of the Church. The Church’s apostolicity refers to the Church’s roots in the New Testament and consistency with apostolic teaching (L. Johnson 273-75). The Apostles’ Creed derives its name from its apostolic content. The Creed reflects and

summarizes apostolic teaching.

### **Role of Pastor-Teacher**

Not only does Ephesians 4:11-16 treat themes of formation in terms of growing and maturity, but it also includes the role of pastor-teacher as part of the process of forming a church in the image of Christ. Attention to the relevance and value of theological study as a means of grace or spiritual discipline that nurtures Christian formation calls for more emphasis on the teacher side of pastor-teacher. The biblical material in Ephesians continues to guide and inform the theology of ministry many pastors hold today. This study includes an emphasis on how theology and doctrine are formative.

The New Testament emphasizes the ministry of all church members. At the same time, throughout Christian history from the New Testament onward, the Church has seen unique and distinct roles and functions for various members. Consequently, the Church sets apart some for leading and providing direction in spiritual formation. Through baptism, God calls all Christians to ministry. Still, God does call some of those who are baptized to be leaders. William H. Willimon draws attention to Martin Luther's assertion that not all Christians can do all of a church's tasks every time the church gathers. Therefore, the Church ordains some of the baptized to witness, teach, heal, and proclaim to the rest of the Church on Sunday. The purpose of the pastor's representative ministry is to enable all the baptized to witness, teach, heal, and proclaim the rest of the time. Tracing the history and meaning of ordination shows the validity of special pastoral ministry (*Pastor* 16; see also Oden, *Pastoral Theology* 26-34).

Ephesians 4:11 closely associates pastors and teachers. “Teacher” is one important role pastors fill. Accordingly, the church expects pastors to teach in such a way that Christian community and individual Christians are formed in Christ’s likeness. Willimon devotes a chapter to “The Pastor as Teacher: Christian Formation” (*Pastor* 203-23). Interpreting Matthew 28:19-20, Willimon emphasizes that disciples are made rather than born. Further, he notes that Paul refers to himself in 1 Corinthians 5:9 as an *architecton* of God’s building, the church. This word refers to a craftsperson, an architect, or engineer. “Like a skilled artist, a pastor works with Christ to form the church” (204). Willimon then defines disciples as “those who have been formed by the good news of Jesus Christ into certain sorts of people who live in the world in certain sorts of ways that are often counter to the world’s ways” (204). Later he declares that all education is “transformation, conversion, formation, catechesis” (213). The pastor’s responsibility is to ensure that the congregation experiences *Christian* education and formation. The importance of the pastor’s role appears in the following statement: “The primary Christian educator is the pastor who, in the multiple acts of ministry, must model what it means for Christians constantly to be growing in their faith” (214). A pastor-teacher both experiences Christian spiritual formation and leads others to experience it as well.

### **Community as Context for Ministry and Formation**

The pastor-teacher’s personal formation occurs in the context of the body of Christ. Leading others to experience Christian formation implies a Christian community. From the beginning the Bible affirms God’s intention for community (Grenz, “Community of God” 24). In the Garden of Eden, God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18). God then created another human. The first recorded sin

humans committed after the Fall was murder, which destroys community. Cain's punishment for killing his brother, Abel, was to become a wanderer away from his community. He feared that he would be killed then, so God graciously provided him with some sort of protection (Gen. 4:1-16).

Throughout the primal history of Genesis 1-11, God dealt with humanity in general, though God did focus on sparing one family in the flood. The tower of Babel scene shows the power of human community, even though community was misdirected in an attempt to stay in one place rather than spread over the earth as God intended. The story of Babel follows the pattern of the other accounts of human sin throughout chapters 1-11, except this scene does not end with an act of grace as do the other accounts. Nevertheless, Abraham's call immediately follows the Babel story. In the Abraham narrative, God began to deal with this individual and his wife. God's goal was to make Abraham a great nation and a blessing to all the peoples on earth (Gen. 12:2-3). Throughout the rest of the Old Testament, God focuses on Abraham's family, the people (community) of Israel. Much of Israel's law concerned forming community and living in community. God's covenant was with the whole people, and God's desire was to dwell with God's people.

Out of the community of Israel emerged an individual: Jesus Christ, Israel's anticipated Messiah and "God with us" (Matt. 1:23). During much of Jesus' ministry, he focused on the small community of his disciples. By associating with and welcoming people who were not accepted in Israel's community life at the time, Jesus showed that God's kingdom is open to all. Much of Jesus' teaching concerned life in community. Jesus recovered the worldwide focus when he sent his people into all the world with the

gospel and with instructions to make disciples of all peoples. C. Norman Kraus points out that the kingdom of God Jesus proclaimed is a community of individuals who submit to the authority of God's covenant of "life and peace" (Mal. 2:5). This community both affirms individuality and makes *agape* the bond of unity (56).

The Gospels consistently emphasize the importance of community. Matthew serves as a good example. The genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1:1-17 shows his connection with the community of Israel. Jesus' title, Immanuel/God with us, shows God's desire to dwell with his people (1:23). Jesus' calling of the disciples began to create the new community (4:18-22). The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) depicts the life of those who are in God's new community. By calling Matthew and eating at his house with many tax collectors and sinners, Jesus showed the openness of his community (9:9-13). Jesus later told his disciples to pray for the Lord to send workers into the harvest field. He immediately called twelve of those disciples and sent them into the harvest field (9:37-10:5). The number twelve recalls the tribes of Israel and perhaps shows that Jesus was reconstituting the community of God's people. When Jesus' mother and brothers came to speak to him, he referred to his disciples as his mother and brothers. "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (12:46-50). In this instance Jesus was showing that the community of God's kingdom is a family that in some ways takes precedence over earthly families.

Matthew is the only Gospel that uses the word "church" (16:18; 18:17). Chapter 18 is concerned mostly with relationships in the Church, the community of faith. Matthew concludes with Jesus sending his followers into the world to make more disciples and to include more people in the community of those who are baptized and do

the Father's will. Jesus will continue to be "Immanuel," God with his people, for all time (Matt. 28:18-20).

Following Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension, the Holy Spirit came upon the gathering of Jesus' followers and made them into the Church, which is the community of the Spirit and the body of Christ. Kraus notes that the Pentecost experience was "*the formation of the new covenant community of the Spirit* [original emphasis]" (18). Acts 2:41-47 provides a summary of the early Church's growth. This passage continues to guide many in their thinking about the nature of the church and Christian community. Devotion to "the apostles' teaching" is especially relevant to the present study.

Ben Campbell Johnson and Glenn McDonald find two major aspects of community in four of the early Church's practices that Acts 2 describes. The apostles' teaching and breaking of bread are *formal* aspects of community. Fellowship and the prayers are *relational* aspects of community. "A vital community requires both the formal, which defines boundaries, worldview, and purposes; and the relational, which centers in fellowship and worship" (26-27). This study emphasizes one formal aspect of community, namely, defining boundaries of Christian belief through the Apostles' Creed.

The rest of Acts describes the community's growth as the members dealt with various issues regarding their life together. As such, Acts portrays the Christian community as on the move, reaching out, and establishing new communities in more places.

Nearly all the New Testament letters are addressed to local communities of the Spirit. Paul particularly sought to help believers understand the meaning of belonging to



God's new community. Robert Banks asserts that what distinguishes Paul's contribution to New Testament thought is primarily Paul's idea of community (2). Banks goes on to show that Paul's understanding of salvation and his idea of community are closely related. Paul did not view salvation as simply a transaction between the individual and God (17-18).

Gordon D. Fee also emphasizes the importance of community in Paul's theology and practice and condenses a broad range of material in his statement that Paul's "focus and concern are always on the people as a whole" (*Paul* 64). Certainly people enter salvation individually, but Paul rarely, if ever, considers salvation as simply a one-on-one relationship with God. He does include such a relationship in thinking about salvation, but for Paul, "to be saved" means to be joined with God's people. Fee demonstrates that in Paul's theology the primary goal of salvation is "an eschatological people, who together live the life of the future in the present age as they await the final consummation" (64).

Fee shows that the continuity between Paul and the Old Testament lies with the reality that God is saving *a people*. Discontinuity between Paul and the Old Testament relates to how God's people are now constituted. "It is still by election and grace, to be sure; but election has now taken place in Christ, and people are elect by virtue of their association with Christ through the Spirit" (*God's Empowering Presence* 870). Paul uses Old Testament terms for the church—"God's people," "God's saints," "God's elect," "Israel of God"—"but the most common designation is 'the church' (*ekklesia*)," which in the Septuagint "is regularly used to translate the Hebrew *qahal*, referring most often to the 'congregation of Israel'" (871; see also Banks 41-46). This connection of Israel and

the Church emphasizes the corporate nature of God's people as God's covenant was with the whole people of Israel.

The Holy Spirit creates and forms Christian community; thus, each community becomes a fellowship of the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13; 2 Cor. 13:13; Phil. 2:1-4). Paul's three major images for the church highlight the centrality of the Spirit to Paul's view of the believing community. First, he sees the church as God's family (Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:15). Banks says that family is the most significant metaphor of all for revealing the essence of Paul's thinking about community because of the emphasis on solidarity with one another (49). Next, Paul speaks of the Church as God's temple (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Tim. 3:15-16; cf. 1 Pet. 2:4-10). Finally he says that the Church is Christ's body (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-26; Eph. 1:23; 2:16; 3:6; 4:1-16; Fee, *God's Empowering Presence* 872-75). These images depict the holiness, unity, diversity, and relationship to God of the Church and the Church's individual members.

The New Testament ends with a depiction of community. Revelation pictures "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb" (7:9). Revelation also portrays the Church as the bride of Christ and uses the image of "the marriage supper of the Lamb" (19:7-9; 21:2-3). Most of Revelation 21 portrays God's covenant people as a city, a community in which God dwells with his people.

Stanley Grenz states, "[T]he concept of community lies at the center of the entire message of the Bible" ("Community of God" 24). This vision of community begins in the past and at its center is God's desire to dwell among his people. Still, the grand fulfillment of God's program lies in the future (24-25).

Not only biblical study but also theological reflection helps uncover God's intention for community and how to experience such community. Grenz calls for seeing "community" as an "integrative motif for theology" ("Community' as a Theological Motif" 14). Emphasis on God's kingdom was the focus of theology in the twentieth century, and Grenz wants to incorporate "community" to define the nature of God's reign. This understanding of community can "fill the concept of the kingdom with its proper content" (14). More importantly, community is central to the message of the Bible (as the previous survey shows). "God's program is directed to the bringing about of community in the highest sense of the word—a reconciled people from all nations, living within a renewed creation, and enjoying the presence of their Redeemer God" (14-15).

Emphasizing Christian community, Wesley rejects "solitary religion" as inconsistent with the gospel. In a famous assertion he says, "The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness" (13:321). By social holiness Wesley meant both fellowship or Christian community and Christian action or service. "'Faith working by love' is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection" (322). He bases his call to social holiness on Scripture: "Ye are taught of God, 'not to forsake the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is;' but to instruct, admonish, exhort, reprove, comfort, confirm, and every way 'build up one another'" (322).

Not only is Wesley's idea of social holiness instructive, but his practical application of social holiness also gives a model for experiencing Christian community. Wesley's work organizing the early Methodists into societies, classes, and bands ensured that they would be in community with other seekers and believers. Wesley also practiced

and encouraged others to practice means of grace that help provide for spiritual growth. The means that Wesley specifically emphasizes are prayer, searching the Scripture, the Lord's Supper, fasting, Christian conference, and works of mercy (Harper, *Devotional Life*). While Christian conference specifically refers to community, both individuals and groups can practice all of the other means of grace.

The biblical emphasis on community is a reminder that Christian faith is not simply individual experience or beliefs. Instead, Christian faith is the Church's faith of which the creeds are summaries and expressions. Behind the "I believe" of the Apostles' Creed is the "We believe" of the Nicene Creed ("Catechism" pars. 166-67). Interestingly, Christians say, "I believe" *together* as they usually recite the Apostles' Creed in corporate worship.

### **The Trinity as Model of Community and Formation**

While many theological themes could inform this discussion, the doctrine of the Trinity seems especially pertinent to this study. The one God who exists in three persons is both the model and the source of community for the church. Stephen Seamands describes the doctrine of the Trinity as the grammar of the Christian faith that is necessary to comprehend the Christian understanding of God and to communicate that understanding effectively (11). "However, the primary purpose of the Trinitarian grammar is not comprehension or communication, but communion with God" (12). Memorizing and repeating the Apostles' Creed is one way of learning this Christian "grammar." The Trinitarian outline of the Apostles' Creed gives shape to Christian believing and Christian life as it helps individuals know God better.

Grenz again offers a helpful summary, explaining that the ultimate basis for the goal of community is nothing less than the character of the triune God. God's purpose is that humanity might reflect God's eternal essence and that persons might truly be the image of God. The divine nature that humans are to reflect is love, which characterizes God from all eternity. Even before God created the world, God's nature was love. The doctrine of the Trinity asserts that throughout eternity God is a "multiplicity within unity" ("Community of God" 25). Within the divine life is an eternal love relation between the Father and the Son, with the Holy Spirit being that love. God's eternal being is as a community of love. God intends the Church to be God's community: "[a] fellowship of persons who are bound together by the love present among them through the power of God's Spirit and thereby who seek to show forth what God is like" (25).

Because human experience is social, faith and life in Christ involve community rather than just an interior awareness in the hearts of individuals. Community also reflects the triune life's relationality within creation. God delights in this reflection of God's life and at the same time brings fulfillment to human lives. The Holy Spirit creates fellowship among humans in history and the Spirit is the bond of love between the Father and Son in eternity. Because the Trinity is an open and inviting fellowship, God wants the church to be open and inviting as well. "The church is meant to resemble the triune life by being itself a place of reciprocity and self-giving" (Pinnock 116-17). Fellowship speaks of both divine life and community life because God intends the community to reflect the communion of the Trinity, which gives the church its being. Ministry in the Church also has a Trinitarian shape: "The ministry into which we have entered is the ministry *of* [original emphasis] Jesus Christ, the Son, *to* [original emphasis] the Father, *through*

[original emphasis] the Holy Spirit, for the sake of the church and the world” (Seamands 1-2, 15).

For too many Christians, the Trinity is simply an odd and hard to understand (much less explain) belief rather than the vibrant heart of Christian faith and the very life of the church. The life of the Trinity enters into Christians who also enter into the life of the Trinity through the Holy Spirit. After Jesus says, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9) and he promises to send “another Advocate ... the Spirit of Truth” (14:16-17), he also assures his followers, “I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you” (14:18). Further on in this passage, Jesus makes an amazing promise: “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and *we will come to them and make our home with them* [emphasis mine]” (14:23). Through the Spirit’s indwelling, God the Father and the Son also dwell in believers. At the same time, the Spirit lifts believers up to participate in the life of the Trinity. The Trinitarian structure of the Apostles’ Creed aids Christians in knowing the Trinity and being formed in the image of the triune God.

### **Overview**

Chapter 2 provides a survey of literature related to spiritual formation including emphasis on the church as the environment for spiritual formation. A look at the importance of Christian doctrine, especially as it relates to spirituality, follows. Next, this review presents the Apostles’ Creed as a summary of Christian faith and a means of spiritual formation. Chapter 3 describes the methodology for the ministry intervention conducted at FUMC. Chapter 4 summarizes the study’s findings, and Chapter 5 draws conclusions and applies them to the church’s life.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE

#### **Describing Spiritual Formation**

Over the last several years, many authors have contributed to a wider awareness and deeper understanding of spiritual formation. Richard J. Foster, author of *Celebration of Discipline*, a work that will soon have been in print for thirty years, stands out in the field of spiritual formation. In that work Foster introduced many Protestants to the concept of spiritual disciplines that promote true liberty and spiritual growth. Foster continues to be part of the contemporary spiritual formation movement. *Renovaré*, a ministry Foster founded, holds various conferences and has published several works including *The Renovaré Spiritual Formation Bible*. This study and devotional Bible includes essays, introductions to books, and notes that focus on God's presence with and formation of God's people (Foster et. al. xv).

Mulholland has also been a leader in reclaiming the idea of spiritual formation. In an early work, he describes Christian spiritual formation as “the process of being conformed to the image of Christ” (*Shaped by the Word* 27). Later he adds to that definition the important phrase “for the sake of others” (*Invitation* 12). Diverse authors put forth a variety of definitions and descriptions of Christian spiritual formation (Porter 415). Mulholland's emphasis on “process” and conforming to Christ's image is broad enough to include other descriptions. His “for the sake of others” helps avoid the spiritual narcissism that a wholly interior emphasis could produce. Dallas Willard's approach complements Mulholland's definition when he states that Christian spiritual formation “basically refers to the Spirit-driven *process* [original emphasis] of forming the inner

world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself” (*Renovation* 22-23). This inner transformation leads to obedience and external manifestations of Christlikeness.

### **History of the Idea**

The idea of spiritual formation is biblical and has a long history in the Church (Allen, *Spiritual Theology* 10, 16; Foster, *Streams*; Foster et. al. xxxvii; S. Johnson, 12; Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word* 27-30; Muto and van Kaam 31-32; Sheldrake 23-26). Willard states that spiritual formation is not a new thing in Christian history. To the contrary, “the ancient Christian communions of East and West show that practices of spiritual formation are as ancient as they themselves are” (“Idaho Springs” sec. 3). Groups within the Roman Catholic Church have long used the actual phrase *spiritual formation*. “Moreover, the reality, if not the language, is substantially present in the Protestant wing of the Church in its Reformed and Puritan forms, as well as among Anabaptists, Methodists and many later sub-divisions” (sec. 3).

From New Testament times until about the twelfth century, general use of the term “spiritual” reflected the apostle Paul’s understanding where “spirit” [*pneuma*] and “spiritual” [*pneumatikos*] referred to life in the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:17; 2:10-11). “Spiritual” speaks of the Spirit’s influence or manifestation. “The ‘spiritual person’ (e.g. 1 Cor. 2:14-15) is *not* [original emphasis] someone who turns away from material reality but rather someone in whom the Spirit of God dwells” (Sheldrake 23-24). The Latin noun *spiritualitas* (spirituality) appears in the fifth century. The context for this usage deals with living in the power of the Holy Spirit, so it still reflects Paul’s basic theology (24). With the rise of scholasticism in the twelfth century also arose a sharper distinction



between spirit and matter. The Pauline sense of “spiritual” diminished and the word increasingly represented opposition to the corporeal. However, into the thirteenth century, some prominent theologians held together both the Pauline and the anti-material understandings of spirituality. For most of the period from the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries, “spirituality” most frequently referred to clergy. In seventeenth century France the word again referred to the spiritual life. Positively it spoke of “a personal, affective relationship with God. However, this new meaning was also used pejoratively of enthusiastic or quietistic movements and here it was contrasted with words such as ‘devotion,’ which seemed to preserve a proper emphasis on human cooperation” (24). Therefore, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Christian writers employed a variety of words to express life in the Spirit, including Wesley’s use of “perfection.” Roman Catholic writers rarely used “spirituality” through the eighteenth century. Religious groups outside the mainline churches held claim to the word “spirituality” in the nineteenth century. Widespread use of “spirituality” increased in many churches throughout the twentieth century (24-25).

Philip Sheldrake suggests that the word “spirituality” seeks to express “the conscious human response to God that is both personal and ecclesial. In short, ‘life in the Spirit’” (25). He then explores different periods of Christian history in order to find literature that deals specifically with the “spiritual” life.

A comprehensive survey of the history of Christian spirituality or the many examples of spiritual formation in Christian history is beyond the scope of this study. The three volumes on Christian spirituality (McGinn, Meyendorff, and Leclercq; McGinn, Meyendorff, and Raitt; Dupré, Saliers, and Meyendorff) in the series *World Spirituality*

offer a wealth of information. Bernard McGinn's multivolume work, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, also treats the Christian spiritual tradition in each major era of Christian history. More concisely, Kenneth J. Collins introduces various perspectives on Christian spirituality and includes essays on spirituality from representatives of numerous traditions within Christianity (*Exploring Christian Spirituality*). Foster includes two appendixes that survey Christian history and lift up representative figures and movements illustrating aspects of life in the Spirit (*Streams*).

### **Historical Examples of Christian Spiritual Formation**

Despite the vast scope of Christian history and spirituality, highlighting some examples from that history seems appropriate because twenty-first century Christians are not the first to discover God's intention to form them in Christ's image and God's means of providing that formation. Since the biblical era, multitudes of Christians have learned about God's transforming grace and experienced it personally. The following examples give glimpses into some of the ways people have experienced God's grace forming their lives.

**Ignatius of Antioch.** Ignatius stands among the "apostolic fathers." "The category 'apostolic fathers' consists of persons and documents that interpreted and applied the apostolic message in the first apostleless generation, which was besieged by false apostles and attacks from pagan skeptics" (Olson, *Story* 41). Ignatius was bishop of Antioch in Syria and was martyred in Rome around AD 110 or 115. On his way to Rome, he wrote seven letters to various churches and to Polycarp of Smyrna (46).

Ignatius' letters reveal a spirituality that focuses on right belief about Jesus Christ,

holds to the faith of the one church, and has a high view of the sacraments. In the face of a form of Judaizing and of Docetism, Ignatius maintained the real incarnation of God in Jesus Christ (González, *History* 73-74). Ignatius maintained the unity of the Church in contrast to the various sects. González notes that Ignatius was the first to speak of the “catholic church” and to refer to the faith as “Christianity” (76). The Church submits to God, to Christ, and to the apostles through the bishops, presbyters, and deacons. The sacraments are the primary form and expression of this submission. “In the unity of the church, and especially through the eucharist, believers are united to Christ” (77). Ignatius refers to the Eucharist as “the medicine of immortality, and the antidote which wards off death but yields continuous life in union with Jesus Christ” (Richardson 93).

Some of Ignatius’ comments are noteworthy as they relate to this study. As he defends the reality of the Incarnation, he uses phrases that later appear, in somewhat different form, in the rule of faith and the creeds:

For our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived by Mary, in God’s plan being sprung both from the seed of David and from the Holy Spirit. He was born and baptized that by his Passion he might hallow water. (92-93)

Be deaf, then, to any talk that ignores Jesus Christ, of David’s lineage, of Mary; who was really born, ate, and drank; was really persecuted under Pontius Pilate; was really crucified and died, in the sight of heaven and earth and the underworld. He was really raised from the dead, for his Father raised him, just as his Father will raise us, who believe on him, through Christ Jesus, apart from whom we have no genuine life. (100)

Regarding our Lord, you are absolutely convinced that on the human side he was actually sprung from David’s line, Son of God according to God’s will and power, actually born of a virgin, baptized by John, that “all righteousness might be fulfilled by him,” and actually crucified for us in the flesh, under Pontius Pilate and Herod the Tetrarch. (113)

Ignatius’ letters reveal a spirituality that, among other features, has roots in the apostolic faith.

**Monasticism and mysticism.** Owen Chadwick states that “the monks always looked back to the apostolic Church as the source of their way of life” (13). Chadwick sees in the earliest Church a “puritan” emphasis. As the Church became more a part of wider society, it lost some of its puritan impulse. The monks sought to recover the high moral standards, rigorous discipline, and demanding expectations of the early Church. “They were the successors of at least one facet, an important facet, of primitive Christianity” (13).

As early as the second century, some Christians practiced stricter discipline in an attempt to fulfill the New Testament demand for *ascesis*, self-discipline. Two major developments led to loosely organized ascetics’ development: they withdrew from the congregation and they entered into a common discipline and rule (Chadwick 14-16).

Among “notable figures and significant movements,” Foster includes “Desert Fathers and Mothers” (*Streams* 322). Antony of Egypt was the most famous leader of this movement that began early in the fourth century. Leaders and contemplative communities were settling in the Egyptian desert. “By the middle of the fourth century Antony’s followers and thousands of other ascetics were devoting themselves to prayer and following Christ while living in the desert” (322).

Considering the interaction of doctrine and practice in the desert fathers, Chadwick states the difficulty in determining “precisely how far doctrine created the new way of life and how far the new way of life exacted a certain development in doctrine to account for it” (19). As Christians in the fourth century tried to define sanctity, perfection, holiness, and the fruits of holiness in one’s life, they drew on their memory of the martyrs. Those who had given up their lives rather than turn from the faith were great

heroes in the eyes of many ordinary Christians who wanted to imitate the martyrs.

Asceticism thus became a kind of substitute martyrdom and “martyr” became a figure of speech for anyone living a truly self-sacrificing life (20). As the Church became more established and less distinct from the world, numerous Christians followed the impulse to pursue holiness by drawing away from the Church and society. They sought solitude, but communities usually developed around them. Wiser and more experienced spiritual leaders provided for the less experienced as they faced the hardships of solitude. Leaders in Antony’s tradition developed the standard teaching that “no one should be allowed to attempt the solitary life until he had served a long probation in community” (24). Rules for community life developed and became part of spiritual direction for those who wanted to pursue holiness as Antony and others had.

Two subsequent leaders who developed and spread monastic order and teaching were John Cassian (360-432) and Benedict of Nursia (480-547). Cassian had lived in a community in Bethlehem. He then spent at least ten years studying under the solitaires of Egypt before going into exile in Marseilles. There he founded a community of monks and nuns. “His writings—the *Institutes* and the *Conferences*—gave the west a sane and balanced view of the aims and ideals of the Antonian movement and the Greek theories of ascetical spirituality” (Chadwick 25; see also Olson, *Story* 280-85). Benedict composed his rule sometime in the last decades of his life. Pope Gregory the Great possibly instituted *The Rule of St. Benedict* around 590-600 (Meisel and Mastro 28; Chadwick 25, 28-29). Four contributions of Benedict’s rule to Western monasticism are also elements of Benedictine spirituality: the work of God, which is formal and communal worship; communal work, with each monk having tasks to perform;

intellectual activity, reading and studying especially Scripture and Cassian's *Institutes* and *Conferences*; and, the vow of stability, whereby a monk promised to remain part of the community until his death (Meisel and Mastro 30-32). Foster summarizes the effects of Benedict's rule: "He provided connectedness to the past with his rule of 'spiritual reading,' simple accountability with his rule of 'stability,' and rootedness to common life with his rule of 'daily manual labor'" (*Streams* 312). Benedict's rule continues to guide the order that bears his name while it also offers insight to those from other traditions who seek order and structure in their spiritual life.

The Benedictines emphasize rule and order as means to purity and union with God. Another monastic order, the Carmelites, emphasizes contemplation of God and awareness of living in God's presence. The Carmelite tradition derives its name from Mt. Carmel where the prophet Elijah had a powerful encounter with God as he opposed the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:20-46). Leaders in the Carmelite tradition include Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross. A well-known Carmelite is Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, a seventeenth century lay brother who worked in the Carmelite monastery in Paris. Keith J. Egan notes that a theme of Carmelite spirituality was continual prayer, with life centered on following Jesus (97). Part of this background included mysticism, stemming from a medieval text, *Institution of the First Monks*, likely studied by both Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross (100). Another aspect of Carmelite life that would affect Lawrence the lay brother was that "from the time of the entry of the Carmelites into the mendicant ranks, lay women and men associated themselves with the order and on a variety of levels shared fellowship with the Carmelite friars" (101). A "renewed interest in the interior life" led to reform among the Carmelites in France during the

seventeenth century. Some of this renewed interest was due to the impact of the Discalced (Shoeless) Carmelites (Lawrence's order) on the main Carmelite body (104).

Brother Lawrence simply wanted to love God and do all for the love of God. He said, "Neither finesse nor learning is required to approach God, only a heart resolved to devote itself exclusively to him, and to love him alone" (96). At the same time, Lawrence was not anti-intellectual. Conrad De Meester points out that Lawrence had some intellectual training. He spoke sometimes of books he read or examined. He had the opportunity to hear fine sermons in the monastery church or others in Paris. Teresa of Avila's *Way of Perfection* was read in the refectory every year. She had written that "the Lord walks among the pots and pans"—a comment that must have pleased Lawrence the cook. He may also have read John of the Cross, whose works were translated by Cyprian of the Nativity, one of Lawrence's "confreres" (xxii). Still, Lawrence's way of life in God was not strictly intellectual. De Meester states, "But what is striking in the teaching of Lawrence, the nonintellectual opposed to elaborate methods, is that he cracks the nutshell, frees the essential, goes directly to the goal" (xxxv).

Brother Lawrence writes, "The [practice of the] presence of God is an application of our mind to God, or a remembrance of God present, that can be brought about by the imagination or the understanding" (39). He describes the awareness of God's presence as "an intellectual presence of God," sometimes called a "simple act," a "clear and distinct knowledge of God," an "indistinct view," a "general and loving awareness of God," "attention to God," "silent conversation with God," "trust in God," or "the soul's life and peace" (39-40). Frequently bringing the mind back into God's presence is an experience he calls "actual presence of God" that one experiences "in the depths and center of the

soul” (40). He concludes that “[t]he presence of God is then the soul’s life and nourishment, which can be acquired by the Lord’s grace” (40).

Brother Lawrence also shows a relaxed attitude toward work and failure. When he had the opportunity to practice some virtue, he would pray, “My God, I can only do this if you help me.” When he failed, he simply acknowledged the failure and told God, “I will never do anything right if you leave me alone; it’s up to you to stop me from falling and correct what is wrong” (92). Then he would no longer worry about his failure. He balanced this relaxed attitude with a strong commitment to doing God’s will and pleasing God. The first means to attaining this presence of God is “great purity of life” (41). Practicing God’s presence involves a commitment “always to be with God, and to do, say, or think nothing that could displease him” (49). He writes, “I do my work in simple faith before God, humbly and lovingly, and I carefully apply myself to avoid doing, saying, or thinking anything that might displease him” (53). In correspondence with a nun, he reminds her, “Our only concern in this life is to please God,... everything else is folly and vanity” (67).

The monastic tradition includes a variety of approaches to life in the Spirit. Humility, obedience, discipline, mystical union, and contemplative prayer all contribute to knowing God and experiencing Christian spirituality.

**Thomas à Kempis.** Thomas Hemerken was born in Kempen, Germany in late 1379 or early 1380. He received the name Thomas à Kempis (of Kempen) when he joined the community of the monastery of Mount St. Agnes near Zwolle in the Netherlands. He wrote the four books that comprise *The Imitation of Christ* between 1420 and 1427 (Tylenda xxxi, xxxii). Thomas died in 1471, leaving as a legacy *The Imitation*,



which “is the most famous and most beloved Christian devotional book ever written” (xxvii). Excluding the Bible, *The Imitation* is the most popular of Christian classics and the most widely read book in Western Christianity (Cunneen xvi; Foster, *Streams* 369).

In his work, Thomas gives wise and practical guidance for the monks in his community. Although he wrote for the monks, readers of all walks of life and various religious traditions find insight in *The Imitation* and benefit from familiarity with it. The dominant theme of the work is imitating Christ, following his example. At the same time, Thomas does not ignore relationship with Christ and union with him. The idea of union with Christ is most prominent in the fourth book, “On the Blessed Sacrament” (see Kempis 188-89).

Relating to this study, Thomas offers the helpful reminder that learning and knowledge alone are insufficient; followers of Christ need God’s enlightenment to deliver them from blindness of heart. Even hearing the gospel repeatedly has little effect on persons who do not have the spirit of Christ and do not strive to conform their lives to his (Kempis 3). Thomas even challenges the desire to know theology for its own sake:

What good does it do you to be able to give a learned discourse on the Trinity, while you are without humility and, thus, are displeasing to the Trinity? Esoteric words neither make us holy nor righteous; only a virtuous life makes us beloved of God. I would rather experience repentance in my soul than know how to define it. (3)

For Thomas, humility, submission, obedience, experience, and suffering are essential features of a life making spiritual progress in imitation of Christ; they are more important than human knowledge (140-41).

Thomas calls for discipline, not only in imitating Christ but also in following the example of other heroes of the spiritual life such as the desert fathers (Kempis 22).

Making spiritual progress requires living in the fear of the Lord. “Do not be easygoing, but control and govern your senses and do not give yourself over to foolish merrymaking. Apply yourself to repentance of heart and you will find much devotion” (29).

One of the many prayers in *The Imitation* expresses well Thomas’ spirituality:

Grant me, Lord, to know what I ought to know, to love what I ought to love, and praise what pleases You the most. Let me hold in esteem what is most precious to You and detest all that is foul in Your sight. (Kempis 157)

According to Thomas, submission to Christ in a spirit of humility leads to becoming more like Christ in one’s attitude and behavior.

**John Wesley.** David Lowes Watson demonstrates that Wesley was able to create a “theological synthesis between the two major strands of English Protestant spirituality—Anglican holiness of intent and Puritan inward assurance—and apply it in the practical outworking of an accountable discipleship” (172). Wesley read widely in these two traditions as well as in the writings of Roman Catholic mystics. Robert G. Tuttle, Jr. examines the mystics’ influence on Wesley as he traces Wesley’s infatuation with the mystics and his later rejection of them. Wesley finally synthesized the best of mystical teaching with the other theological and spiritual influences in his life (*Mysticism* 65-142, 184-85). Watson points out that the powerful inward assurance Wesley experienced was his reason for turning from the mystics for a time. He goes on to explain how Wesley held together God’s initiative as the *dynamic* of spirituality along with spiritual disciplines as the *form* of spirituality. Wesley continued to appreciate the emphasis of some mystics on defining “true religion” as union with God, participation in God’s nature, God’s image upon the human soul, or Christ’s formation within the

Christian. “The quest for Christlikeness continued to be integral to Wesley’s spirituality” (176).

Wesley’s “order of salvation,” which he summarizes especially well in his sermon “The Scripture Way of Salvation” exalts God’s initiative throughout the Christian life. At the same time, Wesley holds that human response is necessary and, by grace, human response is possible (6: 43-54). Wesley’s view of salvation includes major transitions that mark progress from one experience of grace to another. These transitions take persons “from *ignorance* [original emphasis] of God (natural state), to the *fear* [original emphasis] of God (the legal state), to the very beginnings of the *love* [original emphasis] of God (evangelical state), and ultimately to the perfection of that love (entire sanctification)” (Collins, *Scripture Way* 69). Collins identifies two basic themes in Wesley’s way of salvation. The first theme is an emphasis on process, with the basic imperative to go forward. The second theme stresses “the actualization of grace such that believers become truly *transformed* [original emphasis] in affections, temper, and being and thereby become fit, through the favor and power of God, for deeper appropriations of grace” (70). Watson claims that Wesley’s order of salvation shows that his spirituality “was accountable to a disciplined theological reflection” and stayed true to the principles of the English Reformation (177). Part of this study’s purpose is to portray a mutual accountability between spirituality and theology.

The biblical and historical vision of life in Christ is a vision of a transforming process. An intention to receive God’s grace, to please God, and to grow is an important part of this process (Law 12-18; Willard, *Renovation* 87-89). As an expression of the intention to receive God’s grace, spiritual disciplines are a vital part of the transforming

process of spiritual formation. Likeness to Christ as the goal of the transforming process gives spiritual formation a Christological shape. Because likeness to Christ includes self-giving love, spiritual formation is for the sake of others and occurs in the company of others (Mulholland, *Invitation* 16-17). This emphasis on self-giving love gives Christian spiritual formation a Trinitarian focus (Chan 46, 49; Charry, “Spiritual Formation” 371). Regular use of the Apostles’ Creed and study of the Creed, with its focus on Christ and Trinitarian outline, hold these realities before the Church and remind believers of what forms their lives.

### **Church as Environment for Spiritual Formation**

Willard declares that spiritual formation in Christlikeness is “the exclusive primary goal of the local congregation” (*Renovation* 235). Drawing on the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20, Willard identifies three stages of God’s plan for spiritual formation in the local congregation. First is making disciples, or “apprentices,” of Jesus. Next, making disciples includes “immersing the apprentices at all levels of growth in the Trinitarian presence” (240; see also Charry, “Spiritual Formation” 372). Finally, making disciples involves inward transformation, so the words and deeds of Christ flow naturally from the transformed inner life. Willard maintains that the aforementioned process is what Jesus meant by “teaching them to do everything I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20). God calls and enables local congregations to make disciples in this way (240). Spiritual formation is an essential component of disciple making.

The church is a community that creates an environment or ecology for “faith formation,” Christian identity, and spiritual formation (Matthaei 57-58; S. Johnson 70).

For Webber, because God is present in the Church, “the church itself is a womb for disciple making” (*Ancient-Future Evangelism* 74). Faith formation can lead to spiritual formation, as its aim is a deeper relationship with God that produces faithful witness through word and action. Being in this relationship with God transforms people and increases their love for God’s creation, including themselves and others. “While the faith community’s efforts do not cause this transformation, they provide the environment and opportunities for lives to be transformed by God through the process of faith formation” (Matthaei 57). Ephesians 4:15-16 declares that the spiritual growth of the entire faith community is decisive, not simply the spiritual growth of individual Christians. Any Christian spiritual formation depends on a church that is alive and involved in God’s creative and redemptive work. “The more authentic the experience of the church *as* [original emphasis] church, the more authentic will be the experience of Christians who are shaped through initiation and involvement there” (S. Johnson 73). The Church experiences a new reality as it lives by a unique vision and story. Entering into the Church’s life means learning and experiencing the Church’s story, values, and perspective. A person entering the Church’s life in this way catches the countercultural nature of the faith and “begins to be formed by immersion in the ways of the community” (Webber, *Ancient-Future Evangelism* 75). All that a church does educates and forms people in some way, but a church also needs specific teaching and effort aimed at spiritual formation.

Proclaiming and teaching Christian doctrine are aspects of the faith community’s effort to provide a transformative environment. Charry suggests framing the Christian life around “prayer, study and service” (*By the Renewing of Your Minds* 242). With those

three pillars in place, she presents three corresponding stages in the process of forming Christian life: awakening, catechesis, and sapience (242). This study especially emphasizes the study/catechesis aspect of Christian spiritual formation while recognizing the importance of other aspects.

Foster includes study in his treatment of primary spiritual disciplines. Citing Romans 12:2, he states that the mind is renewed by applying it to those things that will transform it (*Celebration* 62). Further, Foster defines study as “a specific kind of experience in which through careful attention to reality the mind is enabled to move in a certain direction” (63). Scripture is the primary resource for study that promotes Christian spiritual formation. The Bible is central, foundational, and nourishing for Christian faith. At the same time, “the experiential classics in Christian literature” are valuable for study that forms persons spiritually (71).

This study sought to show that Christian doctrine has value for Christian spiritual formation. The Apostles’ Creed is one example of presenting Christian doctrine in a condensed form that people can learn easily. Important considerations include remembering the biblical roots of sound doctrine and recognizing the need for persons to experience the realities that sound doctrine signifies.

### **The Role of Christian Doctrine and Theology**

In the realm of Christian belief, “doctrine” has a number of meanings. Some categorize Christian beliefs as *dogma* (essential to the gospel), *doctrine* (important but not essential), and *opinion* (interesting but relatively unimportant to the Church’s faith) (Grenz and Olson 73-77; Olson, *Story* 17-18; Allen, *Spiritual Theology* 159-60). Describing John Calvin’s approach, Charry refers to *articles of religion* as statements of

faith that all believers can agree on (various sections of the Creed), *doctrine* as the totality of knowledge of God, and *doctrines* as specific but nonessential practices. Calvin used “doctrine” in the broad sense to speak of the “general force or sum of teaching that guides believers toward God. Presenting it clearly is the task he set himself as an interpreter of the Creed” (*By the Renewing of Your Minds* 204). Yet another delineation of “doctrine” sees its broadest meaning as encompassing all the teaching the Church does in all its forms. An additional level, within that broad category, includes official teachings by which church leaders set out to instruct others. Narrowing the category even further, official teaching includes statements that are “authoritative official teaching.” The Church validates all other doctrines by reference to authoritative doctrine (Jones 33-34; Abraham, *Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia* 34). While all of these levels of doctrine may contribute to Christian formation, this study primarily considered core or essential doctrines as the Apostles’ Creed outlines them.

Among several aspects of initiation into the reign of God, Abraham includes an intellectual component. Christian initiation has an “inescapably cognitive side to it” (*Logic* 142; see also Jones 283). Entering God’s reign involves commitment to the Church’s intellectual heritage and theological tradition that arose in response to God’s kingdom coming into history (Abraham, *Logic* 143). Abraham sees some sort of creed as indispensable for Christian faith, and he puts forth good reasons for using the Nicene Creed as a symbol and summary of the faith, though as previously shown, Abraham does not see essential differences among the early Christian creeds (147).

As well as being essential to Christian initiation, the intellectual component

contributes to ongoing Christian faith and life. Webber points out that Martin Luther saw that the Holy Spirit generates lively faith through instruction in faith after baptism and before confirmation, as well as throughout life in the church. “To assure this lively faith Luther introduced the *catechism* [original emphasis] (the word means ‘instruct’)” (*Ancient–Future Evangelism* 28). According to some expressions of classical Christian theology, sin arises in the mind. Regeneration also arises in the mind and becomes the means of clearing a confused mind (Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds* 207, 210). The modern rationalist tradition has divided mind from heart, or cognition from affect. Classical Christian theology, on the other hand, does not know this dualism but sees the self as including both cognition and affect. Understanding the mind in a holistic sense enables an accurate understanding of the mind’s role in sin, regeneration, and sanctification (220). Spiritual formation requires thinking in a holistic way. “Thoughts” include all the ways people are conscious of things such as memories, perceptions, and beliefs. Examples of “thoughts” also include thinking about a person, an appointment, or what to have for dinner. Thinking includes searching out what has to be true or could not be true, given certain facts or assumptions (Willard, *Renovation* 96, 104). Changing thinking changes beliefs and, therefore, changes behavior because beliefs give shape and direction to the manner in which people live (Grenz, *What Christians* 15; A. Hart 21; Thieliicke 4; Willard, *Renovation* 30-31, 90, 94). Regarding the Great Commandment, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matt. 22:37), St. Augustine says, “Thus all your thoughts and all your life and all your understanding should be turned toward Him from whom you receive these powers” (*On Christian Doctrine* 19). He later warns against thinking that the Holy Spirit



is a substitute for learning. The Spirit's teaching does not preclude learning from other people as well (141).

Theologians often cite Anselm's phrase "faith seeking understanding" as the purpose of theology (1; see also Charry, *Inquiring after God* 1-3; Chilcote 65; Olson, *Story* 11). Anselm's phrase is also an appropriate description of one part of ongoing life in Christ or one aspect of spiritual formation. Theological study is important for shaping, informing, and nurturing Christian spiritual formation. In some sense, every person is a theologian (L. Hart 2). The question, then, is whether one is a good theologian who actually does the hard work of thinking (Cobb 7) and whose theology is true (Grenz and Olson 13-14). Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson describe a spectrum of reflection on Christian faith that ranges from folk theology to academic theology and that includes lay theology, ministerial theology, and professional theology (26). While subjecting folk theology to criticism, these authors see the other varieties as valid and appropriate for various situations. They assert that theology, or thinking about God, is essential and has a role in the life of discipleship (or spiritual formation) because good theology grounds people's lives in "biblically informed, Christian truth" (39).

Those in the evangelical tradition tend to emphasize grounding Christian spiritual formation in the truth of God's revelation (Chan 35; Grenz and Olson 41; G. Lewis 292; Porter 415; Waltke 28, 35). Gordon R. Lewis stresses this point, but at the same time he almost obscures it by an overemphasis on mental assent to propositional statements, which he claims is necessary for salvation (278) and by his polemic regarding inerrancy (271, 297-98). Webber states that the common Protestant equation of knowledge and spirituality results from a strong emphasis on the catechism and a rejection of everything

Catholic (*Ancient-Future Evangelism* 29). Allison affirms that the creeds are important “as faithful guidelines to the inevitable implications of scripture and boundaries for what can be called authentic Christianity” (65). The limits that the creeds provide are valuable but those limits themselves can lead to a heresy: “the tendency of orthodoxy to define itself as simple assent to the creeds” (65). Lewis does not go as far as the heresy Allison cautions against, and, despite his tendency toward scholasticism, Lewis makes the valid point that Christian faith and spirituality have some form and content and are not simply amorphous or nonrational.

Grenz and Olson aver that faith is not the same as assent to doctrine; rather, faith is personal response to God’s call and “this response entails an intellectual reorientation” (127). Christians do affirm the basic assertions that the gospel includes. At the same time, faith also involves a person’s will and emotions. In Christian faith persons commit themselves to God as revealed in Jesus Christ, “whom to know is to love” (127). A theologian is not necessarily a person of greater faith, although one could anticipate that studying theology would lead to “greater trust in, love for and obedience to our great God and Savior. With faith we move into life. As people of faith we seek to take Christian commitment—Christian belief—into our world” (127).

Another characteristic of evangelical spirituality is an emphasis on “a conscious, personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ” (Chan 9). G. Lewis, a strong proponent of revelation as propositional and belief as intellectual assent, acknowledges that Christians place their faith in the living Christ (289). Further, he states, “Evangelical spirituality is holistic. Faith in God and fellowship with God involves (1) mental assent to revealed truth; (2) affectionate desire for its referent [an odd way to describe humans’

love for God]; and (3) volitional action in humble obedience” (293). In other words, Christian faith involves balancing and uniting propositional and experiential truth. Thus, being Christian includes believing, committing, speaking, and doing the gospel (Tuttle, “Shortening the Leap”). Evangelical spirituality is Christ-centered and so stresses “conversion to a lively, personal faith in Jesus Christ” (Chan 47; see also George and McGrath 3). This emphasis on relationship with Christ reinforces the idea of spiritual formation as growing or increasing in Christlikeness.

Charry promotes theology and doctrine as useful and beneficial for healthy Christian life and spiritual formation. Doctrine is both formative and sapiential, that is, it involves “engaged knowledge that emotionally connects the knower to the known” (*By the Renewing of Your Minds* 4). The believer has knowledge *of* God, not just knowledge *about* God. Still, knowing God involves knowing things about God. As a result, doctrine and creeds have a place in persons’ knowledge of God. Charry describes the heart of her work when she relates how classical Christian writers spoke of God and addressed their readers:

Taking the doctrines of the Christian faith seriously was assumed to change how we think and act—to remake us. The theologians who shaped the tradition believed that God was working with us to teach us something, to get our attention through the Christian story, including those elements of the story that make the least sense to us. They were interested in forming us as excellent persons. Christian doctrines aim to be good for us by forming or reforming our character; they aim to be salutary. They seek to form excellent persons with God as the model, and this in a quite literal sense, not as metaphors pointing to universal truths of human experience that lie beyond the events themselves. (vii)

G. Lewis states that every biblical doctrine is of “enduring spiritual significance” (296).

Michael Jenkins affirms that Christians’ common life before God is the ground of knowing God and that the purpose of studying God “is nothing less than the

transformation of our lives ‘by the renewing of our minds’” (17). Christian doctrine and its study are spiritually forming as they can help persons know God.

Medical imagery comes to the forefront in some treatments of doctrine and its function in the Church. For example, the skeleton gives shape to the human body and makes freedom of movement possible; doctrine functions similarly in the body of Christian faith and life (Brand and Yancey 75-77). Another approach appearing in some discussions of the Church uses images of “diagnosing” the Church’s troubles and then “prescribing” curative measures. Abraham writes about “the healing of doctrine,” meaning the Church’s recovery of doctrine and the renewal such a recovery brings to the Church (*Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia* 90). He prescribes retrieving the great canonical traditions of the Church including the gospel, the Scriptures, the sacraments, classical disciplines of the Christian life, and “the great classical doctrines of the church as represented by the early fathers and the creeds” (90). These canonical traditions are gifts of the Holy Spirit to the Church for the purpose of salvation and healing (90-91). Charry describes Christianity as therapy or medicine for the soul. She uses the medical model to help contemporary readers understand something of the claims of premodern theologians that “God effects spiritual transformation” (*By the Renewing of Your Minds* 11). Just as with medical practice, the basis for theology involves more than knowledge and sound judgment. The patient must trust and cooperate with the doctor and follow the doctor’s orders. Accordingly, the successful practice of both medicine and theology requires trust and obedience. “The believer must trust God, be acquainted with the teachings of the church, participate in rites and practices of the church, and be nourished by a supportive community” (14).

Other studies take the medical analogy and the whole discussion of doctrine and theology in a different direction. John B. Cobb, Jr. claims that the trend of persons taking more responsibility for their own health is analogous to the practice of Christians taking responsibility for their own believing. While he makes the good point that no one can believe for another person, Cobb diminishes the role of Christian tradition, including creeds, in contemporary Christian faith. Cobb desires that people not simply acquiesce to doctrine but that they instead discover and articulate the convictions that shape their lives (17-18). He seems to assume that believers ought not identify their personal convictions with traditional Christian beliefs or draw on traditional Christian beliefs to form their personal convictions. Cobb's approach contrasts with one of the basic assumptions of this study, namely, scriptural and classical Christian doctrine as expressed in the Creed is part of the conviction that shapes Christians' lives.

Cobb sees personal authenticity and integrity as more important than received tradition or doctrine. In treating the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, he sees all four components (Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience) as equal in "realistically" guiding theological thinking (61). These components are internal rather than predefined and imposed from without the person. One determines their meaning and authority only in the process of doing theology (61-62). Cobb begins with *experience*, then treats *reason*, *tradition*, and *Scripture*. Nevertheless, he does see normative elements within Christian tradition that can criticize unreflective conventions and habits. Then he asserts that tradition includes all of culture as it informs personal beliefs (65-66). As such, the Bible is part of tradition. Cobb asserts that the Bible has authority that differs from the authority

the Church has traditionally claimed (wrongly in Cobb's view) for a creed. He downplays and almost rejects creeds:

A creed can *claim* [original emphasis] to be the congealed expression of the truth cumulatively developed through complex historical processes, rather than just one step in the whole movement of tradition. Fortunately, *since there is no creedal summary in the Bible* [emphasis mine], there is no danger of this distortion. (68)

“Congealed” seems a rather disparaging description of Christian creeds. Further, while the Bible contains no specific “creedal summary,” Scripture appears to include at least some creed-like summaries of doctrine. These summaries are not identical to the later creeds, but the early Church saw the creeds as expressing the substance of biblical teaching in general, and New Testament teaching in particular (Cullmann 22-23, 41; L. Johnson 11-21; Kelly 13).

Later, Cobb seeks to deal with the tension between “total personal integrity” and the Church’s need for “shared convictions as a basis for common worship and common action in the world” (139). Cobb suggests that personal integrity and authenticity requires individuals to discover their own real life-determining beliefs. This personal discovery contrasts with the beliefs persons hold only because such beliefs are part of official Church teaching, especially as expressed in ancient creeds. “Thus the development of authentic, explicit faith and personal theology seems to involve the downgrading of church teaching!” (140). While Cobb seems to prefer to resolve this problem by dispensing with creeds, he recognizes the reality that churches without creeds often become divisive. He concludes that the best answer is to relegate creeds or articles of religion to items of historical interest and not to require certain beliefs of church members; instead, Cobb suggests that church members should be taught to think

theologically according to the quadrilateral (140-41). Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., shares Cobb's discomfort with assent to propositions that seem unbelievable. Jennings writes about the embarrassment that a modern person might feel when affirming some of the statements in the Apostles' Creed. His solution is to view the Creed as something similar to a pledge of allegiance or wedding vows. As such, Jennings portrays the Creed as an expression of loyalty to the God the Creed identifies (15, 18-19). Certainly loyalty or faithfulness is an aspect of faith, but this recognition does not call for disregarding the content of the Church's faith. Further, Christians might wonder why the Creed's affirmations can provide a reliable account of God's character if those affirmations are not true.

Cobb seems to represent an Enlightenment worldview. He appears to be among those with "a certain frame of mind which, in effect, believes that adherence to the historic Creeds of the Church is the antithesis of unfettered Christian spirituality" (A. Hart 19). Abraham rejects this view of doctrine in relation to contemporary theology (*Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia* 44, 56). Rather than simply offering background material for contemporary theologizing, classical Christian doctrine including creeds presents a rich resource for Christian thinking and spiritual formation. Cobb's perspective may include the helpful reminder that Christian faith is alive and growing and that orthodoxy can harden into a dead letter rather than being a living and life-giving means of grace. Still, Cobb seems to have given up too much in trying to lift up individual autonomy, authenticity, and integrity. "The faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3) continues to be a rich resource for the Church's faith and life.

Christian doctrine both provides the content of Christian belief and shapes Christian character. Christian teaching can help people know, love, and enjoy God. Christian formation is both intellectual and spiritual. Believers grow in their understanding of God and experience formation by loving the God whom they confess. The study of theology both informs and transforms (Allen, *Spiritual Theology* 19, 97; Charry, “Spiritual Formation” 368; *Inquiring after God* xxiv; Jones 74). As churches engage in evangelistic and spiritual formation ministries, they discover or rediscover their need for Christian doctrine. Doctrine is necessary to deal with questions regarding the content of the gospel message and how best to communicate that message. In the process of spiritual formation, doctrine gives definition to the goal of Christian life, describes mature Christianity, and provides a gauge for progress in Christian development (Jones 17-18). Personal experience of God in Jesus Christ gives rise to true theology. As theology reflects on that experience, it leads to experiencing and knowing God more fully. By giving spiritual life a distinct focus, theology leads to godliness (Chan 16-17).

Another description of Christian spirituality views it as the attempt by Christians to shape their lives in accord with Christian doctrines and to live by the truth the doctrines enshrine (Allen, *Spiritual Theology* 152). Because sin clouds human hearts and minds, receiving God’s revelation requires repentance. In the same vein, increasing understanding of God’s revelation requires ongoing spiritual growth (Allen, “Intellectual Inquiry” 18; *Spiritual Theology* 153). Engaging in working through problems intrinsic to theology (e.g., the Trinity) can result in spiritual formation if a person is involved with God and seeking to know God (“Intellectual Inquiry” 17, 24). Diogenes Allen writes about the importance of doctrine in shaping one’s life:



If we are not serious about trying to shape our life in accordance with Christian teachings, however tentatively we first hold them to be true, then the substantial help we need is unlikely to be available to us and our understanding will be inadequate. *To ask that Christian doctrines be taken seriously by those who are concerned with spirituality is not a baseless demand for conformity, but an invitation into contact with God, who will help us and lead us to greater knowledge* [emphasis mine]. (*Spiritual Theology* 160)

Humans know God through God's self-revelation. Doctrine develops to convey some of the content of that revelation. In theology, persons reflect on and respond to revelation. Increasing knowledge of doctrine and theology can be a means of grace to increase knowledge of the God who gives that revelation. The Apostles' Creed is one expression of doctrine that arises from revelation. Prayerfully studying the Creed and its articles is a theological exercise that helps the spirit and, therefore, the whole person grow.

### **The Apostles' Creed as Christian Doctrine and Means of Spiritual Formation**

Not only skeptics, but also many within the Church see the historic creeds as restricting or confining Christian spirituality (Cobb 140; A. Hart 19). On the other hand, many see an important relationship between the Church's creeds and a life of prayer and devotion. This position is based on claims that Christianity's existence is rooted in God's own revelation, that God's revelation is "perfectly expressed" in Jesus Christ, who is both fully God and fully human, and that the Creeds summarize God's Word that reveals God's saving action in Jesus (A. Hart 19). Implications of these claims include the idea that true spirituality is a loving relationship with God on God's terms. Because Christian spirituality is relational, it is also creedal. "A Christian's spirituality thus constantly draws on and is directed by the truth of the Trinity and of the redemptive work of the incarnate Son—truths which are in the deepest sense creedal, believed in" (20). Creedal spirituality is holistic, encompassing all of life. Therefore, the Creeds express belief that

relates to all of life. The triune God is the model for loving human relationships, and the Word who became flesh in Jesus is the model for human life. A creed impacts character. “Creed shows us God’s grace and love, spirituality deepens our own capacity to return love, and discipleship comes to manifest that love to the world” (21). The Apostles’ Creed summarizes Scripture and God’s Spirit enlivens the Creed, so persons who affirm the Creed come to know God better and grow in Christ’s likeness.

Drawing on educational theory that stresses the importance of cognitive development occurring through transformation of the cognitive structure, Webber describes the Creed’s relation to conversion:

The Apostles’ Creed is a cognitive worldview that is not attained by a social process, but by a conversion to a new way of seeing reality. In this sense, the creed is an intellectual commentary on the Christian narrative. It affirms the Trinity and trinitarian action in the world through the Father who creates, the Son who becomes incarnate, and the Spirit who now works in the world and in the church. The new convert accepts this worldview, not out of reason, but out of a conversion. (*Journey* 147)

Christian conversion is thus the beginning of a new way of understanding reality. The Creed gives content and shape to this new worldview and emphasizes that conversion is above all to a new relationship with the triune God.

### **The Creed’s History**

A close relationship exists between the canon of Scripture and the Apostles’ Creed because the Church used the Creed to summarize biblical teaching and developed both the canon and the Creed during the same period.

**Relation to Scripture.** When introducing the Apostles’ Creed, authors generally relate and then dismiss the legendary story that the twelve apostles actually composed the Creed soon after Pentecost and prior to their missionary work (Barclay 10-11; Cullmann

14-15; González, *Apostles' Creed* 1-2; Howell 4-5; Kelly 1-5; Lochman 7-8). Despite that disclaimer, many interpreters of the Apostles' Creed also point out that the Creed's contents are consistent with apostolic teaching found in the New Testament (Cullmann 10, 13; Kelly 7-9; Leith; Lochman 8-9; McGrath 11). The apostles themselves used formalized summaries of central Christian beliefs. Later generations of Christians then more extensively summarized the faith they received from apostolic teaching and writing (D. Wright 5). Some scholars see creedal forms throughout Scripture and affirm that the Creed follows the biblical pattern, expresses biblical teaching, and retells the biblical story (L. Johnson 11-13). The Creed is not a random list of propositions that could be rearranged and still be a creed. Instead, the story the Creed tells proceeds in chronological order: "God is first, then God creates; then God sends Jesus, who is born, dies, and is raised; and then the Holy Spirit dawns on the Church and its life" (Howell 5).

Creedal, or creed-like, statements in Scripture include the *Shema Israel* (Deut. 6:4-5). This statement calls for the entire community of Israel to recognize God as one and to give allegiance to the Lord alone. The called-for commitment is personal: The people are to "love" the Lord God with their whole being. Another feature of the *Shema* is its place within Israel's story of how God has been at work among the people.

Introducing the Ten Commandments, God reminds the people of that story: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me" (Exod. 20:2-3). The people respond with love and obedience to the One who first loved them and was faithful to them. "The creedal statement 'The Lord our God is one Lord' does not replace their experience and story, but is its most compressed expression" (L. Johnson 11).

The Christian Creed also originates as an expression of a people's experience and story and a declaration of their allegiance in the midst of competing claims. Important as the *Shema* was for the early Church, the Christian experience of Jesus led to altering the *Shema* along with the story of God and God's people. "Thus, the origins of the creed are easily detectable within the pages of the New Testament" (L. Johnson 12). The resurrection of Jesus and the Church's experience of the living Lord through the Holy Spirit made all things new. Christians' relationship with Jesus, including their understanding and proclamation of who Jesus is, sets them apart. The designations of Jesus as Christ, Lord, and Son of God are New Testament concepts that the Creed also expresses (11-13).

The New Testament emphasizes "the transmission of authoritative doctrine" (Kelly 8). This emphasis is especially clear in later writings such as the pastoral epistles, Hebrews, and Jude. "The Word of life" in 1 John 1:1 probably refers not only to the Incarnate Lord but also to the Church's message of salvation. Passing on doctrine is not limited to the later New Testament but is present in Paul's writings as well (e.g., 2 Thess. 2:15; Gal. 3:1; Rom. 6:17; 1 Cor. 11:23; 15:3). In these passages Paul refers to traditions and teaching that he received and then handed on to his hearers. References to "the gospel," "the preaching," and "the faith" also point to an objective body of authoritative teaching the Church handed down. Therefore, the primitive Church had a creed, though not in the sense of the fixed creedal forms of a later time (Kelly 8-10).

J. N. D. Kelly also points out numerous "fragments of creeds" throughout the New Testament and into the post-apostolic era (13). He finds these fragments mainly in relation to baptism, catechism, preaching, polemics, liturgy, exorcism, and

correspondence from Christian leaders to local churches (13-14). Several “one-clause Christologies” appear (14-15; see also Westra 71). The briefest and most popular is “Jesus is Lord” (1 Cor. 12:3; Rom. 10:9; Phil. 2:11). Baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 8:16; 19:5; 1 Cor. 6:11) implies that the declaration of Jesus as Lord was part of the rite (Kelly 14-15). A Christian is one who has “received Christ Jesus the Lord” (Col. 2:6). This statement declares the believer’s loyalty and commitment to Jesus Christ above all others, including Caesar. “Jesus is Lord” also declares certain things about Jesus especially in relation to God (McGrath 11). “Jesus is the Christ (or Messiah)” is another key New Testament phrase, as is “Jesus is the Son of God” (Kelly 16; see also L. Johnson 13-20).

The New Testament also includes many detailed confessions that function similarly to creeds. First Corinthians 15:3-8 is a good example as it “gives the gist of the Christian message in a concentrated form” (Kelly 17). Kelly calls attention to numerous other passages in Paul that share the structure and content of confessions about God and Jesus (17-22). The New Testament contains few explicit Trinitarian confessions; however, some passages explicitly refer to the Trinity (Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 6:11; 12:4; 2 Cor. 1:21; 13:14). “The Apostles’ Creed is in fact an expression of Matthew 28:19.... It is precisely the Church’s belief about the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit that this creed defines” (Barclay 11). Kelly finds a “triadic schema” in Galatians 3:11-14, 1 Thessalonians 5:18-19, Hebrews 10:29, and 1 Peter 1:2 (22-23). Though Trinitarian creeds are rare in the New Testament, the Trinitarian pattern that would shape all the later creeds was already established in the Christian tradition of doctrine (23).

Kelly summarizes the connection of the Creed to the apostles and their teaching:

The story that the Twelve, meeting in solemn conclave, composed an “Apostles’ Creed” is no doubt a pious fiction. But the second-century conviction that the “rule of faith” believed and taught in the Catholic Church had been inherited from the Apostles contains more than a germ of truth. Not only was the content of that rule, in all essentials, foreshadowed by the “pattern of teaching” accepted in the apostolic Church, but its characteristic lineaments and outline found their prototypes in the confessions and credal summaries contained in the New Testament documents. (29)

This brief survey indicates that Scripture does include credal elements, which later developed into more formal creeds of the Church. Creeds are not a barrier to the Bible but are instead a way to summarize and affirm what the Bible teaches (Howell 6). The Apostles’ Creed is rightly named, not because the apostles wrote it, “but because of its undoubted spiritual kinship with the New Testament origins” (Lochman 13).

Olson notes that the Church was using “rules of faith” and creeds before it arrived at an official agreement on the canon of Christian Scripture. Certainly the Hebrew Scriptures and the writings that would become the New Testament were available to Church leaders. Nevertheless, “some form of the Apostles’ Creed recognized by most Christian churches of the Roman Empire almost certainly predates the ‘closure of the canon’ in its various forms here and there” (*Story* 130-31). Allison compares the process of canonizing Scripture and the process the Church used for centuries as it sifted through various teachings offering a variety of answers to questions raised by Scripture. This process led to the Church setting limits and boundaries for those teaching. Christians now know those boundaries as the classical creeds (26-27). Oscar Cullmann states that the early Church accorded the confession of faith an equal authority with the canon of Scripture (13). Further, Olson maintains that both Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches still emphasize the authority of tradition *over* the canon of Scripture because the

canon is a product of the apostolic tradition. The “living tradition embodied within the fellowship of the bishops and expressed in the rules of faith eventually gave rise to recognition of certain writings as inspired” (131). Protestants later reversed this view as they set the inspired text over unwritten tradition. Still, the major branches of the Church view Scripture and the Creeds as expressing central and essential Christian beliefs.

**Later development.** The process by which brief summaries of Christian belief became a fully developed and accepted creed continued for some centuries. Still, despite some changes and adjustments in response to various needs and challenges, the outline and many elements of the Apostles’ Creed were constant from early in the process.

No one knows the Creed’s exact lineage. Scattered creedal formulas from second century writings show the Creed’s development and demonstrate what prompted Christians to develop it. Concerns included church unity, proper understanding of the faith, the need to emphasize Jesus’ true humanity and to deal with conflicts regarding how to understand Jesus, the confession of faith at baptism, the Church’s response to opponents, and the Church’s view of the Trinity, especially the relationship of the Father and the Son (L. Johnson 22-26; Barclay 11-12; Kelly 65-76; Oden, *Living God* 11-12; Olson, *Story* 130). Liuwe H. Westra explains that by the turn of the second century, “a slightly longer but still purely Christological confession arose for antidocetist purposes” (71). From this confession came “the so-called Christological sequence” before AD 150 (71). Meanwhile, churches continued to use older confessions in the setting of baptism. Perhaps for antignostic reasons, rules of faith came about that used the older Christological sequence as well as Trinitarian formulae (71). Sometime between 150 and 250, someone in Rome fused the Christological sequence with a Trinitarian baptismal

formula. Westra hypothesizes that the process of fusing these confessions produced a Roman creed he calls proto-R. Probably from the third century on, proto-R spread throughout the Latin Church and various communities expanded it in different ways. In the fourth century, creeds of synods and private creeds took over the function of rules of faith. Also at that time the Church began to regard creeds as unchanging summaries of faith. The era of creedal studies began then and continues to the present. Although the Church was beginning to view creeds as unchanging, the Apostles' Creed continued developing freely for another three or four centuries (71-72).

In the late second century and into the third century, the Church became more intentional regarding how to define right teaching (orthodoxy) and false teaching (heterodoxy). Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen stand out during this era as teachers who worked to define right teaching. Their works include descriptions of “the faith” that resemble earlier creedal fragments and include the basic ingredients of the later Creeds (L. Johnson 27-30; Kelly 76-99; Oden, *Living God* 12). Irenaeus' writing provides a good example:

Now the Church, although scattered over the whole civilized world to the end of the earth, received from the apostles and their disciples its faith in one God, the Father Almighty, who made heaven, and the earth, and the seas, and all that is in them, and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was made flesh for our salvation, and in the Holy Spirit, who through the prophets proclaimed the dispensations of God—the comings, the birth of a virgin, the suffering, the resurrection from the dead, and the bodily reception into the heavens of the beloved, Christ Jesus our Lord, and his coming from the heavens in the glory of the Father to restore all things, so that every knee may bow, of things in heaven and on earth and under the earth, to Christ Jesus our Lord and God and Savior and King, according to the pleasure of the invisible Father, and every tongue may confess him, and that he may execute righteous judgment on all. The spiritual powers of wickedness, and the angels who transgressed and fell into apostasy, and the godless and wicked and lawless and blasphemers among men he will send into the eternal fire. But to the righteous and holy, and those who



have kept his commandments and have remained in his love, some from the beginning [of life] and some since their repentance, he will by his grace give life incorrupt, and will clothe them with eternal glory. (360)<sup>1</sup>

Irenaeus' summary of the Church's faith includes the outline and much of the content of what would later become the Apostles' Creed.

By the third century, "some form of the Apostles' Creed or 'Old Roman Symbol' (a term for the Roman church's baptismal formula that was a precursor of the Creed) was widely accepted as an authoritative summary of the apostolic tradition" (Olson, *Story* 130). The earliest set form of the Apostles' Creed comes from Hippolytus' *Apostolic Tradition* (ca. AD 215). This form consists of questions the Church (through a bishop or other leader) asked those undergoing baptism, most likely in Rome:

Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty?  
 Do you believe in Christ Jesus, Son of God,  
 Who was born by the Holy Spirit out of Mary the Virgin, and was  
 crucified under Pontius Pilate and died and was buried, and rose on the  
 third day alive from among the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sits at  
 the right hand of the Father, to come to judge the living and the dead?  
 Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Church, and the  
 resurrection of the flesh? (L. Johnson 30; see also Dix 36-37; Easton 46-  
 47; Kelly 114; Stevenson 155)

The person being baptized would answer each of these questions affirmatively, express belief in the God described here, and identify with the Church that believed these things.

Other versions of this creed appear in various places throughout the fourth and fifth centuries. One outstanding appearance is in AD 404, in a *Commentary on the Apostles' Creed* by Rufinus of Aquileia. Rufinus is the first to record the story of the apostles composing the Creed, though he points out that it was already a tradition in the

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<sup>1</sup> Other selections that exemplify these writers' summaries of the faith are in Kerr 29, 40, 43-44; Richardson 375; Stevenson 115, 175-76, 212-13.

Church. Luke Timothy Johnson states that Rufinus also introduced the phrase stating that Jesus “descended into hell” (31). To the contrary, Kelly traces some of the history of that phrase and its place in the Creed prior to Rufinus’ commentary (Rufinus 121).

A standard version of the Apostles’ Creed dates to the seventh century. This version owes much to the older Roman “Symbol,” and Rome eventually adopted this later version as its own (L. Johnson 32). Official acceptance of the creed came under Emperor Charlemagne around 813, although some historians date its attaining status as an authoritative creed for all Christians as late as 1014 (Olson, *Story* 130). L. Johnson translates the seventh-century text:

I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, his only son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into hell, on the third day rose again from the dead, ascended to heaven, sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty, thence he will come to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen. (32)

Although Johnson calls this seventh-century text the “final standard version,” other texts of the creed include slightly altered phrases. The alterations do not affect any doctrinal content; they simply vary the wording (Kelly 369; Lochman xiii; Olson, *Story* 129-30).

### **The Apostles’ Creed and Spiritual Formation**

With its roots in New Testament proclamation and teaching, and its development from a series of baptismal questions, the Apostles’ Creed has a close relationship to the beginnings of Christian faith and life. As the need arose to prepare persons for baptism, the Church found the Creed a helpful summary of Christian teaching to use in catechism (“Catechism” par. 196). The Catechism of the Episcopal Church asks, “What is the

Apostles' Creed?" and answers, "The Apostles' Creed is the ancient creed of Baptism; it is used in the Church's daily worship to recall our Baptismal Covenant" (*Book of Common Prayer* 852). Webber's idea of a "baptismal spirituality" (*Ancient-Future Evangelism* 90) seems to fit well with the baptismal Creed and living out the beliefs expressed in that Creed. "We are called to live in our baptism. In our identity with the death and resurrection of Jesus, we live a life empowered by the Holy Spirit, a life that continually dies to sin and continually rises to the life of the Spirit" (91-92).

L. Hart notes that, historically, the Church has used the Apostles' Creed as a confession of faith at baptism, a pattern for teaching the Christian faith, a "rule of faith" against heresies, and as a means of confessing faith in corporate worship. "The Christian faith is creedal: it is theological by its very nature" (15). Westra reports that from around AD 300-400 to around 800, probably every bishop of the Latin Church preached on the Apostles' Creed at least twice a year (10). As a summary of the Christian faith, the Creed conveys doctrine and contributes to ongoing Christian development. Engaging in study of the Creed is a spiritual discipline or means of grace that allows spiritual formation to occur.

One of the terms used for the Creed is "symbol of faith." The original word for "symbol" referred to joining two objects such as parts of a ring, tablets, or seals to signify recognizing or receiving another person or making a treaty. The early Church referred to the Creed as a *symbolon* because the community handed it over to those being initiated as a sign of their reception. The term "symbol" eventually included the sacraments—signs that participate in the reality the sacraments signify. The Creed can also be viewed as symbolic as it participates in the realities of which it speaks (L. Johnson 52-53). As

believers faithfully affirm the faith that the Creed expresses, they find connection to God's transforming reality and action in the world.

The Apostles' Creed helps form Christian identity by expressing what Christians believe and marking boundaries for Christian belief. In this sense the Creed is a "definition of faith" (L. Johnson 49-51). Jan Milič Lochman provides an apt illustration of this function of the Creed when he describes the ancient custom of "walking the bounds" that some Swiss communities still observe. Each spring on Boundary Day, people of a village gather and walk around the village boundaries to assure that no one has moved or covered the boundary markers. The Apostles' Creed offers a way to outline Christian doctrine by surveying "the 'landmarks' of the Christian faith," checking them against the "land register," and claiming the Christian heritage anew (ix). In a real sense, persons are what they believe (Killinger 15). By marking the boundaries of Christian belief, the Apostles' Creed helps define and shape Christian life.

Persons who profess the faith expressed by the Creed identify themselves as Christians. Worth noting is the fact that the Apostles' Creed comes from a time when the Church was being persecuted. Making this profession of faith was once very costly. Often saying "*Credo*/I believe" meant death to the believer. Still, many people claimed, professed, and declared this faith, and thereby became martyrs or witnesses of the faith (L. Johnson 24, 43-44; McGrath 12-13; Oden, *Living God* 11).

The Church recognizes that the Apostles' Creed is not simply a summary of doctrine or list of beliefs. Instead, the Creed possesses a narrative structure and provides a way of telling the Christian story of God's action in creating and saving (L. Hart 14; Howell 5; L. Johnson 58-59; Van Harn xii). Behind a doctrine or theological paradigm

stands a story about human experience, an event, or a series of events. “There is a community in which and for whom both the experience and the story became an exemplary of God and of their connections to God” (Wallace 45). Living faith depends upon the stories people tell one another regarding encounters with God. Spiritual formation, then, involves learning to understand and tell stories that will help people recognize God’s activity. The Church needs “both the intellectual rigor of doctrinal theology and the rigorous immediacy of powerful stories” (49). Storytellers need to focus upon vital matters of faith and life (58). The Creed is one way the Church tells what is truly important. In the hermeneutic of the New Testament writers and the early church fathers, persons enter the Christian story through the work of Jesus Christ. Jesus makes known creation’s purpose, the problem of the Fall, and the hope of new heavens and a new earth. Through Jesus the Father’s purpose and the Spirit’s work become clear. “We begin, then, with the story of Jesus revealed through the incarnation, death and resurrection, for this story is the story that evangelizes and makes disciples of Jesus” (Webber, *Ancient-Future Evangelism* 139). The gospel story, the teaching of the Apostles’ Creed, “needs to be taught to new Christians in their process of formation” (139). Obviously, the Apostles’ Creed does not tell the entire story of creation and redemption; the Bible serves this purpose. Nevertheless, the Creed gives the outline and parameters of the Christian story, and it includes key points the Church must remember when bearing witness to God in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Webber draws together strands of teaching from the early Church that depict the Church’s process of Christian formation. In the activities of catechesis, baptism, and incorporation into the Church, Webber finds insights for contemporary Christian

formation. The Apostles' Creed had an important place in the early Church's process of formation and continues to be a vital resource for the Church today. The ancient Church's baptism ritual called for the one being baptized to renounce Satan while the presbyter anointed the new believer with the Oil of Exorcism. After renouncing Satan, the one being baptized gave allegiance to God, responded affirmatively to the Creed in the form of questions the presbyter asked, and was baptized. Webber notes that the interrogatory creed asks the new believer to be loyal to the Church's faith that had been handed down from apostolic times. "In this context it is not a mere intellectual assent to particular propositions of faith, but a pact with Christ that replaces the pact with the devil" (*Liturgical Evangelism* 90-92).

At baptism, the Church presented persons with the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer. Webber sees in this presentation a symbol of a deeper understanding of the faith as the Creed and the Lord's Prayer embody the church's tradition of faith and prayer (*Journey* 136). The Creed and the Lord's Prayer functioned as weapons of spiritual warfare, helping believers deal with temptation. Memorizing and repeating the Creed and the Prayer developed "an inner armor of dependence upon God and a reminder of what the Christian believes" (*Ancient-Future Evangelism* 100; *Journey* 137). By inculcating new believers with the Apostles' Creed (*What Christians Believe*) and the Lord's Prayer (whom and how Christians praise), the Church was holding together right faith and right praise (100-01).

In the process of spiritual formation Webber outlines for the Church today, he sees a place for using the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer in a way similar to how the early Church used them. One reason for using the Creed is that contemporary culture

affirms many beliefs, even belief in Jesus. The Church needs to define Christian belief.

“The Apostles’ Creed is a summary of Christian faith that clarifies what we mean by faith in Jesus: the creed witnesses to who Jesus is in the community of the Godhead” (*Journey* 147). Through the Creed, persons experiencing Christian spiritual formation find connection to Christians of the past as well as those around the world who confess Jesus. The Creed also protects against a distorted view of Christianity (147-48). After describing how to use the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer in a rite of passage for spiritual formation, Webber summarizes why this presentation is so important:

The recitation of the creed and the Lord’s Prayer are not simply formalities. They deal with the very essence of that tradition that reaches back through history to the time of Christ and his disciples. What they believed and taught has been handed down from generation to generation in the church. Now, almost two thousand years after the event, the candidate accepts that tradition with the spiritual intent and meaning that countless millions of people throughout history have experienced. This is no dry, rote action. It trembles with an inexpressible mystery, immerses us in the meaning of faith, and penetrates into our very being, bringing us into the narrative of history and salvation as participants with firsthand experience. (152)

As Christians experience spiritual formation through using the Apostles’ Creed, they realize unity with other Christians of all times and places who also affirmed the faith the Creed contains.

The Apostles’ Creed can also be a resource for ongoing spiritual formation as believers use it to guide their prayers. Austin Farrer offers suggestions for actually turning the Creed into prayer. He asserts that prayer and dogma are inseparable and he calls those who hold to the Creed to “attend to the truth it shows” (9). In prayer a person actively uses or exercises faith. The Creed gives guidance for using and exercising faith; it “defines the contours” of the world that people see by faith (10). The Creed is

necessary as a sort of map of Christian experience and a guide for learning to pray.

Without the Creed, Christians do not know how to call on God or even what God to call upon (14). Farrer urges Christians to use intellect and imagination well to “meditate the creed” (16). He writes about essential doctrines, not in the form of prayer, but in the attitude of one who means to pray. Each chapter describes a doctrine, an aspect of faith in God, or a characteristic of God. Then each chapter concludes with a prayer that the doctrine informs and guides (16). The book concludes with Farrer describing how he learned to pray the rosary and the benefits he found from praying in that way (80-95).

Two personal acquaintances, when they heard about my research on the Creed and spiritual formation, related experiences to me that illustrate using the Creed in prayer or turning the Creed into prayer. A woman told about a time when her adult son was in the hospital. Driving home, she cried and prayed all she knew to pray. Finally, she said, “I believe.” Then she said, “I believe in God.” Then, “I believe in God the Father Almighty.” The Creed became her prayer. She found blessing and assurance that, no matter what happened to her son, everything would be all right.

Tom Albin, Dean of the Upper Room in Nashville, told about a married couple whom he befriended when he was teaching in a seminary. The wife was a pastor, so Tom filled the role of pastor for the couple. The husband became ill with Hodgkin’s lymphoma. He confessed that he was frightened and was unsure of his salvation, despite having prayed “the sinner’s prayer.” Tom was praying, asking for wisdom to help his friend. Then an idea came and he told the man to pray the Apostles’ Creed when he was scared. The man started praying the Creed. He put it on a note card that he kept with him. When he felt the fear, he recited and prayed the Creed. In the last hours of his life, he and



his wife said it together. When he could no longer draw enough breath to say, she said it for him. The man died unafraid, with peace and with confidence in the God the Creed proclaims.

One of Farrer's prayers expresses the intent of this section:

God above me, Father from whom my being descends, on whom my existence hangs, to whom I turn up my face, to whom I stretch out my hands:

God beside me, God in a man like me, Jesus Christ in the world with me, whose hand lays hold of me, presenting me, with yourself, to God:

God within me, soul of my soul, root of my will, inexhaustible fountain, Holy Ghost:

Threefold Love, one in yourself, unite your forces in me, come together in the citadel of my conquered heart.

You have loved me with an everlasting love. Teach me to care. (23)

The Apostles' Creed affirms faith in the triune God. As persons say the Creed they can experience something more than simply reciting some ancient words. The Creed can help them remember their baptism. Saying the Creed in worship or in private is an opportunity to renew faith in God who reveals and redeems in Jesus Christ and who is present in and with believers through the Holy Spirit. This renewed connection with God through the Creed forms a person's inner life to be more like Jesus' life and so transforms one's entire life.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Problem and Purpose

God works through a variety of means to form God's people in the likeness of Christ. Christian doctrine provides shape to form Christlike lives and content to nurture spiritual growth. Studying Christian doctrine is a spiritual discipline or means of grace that contributes to Christian spiritual formation. The Apostles' Creed is an early and well-known summary of basic Christian doctrine. The purpose of this research was to discover how *What Christians Believe*, a twelve-week study based on the Apostles' Creed, influenced the spiritual formation of participants at First United Methodist Church in Eufaula, Oklahoma. As such, this study hypothesized that learning Christian doctrine and theology was an effective means of Christian spiritual formation. Sustained theological study not only increases knowledge but can also nurture spiritual development. Further, this research suggested that such development manifests itself in persons' deeper sense of closeness to God and their higher level of commitment to such spiritual disciplines as worship, prayer, study, and service.

#### Research Questions

Three basic research questions guided the development of this study.

##### Research Question #1

What understanding of and appreciation for basic Christian doctrine do participants display following the class *What Christians Believe*? This study hypothesized that many church members had a vague awareness of Christian doctrine and live according to this doctrine to a greater degree than they were aware. All Christians have

room for growth regarding the content of the Christian faith because a gap often exists between *What Christians Believe* and how they behave. Thayer's Reflection Scale "assesses one's participation in critical reflection of culture and one's own life" (200). The Reflection Scale includes items relating the Bible to church doctrine (# 29) and historical interpretation (#30); therefore, this scale seemed most relevant to RQ # 1 (see Appendixes B and D). Personal interaction during the class sessions also contributed to understanding what participants believed and how their beliefs influenced them. Class evaluations allowed participants to respond specifically to statements such as, "The subject (basic Christian doctrine) was interesting to me," "Following this class, I have a better understanding of what I believe," and "I would be interested in other studies of Christian doctrine." Post-class interviews with ten participants included asking them to describe basic Christian doctrine and their personal appropriation of those beliefs.

### **Research Question #2**

How do participants perceive the relationship between Christian doctrine and Christian spirituality following their involvement in the class *What Christians Believe*? The CSPP assumes a connection between respondents' theology and spirituality, and each of its scales assesses commitment to spiritual growth through various relationships and activities. However, while strong scores on the various scales indicate commitment to spiritual growth, they do not specifically show the impact of doctrine on that commitment. Therefore, in post-class interviews, I specifically asked participants to describe the relationship between Christian doctrine and Christian spirituality and how their beliefs help them grow spiritually.

### Research Question #3

Does sustained study of the Apostles' Creed affect participants' perception of an increase in their knowledge of Christian doctrine and aid their spiritual formation? The study's hypothesis was that knowledge of Christian doctrine and spiritual formation would increase through such interaction with the Creed. Pre- and post-intervention responses to the CSPP were intended to evaluate whether participants were more likely to be committed to spiritual growth following the Creed study. Class evaluations asked participants to respond to the statement, "I feel that participating in this class helped me grow spiritually." In post-intervention interviews, I asked participants to describe Christian doctrine and to say what relationship they saw between Christian doctrine and Christian spirituality. I also inquired as to where participants thought they had acquired their Christian beliefs. Many Christians seem to acquire beliefs indirectly—through the Church culture, by overhearing others discuss faith, or by gathering fragments from sermons, Sunday school lessons, Bible studies, and hymns. Seemingly few church members engage in direct and concentrated study of Christian belief. The project aimed to discover whether such undertakings benefited people and if exposure to Christian faith in its concentrated form (the Apostles' Creed) helped produce spiritual growth and fruit.

### Participants

Participants included the adult Sunday school classes of First United Methodist Church, Eufaula, Oklahoma, who took part in *What Christians Believe*, a twelve-week study of the Apostles' Creed, in the fall of 2007. Church members not previously attending those Sunday school classes were also encouraged to participate. Further, I asked members to invite unchurched friends who might be interested in learning about

Christian beliefs. Fifty-nine persons attended at least one class session. Twenty-four participants (40.6 percent) were male, and thirty-five were female (59.32 percent). This ratio was similar to that for the church as a whole: 349 members, 43.84 percent male and 56.16 percent female. The average age of respondents was 69.66, which reflects the congregation as a whole. The classes met for forty to forty-five minutes during Sunday school for each of the twelve weeks. González's book *The Apostles' Creed for Today* was the basis for the study. To supplement the questions at the end of González's chapters, I included additional information and discussion questions as part of each session (see Appendix A). I also made use of some of the techniques for Bible study that Dick Murray presents in *Teaching the Bible to Adults and Youth*. Prior to the first session, participants responded to the CSPP, which "measures the intensity of a person's involvement in a process that leads to desirable change" (Thayer 196).

### **Instruments**

T. L. Brink states that combining qualitative and quantitative methods seems most effective in studying religion. Alternating the two types of methods produces a richer understanding (461). While the research for this study was primarily qualitative, dealing mainly with persons' spiritual growth, a quantitative element appeared in measuring participants' commitment to practices involved in spiritual growth. The Christian Spiritual Participation Profile, administered before and after the class, gave indications of participants' involvement in ten spiritual disciplines related to spiritual formation. A class evaluation attached to the post-class CSPP gave participants an opportunity to rate their responses to statements regarding the content of the class, the text, discussions, and the effect of the class on their understanding and spiritual growth. They also had the

opportunity to write additional comments (see Appendix F). Semi-structured interviews conducted with ten participants following the class inquired about when participants first came to faith, what they thought helped them grow, their understanding of Christian doctrine, and what relationship they perceived between doctrine and spirituality. The interviews also included questions regarding participants' personal perception of how their believing helped them grow spiritually and to what actions their beliefs led (see Appendix H). The interviews were conducted in January 2008, more than a month after completion of the class. The time between finishing the class and conducting the interviews allowed everyone involved to get past the busy holiday season. Persons had time to reflect on what they had learned and could discern if the class experience was beginning to affect their perception of closeness to God and their practice of spiritual disciplines. The interviewees were randomly selected based on attendance in the class sessions.

### **The Christian Spiritual Participation Profile**

Thayer sees in Scripture indications that the growth and transformation God provides are methodologies that lead toward spiritual maturity. "The CSPP measures the intensity of a person's involvement in a process that leads to desirable change. It does not purport to assign a level of achievement or maturity" (196). The CSPP is a paper-and-pencil measure, using a six-point Likert frequency scale, from 0 to 5 (206). The profile's fifty items produce scores on four scales. Each scale represents a "spiritual development mode" (203). Thayer developed the items from ten spiritual disciplines: prayer, repentance, worship, meditation, examen of conscience, Bible reading and study, evangelism, fellowship, service, and stewardship (204). She defines a spiritual discipline

as “an activity of the mind or body purposefully undertaken by Christians to respond to God or to place oneself before God” (197). The ten disciplines were developed into scales based on the four learning modes of Kolb’s experiential learning theory. Thayer conducted data collection and analysis to determine each scale’s reliability and validity. “The conceptual framework of the CSPP posits that the balance and depth of participation in each spiritual development mode are indicators of the commitment to and the potential for spiritual growth” (204).

Thayer developed the CSPP basing it on the assumption that an analogy exists between the processes of learning and the processes of spiritual growth. Another assumption behind the CSPP’s development is that religious behavior includes basic variables present in any behavior. Nevertheless, those basic variables interact with other variables in religion to provide unique relationships (195).

Focusing on behaviors (participation in spiritual disciplines), the CSPP measures how extensive and balanced is a person’s participation in four spiritual development modes. Thayer describes these modes:

Through concrete experience, spiritual knowledge is grasped by the personal experience of relating to God; through abstract conceptualization, it is grasped by abstract symbols of language in reading and hearing both the Scriptures and testimonies of others’ experiences. Through reflective observation, spiritual knowledge is transformed into learning by critical reflection; through active experimentation, it is transformed into learning by praxis. (196)

This study emphasized especially the second mode relating to grasping spiritual knowledge through “abstract conceptualization.” Studying doctrine such as the Apostles’ Creed involves “abstract symbols of language” in much the same way as reading and hearing Scripture and testimonies would.

Thayer describes the process of constructing the CSPP in five steps: (1) Scale Development—Phase 1; (2) a validity study; (3) Scale Development—Phase 2; (4) a reliability study; and (5) Scale Development—Phase 3 (197). Thayer sought a population narrow enough to share a similar understanding of spirituality and broad enough to avoid biasing the data by a single denomination's perspective. She selected participants from among four groups of evangelical Protestants: Baptist/Free Church, Pentecostal, Reformed, and Wesleyan/Arminian (197). College students and church members were among the population samples (197, 199). Although the CSPP was designed with an evangelical perspective on Christian spirituality and was validated with samples from evangelical groups, it seemed an appropriate instrument to use at First UMC. One reason I believed it was appropriate is that the ten spiritual disciplines included in the profile are classical Christian disciplines not limited to one tradition. In addition, First UMC experiences enough evangelical influence that participants in the study would be able to relate to the items in the profile. I also hoped that exposure to the ideas in the profile might nudge people toward a more evangelical understanding of Christian life. I did change the wording of two items so that people in First UMC could better relate to the statements. Number 36 originally stated, "I invite unchurched people to attend church or small-group meetings with me." As First UMC had no specific small-group ministry, the item was restated, "I invite unchurched people to attend worship or other church activities with me." Number 37 originally said, "I pray for people and/or organizations that are working for the salvation of the unsaved." The statement became, "I pray for people and/or organizations that are working to reach people with the Good News of Jesus Christ." I also changed "examen of conscience" to a more familiar term, "examination of



conscience.” These slight changes reflected better the situation and understanding of the church.

The CSPP’s final form includes fifty items related to ten spiritual disciplines and it produces a score for each of four spiritual development modes. Thayer provided a “Code for Determining Scales” (see Appendix D). The transcendent scale (sixteen items) assesses a person’s participation in a relationship with God. The reflection scale (ten items) measures how involved a person is in critical reflection of culture and his or her own life. The vision scale (twelve items) assesses how a person participates with the Word of God. The new life scale (twelve items) evaluates a person’s participation in relationships with others (Thayer 200). Thayer summarizes the evidence for reliability for the four scales:

The coefficients of internal consistency (coefficient alphas) for the four scales range from .84 to .92 based on the 899 college students who participated in Step 5 of the scale development. Reflection, the shortest scale, has a coefficient alpha of .84. The coefficient alpha for the Vision scale is .89; for the New Life scale, it is .90; and for the Transcendent scale, it is .92. (200)

One group completed the same form in Steps 2 and 4. “The test-retest correlation coefficients were .82 for the Transcendent Scale, .68 for the Reflection Scale, .83 for the Vision Scale, and .87 for the New Life Scale” (200).

Thayer drew evidence to support the CSPP’s validity from the three major sources of validity in quantitative studies: “content-related evidence, construct-related evidence and criterion-related evidence” (200). The conceptual framework supporting the CSPP’s development includes two integrated domains: spiritual disciplines or Christian practices and learning modes. Using Kolb’s learning modes to classify the disciplines further restricted the conceptual framework. Content-related evidence that supports the CSPP’s

validity was obtained through the procedures for selecting disciplines, constructing items, having theologians and religious educators evaluate the items and educators classify the items, and selecting final items (200-01).

Thayer's study provides construct-related evidence in dealing with four constructs within spirituality: four spiritual development modes. Complex constructs require multiple subscales. Constructs related to spirituality are complex; therefore, using four separate scales in a measure dealing with spirituality is not unusual. Thayer relates how she tested for the presence of four constructs:

To test for the presence of four constructs, two factor analyses were made with the final 50 items: the solution with all factors with eigenvalues above one and the four-factor solution. The initial solution produced 7 factors with eigenvalues over one. The first four factors corresponded to the four predicted scales of Kolb's learning theory. Each of the last three factors also corresponded to one of the predicted scales. A scree test suggested that 4 factors would be appropriate. (201)

The four scales in the CSPP show moderate correlation (ranging from .64 to .75) and fine discrimination across a wide range (201-02).

Thayer tested the initial form of the CSPP using scales from five construct-related instruments: three indexes in the Spiritual Well-Being Questionnaire, three scales in the Interpersonal Reactivity Index, two scales in the Religious Orientation Scale, one scale from the Religious Life Inventory, and three scales from the Spiritual Well-Being Scale. In addition a shortened version of the Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale was administered. Thayer provides a table showing the correlations of the validation scales with the four scales of the initial form of the CSPP (202). She tested the final form of the CSPP with the Faith Maturity Scale. She concludes that the CSPP does provide a valid measure of commitment to spiritual practices that indicate a willingness to grow (203).

The CSPP seemed to be an appropriate measure of persons' commitment to spiritual growth through specific disciplines. The profile's holistic perspective on spiritual formation included aspects relevant to the present study. These aspects included the analogous relationship between learning and spiritual growth as well as specific reference to study and doctrine as indicators of commitment to grow spiritually. Thus, as a pretest, posttest measure of observed changes in participants, it was an effective instrument to help discover how *What Christians Believe*, a twelve-week study based on the Apostles' Creed, influenced the spiritual formation of participants at First UMC in Eufaula, Oklahoma.

### **Class Evaluations**

Attached to the CSPP posttest was a class evaluation (see Appendix F). Participants could rate their responses to statements regarding the content of the class, the text, discussions, and the effect of the class on their understanding and spiritual growth. They also had the opportunity to write additional comments. The evaluations provided additional insight to supplement the CSPP and the interviews.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

Following the study of *What Christians Believe*, I conducted semi-structured interviews with ten participants. These interviews inquired about when participants first came to faith, what they thought helped them grow, their understanding of Christian doctrine, and what relationship they perceived between doctrine and spirituality. The interviews also included questions regarding participants' personal perception of how their believing helped them grow spiritually and what actions their beliefs led them to take. Interviewees were selected based on their frequency of attendance in the class.

Those who attended all or nearly all the sessions seemed more likely to provide a good indication of the study's impact. Questions from the interviews are found in Appendix H.

### **Variables**

Variables included engagement with Christian theology/doctrine and spiritual growth as perceived by participants and reflected in various acts of devotion and service. An independent variable was the twelve-week study of *What Christians Believe* using *The Apostles' Creed for Today* (González). Participants attended the weekly class sessions and read chapters from González and a study guide. In addition to questions at the end of González's chapters, I wrote questions and guides for further study to be part of each session (see Appendix A). Another independent variable was my approach to presenting the material and leading the discussions. I opened each session by reading a theme scripture and praying. I then provided some context and background for the day's topic. If class members needed clarification about something in the reading, I tried to provide it. While I sought to avoid simply lecturing, some subject matter required a good deal of description and clarification. Several participants felt free to interact, asking questions and raising concerns during the class sessions. The class divided into four or five smaller groups to discuss the study questions. The dependent variable was the effects of the study on participants' spiritual formation. These effects were evaluated by using the CSPP, class evaluations, and semi-structured interviews. Intervening variables may have included attendance patterns. While I attempted to obtain a commitment from participants to attend all the class sessions, some members dropped out due to health concerns and for other reasons and some members joined during the course. Other intervening variables included the variety of ages and levels of experience of the group.

Variations in educational levels among the participants may have affected how persons experienced and responded to the study. The effort was made to keep the discussion of Christian doctrine at a basic level. At the same time, the idea that discipleship involves learning and that learning contributes to growth was part of the study's hypothesis.

Everyone involved faced this challenge to learn and grow. Individuals experience the process of spiritual formation uniquely, but the process also has an objective element that provides a common experience for persons involved in Christian spiritual formation.

### **Data Collection**

The class on *What Christians Believe* was arranged through contact with the various Sunday school teachers. Announcements in the church newsletter and bulletin informed the congregation about the class and its purpose. I spoke to each of the classes and invited the members to participate. Attendance was voluntary.

The week prior to the first session, I distributed the CSPP in the three Sunday school classes. Two classes suspended their regular study and took that time for members to complete the CSPP. Members of the third class took the profiles home and returned them the next week. The first week of the study, participants who were not present the previous week received the CSPP to take home and complete. During the last class session, participants again received the CSPP to take home, complete, and return to me as soon as possible. Besides requesting demographic information, I asked each respondent to write a four-digit number on their form in order to identify pre- and posttest profiles from each participant. By the end of the twelve weeks, several participants had forgotten their identification number; therefore, only twenty-nine participants completed both pre- and posttest profiles that could be correlated and used for comparison.

Attached to the CSPP posttest was a class evaluation (see Appendix F).

Participants could rate their responses to statements regarding the content of the class, the text, discussions, and the effect of the class on their understanding and spiritual growth. They also had the opportunity to write additional comments.

Semi-structured interviews with ten of the participants provided insight into participants' self-perception of spiritual commitment and maturity as well as changes in perceptions following the study. I selected interviewees from among participants who had attended at least ten class sessions because they seemed more likely to represent the class's influence. I also selected people with whom I felt I had a good rapport. Length of involvement in FUMC varied among the ten interviewees. Their ages ranged from about the late fifties to early eighties. Six female and four male participants were interviewed. Six of the interviews were conducted in a classroom at the church. Four were conducted in persons' homes. One couple chose to speak with me together. The length of the interviews varied from fifteen minutes to nearly an hour. Some people gave succinct answers to the interview questions as well as to follow-up questions. Others went into detail about their personal history and experiences. With the agreement of each interviewee, the interviews were recorded. I later transcribed the tapes for review and used the transcripts to identify insights and themes. I was especially aware of indications that people perceived changes in their lives and behavior following the class.

In my role as a pastor, ethical considerations, including confidentiality, are paramount in dealing with church members. As a researcher, I obtained from church members personal information for use in this study. Efforts to ensure confidentiality included using personal identification numbers instead of names on the CSPP responses.

Participants were aware that I was using the information in research and would include it in the study. I obtained permission from each interviewee to record the interview and they each signed a statement giving me permission to use what they shared in my research and writing.

### **Data Analysis**

Thayer provided a “Scoring Sheet for the Christian Spiritual Participation Profile” (see Appendix C). After matching participants’ pre- and posttest profiles, I transferred both sets of scores from each participant’s profile to a scoring sheet, using one sheet per participant. On the scoring sheet’s graph, I placed the mean for each column in different colors: pretest (blue) and posttest (red), giving me a visual comparison of participants’ pre- and posttest scores. Then, using Thayer’s “Code for Determining Scales” (see Appendix D), I compiled each participant’s scores on the items in each scale. I calculated each participant’s mean score for each scale and entered the number of participants with scores of 4.0 or higher and 3.99 or lower in the appropriate cells on Thayer’s “Chart showing participation in the spiritual development modes” (see Appendix E). In addition, a math teacher at the local high school ran a statistical analysis on the scores of the twenty-nine participants in each scale. She also helped me interpret the statistics. The data indicated how participants’ responses changed from the pretest to the posttest.

A total of thirty-one participants returned class evaluations. I tabulated their responses according to the percentage of participants who responded to each of the options in the scale (see Appendix G).

Listening to the tapes of the interviews as I transcribed them, I identified themes and patterns. Those themes and patterns became clearer as I reread the transcripts.

**Generalizations**

Because this study was limited to the experience of an intact group at one church, the results do not represent a wide variety of congregational contexts. Any generalizability may be limited to churches of a similar size, socioeconomic background, and theological commitment. The content of the class was a component that could be generalized as it consisted of basic universal Christian affirmations found in the Apostles' Creed. González is a mainline Protestant writing primarily for other mainline Protestants; however, his work is accessible to Christians from other traditions. While the CSPP was developed primarily for evangelical churches, Christians from many traditions practice the spiritual disciplines it includes. The generalized nature of Christian doctrine and spiritual disciplines along with the common experience of involvement in FUMC also helped diminish variables in participants' age, gender, educational level, and socioeconomic status.



## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

This chapter includes a description of participants' characteristics and a presentation of the data collected and analyzed. The purpose of this research was to discover how *What Christians Believe*, a twelve-week study based on the Apostles' Creed, influenced the spiritual formation of participants at First United Methodist Church in Eufaula, Oklahoma.

Three research questions guided this study: (1) What understanding of and appreciation for basic Christian doctrine do participants display following the class *What Christians Believe*? (2) How do participants perceive the relationship between Christian doctrine and Christian spirituality following their involvement in the class *What Christians Believe*? (3) Does sustained study of the Apostles' Creed affect participants' perception of an increase in their knowledge of Christian doctrine and aid their spiritual formation? Main sources for data were the CSPP, participants' evaluations of the class, and semi-structured interviews with ten participants following the class.

#### Profile of Participants

Attached to the CSPP pretest was a section that asked participants to report basic demographic information (see Appendix B). I asked for their age, gender, marital status, education level, and number of years they had been involved in FUMC. The posttest asked for this same information and also asked participants to indicate how many sessions of the class they attended and what percentage of *The Apostles' Creed for Today* they had read. Fifty-nine persons attended at least one class session. Twenty-four participants (40.6 percent) were male and thirty-five were female (59.32 percent). This

ratio was similar to that for the church as a whole: 349 members, 43.84 percent male and 56.16 percent female. Twenty-nine participants completed both the pretest and posttest instrument and provided enough information to correlate and use both profiles. Of those twenty-nine participants, nine were male (31.1 percent) and twenty were female (68.9 percent). The average age of respondents was 69.66, which reflects the congregation as a whole. Because the number of male and female attendees was more evenly balanced (a difference of 18 percent), I was somewhat surprised at the wider range between respondents (37.8 percent). Men attended Sunday school in smaller numbers and perhaps they were less interested in repeating the CSPP.

Table 4.1 shows the educational levels of the participants.

**Table 4.1. Participants by Educational Level (N=29)**

<b>Educational Level</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
High school	11	37.93
College	12	41.38
Master's degree or higher	6	20.69

The high percentage of participants with a college degree or higher may be a clue as to this group's remaining with the class to the end and showing more interest in completing the posttest survey. The twenty-nine respondents attended an average of nine class sessions, with 68 percent attending nine to twelve sessions. The majority of respondents also read the entire text for the class (see Table 4.2).

**Table 4.2. Percentage of Class Text Read by Respondents (N=29)**

Percentage of text	n	%
100	16	64
90	3	12
85	1	4
80	2	8
60	1	4
50	1	4
20	1	4

Participants recorded the number of years of their membership, or involvement if they were not members, in FUMC. The average for the twenty-nine respondents was 12.66 years. Interestingly, given the high average age of participants, the greatest number of respondents had been involved in the church for less than fifteen years. This detail reflects the fact that Eufaula is a retirement community where a good number of people have come to live later in life. FUMC seems to experience more turnover and diversity in membership than a comparable church in a community with a more stable population. Table 4.3 shows numbers of respondents in ranges of years.

**Table 4.3. Length of Involvement in FUMC (N=29)**

Number of years	n	%
0-4	7	24
5-10	9	31
11-15	8	27.8
16-20	2	6.9
21-30	1	3.4
31-40	1	3.4
40+	1	3.4

Thayer provided a Code for Determining Scales (see Appendix D) and a “Chart showing participation in the spiritual development modes” (see Appendix E). Tables 4.4 and 4.5 represent respondents’ placement in that chart before and after the twelve-week study of the Apostles’ Creed. The majority showed weak participation on all four scales in the pretest. On the posttest, the majority showed strong participation on the Transcendent Scale and weak participation on the other three scales. Interestingly, the number of respondents showing strong participation increased for each of the spiritual development modes. That increase alone was insufficient evidence to confirm the study’s hypothesis, but it looked promising. The following sections explore more fully responses to the CSPP, class evaluations, and interviews.

**Table 4.4. Participation in the Spiritual Development Modes (pretest) N=29**

Spiritual Development Mode	Strong * Intentional Participation		Weak** Intentional Participation	
	n	%	n	%
Growing through a relationship with God (Transcendent Scale)	13	45	16	55
Growing through a relationship with others (New Life Scale)	1	3	28	97
Growing through a relationship with the Word (Vision Scale)	2	7	27	93
Growing through critical reflection (Reflection Scale)	5	17	24	83

\*Strong Intentional Participation is set at 4.0 and higher.

\*\*Weak Intentional Participation is set at 3.99 and lower.

**Table 4.5. Participation in the Spiritual Development Modes (posttest) N=29**

Spiritual Development Mode	Strong * Intentional Participation		Weak** Intentional Participation	
	n	%	n	%
Growing through a relationship with God (Transcendent Scale)	21	72	8	28
Growing through a relationship with others (New Life Scale)	3	10	26	90
Growing through a relationship with the Word (Vision Scale)	9	31	20	69
Growing through critical reflection (Reflection Scale)	10	34	19	66

\*Strong Intentional Participation is set at 4.0 and higher.

\*\*Weak Intentional Participation is set at 3.99 and lower.

### **FUMC Members' Understanding of and Appreciation for Christian Doctrine**

This section explores data related to Research Question 1. Relevant information from the CSPP, class evaluations, and post-class interviews come to bear on the question.

#### **CSPP**

The Reflection Scale of the CSPP seemed most relevant to the question of how participants understood Christian doctrine. This scale assesses “participation in critical reflection of culture and one’s own life” (Thayer 200) and includes items specifically dealing with doctrine and history (#29, #30; see Appendixes B and D). The Vision Scale might also have relevance for this question. That scale assesses “participation with the Word of God,” which is the basis for Christian doctrine. Results for these two scales seemed to support the hypothesis that church members had a *vague* awareness of Christian doctrine. On both the pretest and posttest profiles, the majority of respondents demonstrated weak intentional participation (scoring 3.99 or lower on the items in these scales). Tables 4.4 and 4.5 display these results showing some improvement in the posttest results. For the Vision Scale, the number of participants showing strong intentional participation (scoring 4.0 or higher) increased from two (7 percent) to nine (31 percent). Those showing strong participation in the Reflection scale increased from five (17 percent) to ten (34 percent). Even with those increases, a seemingly small number of respondents showed strong intentional participation in Vision and Reflection.

#### **Class Evaluations**

On class evaluations, participants responded to three statements specifically addressing doctrine and belief. Table 4.6 displays responses to the doctrine-related statements. A large majority (ninety percent) of the respondents indicated that the subject

of basic Christian doctrine was interesting to them. Following the class, eighty-seven percent felt that they had a better understanding of what they believed and seventy-four percent indicated that they would be interested in further studying Christian doctrine. These responses show that class members' appreciation for Christian doctrine was fairly high.

**Table 4.6. Responses to doctrine-related statements from class evaluations**

<b>Evaluation Items</b>	1 “Strongly Disagree	2 “Disagree”	3 “Neutral	4 “Agree”	5 “Strongly Agree”
1. The subject (basic Christian doctrine) was interesting to me. <b>N=31</b>		n=1 3.2 percent	n=2 6.5 percent	n=17 55 percent	n=11 35 percent
10. Following this class, I have a better understanding of what I believe. <b>N=30</b>		n=3 10 percent	n=4 13.3 percent	n=13 43.3 percent	n=13 43.3 percent
12. I would be interested in other studies of Christian doctrine		n=2 6 percent	n=5 16 percent	n=9 29 percent	n=15 48 percent

## Interviews

Within the interviews, participants did not show the same level of understanding and appreciation for doctrine that the evaluations indicated. Responses to the question, “How would you describe Christian doctrine?” varied. Some people took a long pause before answering. One person was self-deprecating: “I don’t know that I’m intelligent enough to describe [Christian doctrine].” Another simply said, “That’s a real tough one.” No one mentioned the Apostles’ Creed as a summary of Christian doctrine, although

some did mention ideas that the Creed includes: “belief in God,” “Jesus Christ and the Holy Trinity,” “Jesus dying on the cross is my first thought about Christian belief,” “the essence of Christian doctrine is atonement for salvation through the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross and his resurrection and ascension into heaven.” Several interviewees confused Christian doctrine and practice. They made comments such as the following: “I think Christian doctrine really is a way of living.” One person summarized Christian doctrine as “belief in God,... doing good for other people,... not saying bad things or criticizing people.” Another described Christian doctrine this way: “the Golden rule more than anything else. With an added belief in the faith and grace that’s been brought to us by Jesus Christ.” A similar response was, “Well, believing the Ten Commandments and then believe the commandment of ‘love thy neighbor as thyself.’”

Two persons made more of a connection between study and behavior:

Christian doctrine is education. And it is exploring your faith and exploring your belief and reaching out to others, not in an “evangelical” way, but trying to show God through you and your daily life as well as your weekend life.

I think Christian doctrine is learning and studying about what Christ taught, following his life as an example. Helping others when they seek help. It’s not something that you force on somebody else or try to get them to agree.

The ten interviewees’ responses showed an overall lack of understanding of basic Christian doctrine as this study defined it.

Respondents showed some interest and appreciation for basic Christian doctrine as seen in the class evaluations; however, relatively few showed a strong intentional participation in the spiritual development modes of “growing through a relationship with the Word” and “growing through critical reflection” (see Table 4.5). Responses of ten



participants in interviews failed to demonstrate a grasp of basic Christian doctrine as this study defined and explored it. These results indicate that participants displayed a lack of understanding, or an incomplete understanding, of basic Christian doctrine following the class *What Christians Believe*. Another possible assessment of this evidence is that participants did not *articulate* as full and rich an understanding and appreciation for doctrine as I expected.

### **FUMC Members' Perception of Relationship between Christian Doctrine and Christian Spirituality**

This section explores data related to Research Question 2. The CSPP assumes a connection between respondents' theology and spirituality, and each of its scales assesses commitment to spiritual growth through various relationships and activities. However, while strong scores on the various scales might indicate commitment to spiritual growth, they do not specifically show the impact of doctrine on that commitment or provide a measure of participants' perception of the relationship between doctrine and spirituality. Further, while the class evaluations included an item connecting the class and personal spiritual growth, it serves better to answer Research Question 3. This section, therefore, deals with insights gained from participants in interviews.

Responses in interviews indicated a positive perception of the relationship between doctrine and spirituality. Responses to the question, "What helps you grow in faith?" included references to study, doctrine, or theology:

I keep trying to read the Bible every day and the study lessons I have from three different magazines.

Being with other Christians, teaching Sunday school—discussions have helped me deepen my spirituality and strengthen my faith.

I'm not always sure that I grow enough. But studying the Bible has always been interesting to me. Anything pertaining to theology. But the Bible in particular.

The individuals who made these statements made a connection between their study and their growing in faith. They had probably made this connection before participating in the class on *What Christians Believe*; the effect of the class on their perception is unclear.

Another interview question specifically asked, "What relationship do you see between Christian doctrine and Christian spirituality?" As the interviews took place after the class, participating in the class may have had some effect on how people answered. A follow-up question specifically asking about the class's influence would have been helpful. Nevertheless, interviewees made some interesting observations about doctrine and spirituality:

Christian doctrine is like a guidebook and spirituality is what grows within you when you recognize that you are part of God and that he created you and that he has his Holy Spirit that will guide you and help you.

The person who made this comment had come to faith through questions of doctrine. She had been reared Roman Catholic, but as a teenager she rejected several Roman Catholic teachings such as praying to Mary, purgatory, the confessional, and the idea of unbaptized babies being consigned to limbo. She searched among several churches and finally became a Baptist because that church's beliefs were closest to her own. Then, somehow, she encountered the teachings of Edgar Cayce and joined a study group that led to membership in a Religious Science church. She had moved to Eufaula recently and joined the UMC because the Eufaula area had no church like Religious Science. Her comment about "being part of God" reflects the Religious Science training. I had not heard this part of her story until I conducted this interview. I was troubled by her affinity

for Religious Science but grateful that she had joined FUMC and attended the class faithfully. Hopefully, her exposure to orthodox Christian teaching will overcome the teaching she received from Religious Science.

Other responses to the question about the relationship of doctrine and spirituality showed that some persons were unclear about that connection. Questions from those interviewees gave me the opportunity to clarify the terms' meaning and draw out thoughtful responses. Most interviewees saw doctrine and spirituality as inseparable as these comments show:

I'm probably more of a spiritual person than a doctrine person. But I guess it's tied together. Your spirituality grows from the doctrine you believe in.... How can you have one without the other?

You can't have one without the other. The spirituality—that is within you. I couldn't function without it. When you use the word “doctrine” it reminds me of some legal something.

You know, to me, it's faith—Christian spirituality. Then you explore the Christian doctrine using your faith and spirituality and discussions.

I think they go hand in hand. Because your Christian doctrine kind of strengthens your spirituality.

The comment about doctrine being something “legal” was interesting. I suggested that “theology” or “beliefs” might be another way to express the thought. That helped the person see that doctrine is not legalistic, but it gets to the heart of faith, such as believing “Jesus died on the cross for me,” as this person said.

Another person observed that the relationship between doctrine and spirituality “depends entirely on the individual.” He went on to say that some people profess to believe Christian doctrine, but their lives are inconsistent with their profession. He was saying that individuals must appropriate doctrine and spirituality for themselves. Another

man raised the opposite question. He wondered about people who do not believe Christian doctrine but live a good life:

There are a lot of good people who don't profess to be Christians. And the difference is, I accept Jesus Christ as my Savior and I plan to go to heaven. And these people, who may live good lives, don't believe that. My sister doesn't. And she's a good person. So to me, that's the difference there.

I did not delve into this subject with him at the time, but his comments, and those of the man who saw people professing Christian faith but not living it, could help introduce a conversation or presentation about “common grace,” “prevenient grace,” and human responsibility.

The follow-up question, “How does what you believe help you grow spiritually?” aimed to help people make the connection between doctrine and spirituality in their own experience. Their answers tended toward the practical, putting faith into practice: “Trying to practice every day, reading and studying to help me further along.” “I've started practicing being a better Christian.” Other comments were more specific:

It helps me in my relationship with my fellow men.... I've learned that listening is one thing I have to learn how to do. It's helped me a lot in understanding other people's opinions about things as well as my own.

It helps me a lot. I've gone through some pretty hard times. And even when I was an agnostic, I think God helped me. My basic foundation—I was raised in a Christian home and I just naturally turned to God. There's other ways you could go. You could drown your sorrows in drink or what have you. But that never really occurred to me, because as I say, I was raised in a Christian family.

One man described his struggles with spiritual growth:

I have a lot of problems with my own growth spiritually. I do have a basic problem: I have been a missionary. My deciding to become a missionary and ordained,... I studied hard. But I have never really felt that God called me. I've never had the experience that a lot of my friends have had that God spoke to them. I do feel as though God points things out to me that

need to be done. And I really get excited about it and I do them. But I really can't say God spoke to me. That bothers me. It really bothers me to no end. Why can't he just once do what these others have experienced? I've even wondered if what other people claim may not be true. But I cannot say that I've heard any voice speaking to me. I've been emotional and concerned about Christian mission. But the thing I have longed for all my life is some spiritual epiphany or something that really said, yes God did it. I've longed for that and it's never happened for me.

That comment led to conversation about how God speaks and what hearing from God means. I tried to show him that he really has heard God in the events and decisions of his life. As we talked about Providence, he acknowledged ways that God has led him, but still expressed the frustration of not "hearing" God the way many other Christians seem to hear. This conversation gave me the opportunity to address the question of hearing God in a sermon the following Sunday. The man later told me other ways that he has experienced God's speaking. Christian doctrine provided a basis and a guide for helping this person in his spiritual struggle.

The practical nature of responses to the question of how believing aids spiritual growth led naturally into another follow-up question: "What actions do you take because of what you believe?" The question's aim was to bring spiritual disciplines to the surface, which it did in some cases. Other responses addressed character and behavior. One woman responded in terms of seeking guidance for decisions. Her beliefs also led her to daily devotional reading and prayer, as well as decisions to be honest and faithful. A man simply said, "I'm kinder to people." The man who struggled with hearing from God said that his beliefs led him to try to be nice, to attend church, and to be involved. He had been a missionary and later did nonprofit work. All along he had the sense of being led or guided. Another woman saw her beliefs leading her to participate in worship and Sunday school, to study the Bible and read other books, and to use a daily devotional. A woman

who led the church youth group for years and is now a lay speaker said, “What I’m called now is to do something, not just sit back and do nothing. That is what Christian doctrine is, Christian belief is: you’re not through.” Her husband added, “You have a purpose.”

People who had seemed somewhat inarticulate when describing doctrine in the abstract were better able to connect doctrine and spirituality in concrete and practical terms. However, whether the class on *What Christians Believe* affected how participants perceived the connection between doctrine and spirituality is unclear.

### **FUMC Members’ Spiritual Formation and Knowledge of Christian Doctrine**

#### **Following Study of the Apostles’ Creed**

This study aimed to test the hypothesis that studying Christian doctrine both increases knowledge and promotes spiritual formation. Addressing Research Questions 1 and 2 has suggested that the study’s hypothesis was correct; however, the data has not proved conclusive. This section deals with Research Question 3 and attempts to make clearer how the intervention affected participants. Data from the CSPP, responses to the class evaluation, and insights from participant interviews will come to bear on the study’s purpose and the questions it entails.

#### **CSPP**

Recording participants’ CSPP scores gave me the impression that an overall increase from pretest to posttest had occurred. After calculating each respondent’s mean score for the items in the CSPP’s four scales, I entered the total number of strong (4.0 and above) and weak (3.99 and below) scores in Thayer’s Spiritual Development Chart. Tables 4.4 and 4.5 display that data for pretest and posttest respectively. The posttest numbers were greater for each scale, which suggests that participation in the class *What*

*Christians Believe* had some positive effect on participants' commitment to spiritual growth. Statistical analysis on participants' mean scores in each scale also contributed to the study. Table 4.7 shows the data for "Strong Intentional Participation" pretest and posttest.

**Table 4.7. Participants with "Strong Intentional Participation" Scores Pre- and Posttest (N=29)**

Spiritual Development Mode	Pretest		Posttest	
	n	%	n	%
Growing through a relationship with God (Transcendent Scale)	13	45	21	72
Growing through a relationship with others (New Life Scale)	1	3	3	10
Growing through a relationship with the Word (Vision Scale)	2	7	9	31
Growing through critical reflection (Reflection Scale)	5	17	10	34

The Transcendent scale's spiritual development mode is "growing through a relationship with God" (Thayer 204). This scale assesses a person's "participation in a relationship with God" (200). The Transcendent scale includes spiritual disciplines of prayer (six items), examen of conscience (one item), repentance (four items), service (one item), stewardship (one item), and worship (three items) (201). A matched pairs t-test of the data in Table 4.8 yielded the following results:  $t = 1.939$ ;  $p = .0313 (\leq .05)$ ; mean difference = .196; standard deviation = .5458. Evidence supports affirming that the positive difference between the posttest and pretest results is statistically significant.

A significant increase in scores on these items from pretest to posttest seems to indicate a positive result for the ministry project. Participants demonstrating an increase

in their commitment to growing through a relationship with God following the class on *What Christians Believe* suggests that the class had a positive influence on their spiritual formation. Table 4.8 shows the mean score for each participant on the items related to the Transcendent scale.



**Table 4.8. Scores for Transcendent Scale Items**

<b>Participant Number</b>	<b>Score Posttest</b>	<b>Score Pretest</b>	<b>Difference (Post – Pre)</b>
1	4.5	3.8	0.7
2	4.7	4.25	0.45
3	4.1	3.9	0.2
4	4.1	3.9	0.2
5	4.9	4.9	0
6	4.1	3	1.1
7	3.3	3.25	0.05
8	1.3	2.6	-1.3
9	4.5	3.8	0.7
10	2.9	3.6	-0.7
11	5	4.4	0.6
12	4.9	4.9	0
13	4.4	4.2	0.2
14	4	3.4	0.6
15	4.9	4.4	0.2
16	4.9	4.4	0.5
17	3.4	2.7	0.7
18	4	3.7	0.3
19	5	4.9	0.1
20	4.1	4.6	-0.5
21	2.4	3.1	-0.7
22	3.5	4	-0.5
23	3.9	4.3	-0.4
24	4.1	3.4	0.7
25	1.9	1.9	0
26	4.25	3.9	0.35
27	4.9	4.75	0.15
28	4.1	3.4	0.7
29	4.9	4.3	0.6

The Reflection scale's spiritual development mode is "growing through critical reflection" (Thayer 204). This scale assesses a person's "participation in critical reflection of culture and one's own life" (200). The Reflection scale includes the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading (two items), examen of conscience (seven items), and stewardship (one item) (201). A Matched Pairs t-test of the data in Table 4.9 yielded the

following results:  $t = 2.694$ ;  $p = .0059 (\leq .01)$ ; mean difference = .307; standard deviation = .613. This evidence is strong enough to conclude that the positive difference in test scores is statistically significantly different.

The scores for the Reflection scale were considerably lower than for the Transcendent Scale; still, a significant increase in scores on these items from pretest to posttest seems to indicate a positive result for the ministry project. Participants demonstrating an increase in their commitment to growing through critical reflection following the class on *What Christians Believe* suggests that the class had a positive influence on their spiritual formation. Table 4.9 shows mean scores for each participant on the items related to the Reflection scale.

**Table 4.9. Scores for Reflection Scale Items**

<b>Participant Number</b>	<b>Score Posttest</b>	<b>Score Pretest</b>	<b>Difference (Post – Pre)</b>
1	3.9	2.9	1
2	3.9	3.8	0.1
3	3.5	3.2	0.3
4	3.5	3.5	0
5	4.4	3	1.4
6	3.5	3.2	0.3
7	3.4	3.1	0.3
8	2.1	3	-0.9
9	4.4	3.2	1.2
10	4	3	1
11	5	3.5	1.5
12	4.7	4.9	-0.2
13	2.6	2.6	0
14	3.9	3.2	0.7
15	4.7	4.1	0.6
16	4.4	4.9	-0.5
17	3.4	3	0.4
18	3.4	2.6	0.8
19	5	4.7	0.3
20	3.1	3.2	-0.1
21	2.3	2.4	-0.1
22	3.5	3.6	-0.1
23	3.4	3.5	-0.1
24	3.4	1.7	0.6
25	2.3	1.6	0.7
26	2.5	3.6	-1.1
27	4.5	3.9	0.6
28	3.7	3.7	0
29	4.5	4.3	0.2

The Vision scale’s spiritual development mode is “growing through the Word” (Thayer 204). This scale assesses a person’s “participation with the Word of God” (200). The Vision scale includes the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading (five items), fellowship (one item), meditation (four items), stewardship (one item), and worship (one item) (201). A Matched Pairs t-test of the data in Table 4.10 yielded the following results:

$t = 2.878$ ;  $p = 0.004$  ( $\leq .01$ ); mean difference = .267; standard deviation = .5003. This evidence suggests skewed data, which leads to a cautious conclusion that the positive difference in the test results is strongly statistically significant. Statistical evidence supports this claim, but further review could lead to a different conclusion.

Though weaker than the evidence from the Transcendent and Reflection scales, the increased scores on the Vision scale lend support to the idea that participation in *What Christians Believe* had a positive influence on participants' spiritual formation.

Table 4.10 shows mean scores for each participant on the items in the Vision scale.

**Table 4.10. Scores for Vision Scale Items**

<b>Participant Number</b>	<b>Score Posttest</b>	<b>Score Pretest</b>	<b>Difference (Post – Pre)</b>
1	4.1	3.6	0.5
2	3.7	3.5	0.2
3	3	2	1
4	4	2.9	1.1
5	4	2.9	1.1
6	2.4	1.7	0.7
7	3.4	2.75	0.65
8	1.25	2.2	-0.95
9	4.1	3.6	0.5
10	2.5	2.6	-0.1
11	4.25	3.3	0.95
12	4.1	4.25	0.15
13	2.5	2.5	0
14	4	3.6	0.4
15	3.5	3.7	-0.2
16	4.3	4.3	0
17	2.4	2	0.4
18	3	2.25	0.75
19	4.1	3.8	0.3
20	3.8	2.6	1.2
21	2.3	2.4	-0.1
22	3.6	3.8	-0.2
23	2.5	2.6	-0.1
24	1.75	1.4	0.35
25	1.4	1.5	-0.1
26	2.3	2.9	-0.6
27	3.8	3.5	0.3
28	3.75	3.4	0.35
29	4.1	3.5	0.6

The New Life scale’s spiritual development mode is “growing through relationship with others” (Thayer 204). This scale assesses a person’s “participation in relationships with others” (200). The New Life Scale includes the spiritual disciplines of evangelism (four items), fellowship (four items), service (three items), and stewardship (one item; 201). A matched pairs t-test of the data in Table 4.11 yielded the following

results:  $t = 2.295$ ;  $p = .015$  ( $\leq .05$ ); mean difference = .307; standard deviation = .7202.

This evidence supports the claim that the difference in the test results is statistically significantly different than zero but is insufficient for drawing a solid conclusion. Table 4.11 shows mean scores for each participant on the items in the New Life scale.

**Table 4.11. Scores for New Life Scale Items**

<b>Participant Number</b>	<b>Score Posttest</b>	<b>Score Pretest</b>	<b>Difference (Post – Pre)</b>
1	4.1	3	1.1
2	2.75	2.6	0.15
3	2.25	2.25	0
4	2.3	1.4	0.9
5	3	2.7	0.3
6	0.6	0.5	0.1
7	1.8	1.6	0.2
8	1.5	1.8	-0.3
9	3.9	2.8	1.1
10	1.7	3.2	-1.5
11	2.9	0.4	2.5
12	4.1	3.4	0.7
13	2.75	2.25	0.5
14	2.75	2.7	0.05
15	2.75	2.3	0.45
16	2.4	2.5	-0.1
17	2	2	0
18	2.3	1.75	0.55
19	4.25	3.75	0.5
20	2	0.9	1.1
21	1.7	1.8	-0.1
22	3.3	4.25	-0.95
23	2.5	2	0.5
24	1.4	1	0.4
25	0.7	0.9	-0.2
26	2.4	3	-0.6
27	2.25	1.6	0.65
28	3.7	3.2	0.5
29	3.9	3.5	0.4

The data from the CSPP seems to show a significant increase in participants' scores, which indicates that study of the Apostles' Creed did aid participants' spiritual formation.

### Class Evaluations

The class evaluation included this statement: “Participating in this class helped me grow spiritually.” A total of twenty-four participants (83 percent) indicated that their taking part in the class helped them grow spiritually. Three were neutral on this question and three indicated that it did not help them, for a total of twenty percent who indicated that participation did not help them grow. Table 4.12 displays the responses to this evaluation item.

**Table 4.12. Responses to Evaluation Item 11: Participation and Spiritual Growth**

Evaluation Items	1 “Strongly Disagree”	2 “Disagree”	3 “Neutral”	4 “Agree”	5 “Strongly Agree”
11. participating in this class helped me grow spiritually N=30	n=1 3.4 percent	n=2 6.7 percent	n=3 10 percent	n=10 33.3 percent	n=14 46.6 percent

Without expending too much energy on the most negative response, exploring it may be worthwhile. The person who strongly disagreed with the statement about the class helping with spiritual growth also wrote a comment on the evaluation sheet: “I don’t care for the nitpicking and analyzing every word of every phrase. I find it destructive to my faith and [insulting to] my beliefs.” This person’s responses on the evaluation were consistently negative: In addition to this “1,” the evaluation included five “2s,” and three “3s.” The person did not find basic Christian doctrine interesting, did not think the text presented the subject effectively, did not have a better understanding of belief following the class, and would not be interested in other studies of Christian doctrine. This person attended seven out of the twelve sessions and read all of *The Apostles’ Creed for Today*.



In conjunction with this negative evaluation, this person's CSPP scores all fell into the "weak intentional participation" (3.99 and below) category. Scores on seven of the ten spiritual disciplines actually decreased from pretest to posttest. Accordingly, this person's scores in each of the four scales decreased. This negative reaction likely reflects an overall negativity in the person's life. While this lone negative response did not adversely affect the study, I want to take it seriously as a matter of pastoral concern.

The majority of participants indicated that participating in the class helped them grow spiritually. This trend suggested that for most participants studying Christian doctrine did aid their spiritual formation.

### **Interviews**

Evidence based on information from the post-class interviews is weak. No question in the interview asked specifically about the Apostles' Creed or how interviewees saw the class influencing their spiritual formation. However, some of the responses included phrases or ideas from the Creed as persons described Christian doctrine. One person mentioned belief in Jesus Christ and the Holy Trinity. Another asserted, "Jesus dying on the cross is my first thought about Christian belief." One interviewee used phrases similar to the Creed's second article: "The essence of Christian doctrine is atonement for salvation through the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross and his resurrection and ascension into heaven."

When asked about what helps him grow in faith, one man said, "When we recite the Apostles' Creed, that really helps me. So I like what you did [in offering the class]." This same man, in describing his move from another denomination to the UMC, recalled visiting a UMC and found meaningful that church's use of the Creed: "When they recited

the Apostles' Creed I thought, 'Now these people really know what they believe in.' And I accept that." Finally, one woman mentioned the class when asked when she felt she had learned the most about Christian beliefs: "I think I've learned especially when we had the class on the Creed. I learned a lot then."

The support these interview responses offer is slim. Interviewees mostly did not make a connection between the Apostles' Creed or the class *What Christians Believe* and their spiritual growth.

### **Summary of Major Findings**

Major findings of this study included the following:

- Participants demonstrated a need for spiritual growth as the majority showed weak participation on all four scales in the pretest CSPP. In the posttest, the majority continued to show weak participation in three of the scales.
- Significant difference in scores from pretest to posttest indicated that studying Christian doctrine and theology has potential to aid spiritual formation. This increase was especially evident in the transcendent scale as the majority of respondents on the posttest showed strong participation in this scale. While most respondents continued to show weak participation in the other three scales, the number of those showing strong participation increased. On the new life scale, the number of respondents showing strong participation tripled (from 1 to 3). On the vision scale, the number more than quadrupled (from 2 to 9) and on the reflection scale, the number doubled (from 5 to 10). The vision scale included worship attendance. Most of the participants regularly attended Sunday school and, therefore, also attended worship regularly. These facts may account for a large number of high scores in the vision scale.

- Church members struggled to think through and articulate Christian doctrine.
- Members seemed drawn to practical and concrete expressions of belief and

were more responsive to those expressions than to abstract doctrines.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

The purpose of this research was to discover how *What Christians Believe*, a twelve-week study based on the Apostles' Creed, influenced the spiritual formation of participants at First United Methodist Church in Eufaula, Oklahoma. Each week, participants read one or two chapters of González's *The Apostles' Creed for Today*. The class met for approximately forty-five minutes during the Sunday school hour. I provided content for each session by introducing the topic, giving background information, and clarifying what was in the reading for each session. For each session I provided a study guide with additional information on the subject and questions to supplement those at the end of González's chapters. The class was arranged at four large tables (a few latecomers sat at a table in the back of the room). For small group discussion, participants shared with others at their table.

Using *The Apostles' Creed for Today* as the class text led to some interesting discussions. The book is a good introduction to the Creed and seemed like the right choice for the class because its short chapters provided an appropriate amount of reading for each week. Also, González presents historical background on the Creed's formation and explains why certain affirmations were necessary at the time the Church was developing the Creed. González is theologically moderate. His writing is rooted in classical Christian teaching while some of his interpretations and applications tend to the left. Still, I thought the book was appropriate for this study.

Most of the class members seemed to appreciate González's book, but some outspoken members criticized it. At the beginning of session three, a few members were critical of the book. One said it was "well-researched, but not well-written for laypeople." When I asked how the reading was going, one person said, "Confusing." I noted at the time that the book was more academic than I had realized, and more academic than most laypeople are accustomed to reading.

A man in the class who holds a PhD in education and had been teaching one of the Sunday school classes, explained to the class that González deals with the Creed's development, not its meaning. I continued by saying that historical background is important. In a way similar to interpreting Scripture, discovering the text's original meaning guides understanding of the text's present meaning.

During session five, I listened in on some of the small group discussions. One group informed me again that they did not like González, though they did not explain why. They asked why I had chosen his book for the class. I explained that the book and its chapters seemed about the right length for the study and that it was in the middle ground between overly simple and very academic. I also pointed out that I did not choose González because I agree with all that he says. People can learn from someone with whom they disagree.

Finally, another reason for dissatisfaction with González's book came to light. After the last session, a woman in the class said she wanted to ask me about a sentence in the book that she believed contained poor grammar. As I read it I realized that she was reading it one way and I was taking it in another. The sentence was informal as it began with the pronoun "these," referring to an antecedent in a previous sentence. This woman,

however, read the sentence as though González was using the wrong pronoun; then she said something about González being “Mexican.” I pointed out that he is Cuban, but she brushed off that comment. I was not sure of her intention, but she implied, “That Mexican needs to learn English.” I tried to explain how I saw the sentence, but she did not listen. I saw her actions and attitude as trying to assert power and as almost overt racism. I had wondered at the beginning if the name González would be a problem for anyone, but I decided it surely would not be. For this woman, at least, I was wrong. This rather disturbing encounter exposed the need for more growth in grace or deeper spiritual formation in the likeness of Christ.

The instrument utilized in the ministry intervention was the Christian Spiritual Participation Profile (CSPP). Participants completed the CSPP before and after the class on *What Christians Believe*. Comparison of pretest and posttest scores showed significant positive change. Participants’ responses in class evaluations provided additional information. Interviews with ten participants following the class also contributed to the study. The major findings of the study reveal that the hypothesis proved true to a degree, although questions remain. The following section explores what the study revealed followed by consideration of the study’s limitations. Next, several serendipitous observations receive attention. This chapter concludes with recommendations for future research along the lines of this study.

### **Major Findings**

The study generated three major findings that I wish to explore in this section: the Need for Spiritual Formation, Studying Christian Doctrine and Theology Has Potential to

Aid Spiritual Formation, Struggling to Articulate Christian Doctrine and Make It Practical.

### **The Need for Spiritual Formation**

Participants demonstrated a need for spiritual growth as the majority showed weak participation on all four scales in the pretest CSPP (see table 4.4). In the posttest, the majority continued to show weak participation in three of the scales: new life, vision, and reflection (see table 4.5). These results suggest that spiritual growth is a need in the church. Perhaps pastors always see a need for greater spiritual maturity in the congregations they serve. Nevertheless, after nearly five years as pastor at FUMC, my assessment is that the congregation continues to need deeper spiritual formation.

Evidence of this need includes some divisiveness and a lack of Christlikeness in the way some treat others. At the same time, signs of growth are also evident. Attendance has increased, a recent women's Bible study had a great response, people are concerned about mission in the community and beyond, and a number of people are supporting the effort to build a new facility for the church.

The survey of formation themes in the Bible as presented in Chapter 1 revealed God's desire to form the lives of his people in the image of Christ and to grow the Church, the body of Christ, into Christ's likeness. This study concentrated on Paul's writings that emphasize Christ's formation within believers and believers' formation in the image of Christ. God's giving gifts to the Church in Ephesians 4 also has the goal of God's people maturing in the likeness of Christ. The survey of community in Scripture briefly mentioned sin as destroying community and highlighted God's response of grace to human sin. Chapter 1 did not expound on the spiritual *deformation* sin causes;

however, that reality certainly exposes the need for spiritual formation in Christ's likeness.

Because spiritual formation is a process, a need for growth and further formation is always present. Results from the CSPP show that participants' experience demonstrates the need for growth. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 not only shows the need for Christian spiritual formation, but it also reveals the richness and depth of life in the Spirit that God intends for people. Neither the Church nor individuals can appropriate all that richness and depth instantly, or even quickly. Greater experience of life in the Spirit is always available; more knowledge of God and about God always remains for Christians to learn; deeper involvement in Christian spiritual formation is always accessible. As a pastor, I hope to lead the people I serve to such greater experience, increasing knowledge, and deeper involvement.

The CSPP measures "the intensity of a person's involvement in a process that leads to desirable change" and "the extent and balance of a person's participation in the four spiritual development modes" (Thayer 196). It achieves these measures by revealing a person's commitment to participation in a variety of activities. This commitment indicates a desire and willingness to grow. Consequently, the weak participation scores indicate the need for growing commitment to practice spiritual disciplines as response to God (197). Normally, spiritual formation does not occur automatically, apart from human cooperation. The literature on spiritual formation includes an emphasis on intentionally being in God's presence, open to God, obedient to God, and receptive and responsive to God. Participants' placement in the CSPP highlights the need to be intentional about life in the Spirit and disciplined in pursuing God's goal of Christlikeness for God's people.



Pastoral ministry includes personally practicing intentionality and discipline in order to lead others in this experience. Many church members are strong examples of commitment to spiritual growth and they have helped me to grow. Life in the Christian community involves mutual influence among all parts of the body of Christ.

### **Studying Christian Doctrine and Theology Has Potential to Aid Spiritual Formation**

The significant difference in scores from pretest to posttest profiles indicated that the study of Christian doctrine and theology has potential to aid spiritual formation. Participants' scores increased somewhat in each of the four scales, while a majority showed an increase in the transcendent scale. The transcendent scale measures commitment to growth through a relationship with God. One inference from the significant increase in this scale was that studying Christian doctrine together helped people get to know God better. While the CSPP is not intended to assign a level of achievement or maturity, it does measure willingness to be part of a transforming process and commitment to activities involved in that process. The profile, therefore, indicates potential for spiritual growth (Thayer 196, 204). As a valid measure of willingness, commitment, and potential to grow, the CSPP offers a realistic indication of persons' involvement in spiritual formation. Thayer notes that the theory of spiritual development supporting the CSPP "recognizes the redemptive work of God in every mode of spiritual development. The Holy Spirit is present in the process of each mode and can transform the person through the learning that occurs" (197).

While God works through all the modes of spiritual development, I expected the Word of God Mode/vision scale or the Critical Reflection Mode/reflection scale to be most relevant to this study. These two modes seemed to complement the cognitive nature

of studying the Creed; however, the highest scores, both pretest and posttest, were in the Relationship with God Mode/transcendent scale. This result suggests that, for most participants in *What Christians Believe*, studying Christian doctrine actually enhanced their relationship with God. Although this study's impact is limited to participants at FUMC, other groups might have similar results.

Although the majority of respondents showed weak participation in the vision scale, a large number of high scores occurred in this scale. CSPP items in the vision scale included worship attendance. Because most participants in the study regularly attended Sunday school, they generally attended worship regularly as well. This fact could account for a large number of high scores in this scale. Thayer encountered a similar trend in establishing the CSPP's validity. In testing for validity, she found that the Transcendent scale approached a ceiling effect with a mean of 4.13 and a standard deviation of .69. She attributes this tendency to the transcendent scale's containing several items dealing with worship attendance and so possibly reflecting the fact that all of the adult participants were contacted at church (202).

Another occurrence that could have skewed the vision scale data for FUMC is the large number of zeros participants gave to item 17: "I record in a journal my thoughts on my spiritual journey." Twenty-five respondents on the pretest rated this item either "zero" or "one." On the posttest, twenty-three rated the item "zero" or "one." These consistently low scores may have some bearing on the possibility of the data being skewed. Journaling was obviously not a prominent spiritual discipline among the participants. I have kept a journal of sorts for several years and I find that this practice often aids my own growth. However, I have not taught about journaling or emphasized its

benefits in my ministry at FUMC. Sharing my own experience and encouraging people to record their thoughts, prayers, and insights could possibly lead them into a means of grace that would be effective for many of them.

Tables 4.4 and 4.5 show that only one respondent in the pretest had a strong participation score on the new life scale and only three had strong scores in the posttest. Thus, the participants showed the weakest participation in the new life scale, which includes the disciplines of fellowship, evangelism, and service. Scores on the vision scale were just higher than those on the new life scale, and scores on the reflection scale were slightly higher than those on the vision scale. Participants showed the strongest participation in the transcendent scale. These results are very similar to those Thayer found for the group in the last step of the CSPP's development (204).

Through study of a historic creed and participation in the process of spiritual formation, twenty-first century Christians such as those at FUMC take their place in the long line of people who have experienced God's transforming power. The historical survey in Chapter 2 lifts up some of those previous individuals and groups. Believers today share in the faith and experience of figures such as Ignatius of Antioch and Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection. As United Methodists, FUMC members share Wesley's heritage of spiritual formation through sermons, means of grace, and an understanding of God at work in human lives. The same God at work in Scripture and Christian history to form a people for himself continues that work in the Church today.

The study's results resonate with the theological background in Chapter 1 as the study of the Apostles' Creed had benefits for the community of faith, the church. The local church was the environment for the growth participants experienced through this

study. Although an informed layperson could teach a class such as *What Christians Believe*, I was fulfilling the role of pastor-teacher as I led the class. I also learned a good deal through teaching this class. One insight was the reminder that study, even of doctrine, does not have to be heavily academic. One task teachers in the Church have is translating academic theology into something understandable from which laypeople can benefit. At the same time, the struggle to understand is part of spiritual formation. While I find spiritual nourishment in academic study, I must recognize that not everyone has the same experience, and I should look for ways to help them receive the benefits of Christian doctrine without necessarily engaging in academic study.

Prominent in Chapter 2 was an emphasis on the benefits of healthy doctrine. For example, Charry promotes theology and doctrine as useful and beneficial for healthy Christian life and spiritual formation. Doctrine is both formative and sapiential, that is, it involves “engaged knowledge that emotionally connects the knower to the known” (*By the Renewing of Your Minds* 4). Abraham speaks of doctrine’s healing, and he describes the Church’s canonical traditions, including creeds, as gifts of God for salvation and healing (*Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia* 90-91). While measuring those benefits and correlating them with a specific activity is difficult, this study demonstrated that growth in relating to God is a benefit of interacting with basic Christian doctrine in the company of other believers.

### **Struggling to Articulate Christian Doctrine and Make It Practical**

Church members struggled to think through and articulate Christian doctrine. Practical and concrete expressions rather than abstract doctrines elicited greater response from members. This finding came primarily through interviews in attempting to answer

Research Question 2. Comments during the class also revealed that people were struggling with the content, as well as with understanding why they even needed to study Christian belief. In session eight I gave them a handout titled, “Remind Me Again Why We’re Doing This” (see Appendix I). This summary was an attempt to keep people on board and let them know they had good reason for engaging in this or any study of Christian doctrine.

Class discussion became more animated when dealing with what people considered real life issues. In the section on Judgment, class members focused on justice now and asked whether people today really can experience justice. Various members posed ethical dilemmas, usually extreme cases. One member called for using logic and not just emotion in dealing with such issues. Forgiveness was another topic that sparked good discussion. Members were truly concerned about questions surrounding forgiveness, including being able to forgive oneself. During discussion about the Holy Spirit as Advocate/Helper, someone brought up experiencing a narrow escape from a car accident. Then others told stories about their own seemingly miraculous escapes from injury. While such events were not what I had in mind, or what I believe John’s Gospel addresses, class members found such accounts meaningful. Another example of literal, almost narrow, thinking surfaced in discussion of the phrase, “the holy catholic church.” Despite repeated explanations from me and other class members that “catholic” with a small “c” means “of the whole” or “universal,” several members admitted that they still refuse to say “catholic” when reciting the Creed. Associations with the Roman Catholic Church seemed too strong for some people. Grasping the idea that a word such as “catholic” could have multiple meanings was apparently too much for some members.

While rereading the interviews, I noticed this inclination toward the practical and concrete. When describing how their beliefs helped them grow, some interviewees referred to “practicing” Christianity. Trying to describe Christian doctrine, most interviewees spoke of actions, behavior, and relationships, although some did lift up doctrinal statements.

The tendency to emphasize practicing Christianity reflects the traditional Methodist approach to “practical divinity” (Langford 20-22). Those participants who were life-long United Methodists were expressing their tradition as they described Christian doctrine in terms of practice. Participants who came from other backgrounds also showed an attraction to the Methodist tradition’s practical emphasis. Reflecting on my own interest in doctrine and theology and my affinity for abstract thought and theory raises questions about my relationship to my own United Methodist tradition. My emphasis on doctrine could be rebellion against my tradition, but I see it more as trying to offer balance and enriching experience within that tradition. I see the danger of a good and valid aspect of Methodist tradition (practical divinity) becoming pure pragmatism and drifting into folk theology. I also see the validity and benefit of reflecting on the faith, and I hoped to persuade people that studying doctrine is valid and beneficial, and that doctrine itself is practical.

I recall experiencing some frustration while studying theology at an evangelical university. Church history and theology texts contained a Reformed emphasis. I often wondered about Wesley’s place in the Church’s history and theology. Part of my motivation in this study may have been trying to find a place for a Wesleyan emphasis and approach to theology. Those within the Wesleyan tradition are not focused totally on

experience and are not concerned with pragmatism alone. Part of this study's purpose was to stress the divinity side of practical divinity without losing the practical side.

Emphasizing the practical aspects of theology has great value. Doctrine that stays removed from daily life can become the dead orthodoxy that Christian theologians want to avoid. Much of the literature in Chapters 1 and 2 stresses the need for believers to live their theology. Collins' definition of Christian spirituality refers to "the lived experience of Christian belief" (*Exploring Christian Spirituality* 13). Another description of Christian spirituality presents it as the attempt by Christians to shape their lives in accord with Christian doctrines and to live by the truth the doctrines enshrine (Allen, *Spiritual Theology* 152). Christian faith takes in all of life, not simply the intellect.

Overintellectualizing or taking a purely academic approach to Christian faith and life can lead to an elitism that excludes those who are not as well educated or who are not as interested in academic pursuits. Such an approach can also promote the notion that thinking about faith is the same as having faith or studying love is the same as loving or contemplating service is the same as serving. Over-spiritualizing Christian faith and life leads into the kind of errors the Apostles' Creed was trying to combat, such as Gnosticism and Docetism. Christian doctrine and Christian spiritual formation include the whole person, not one isolated component.

On the other hand, the practical emphasis can be a way of avoiding mystery or avoiding thinking through difficult issues. A purely pragmatic faith can be flat, narrow, and confined rather than uplifting, expansive, and open to new things God wants to do and to give. Christian faith and life include an intellectual component. Followers of Jesus Christ love God with their *minds* as well as with heart, soul, and strength. Learning and

growing go together, and they are ongoing dynamics in Christian living. This study emphasized aspects of the intellectual component and showed that studying Christian doctrine can be a means of grace that promotes spiritual formation. However, this study has lifted up and examined just one aspect of Christian faith and life. In this ministry intervention, I brought to the participants one model of spiritual formation that is part of a bigger and richer complex of experience and community in the Church. Studying and learning are not the whole of Christian experience; rather, they have their place in a range of activities, attitudes, affections, and behaviors that characterize persons who live to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit.

### **Limitations**

The study met the purpose for which it was designed. The CSPP was a good instrument for this study because it offers a comprehensive and balanced approach to Christian life. The consistently lower scores in the vision, reflection, and new life scales—both for Thayer’s test group and for participants at FUMC—need further exploration to determine if they indicate a weakness in the instrument or a weakness in contemporary American church life. The CSPP seems simple and straightforward, but three participants turned in profiles with entire sections left blank, so I excluded those profiles.

The facility in which the class was held limited interaction. Participants needed more room to spread out for small group discussion. We used the church’s fellowship hall, but with the number of people present, the space was still a bit cramped. Groups could not separate sufficiently to keep from distracting the other groups with their conversations.



I chose to hold the class during Sunday school in order to have a higher attendance as most of those people were present nearly every Sunday. Nevertheless, meeting during the Sunday school hour had limiting effects. FUMC's Sunday morning schedule, with one Sunday school hour and one worship service, limited class time. Several people in the class had responsibilities in worship such as singing in the choir, greeting, or ushering, so they had some distractions. People entering the church through the fellowship hall, toward the end of class, were distracting. Members who had attended Sunday school for some time had expectations of Sunday school that may have conflicted with the study's approach. The study was more academic and deeper than typical Sunday school lessons at FUMC. Such a variance may have called people to make adjustments they were not prepared for. Alternative possibilities for the class might have included meeting during the week, either in the morning or evening, or both. One reason I did not use this approach was to include more than the same twelve to fifteen people who come to every study at the church. Still, exploring other possibilities may have proved worthwhile.

Data collection for this study could have been improved by finding a better way to identify participants' pretests and posttests. I asked people to supply their own four-digit personal identification number on the pretest profile. By the time they completed the posttest twelve weeks later, many had forgotten their number. Therefore, correlating pre- and posttest profiles was difficult, and I was unable to use some because I could not find matching pre- and posttest profiles for everyone. Perhaps keeping a list of the numbers on the pretest profiles and making that available at the end of the study would have helped people recognize their own numbers.

Allowing time in class to complete the profiles would have been more effective. Before the first session, Sunday school classes had the profiles, and two classes took class time to complete them while members of the third class chose to take the profiles home. The twelfth session was rushed as I tried to cover material and encourage participants to complete the profile. A better method would have been to ask participants to take the time in Sunday school the following week to complete the posttest profiles. Such a procedure likely would have produced a better return rate, although class members' absences the following week might have created another obstacle.

The interviews would have been more effective had they included more specific questions about the Apostles' Creed and the class. Asking participants about the Creed, in particular, along with asking about doctrine, in general, may have provided more relevant information for the study. Additionally, asking specifically how participants thought the class influenced their spiritual life may have produced helpful insights.

Finding ways to include a broader range of participants would have been useful. At the end of the class, one couple commented that they hoped my research would not be adversely affected by having so many "old" people like them who were set in their ways and had their minds made up. Even given the limits of the church I serve, I could have involved more people. Offering another session of the class during the week might have worked. I invited the youth Sunday school class to participate, but they were uncomfortable with the idea of meeting with the church's adults for twelve weeks. Following a suggestion in my proposal hearing, I asked the five members of the youth class to complete the CSPP. I also invited the congregation as a whole to do the CSPP as a kind of control group, but only about three people responded. Another approach to

including more participants would be to team up with another church that would offer a study of the Creed and administer the CSPP.

The twelve-week class worked but perhaps could have been more effective with some changes. Possibly a shorter class would have been better. We could have used eight weeks: the first week completing the CSPP, studying for six weeks, and repeating the CSPP and doing evaluations the eighth week.

I made an effort to simplify material and tried to keep the class from being a merely academic exercise. I possibly underestimated members' interest in studying doctrine or overestimated my ability to make the study interesting. While many participants appreciated and affirmed the class, several struggled and complained about the academic approach. Some class evaluations included comments indicating confusion about the study:

I feel that the scholarly approach went over the heads of some of those who were present. Sometimes it seemed as if "too much information" or nitpicking of facts plus presenting different points of the subject confused the class.

It was interesting but in some aspects confusing. But John and others in class explained most of it. But we had quite a few differing opinions and beliefs.

One person expressed a similar thought in an interview:

I think the class was a bit advanced for a lot of the people in it. I don't think some of them have a basis in Christianity at all, or in the Bible even. And because of that, I think it was hard for them to understand a lot that was in the book. The book was a little bit advanced for quite a few of them.

Hearing comments such as these, especially in the first few weeks, led me to simplify class handouts even more, to reduce the number of discussion questions, and to add

supplements that addressed the importance of doctrine and thinking as part of Christian faith (see Appendix I; Willimon, “Christian Faith”).

### **Serendipitous Observations**

The first unexpected insight came through conducting interviews. The simple action of asking someone a set of questions involved unplanned benefits that enhance pastoral care. Because the interviews were part of research, people seemed more willing than usual to speak about personal beliefs and experiences. Possibly I was more comfortable asking about their personal beliefs and experiences in the interview setting. This willingness or comfort enabled conversations to go beyond mere small talk. The interviews gave both the interviewer and the interviewees an excuse to talk about important matters. The interviews helped me learn more about people in the congregation and they gave the people a chance to share their faith. Ideas, subjects, and concerns surfaced that can become matters for prayer and can be addressed in future preaching and teaching.

Using the CSPP produced a second unplanned insight. Consistently low scores in some portions of the CSPP reveal areas where the church needs to focus its attention, namely evangelism, fellowship, and service. Empirical evidence that supports the indications of the profile includes the fact that no one brought unchurched people to the study, as I had invited them to do. Also, the low numbers of professions of faith at FUMC shows the need for increased attention on evangelism. Regarding fellowship, the church includes several groups such as choir and Sunday school classes and holds occasional “fellowship” events (usually involving a meal). Still, many people do not experience fellowship, and the church falls short of being the community of God that Chapter 1

described. Considering service, many people in the congregation give money to others rather than getting personally involved in serving. The high number of older people in the church accounts for some of this tendency, but more people could be actively involved in service. This insight calls for the church's leadership to focus more on motivating and training people to share the faith, to offer more opportunities for fellowship and experiencing community, and to find more ways to involve people in serving beyond the walls of the church.

The church's shortcomings in evangelism, fellowship, and service are also interesting in light of respondents' affinity for practical Christianity. Apparently, these practices are not what a majority of participants had in mind. Most of those interviewed tended to emphasize being kind or treating others right. Certainly sound Christian doctrine can produce the benefit of becoming better people (Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds* vii; 4). At the same time, the spiritual formation resulting from studying Christian doctrine draws Christians together in fellowship and impels them into evangelism and service. Fellowship, evangelism, service, and other Christian practices are means of grace or spiritual disciplines that promote spiritual formation. One can also see the discipline of study as reflection on the actions people take and the impetus to further action.

### **Recommendations**

Specific, focused studies of Christian doctrine can aid spiritual growth. Churches, Sunday school classes, small groups, and pastors' groups might consider conducting such a study. Churches need not shy away from teaching what they believe and what the Church has believed throughout its history. Not only will such teaching foster spiritual

formation, but Christians need to know what they believe and why, especially in light of many other belief systems that surround them. Studies such as this one can help establish people in the faith and give them resources for growing in faith and sharing the faith.

Conducting such a study with participants in a broader range of age and church involvement would be interesting and helpful. González's book would be good, especially with a group that appreciates the history and background of Christian beliefs. Other useful studies of the Creed include McGrath's *"I Believe"* or Howell's *The Life We Claim*. Dunnam's *This Is Christianity* is not an exposition of the Creed but uses the Creed's themes as the starting place to present a Christian primer. *Christian Believer* by J. Ellsworth Kalas is a widely used exploration of Christian doctrine that many churches have found to be effective. Each of these works was considered for this study. Comparing this study's finding with one that used one of those other texts might be interesting.

The CSPP is a useful instrument for a variety of settings. Churches, classes, pastors, and teachers can profit from using it. One benefit in using the CSPP is identifying where members need more attention or need to give more attention to spiritual growth. A leader can use the CSPP as a one time profile to indicate where people are in their spiritual commitments and where they might want to focus attention. As a pretest/posttest instrument, the CSPP could work with a shorter class on the Creed or another exploration of Christian doctrine. A Bible study leader might use it to help determine the effectiveness of Bible study on commitment to spiritual formation. Using the CSPP with a group going on a mission trip or in a congregation that is highly active in social justice ministry might produce some interesting results. The profile might work

well to complement a spiritual gifts inventory or someone might want to correlate it with a personality profile or temperament analysis.

### **Postscript**

This research has confirmed C. S. Lewis' assertion that Christians need instruction as well as exhortation (205). Learning to think about Christian doctrine may be difficult, but is also rewarding. God continues to form persons in Christlikeness and bring the Church to "the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). Christian doctrine, such as the Apostles' Creed summarizes, is one means God uses to fulfill his goal of a mature Church comprised of Christlike persons.

## APPENDIX A

### Class Outline and Supplemental Study Guide to *The Apostles Creed for Today*

#### ***What Christians Believe*—A Study of the Apostles' Creed: Session 1**

*Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share,  
I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith  
that the Lord has once for all entrusted to us, his people. (Jude 3, TNIV)*

#### **What Is Theology?**

#### **Sound/Healthy Doctrine Helps Make a Sound/Healthy Church**

**1 Timothy 1:10-11; 3:14-16; 2 Timothy 4:25; Titus 1:9; 2:1**

Quotations from *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, *Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia*, and *By the Renewing of Your Minds*.

#### **The Faith of the Church**

**See González 8-9.**

Chesterton quotation (*Orthodoxy* 13).

#### **What Is the Apostles' Creed and Why Is It Important?**

#### **Review González's Introduction.**

Why *Apostles*?

Association with baptism.

Emphasizing certain points of doctrine.

"Pledge of Allegiance"

McGrath, "*I Believe*" (9-10).

Tom Albin's story of telling his friend to pray the Apostles' Creed.

#### **Small Group Discussion**

Questions on page 9 of González.

#### **For Next Time**

Read González, chapter 1.

Hebrews 11:1-12:3

Matthew 6:9-13

John 14:5-14

Romans 8:13-17

Rich Mullins "Creed."



***What Christians Believe—A Study of the Apostles' Creed: Session 2***  
**“I Believe in God the Father”**

*“I believe; help my unbelief!”* (Mark 9:24, NRSV)

Justo L. González, *The Apostles' Creed for Today*, chapter 1.

**What does “believing” mean?**

Pages 10-11: levels of belief:

- uncertainty
- opinion we support
- convinced something is true whether anyone else thinks so
- absolutely convinced; conviction
- trust

**Note the emphasis on “belief *in*” God (pp. 11-12, 17-18).**

**Why do Christians call God “Father”?**

Matthew 6:9-13; John 14:5-14; Romans 8:13-17

See González 12-17

New Testament context/Jesus' teaching

How do you respond to González's use of “Mother” to refer to God?

Roman context of the Creed

Powerful father who rules household.

God is a loving and nurturing Father who rules over all.

Changing our image of “father,” “mother,” “parent.”

**Small Group Discussion**

Apart from affirming that God exists, what else is implied by the statement “I believe in God”?

What would you say to someone who said that they would like to believe but have difficulty overcoming their doubts? (Alister McGrath, *I Believe* 24)

Questions (González 18)

**For Next Time**

Read González, chap. 2.

Genesis 1, 2

Psalms 8, 19, 104

The goal of this study is to know God, not just know some things about God. Of course, if you know someone, you do know some things about that person. Theology and doctrine help us know God as we learn about God. Also, keep in mind the idea of theology as “faith seeking understanding.” See Will Willimon’s article on the back of this sheet (“Christian Faith”).

***What Christians Believe—A Study of the Apostles’ Creed: Session 3***  
**“Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth”**

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth* (Gen. 1:1).

Justo González, *The Apostles’ Creed for Today*, chapter 2

**Gnosticism.**

**Marcion (c. A.D. 100–165).** (Patzia and Petrotta, *Pocket Dictionary of Biblical Studies*)

Affirming God as Creator and Ruler of all things (including the physical universe) was an answer to the challenges of some gnostic thinking and people such as Marcion.

The difference between “all-ruling” and “all-powerful” (22). The emphasis is on what God rules, not philosophical speculation about the extent of God’s power or the meaning of “all-powerful.”

Relation of the doctrine of creation and modern science (23-25).

**Small Group Discussion**

Paraphrase (put in your own words) Psalm 8.

Is there anywhere in God’s creation that you find yourself especially aware of God’s presence?

What implications are there in the assertion that we have been made “in the image of God”? How do these apply to you?

What steps could you take to ensure that you take care of God’s creation rather than spoil it? (McGrath, *“I Believe”* 36)

Questions on p. 26 of González.

**For Next Time**

Read González, ch. 3.

John 1:1-18; Matthew 28:18-20; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 13:14;  
 Matthew 7:21-22;

Romans 10:9-13; 1 Corinthians 12:3

***What Christians Believe—A Study of the Apostles' Creed: Session 4***  
**“And in Jesus Christ His Only Son Our Lord”**

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,  
that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16, TNIV)*

Justo González, *The Apostles' Creed for Today*, chapter 3

**Trinity.** (Grenz, Guretzki, and Nordlin)

The Bible does not use the word “Trinity,” but there are biblical statements that are part of the basis for the doctrine of the Trinity: **Matthew 28:18-20; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 13:14; John 14:8-26.**

**Incarnation.** (Grenz, Guretzki, and Nordlin)

**Small Group Discussion**

Read Philippians 2:5-11

What does this passage tell us about God?

What does it tell us about human beings?

What does it tell us about the relationship between God and human beings?

How does knowing God as Trinity affect our understanding of the Church?

What do we mean when we call Jesus by the title *Christ*?

What are some ways that we can affirm Jesus as *Lord* today?

Do we experience God's presence in the Holy Spirit such that we would have voted for the doctrine of the Trinity?

**For Next Time**

Read González, chs. 4 and 5.

James Howell, “A Deeper Reflection—Holiness Is Normal” (handout)

Matthew 1:18-25

Luke 1:26-38

Matthew 27:11-56

Luke 23:26-56

Consider what these passages tell us about Jesus' humanity.

Why was affirming the reality of Jesus' humanity so important to the Church developing the Creed?

Do people today struggle more with Jesus' being God or being human?

**What Christians Believe—A Study of the Apostles' Creed: Session 5**  
**“Who Was Conceived by the Holy Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary,**  
**Suffered Under Pontius Pilate, Was Crucified, Dead, and Buried”**

*Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers and sisters in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. (Heb. 2:14-18, TNIV).*

**Chapter 4: Jesus’ birth is both special and real.**

Need to distinguish between two terms that often are confused:

**immaculate conception.** [González mentions this on page 38.]

**virgin birth (virginal conception).** (Grenz, Guretzki, and Nordlin)

**Group Discussion**

Talk about James Howell’s “A Deeper Reflection—Holiness Is Normal” (52-58)

What do you think about his reasons for believing in the virgin birth?

What are some reasons you have heard for believing or denying the virgin birth?

**Chapter 5: Jesus’ life and death are located in history.**

This is another affirmation of Jesus’ real humanity.

p. 41: The idea that in Jesus the myths came true was part of what persuaded C. S. Lewis to become a Christian.

p. 44: Last paragraph summarizes the section.

Think about “Some Reflections for Today” (45-46).

**Group Discussion**

Why is it so important to insist that Jesus is both fully divine and fully human? (McGrath 53)

(Think of this in terms of salvation. Only God can save us. Only in a human being can God’s salvation reach us.)

Questions, p. 47

**For Next Time**

González, chs. 6, 7.

1 Peter 3:18-20; Ephesians 4:8-10; Matthew 27:45-50

Mark 16:1-8; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

***What Christians Believe—A Study of the Apostles' Creed: Session 6***  
**“He Descended to the Dead—On the Third Day He Rose Again”**

*“You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen!”* (Mark 16:6)  
*And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.* (1 Cor. 15:14, TNIV)

**What is your favorite Easter hymn and why?**

**Note the four views of Jesus' descent in chapter 6.**

Another view sees the descent as Jesus sharing the depths of human suffering (note his cry of forsakenness on the cross).

**Small Group Discussion**

Which view of the meaning of Jesus' descent is most meaningful to you? Why?  
In what ways today do we see the powers of evil destroyed or overcome by our Lord who “descended into hell?” (González, 53)

Tom Oden quotation (*The Word of Life* 450).

**Jesus' resurrection as the center of the Gospel and of Christian faith.**

**Explanation of “third day.”**

**Christian worship on the first day of the week.**

**Resurrection as victory and new beginning.**

**Already and Not Yet.**

**Small Group Discussion**

Why is “Christ is risen!” such a central Christian affirmation? (González, 60)

For you, is Communion more a somber remembrance of Jesus' death or a joyful celebration of Jesus' resurrection?

What hope does the resurrection of Jesus offer to those who are afraid of death? (McGrath 72)

**For Next Time**

González, ch. 8.

Acts 1:1-11

Ephesians 4:8-10

Colossians 3:1-3

***What Christians Believe—A Study of the Apostles' Creed: Session 7***  
**“He Ascended into Heaven, Is Seated at the Right Hand of the Father”**

*The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven... Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. (Heb. 1:3; 4:14, TNIV).*

**Read Acts 1:1-11 silently.**

Read it again, imagining that you are one of the disciples. Be aware of all your senses: what are the sounds, sights, smells, touches, and tastes? Share those with the group.

**González, ch. 8**

*The ascension is an essential part of the story.*

*Easter goes on.*

*Incarnation continues.*

*At the right hand—the place of glory, power, and authority.*

Luke Timothy Johnson explains some of the meaning and impact of Jesus' resurrection and ascension (*The Creed—What Christians Believe and Why It Matters* 191-92).

**Small Groups**

Questions on p. 65.

**For Next Time**

Read González chapter 9.

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

**What Christians Believe—A Study of the Apostles' Creed: Session 8**  
**“And Will Come Again to Judge the Living and the Dead”**

*In the past God overlooked such ignorance [pagan idol worship], but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead. (Acts 17:30-31, TNIV)*

Why does the older version of the Creed say “the *quicks* and the dead”?

**Chapter 9**

**Justice and Love**

**The One who will come to judge is the Lord we already know.**

Notice that the Creed does not go into detail about Jesus' return. It simply affirms that he will come again.

Small Group Discussion

According to 1 Thessalonians 4:11-5:13, believing in Jesus' return should affect our lives in what ways?

What does the Parable of the Weeds (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43) tell us about judgment?

**Questions p. 69.**

**For Next Time**

González, chapter 10.

John 14:15-27; Acts 2:1-41; Romans 8:1-17, 26-27

***What Christians Believe—A Study of the Apostles' Creed: Session 9***  
**“I Believe in the Holy Spirit”**

*But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you (John 14:26 TNIV).*

Maxie Dunnam on the Trinity and mystery (68-69).

**Who is the Holy Spirit?**

See the Nicene Creed for a fuller expression of the Spirit's identity.

Dunnam again offers a helpful summary (69-70).

**The Spirit and Faith**

**The Spirit and Power**

**The Spirit and Holiness**

The *Holy* Spirit makes us holy.

**Review John 14; Acts 2; Romans 8**

Larry Hart provides a useful summary of the Holy Spirit's work (343).

**Small Group Discussion**

Questions, p. 75.

**For Next Time**

González, ch. 11.

Matthew 16:13-20

1 Corinthians 12:4-31

Ephesians 2:19-22

1 Peter 2:4-10



***What Christians Believe—A Study of the Apostles' Creed: Session 10***  
**“The Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints”**

*To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours. (1 Cor. 1:2).*

**The Creed’s statements about the Church come under the heading of “the Holy Spirit.”**

**The Nicene Creed includes four “marks” of the Church** (*The United Methodist Hymnal* #880):

*The Church is one* (quotation from McGrath 92).

*The Church is holy.*  
González 77-79.

*The Church is catholic.*  
González 79-80.  
“*Catholic* is an affirmation of the universal validity and relevance of the gospel” (McGrath 93).

*The Church is apostolic.*  
(McGrath 93)

**Communion of Saints**

González 80-81. Note last paragraph on 81.

**Small Group Discussion**

Read the hymn “For All the Saints” (*United Methodist Hymnal* #711). What images or phrases in this song appeal to you or speak to you?

How could you more fully belong to and get involved in your church? Why is this aspect of the Christian faith so important?

Who are the individuals who have really helped you in your life of faith? Have you ever been able to thank them? (McGrath 112)

**For Next Time**

Read González, ch. 12

Isaiah 59:1-21

Psalms 32

Matthew 6:14-15

1 John 1:5-2:2

***What Christians Believe—A Study of the Apostles' Creed: Session 11***  
**“The Forgiveness of Sins”**

*Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you (Eph. 4:32).*

**Review Scriptures**

Isaiah 59:1-21	The need for forgiveness; God as Savior
Psalms 32	The blessedness of forgiveness
Matthew 6:14-15	The need to forgive others
1 John 1:5-2:2	God's faithfulness to forgive, our need to confess

Tension between holiness and forgiveness (González 83).

Forgiveness does not mean saying the action was unimportant. “[T]elling the other that whatever he or she did is not important ... is a way of telling them they are not important” (84).

To affirm the forgiveness of sins is to affirm that we ourselves have been forgiven and to affirm the forgiveness of the sins of others (84).

Matthew 18:21-35

“Before God, we are like that man whose enormous debt was forgiven” (85).  
Having been forgiven, we are also representatives of God (85-86).

**Small Group Discussion**

Questions (86).

Why is real forgiveness so difficult both to offer and accept? How does this apply to you in your relationship with God?

**For Next Time**

Read González, ch. 13.  
Daniel 12:2  
John 5:24-30; 11:21-27  
1 Corinthians 15:12-58  
Philippians 3:20-21

***What Christians Believe—A Study of the Apostles' Creed: Session 12***  
**“The Resurrection of the Body and the Life Everlasting”**

*And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.*

(Rom. 8:11, TNIV)

**Resurrection and Life**

**Resurrection of the Body more than Immortality of the Soul**

**God's Gift of Eternal Life**

**Why Resurrection of the Body?**

God's active role in Christian hope

The positive value of what is material, physical

**Small Group Discussion**

Questions on p. 92.

What aspects of eternal life are you enjoying now? And what are you looking forward to in the future?

For Further Reading on basic Christian beliefs, the Creed, and spiritual growth

Rodney Clapp, *Tortured Wonders—Spirituality for People, Not Angels*.

Maxie Dunnam, *This Is Christianity*.

Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*.

James C. Howell, *The Life We Claim*.

C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*.

Alister McGrath, *“I Believe”—Exploring the Apostles' Creed*.

John R. W. Stott, *Basic Christianity*.

N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian*.

(All of these books are available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) and [www.cokesbury.com](http://www.cokesbury.com).)

## APPENDIX B

### The Christian Spiritual Participation Profile

Please respond to each statement according to your experience at the present. Don't dwell too long on the statements. Your initial reaction is probably the best.

0=Never, 1=Rarely, 2=Occasionally, 3=Often, 4=Frequently, 5=Always

#### Prayer

- |   |             |
|---|-------------|
| 1. When I pray, I am confident that God will answer my prayer.  | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. When I pray, I sense that God is infinite and holy.  | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. In my prayers, I reveal to God my innermost needs and thoughts.  | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. In my prayers, I actively seek to discover the will of God.  | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5. In my prayers, I thank God for the salvation God has provided for me in Jesus Christ.                  | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6. When experiences in my life lead me to despair or depression, I turn to God in prayer for deliverance. | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |

#### Repentance

- |   |             |
|---|-------------|
| 7. Repentance is a part of my private prayers to God.   | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 8. When I confess and repent of my sins, I experience the assurance of being forgiven by God. | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 9. I experience genuine sorrow for my sins.   | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 10. When I confess a sin, I express a desire to be delivered from its power.                  | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |

#### Worship

- |   |                       |
|---|-----------------------|
| 11. My worship of God is a response to what God has done for me.  | 0 1 2 3 4 5           |
| 12. My worship is focused on the Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.                                     | 0 1 2 3 4 5           |
| 13. My participation in the Lord's Supper (Communion, Eucharist) draws me into a closer relationship with Jesus Christ. | 0 1 2 3 4 5           |
| 14. I attend a church worship service:  |                       |
| Never   | About 2 times a month |
| Less than once a month  | About 3 times a month |
| About once a month  | Every week            |

#### Meditation

- |  |             |
|--|-------------|
| 15. I reflect thoughtfully on passages I read in the Bible.  | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 16. I listen to music that praises God.  | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 17. I record in a journal my thoughts on my spiritual journey.   | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 18. I freely forgive those who sin against me even when the damage or hurt they have caused is very great. | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |

0=Never, 1=Rarely, 2=Occasionally, 3=Often, 4=Frequently, 5=Always

#### Examination of Conscience

- |   |             |
|---|-------------|
| 19. When I examine my life, I recognize my great need for God's redemptive work for me.   | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 20. I evaluate my culture by principles found in the Bible.   | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 21. When I read or hear reports of terrible crimes that have been committed against people, I grieve over the evil in the world.                          | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 22. When I hear about famines, floods, earthquakes, and other disasters, I want to help the victims in some way.  | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 23. When I see or learn about the immoral ways so many people live, I long for God's will to be done.   | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 24. Even though evil seems to be so powerful and pervasive, I feel confident that God will ultimately provide justice.                                    | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 25. Even when a situation seems unbearably difficult or painful, I have confidence that through God's providence, God can bring something good out of it. | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 26. I use biblically based principles to govern ethical decisions.  | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |

#### Bible Reading and Study

- |   |                                     |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| 27. I read or study the Bible to learn the will of God.   | 0 1 2 3 4 5                         |
| 28. When I read or study the Bible, I attempt to learn the enduring principles being taught by the specific passage I am considering. | 0 1 2 3 4 5                         |
| 29. I study the Bible to understand the doctrines of my church.   | 0 1 2 3 4 5                         |
| 30. As part of my study of the Bible, I consider how the church has dealt with issues throughout its history.                         | 0 1 2 3 4 5                         |
| 31. When I read or study the Bible, I change my beliefs and/or behavior to accommodate new information or understanding.              | 0 1 2 3 4 5                         |
| 32. I read devotional articles and/or books.  | 0 1 2 3 4 5                         |
| 33. I read or study the Bible:  |                                     |
| Never   | About 1 hour a <i>week</i>          |
| 10 hours or less a <i>year</i>  | About 15 to 30 minutes a <i>day</i> |
| About 1 to 2 hours a <i>month</i>   | More than 30 minutes a <i>day</i>   |

#### Evangelism

- |   |             |
|---|-------------|
| 34. I work with other Christian believers for the purpose of introducing unchurched persons to Jesus Christ.    | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 35. Based on my abilities and spiritual gifts, I assist in some way in the teaching ministry of my church.      | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 36. I invite unchurched people to attend worship or other church activities with me.                            | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 37. I pray for people and/or organizations that are working to reach people with the Good News of Jesus Christ. | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |

0=Never, 1=Rarely, 2=Occasionally, 3=Often, 4=Frequently, 5=Always

#### Fellowship

- |   |             |
|---|-------------|
| 38. When someone in my church is sick or experiencing some other problem and needs me, I help them.                             | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 39. I meet with a small group of Christian friends for prayer, Bible study, or ministry.  | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 40. I serve as a peacemaker among my friends and/or among members in my church.   | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 41. Within my local church, I associate personally even with those with whom I have no common social or intellectual interests. | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 42. I see evidence that my participation in my church helps to encourage or build up the whole congregation.                    | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |

#### Service

- |   |             |
|---|-------------|
| 43. I serve in a church ministry or community agency to help people in need.  | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 44. When a friend, fellow believer, or neighbor suffers pain, hardship, or loss, I join them with my presence and suffer with them. | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 45. I depend on God to help me accomplish the work he calls me to do.   | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 46. I use my home to provide hospitality to strangers or to those in need.  | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |

#### Stewardship

- |  |             |
|--|-------------|
| 47. My actions in nature are guided by what is best for the environment.   | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 48. I give financially to support the work of the church.  | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 49. I do without things that I want in order to give sacrificially to the work of God.   | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 50. I choose what to eat and drink and how to live my life based on the concept that caring for my health is being a good steward of God's blessing of life. | 0 1 2 3 4 5 |

(This survey was developed by Dr. O. Jane Thayer, Andrews University)

Please write a 4 digit number in the blank. Use a number that is easy to remember (like the last four digits of your Social Security number, or any other number you will recall). This is to provide confidentiality and to help in matching responses when we do this survey again after the class.

Number \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

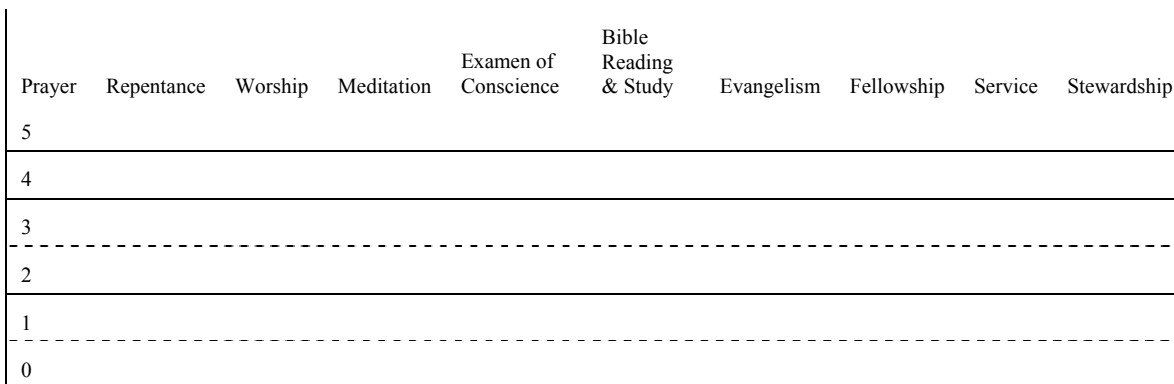
### Scoring Sheet for the Christian Spiritual Participation Profile

Directions: Transfer the numbers you circled on the Christian Spiritual Participation Profile questionnaire to this grid. Add each column and divide by the number of items in the column to find the mean. Then plot the mean on the graph at the bottom of the page.

at the bottom of the page.

Prayer	Repentance	Worship	Meditation	Examen of Conscience	Bible Reading & Study	Evangelism	Fellowship	Service	Stewardship
1.	7.	11.	15.	19.	27.	34.	38.	43.	47.
2.	8.	12.	16.	20.	28.	35.	39.	44.	48.
3.	9.	13.	17.	21.	29.	36.	40.	45.	49.
4.	10.	14.	18.	22.	30.	37.	41.	46.	50.
5.				23.	31.		42.		
6.				24.	32.				
				25.	33.				
				26.					
T =	T =	T =	T =	T =	T =	T =	T =	T =	T =
(Divide by 6)	(Divide by 4)	(Divide by 4)	(Divide by 4)	(Divide by 8)	(Divide by 7)	(Divide by 4)	(Divide by 5)	(Divide by 4)	(Divide by 4)
M =	M =	M =	M =	M =	M =	M =	M =	M =	M =

T = Total. Add the total of the numbers in the column. M = Mean or average. Divide the total by the number of items.



Plot the mean of each discipline by placing a dot under each discipline at the point that represents the number of your mean. Then connect the dots. This will indicate the strength of your participation in each discipline as it relates to the others. It can indicate where you might want to focus your attention for spiritual growth.

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## APPENDIX D

### Code for Determining Scales

#### PLACEMENT OF CSPP ITEMS IN DISCIPLINES AND SCALES

Discipline	Scales			
	Transcendent (CE)	Reflection (RO)	Vision (AC)	New Life (AE)
Bible Reading		29, 30	27, 28, 31, 32, 33	
Evangelism				34, 35, 36, 37
Fellowship			39	38, 40, 41, 42
Meditation			15, 16, 17, 18	
Prayer	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6			
Examen of Conscience	25	19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26		
Repentance	7, 8, 9, 10			
Service	45			43, 44, 46
Stewardship	50	47	48	49
Worship	11, 12, 13		14	

Notes. Numbers refer to the items in the final form of the CSPP. Letters in parentheses refer to Kolb's learning modes: CE is concrete experience; RO is reflective observation; AC is abstract conceptualization; AE is active experimentation.

Transcendent Scale represents "Growing through a relationship with God."

Reflection Scale represents "Growing through critical reflection."

Vision Scale represents "Growing through a relationship with the Word."

New Life Scale represents "Growing through a relationship with others."

Note: For each student, figure the mean score for each scale. Then, count the number of students in each scale who have a mean score of 4.0 or higher and place that number in the appropriate cell of the Assessment Report Form. Place the number who score lower than 4.0 in the appropriate cell. This will give you an overall view of your student body and point out the areas of strength and weakness in the spiritual life of your students.



## APPENDIX E

### Chart Showing Participation in the Spiritual Development Modes

Spiritual Development Mode	Strong *		Weak**	
	Intentional Participation		Intentional Participation	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Growing through a relationship with God				
Growing through a relationship with others				
Growing through a relationship with the Word				
Growing through critical reflection				

\*Strong Intentional Participation is set at 4.0 and higher.

\*\*Weak Intentional Participation is set at 3.99 and lower.

## APPENDIX F

### Class Evaluation

Please rate aspects of the class “*What Christians Believe*” on the following scale:

1=Strongly disagree 2=Disagree 3=Neutral 4=Agree 5=Strongly agree

The subject (basic Christian doctrine) was interesting to me. 1 2 3 4 5

General class discussion was helpful. 1 2 3 4 5

Dividing into table groups made discussion easier. 1 2 3 4 5

Small group discussion was helpful. 1 2 3 4 5

The text (*The Apostles' Creed for Today*) effectively presented the subject. 1 2 3 4 5

The text was easy to read. 1 2 3 4 5

John's class presentations made the subject clearer. 1 2 3 4 5

John was open to differing views. 1 2 3 4 5

The class handouts were helpful. 1 2 3 4 5

Following this class, I have a better understanding of what I believe. 1 2 3 4 5

I feel that participating in this class helped me grow spiritually. 1 2 3 4 5

I would be interested in other studies of Christian doctrine. 1 2 3 4 5

Do you have any other comments?

## APPENDIX G

### Responses to Class Evaluations

	1 “Strongly Disagree”	2 “Disagree”	3 “Neutral”	4 “Agree”	5 “Strongly Agree”
1. interesting subject N=31		n=1 (3.2%)	n=2 (6.5%)	n=17 (55%)	n=11 (35%)
2. helpful class discussion N=30		n=1 (3%)	n=4 (13%)	n=14 (47%)	n=11 (37%)
3. table groups made discussion easier N=30	n=1 (3%)	n=2 (7%)	n=8 (27%)	n=14 (47%)	n=5 (17%)
4. small group discussion helped N=30		n=1 (3.3%)	n=12 (40%)	n=13 (43.3%)	n=4 (13.3%)
5. text effectively presented subject N=30		n=3 (10%)	n=2 (6.7%)	n=15 (50%)	n=10 (33.3%)
6. text was easy to read N=31		n=4 (13%)	n=5 (16%)	n=8 (26%)	n=14 (45%)
7. leader’s presentations were clear N=29			n=2 (7%)	n=11 (38%)	n=16 (55%)
8. leader was open to differing views N=30				n=5 (16.6%)	n=25 (83.4%)
9. class handouts were helpful N=29			n=4 (14%)	n=8 (28%)	n=17 (58%)
10. following the class, I have a better understanding of what I believe N=30		n=3 (10%)	n=1 (3.3%)	n=13 (43.3%)	n=13 (43.3%)
11. participating in this class helped me grow spiritually N=30	n=1 (3.4%)	n=2 (6.7%)	n=3 (10%)	n=10 (33.3%)	n=14 (46.6%)
12. I would be interested in other studies of doctrine N=31		n=2 (6%)	n=5 (16%)	n=9 (29%)	n=15 (48%)

## **APPENDIX H**

### **Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

1. Tell me about how you came to faith. What helps you grow in faith?
2. Where did you first learn about Christian beliefs? When do you feel that you learned the most?
3. How would you describe Christian doctrine? What do you think it includes?
4. What relationship do you see between Christian doctrine and Christian spirituality?
  - a. How does what you believe help you grow spiritually?
  - b. What actions do you take because of what you believe?

## APPENDIX I

### Class Supplement on the Need to Study Doctrine

“Remind Me Again Why We’re Doing This”

#### Examples from Scripture

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Ephesians 4:11-16)

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry. (2 Timothy 4:1-5)

#### Some Basic Points

Christian faith involves *what* we believe as well as trust in God or knowing Christ in our hearts. What we believe matters. Faith seeks to understand: Who is the God who creates and saves us? What does believing in Jesus mean? How do we experience salvation? What does a mature Christian life look like? How does Christian faith relate to life in this world? We want answers to these and other questions.

We need to define Christian belief so our witness will be clearer. In a world where there are many competing beliefs, we need to know what we believe and why. The Apostles’ Creed is one summary of what most Christians have believed most of the time. It outlines the core Christian story.

We want to guard against false teaching. A lot of people claim to speak in God's name or claim to be Christian—but they promote beliefs that don't fit with the Bible and what the Church believes and teaches. Bob Tuttle illustrates this point: You don't have to know the details of internal combustion to drive a car. But if you don't know something about how it works and it breaks down, you can get ripped off. You don't have to know the details of major works of theology to relate to the living God. But if you don't know something about theology and there's a "breakdown," you can get ripped off.

Study is one spiritual discipline or means of grace that God uses in our lives to help us experience grace and get closer to God.

Sound Christian doctrine is nourishing and contributes to our spiritual health and growth.

Knowing what we believe is one aspect of knowing God.

### **Support from Other Sources**

*The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* affirms the UMC's doctrinal heritage:

United Methodists profess the historic Christian faith in God, incarnate in Jesus Christ for our salvation and ever at work in human history in the Holy Spirit. Living in a covenant of grace under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, we participate in the first fruits of God's coming reign and pray in hope for its full realization on earth as in heaven.

Our heritage in doctrine and our present theological task focus upon a renewed grasp of the sovereignty of God and of God's love in Christ amid the continuing crises of human existence.

Our forebears in the faith reaffirmed the ancient Christian message as found in the apostolic witness even as they applied it anew in their own circumstances.

Their preaching and teaching were grounded in Scripture, informed by Christian tradition, enlivened in experience, and tested by reason.

Their labors inspire and inform our attempts to convey the saving gospel to our world with its needs and aspirations. (41)

Bishop Scott Jones describes the importance of Christian doctrine for United Methodists

[T]he goal of United Methodist doctrine is a life of Christian discipleship. (61)

[L]iving the Christian life is shaped, in part, by Christian doctrine. Even when individual Christians may not be able to quote doctrinal formulations, those formulations may have so informed their thinking, speaking, and actions that they are living out the doctrine implicitly.

*Studying the various doctrinal statements is important primarily as it tends to shape one's life to be a better Christian [emphasis mine]. (81)*

Thus, to maintain doctrine is to exercise one's work as a leader in the Christian community so that the doctrine of the faith shapes the community and the lives of its members. (278)

Stanley Grenz and Roger Olson assert the practicality of good theology:

Good theologians discuss intellectual questions and concern themselves with academic debate because their chief concern is life. They want to know the truth not merely so that they might think properly, but so that they might live properly. They engage in theology not merely to amass knowledge, but also to gain wisdom. Good theology, therefore, bring the theoretical, academic, intellectual aspect of Christian faith into Christian living. In so doing, theology becomes immensely practical—perhaps the most practical endeavor one ever engages in! (43)

As usual, C. S. Lewis gets to the point very well:

For my own part, I tend to find the doctrinal books often more helpful in devotion than the devotional books, and I rather suspect that the same experience may await many others. I believe that many who find that “nothing happens” when they sit down, or kneel down, to a book of devotion, would find that their heart sings unbidden while they are working their way through a tough bit of theology with a pipe in their teeth and a pencil in their hand. (*God in the Dock* 205)

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