

God As Triune

Belief in the Trinity — God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit — is central to the faith. God is the Father to whom we come, the Son through whom we come, and the Spirit by whom we come.

The doctrine of the Trinity teaches belief in one God who exists as three “persons” with the word “person” having a different meaning from common usage today. The word comes from the Latin “persona” meaning the mask through which actors spoke in Greek plays; and this word was derived from the Latin words “per” and “sonare” meaning to speak or sound through. The original meaning of the word shows we are concerned not with a mask that hides, but with a medium that reveals. The one God comes to us in three modes.

The doctrine of the Trinity arises from all that the Bible tells us about God as the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sustainer. The New Testament writers portray Jesus through his words and actions as divine and the Son of God. (See John 1:1-3,14; Colossians 2:9, and Hebrews 1:1-3.)

Adapted from Being a Presbyterian in Canada Today by Stephen A. Hayes, pp. 5-9.

The Bible

The Presbyterian faith goes back behind all denominational divisions and interpretations to the Bible. The Bible inspires and guides us in what we believe and how we live. Presbyterians think of the Bible as the written Word of God. They consider it the most authoritative source for faith and practice. The writers of the Bible were guided and inspired by God to record events and God’s instructions. By reading the Bible, succeeding generations know what God has done and what God requires.

Scripture is partly shaped by its particular historical and cultural circumstances. We are also conditioned by our own time and culture. We bring to Scripture our own presuppositions. The task of joining text with reader involves four major components that are constantly interrelated.

We are prompted by the Spirit working on our experience to listen afresh for God’s Word witnessed to in Scripture.

We seek to understand the Bible in its original historical setting, recognizing the variety of material it contains. For this, a wise use of historical-critical methods is essential.

We look at the biblical material as a canonical whole. The dangers of quoting isolated proof texts are well known. We look for the underlying unity and diversity, continuity and discontinuity in Scripture, paying particular attention to the relationships between the Old and New Testaments.

We bring the biblical materials to bear on our contemporary situation. The gift of discernment is especially needed here. We must pray for the guidance of the same Holy Spirit who inspired Scripture.

From 1994 Acts and Proceedings, The Church Doctrine Committee, pp. 252-253.

Worship and Sacraments

Worship gives Presbyterians an opportunity to praise, listen, and respond to God. Most congregations organize the worship service into four parts: gathering, listening, thanking, and going. These parts are expressed in terms like: Gather in God's name; Proclaim the Word of God; Give thanks to God; Go in God's name.

In worship we celebrate two sacraments – Baptism and Communion. Baptisms happen at many points of the church year. Traditionally, Communion was celebrated four times a year, but more and more Canadian Presbyterian churches offer it more frequently – monthly or even every Sunday. Both Baptism and Communion are visible expressions of the gospel given as a way to enter and encourage Christian growth.

Baptism can occur at any age in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. It occurs in conjunction with a profession of faith and admission to church membership. Believing parents bring their child for Baptism and promise to raise their child to love and serve God. The entire congregation promises to support the child. Usually the minister pours or sprinkles water on the person's head in Baptism. The waters of Baptism symbolize refreshment, cleansing, new life, the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Because Baptism is seen as an act of the whole church and a sign of church membership, Baptism always happens in the presence of the worshipping congregation.

Communion, the breaking of bread and drinking of wine or grape juice, reminds us of Jesus. In Communion we are united with Jesus and with each other; we are strengthened to go out into the world as a "symbol of hope for a troubled age." Communion is thanksgiving and a memorial of Christ's life and death.

In 1987 the General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada invited each congregation's session to study the place of children at Communion, recognizing that:

Children are capable of the same childlike faith that Jesus required of adults
The faith of children may be nurtured by participation in the Lord's Supper
The participation of children affirms their place in the fellowship we share as a spiritual family at the Lord's Table

Approximately half the Presbyterian congregations in Canada invite children to be present at the Lord's Table.

Living Faith

In every generation the church needs to confess its faith anew. That confession must at one and the same time be the ancient faith of the church and yet spoken into the mood and questions of its own time. Living Faith endeavours to do that. This

Statement of Christian Belief was prepared under the direction of the Committee on Church Doctrine of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. It has been received by the General Assembly of that Church and commended as an acceptable statement and as useful in both worship and study.

While arising out of the Canadian Presbyterian experience, it is hoped that the statement speaks to a much wider circle than one denomination, and to people outside the church. Here, perhaps for the first time, a confessional statement acknowledges the difficulties of belief and the ambiguities of the life of faith. In writing this document the authors have tried to be in contact with people where they stand today. Thus the statement speaks not only of God's work in Christ, but also of sex, war, the economy, the family and justice.

We believe that all this is fitting in a faith which has as its central affirmation the great truth that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." The living God became the person of Christ and walked in our midst in a world that to an astonishing extent shared many of the same problems we do now. If God could get involved with the grim fabric of life, then so can God's church! So too, must the faith we confess.

Reaching Out and Serving

The Christian church exists for others. We believe that our faith is alive through our actions of service (James 2:14-26). In Presbyterian churches we find evidence of activities that build community and reach out to serve others. Many congregations sponsor Girl Guide or Scouts Canada groups, encouraging the young people to get involved in Religion in Life Programs. On bulletin boards we see notices about coffee hours, potluck dinners, meetings of parents' groups or CGIT. In church services we hear news of our church's overseas staff or the work of Presbyterian World Service & Development (PWS&D). Many congregations have groups that support alternative trading organizations like Bridgehead or human right initiatives like those of Amnesty International. Our church bulletin might include an announcement about an intergenerational program for Pentecost or an upcoming youth event, an appeal for Meals-on-Wheels volunteers or for contributions for a food drive, or information about a petition or letter-writing campaign calling for justice in another country.

Presbyterians are people involved in social action.

Presbyterians believe that Jesus came into the world to demonstrate God's concern for the world and its people. We recognize Jesus' challenge to follow him (Luke 9:23) and his final commission to us (Matthew 28:19). In congregations, people of all ages learn to heal and care for each other. They are active in mission and worship beyond their own congregation's activities - in politics, economics, social structures, the environment, and the world of human needs. As Christians, we go into the world and try to make it more like God's kingdom.

Presbyterians believe God interacts with all aspects of our lives. One of the clearest messages for us in our daily living is found in Micah 6:8, "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

"Many communities across Canada are... cooperating ecumenically for Ten Days for Global Justice, the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, reconciliation and healing with aboriginal peoples and with other programs. We must also recognize that Christians are working together shoulder-to-shoulder with people from other denominations in the Out of the Cold program, food banks, Meals on Wheels and other community projects... I believe we should celebrate, publicize and promote what is already happening ecumenically in our communities as we anticipate the dawning of the new millennium."

From Working Together by Tamiko Corbett in the Presbyterian Record, March 1997

Apostle's Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's 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 to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come again 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.